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From New Materials and New Questions to a New Methodology

Looking Back on Research on Sinographic Literature, and Looking Ahead

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, research on Sinographic literature has made significant strides. From the standpoint of academic history, this research has undergone three broad stages, which are represented respectively by new materials, new questions, and new methods. These have been the overall trends, which necessarily overlap each other. Research on Sinographic literature has diverged from a focus on new material toward the refinement of new questions and the exploration of new methodologies. One such exploratory approach is “the Sinosphere as methodology,” which addresses the shortcomings of four previous research models and seeks to put this new methodological concept into practice, to contain the expansionist impulses of cultural imperialism, and to prise apart nationalist parochialism.

Keywords

Sinographic literature – new materials – new questions – new methods

Even though the Chinese general public is somewhat familiar with the phrase “Sinographic literature” (*yuwai hanji* 域外漢籍, or “writings in Chinese from beyond the borders”), it remains necessary to define the concept here. Sinography refers to texts written in Chinese characters, while “beyond the

borders” means beyond “the territory of Yu” (*yuyu* 禹域); that is, outside China. Therefore, Sinographic literature refers to all manner of texts that were written in the Chinese script and existed outside China before the twentieth century. Specifically, it comprises the following three elements: i) premodern texts written in Chinese characters by scholars outside China; ii) block-printed and hand-copied Chinese texts outside China, as well as anthologies of and commentaries on classical Chinese texts by non-Chinese figures; and iii) premodern Chinese texts scattered outside China (including scroll fragments).

Historically, intellectuals from countries and regions surrounding China wrote a vast number of texts in Chinese characters, covering areas that are basically equivalent to the Chinese “National Studies” (*guoxue* 國學). These materials constituted part of a long-term “knowledge-sharing community” across East Asia. This raises a large number of questions for us, and also offers us the possibility of continued exploration, both theoretically and methodologically. In this sense, research on Sinographic literature has witnessed a three-stage process.

The first stage is that of Sinographic literature as “new materials,” which involves primarily the collation, sorting, and presentation of documents. The second stage is that of Sinographic literature as “new questions,” which involves the analysis and interpretation of the questions embedded within the content. The third stage is that of Sinographic literature as “new methods,” research methods that address the specific characteristics of texts and explore their unique qualities. Most of the existing studies lie between the first and second stages, while only a few works lie between the second and the third. Naturally, these three stages represent overall trends; they necessarily overlap rather than supersede each other.

1 Prehistory of Research on Sinographic Literature

People in premodern China developed a concept of *tianxia* 天下 (“all under heaven”) with themselves as the center. Beginning with the *Shiji* 史記, China’s official histories were written on a world-historical scale. There has been a long-standing awareness of Sinographic literature from China’s neighbors. Ch’oe Ch’i-wŏn 崔致遠 (b. 857) of ancient Korea’s Unified Silla period (668–935) passed the Tang dynasty’s (618–907) *jinshi* 近世 examination as a guest candidate; his work *Kyewŏn p’ilgyŏng jip* 桂苑筆耕集 was recorded in the *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 and the “Yi wen zhi” 藝文志 of the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, while his *Jungsan bokgwejip* 中山覆篋集 appeared in the Song dynasty’s (960–1279) *Mishu sheng xubian dao siku que shumu* 秘書省續編到四庫闕書目. His books

circulated widely in China. The works of Ch'oe Saje 崔思齊 (d. 1091) and other special envoys appeared during Korea's Koryŏ period (918–1392), corresponding to the Yuanfeng 元豐 era (1078–1085) of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). The famous work *Gaoli shi* 高麗詩 was inscribed in China, and appeared in the *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志. During the Xining 熙寧 era (1068–1077), Pak Ilyang 朴寅亮 (d. 1096) and Kim Kŭn 金覲 (dates unknown) served as envoys to the Song dynasty; their poems were published in a collection called *Sohwa jip* 小華集, which was recorded in the “Pak Ilyang chŏn” 朴寅亮傳 of the *Koryŏsa* 高麗史. Moreover, Yi Che-hyŏn's 李齊賢 (1288–1367) *Ikch'ae jip* 益齋集 was published in the *Yueya tang congshu* 粵雅堂叢書 and its *ci* 詞 poetry was included in the *Jiangcun congshu* 彊村叢書.

Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn 許蘭雪軒 (1563–1589), a representative female writer from the Chosŏn era (1392–1897), was widely popular in China. This is evident from the fact that her poems were selected for inclusion in a large number of anthologies during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties, such as the *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集 and *Mingshi zong* 明詩綜. Another example is that of Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk 徐敬德 (1489–1546), whose collection *Hwadam jip* 花潭集 was included in the literature section of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. Most of the work of Kim Taekyŏng 金澤榮 (1850–1927), who lived at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, was published by Hanmo lin yinshuju 翰墨林印書局 in Nantong, Jiangsu. In addition, the *Shichi hei Mōshi kōbun hoi* 七經孟子考文補遺 by Japanese scholars Yamanoi Kanae 山井鼎 (ca. 1681–1728) and Monokan 物觀 (ca. 1673–1754) was included in the *Siku quanshu*. Ichikawa Kansai 市河寬齋 (1749–1820) compiled the *Zen Tōshi itsu* 全唐詩逸 with the desire “to spread it westward to China and show the glory of my country.”¹ This book was ultimately included in Bao Tingbo's 鮑廷博 (1728–1814) *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* 知不足齋叢書. *Nam Ōng mōng lục* 南翁夢錄, by Vietnamese scholar Lê Trùng 黎澄 (1374–1446), was included in many Chinese book series. The *Tongüibogam* 東醫寶鑑 by Hŏ Chun 許浚 (ca. 1539–1615) of the Chosŏn dynasty had block-printed editions in China.

Of the premodern Chinese texts scattered outside China, many have been returned, including Huang Kan's 皇侃 *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏, which was brought back from Japan and included in the *Siku quanshu*. From the Japanese Edo period (1603–1868), the *Isson sōsho* 佚存叢書, compiled by Hayashi Taira 林衡 (1768–1841), is a collection of many Chinese texts that had been preserved in Japan, including *Kobun kōkyō Kōshi den* 古文孝經孔氏傳 collated by Dazai Jun 太宰純 (1680–1747), and *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 by Xiao

1 Ichikawa Kansai 市河寬齋, “Yokawakokin” 與川子欽, in *Kansai sensei yokō – Kansai mankō* 寬齋先生餘稿·寬齋漫稿, ed. Ichikawa Sanyō 市河三陽 (Yutokuen 1926), 105.

Ji 蕭吉 (ca. 530–a. 610) of the Sui dynasty (581–618), among others, which were later included in the *Zhibuzuzhai congshu*. During the late Qing, even works of fiction, which had been regarded as a “minor art” throughout the ages, were returned from Japan to China. Zhang Zhuo’s 張騫 (ca. 660–ca. 740) *You xianku* 游仙窟 is an example of this.

The appearance of Sinographic literature in China has naturally been subject to a certain amount of discussion. Yet with the exception of premodern Chinese Buddhist texts, people in premodern China often considered Sinographic literature as a reflection of China’s cultural and educational prosperity or “seeking the lost rituals from the people” (Confucius’ words, quoted in the “Yi wen zhi” of the *Hanshu*). From the early twentieth century, scholarship started to evolve from the traditional to the modern, with scholars paying particular attention to the emergence of new materials. Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) emphasized the importance of using “scientific methods” to organize China’s national cultural heritage; these scientific methods referred to methods used by Western scholars, of which one central tenet was the pursuit of reliable research materials. In his 1928 article *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo gongzuo zhi zhiqu* 歷史語言研究所工作之旨趣, Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950) stated that: “Westerners do not pursue scholarship by reading books; they do so via a widespread, hands-on search for new materials, broadening pre-existing scopes as they go. Therefore, only this form of scholarship can develop in all directions and reach new heights.”² This idea of scholarship derived from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, and it involved the transformation of the eighteenth-century pursuit and appreciation of mere erudition, rendering innovative research the “intellectual ideology” of the new era. Thus, intellectuals of the era paid particular attention to classical philology and historiography and to new materials. Such was the influence of German scholarship on Fu Sinian. In *Wang Jing’an xiansheng yishu xu* 王靜安先生遺書序, written in 1934, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) reviews Wang Jing’an’s (Wang Guowei 王國維, 1877–1927) role as an intellectual paragon. He mentions *inter alia* “taking foreigners’ old books to complement our own,”³ in which “foreigners’ old books” include Sinographic literature. In his letter to Fu Sinian dated September 2, 1938, Hu Shi recounts his experience of reading aloud from his paper “Recently Discovered Material for Chinese History” at a historiographical conference held in Zürich in August of the same year. He notes the presence of Chinese historical records in Japan and Korea, of which the overwhelming

