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Reflections on “Orientalism” from the Angle of Japan-Related Research

Carl Steenstrup

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* is a "deep" book: deeply flawed and deeply disturbing. Flawed because it scolds indiscriminately; disturbing because it has forced Asianists to re-think their methodologies. Both aspects were argued with force and eloquence in the "Review Symposium" in *JAS* XXXIX (1980): 481-517 by Rob. A. Kapp, Michael Dalby, David Kopf, and Richard H. Minear; I shall therefore limit myself to points bearing on what I have to say later on my own topic.

In my opinion, Said does not seem to realize sufficiently that Europe's ignorance, fear, and envy of the "Orient" were well-entrenched centuries before the first stirrings of "Oriental studies" in the West. It is well known that stereotyping and even demonizing of alien cultures belong to the common, un-regenerate stage of human thought; while research and scholarly publication on them, in short "Orientalism," have, by making the facts known, reduced rather than abetted prejudice. "Orientalism," such as Denis Sinor's symposium volume *Orientalism in History* took stock of it, has, with all its hangups and *hybris*, made history less Euro-centered and generally wiser; these changes belong to "Orientalism's" heritage alongside the vicious prejudices alleged by Said. So do modern Asia's self-realization and drive for political independence; they would probably have come about much later, had it not been for the publication by westerners of, say, the treasures of Indian and Persian literature. Further, such works as F. Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* and Legge's *Chinese Classics* incontrovertibly proved how much the proud West of the 19th century could still learn from Asia in the fields of religion, philosophy, and ethics. Likewise, on a common human plane, it was probably more than anything the proddings of the
As Others See Us

"China helpers"—however patronizing the attitudes of these helpers at times were—which made the average educated westerners of the 19th and 20th centuries empathize with Asia's suffering peoples. Finally, scholarly commensality across the borders of antagonized national pasts might not have emerged without "Orientalism" as an institutional seedbed for research. In short, but for Guillaume Postel, van Linschoten, and all the other "Orientalists" from the Renaissance until the present day we might still be where our 16th century ancestors set out on their voyage towards a comprehensive view of the world: that is, bound to unquestioning belief in the general applicability of their own ideas and institutions. Without the facts elicited and published by "Orientalists", history and anthropology could not have arrived at their present stance of trans-cultural relativism. This is particularly obvious as regards those parts of "Orientalism" which concern East Asia, that is areas where Western dominance was only realized partially or not at all. Contamination of scholarship by colonialist motives was only rarely a conspicuous feature of Western Sinology, and hardly ever appeared in Western Japanology. There is, further, no clear-cut relationship between a colonialist environment and crooked scholarship. British and Dutch pre-WW II scholarship on South-East Asia—then solidly under Western control with the exception of Thailand—had already reached a level of objectivity and in many instances of positive appreciation of the local cultures which Western scholarship on China and Japan only reached in the postwar years. A considerable number of scholars reared within the traditions of Dutch and British colonial bureaucracies wrote superb historical and anthropological works, and in the process more often than not got genuinely captivated by the achievements of the cultures they studied. The very rigors of their research somehow dispelled the Eurocentric hybris which these authors may possibly have had at the outset of their careers.

In spite of Said's venom, and the regional limitation of the validity of his strictures, the Saidian controversy has in my opinion been useful because it created the opportunity to haul onto the surface submerged prejudices, in areas of research where colonialism prevailed, and to chase related prejudices and misunderstandings in research areas where it did not, or only did so to a limited extent, as in Far Eastern studies. Below, I shall try to pin down some of the particular pitfalls in Far Eastern research, focusing on the field with which I am familiar, viz. Japanology. Let it be said from the outset that I would have been extremely happy to have produced any of the works I mention as cautionary examples.

I. Insufficient grounding in the roots of one's own civilization

A Portuguese Jesuit missionary in, say, 16th century Japan, might be as chauvinistic as anybody when it came to quarrels with Spanish colleagues (and vice versa) or with other religious orders such as Franciscans (and vice versa). But he had gone through an arduous physical and spiritual training which made him what the Japanese would call a nikudan, a human bullet, of the Church
Militant, a training which, coupled with his supramundane aims, made him rather impervious to beliefs in the absolute supremacy of his society and his kin; with all his narrowness the Jesuit was as much of a cosmopolitan as his contemporary world could make him.\textsuperscript{13}

The present-day East Asia researcher, whether he hails from the US or from Western Europe, has no metaphysical anchor, nor has he been subjected to any \textit{exercitia}. Instead, he is an unreflecting, and therefore totally trusting, believer in the values of the particular secular society he came from, or in some other, future society whose excellence is being touted there. But he has normally learned little about the moorings of Western civilization, not only because most teaching of Western history is centered on the particular nation rather than on the particular advance in thought and technology, but also because the teaching of Western philosophy in schools has ceased, and the teaching of the history of science not begun. The arduous and quite unique process by which a handful of peripheral lands on the Eurasian continent developed mathematics, navigation, ocean-going ships, physics, medicine, and the methods of critical history and linguistics, during the twelfth through the nineteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{14} is therefore not clear to him. Confronted with, say, the civilization of China, he may tend to despise it for not having developed the way Western Europe did during those centuries, rather than look upon China as the “normal” way of changing, and Western Europe as the fast, lucky, jerky, abnormal one. Or he may go looking for some proto-scientific seed in China’s intellectual history which did not blossom into critical, quantitative science, and devise “causes” why it did not. Or he may not notice the problem at all, and consider China a purely “bookish” civilization, in which the material contributions are not worth studying, particularly if nobody has bothered to tell him that technologically Western Europe was at the receiving end and China at the pouring end of the pipeline of ideas up to about 1500.\textsuperscript{15} Or he may undertake a comparison with Japan and conclude that the Japanese are much smarter since they got railways and inoculation faster and with less fuss. Which may well be true, but is not proven without a serious consideration of the two countries’ size, the relative numbers of the trained bureaucratic classes, the relative weight of literary traditions, and the presence or absence of a foreign yoke. Many of the “grand” questions in Asian history can be dissolved by the application of critical devices long tested in Western history; conversely, a half-understood chain of events in Western history is sometimes misused as an “explanation” of a somewhat similar—whatever that may mean—chain of events in Asian history.\textsuperscript{16}

