

The 'Global' and the 'Local' in Early Modern and Modern East Asia

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From 'East Asia' to 'East Asian Maritime Worlds': The Pros and Cons of the Construction of a Historical World¹

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Time, space, and human society are the three fundamental organizing principles of historiography. One could, for example, draw boundaries on the continuum of time in the past according to some chronological scheme to establish periodization such as ancient, medieval, and modern. One could also distinguish the closely interrelated aspects of human societies and place them into different categories according to these aspects or dimensions: women's history, business history, ecclesiastical history, intellectual history, art history, et cetera. Or one could divide the areas on the Earth's continuous surface according to certain geographical schemes in order to establish regional histories: for example, Shanghai history, Central Asian history, Mediterranean history, or national histories. Since the twentieth century, the discipline of history has been organized in order of local history, national history, regional history, and history of civilizations.

One fundamental tension in the process of writing history arises between viewing history in its entirety versus the applying analytical concepts to only one part of it. We conceive of time as the past, present, and future. The present is a moment which keeps moving ahead and cannot be seized. The future is a notion of all of the 'presents' that have not yet arrived. The past is a reference to all previous presents. Everything located in the past lies within the domain of history. But writing history is not merely a process of record keeping, and it is not possible to present the entirety of history. There must be selection and variation in emphasis. What to choose as subject and what to focus on within that subject are the questions every historian faces. The standard or criterion for selection results in the omission of large parts of history. This exposes the historian to criticism; especially in cases where the historian's value judgments, orientation, or ideological agenda are conspicuous, controversy and objections will readily arise. Dynastic histories and national histories

¹ I would like to thank Nicholas Jackson who helped me to render an English version of this article.

especially suffer from this problem, while regional histories and histories of civilizations also cannot escape it. 'Sinocentric' is one of the terms we often apply to this problem of biased selection or viewpoint. 'Eurocentric' is another.

I The Position of Regional History in World History

From the perspective of the field of historiography, global history writing can be divided into three phases or three forms. First is the pre-1500 world history: Sima Qian's *Shiji* and Herodotus's *Histories* are two representative works from the East and the West. Both narratives incorporated the whole known world though centered on their own countries and both are famous literary works in their own right. Second is history writing from the 1500s to the 1980s: The Age of Discovery and the Enlightenment brought the whole world to the attention of the West, but this perspective is often characterized as Eurocentric and evolutionary, with a focus on the national history of European states. Third, the writing of a new world history in the present day: this is not only legitimate, but also urgent, due to rapid developments in transportation, communication, and information technology and the deep crises in population, environment, energy, and wars that have arisen globally since 1990.

But to write a new world history, we still face several questions, such as how to deal with national history and nationalism; how to construct reasonable and convincing frameworks; and how to balance different parts of history with the entirety of historical content. Without successfully dealing with these problems, there is no way to write a world history that can satisfy most people. Haneda Masashi has proposed that scholars use the way Japanese historians have dealt with the relationship between different historical components within Japan and Japan as a whole during the writing of Japanese history as a way of dealing with the relationship between the components and the whole in world history.² But we are confronted with a question: is the relationship between the historical components of Japan and Japan as a whole sufficiently analogous to that relationship for the entire world? Even though there is an international organization like the United Nations, there is no authoritative agency which can supervise and operate over every national government. Furthermore, universal human identity in the modern sense is not a real historical phenomenon. It is the goal that the writing of new world history hopes

2 Please refer to Haneda Masashi's paper 'A New Global History and Regional Histories' in this volume.

to achieve, not what it depicts. These facts and considerations all constitute obstacles to the writing of a new world history.

Recently, it has been regional history, located on the boundary between national history and world history, which has received growing emphasis in the Euro-American historical field. So, can the perspective of regional history offer a new and more satisfactory path to writing world history? What exactly is the position of regional history within world history, and what role can it play?

Regions can be divided according to different criteria: geographical, political, cultural, religious, or economic. A particular region may become a distinct historical domain only when the following conditions are satisfied: first, this region is not confined to the geographic boundary of a certain country; second, different areas in this region should have had intimate connections and intercourse over a long period of time—sufficient time to form a relatively distinct social *human* ecology; third, different areas in this region have to share cultural commonalities or resources. At the same time, the boundaries of a historical domain may be subject to change over the different periods of its formation; the regional space of a particular historical domain is open to interconnections and interactions with other regions.

