

Editorial Note

The first three papers in this double issue deal with the ways in which the legal, institutional, and political issues facing Japan, China, Vietnam, and Korea in the decades before and after 1900 were framed in a transcultural context. These studies were originally presented at a September 2017 workshop at the University of Connecticut on “Nation, Race, and Survival: Transnational Discourse and Activism in the Construction of the East Asian Modern” that had been organized by Peter Zarrow and Bradley Davis in honor of the memory of Professor Catherine Lynch (1949–2015), whose study on Liang Shuming, a Chinese philosopher and activist in rural reconstruction with a strong interest in cultural comparison, has just appeared posthumously.¹

Douglas Howland takes us into the arcane world of debates among legal scholars about the territorial foundations of sovereignty with a special focus on Japan and China. The present controversy surrounding the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands gives his study a heightened actuality. It also highlights to what degree such legal battles drive, and are driven by, broad social and political movements. The article focuses not only on territorial anchors for national identity and on overcoming asymmetries encoded in power relations but also in legal concepts such as the famous *terra nullius* (“no-man’s land”) with its definition that only a fully developed Western-style state could have claims to own a given territory. Due to the conflicts even among the major powers, these legal debates have a certain critical independence, which prompts countries such as Japan and China to make full use of the ensuing leeway for themselves, and they did and do so skillfully. While the states involved are represented in the legal battles through the fiction of a single voice, the social and political reality involves many players with different agendas. The fierce Japanese struggle against the extraterritoriality of foreigners residing in Japan did not prevent the country a few years later from establishing its own colonial empire on Chinese soil while also abrogating the extraterritoriality of Westerners there. The broad public support for the Chinese government’s struggle against the extraterritoriality of Westerners during the 1920s and 1930s did not prevent the papers that were wholeheartedly supporting this struggle from legally registering their businesses under the names of foreigners or in the United States as Delaware corporations to be shielded against the very same government. Howland’s study challenges us to explore the complex interplay between legal, political, and social controversies that draw on and feed into processes of transcultural interaction.

1 Catherine Lynch, *Liang Shuming and the Populist Alternative in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox digs into the archives of the Vietnamese state to reconstruct a moment when it tried to cope with the ever-intensifying French pressure to transform the country into a colony. A look into his footnotes shows that, ironically, many of the relevant sources are kept to this day in French archives, a colonial heritage that has recently received critical attention in relation to the French government's discussion about the best way to deal with the African cultural heritage held in French archives and museums. His study traces the circuitous ways in which knowledge about the institutional foundations of the "West's" dominating powers reached the Vietnamese court and began to inform the way in which it redesigned its policy questions for examination candidates. Perhaps the most prominent source for this effort was a Chinese world geography from the 1840s that was largely based on Murray's *Encyclopaedia of Geography* that had been orally summarized for the author by an American missionary.² But the sources also included a plethora of smaller texts published by Protestant missionaries in Chinese in places outside of China, such as Penang, from the 1820s onward. These in turn excerpted popular and encyclopedic reading matter from the United States and England and were designed to convey "useful knowledge" to a Chinese readership that was considered as remaining locked in its claustrophobic worldview and conceited in their self-assessment. Reprinted in Japan from early on for an elite routinely reading classical Chinese in a highly complex reconfiguration into Japanese words and grammar, these works mostly reached Vietnam in their Japanese versions. Japan rather than China seemed like the model to follow at the time if sovereignty and modern development was at stake. At the same time, Japanese reformers, who were often very critical of their government, were eager to meet, support, and host people from other parts of Asia with similar ideas. With its focus on the Vietnamese court, the study recovers a neglected record of transcultural engagement with its own particulars. It contributes an important microhistorical study to the growing body of knowledge on trans-Asian 'reform networks associated with Erez Manela's *Wilsonian Moment* (2007) and Pankaj Mishra's *From the Ruins of Empire: Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (2012).³

2 Hugh Murray, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Geography: Comprising a Complete Description of the Earth, Physical, Statistical, Civil, and Political; Exhibiting its Relation to the Heavenly Bodies, Its Physical Structure, the Natural History of Each Country, and the Industry, Commerce, Political Institutions, and Civil and Social State of All Nations* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1837).

3 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012).