In short, one should not expect first-rate books on Chinese, Japanese, or Korean history to be written by those who were not first exposed to a thorough guided tour of their own culture, of its historical roots, and its unique features. The Jesuits, in spite of their religious blinkers, were excellent observers because their thorough training in their own line had at the same time contained a modicum of intellectual distance to the culture in which they had grown up. Taking that culture for granted\textsuperscript{17} and “normal” is the source of an “Orientalism” as pernicious to scholarly \textit{akribia} as the prejudices lambasted by Professor Said. Even worse, it happens that Eastern scholars internalize the unexpressed foun-
As Others See Us

dations of Western historical ideology to the extent that they see them as normative. One of the few places in the world of to-day where these sorts of institutionalized parochialism are effectively combated is the Institute for the History of the European Expansion of Leiden University. There, and at the Rijksarchief at the Hague, Eastern scholars study the past of their own countries from the documents left by the Dutch East Indian Company (VOC); while themselves teaching the implications of that history to Western confrères, who either have, or get, a comparativistic perspective of their own countries' past otherwise rarely achieved.

II. The trend to see Asian cultures as “philosophical” or “literary” and one’s own as “practical”

A Western researcher who has not studied the preconceptions of his own civilization, in particular the history of its thought, confronts, say, vast amounts of premodern Chinese texts dealing with the relationship between Heaven, State, and Man, while the much similar tomes of scholastic thought in Europe’s medieval ages are unknown to him. He thereby gains the impression that traditional Chinese civilization was more prone to philosophical speculation than was his own. He may also note that the political figures of modern China often quote historical paradigms in speeches and articles. He therefore thinks that the Chinese are in a peculiar way wedded to their past, overlooking the fact that European, say, 17th century, tracts argue in the same manner, because history was then the basis of any education, but is no longer so in the West. Finally, his research program may expose him to larger doses of prose and poetry than he ever voluntarily consumed at home, and he may therefore overvalue the importance of literature in Chinese culture. The same distortion may, mutatis mutandis, befall the Japanologist and the Koreanist. The remedies are thorough study of Western intellectual history before that of any Eastern civilization is embarked upon, and more “participant observer” research abroad, preferably by such scholars as already know a particular field of endeavor, and now ply it in an Eastern environment. Yet, in a way the tendency to view Asian societies through their texts rather than directly is unavoidable: textual study can be done at home, while problem-centered research requires a stay abroad; textual study requires no fluency in the spoken language, the great bugbear of Japanese and to some extent Chinese studies; and in certain fields it is still possible to gain academic credentials by endless footnoting of seemingly profound, but really unimportant texts, and publishing the stuff. I, for one, got away with it. A brief glance at the holdings of a well-stocked research library will show what is wrong: for each study of the nitty-gritty of Chinese or Japanese society there are ten studies of fine points of prosody, grammar, and literary biography. Until this distribution of the expenditures of funds and scholarly energies changes, Asian cultures will be viewed through a distorting blizzard of printed paper.
III. The trend to maximize the profits flowing from some mastery of a hard language

Having gone to the tremendous trouble and expense involved in learning to some usable extent a Far Eastern language, one is only too happy to dive into its vast sea and bring up a pearl of understanding by which one can justify to oneself and others that the effort was well spent. That is but human. But the trend impinges upon scholarship; if one spends years on studying, say, the Mohist Canon or the Book of Changes, one is apt to get sense out of them, “sense” being understood, subconsciously, as “almost as good as what the Greeks did.” In the same manner, the literary scholar may be tempted to write up, in the foreword of his translation, a work which makes no one happier or wiser, but took so many years to translate. This form of “Orientalism” is insidious, because it may warp the general public’s impression of the entire culture. One remedy is first to translate those works which the leading pundits of both cultures think are worth presenting to the jaded Western eye. For purely scholarly purposes other criteria apply, of course. But it is “Orientalism” in the bad, Saidian sense of the term, to try to foist upon the public what is incoherent just because it was written on, say, the Japan side of the Pacific. Abe Kôbô’s dubious view that industrial man is puny, isolated, and largely unable to better his lot is now being solemnly discussed by Western Japanologists agreeing that there must be something of value in it, driven by a quest for “meaningfulness” similar to the hooked layman’s quest for truth in the gnomic utterances of commercialized gurus. A sort of subtle “Orientalism” is at work here: we accept what is doubtful or wrong if it is sufficiently alien, because of a bad “post-colonial” conscience. Perhaps one should always, before embarking upon a translation, ask oneself: “Are you doing this because the Western public needs to know, or for some ulterior purpose irrelevant to the work itself?” I mention this point also because I did such dubious work for some years, translating medieval or late medieval kakun or houselaws, thinking that specializing in this border area between religion, philosophy, and history might create an interest in the genre, particularly among comparative historians. But having failed in this aim, and reviewing the efforts in the light of sociology’s recent findings that much “Wisdom” literature of the Fürstenspiegel or kakun type was indeed written by schoolmasters rather than by “opinion leaders” and thus expressed the author’s concerns with proprieties rather than tell us what people actually did, I have come to realize that what is trivial in one language is trivial also in translation, be the grammar and script ever so hard to crack. Possibly, the free choice of translation objects, left to the vagaries of graduate students, teachers, journal editors, and publishers, is at the root of the present situation where basic works are often left untranslated and modish works and views translated. Paradoxically, the present economic pinch may, relatively speaking, improve the situation, because publication activities become more dependent on Japan Foundation support, which is—witness the lists published in Japan Foundation Newsletter—doled out according to strict criteria of lasting relevance.
IV. The trend to cultivate "niche"s rather than attacking problems

