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Communications

The Editors

Journal of the American Oriental Society

The Journal of Asian Studies

Dear Sirs:

I address this message, through you, to the members of the American Oriental Society and of the Association for Asian Studies, in particular to those members interested in the Far East. Its topic is actually much discussed in congenial groups, but has been little advertised in professional journals—I refer to the fruitless bickering which disgraces contemporary sinology. It is time for sinology to grow up. Perhaps it is time to abandon the time-honored words “sinology” and “sinologist” altogether. That they continue to be used has itself become a source of friction and misunderstanding. I hope that my colleagues will forgive me for a little plain speaking on this subject. We have all heard among “sinolo-

gists" statements of the type "linguists are the prophets of statistical trivialities," "philologists are pettifogging antiquarians," "sociologists are imprecise abstraction-mongers," and a hundred others. To one protagonist the continuance of humane values is at stake in this sanctimonious melee, to another, the assurance of scientific progress. The "classical" sinologist deplores the "fashionable" preoccupation of the "modern" sinologist with broad social trends; the modernist laments the "obsolete" concern of the traditionalist with minute biographical details. The whole spectacle must appear ludicrous to those fortunate scholars who, though bemused by some aspect of European history, or European philosophy, or European literature, are unburdened with the title of "europeanist" and so are spared meaningless and humiliating combat. To stigmatize a competent Byzantine palaeographer as a mediocre theorist of Balkan politics, or a student of Turgot's financial arrangements as an inadequate critic of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, would, I think, deserve little but scorn and mockery. Yet this is precisely the sort of thing that takes place, sub rosa for the most part, in sinological circles. Technical philologists¹ pontificate on the exegetical shortcomings of specialists in the dynamics of social change in the Far East; students of political processes in China bewail the obtuseness of textual critics in respect to political theory. It is time for such nonsense to stop. To insist on a geographical area as a scholarly discipline is part and parcel of the muddled thinking which has produced such monstrosities as the "area major" in our college curricula, asylums for dilettantes and refuges for mediocrities. There is no rigorous methodology for studying an area. A "europeanist" is neither fish nor fowl; neither, nowadays, is a "sinologist." To be a mineralogist interested in the pegmatites of China is one thing; to be an analyst of Chinese *lapidaria* is another. Let the scholar interested in East Asia, like the scholar interested in Europe or in Latin America, decide whether he is a literary critic, a historian of philosophy, a political scientist, a descriptive linguist, or whatever. He should, for the good of his soul, try to inform himself about the achievements of his colleagues in other disciplines with a similar geographic limitation, as he may profitably do by perusing the pages of *JAOS* and *JAS*, but let him prove himself as a scholar in equal competition with critics of Spanish literature, with specialists in scholastic philosophy, with students of European governments, with analysts of Bantu

¹ I use the term "philology" not, as formerly, as a synonym of what we now call "linguistics," but approximately in the sense of *Webster's New International Dictionary* (2nd edition), which begins, "The study of the cultures of civilized peoples as revealed chiefly in their languages, literatures, and religions. . . ." I prefer my own definition: "the analysis and interpretation of textual remains, employing such aids as epigraphy, palaeography, exegesis, the lower and higher criticisms, leading to the study of literature as an immediate expression of the intricacies of culture and the subtleties of the mind." Philology, like the humanities generally, aims at knowledge on a comparatively low level of abstraction, as compared with sociology for instance, though its techniques may be highly abstract. Ultimately it is concerned with the concrete, the personal, the immediate, the crystallized, and the expressive, and therefore with biography, with imagery, with metaphor, and with myth. The house of philology, like the house of history, has many mansions. I think there is room in my definition for the critic of style, the folklorist, the lexicographer, and many others.

phonology, whichever is appropriate. In this view, to be very blunt, to claim the mantle of "sinologist" while censuring another "sinologist," unless he is devoted to a truly comparable discipline, is to make oneself vulnerable to the charge of cowardice. Accusations of "old-fashioned" and "new-fangled" are meaningless. To be a good historian or a good epigraphist means something; to give the name of "good sinologist" has become invidious practice, differently employed by representatives of different academic disciplines. The result of this fuzzy thinking is (for instance) the confounding of the assertion "some philologists (or sociologists, or linguists) are second-rate" with the assertion "philology (or sociology, or linguistics) is a second-rate discipline." The word "sinology" has no place in the picture except to solidify and sanctify the confusion. It seems to me that among the scholars of the Far East it is the linguists (of which group I am *not* myself a member) who take their responsibilities most seriously, and judge each other by standards current among scientific linguists generally. Let the philologists and the historians and the sociologists follow this excellent example. I am a philologist with a particular interest in medieval Chinese literature relating to material culture, and my standards are set (for example) by students of al-Biruni and Agricola and even of Chaucer. I would prefer to be judged an unsuccessful philologist than to deserve the appellation of impertinent "historian" or presumptuous "linguist" (I have been both). This personal testament is given as a harmless example of the kind of self-classification I recommend, though its adequacy ought not to prejudice the issue. To each his own. Let the snarling cease.