The World History Association divides the world into roughly thirty historical regions,³ and tries to build a relatively comprehensive world history through separate regional studies. This elaborate scheme of regional division has its problems. First, although the division pays attention to geographical and cultural elements, there is no application of a universal and comprehensive standard to make the divisions. Without such a criterion, there are countless potential regions. For example, since there is an Islamic World, there should also be a Christian World, Buddhist World, and Confucian World; since there is an Indian Ocean area, there should also be Mediterranean Sea, South Sea, Eastern Sea, and Caribbean Sea areas. Second, this scheme does not take into account the periodization for each region, ignoring the fact that certain regions might exist during one age, but not in others. For example, Latin America could not be regarded as a region before Columbus. Third, the Eurasian and African continents are divided into many overlapping areas, which promises to cause confusion and difficulties in the framing and writing of world history.

3 They are Afroeurasia, Americas, Arctic Regions, Arid Zones, Atlantic Ocean, Australasia, Atlantic World, Central Asia, Desert Zones, East Asia, Europe, Eurasia, Islamic World, Indian Ocean, Inner Eurasia, Latin America, Middle Afroeurasia, North Africa, North America, Oceania, Pacific, Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Southwest Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Sub-Tropical Zones, Temperate Zones, and the Tropics. See <http://www.thewha.org/index.php>.

The major contribution of regional studies is to break down national boundaries in order to understand a region as a social, cultural, and economic whole. From another point of view, its contribution is to achieve a regional identity by dissolving national identities. In this sense, 'regional history' becomes a mediator that bridges 'national history' and 'world history'. But while this appears promising, it also suffers some problems. First, the national boundaries that regional history is supposed to break down: what are these nations, and what kinds of boundary? Just as we recognize that there have been states in history, we have to acknowledge the diversity in the variety of states. The establishment of boundaries is fraught with difficulty, whether they are boundaries from the past or boundaries of modern nations. Furthermore, is 'breaking down national boundaries' a peculiarly Western concept? Second, the 'national identity' that 'regional history' tries to dissolve: what kind of 'nation' and 'identity' are these? For most of human history, the nation state did not exist, and 'national identity' itself is constantly in a process of forming and transforming. In the case of China, 'cultural identity' might be more appropriate, as that entity often transcended national boundaries.

Regional history is not the only method of writing world history that aims to construct a human identity. Another viable approach is to write world history that centers on a common issue shared by all humans. This approach selects a specific problem faced by all humanity, and provides a retrospective viewpoint to the problem, in order to allow humans, present and future, to reach a clear and objective understanding of the background, formation, and cause of the problem. Such a way of writing history may be called 'topical' or 'thematic' world history, which means studying a specific field of history through a global scope. Through this process, for example, historians are able to write the global history of warfare, showing the roots of warfare in the past, and thereby providing all present and future human beings with ideas of how to avoid wars in the future. In the same way, histories of the environment, energy resources, science and technology, ideas, economics, politics, religions, and arts can also be constructed. Within each of these categories, further categorizations can take place. In the history of ideas, for example, we can focus on the conception of 'loyalty' in all areas of the world, in different cultures and eras. In the history of economics we can study the uses of money and the flow of currency from a global perspective. In the history of art, we can study the various representations of female forms throughout the world.

When approaching the writing of world history in this thematic way, one can hardly avoid comparison and judgment. It is imperative for historians to be careful to refrain from passing judgments on different cultures as superior or inferior, or writing within the tunnel vision of one's own cultural identification.

To write world history with the aim of constructing a collective human identity requires the writer to recognize and embrace aspects that may be classified as universally human. In writing world history, the author uses ‘we’ to stand for all human beings. Furthermore, the emphasis on basic commonality among all humans should serve as the fundamental theme and tone in writing world history. When embarking upon a study from the perspective of world history, one should raise questions that concern the origins and essence of the human experience. For instance, in the case of art history, one may first ask ‘why do people need art?’ Or in the study of environmental history, one may first ask ‘what is the essence of the relationship between man and the environment?’

