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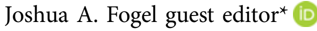
INTRODUCTION

Introduction: National Traditions of Sinology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Several years ago, Pat Ebrey, founding editor of this journal, solicited the board for ideas for special issues. I have long been interested in the historiography of different national Sinological traditions and suggested a series of essays on this topic from a host of such historiographical backgrounds. Pat agreed and enthusiastically supported the idea. I had spoken about such a topic in a vague, roundabout manner some twenty years earlier with Martin Kern (Princeton University), and so I consulted him and was extremely fortunate to be given by him a handful of names of scholars who might perform such a task for their countries of origin, mostly in Europe. I was able to gradually compile a list that runs now to fifteen essays. Most of the authors are senior scholars in their fields, although some are mid-career or even junior; one is written by a graduate student. It was, of course, also essential that these authors all be able to write in English.

Two obvious candidates for essays, China and the United States, are purposefully missing, and their absence demands a brief explanation. China's own scholarship on its history is both widely known and, of course, highly contentious; it would require a team of scholars to trace its many Sinological traditions, and one or even two essays would be insufficient. By the same token, American scholarship on Chinese history and culture has been analyzed in countless venues to date, at least to my way of thinking.

As these essays have come together, striking convergences have emerged, especially among the European traditions, but there are individually distinctive trajectories as well. Only the East Asian nations (Vietnam, Korea, and Japan) have genuinely premodern Sinological traditions. All of these national Sinological histories have faced serious disruptions, often dramatic ones, over the course of their development. World War II is, quite obviously, the most dramatic of such events, but the Russian Revolution and its impact throughout Eastern Europe especially in the postwar decades was a close second, resounding still in China and Vietnam and Marxist historiographical traditions elsewhere. In Europe, Czechoslovakia (and the Czech Republic, now) probably encountered the most such disruptions within Europe (1938–1945 from the Nazi invasion to the end of World War II; 1968 with Prague Spring and its crushing demise; and 1989 with the collapse of communism across Eastern Europe). Vietnam faced French colonialism, Japanese invasion, French return and renewed war, national division and war with the United States and its allies, and finally reunification (and, soon thereafter, a border war with China).

One change evident in virtually all of these cases—as well as in the United States and China, and probably in most fields of scholarship—is the increasing presence of

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women scholars. One must search long and hard (and ultimately fail) to come up with a significant group of female Sinologists anywhere in the world before World War II, and national ideologies seems to play no differentiating role here. Significantly, the editorship of this journal will soon pass from one woman to another—all to the good.

A fascinating point that emerges from the essays is the different ways in which the word "Sinology" (and its various linguistic cognates) is understood around the world. Sometimes it means what it literally denotes: study of China; other times, it seems to point more toward the humanities, leaving "China studies" for the social sciences. In the United States, unlike Europe, for example, it has effectively become a term of derogation. Similarly, "Orientalism" (and "Oriental") retains a lingering European presence in the names of departments and journals and fields of research; in the Anglophone world, while it hasn't disappeared, it has largely retreated to medieval and earlier eras in history, occasionally elsewhere in the humanities, as well as focusing more on Western Asia.

The three Asian national traditions covered all have long periods in which things Chinese were not completely foreign, even in some instances fully nativized; and Sinological traditions in the realm of scholarship, even governance, remained fixtures to varying degrees well into the early modern eras. For many centuries, the classics of the "Chinese" tradition were almost as revered in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam as they were in China itself. Only with the advent of the nation-state have these texts and the traditions embodying them become the sole possession of a foreign land. Similarly, "Chinese" New Year and "Chinese" medicine, while retaining these adjectival ethnonyms, really denote general East Asian phenomena.

Despite our not addressing the development of Sinology in the United States, it should be noted that, although one of the youngest fields internationally, studies of Chinese history and culture in the United States has ironically had an outsize influence everywhere—even in China itself. This contradictory phenomenon is undoubtedly the result of the immense investment in area studies during the Cold War and since, the large number of public and private universities, the superpower status attained by the United States, and its comparative great wealth. We have now reached the point where there are few Western journals of Sinology not published in English, and numerous Chinese students seeking doctoral degrees have come to study about their homeland in America, more often than not remaining to teach at institutions of higher learning on this side of the Pacific. This phenomenon only took off from the 1980s when China itself opened up.

Two major developments during my half century or more in this field have radically altered the state of Sinology worldwide: the opening of the major archival collections in China and increased access to Japanese scholarship. The imperial (Number One) archives in Beijing are primarily for Qing scholars (and to a lesser degree Ming scholars) who still dominate pre-twentieth-century Sinology in the West, even more so in North America than in Europe; the Republican era (Number Two) archives concern primarily twentieth-century materials prior to the founding of the PRC. Acquisition of reading ability in Japanese has long been a scholarly desideratum for Sinologists, as it continues to be. With only an exceedingly small group of exceptions, Korean-language acquisition has been a bridge too far for the overwhelming bulk of foreign scholars. And, as noted, Europeans have been kind enough to become proficient in English, as these essays demonstrate.

We are currently at something of a perilous moment in China studies. As these archives are becoming ever more restricted and as access itself to China is becoming

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more difficult, we may wish to look back to the way Sinology was done outside for many decades before the 1980s. Taiwan's archives provided an important basis from which to work, and access to them appears to remain constant. By the same token, for scholars working on pre-Ming and, indeed, the Ming itself, these archives were beside the point. It may be instructive to learn from earlier experiences on how to proceed if these unfortunate trends continue. We have many tools at our disposal that did not exist earlier.

Although not a central theme of these essays, one might ask the degree to which foreign Sinology has influenced scholarship within China? That is actually a two-part question. In translation, foreign-language works, mostly from English and Japanese, have made important inroads into Chinese thinking about their own history and culture—probably more in Taiwan than in the PRC. That fact does not necessarily mean that Western or Japanese approaches have found natural enclaves of support in China—more on the order of interest and curiosity. Foreign-language originals have had less of an impact, except insofar as younger Chinese scholars remain in Japan and the West after completing their degrees. This development has been truly significant over the past two or three decades, and it doesn't appear to be abating any time soon.

I hope that these fifteen essays will arouse interest in the history of our field around the globe. It is instructive to see what has come before us elsewhere. Of course, it is impossible to know the future of where our field is headed, but perhaps some young scholar (now) will entertain the notion of doing this again in several decades.

As this issue of *JCH* was in the process of production, Joe McDermott, who had been initially scheduled to write the essay on Japanese Sinology, passed away in Cambridge, England. We respectfully wish to dedicate this issue to him, a man whose life and scholarship spanned three continents.

Toronto
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