

Towards the Creation of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies

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1 Introduction — The Founding of an Academic Center in Cultural Interaction Studies and its Purpose

In 2007, we were selected as one of institutions for the Global COE (Center Of Excellence) Program promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and established two academic organizaions. One of these organizaions will be the foundation, in April 2008, of a new academic program: Cultural Interaction Studies. This launch will constitute a reorganization of the Kansai University Graduate School of Letters, and this academic program will rank alongside the existing integrated department in Humanities. It will offer one course, East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies, which is designed to train young researchers in accordance with the Global COE Program. Each year, 12 students in master program and 6 students in doctoral program will be accepted, and those completing the program will receive the new degree of either Masters in Cultural Interaction Studies or Doctorate in Cultural Interaction Studies, respectively.

The other academic foundation is the Institute for Cultural Interaction Studies that was officially inaugurated in October of 2007. This institute is primarily responsible for carrying out research activities, and under its program director, there are currently 15 program members in total, in addition to core supporters (made up of vititing professors, assistant professors, research fellows, and post-doctoral fellows). All of the students in doctoral program for the aforementioned new graduate school academic program are assigned as research assistants to these core individuals.

The program director administer both of these academic organizations as one *de facto* entity, for which a university-wide Global COE Administration Council has been established with the university president as its chairman. A university-wide support system forms the basis on which the administration and progress management for this program is conducted.

The following three points summarize the purpose of the program's activities.

1) The cultivation of a new generation in East Asian cultural studies

The program aims to cultivate independent young researchers who share a multifaceted viewpoint in which the East Asian world is seen as an interwoven cultural complex of multilateral relationships, and who possess the ability to communicate on an international level.

2) The creation of cultural interaction studies as a new academic field

The new academic field of cultural interaction studies goes beyond conventional inter-country relations and integrates the cultural exchange studies in different academic disciplines. The program will create the field's theories and methodologies, reviewing and systematizing specific case examples.

3) The formation of an East Asian cultural studies hub

The program joins together such topics as cultural exchange studies and the history of international relations — which are usually studied separately by individual country — in an international network, leading the way in cultural studies for each region of East Asia, and establishing a research hub with its own unique international academic conference.

In the next section, we will introduce some of the concrete ideas we currently have for the achievement of this program's goals.

2 The Current State of East Asian Cultural Exchange Studies

The basis of this COE is the cultural exchange studies centered on Sino-Japanese relations which Kansai University has been carrying out for many years through its Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies. The COE, with full consideration of the outcomes of these studies, aims at a wide-ranging and high-level expansion of the studies. To that end, the reason we have replaced the comparatively familiar phrase of “cultural exchange” with “cultural interaction” is due to our awareness of the current situation, as described below.

In conventional cultural exchange studies, there is a premise in national research frameworks of seeing nations as units. Using the history of Sino-Japanese exchange as one example, the current approach is to essentially separate the two countries of Japan and China from the pluralistic cultural exchange of East Asia, and to conduct research in the context of bilateral cultural exchange. Furthermore, individual studies are constrained to a national framework of Japan and China, even if those studies are bilateral. Carrying this argument to the extreme, historical studies in Japan of cultural exchange between Japan and China and how China is represented in Japan and historical studies in China of cultural exchange between China and Japan and how Japan is represented in China have become the subjects of consideration, and it is difficult to claim that there has been any cross-border, comprehensive formation of research organizations or fields of study. For example, the way that Sino-Japanese cultural exchange of the 17th to 19th centuries is called “cultural exchange between China and Japan in the Qing Dynasty” in China and “cultural exchange between Japan and China in the Edo and Meiji eras” in Japan

reflects the reality of how historical cultural exchange studies are conducted in the respective frameworks of Chinese and Japanese history.

Conventional cultural exchange studies have come to be primarily formulated as stacks of case studies related to cultures or institutions in each separate academic field. As a result, there has certainly been a bountiful accumulation of knowledge in each academic field regarding language, ideas, ethnic groups, religion, literature, history, etc. Again, taking the example of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange, past studies in each field have provided enough quality and quantity to make up entire libraries. However, the results of this research are, in a sense, just an increase in the accumulation of individual descriptions, and consideration of methods for grasping the overall picture of cultural interaction, even if limited to that between Japan and China, is still an undeveloped field. Although it studies the same phenomena, it can be said to be lacking connections that transcend academic fields, which reflects the present situation that the modern study of humanities has lost its totality.

