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# INTRODUCTION: HISTORY FROM BETWEEN AND THE GLOBAL CIRCULATIONS OF THE PAST IN ASIA AND EUROPE, 1600–1950\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article argues for a ‘history from between’ as the best lens through which to understand the construction of historical knowledge between East Asia and Europe. ‘Between’ refers to the space framed by East Asia and Europe, but also to the global circulations of ideas in that space, and to*

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*the subjective feeling of embeddedness in larger-than-local contexts that being in such a space makes possible. Our contention is that the outcomes of such entanglements are not merely reactive forms of knowledge, of the kind implied by older studies of translation and reception in global intellectual history. Instead they are themselves ‘co-productions’: they are the shared and mutually interactive inputs to enduring modes of uses of the past, across both East Asian and European traditions. Taking seriously the possibility that interpretations of the past were not transferred, but rather were co-produced between East Asia and Europe, we reconstruct the braided histories of historical narratives that continue to shape constructions of identity throughout Eurasia.*

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This special issue argues for a ‘history from between’ as the best lens through which to understand the construction of historical knowledge between East Asia and Europe. ‘Between’ refers to the space framed by East Asia and Europe, but also to the global circulations of ideas in that space, and to the subjective feeling of embeddedness in larger-than-local contexts that being in such a space makes possible. Our contention is that the outcomes of such entanglements are not mere reactions of the kind implied by older historiographies of the ‘diffusion’, ‘transfer’, or ‘reception’ of science and thought.<sup>1</sup> Instead they are themselves ‘co-productions’: they are the shared and mutually interactive inputs to enduring modes of uses of the past, across both East Asian and European traditions.

Our case studies here focus in particular on regimes of history-writing in China and Japan. We examine both the interaction of those ‘regimes’ with discourses about the past emerging about and from Europe, and how East Asian scholars and their global interlocutors studied, absorbed, and appropriated each other’s experiences of history, related them to their own practices of historiography, and mapped them onto their own intellectual landscapes. Their narrations of the past, as much as their knowledge about the past itself, revealed processes of exchange between and within East Asia and Europe and in turn produced outcomes that endured beyond the initial moment of entanglement. Such outcomes included new languages of popular and scholarly discourse, as well as interpretations of novel concepts in ways that rendered them relevant to particular scholarly concerns. But they also included, crucially, modes of ‘using’ specific parts of Europe’s past to craft new narratives of East Asian pasts. These articles show how the views that East Asians held of other peoples’ histories

<sup>1</sup> George Basalla, ‘The spread of Western science’, *Science*, n.s. 156 (1967), pp. 611–22. For a thoughtful critique, see Dhruv Raina, ‘From West to non-West? Basalla’s three-stage model revisited’, *Science as Culture*, 8 (1999), pp. 497–516. Echoes of similarly diffusionist models of ‘transfer’ resurface, e.g., in Jörg Leonhard, ‘Language, experience and translation: towards a comparative dimension’, in Javier Fernández Sebastián, ed., *Political concepts and time: new approaches to conceptual history* (Santander, 2011), pp. 245–72.

shaped interpretations of their own past experiences, present predicaments, and future perspectives.

To better comprehend the diverse contexts for writing about the past, our articles as a whole deploy interdisciplinary perspectives from history, literary criticism, translation studies, and political theory. Individually, we also draw on intellectual history, global history, and history of science approaches.<sup>2</sup> Our interdisciplinary perspective is both deliberate and necessary. None of the knowledge outcomes we reconstruct can be described and explained from within any one locality, tradition, or language. Given the varieties of period, textual genre, and historical contingency that underlay the varied ways of narrating the past, we believe that a unified conceptual vocabulary would unduly constrain our attempt to capture the granular detail as well as conceptual innovation that characterize these examples of 'history from between'. By considering the global flow of ideas in relation to actors' own efforts to articulate their global (or at least non-local) contexts, and by recognizing the influence of existing forms of narrating the past in doing so, we emphasize the mutually rather than unilaterally transformative productions of shared knowledge between and within East Asia and Europe.

One important consequence of this approach is that we refuse to distinguish historical actors' perceptions of the global from the transregional networks in which they were embedded. Nor do we treat terms such as 'Japan', 'China', 'East Asia', or 'Europe' as bounded geographic realities which delimit how ideas circulate. Rather, we acknowledge the many ways in which individual actors' perceptions of the global were fully embedded both in the networks within which they operated and in the ideas to which they were exposed. In our articles, 'East Asia' and 'Europe' stand more as convenient reference points rather than specific geographic markers; they help to track (but are not meant to constrain) the new possibilities for action and thought created by the movement of ideas across space and time.