EDWARD H. SCHAFER

University of California, Berkeley
 March 4, 1958

The Editor, *The Journal of Asian Studies*

Dear Sir:

Professor Herbert Franke of the University of Munich, whose very interesting and valuable translation of Yang Yü's *Shan-chü hsün-hua* I reviewed in a recent issue of the *Journal* (XVII [Nov. 1957], 118–125), in the course of a long and learned letter to me in reply to my request for advice about other matters of mutual interest, has appended some paragraphs discussing my review. Among other things, Professor Franke notes a slight error or two which I made in reading his German text, where idiomatic usage misled me to point out at least two "errors" that do not in fact exist. By way of correction, I would like to call the reader's attention to these points, and quote here from Professor Franke's letter:

On page 121 of the review you take exception to my "*i-shih*"—"von einer Stunde zur anderen." This, in German, does *not* imply *repeated* action but just "within a certain (but comparatively short) time." In another case you seem to have been misled by a German idiomatic expression. Page 120 of the review, on item 78, you say: "A negative likewise is missing" when dealing with my sentence "und bin so darum gekommen" etc. There is no negative missing. . . [idiom explained] . . . My translation is therefore good as it stands. . .

Professor Franke also points out (and correctly) that I should not refer to readings of *mou* (for *wu*) and *ch'u* (for *shu*) as "misreadings" (review, page 121), in as much as they are correct "literary" readings, especially for the Yüan period. I should have clarified the basis of my objection to them, which is that I feel that current, Mandarin usages should always be the standard to be observed in sinological writings (except where phonology is the issue at hand, of course). This however could involve a long discussion, which I shall not take up here.

May I take this opportunity here again to commend the work under discussion to the readers of the *Journal*, and to apologize for errors foolishly (if conscientiously) made in my review of it.

FREDERICK W. MOTE

Princeton University
January 29, 1958

Dear Sir:

On reading Professor F. W. Mote's review of Herbert Franke, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Chinas unter der Mongolenherrschaft* in the November 1957 issue of the *Journal of Asian Studies*, I was struck by what seem to me to be theoretical errors of the reviewer, resulting in undeserved criticism of Professor Franke's translation of the *Shan-chü hsin-hua*. I refer to the section on page 121, where Professor Mote uses the terms "overly-literal translations" and "anachronistic overliteralism." This type of criticism is often the result of seeing "Classical Chinese" through the veil of Mandarin dialect or of Sino-Japanese. It is well known that a primary tool, and a very fruitful one, in word- and sentence-analysis is the concept of "free" vs. "bound." This concept has been clearly stated, with special reference to Mandarin, by Y. R. Chao on p. xxvii of his *Concise Dictionary of Spoken Chinese*. It can readily be shown that "Classical Chinese" is very much richer in free forms than "Mandarin," and that many forms which are bound in "Mandarin" are free in "Classical." Thus, to use some of the forms discussed by Professor Mote, it can be proven that *shou* "head," *shih* "adornment," *chi* "register," and others, are all free in "Classical" but bound in "Mandarin." To put it another way, each of these linguistic forms is a "word" in "Classical Chinese," while such expressions as *shou shih* and *shu chi* are conventional phrases, though the latter have become compound words in Mandarin. In requiring that the translator use "jewelry" for "eine Zier des Kopfes" and "books" for "schriftliche Aufzeichnungen," Professor Mote is in fact asking him to treat "Classical Chinese" as if it were "Mandarin." In short, it is Professor Mote who is anachronistic, not Professor Franke. Professor Mote seems to regard the translation of such phrases fully and faithfully as "clumsy." It should be unnecessary to remind him that King James' translators of the Bible into English faithfully reproduced similar "clumsy" Hebraicisms, which have since passed into ordinary English speech and are even regarded as models of style. Professor Mote also reveals a dislike for translating metaphors, metonymies, euphemisms, and tropes of all kinds. He is clearly aware of their existence, since he refers to the expression *te yin* "virtuous intonation" as a "euphemism for

'imperial edict.' " What is surprising, and even shocking, is that he wants it *translated* "imperial edict." If this principle is strictly adhered to, we can expect translations of medieval Chinese texts to become more pallid, lackluster, and insipid than ever. I, for one, am grateful to Professor Franke for attempting to bring out much of the color and flavor of the original text, instead of yielding to the temptation to simplify his task by the application of the unscholarly principles of "Mandarinization" and "etiolation."