2 Fu Sinian 傅斯年, *Fu Sinian quanji* 傅斯年全集 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1980), 4: 258.

3 Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, *Jinmingguan congkao erbian* 金明館叢稿二編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 219.

majority are written in Chinese.⁴ A book published recently titled *Qingmu Zheng'er jiacang Zhongguo jindai mingren chidu* 青木正兒家藏中國近代名人尺牘,⁵ includes letters by Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), Wang Gulu 王古魯 (1901–1958), Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902–1985), Fu Yunzi 傅芸子 (1902–1948), and others. Among these letters, there is no shortage of investigations into Sinographic literature held in Japan or inquiries about purchasing such literature. Although historical Sinographic literature had already drawn the attention of people of insight, its significance failed to earn the widespread attention of the academic community. Furthermore, in countries and regions bordering China, Sinographic literature was snubbed, due to the ascendancy of modern Western academia and the rise of national consciousness and even a surge in nationalism. For researchers of Chinese literature, although Chinese poetry and literature occupied a place of central importance in their countries' literary histories, the fact that these were written in Chinese meant that they were hardly reflective of a “national essence,” and they came to be viewed as being unable to truly represent the people of those nations.

The touchstones of traditional Chinese methodology in the study of academic history were, without exception, “to divide various works into categories, and to examine the origin and context of each conclusion.”⁶ Therefore, in looking back on the history of research on Sinographic literature, we will naturally cast our gaze on the distant past and at times search for a forerunner to our work today. Nevertheless, in intellectual history, the rise of a new form of scholarship worthy of the name necessitates new materials, new questions, new theories, and new methods. It does not simply issue forth from the occasional attention of one or two public giants or the inadvertent touching upon a concept. Therefore, I can only regard the section above as a “prehistory” of Sinographic literature.

2 Sinographic Literature as New Material

Internationally, attention to and research on Sinographic literature began in earnest in the 1980s. Liu Chunyin 劉春銀, former library director of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, notes that:

4 Wang Fansen 王汎森, ed., “Shiyusuo cang Hu Shi yu Fu Sinian laiwang hanzha zhi shiqi” “史語所藏胡適與傅斯年來往函札” 之十七, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 93:3 (1996): 107.

5 Zhang Xiaogang 張小鋼, ed., *Qingmu Zheng'er jiacang Zhongguo jindai mingren chidu* 青木正兒家藏中國近代名人尺牘 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2011).

6 Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, *Jiaochou tongyi* 校讎通義, annot. Ye Ying 葉瑛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1.

Worldwide, research related to Sinographic literature took off in various countries and regions in the 1980s. For instance, from 1986 to 1995, the United Daily News held ten conferences on Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese classics written in Chinese. In 2000, Nanjing University formally established the “Institute for the Study of Asian Classics in Chinese,” which was the first research entity of its kind in the world. ... The Institute has a systematic approach to undertaking research and academic exchanges in the areas of promoting Sinographic literature, documentation, cultural exchange, fields of study, and the significance of these to Han Chinese culture.⁷

Shizunaga Takeshi 靜永健, professor at Kyushu University’s Graduate School of Humanities, notes that:

There are no “national borders” in academic research! However, in reality, just like scholars who research Japanese literature, Chinese scholars of their own country’s literature have likewise fallen into a state of confusion in which all kinds of intangible “national barriers” have blocked their field of vision. It is precisely this academic environment that has given rise to a new approach to the study of China within mainland China. This is what Professor Zhang Bowei, head of the Institute for the Study of Asian Classics in Chinese at Nanjing University, means by “Sinographic research.” I personally believe that this is a brand-new research philosophy that seeks to dismantle the “national borders” of academic research, one that is built on a research foundation that is critical of “merely focusing on the literature and documentary materials of one’s own country.”⁸

Chan Hing-ho 陳慶浩, a researcher at France’s Centre national de la recherche scientifique, also notes that:

Since the inception of the concept [of Sinographic research] to the present day, the research can be retrospectively divided into two stages. The first stage involves the promotion of the concept and the organization and research of old documents through the staging of international

7 Liu Chunyin 劉春銀, “Tiyao zhi bianzhi: yi ‘Yuenan Hannan wenxian mulu tiyao’ ji ‘Buyi’ wei li” 提要之編制：以《越南漢喃文獻目錄提要》暨《補遺》為例, *Fojiao tushuguan guankan* 佛教圖書館館刊 46 (2007): 72.