While published biographies of many second-rate Asian figures exist in the Western world, many first-rate Asian figures still go un-biographed. Why? Because sources and secondary literature on the latter, in hard Oriental languages, are vast, and reading speed is too slow. The problem is unavoidable. But the choice of small subjects, because they are manageable, in terms of time and effort, is a sure way of lapsing into "Orientalism," and distort the coverage of an entire field of inquiry. The way out of the dilemma is the encouragement of efforts to have fundamental, scholarly works written by, say, first-rate Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scholars translated, in order that Western researchers may "fan out" from these bases and find their niche necessary for thesis work; and to permit collective efforts to be undertaken as thesis work. It ought to give as much kudos in the academic world to be one of the group who will give us the English-language bibliography of Itô Hirobumi as to have written a monograph on a second-rank figure, chosen more or less because sources and secondary literature on him were of manageable size. This is a matter for deans, advisors, and appointing boards, rather than for individual scholars. But the trend to choose "niche"s rather than challenges" is another form of "Orientalism" as fatal to Asian studies as any of the fads and fallacies deplored by Mr. Said.

V. The trend to create clusters of monographs surrounded by blank areas

Most research lives grow out of dissertations, and dissertations grow out of "papers," "papers" grow out of seminars, and seminar themes are decided by the whim of some pundit. Much effort is misdirected in this way. For training purposes, it is as rewarding to study a minuscule subject as an important one. But given the fact that we know so much less on, say, fundamentals of Japanese history than about fundamentals of French history, it would be highly useful if a data bank existed in which on the one hand a fairly tightly-meshed subject catalog was encoded, and opposite to each item were the most recent books, articles, projects, and seminars. One might then see at a glance where the gaps are, and research institutes and individual scholars might then, though they are as ever independent of each other's target choices, vie to fill these gaps. A field like medicine advances fast because nature itself poses the problems. But fast progress in the humanities and the social sciences demands conscious choices of target. For Chinese studies, the Bureau International de Sinologie could be given the funds required to do such documentation. For Japanology and Koreanistics, Leiden in the Netherlands might, for the reason mentioned below, be the right place to have such an internationally financed data bank and the people required to run it. The idea is my own. I have not asked them.
VI. The Western Babel versus a combined research front

While research money is largely found in the Western hemisphere, along with the best libraries, great amounts of solid scholarship is still carried out in Europe in German, French, Russian, Dutch, Italian, and Scandinavian. These scattered tongues are rarely read, and even central works couched in them rarely quoted or reviewed where it counts, namely in the works of American scholarship, the United States being since the end of WWII the haven of scholarship on East Asia. Those who publish in the lesser tongues all read English, and, funds permitting, buy American books. Why then, do they not cease publishing in the national tongues? One reason is practical: the scarce jobs are in many countries distributed by political bodies, and with them an article in the mother tongue may count more than a book in English. Another reason is the attitude of reviewers who have English as their first language: they tend to ridicule foreignisms to gain an easy point. Ridicule of this kind is, by the way, one reason why some academic journals in Japan have ceased to carry summaries in English. Hiring a professional translator to weed out goofs may cost the scholar, or his supporting foundation, as much per hour as he earns per day. A third reason is political. French authorities, e.g., want French recognized as a world language, and encourage, for reasons of national prestige, scholarly publication—oral as well as written—in French, as well as French renderings of Asian literary works, as soon as they have been done into English. A fourth reason is style. German works carry bulky footnotes and a weight of abstraction that defies translation into a less metaphysical tongue, like English. Scandinavian works suffer from funds-starved libraries, and high sales taxes on books; in such cases it is safer to publish in the national tongue, for fear that lack of acquaintance with the latest research literature make the product ridiculous in the eyes of the transnational community of scholars. As for Dutch, Italian, and Scandinavian productions, it is probable that the present trend, viz., to publish abroad and in English most of what is deemed important in scholarship, because local printing costs are high with small circulation, and spiral with inflation, will run its course. There remain German (particularly important for Japanology), French (particularly important for Sinology) and Russian (particularly important for both). Here a data bank of research themes, so as to avoid doubling and fill gaps, or rather produce the bibliographical knowledge necessary to do so, is a great desideratum. Another would be intensive reading courses for Japanologists in German, and in French for Sinologists, at American universities, and some form of centralized translation of Russian contributions into English. The parade of at least six major, largely uncoordinated research traditions in, say, Japanology (German, Russian, and French, which will last, plus Italian, Dutch and Nordic, which may switch totally to English) besides the great trunk of English-language publications is grand but sad, because it is such a waste. I would go so far as to say, since this is, pace Said, our new pet invective, a sort of Orientalism: for few think of making, say, Japanese the vehicle for all Japanese studies as French is for all French studies the world over. Lacking a one-tongue solution, a documentation center,
best in a country too small to use scholarship for political ends, and yet large
enough to have a substantial institute for Sinology, Japanology, and Koreanistics,
seems to be the way. And Leiden seems to me to be just the place, both for
facilities and accessibility, and for its ancient traditions in the field.

