

PREFACE

Promoting Transnational Approaches to Cultural Networks in East Asia

De-min Tao*

As the organizer of this symposium, I am glad to have the opportunity to give a brief review of ICIS's efforts in recent years for promoting transnational approaches to cultural networks in East Asia.

It is not an exaggeration to say that when ICIS was founded in the fall of 2007, and especially when the Society of Cultural Interaction in East Asia (SCIEA) was launched in the spring of 2009, our G-COE program received considerable attention. Professor Ying-shih Yu inscribed Xun Zi's words — “The beginnings of Heaven and Earth are still present today” (天地始者, 今日是也) — to encourage us to break new ground in East Asian studies. Professor Akira Iriye contextualized our program in terms of transnational history: it “reflects awareness of the importance of transcending a purely nation-centric approach to history, and stresses the cultural aspect of cross-border relations. Both of these fit admirably into the framework of transnational history. It is part of a global, transnational effort to chart a new course in understanding our past. The past must be shared by all people regardless of national division, but the part of the past that can be shared most meaningfully is cultural productions, their infusion, and their transmission.”

My personal impression is that our program has achieved the following major accomplishments in accordance with the initial plan.

First, we spread the message of *bunka kōshō gaku* (文化交渉学, *wenhua jiaoshe xue* in Chinese, or “cultural interaction” in English) domestically and internationally. It had been a practice in academic circles to use the word *kōryū* (交流, *jiaoliu* in Chinese, or “exchange” in English) to describe contact between different countries and regions. Scholars became accustomed to limiting their attention to bilateral relations between countries or regions. But *kōryū* implies the positive and ideal; it does not include the

* Director, Institute for Cultural Interaction Studies, Kansai University.

meaning of negative or harmful consequences from contact or relationships, and therefore, could lead to a lopsided view of history. In light of this problem, we suggested the term *kōshō* (交渉, *jiaoshe* in Chinese, or “interaction” in English) to promote a neutral attitude and objectivity in research. We also emphasized the importance of exploring contact and relationships in a larger context of multilateral interactions. Fortunately, our proposal has become increasingly accepted by many scholars and has now become a consensus in the SCIEA. For example, Professor Liu Jiafeng wrote to me in an e-mail that “I entirely agree with the use of *jiaoshe* to replace *jiaoliu*, as the word *jiaoliu* is too positive and represents too much of an ideal” to describe the historical relations between Christianity and Islam in China, which was full of negotiations and conflict.”¹⁾

Secondly, we carried out research projects with our domestic and overseas colleagues in three areas: “differences and similarities between traditional spiritual cultures in East Asia,” “unconscious collaboration of East Asian countries in absorbing modern Western terminologies,” and “transmission and circulation of material cultures.” In particular, we are satisfied with the productive outcome of a conference series on printing, publication, knowledge transmission, and cultural exchanges in East Asia. Since 2008, this annual conference has been held at Fudan University in Shanghai, City University of Hong Kong, Kansai University in Osaka, and Beijing University of Foreign Studies, and has brought together the results of outstanding research in the aforementioned three areas. On several occasions, I suggested considering the role that traditional Chinese writing (*kanji* and *kanbun*) played in East Asia with that of Latin in Europe. Professor Wang Yong coined the impressive phrase “book road” to characterize cultural interaction in East Asia in terms of trading and circulating *kanseki* and compared it with the role of the Silk Road. Professor Kin Bunkyo published an informative study, *Kanbun to Higashi Ajia*, which discusses the reception of *kanbun* and various innovative methods for reading it in the various countries and regions of East Asia. A revived identity through *kanji*, *kanbun* and *kanseki*, I think, will undoubtedly contribute to a sense of awareness

1) To be sure, the word *kōshō* also has its problems. Over the course of its modern popular usage, it referred restrictively to such actions as political negotiations; the meaning of association and intercourse from an earlier age was almost forgotten. For this reason, some Chinese scholars thought that it is too awkward to use in discussing scholarly issues. However, it was in Japan rather than in China that scholars used the term often in their book titles and discussions concerning international contact. Through our efforts, the word *kōshō* is now recovering its original meaning of association and intercourse, which could be considered a phenomenon of reverse-export and cultural interaction.

of cultural community for promoting mutual understanding between the peoples of East Asia.

Thirdly, the part of our program of which we are most proud is the effort to foster young scholars to be open-minded, to have fieldwork experience, multilingual presentation skills, and know-how of conference organization. To train such students on a regular basis, we have already established the new Graduate School of East Asian Cultures based on the foundation laid in recent years. Fieldwork in such “peripheral crossroads” as Hue in Vietnam and Amakusa in Kyūshū has given graduate students the invaluable experience of coming into contact with mixed cultures and newly discovered historical documents. Beside presentations in Japanese and Chinese, many students have also experienced presenting scholarly topics in English at the annual meeting in Tokyo of the Asian Studies Conference Japan (ASCJ), a branch of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) of the United States. This year, a panel proposal was also accepted by the AAS to participate in its annual meeting, which will be held in Toronto.

Fourthly, the founding and running of the SCIEA may be considered our most important achievement in that it has a great influence on academic circles. Before ICIS was founded, we already had a number of networks of special interests and felt a need to combine them into a larger association. Thanks to many sister institutes and their leaders, our idea to do so was positively responded to and, as a result, the launching of the Society was attended by many distinguished guests, such as Professors Aoki Tamotsu, Akira Iriye, Hirano Ken'ichiro, Tsuchida Kenjiro, Huang Chun-chieh, Cheng Pei-kai, Yan Shaodang, Ge Zhaoguang, Zhang Xiping, Jin Siyan, Kim Tae Chang, Choe Yong Chul, Choi Gwan, Francis Fukuyama, Martin Collcutt, Rudolf Wagner, and Willy Vande Walle. So far, the annual meeting has rotated from Kansai University in Osaka (2009), to National Taiwan University in Taipei (2010), and Huazhong Normal University in Wuhan (2011). It will be held at Korea University in Seoul in 2012 and City University of Hong Kong in 2013. Many attendants have recognized the value of this new scholarly platform and have expressed their willingness to participate. We hope the Society will continue to grow both in terms of multinational membership and academic excellence, become a true forum for spreading transnational and cross-cultural ideas and opinions, and exert the kind of influence it deserves.

Finally, I would like to raise the issue of our attitudes toward “hybrid cultures” (混

成文化²⁾), a term I learned recently from a conversation with Professor Akira Iriye. As a matter of fact, any kind of cultural interaction inevitably generates hybridization, whether that interaction is human, a product, a practice, or an environment. If someone does not know the importance of diversity for coexistence, and has no experience working with people of different backgrounds, but only acknowledges narrowly defined “national traditions” or “pureblood cultures,” he or she would never take “hybrid cultures” seriously or recognize their legitimacy. Speaking from personal experience, I was born in Shanghai after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, but never had the opportunity to learn about Confucianism until I came to Japan for doctoral training in the late 1980s. I was fortunate to be able restore my cultural roots through working with my Japanese advisors and to complete my dissertation on the Kaitokudō, a Japanese Neo-Confucian academy in early modern Osaka. Therefore, it is fair to say that a person may not necessarily be the inheritor of his or her cultural roots simply through ethnicity or nationality. In order to carry on the tradition to which he or she belongs, he or she has to learn and be educated, and the provider of that education may not necessarily be in his or her birthplace or native country.

2) Professor Aoki Tamotsu is a pioneer in using this *kanji* expression, which I prefer to use for “hybrid cultures.” There were similar expressions, such as 雜種文化 suggested by the late professor Katō Shūichi, as well as 混血文化 by others.