8 Shizunaga Takeshi 靜永健, *Chūgokugaku kenkyū no shinhōhō* 新・中国学のヒント, vol. 348 of *Tōhō* 東方 (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 2010), 12–13.

conferences, the compilation of catalogues, sifting through Sinographic literature and launching research ... In 2000, Nanjing University established the “Institute for the Study of Asian Classics in Chinese,” which can be seen as the start of a new era of research on Sinographic literature. In 2005, the Institute launched the *Yuwai Hanji yanjiu jikan* 域外漢籍研究集刊; it has also overseen the publication of *Yuwai Hanji ziliao congshu* 域外漢籍資料叢書 and *Yuwai Hanji yanjiu congshu* 域外漢籍研究叢書, thus forming a complete system for research on Sinographic literature. Progress has been rapid.⁹

These excerpts broadly summarize research trends since the 1980s, with the focal points of analysis being the organization and publication of documents and literature of value.

In the early stage of research on Sinographic literature, knowledge and understanding were largely centered on possessing new materials. There is no question that academic research should focus on materials. However, it is also right and proper that academic researchers should focus even more closely on the discovery and usage of *new* materials. In this regard, Chen Yinke made the following remark, often cited as a maxim in academic circles:

In any era, academic work needs new materials and new questions. Making use of these materials and studying new questions constitute the new wave of intellectual endeavor in the present era. Scholarly researchers who have been able to anticipate this trend are ahead of the curve. Those who haven't are behind the curve. This is a commonsense approach to ancient and modern academic history, unlike that of those who shut themselves off behind closed doors.¹⁰

This passage notes that scholarly attention is frequently devoted to new materials but overlooks new questions. My point here is that even with an overabundance of new materials, “the new wave of intellectual endeavor” for the era cannot take shape in the absence of new questions. We may even venture to say that if no new questions are identified, new materials will be wasted. Because relatively few people focused on Sinographic literature in the past, the field is open to a great number of new questions that are worthy of exploration. Therefore, if this field of research is to make substantial progress,

9 Chan Hing-ho 陳慶浩, “Han wenhua zhengti yanjiu sanshi nian ganyan” 漢文化整體研究三十年感言, *Shupin* 書品, no. 5 (2011): 31–32.

10 Chen Yinke, *Jinmingguan congkao erbian*, 236.

it must surely move away from a focus on new materials and toward new questions and new methods.

3 New Questions in Sinographic Literature

Where do new questions stem from? Naturally we cannot discount the importance of reading. Yet the raising of new questions also represents an opportunity that may stem from comparisons of different textual sources, and from the stimulus provided by Western intellectual inquiry.

Those familiar with the history of Chan Buddhism know that, while there was a differentiation between the Southern and Northern schools during the Tang dynasty (618–907), there was little conflict between the five houses of the Southern school. However, during the Song dynasty, there was a stronger sense of sectarianism within the Chan school, in which internal struggles were quite fierce. Following this contest of ideas, the Linji 臨濟 and Caodong 曹洞 sects basically developed side by side during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), with the Linji sect having grown particularly powerful. The struggle between them lasted until the Qing dynasty, while in Japan, Eisai 榮西 (1141–1215) and Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) introduced, the Linji (Rinzai) and Caodong (Sōtō) sects respectively, while also inheriting the disputes between them. There was a saying that “the shogun follows Rinzai, and the people of the land follow Sōtō” because the former was particularly influential upon the shogun, while the Sōtō sect held sway among ordinary people. A reading of the Japanese monk Kakumon Kantetsu 廓門貫徹 (d. 1730) in *Chū sekimon moji zen* 注石門文字禪, and an understanding of his life, will naturally lead us to the following question: how could a disciple of the Sōtō sect annotate ancient texts of the Rinzai school? In his book, Kakumon Kantetsu asks a probing question to a companion: “Since you are a descendant of the Sōtō sect, why do you not annotate the works of the great Sōtō masters, but instead, immerse yourself in the writings of the Rinzai monks?”¹¹ Let us consider this in tandem with descriptions from Kakumon’s teacher Dokuan Genkō 獨庵玄光 (1630–1698): “In Japan today, followers of the Sōtō and Rinzai sects all flaunt their strengths, and slander and humiliate each other”; “The Sōtō and Rinzai sects find each other repellent. Just like fire and water, they cannot co-exist.”¹² Kakumon’s scholarly