The construction of identity is one of the aims of historical writing, and this is achieved through attaining historical awareness. Through accomplishing this goal, world historians are able to satisfy the people’s need to comprehend the world they are living in in its entirety. The writing of national histories and their integration can only partially complete this task; regional history can provide additional help to this end. Regional history that crosses national boundaries can broaden our knowledge about the past, because it emphasizes the inherent links between different historical components within a region that transcend the borders of countries. Theretofore, it illuminates what cannot be found or what is not prominent in the history of individual nations, so that we may learn to perceive things from more perspectives. In the twentieth century, some attempts at writing ‘regional histories’ succeeded while others failed. Among the most successful ones, we can point to the widely acclaimed study by the French historian Fernand Braudel of the Mediterranean world-system. In contrast, the studies of East Asia by Japanese scholars from the post-Meiji period to the end of World War II can be cited as examples of failure, since they carried too much of their inappropriate political aspirations into their nationalistic historiography.

II Politics and the Conception of a Region: ‘East Asia’ as a Case Study

The name of a geographical space can come into being in two basic ways: one way is for it to be proclaimed by the locals themselves, and is then gradually made known to outsiders who came to refer to that place in the same way—for example, Shanghai. Another is for it to be named by outsiders, which then gradually became accepted by most people including the locals—for example, Philippines. Of course, there is another way besides these two: the name used by both locals and outsiders can coexist without conflict, like China and *Zhongguo* 中国. According to the size and administrative level, a series of place

names can form a sequence. For instance, the names Shanghai, Jiangnan, China, East Asia, Asia, Afro-Eurasia form an ascending sequence of organization according to size. Simple as it seems, it contains an internal logic that concerns politics, culture, and economy. When dividing and naming these geographical areas, (especially names of countries and administrative regions within countries), political factors always play a decisive role. As for the division and naming of transnational areas, these names often not only embody the international relations within these regions, but some countries would also often use them as means to seek intraregional political advantages. The concepts of 'Asianism' and 'Greater East Asia' in Japan after the 1868 Meiji Restoration are typical examples.

Asia was originally a concept European used to distinguish the vast eastern region from theirs. This concept, the connotation and extent of which varied with the times, had existed for more than 2,000 years before spreading to the Chinese and Japanese 'world'. In these two centuries, since 1600–1800, when this concept circulated in Europe, it exerted influence merely as a geographical concept—the locations of landmasses and waters. However, after the Meiji Restoration, 'Asia' and 'East Asia' became the focus of attention in Japanese intellectual circles. It showed a way of deconstructing the China-centered international system and redefining Japanese leadership in this region, in both academic and political terms. If 'Asia' and 'East Asia' were European concepts, 'Asianism' and 'Greater East Asia' represented a thoroughly Japanese way of thinking. Whether the academic movement led to the formation of the political ideology, or the political agenda required academic circles to propound its validity, in the end the combination of militarism and the ideology that was founded upon of 'Asianism' and 'East Asia' left enormous scars on the psyche of China, Korea, and even the whole world.

Japanese academia's postwar reflections on the study of Asia have continued to this day. Among the most important works are *The Ecological Conception of the History of Civilizations* by Tadao Umesao (1957), *Pan-Asianism* edited by Yoshimi Takeuchi (1963), *Thinking in Asia* edited by Mizoguchi Yūzō and Takeshi Hamashita (1993), and *How Asia Is Depicted: Orientalism in Modern Japan* by Koyasu Nobukuni (2003). The main postwar trend in Japanese studies of Asia has been divesting itself of ideology (de-ideologization), to use the Beijing historian Wang Hui's terms, in favor of a restoration of academic neutrality and rationalism. Three aspects of this trend can be distinguished. First, it emphasizes studying Asia and East Asia's internal interactions and characteristics from economic and cultural perspectives. Second, the conception of an East Asian political paradigm is studiously avoided. Scholars advocate the use of Asia and East Asia in a non-political scope when studying much more

narrow and concrete specific issues. As Koyasu Nobukuni has remarked, 'Asia' should be reshaped as a methodological concept, and not a term used for the regeneration or revival of a substantive geopolitical ideology.⁴ Third, those studying this topic strive to reconsider the relationship between the East and West after the sixteenth century, and try to reveal more about the historical development of the concepts of 'Asia' and 'East Asia'.