In a similar manner as Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox for Vietnam, Joshua Van Lieu delves into the court archives for Korea to map the discussion of the impending fate of this country as Japanese pressure increased and as there were reformers within the country who felt that temporary Japanese tutelage was the only hope to lift the country out of its rigid traditionalism. With the recent fate of Vietnam not far away, and a moving account about the inner causes of the *History of the Fall of Vietnam* by the leading Vietnamese reform advocate Phan Bội Châu just published in Chinese—or better, Sinitic—which could be read by members of the Korean elite, an indirect and relatively safe platform was available to discuss the dark prospects of the Korean nation in newspapers and at the court by talking about Vietnam. Phan had written his book in the very Japan that was now threatening the demise of Korea. His book was published with the help of the Chinese reformer Liang Qichao in Shanghai in the midst of an extended Chinese debate about the threatening fate of China being “carved up.” The Sinitic version was published in Korea as early as 1906, and various translations into modern Korean followed in quick order. These are all signs of close transcultural links and exchanges between East Asian reformers and of the ways in which discussions among reform advocates penetrated court discussions, enhanced by the new features of an independent publishing culture in Shanghai, and the new media of the newspaper and periodical press.

As the field of transcultural studies moves from broader border-crossing issues to include microhistorical analyses, the three studies in this group make an important contribution to a set of agenda now also pursued by a specialized Society for Cultural Interaction in East Asia (<http://www.sciea.org/en/>).

Susanna Fessler probes how two intellectuals, one from Tsarist Russia and one from Imperial Japan, who were both disturbed by their respective governments’ military mobilization against each other and the willingness of the uneducated to go along, found common ground in the belief that religion properly understood might be the panacea. In the midst of the Russo–Japanese War in 1904–1905 and faced with a war propaganda machine on both sides denouncing the opponent, Leo Tolstoy wrote his *Bethink Yourselves* at his country seat and Anesaki Masaharu, a young professor at Tokyo’s Imperial University, took this essay up and held its anti-war stance up for emulation in Japan, just as it was bathing in the glory of victory. Not speaking from the relatively safe haven of an established ideology such as anarchism or a religion such as Buddhism or Christianity, both men were fiercely critical especially of the deadening effect of organized religion on religious feeling and of the callous support religious authorities had given to warmongering. The consequence was that both

came under equally fierce criticism. Tolstoy was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church and his essay banned in Russia, and Anesaki Masaharu had to ask an American colleague whether there would be a job for him at a US university if he were to be fired by his own university for his stance. Joining a broad and closely connected but institutionally weak international intellectual current at the time that was critical of organized religion but upheld the power of religions to move people to the good, their individualized religion accommodated elements from various backgrounds and allowed them to disregard national-state imperatives by engaging with marginalized currents in their own country and people of similar mindset in other nations. During the last hundred years, we have seen an exponential growth in such informal connections and networks across the world. Many of them are religious in character, others focus on the environment or other issues. The study offers a pioneering microhistorical analysis of the type of personality involved, the disproportionate impact they had internationally and in their own countries, the way how they connected, and the agency driving this interaction.

The final article in the issue, Sophie Roche's essay on "Knowledge Production on Central Asia," continues our series of articles about the contribution a transcultural approach might make to different disciplines. Central Asian studies is in an unusually complex situation. At present, the authorities in the newly independent Central Asian republics are busy inventing and imposing unified historical narratives as a way to stabilize national identity. At the same time, the heritage this field received from Soviet scholarship is marked by the qualification of religion (in this case, Islam) as "opium for the people," a relic of a past that needed to be overcome with the help of the Russian brethren, and by the notion that the customs of these people were the object of ethnological study and in urgent need of a reform along socialist lines. The very small pool of specialists working outside of Central Asia and Russia today are pushed by funding agencies to focus their research on security threats from Islam and the potential of exploiting the oil resources of the region. At the same time, the field remains defined as "Central Asia." This lumping together is not the result of an insight into the necessity to understand the region through the benefit of a transcultural approach, but the fact that the individual countries were unable to garner enough attention to generate a bona fide "Kyrgyziology" or "Turkmenistanology." The religious, linguistic, historical, social, and economic elements connecting the Central Asian states among each other and with broader regional and global currents together with the fact that time and again the region has shown its potential to have a huge impact far beyond its outer range indicate that

a transcultural approach would both free the discipline from its Soviet heritage and its restrictions by definitions of security concerns and resource potential, and would allow it to further develop the buds of a fruitful new future that are already in evidence in small research groups in places such as Berlin or Cambridge (MA).

Rudolf G. Wagner