11 Zhang Bowei 張伯偉 et al., annot., *Zhu shimen wenzi chan* 注石門文字禪 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 2: 1727.

12 Dokuan Genkō 獨庵玄光, “jikei go” 自警語, in *Dokuan Genkō gohōshū* 獨庵玄光護法集, Komazawa University library collection, 2:36–37.

insight and ideas on sectarianism demand further investigation. What is the source of his learning? What was the context in which he developed his ideas and what are their academic implications? These are all new questions worth examining.

From the Song dynasty, the *Mengzi* 孟子 was elevated from the Masters Category (*zibu* 子部) to the Classics Category (*jingbu* 經部). In his *Zhizhai shulujieti* 直齋書錄解題, Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (ca. 1183–ca. 1262) said: “Today the state is implementing the imperial examinations; the *Lunyu* 論語 and the *Mengzi* stand side by side as classics.”¹³ Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) collected annotations on the *Mengzi* have had a far-reaching influence. Not only do Zhu Xi’s annotations elaborate on the doctrine of the *Mengzi*, they also touch upon on its literary style, and they had a significant impact on the study of the *Mengzi* from a narrative perspective in the Ming and Qing periods. The *Mengzi* itself had already played a major role in intellectual and literary spheres since the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Zhu Xi’s annotations built on this foundation and gave it further momentum. Confucian scholars of the Chosŏn dynasty had the utmost respect for the *Mengzi*; its impact on Chosŏn intellectual and literary spheres was even greater than it was in China. When Confucian scholars annotated the *Mengzi*, they often focused on style and context; when literati wrote essays, they often borrowed from the intellectual resources it offered. Interestingly, this same Confucian classic was largely unpopular in Japan. In his *Wu zazu* 五雜俎, Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624) recounts an apocryphal claim: “The Japanese people also attach importance to Confucian texts, and believe in Buddhist doctrine. Whenever they see a classic Chinese scripture, they won’t hesitate to buy it at a premium. But that’s not the case with the *Mengzi*. Legend has it that the boat carrying the *Mengzi* to Japan capsized. This is indeed strange.”¹⁴ Similar accounts appear in *Kōko nichiroku* 好古日錄 by Japanese author Fujiwara Sadamoto 藤原貞幹 (1732–1797) and *Keirin manroku* 桂林漫錄 by Katsuragawa Nakayoshi 桂川中良 (1744–1808). The *Mengzi*’s influence on Chinese literary studies in Japan was only very minor, and high-profile commentaries on it, such as that contained in Saitō Masakane’s 齋藤正謙 (1797–1865) *Setsudō bunwa* 拙堂文話, were extremely rare. Confucianism in Vietnam began in the latter years of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220) with the appointment of Shi Xie 士燮 (137–226) as administrator of the Jiaozhi Commandery in present day Vietnam. There were annotators of the *Mengzi*

13 Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulujieti* 直齋書錄解題 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 3.72.

14 Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Wu zazu* 五雜俎 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), 4.86.

during the Han dynasty, namely Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201), Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), and Liu Xi 劉熙 (d. ca. 200). The writings of the latter two have been lost. Liu Xi fled to Jiaozhou 交州, where his *Mengzi zhu* 孟子注 circulated. The second year of the Thần Vũ 神武 period (1070) of Vietnam's Lý dynasty (1009–1225) saw the construction of the Confucius Temple (*wenmiao* 文廟) and the carving of statues of the Duke of Zhou 周公, Confucius (551–479 BCE), and Mencius (372–289 BCE). In the fourth year (1075) of the Thái Ninh 太寧 period, imperial examinations based on the Confucian classics were first held. The Later Lê 後黎 dynasty (1428–1789) saw the first examinations based on the *Sì shū* 四書, with only the *Mengzi* being compulsorily tested. What are the reasons for these minor differences between China, Korea, or Vietnam, and the vast gaps between Japan on the one hand and China, Korea, and Vietnam on the other? What is their significance? These questions are worth pursuing in greater detail.