In the next section, we explain more about how our 'history from between' builds on ongoing work in a number of fields to describe these entangled, translocal, and polycentric sites of narration about the past. These narrations affect not only conceptions of time but also the formation of networks and the interactions which they facilitated and constrained. Consequently, many of our articles suggest more fine-grained geographies for global intellectual history, extending to regional and sub-regional interconnections, as well as to broader imperial networks. We then explore what it might mean to recentre history-writing on these in-between spaces, using

<sup>2</sup> In addition, many of our articles instinctively explore the relationship between 'micro' and 'global' history. For a recent discussion of the 'between' in this context, see Jean-Paul A. Ghobrial, 'Introduction: seeing the world like a microhistorian', in 'Global history and microhistory', *Past & Present*, 242, issue supplement 14 (2019), pp. 1–22. We are grateful to Professor Ghobrial for sharing this article with Martin Dusinberre prior to its publication.

our articles as a reference point to illustrate the promises and challenges of such an approach.

## I

We call ‘history from between’ that space in which historical actors respond to, narrate, and contribute intellectually and materially to the contexts of global interaction in which they find themselves. Here, ‘between’ signals the complex circulations of ideas that are enabled in the spaces these actors inhabit – between Europe and East Asia, as well as between East Asia and its neighbours and internal ‘others’. Thinking of these transformations as ‘between’ is particularly apt for our cases, because the conditions under which they took shape were not necessarily determined by specific dynamics of power. The geopolitical asymmetries generated by European imperialism – although resulting in a situation where, for some two centuries, European thought and experience would form the building blocks of a global discourse in nearly every field – still left open how such discourses would take shape in circulatory spaces away from the centres of the European world. To make this point is not to whitewash the underlying realities of power asymmetry and colonial hegemony by positing a situation of mutual equality and well-meaning harmonious collaboration. As has been noted, ‘To write a global history that takes all parts of the world and their historical relations epistemologically equally seriously without arbitrarily constructing equal importance between the entangled entities remains difficult.’<sup>3</sup> Rather, we mean to draw attention to the countless ways in which actors, even under such asymmetrical conditions, exercised agency when availing themselves of ‘European’ building blocks. They made sense and use of such blocks in a manner not predetermined by their original constellations of meaning or power.

Under these conditions, the interactions in this in-between space are characterized by distributed agency. Their outcome is not a reaction to or transplantation of ideas so much as what some articles in this issue call a ‘co-production’.<sup>4</sup> Co-production, as it is understood in histories of knowledge, describes processes of circulation between different spaces that are inevitably shaped by asymmetrical power relations.<sup>5</sup> Birgit Tremml-Werner adapts this definition in her article for this special issue to argue that ‘New encounters in the sixteenth

<sup>3</sup> Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ‘Global conceptual history: promises and pitfalls of a new approach’, in Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ed., *A global conceptual history of Asia, 1860–1940* (London, 2014), pp. 1–24, at p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent discussion of transplantation, see Martin Dusinberre and Mariko Iijima, ‘Transplantation: sugar and imperial practice in Japan’s Pacific’, *Historische Anthropologie*, 27 (2019), pp. 325–35.

<sup>5</sup> Kapil Raj, *Relocating modern science: circulation and the construction of knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke, 2007); Kapil Raj, ‘Beyond postcolonialism ... and post-positivism’, *Isis*, 104 (2013), pp. 337–47; Thomas A. S. Haddad, ‘Global infra-connections? Science and everyday transactions in an early-modern missionary setting’, in Amélia Polónia,

and seventeenth centuries resulted in a shared understanding of the worlds in which people interacted, but also in unconscious co-production of concepts.<sup>6</sup> Such concepts often go on to alter the content of historical knowledge as well as its narrative forms and practices.

‘Co-production’ and ‘history from between’ therefore call to mind work that has long recognized the value of ‘contact zones’, frontiers, and borderlands to the production of the very entities – nation-states, civilizations, colonizers – that marginalize or overlook them.<sup>7</sup> Mary Louise Pratt’s germinal work, for example, has shown how transculturation in the contact zone played a critical role not just in manufacturing identities for the subordinated subjects of South America and Africa, but also in altering and producing the representations by which Europe came to know itself. Rejecting diffusionist accounts (which in East Asian history are often associated with the ‘impact–response model’), Pratt argues that it was rather ‘the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures’ coming together in sometimes unpredictable, multidirectional processes of interaction that created self-understandings for colonizer and dominated alike.<sup>8</sup>

In building on Pratt’s insights, our special issue additionally draws on recent work in the history of science, translation studies, and the global history of concepts in particular. Heeding calls to reconsider the ‘place of knowledge’, as formulated programmatically by Adi Ophir and Steven Shapin nearly three decades ago,<sup>9</sup> historians of science have done much to reconstruct how exchanges and transactions among cultural brokers of different backgrounds shaped co-productions of scientific knowledge in diverse cultural borderlands.<sup>10</sup> The case studies in this issue adopt a similar perspective. They

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Fabiano Bracht, and Gisele C. Conceição, eds., *Connecting worlds: production and circulation of knowledge in the first global age* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018), pp. 220–47.