VII. The trend to use the portmanteau word “Western”
rather than more specific terms

We may have to eradicate “Oriental” from the discourse, pace Said, but we
still in writing papers and monographs use “Western” in opposition to, say,“Japanese,” as if Americans and the denizens of Western Europe thought and felt
the same way. They sure do not, and the use of the term “Western” clouds many
issues. Much of what is touted as specifically Japanese in American books, such as
groupism, hierarchy, reticence in stating one’s point, and suspiciousness towards
outsiders, particularly when they try to be nice and burden one with gratitude
(the on syndrome), is just the consequence of centuries of closed, bu-
reaucratically regimented living, and not particularly Japanese, while the op-
posites of these traits, such as individualism, egalitarianism, outspokenness, and
gregariousness, are not Western, but just American. A European feels the cage
closing in on him as soon as he reverts to his home country, just as a Japanese
does, with the difference that most Japanese seem to like the homely cage, and
most Europeans do not, once they have lived in the US. The remedy against
abuse of the term “Western” in comparisons is simply to be aware of the fact, and
use instead qualifications as to which nation and which class therein are being
compared. The average American’s frankness is as startling to a middle-class
Scandinavian as to a Japanese of whatever class, but the shock (which impairs
intellectual productivity) may be cured by a short introductory course in US
middle class behaviour at least as thorough as that which young Americans are
given on Japanese customs at, say, Dōshisha, the Sophia, or the Kansai Gaidai
universities, before they embark upon their Japanese intellectual adventures. To
western Europeans of the middle class and born before WWII, the US is, in
many ways, except for the language and the bodies and the faces, more foreign
in the true sense of the word than Japan, which has the same social configurations
that bureaucratic kingship built in their countries, only in a more extreme
degree. Seen in a larger perspective, to perceive US culture and Western
European culture as one, while Asian cultures are seen as discrete, is a cute, but
perspective-distorting form of “Orientalism,” I think. It is part of the general
wrongheaded belief in one’s system as “normal” and those of the others as
aberrations therefrom.

VIII. The trend to apply “idées fixes” when dealing with highly
abstract, or ideologically tricky matters

Idées fixes are, of course, not confined to westerners(!) dealing with oriental
cultures. The reverse occurs as well. In “The Significance of the Period of
National Seclusion Reconsidered”29—an essay of genuine profundity—Katō
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol13/iss13/17

8
Hidetoshi makes postwar Britain, rid of its dependencies overseas, a sort of analogy case to Japan in her period of Tokugawa seclusion, the idea being that seafaring island nations on continental perimeters tend to have somehow parallel histories. But isn’t the quest for parallels a fixed idea introduced by the natural sciences, or by the mind’s trend to impose regularity on the amorphic world? Occidental and religious idées fixes may be at work when the breathtakingly erudite George Elison in Deus Destroyed\textsuperscript{30} does not explicitly answer the readers’ anxious query, “Wasn’t Christianity truly a fifth column in Tokugawa Japan?”—which is something else than being perceived that way. That the Iberian nations strove to conquer, with the missionaries as spearheads, in the East what Protestantism had deprived them of in the West is undeniable; and was not the very idea of spreading the outrageous postulate that one man was God among a reasonable, philosophically mature people an abomination? Had not, all things considered, the bateren, by trying to foist upon a Far-Eastern people a Near-Eastern faith, deserved their cruel fate? Imagine Buddhist preachers in Philip II’s Spain or Elizabeth I’s England, and what would have been immediately done to them. . .\textsuperscript{31} The stereotype of the Western missionary as “good” and his heathen persecutors as “bad” dies slowly. Elison’s equally brilliant contribution “The Cross and the Sword” in Elison and Bardwell Smith (eds.), Warlords, Artists, and Commoners\textsuperscript{32} leaves me no wiser in the above respect. Maybe the question is unanswerable. But as I see it, Japan’s rejection of Christianity was also a rejection of Western presumption in “evangelizing” it, and thus the East’s first effective answer to “Orientalism” in its “Saidian” form.

Fixed ideas and stereotypes, within and without scholarly tomes, are historical facts per se. Japan was the object of missionary joy in the 16th century, of missionary horror in the 17th, of bemused politico-ethical debate in the 18th, of irritation in the first half of the 19th, of growing admiration in the next half century, of loathing in the “Dark Valley” period, and of grudging, growing admiration in the post WWII-period. But thanks to the martial qualities of the Japanese they were never the objects of the savage derision heaped upon the Chinese, whose stocks rose slowly in Europe’s eyes during the 16th, fast in the 17th, reached an apogee in the middle of the 18th, and then plunged, and remained there: for the man in the street, a “problem” rather than a “culture.” The distinct difference in image and evaluation of those images was a fact, already in the 16th century, and tended to be based on comparison of soldierly qualities.\textsuperscript{33}

**IX. Falling prey to group Narcissism**

Self-stereotyping providing grist for the masses’ Satanic mills of culture-blindness occurs, too. The image of a few thousand honest Britons ruling a few hundred million, dependent Hindus created by late-Victorian historians is still part of popular mythology in the Anglophone world. Among the latest newcomers to try their hand as “Herrenvolk,” the Japanese, books on what it “means” to be a Japanese (Nihonjinron) are still a growth industry. A serious monograph on the subject in a Western language is a desideratum. To most Nihonjinron
stereotyping belongs a duty to feel miserable outside Japan; and the Japanese live up to it with abandon, creating, even when they know English, mobile fortresses of Japanese-ness by moving in groups. Comparative studies of British behavior abroad, American behavior abroad, and Chinese and Japanese behavior abroad, would be highly useful. The subject is dead serious, for such behavior is in itself image creating among the general public, and eventually filters back into scholarly writings; stereotyping thus running its full and pernicious course, by creating "national characters" to which otherwise sensible people subsequently adapt their behavior and even their modes of thought.