Some of these questions have been given momentum by Western intellectual inquiry. Since the 1970s, the question of “the literary canon” or “literary classics” has been the subject of intense discussion in the Euro-American theoretical sphere. Beginning in the 1990s, this question has also received widespread attention in the Chinese intellectual sphere. This heated debate on the question of the classics among Euro-American theorists since the last century has sparked a canon transformation, the context of which is a focus on, and assessments of, late twentieth-century multiculturalism. The two most powerful challenges to Western literature's historical canon have been issued primarily from two sources: gender and race. The former is represented by feminists, the latter by the African-American racial minority. They have been profuse in their publication of contentious and powerful works that have challenged the status quo. They have also met with a certain degree of success; so much so that in the opinion of Harold Bloom, a defender of the traditional literary canon, feminists and Afrocentric theorists belong to a “School of Resentment”¹⁵ because they seek, without exception, to subvert the dominance of the erstwhile literary classics.

Let us now return to Chosŏn women's literature from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the corresponding case of China, with its long-established literary canon and dominant discourse, which path will enable China to develop a canon of its own? What would set this apart from the strident calls for the opening up of the canon in the late-twentieth century West, or its sharply cynical and high-minded antithetical criticism? We see that Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, as part of the canon of Chosŏn women's literature,

15 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 4.

consolidated her place in literary history across the more than three hundred years between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Her reputation extended across national boundaries, particularly into China, where she was widely read and enthusiastically praised. The Ming dynasty figure Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556–ca. 1622) noted that: “Although Hō Nansōrhōn was a Barbarian woman (*yinü* 夷女), her good name spread across Chosŏn, and she was popular in China too.”¹⁶ The “Barbarian woman” moniker was one that encompassed both females and ethnic minorities; if we are willing to overlook the prejudices inherent in the use of that term, and focus specifically on the process by which “her good name spread,” we would soon realize that when a canonical figure such as she became apparent to Chinese literati, she earned genuine, consistent, and generous praise. Broadly speaking, mainstream authority was not used to oppress, nor was favor used to condescend; there was neither a gender war nor race-based exclusion between Chinese and non-Chinese. This, perhaps, is what distinguishes the East Asian character in the establishment of a Sinographic literary canon. Today, in a twenty-first century marked by gender, racial, and civilizational tension, it may help to look back on history to recognize and affirm the value and significance of Han culture, and to find inspiration in the development of the Sinographic literary canon. These questions and perspectives have been given momentum by Western intellectual inquiry.

From the examples above, it is not difficult to see that we can derive new questions, whether via readings of texts or via the stimulus of Western intellectual inquiry. There is something to be said for placing these questions in an East Asian frame of reference. What is most needed here is a holistic vision. The questions with which we are dealing are frequently difficult to resolve satisfactorily with old theories and approaches; thus, we must move on to consider the next stage – that of a “new methodology.”

4 Sinographic Literature and Refining a New Methodology

Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) once stated that “the evolution of scholarship should be viewed from a one-hundred-year perspective.”¹⁷ An account of a century of vicissitudes of East Asian scholarship and the greatest question

16 Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆, “Wumen Fan Zhao liang dajia jixu” 吳門范趙兩大家集敘, in *Ming wenhai* 明文海, ed. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, vol. 1456 of *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1986), 326.590.

17 Qian Daxin 錢大昕, “Shijiazhai yangxin lu xu” 十駕齋養新錄序, in *Qian Daxin quanji* 錢大昕全集, ed. Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 7: 1.

encountered today, which is how to reflect on the transformative impact of Western scholarship on East Asia, is centered on the question of methodology. Naturally, on account of the disparities between cognitive perspectives and the pursuit of goals, my approach to this is limited to my personal knowledge and understanding.