<sup>6</sup> Tremml-Werner builds on Sheila Jasanoff’s conception of co-production. See Sheila Jasanoff, ‘Introduction: the idiom of co-production’, in Sheila Jasanoff, ed., *States of knowledge: the co-production of science and the social order* (London, 2004), pp. 1–12, at p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of recent scholarship in relation to Asian borderland studies, see Willem van Schendel and Erik de Maaker, ‘Asian borderlands: introducing their permeability, strategic uses and meanings’, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 29 (2014), pp. 3–9.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London, 1992), p. 7. For a classic representation of ‘impact–response’, see Ssu-yu Teng and John King Fairbank, *China’s response to the West: a documentary survey, 1839–1923* (Cambridge, MA, 1954); for an early critique and alternative to this model, see Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, *In search of wealth and power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Adi Ophir and Steven Shapin, ‘The place of knowledge: a methodological survey’, *Science in Context*, 4 (1991), pp. 3–21. See also David N. Livingstone, *Putting science in its place: geographies of scientific knowledge* (Chicago, IL, 2003). This agenda was fleshed out most impressively by Christian Jacob’s monumental enterprise tracing ‘places of knowledge’ (*lieux de savoir*) around the globe. See Christian Jacob, ed., *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés* (Paris, 2007); and Christian Jacob, ed., *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l’intellect* (Paris, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Fa-ti Fan, ‘Science in cultural borderlands: methodological reflections on the study of science, European imperialism, and cultural encounter’, *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society*, 1 (2007), pp. 213–31, at p. 215.

propose histories from between in order to demonstrate that transcultural encounters in in-between spaces are mutually transformative: that is, they change perspectives on all sides engaged in these inevitably complex negotiations.

This approach also resonates with recent work in translation studies. Leaving behind models of meaning-diffusion that reduced translation to a simple act of lexical substitution in search of absolute equivalence, many studies devoted to circulations of knowledge beyond Europe have shown that translation must be understood as ‘a creative act of generating meaning and constructing discourse’ in translanguaging contexts.<sup>11</sup> In following circulations of specific notions (such as the ‘Pacific age’ or the ‘renaissance’) between Europe and East Asia, our studies confirm that historical translation required continued and dynamic negotiations within and between linguistic, social, and epistemic communities; as such, translation must be seen as anything but a simple transfer of fixed meanings from one locality to another.<sup>12</sup> Processes of translation invariably transform semantic values and reconfigure conceptual relationships across languages; they affect meanings, and actors, in all contexts involved.

Initially reluctant to accept these findings, historians of concepts, whose work remained for far too long restricted by national boundaries,<sup>13</sup> eventually also began to reorient their work beyond ‘comparative historical semantics’ and to open their field to global circulations.<sup>14</sup> Still tentative in some of its methodological assumptions, global conceptual history, with its narrow focus on migrations of individual notions or semantic fields across languages and cultures, aims to complement more expansive attempts to write non-parochial intellectual histories.<sup>15</sup> Early results are promising. Studies tracing the global careers of notions such as ‘culture’, ‘empire’, or ‘civil society’, for example, have revealed patterns of distributed agency that, as in our articles here, subvert

<sup>11</sup> Douglas R. Howland, ‘The predicament of ideas in culture: translation and historiography’, *History and Theory*, 42 (2003), pp. 45–60, at p. 45. See also David Mervart, ‘The republic of letters comes to Nagasaki: record of a translator’s struggle’, *Journal of Transcultural Studies*, 6 (2015), pp. 8–37.

<sup>12</sup> Earlier works highlighting this point include Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual practice: literature, national culture, and translated modernity: China 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA, 1995); Michael Lackner, Imo Amelung, and Joachim Kurtz, eds., *New terms for new ideas: Western knowledge and lexical change in late imperial China* (Leiden, 2001); Douglas R. Howland, *Translating the West: language and political reason in nineteenth-century Japan* (Honolulu, HI, 2005); Martin J. Burke and Melvin Richter, eds., *Why concepts matter: translating social and political thought* (Leiden, 2012); and Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago, IL, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Jani Marjanen, ‘Transnational conceptual history, methodological nationalism and Europe’, in Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freedon, and Javier Fernández Sebastián, eds., *Conceptual history in the European space* (New York, NY, and Oxford, 2017), pp. 139–74.