X. Disregard of scholarship's marginality in the mind

But why do researchers, trained for critical objectivity, develop or follow "idées fixes" or stereotypes? Probably because any modern specialism is, psychologically speaking, but a thin veneer on top of a basically unchanged personality, with all its prejudices alive. Universities no longer have, at least not in continental Europe, any communal living where saintly dons and mature masters taught a tradition of akribia through living it. Newspapers, the telly, unpleasant experiences with foreigners, and the aggressiveness flowing from language frustration when abroad in one's chosen land, may form attitudes more forcefully than textbooks and seminars. Also, students are now recruited from the entire population, thus also from the groups oppressed by factory work or enforced idleness and/or depressing environments, and habitually prone to vent their frustrations on foreigners. Finally, one should not forget that the trend the world over is towards more and crueler violence directed against those who, as it were, flaunt majority opinion, otherwise in command, by looking, dressing, speaking, or acting different. When faced with the psychological shock of indefinite unemployment, Asianists tend to react like most other people, i.e., by projecting their resentment against visible scapegoats, such as foreigners; and they are then not immune against making those foreigners they know best—such as the "unemployment-exporting Japanese" or the "Chinese who defected from the camp of socialism"—the scapegoats of their personal misfortunes. While aggressive stereotyping is still tabooed among established university people, for good and obvious reasons, one can occasionally hear frustrated, highly educated, but jobless Europeans call for closure of the job market to aliens, unless protected by, e.g., The Common Market Treaty. The trend in Europe towards multi-ethnicism within each state now adds elements of anti-foreignism to the ideologies of all social classes. Against this slump-induced contagion, academic learning is no prophylactic. On the contrary, unemployable "experts on foreign cultures" are particularly susceptible, for they have had their mental innards shaken by confronting the "other" in some form, but they have not found the outlet which would have made it possible for them to live down by research, and evacuate by teaching, these unsettling experiences.
One particularly pertinacious misconception is the one that just being in a country for work or study makes one more tolerant towards the specific features of that culture. The opposite is often true: the combination of language frustration, jostling with foreigners in an unwonted climate, visa troubles, in short the whole trauma of being away from home, add up to animosity against the foreign place. The misery of a young American in Tokyo is only surpassed by that of a young Japanese in New York. Both may end up writing brilliant books on their researches, if only their souls are not in the books; the inner man of bubbling resentments, and the exterior man of calm grinding live different lives, the former subconsciously impinging upon the latter, but not vice-versa. To change the inner man you need a creed plus exercitia, like the Jesuits, or a revolutionary mission or some other overriding hangup of the kind which the Germans call Sendungsbevussung, or "Sense of Mission." From which hangup other biases may ultimately grow.

XII. Chasing "Orientalist" hangups beyond the Said controversy

Asianists have now lifted the lid off the Pandora’s box of prejudice—pace the "Saidian row"—and seen what historians of Things Western have known for a long time, viz., that prejudices in scholarly writings are determined by traditions of a political nature, by the structure of the scholarly community and its workings, and—last but not least—by the economic system, upon which the entire world of scholarship is perhaps just an insignificant outgrowth. Severe cutbacks not only contract the entire business of scholarly production, but also warp its contents, particularly when library funds dwindle, while growth—should it ever return—may lead to a boom like that of the sixties when enrollments grew rapidly, and tenures were granted also to those who only taught well, but were not outstanding in research. These trends, which affected Western Europe much, are well-known, have been studied by the OECD’s Manpower and Scientific Resource Planning Committees, and been widely publicized. I shall therefore only point to a few less-appreciated correlations, which apply in Western Europe, and some of which may apply in the US, too.

First, political troubles may enhance Asianists’ career chances. Unemployed Japanologists in Europe, e.g., know they may be hired, if a trade war with Japan starts, and their skills are needed by governments to study Japanese economic forecasts and white-books. They may therefore publish or abet the publication of alarmist articles on the Japanese danger threatening the Common Market economy. Sane and balanced warnings may drown in this noise.

Second, unemployed Asianists increasingly take to textbook-writing, in which they project their hangups and their frustrations. It is dangerous that the established experts on Asia leave the filling of young people’s minds to more or less to those embittered and frustrated. The see-saws of Chinese politics have engendered a plethora of textbooks for school use, some wildly in favor of the Cultural Revolution, some wildly in favor of the "Reverse Course," equally
As Others See Us

As Others See Us

distorted and foisted upon unsuspecting teachers and pupils not by authorities but by publishers hoping to make money out of providing some exciting fare in the drab milieu of school history.