One hundred years ago, East Asian scholarship was undergoing a period of transition from tradition to modernity; on the question of methodology, the need to learn from Europe and the United States was almost a given. This stance resulted in a new wave of activity in East Asia. The only scholar who was genuinely independent and may be considered an exemplar in terms of a contribution to the exploration and practice of research methodologies was Chen Yinke. In 1932, he stated that “there were two sets of mistakes that used to be made in research on cultural history: the outdated conventions of the old school ... and the falsehoods of the new school.”¹⁸ In 1936 Chen also stated that “in today’s China, the old school is erudite but lacks the techniques; the new school has the techniques but lacks the learning. They have good insight but poor judgment because the materials on which it is based are insufficient.”¹⁹ “Learning” refers to materials, and “techniques” refers to methodological approaches. The old school could not help but cling to the old ways and go about its work behind closed doors, while the new school interpreted Chinese materials based on foreign theories, claiming to be “organizing the nation’s heritage with scientific methods.” In Chen Yinke’s view, it was no doubt difficult for the old school to achieve much, while the new school was far from heroic. In 1931, he emphasized that “in the contemporary age, scholarly research has a worldwide scope. It is important to know the other, and not to shut oneself off from the world.”²⁰ This reflects an academic ambition and breadth of spirit based on Chinese cultural standards and a broad perspective on the world. Unfortunately, this line of thought and practice had few successors. When we survey Chen’s exploration of research methodologies, we see that he lived by historical experience in which he “absorbed and introduced foreign doctrines on the one hand, and never forgot the status of his own people, on the other.” He thoroughly explored new historical materials, and put forward new questions; he was neither too firmly entrenched in Chinese traditions, nor did he fall under the sway of Western doctrine. He was critical in assimilating ideas,

18 Jiang Tianshu 蔣天樞, *Chen Yinke xiansheng biannian shiji* 陳寅恪先生編年事輯 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), 222.

19 Bian Senghui 卞僧慧, “Chen Yinke xiansheng Ouyang Xiu ke biji chugao” 陳寅恪先生歐陽修課筆記初稿, in *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術, ed. Liu Dong 劉東 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011), 28: 2.

20 Chen Yinke, *Jinmingguan conggao erbian*, 318.

and reform-minded in his criticisms, finally achieving his aim of attaining “learning that was neither ancient nor modern.”²¹

Where research on Sinographic literature is concerned, the “Sinosphere as methodology” that I have previously proposed attempts a methodological step forward.²² The “Sinosphere” can be expressed in a variety of ways, such as “the East Asian world,” “East Asian civilization,” the “Sinographic sphere,” and so forth. Chinese writing forms the basic medium of this cultural sphere. With its basis in Chinese writing, the Sinosphere accumulated a vast quantity of literature from its beginnings in the Han dynasty until the mid-nineteenth century, which revealed a broad spiritual core, and formed an enduring cohesion from the ground up. What is particularly noteworthy is that there was no single voice in such a community; instead, there were many voices that verged on cacophonous. If research methodologies are the counterpart to the objects of research, then the “Sinosphere as a methodology” that I propose fits perfectly with the objects of its research.

The “Sinosphere as a methodology” broadly consists of the following points, based on my current thinking. First, it considers documents written in Chinese as a whole, from texts to images. Even though they may need to be categorized separately, they are not differentiated by nation, ethnic group, or region, but by the nature of their content. For instance, Buddhist literature written in Chinese includes Buddhist material from China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, Vietnam, and so forth as a whole, and does not draw distinctions between Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, and Vietnamese Buddhism. There is a need to examine the whole regardless of the type of literature being studied. Second, the Sinosphere relies primarily on the circulation of literature, whether in the form of cultural transfer or the transmission of concepts across borders. Through the direct or indirect reading or misreading of books, people spurred the formation of literary diversity within the linguistic unity of East Asian culture. Third, the inner experience and spiritual world of human beings as the goal of exploration, linking the center with the periphery, lent Sinographic literature equal status regardless of which region it was from, and sought connections between the various regions. Fourth, it emphasizes the interpretation of cultural significance, differing interpretations of the same texts in different contexts, and the unity and diversity of ways of thinking in terms of region, social class, gender, and era. Indeed, advancing a particular method or theory on a practical level demands constant refinements, additions,

21 Ibid., 252.

22 See Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, “Zuowei fangfa de Han wenhua quan” 作為方法的漢文化圈, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化, no. 2 (2009); Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, *Zaitan zuowei fangfa de Han wenhua quan* 再談作為方法的漢文化圈, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, no. 2 (2014).

and amendments; its intellectual implications are yet to be developed, interpreted, and explained. Therefore, I look forward to a time when more scholars can explore these areas further.