In the first half of the twentieth century, while Japanese 'Asianism' and 'Greater East Asia' were being widely propagated, Chinese intellectuals did not take an active part in the discussion, with the exception of a few limited statements by Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, Li Dazhao 李大钊, and Sun Yat-sen 孙逸仙, which were 'confined within the Japanese context'.⁵ After the Second World War, China identified itself as a 'southern country' in the 'north-south divide,' a 'third-world country' in the 'three worlds' theory, and a 'developing country' in the 'developed vs. developing countries' framework. After the institution of the Reform and Opening Up Policy, particularly in the 1990s, with the impetus of regional economic cooperation, Chinese scholarship has rediscovered and redefined the concepts and framework of 'East Asia', 'ASEAN', and 'Asia-Pacific', not only for practical economic and political considerations, but also as a form of reanalysis of the humanistic studies of Chinese, Korean, and especially Japanese conceptions of 'Asia' and 'East Asia' in the twentieth century. Representative examples of this scholarship include Sun Ge (2002, 2011), Wang Pin (2004), Lin Qinyuan and Yang Qifu (2006), Wang Hui (2010), and Ge Zhaoguang (2011).⁶ Scholars from China and Japan finally found common ground in the interest of summarizing the historical experience and lessons, re-evaluating the position of their own countries in the larger region, and exploring new methods and avenues for further study of East Asia.⁷ This phenomenon is partly due to de-idealization and de-politicization of 'Asia' and 'East Asia'. On this basis, Chinese and Japanese scholars are enjoying more possibilities for communication and collective enterprise. Let us now turn to two eminent examples of this which have generated much discussion.

In *Modern China's International Opportunity: The Tributary Trade System and Early Modern East Asian Trade-zone*, Takeshi Hamashita examined early modern East Asian markets from the perspective of economic history, thus

4 Nobukuni 2011, 91.

5 Wang Hui 2010, 24.

6 Sun 2002, 2011; Wang Ping 2004; Lin and Yang 2006; Wang Hui 2010; Ge 2011.

7 For Chinese scholars who do East Asian research, they usually either have a Japanese educational background, or have conducted close and extensive exchange with individuals or institutions of Japanese academia.

avoiding the entangling and compromising issues of national and cultural identity, religion, nation-states, and territorial disputes. Thus, he makes it possible to comprehend modern Asian history (East Asian history) from the viewpoint of economic history. The book has exerted widespread influence on Chinese academia since it was published. Its opinions, as well as its methods, are accepted by Chinese academia, and it has stimulated a series of studies on the tributary trade system. Takeshi Hamashita himself has a close relationship with Chinese academia while teaching at Sun Yat-sen University.

Nonetheless, we should note that Hamashita's study of the East Asian tributary system and trade zone left some room for improvement. First, Hamashita focused on maritime transportation rather than land transportation. The countries that paid their tribute by sea travel are examined, but those that did so by land are neglected. Therefore, in the spatial dimension, his study of the tribute system is far from comprehensive. Second, he concentrated on the early modern period, especially the nineteenth century, and hardly dealt with the sixteenth century and earlier periods. So, in its chronological and diachronic scope, the book also leaves something to be desired. In Hamashita's account, one can only learn about the collapse of the system due to the strong impact of the Western powers, but not its formation. We cannot know from his study how the tribute system developed, only how it disappeared.

By focusing on the tributary system, Hamashita successfully revealed the cross-regional relationships among Asian countries. However, the question remains: at that time, how important was the tributary system, for both China and its tributaries? For China, we should note contra Hamashita that recent research by John Wills and others show that the tributary system was neither its major form of trade nor the center of its political life in most periods. Of course, this critique is raised from a perspective of national history, but national history should function as an important part of the regional history of this nation's geographical area. 'Regional history' and 'national history' are merely two different but interrelated perspectives, rather than two fields isolated from each other. As Huang Junjie has pointed out, 'it is out of the interactive relations between "national histories" that the concept of "regional history" has emerged. It is not an abstract category which goes beyond the national histories of individual countries'.⁸

Since the late 1990s, Huang Junjie and his colleagues have been working on studies of East Asian Confucianism and East Asian civilization. They have published an extensive series of scholarship—'Study of East Asian Civilization', 'Documents for the Study of East Asian Civilization', 'Bibliography of the Study