EDWARD H. SCHAFER

University of California, Berkeley
December 2, 1957

Dear Mr. Editor:

Mr. Purcell has great fun at Mr. Skinner's expense in your last issue and so do we. But he should not be allowed to get away with *all* of it. Mr. Skinner can doubtless defend himself if he wants to. I am only concerned to defend sociology.

Really, Mr. Purcell's unhappy youthful experience with a sociologist who treated the social structure as an object of reverence rather than of analysis should not lead him to damn the whole tribe. It has certainly given him an odd idea of sociology. It is, he tells us, no substitute for "the old 'colonial' method of prolonged contact and observation . . . the use of criteria of many sorts and kinds, trial and error, and the treatment of Chinese and Thai as human beings rather than sociological data." Now, I do not quite see why the sociologist should rob the Chinese and Thai of their humanity when he uses them as his data any more than the historian when he uses them as his. Except perhaps in this sense; that a sociologist should be trained in the art of separating his reporting of facts and of his opinions about the relations between facts on the one hand, from his reporting of his feelings about the facts on the other. This approach of the "levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind" may seem less "human" than the traditional practice of diffusing feeling among fact much as the fat is diffused among the lean in prime colonial beef; but it might in the end prove more useful in solving some of the problems which trouble honest ex-colonial consciences.

And then there is this opposition between sociology and trial and error. This is a false one. Sociology, if it is good sociology, proceeds by trial and error. The difference may be that whereas Mr. Purcell might be content to leave error as error and have done with the matter, the sociologist would want to go on—to amend his original assumptions and make a retrial.

Just how perversely Mr. Purcell insists on missing this point is clear from his charge that concepts such as "class-organised society," being formulated by Americans on the basis of American society, have no relevance to Thailand. Surely all scientific knowledge—knowledge about regularities in nature—is accumulated by comparison. The formulation of concepts such as "class-organised society" is valuable when it is a preliminary to generalization about human societies—generalizations, for instance, concerning differences between class-

organised and non-class-organised societies in the sources of their political leadership, the nature of their social tensions, the strength of ethnic and family bonds, the ease with which they develop a sense of national unity and so on. It is very true that, since the majority of productive modern sociologists have been American, most of the concepts and generalizations current in modern sociology fit American society. That is why their value as generalizations concerning human societies can *only* be tested elsewhere. And if that is what Mr. Skinner is about in Thailand, the more power to his elbow. Mr. Purcell may find human nature a duller subject of enquiry than, say, Chinese, Americans, or Cambridge dons, but this does not prevent him implicitly using, in the paragraph in which he discusses the factors which have aided or impeded Chinese assimilation in Thailand, a number of quite interesting and illuminating generalizations about human nature.

Finally, one word, not as a sociologist, but as a fellow-Englishman who happens to live within ten miles of the American frontier. Surely this scathing assault on Mr. Skinner's colloquialisms is a little hard. Even our most elderly and respected radicals are, I suppose, entitled to preserve a little corner for conservatism in their hearts, but the fault with Mr. Purcell's conservatism is its inconsistency. "Perhaps," he says, "some of these locutions may eventually find their way into the literary language," and he gives us to understand that once they have been accepted into the club he, for one, is prepared to treat them like gentlemen. But how will they ever find their way from the bar and the barrack-room into polite circles, if not by the pioneer efforts of the Skinners of this world?

Do I perhaps sense that Mr. Purcell's objection lies in the fact that it is *American* slang which is in question? Now there are many forms of anti-Americanism that I would go along with. I would even go along with that quite ordinary little girl, Myra Buttle,¹ when she cocks a snook at the Americans who imitate "guileless British arrogance" and don't quite make the grade, or rather over-make it. But its slang, with its vitality and red-corpuscular virility, is one aspect of American life which I should have expected to evoke more than superciliousness in Mr. Purcell. Come, come. Chuck it, Purcell!

R. P. DORE

Vancouver, B. C.
April 16, 1958

¹ See M. Buttle, *The Sweeniad* (1958), p. 41. It is suggested that Myra Buttle is a pseudonym for an unknown person who lives in Cambridge, Eng. It is whispered that there is a deep significance in the fact that she quotes Chinese with accuracy and pertinence.