<sup>14</sup> Joachim Kurtz, ‘Cosmopolitanism in late Qing China: local refractions of a global concept’, in Imo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz, eds., *Reading the signs: philology, history, prognostication* (Munich, 2018), pp. 367–88, at pp. 372–3.

<sup>15</sup> Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global conceptual history: a reader* (London, 2016).

any claim to exclusive conceptual ownership.<sup>16</sup> Many others writing in East Asian and global history have relied on such inspirations to resist nationalist and civilizational histories which assume a singular, transhistorical subject as the generator of authoritative representations about what is really going on in the past and present.<sup>17</sup> Like these scholars, we too attend carefully to the inequalities of power that shape such ‘in-between’ encounters, while acknowledging, with Pratt and others, that subjugated peoples can and do exercise significant agency in absorbing and interpreting the dominant culture within their own systems of representation.<sup>18</sup>

But here we extend that concern beyond representations and self-understanding to the more general processes by which the past comes to be known. We examine the ways in which such new knowledge of the past established its value, not only from its practical application or its similarity to European models, but also from how well it contributed to existing streams of discourse that continued to govern the value and valence of new thought in host societies. Tremml-Werner’s article, for example, shows that the history of past encounters between Europe and Japan shaped the ways in which Japanese authors narrated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including their use of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (1475–1519), and other famous actors as models from the European history of expansion. In describing the translation and ‘co-production of knowledge involving Chinese, Japanese, and European practices of interpreting and writing about the past’, Tremml-Werner draws attention to how not only the sources themselves, but also the methods used in interpreting them, and the language used in describing past processes, are transformed in this encounter of co-produced historiography. Such a focus speaks closely to the work of Megan Thomas on nineteenth-century Filipino intellectuals. Thomas demonstrates that, in the lead-up to the 1896 revolution, scholars such as José Rizal (1861–96) reconfigured orientalist disciplines such as folklore and ethnology directly from Europe. They bypassed the ‘repertoire’ of their colonizers, the Spanish, and in the process fashioned these scholarly practices ‘on the colonized’s terms’.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in global concept history: culturalism in the age of capital* (Chicago, IL, 2008); Einar Wigen, ‘Ottoman concepts of empire’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, 8 (2013), pp. 44–66; Margrit Pernau, ‘Gab es eine indische Zivilgesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert? Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Globalgeschichte und historischer Semantik’, *Traverse*, 14 (2007), pp. 51–65.

<sup>17</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing history from the nation: questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago, IL, 1995); Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering history in China: American historical writing on the recent Chinese past* (New York, NY, 1996); Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell, ‘Overlapping histories, co-produced concepts: imperialism in Chinese eyes’, *Journal of Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> Pratt, *Imperial eyes*, p. 6 and *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Megan C. Thomas, *Orientalists, propagandists, and ilustrados: Filipino scholarship and the end of Spanish colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN, 2012), p. 2. For another discussion of imperial

Similar stories of co-produced academic disciplines could be told for Japan or even late imperial China in the process by which scholars constructed a national identity through writing history.<sup>20</sup> These strategies affected narrations of the past and thus coalesced with existing historiographical traditions to produce a new way of thinking about time. But they also produced new conceptualizations about the kind of space that was worthy of such narration.<sup>21</sup> By the nineteenth century, these reconceptions of the world in East Asia were often driven by insecurity about European encroachment, particularly after the shock of China's defeat at the hands of the British in 1842. This led to new uses of the past as a means of making sense of China's once-dominant place within a reconfigured global order; it also led to calls for a new spatial configuration to take account of imperial territory. Thus, some of our articles' historical protagonists reconfigured 'Qing China' or 'Japan' as idealized spaces, rendering them 'empires' akin to those of the Europeans. As Jonathan Chappell's article shows, late Qing thinkers had a long-standing tradition of 'frontier' political thought and yet, by 1900, they had begun to reimagine frontiers as more similar in type to European colonies. In doing so they sought to convert places such as the Mongolian frontier into a globally recognized idealized space: the colony.