⁸ Huang 2012, 13; Please also refer to Ge Zhaoguang's article in this book.

of East Asian Civilization', 'Study of East Asian Confucianism', 'Documents for Study of East Asian Confucianism', and 'Global View'—all of which have aroused much attention in historical and other academic circles. Huang and his collaborators have studied Confucianism from an East Asian point of view, rather than study East Asia from a Confucian perspective. 'East Asia' for Huang is a general territorial concept, the region where Confucianism has been disseminated and became influential. Its actual geographical scope covers mainland China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Ryukyu. This area may be conceived of as the 'Confucian Circle'.

Since Confucianism was conveyed via Chinese characters (*hanzi*), the 'Confucian Circle' and 'Circle of *hanzi*' share almost the same circumference. Instead of presenting vague pieces of a crude mosaic, these projects offer a close study of how classical Confucian ideas spread, integrated, and evolved among different nations and regions. According to Huang Junjie, when we regard East Asian Confucianism as a spatial concept, we are observing the development of its inherent values. When we consider it as a temporal concept, we can see its development in the interactions between Asia's Confucian scholars. There has never existed a rigid ideology that was dissociated from the Confucian traditions in different nations.⁹ This point of view not only encompasses all the border-transcending Confucian movements and transformations, but also manages to identify its relevance in the contexts of national and regional history.

The research framework of East Asian Confucianism must deal with two problems. First is the problem of center and periphery. Confucianism originated and prevailed in China. Chinese scholars have held a dominant place in the interpretation of Confucian classics over the adjacent countries and regions where Confucianism spread. Thus scholars face the problem of how to solve the tension between the historical presence of the dominance and centrality of Chinese Confucianism, and modern academic research's desire for 'decentralization'. The second problem concerns the relationship between Confucian values, Western values, and universal values. Studies of 'East Asian Confucianism' have attempted to extract what they consider to be universal East Asian values from the Confucian classics and from Confucianism's history of development. But do such values really exist? How might one differentiate them from the universal values of the West? Did such universally accepted values actually exist in East Asia? Would they be accepted by the present or future generations of people? Currently, with Western values having established a deep influence in East Asia, what is the purpose and significance of reestablishing East Asian

9 Huang 2012, 'Preface', 4.

Confucian values? Will it lead to a new wave of cultural confrontations or even political conflicts? We must be aware that a 'depoliticized' perspective in Wang Hui's terms will not necessarily result in a 'depoliticized' outcome, and sometimes it will instead bring a political or even ideological flavor into cultural discussions.

III From 'East Asia' to the 'East Asian Maritime World'

Regional history includes historical studies of both continental (terrestrial) worlds and maritime worlds. The historical study of maritime worlds, with the sea as its center, examines the influences of maritime transportation and exchanges on surrounding countries and regions. The peoples living in maritime regions have come to share aspects of a common culture through long-term connections and mutual influence. There are not many sea-centered spheres in the world that would qualify for a historical study of maritime worlds. Since Fernand Braudel's study on the Mediterranean Sea as a self-contained historical world, many scholars have tried to identify and study similar areas, such as the South China Sea.¹⁰ The term 'East Asian maritime world' has also gradually become quite popular.

Japanese scholars have played a major role in the study of the East Asian maritime world.¹¹ This field can be regarded as a new trend in Asian studies or East Asian studies. It emphasizes exploring the internal fabric of the East Asian region in history from the perspective of maritime exchange. Moreover, it seeks to reconsider its national history in the larger context of maritime worlds. In this sense, the University of Tokyo project 'East Asian Maritime Exchange and the Formation of Japanese Traditional Culture,' led by Kojima Tsuyoshi, and Fudan University's project 'Viewing China from Bordering Countries' share similar orientations, angles, and insights.¹²

Such projects are examples of national history extending into regional history. They both keep the national history as the center, and study their neighboring countries or the communication between their own countries and others to reevaluate their native histories and cultures. In the wake of such new research initiatives, cooperation and exchange between scholars in the

10 Guillot et al. 1998; Gipouloux 2011.

11 Momoki 2008.

12 For Kojima see: <http://haneda.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/english/maritime/>. For Fudan, see: <http://www.iahs.fudan.edu.cn/en/research.asp>.