Within the East Asian world there does exist the concept of an East Asian civilization, or an East Asian cultural sphere, which as a viewpoint goes beyond national frameworks. However, studies that uncritically assume these civilization theories and cultural spheres, by casually configuring high-level civilizations as being at the center of civilization and culture, are unable to rid themselves of the conventional schema of “civilized area vs. non-civilized area” or “central area vs. surrounding area”. It must be said that the essence of cultural interaction, which is fundamentally bilateral, is therefore not grasped, and that the various and diverse aspects of cultural contact are restricted to the flat plane of a map. The subject of our program is East Asia, but if sufficient critical investigation is not applied to these conventional sorts of research trends, it is unlikely that we will be able to escape from the unilateral perspective in which, just as water flows from high to low, “culture is diffused from China to its surrounding nations”.

3 The Aims of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies

Recognizing the issues presented above, if we were to define in a few words our proposed program in East Asian cultural interaction studies, our definition would have to be as follows. East Asian cultural interaction studies goes beyond analytical units such as nations or ethnic groups; it assumes that there is a cultural complex known as “East Asia” that has a fixed grouping. It is a new academic study that, while taking note of the complex’s various internal phenomena, such as cultural genesis, diffusion, contact, and transformation, attempts to identify the state of total cultural interaction from a multifaceted, overall standpoint that comprehensively includes the various fields of the humanities. In order to build the study, there must be an awareness of at least two “border crossings” — border crossings from national research frameworks, and border crossings from research frameworks in each academic field.

The basic outlines of the cultures of East Asian regions were formed comparatively early and have

become the existing without undergoing any large discontinuities into today's national frameworks. As a result of the refinement of the research conducted within those frameworks, the diversity of the various cultures is readily superimposed with the uniqueness and characteristic traits of a nation or an ethnic group, and the significance of interaction with other cultures has become diluted. However, there are no cultures in existence that were formed in isolation, disconnected from others; even today all cultures repeatedly experience contact, conflict, transformation, and fusion. The East Asian world should be perceived as a complex connected by a chain of unceasing cultural interactions on various levels. Even now, as the concept of an "East Asian community" emerges as a political issue, there is a strong call for the formation of an image of East Asia as a cultural complex distinct from the "one nation/one culture" view. This image cannot be acquired from a point of view that cuts off one nation's culture from that of others in order to examine it. A point of view that dynamically and multilaterally identifies mutual cultural interaction, that takes into account Asian culture as a whole, is the most promising approach towards a new cultural image, and will serve as an initiating agent that will innovate the cultural studies of East Asia.

A point of view that takes into account the "totality" of a certain culture can be attained from a standpoint that integrates scholarly disciplines such as language, ideas, ethnic groups, religion, literature, and history. Of course, individual researchers each have their own academic disciplines, and it is from those disciplines that they embark on their investigations of cultural interactions in East Asia. For example, several of the core members have been pursuing studies related to Nagasaki. During these studies, some issues have emerged in relation to the Taoist deities in Toudera, one of the Chinese-style Buddhist temples still standing in Nagasaki. These studies have shown that this is not particular to Nagasaki, which was a window to China in early-modern Japan — the deities can also be seen in other major temples of Japanese Zen Buddhist sects. There is a clear sense that, in order to explain this phenomenon, this idea of crossing borders, of bringing together several academic fields such as Japanese Buddhist history, Chinese religious history, and East Asian trade history, is valid.

Of course, these two border crossings are not simple things. Research from points of view that go beyond the single-nation-oriented historical framework of "East Asia" has been thriving in recent years, and research projects bearing an "East Asian" title are getting underway even in China and Korea. However, such research viewpoints as exist in Japan are not always favorably or positively accepted in other countries. Moreover, we also do not possess sufficient experience in accomplishing unified, interdisciplinary, and overall collaborative research in our studies in the various fields of the humanities on long-term and wide-ranging areas on an "East Asian" scale. In that sense, it is clear that our program presents an extremely tough challenge.

4 Research Methodology for East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies

We must admit that we do not currently know whether or not the Cultural Interaction Studies we envision will grow and develop into a field of learning that stands alongside subjects such as history or linguistics as one of the fields of the humanities. In the past, religious studies grew out of theology, and just as that field needed a century to become established as an independent discipline, this will likely be a problem we will be thinking about for a very long time. Still, for the time being, we are considering the following three orientations for our research over the next several years.

I The Various Aspects of Cultural Interaction as Seen by an Intermediary: What Is Being Conveyed, and by What?

A variety of things can be supposed to act as intermediaries that transmit culture. There are also diverse and complex types of intermediaries. Normally, the broader divisions of “people and things” come to mind. Regarding “people”, there are individuals such as diplomats, scholars, exchange students, and monks, and there are groups such as pirates and immigrants. “Things” covers a wider range, from textual information such as books to traded commodities. If we broaden the definition of “intermediary”, the scope of research expands to include modes of transportation such as boats and ships and the trade routes that support them, and even international relations. Just addressing these one by one does not go outside the area of the conventional gathering of case examples. In cultural interaction studies, there must always be a consciousness of a sublation to the larger concept of “East Asia”. Just to be sure, it is worth commenting that this is certainly not a contradiction of the “individual description” study results. Studies will not progress without that sort of accumulation. In fact, there is no way to exhibit readily visible results outside of an “accumulation of individual studies” format. However, what we want to make clear here is that the reasons why individual themes are established and how they relate to “cultural interaction in East Asia” must not be delegated to some notion of pre-established harmony, but need to be deliberately expressed. We think that an awareness of this point is the first step in the creation of a unique discipline of cultural interaction studies, and it is the role of all program members to investigate these aspects.