Third, press coverage of Asia tends to be as warped as always: in Europe's dailies, Asia mainly appears when it is ravaged by war, famines, or disasters, or when some new economic pinch is attributed to Asian competition. Since cartelization of the journalistic profession, and the limited need for Asia coverage—let alone serious coverage—in most newspapers, rule out the employment of otherwise jobless Asianists as column-writers or copy-editors, the information gap between the general public and the "Asia experts" tends to widen rather than narrow down. Only in countries where the radio and television media are run by the governments—as in Scandinavia—more Asia knowledge might be distributed this way, creating more understanding of Asia among the general public, and more jobs for unemployed Asianists. However, much Asia reporting is by its very themes controversial, and political censorship, and the general drive in times of economic decay towards more harmless entertainments on the air, both militate against informative broadcasting on Asia.37

XIII. Which defects in Asianists’ output will really matter?

Given these larger societal forces working on the role of the Asianist profession, the importance of the "Saidian" and other traditional biases dwindles vis-à-vis more basic preoccupations with upholding a scholarly output. Books are now—at least in Europe—so expensive that even an employed scholar cannot own them but must borrow them, and the libraries often cannot afford to buy them either. Many of the books reviewed, say, in the Journal of Asian Studies, will remain inaccessible to Scandinavian scholars; and the pinch in library funds is badly felt in the larger, richer European countries, too. In a milieu which is—compared with the decades before—intellectually somewhat impoverished, watching out for other biases than the rather obvious ones above becomes of increasing importance. What follows is a tentative list. The author may be tempted to project the discourse he knows well on the alien reality;38 he may employ terms or choose subjects which permit him, for self-seeking purposes to sermonize his countrymen and/or the scholarly community;39 or he may sheepishly follow the ruts of some national tradition which time may eventually render unfruitful. There are still massive, traditional differences in choice of research targets among German, British, and French Japanology; and each specialization tends to have a sufficiently large public to admit of publication in the "vernacular," that is, languages—here German and French—other than English. German Japanologists delve into Tokugawa intellectual history deeper than any other Europeans do, possibly because their country's history impels them to ask like Japanese scholars, "Was 'Feudalism's remnants' that which made our fathers go berserk?" and because the very idea of taking Geistesgeschichte seriously is an established Hegelian and Post-Hegelian tradition in German universities. Technological lag has induced the British to specialize in "Technical Japanese," and a large and early Indological
tradition has made the French opt hard for Buddhist research. These national specializations may be fruitful to the extent that full mutual communications exist between the reading publics of these traditions. They do in Europe, where any university-trained person reads several languages. But they hamper communication towards the resource pool of research, the Japanological centers in the US, where students, by and large, will not read French and German; most of the brilliant German work on Tokugawa shisōshi, as found, notably, in the Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung, and the equally brilliant French work on Buddhology, by the circle of researchers publishing the Hōbōgin, is little known and little used in the US. Or he may even be tempted to choose his research fields according to the exigencies of funding, or to those of publication possibilities. This is a largely unexplored subject of increasing relevance; funding and publication outlets may already now in many cases determine research targets and methods more forcefully than any scholarly or non-scholarly preconception. And nobody dares to ask about the hangups of those who pay or administer funds for research or publication, or who determine whether a particular piece of research counts as merit or not in the deliberations of, say, an appointment or promotion board. Likewise, it is sometimes hard to determine whether a particular proposal for research was written with an eye to the needs of the field, or to the possibility to take advantage of some trendy research priority laid down by a political authority; or whether research findings in social sciences have been influenced by efforts to comply with the wishes of the authority which may, or may not, extend that particular, time-limited research appointment. But that is (as some Japanese textbooks maintain that the speakers of English tend to say), “another kettle of fish.”

Postscript

The above was written in the summer of 1981. Now (autumn of 1984) some European economies have taken an upward turn, but their government-run universities have become even poorer and dependent, the research libraries can afford even fewer books and periodicals, and academic unemployment, and the reactions among many of those hit by it, have become even more bitter. When unemployed masses and unemployable intelligentsia realize their common plight, the spark which ignites authoritarianism, red or brown, may appear. The violence in words and deeds which preceded 1934 is re-emerging. I think the basic idea of the paper still holds. “Saidian” biases are bad, but knowable. Whereas the subtly warped scholarship produced under the influence of alienation presents a clear and present danger to the quality of research, because the belief in objectivity is generally waning, and much rage does not show up in the professionally looking argumentation on the surface of the writing. The search for causes of bias and error should, therefore, be extended from investigation of traces of “Orientalism” into the influences of the socio-political Zeitgeist. Not all researchers are stoic enough to keep the effects of being told that their trainings are not needed separated from their attitudes. And no scholar is immune from
the psychological pressures working on everybody's mind within that particular society. Probably the scholars, just because their training has given them antennas of sensitivity, are more rather than less attuned than non-scholars to the miasmas common to their era.
Notes


10. H.T. Colenbrander, J.A. van der Chis, W. Ph. Coolhaas, and F. de Haan among the Dutch, and C.R. Wilson and Sir W. Foster among the British are notable examples. And the trend started early; see August Hennings, Gegenwärtiger Zustand der Besitzungen der Europäer in Ostindien I—III (Copenhagen, Hamburg, Kiel, 1784-86), vol. III, Anhang: "Versuch einer Ostindischen Litteraturgeschichte."

11. In the JAS "Orientalism" symposium (vol. XXXIX, 1980, pp. 507-17) Richard Minear, in a provocative essay called "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," tries to demonstrate equally obnoxious debunking or patronizing attitudes in the works of such diverse Japanologists as Chamberlain, Sansom, and Reischauer; I fail, however, to see the proof. The latter two, in particular, remained sort of Japanophiles right through the time of imperial Japan's worst period of aggressive behavior, no mean feat for a Briton and an American.