In his article, Martin Dusinberre focuses on how Japanese intellectuals conceived the Pacific Ocean in the late nineteenth century as a site of history. In this case, time was central to conceptions of space: in order to position Japan's relationship to the Pacific, scholars – in particular Inagaki Manjirō (1861–1908) – had to imagine Japan's place in world history; and such imaginations of world historical time encompassed not only the past but also the future. Inagaki's articulation of what he called 'the Pacific age' of the upcoming twentieth century was only one expression of a larger temporal framing of Japanese global engagements past and future, a framing that came under the rubric of 'expansion'. Indeed, intellectuals such as Inagaki were articulating their ideas of 'the Pacific age' even as sugar labourers in far-flung places such as Hawai'i or Queensland were actually living Japan's Pacific future. Dusinberre thus interprets discourses of Japanese expansionism around the period of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) in temporal as much as spatial terms, and seeks – through focusing on the Cambridge historian J. R. Seeley (1834–95) – to understand the role of European history-writing in the emergence of such discourses.

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repertoires, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: power and the politics of difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> For Japanese and Chinese uses of history in this way, see for example Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's orient: rendering pasts into history* (Berkeley, CA, 1993); Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through history: the May Fourth approach to historiography* (Albany, NY, 2001); and Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow, eds., *Transforming history: the making of a modern academic discipline in twentieth-century China* (Hong Kong, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Christopher L. Hill, *National history and the world of nations: capital, state, and the rhetoric of history in Japan, France, and the United States* (Durham, NC, 2008).



The link between imaginations of time and space should be unsurprising because one key feature of the period 1850–1945, touched on by many of the articles here, was a technological compression of time and space which was noticeable to contemporaries.<sup>22</sup> As in the examples of Mongolia and the Pacific, this led to the conceptualization of broader spatial imaginaries, in which East Asian actors considered how their own identities fitted into global space as they imagined it; but they also used their conception of the globe as a place from which to reconsider time. For example, in Pablo Blitstein's article the Chinese public intellectual Hu Shi (1891–1962), relying on a longer history of uses of the 'renaissance' in East Asia, claimed that China had been producing its own renaissance since the 1910s (namely, his own literary revolution), and that it had also produced some 'minor renaissances' in the past. In so doing, Hu Shi—like many others in Asia and beyond—placed *in* China the chronological framework of European history, and thus implicitly inscribed the Chinese nation into what he imagined to be the inescapable temporal structure of any 'modern' nation of the world. Similar rhetorical underpinnings—which Hu Shi deployed to unburden the notion of 'renaissance' from its European idiosyncrasies—are also encoded in the very idea of 'utopia' as it emerged in Thomas More's (1478–1535) eponymous book and, as Lorenzo Andolfatto argues in his article, in the utopian fiction written in late imperial China. Utopian imaginaries came into being in both Renaissance Britain and early modern China at times when the two societies grappled with a changed sense of global space. In both these contexts, the form of the utopian travelogue provided a provisional conceptual framework for rendering the notion of global space intelligible.

These accounts demonstrate how the meeting of ideas through and between the colony and metropole cannot be accurately characterized as mere processes of translation or appropriation from Europe to the rest. As our articles collectively argue, this is even more the case when we discuss disciplinary forms of knowledge production such as that of history. As Megan Thomas reminds us, not only were the findings of orientalist disciplines such as philology themselves a challenge to 'the idea of the uniqueness of modern European culture and its distinction from the rest of the world'; it was also the case that the exchange of knowledge, even under colonial conditions, did not always predictably favour the colonizer or align with the dominant.<sup>23</sup> This is distinctively—but, as our discussion above suggests, by no means uniquely or exclusively—true for the East Asian context, whose indigenous traditions of history-writing remained relevant even during periods of undeniable Euro-American domination, and whose

<sup>22</sup> Vanessa Ogle, *The global transformation of time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Orientalists, propagandists, and ilustrados*, p. 26. As Thomas argues, 'To engage in a discourse is not necessarily to be dominated by it (or, alternatively, to be dominated by those who have used that discourse before)' (p. 29).

experiences with imperialism were in any case uneven.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, recent scholarship associated with the ‘California school’ of economic history has interrogated the periodization and causes for the ascendance of Europe, encouraging a significant rethinking both about the timing of modernity and about Europe’s dominant place within its narrative.<sup>25</sup> Building from these revisionist views, scholars of early modern Eurasia such as Tonio Andrade and Adam Clulow have offered solid evidence that Asian states in the early modern period possessed considerable power not only to resist, but even to transform, European demands for territorial or commercial expansion. Clulow argues, for example, that, under pressure from the much more powerful Tokugawa *bakufu* 幕府 (shogunate), the Dutch East India Company had to ‘accept a set of new rules for proper conduct, as well as new political vocabulary, and to abandon established practices’ if they were to trade successfully with the Japanese.<sup>26</sup> Clulow specifies this relationship as a clash between two world orders: one, a European model of direct sovereignty over colonial possessions, justified through the invocation of a shared repertoire of practices mainly based on economic benefit; the other, a hierarchical model of foreign relations. Japanese historians labelled this co-produced system of Japanocentric tributary relations *Nihon-gata ka’i chitsujo* 日本型華夷秩序 (‘Japan-centred civilizational order’), modelled on a Confucian-based Chinese practice and designed mainly to gain political legitimacy.<sup>27</sup>