II Cultural Contact in a Particular Region and Its Influence

It is the role of the regional research teams to establish specific regions within East Asia and, bearing in mind the comparisons of cultural interactions with other regions, to set the direction of the research. There are four regional research teams, one for each of the following regions: Northeast Asia, Coastal Asia, Inland Asia, and Outside of Asia. There is a reason why there is no team for “China”. While it is the policy of this project to avoid setting a fixed cultural center, the stance to be taken towards Chinese culture is, in a certain sense, definitive when the subject is East Asian culture. When there is an attempt

to study cultural contact in a region, the problem of what sort of relationship exists with Chinese culture cannot be bypassed. Consequently, each research team has a viewpoint of how its region has contacted with, and been influenced by, Chinese culture, and is thereby able to re-evaluate the position of Chinese culture in East Asia. At the same time, the teams investigate how each region can be characterized within the cultural complex of East Asia. To that end, while each regional research team sets common research topics for which it is primarily responsible, and asks for the participation of the members of other research teams from time to time, they strive to identify regional characteristics in cultural interactions. For example, the Northeast Asia team whose subjects include Japan and Korea has already started research with the common theme of “Traditional Academies in East Asia”. In doing so, from a comparative study of “traditional academies” as scholarly institutions in East Asia, including China, they expect to gain insight into the differences between, and backgrounds of, the cultural inheritance of the regions. A composite of these sorts of research themes should shed light on the diversity and synchronicity of East Asian cultural interactions.

III Cultural Images as Seen by Others and the Formation of Cultural Identity

These avenues of future research are closely associated with the program’s subtitle, “Creating a New Cultural Image of East Asia via a Periphery-based Approach”. The gap that exists between a self-portrait and a portrait painted by the hand of another and the relationship between the self-awareness of another and the formation of one’s own cultural identity are issues that always come to the surface when thinking about contact with different cultures.

Conventional Asian cultural studies have always tried to identify the cultural characteristics of single countries such as Japan or China and their formation inside a single-country framework. In order to grasp the essence of the subject, they have focused on a “center” or “core”, detaching that which is not the center, the so-called “peripheral area”, from the subject of analysis, and have established methods for extracting the various aspects of this refined culture. However, contact with other cultures is constantly occurring, and happens even in those “peripheral areas” that have been cut away. A single culture is exposed to the eyes of others, it experiences conflict, transformation, and intermingling before acceptance and establishment, and by delving deeper into its “peripheral areas”, it becomes possible, for the first time, to grasp the dynamism of its cultural interactions. Also, the cultural images perceived through the eyes of others are likely to differ from the various aspects of a culture refined as a self-portrait, but that causes the emergence of the important elements that make up the essence of a culture, which does not come into view with conventional center-oriented cultural studies. The focusing of attention on these rich “peripheral areas” is called “periphery-based approach” in this project, and it is considered to be the fundamental method used to give shape to cultural interaction studies.

Intentionally standing at these “peripheral areas” and analyzing the subject is essentially the same as relatively positioning a certain culture within East Asian culture. From the viewpoint in question, even

China, which has been recognized as having an overwhelming impact on the traditional East Asian cultural paradigm, is assigned to a position as one of the hubs of cultural interaction. Changing the position of Chinese culture with respect to East Asian culture in this manner will cause a great upheaval in the scheme of Asian cultural studies. Furthermore, by thinking that these “centers” and “peripheral areas” have fluid relationships, and that the marginal regions that exist between the multiple “centers” constitute one type of “peripheral area”, it should be understood that actual East Asian culture is not simply the sum total of Chinese culture and those of each of the countries that oppose it. It would seem that herein can be seen the basic point of view of cultural interaction studies as a new system of learning that views East Asia as a chain of many-to-many cultural connections. This program takes the standpoint of so-called “multiculturalism”, and aims to create East Asian cultural images while avoiding an across-the-board development of individual cultural studies. This theme has the potential to fulfill a sort of “rough draft” role in the illustration of an overall image of East Asian culture.

In this report, we have summarized our vision of the East Asian Cultural Interaction studies and have described its avenues of research. As to whether the program concept is right or wrong, it goes without saying that this will ultimately be determined by the accomplishments of the program members. We have just begun, but this research journal will be the first part of what we will be sending out.