20. By untiring rearranging and re-interpretation of his texts, the erudite A.C. Graham, in his justly famous *Later Mohist Logics, Ethics, and Science*, managed to get an almost Hellenic light out of the murky Mohists. But was there, to begin with, such light in the texts? In a similar apologetic manner, Joseph Needham, in *Science and Civilization in China*, always manages to make the average Chinese proto-scientist look as brainy as any Westerner, though unfortunately inhibited by societal forces—as if these were not subject to man’s control; see especially vol. II, pp. 335-40 and vol. III, pp. 150-68. On the ways in which Leibniz—who had invested much time and effort in finding out about Things Chinese—got hooked upon “Fo-hi” and his alleged “binary system,” and upon ways to improve, by introducing Deist notions, Chinese epistemology (in which field little had been done after Mohism), see Needham II, pp. 340-45, and David E. Mungello, *Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord* (Hawaii University Press, 1977), pp. 122-23, respectively. On the political basis for Needham’s apologetics for Chinese proto-science, see his essay collection *Within the Four Seas: The Dialogue of East and West* (London, 1969), pp. 163-69 and 196-97.

22. It would serve Japan Foundation's purposes well, I think, to have the seminal works of Ishii Ryōsuke, Bito Masahide, Takayanagi Mitsutoshi, Takeuchi Bizo, and Tsuda Sōkichī, translated into English. Only scraps of their oeuvre is as yet available in English; of Ishii, Nihon kokka-shi, of Tsuda only the Tokugawa volume of Bungaku ni arawaretaru kokumin-shiso no kenkyū, of the others scattered articles only.

23. In his review of Keene's magisterial World Within Walls, in Journal of Japanese Studies IV (1978), pp. 37-44, Donald Shively deplores in note 3, justifiedly, the non-use of German critical scholarship on Tokugawa literature. Disregard of German Japanology means inter alia ignorance of the following authors and topics on which there is little or nothing in English: Peter Baron on regional development, Karl Zahl on elite formation, Ulrich Kemper on Tokugawa historiography, Klaus Kracht on the schools of premodern intellectual history, Hans A. Dettmer on Nara institutions, Franz Schütte, Schurhammer and Arcadio Schwade on Kirishitan, Karow on history of Japanese medicine, Benl on poetry, Lewin on linguistics, and the old giants like Siebold, v. Bälz, Rein, Gundert and Hammitzsch, Zuchert, Florenz, Lange, Ramning, and Hammitzsch.

24. French hegemony in Sinology was a cultural one, like that in the Near East, because they could not conquer much, and made do with a "Mission civilisatrice;" see Said's perceptive remarks in Orientalism, p. 215 on the difference in approach between British and French Near Eastern research. For historical surveys of French research, see Journal Asiatique CCLXI (1973), pp. 210-46 by Michel Soymié on Sinology; Daniel Bouchez, pp. 247-53, on Koreanistics; and Bernard Frank, pp. 255-95, on Japanology. The Bulletin de liaison pour les études chinoises en Europe is as basic to sinologists as the Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung is to Japanologists.


26. Most of the still unexplored materials of Kirishitan culture in Japan, and on Jesuits in China and its adjacent lands, are in Italian archives, and much of it is, when published, published in Italian. In the little used and quoted Annali del'istituto Orientale di Napoli (little used for Far Eastern studies, that is) one finds, in supplement XIII (1973) the only extant study in a Western language of the population registers from the Nara age kept in the Shosōin; by Franco Mazzei.

27. The Itinerario journal on European expansion is in English. But the bulk of work on the Dutch in Japan, and on Indonesia's past, is still published in Dutch. And in Dutch are, of course, the most important documentary sources for Asia's history from before 1500 to after World War II, namely the incredibly rich and well-ordered archives of the Rijksarchief at the Hague, to which the inventories, printed as well as unprinted, are mostly in Dutch. See also M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs., ed., De VOC in Azië (Bussum 1976), pp. 62-63, 96-99, 104-06, 153-56, 192 and 233-36.

28. In 1667, the Swedish gunnery officer Willman's report on Japan was published—for bibliographical detail, see Journal of Intercultural Studies VI (1979), p. 22—from which it would have been obvious to Leibniz that in contemporary Japan, Neo-Confucianism was as good as seedbed for some technological advance as Hellenic...
geometry; see for comparison Mungello, Leibniz and Confucianism, p. 123. But alas, Willman wrote in Swedish. Whoever wants to read the great Japanologist Thunberg's first summary of Things Japanese as he had seen them while practicing as a doctor there (he also visited Edo) 1775-76 and learning the language, has to consult "Tal om japanska nationen hallet för Kungl. Vetenskaps-Academien. . .3/11 1784," Stockholm 1784 (Widener Library has a copy, and Swedish reprints are under way), and his letters and papers (some in Dutch, but most in Swedish) in Uppsala; for an introduction to the Thunberg papers, see the Japanese research quoted in notes 11 and 119 of my paper, "A Gustavian Swede in Tanuma Okitsugu's Japan: Marginal Notes to Carl Peter Thunberg's Travelogue," in Journal of Intercultural Studies VI (1979), pp. 20-42. Present-day Scandinavian research on Asia is promoted by the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies (SIAS), which publishes a Monograph series that has now reached its 51st volume, a Studies on Asian Topics series which soon publishes volume 9, Lists of Scandinavian Asianists, various topical newsletters, a general Annual Newsletter, and various library catalogs; and sees to the publication of the Acta Orientalia journal. Among the widespread research activities at the SIAS one may mention Arab studies, East and Southeast Asian linguistics, ASEAN law, Documentation on Vietnam, Chinese economics, the history of ideas and institutions in Japan, Women in Asia, South Asian modern political history and social affairs, Southeast Asian anthropology and prehistory, the history of agriculture in Southeast Asia, the law of Modern China and Japan, Korean folklore, and various studies of the cultures, languages, or literatures of China, Korea, Japan, the Islamic World, and regions in Southeast Asia. Recent conferences sponsored by the institute have dealt with Modern South Asia, Modern China, Korean culture, and Asian Trade Routes, while meetings on South Asian archaeology, Sino-Tibetan linguistics, and on Oceania and Nepal, are in various stages of planning. The staff are nationals of the member countries, and the location is in Copenhagen, Denmark. The working language is Scandinavian, and the language of publication mostly English. As for the natural sciences, SIAS has sponsored research into traditional Chinese mathematics and metallurgy and cooperates with the Research Policy Institute (RPI) of the University of Lund (opposite to Copenhagen, on the Eastern bank of the Sound), which inter alia carries out research into present-day Chinese, Japanese and Indian technology and economics. The RPI working language is likewise Scandinavian, and the preferred language of publication, English.