The result of this exchange was the capitulation of the Dutch largely to the terms of the Japanese game: they acknowledged their vassalage to the *bakufu* in 1632, and in 1636 also conceded their submission to the jurisdiction of the king of Siam. Both acts were in contradiction to Company claims of unassailable legal sovereignty, articulated in treaties across South-east Asia.<sup>28</sup> These examples might be multiplied further. Within Qing China, the trade system at Canton was deliberately designed to work in the Qing state’s favour, and largely did so from its inception in 1757 until the 1830s, when European steamships eroded the defensive hydrographic features of the Pearl river.<sup>29</sup> As with

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Mehl, ‘The European model and the archive in Japan: inspiration or legitimization?’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 26 (2013), pp. 107–27.

<sup>25</sup> R. Bin Wong, *China transformed: historical change and the limits of European experience* (Ithaca, NY, 1997); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The great divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Adam Clulow, *The company and the shogun: the Dutch encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York, NY, 2014), p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218; Arano Yasunori 荒野泰典, ‘Nihongata ka’i chitsujo no keisei’ 日本型華夷の秩序の形成 (‘The development of a Japanese order of civilized and barbarian’), in Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦 and Asao Naohiro 朝尾直弘, eds., *Nihon no shakaishi, 1: rettō naigai no kōtsū to kokka* 日本の社会史—列島内外の交通と国家 (*A social history of Japan, 1: foreign and domestic communication and the state*) (Tokyo, 1987), pp. 183–226.

<sup>28</sup> Clulow, *The company and the shogun*, pp. 235–6.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Arthur Van Dyke, *The Canton trade: life and enterprise on the China coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong, 2007), pp. 16–17.

the defeat of the Dutch at the hands of Zheng Chenggong (1624–62), the Ming dynasty loyalist who drove the East India Company out of their Taiwan colony in 1661, European imperial agents in East and South-east Asia often found themselves submitting to ideas and powers that they did not originate or readily control.<sup>30</sup>

Invoking ‘history from between’ offers a way of conceptualizing these diverse and interstitial relations between East Asia and Europe, without confining non-European peoples or states to a reactive or constrained position within an inevitable hierarchy of power. Admittedly, work such as Pratt’s is careful to show the irreducible novelty of responses to political and cultural dilemmas with no precedent in European history, most prominently that of decolonization, even as their authors drew decisively on the idioms and values of their colonizers.<sup>31</sup> Such acts of colonial mimicry, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, go beyond mere reproduction to establish forms of resistance to European colonial domination: they disrupt the authority of key colonial ideas (about, for example, liberty, history, or the nature of social life) by producing another form of knowledge about them.<sup>32</sup> But these forms of agency have been theorized in relation to the specific European colonial experiences of domination, and so tend to portray the ‘in-between’ as characterized by vastly unequal power between colonizer and colonized. The products of encounters in this space, therefore, are necessarily portrayed in ways that recognize the constraints of subjugated peoples to shape their own and other forms of knowledge. Terms used to describe such encounters often imply reactive adaptations to dominance, such as ‘mimicry’, adaptation, creative borrowing, or ‘writing back’.

In doing so, these studies make it more difficult to defend the validity of these adaptations beyond their time and place of origin, or to comprehend how these ideas could be taken up in dynamic counter-flows that altered not only Europe’s understanding of itself, but also the very practices of history-writing that produced its own narrative of civilizational dominance. These models also emphasize the moment of contact as the most significant aspect of exchange for both parties. Yet as Chappell’s article shows, the ongoing flows (and stoppages!) of knowledge *within* local contexts are as important, if not more so, for shaping the development of new ideas. In the nineteenth century in China, Darwinian ideas melded with existing ideas of temporal change to create a new but distinct temporality that positioned certain ‘others’ within a vision of progress stemming from physical disconnections within the Qing state, which in turn informed how global ideas were perceived. Before the mid-nineteenth century, Han Chinese officials working for the Manchu Qing were barred from serving north of the Great Wall in Mongolia and Manchuria, and

<sup>30</sup> Tonio Andrade, *Lost colony: the untold story of China’s first great victory over the West* (Princeton, NJ, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Pratt, *Imperial eyes*, pp. 176–7.