two countries have become much more frequent and extensive than before,¹³ and quite different from the research environment in the period that followed the Meiji Restoration.¹⁴

'East Asian Maritime world' is not a traditional or conventional concept, but an analytical concept invented by scholars based on the evolution of the conceptions of 'Asia' and 'East Asia'. Narrowly speaking, the 'East Asian maritime world' includes the East China Sea, with China, the Korean peninsula, and Japan on its peripheries. Broadly speaking, it also includes the South China Sea and Southeast Asian countries. The existing historical studies of the East Asian maritime world mainly focus on the interactions between China, Japan, Korea, and Ryukyu, especially the interactions between China and Japan, while the South China Sea and Southeast Asia are usually relegated to the background.¹⁵ Similarly, Southeast Asian studies as an established academic field seldom pays attention to the context of the East Asian maritime world.¹⁶ New studies on the history of East Asian seas, I believe, should reference recent sophisticated research on the 'western border regions' (*xiyu* 西域), as well as studies on South China Sea and Southeast Asia. They should not confine itself to the narrow range of the East China Sea and its peripheries.

I hold such a position for the following reasons. First, the seasonal winds over the ocean east of Malacca encouraged constant movement of trade ships between the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and the formation of a group of port cities on the continental coastline and in the islands. The routes between China, Japan, and Korea only comprise the northern part of the whole East Asian maritime trading network. Second, spices and specialty goods from Southeast Asia were indispensable in this network. Third, Chinese culture and Buddhism maintained a broad presence in and influence over the societies on the East China Sea and in Southeast Asia. Fourth, there were many Chinese immigrants to Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia as a result of frequent trade and cultural exchange. In sum, the East China Sea and the South China Sea constituted an indivisible historical world. Some histories, such as that of Japan-Annam relations and the trade between Ryukyu and Southeast Asia,¹⁷

13 For two examples of the results of the cooperation between Chinese and Japanese scholars published recently, see Guo et al. 2009; National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies 2011.

14 Studies on the history of maritime East Asia published in the past ten years in China include: Ge 2011, 254–270; Li 2009; Chen 2006; Yang et al. 2006; Han 2009.

15 Please refer to Matsuura 2009.

16 Please refer to Tarling 1992.

17 Sakamaki 1964.

can only be illuminated when examined as part of the constellation of this larger maritime world.

Regional history, including the history of maritime worlds, breaks through the boundaries of national history on the one hand, and sets new boundaries of its own designation on the other. Since cultural and economic exchange normally cross the latter set of boundaries, regionalism may as a result become a Procrustean limit placed by historians. In light of this consideration, the idea of 'open' regional studies as raised by Haneda Masashi has obvious value (See Haneda's essay in this volume). Recognizing the danger of the concept of 'maritime worlds' possibly confining historical study into an overly restrictive geographical framework, he argued, 'Only when we do not limit "maritime worlds" to a particular geographical area can we liberate maritime history from the narrative framework of "chronographical history enclosed in a certain space" represented by national history.'¹⁸

Emphasizing the historicity of a region entails recognizing the changes of a region over time, and that the content of regional history also changes accordingly. It could be surmised that the region's range will always be expanding as a general trend, and it will come to establish more frequent and deepening associations with other regions. This can be applied to the case of the East Asia maritime world. This region in the fifth century BC was very different from how it looked in the fifth century AD. The thirteenth-century East Asian seas looked very different from the nineteenth-century ones. Regional characteristics do not have long-term continuity, and hence an overall chronological account of a region may neglect differences over time, and could hardly be comprehensive enough to satisfy peoples of all the countries in that region. Thus, while a history of an East Asian maritime world over a certain period could be undertaken, writing a general history of East Asian seafaring worlds will be extremely difficult. Defining a region from a modern angle and analyzing it diachronically and comprehensively will inevitably neglect its differences over time. It may be possible to write a history of the East Asian maritime region in a certain era. However, it is a formidably hard task to write a general history that includes all historical periods of this maritime region. As a result, there still has not been a publication with a title like 'The General History of the East Asian Maritime Zone'.