34. In his review in Journal of Japanese Studies II (1975), pp. 127-31 of R. C. J. Butow, The John Doe Associates (Stanford University Press, 1974), Akira Iriye points out that Butow takes it for granted that Japan should, in 1941, have given in to US pressure, and failed its German ally. I think the point is well taken. No scholar is uninfluenced by whether he is a member of a powerful or a powerless state.
35. See points I through XI above.
36. See e.g., Endymion Wilkinson, Misunderstanding: Europe versus Japan (Tokyo, Chūō-kōron-sha, 1981), and the review in TLS 1981-10-30, p. 1276. It should not be forgotten that in "scholarly consensus," and to the extent that it influences decision-making, political consensus on Asian affairs, what is not being printed is as important as what is. One ought to find out, what criteria determined which texts went into...
Byōsaku Tsunoda et alii's brilliant and much used Sources of Japanese Tradition I-II (New York 1958 and several later reprints), and into the equally useful Sources of Japanese History I-II (New York, 1974) by David John Lu. Such books may determine an entire generation of undergraduates' view of an Asian culture, not only by what they include, but as much as by what they leave out. Prefaces are usually vague on such themes. The subject is part of the larger field of attitude research broached in Kitamura Hiroshi, Psychological Dimensions of US-Japanese Relationships (Cambridge Mass., 1971), and U.S.-Japan Trade Council, ed., How the American Press Views Japan (Wash., D.C., 1977). Conversely, a study on which Western history subjects attract the Japanese, based on the surveys written for the International Congresses of Historical Sciences, would be worthwhile.

37. The matter is complicated, because news out of Asia is either distorted by Western newsagencies or correspondents who know that such news must be spectacular, or even sensational, in order to get into print; or distorted by national news agencies who distribute nothing but praise of the régime. UNESCO has sided with the latter. Asianists have no say in the matter in either case; the engineering of "public opinion" is quite beyond their sphere of influence.

38. This point applies to the verbal level as well as to the conceptual level. On the former question, see Akira Iriye in Journal of Japanese Studies II (1976), pp. 449-51, reviewing Sheila K. Johnson, American Attitudes toward Japan, 1941-75 (Hoover Institution, 1975), esp. p. 451. On the latter, see, e.g. Marleigh Ryan in JJS II (1976), pp. 249-66, esp. 252-75, and Dan Fenno Henderson, Village Contracts in Tokugawa Japan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 13-19 and 29-33. Loose translation of legal and administrative terms, often engendered by a wish to find "intelligible" (but actually often misleading) parallels in Western history, mars much writing on Japanese history, and is really unnecessary—see the author's paper on the Sata mirensho in Monumenta Nipponica XXXV (1980) pp. 405-35—because contemporary definitions of terms already exist. One is well-advised to do without Western loan terms like chūsei for "medieval age"; see MN 1980, p. 338, or to equalize hōkensei with "feudalism" (p. 340); see John W. Hall in JJS II (1977), p. 366. Likewise, identifying kokkashugi with "Nationalism" leads to unnecessary trouble; as no participant, in the "Symposium on Japanese Nationalism" in JAS XXXI (1971), pp. 5-62, bothered to define what "Nationalism" means in a Japanese context, heat rather than light came out of the praiseworthy enterprise. Finally, the articles by Jeffrey P. Mass (pp. 61-88), by Chalmers Johnson (pp. 89-115), and by Dan F. Henderson (pp. 117-54) in the JJS VI (1980) Symposium on Translation and Japanese Studies contain an entire bestiary of the effects of extrapolating terms from one's own culture onto the Japanese reality, dragging implied meanings with them.

39. This was, essentially, the approach of the 18th century "philosophes" touting "philosophical" China, and by Mao's Western admirers; see Peter Kapitza, "Engelbert Kaempfer und die europäische Aufklärung," Supplementband: "Beiträge u. Kommentar," pp. 41-63 in Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan von Engelbert Kaempfer, Heidelberg reprint (Springer Verlag, 1980); and the chapter on Simone de Beauvoir in China in Paul Hollander, Political Pilgrims (Oxford University Press, 1981). It is remarkable that a companion volume on Western acceptance of Japanese culture on the level of sophistication of Richard T. Chang, From Prejudice to Tolerance (Sophia University Press, Tokyo 1970) does not exist, see esp. pp. 146-61, "The West and the Validity of Science." Likewise, that honest attempts at comparative attitude research like Rhoads Murphey, The Outsiders: Western Experience in India and China (University of Michigan Press, 1977) risk to be unmercifully reviewed in the bargain—see JAS XXXIX (1980), pp. 553-55; while comparative economic researches, however shallow, on, say, Japan vs. Turkey, Japan vs. USSR, Japan vs.
China, or China vs. India, are seen as studies of "development models," and accepted at face value by the scholarly community.