<sup>32</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London, 2006), p. 123.

information about the region was already heavily censored. As a result, Han Chinese literati gleaned information about Mongol peoples and culture mainly from materials designed to promote Manchu cultural identity. Han officials then deployed this essentialized, Manchu-centred conception of Mongol nomadic identity in discussing their annexation policy of Mongolia, itself derived from European models. The result was an entangled exchange of ideas which is unmappable in the typical senses. Here, as in our other articles, ideas become so enmeshed in the social and cultural contexts of particular thinkers that they cannot be said to have been ‘transferred’ from one to another in any meaningful sense.

Even during periods of undeniable Euro-American influence over East Asian cultural, intellectual, and political life, modes of knowledge production did not always follow typical one-way diffusionist models from Europe or the United States to the rest of the world. As Blitstein’s article demonstrates, when the Chinese historian Hu Shi sought to identify a ‘Chinese renaissance’ he was not simply borrowing European categories. Rather, he had a fundamentally different understanding of what a renaissance was and could be from that proposed by his British interlocutor, Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975). Nevertheless, his intellectual engagement with Toynbee resulted in Toynbee’s proposition that the Renaissance was not an *event* which occurred in Europe between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but rather a *type* of event which could occur at any place and time—such that one could speak of ‘multiple renaissances’. This was a framework which would eventually give rise to other ‘multiple’ variations, chief among them ‘multiple modernities’. But by offering a longer historical overview of such frameworks, Blitstein shows that ‘multiple Xs’, presented as a hedge against Eurocentrism, do not have a purely ‘European’ history. Moreover, emblematic temporal labels in Europe proper (such as the Renaissance) are part of larger, multi-local circulation of discourses which go well beyond Europe, and which connect different parts of the world, from Asia and America to Europe. Even if the thesis of multiple renaissances does not definitively challenge the Eurocentric privilege of history-writing, Blitstein reminds us that the history of the concept surely does.

## II

To call the outcomes of engagements between Europe and East Asia documented in these articles a ‘provincialization’ of European ideas (that is, their ‘renewal’ from the margins, in Chakrabarty’s terms<sup>33</sup>) would be to fail to recognize that Asian practices and values played a *constitutive*—and not merely supplementary or influential—role in producing Eurasian political, economic, and cultural relations. It would also leave us bereft of a vocabulary for understanding

<sup>33</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

how rising economic and political powers beyond Europe in the present day – China, India, Japan – continue to invoke the terms of such relations as pivotal in their own forms of history-making. In other words, the dominance of Asian states in the early modern period until 1800, and again, increasingly, from the 1970s to our time, demands a far more radical decentring, not only of world history, but also of the theoretical concepts we use to make sense of the kinds of exchanges that took place under these conditions.<sup>34</sup>

For the Japanese historians discussed by Tremml-Werner and David Mervart, similarly, using the European past was not a form of resistance, but a form of extending the ‘default historical common sense’ prevalent in their own intellectual contexts. As Mervart puts it in his article,

Far from an imperial imposition of a framework for history, around 1800 the Western record of Europe’s past arrived in Japan to be subjected to a re-reading and reshaping in terms of a confident, lively, and unselfconscious body of historiography which provided its own conceptual patterns and period markers. We should pay attention to this moment, for among other things it gives us a counter-factual glimpse of the European past chopped, stretched, and twisted to fit the mould of a different historiographical common sense – something, of course, that otherwise typically happens to pasts non-European.

The braided histories that emerged from such encounters situated Dutch translations of Latin chronicles alongside the Chinese standard history of the Ming dynasty, and a historical account-turned-popular romance of a young man from Japan named Zheng Chenggong, who would go on to be celebrated by Chinese as a hero for liberating Taiwan from Dutch colonial rule. These entangled histories are knotted together not only by the circulation of ideas, people, and texts through early modern Japan, but also by an old Roman story about an ox hide, originally narrated in those Dutch translations to describe Dido’s founding of Carthage.