A theoretical position underpins all methodologies. The theoretical position of the “Sinosphere as a methodology” first considers Sinographic literature as a whole, rather than through the lens of national or regional differences. Second, it investigates the differences within the similarities and the similarities within the differences across East Asia. Third, it pays special attention to the mutual construction of East Asia’s internal and external dimensions, because the construction of East Asia is no longer a “China-centric,” “Western-centric” or “ethnocentric” concept. This theoretical position is directed against the inertia of past research, and consists of four elements.

The first is the ingrained Chinese view that the cultures of nations on China’s periphery are merely an extension of Chinese culture. Beginning with the Song dynasty block prints of the poetry of Pak Ilyang and Kim Kŭn in *Sohwajip*, the *xiaohua* 小華 (“little China”) equates to greater China. A book by the famous Japanese Sinologist Kanda Kiichirō 神田喜一郎 (1897–1984) was called *Riben tianci shi hua* 日本填詞史話, but its main title was *Zai Riben de Zhongguo wenxue* 在日本的中國文學.²³ In the preface, he clearly states that the focus of the book’s analysis is Chinese literature in Japan; in other words, literature in Japan written in Chinese on Chinese literature. Thus, the most hotly contested topic in this field is frequently that of “influence studies.”

“Influence studies” was a research methodology emphasized by the nineteenth-century French school of comparative literature. Although in its theoretical analyses it emphasized “two or more literatures playing off each other’s subject matter, books or emotions,”²⁴ on a practical level the focus was simply on how the recipient, consciously or unconsciously, attributed their spiritual output to the sender’s (or, some may say, the harbinger’s) system, and how they identified with it. Thanks to the great achievements of nineteenth-century French literature and its dominance in Europe, the research outcomes of this type of comparative literature unilaterally reinforced its own splendor.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the Western powers subjected East Asia to immense aggression and oppression. Thereafter, Western Sinologists and Orientalists loosely drew on British historian Arnold J. Toynbee’s (1889–1975) model of “Challenge and Response,” contained in his work *A Study of History*, and applied it to their research on Asia. Here, “challenge” signifies taking the

23 Kanda Kiichirō 神田喜一郎, *Nihon ni okeru Chūgoku bungaku* 日本における中国文学 (Tokyo: Nigensha, 1965).

24 M. F. Guyard, *La littérature comparée* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951), 12.

initiative and assuming a position of dominance; “response” signifies being coerced and lacking options. A civilization capable of answering the challenge of Western civilization has a chance of enduring (and, of course, of dedicating glory to the challenger). Conversely, if it is unable to respond to the challenge or to cope with crisis, that civilization’s fate would be to perish. Its way out is to “naturalize” the West.

In essence, the three research trends described above all imply a theoretical position based on cultural imperialism (although this is very often unconscious). The idea of “greater China” is “Sinocentric,” that of “influence studies” is “Francocentric,” while the “Challenge and Response” model is “Eurocentric.” Even more important to note is that, in this process, East Asian intellectuals “Orientalize themselves,” whether consciously or not; in their research on recent East Asian history and culture, they frequently make use of the same methods and perspectives. The main drawback of using the “Challenge and Response” model to undertake research is that it is centered on the sender, or as some may say, the challenger. In East Asia prior to the nineteenth century, research was a bulwark for Sinocentrism. In the post-mid-nineteenth century world, it was a bulwark for Eurocentrism. They both used their relative civilizational strengths to disparage, disregard, and even despise weaker civilizations, with the latter likely to have become vassals of the former, while the former were always capable of demonstrating their authority.

And so there is a fourth trend, which is in essence part of nationalist discourse. In literary research, it emphasizes the so-called “theory of intrinsic development.” The majority of works of literary history written in Korea since the 1970s have emphasized the independent development of that nation’s literature, marking a complete break from links to outside literature, especially that from China.

Based on the reflections above, I advocate “the Sinosphere as methodology,” and put this concept into practice. It seeks on the one hand to contain the expansionist impulses of cultural imperialism, and on the other, to prise apart nationalist parochialism.

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