A history of the East Asian maritime world would encompass the following aspects of study: maritime routes and ports; economic, cultural, and religious exchanges; and conflicts and wars. The people who played important roles on the stage of East Asian maritime history came from all walks of life.

18 Haneda 2011.

They included fishermen, merchants, sailors, ambassadors, monks, pirates, soldiers, wanderers, and travelers. Such characters were never major players in traditional Chinese historiography, except in histories of exchanges and of regional history. Yet regional history is different from the history of exchanges, as the former emphasizes studying a certain region in a certain period, while the latter emphasizes the outcome and influence of exchanges. Regional history provides a greater possibility for comparing different countries and areas within that region. Furthermore, it offers the possibility of new avenues for exploration and analysis of the history of individual countries.

By studying the historical space that is oriented towards seas, coastal area, and islands cultural features peculiar to maritime areas such as the worship of the goddess Matsu (or Mazu 妈祖) can be further illuminated. But we must be careful not to grant too much emphasis on the maritime aspects of East Asia. For example, although China boasts an extensive coastline on its eastern and southern flanks, the fundamental orientating basis of Chinese civilization was always agriculture. While China is one of the important players in the East Asian sea area, it is also a continental country. When doing research on the East Asian maritime world, we need to judiciously balance our focus between the maritime areas and continental areas. By viewing it through the historical lens of the East Asian maritime region, we must be careful to avoid a distorted conception of Chinese history—even while we gain rich insights through gazing into this lens.

IV Conclusion

As autobiographies differ significantly from biographies, so the history of East Asia as written by East Asians themselves is different from that which was written by Western scholars. East Asian scholars write East Asian history for the people of East Asia, while Westerners write it for an audience of Europeans and Americans, who read it without having any emotional entanglement over particular historical facts, and whose comprehension is undisturbed by factors or issues of national and cultural identity. The studies conducted by Western scholars also tend to emphasize East Asia's contact with Europe in the sixteenth century.

In the West, an East Asian scholar can either be one whose research interest is on East Asia as a whole, or one who is purely working on one specific country in East Asia. In China, the latter would hardly be regarded as an East Asian scholar. Therefore, East Asian history is a different research field from Chinese history. In East Asia, East Asian history has a preexisting goal, which is

to construct a framework that satisfies Chinese, Japanese, North Korean, South Korean, or Vietnamese scholars. But the reality is that strong nationalist sentiment pervades throughout all East Asian countries, and thus many East Asian historical topics are so sensitive to scholars that such a framework can only be constructed with great difficulty. Even the works of Western scholars are not likely to meet with the approval of East Asian academia (though Western scholars do not seek such approval as their primary goal).

For a useful illustration of this point, one could consider the American scholar Rhoads Murphey's book *East Asia: A New History*. As a student of John King Fairbank, Murphey applied the impact-response model of his mentor.¹⁹ For a Western readership the book might be satisfactory, but East Asian scholars would have several objections about it. First, this structure is not a coherent and organic East Asian system, but is formed from a patchwork of the national histories of East Asian countries. Second, the emphasis on Chinese history is disproportionately too great for scholars of other East Asian countries. Third, its discussion of East Asian history before the eighteenth century is dedicated overwhelmingly to Chinese history, and after the nineteenth century the narrative is focused on the impact of the Western nation's approach, while the roles of other countries become supportive or merely peripheral and ornamental.

We may posit that for every historian, truth is the ultimate aim of research. However, few readers of history would be very fond of an exceptionally objective history, free from all emotional sentiment or bias. Without some form of subjective theoretical organizing framework, historical narratives will become disorderly, even incoherent, not to mention insipid. But no perfectly satisfactory theoretical framework has yet appeared. History is multi-dimensional, and one can never obtain a full view from any single perspective. Any research paradigm will lead to new discoveries while neglecting certain historical contexts excluded by its defined scope. Therefore, multiple research perspectives and multiple frameworks must be implemented so that they can supplement each other. Both 'East Asian history' and the 'history of the East Asian maritime region' are historical spaces constructed by modern historians. Each possesses its own theory, approach, and perspective. They are, accordingly, not perfect, and they cannot substitute for other historical frameworks and perspectives, yet they could serve productively in the role of useful supplements to older and more conventional historiographical frameworks.

19 Murphey 2009.

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