It is perhaps no coincidence that three of the articles here discuss Taiwan, and two others reference it at least in passing. Taiwan is an island that is in some ways emblematic of the limitations of existing ethnocentric models for thinking about connected or entangled histories. As Robert Eskildsen notes, this small island ‘disrupts the most important historical narratives – nationalism and [European] imperialism – that have been used to explain the modern history of the region’.<sup>35</sup> It is a place whose indigenous populations have been exploited by Han Chinese settlers, even as these settlers have been subjugated in the process

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji journey: a Japanese historian in the outback* (Honolulu, HI, 2011); Martin Dusinberre, ‘Japan, global history, and the great silence’, *History Workshop Journal*, 83 (2017), pp. 130–50; Leigh Jenco, ‘On the possibility of Chinese thought as global theory’, in Leigh Jenco, ed., *Chinese thought as global theory: diversifying knowledge production in the social sciences and humanities* (Albany, NY, 2016), pp. 1–25.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Eskildsen, ‘Taiwan: a periphery in search of a narrative’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64 (2005), pp. 281–94, at p. 281.

of empire-building by Europeans, the Qing, and the Japanese. It served as a maritime entrepôt for three centuries while resisting integration into the broader East Asian region. Its pasts are inscribed within the histories of Japan, China, Spain, the Netherlands, and Austronesia, even as the exact articulation – and ownership – of its own past remains contested.<sup>36</sup> In short, its imbrication in the complex pasts of so many different polities across time and space renders Taiwan a place ‘in search of a narrative’<sup>37</sup> – a description that could also describe other East Asian polities with cross-cut, complex histories, including Korea.

Our articles introduce further complexity into this already confounding context, by showing how thinkers caught up in these interactive streams of influence confronted, understood, and finally inscribed into the past these kinds of interactions. For reform-minded Chinese officials in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as Shen Baozhen (1820–79), Taiwan stood at the centre of a whirlwind of historical changes. As Chappell’s article shows, while the ongoing frontier status of Taiwan had posed continuing problems for the Qing court since Taiwan’s annexation in 1683, the Mudan incident of 1874 signalled a new European colonial interest in the region. In response, Shen invoked the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) strategic concept of *outuo* 歐脫, a general term for borderlands which had its origins in a specific referent, namely the empty space north of the Great Wall between Han and ‘barbarian’ empires. This space had since been incorporated into the Qing empire, a fate he thus implied must also befall Taiwan. When Taiwan was annexed by the Japanese empire in 1895, its historical status was once again reframed within the hybrid context of European and East Asian pasts. As Tremml-Werner explains, the island figured prominently in the attempts by the imperial historian Murakami Naojirō (1868–1966) to create a notion of early modern Japanese foreign relations, in which he combined approaches from European universal history, Confucian classics, and the evidentiary learning of Chinese empiricist historians (Japanese 考証学 *kōshōgaku*; Chinese 考證學 *kaozhengxue*) to reinterpret sources from the Japanese past. Murakami leaned heavily on historical sources produced by contemporaries of Yamada Nagamasa (1590–1630), who sailed to Taiwan in the early seventeenth century and thereby offered evidence of Japan’s long-standing intimacy with East Asia – what in the nineteenth century would be labelled as ‘Japan’s southern advance’.

The narrations at work on and about Taiwan draw not only from forms of history-writing in China and Japan, which are themselves long-standing, internally self-referential, and autonomous. They also extend to include the ways in which the past is used and experienced by indigenous peoples, who are often

<sup>36</sup> Ts’ao Yung-ho 曹永和, ‘Taiwan shi yanjiu de ling yige tujing: “Taiwan dao shi” gainian’, 台灣史研究的另一個途徑：台灣島史概念 (‘Another path for research in Taiwan history: the concept of Taiwan island history’), *Taiwan zaoqi lishi yanjiu xujì* 台灣早期歷史研究續集 (Continued research on the early history of Taiwan) (Taipei, 2000), pp. 445–50; Damien Morier-Genoud, ‘Taiwanese historiography’, *China Perspectives* (2010), pp. 79–91.

<sup>37</sup> Eskildsen, ‘Taiwan’.

taken to be ‘people without a history’.<sup>38</sup> When the Chinese traveller Chen Di (1541–1617) visited Taiwan at the start of the seventeenth century, he realized that his indigenous hosts did not reckon the past using typical Chinese conventions. In fact, the indigenous (likely Sirayan) peoples with whom he interacted not only lacked the kind of institutions of political and familial authority celebrated in typical Chinese dynastic histories, but they also lacked the means of writing to record them in the first place. His attempt to render their experience of the past in a way that made sense to his Chinese audience, without at the same time rendering their own experiences as an inferior or even absent form of historicity, marked Chen, as Leigh Jenco shows in her article, as an unusually adept sojourner to the space in between: refusing typical tropes that would confine the indigenous Siraya to the stasis of mere ‘savagery’ (*fan* 蕃), he adapted a series of Chinese metaphors to produce a new form of understanding about how the past might be registered and experienced. For Chen specifically, this task involved understanding how a legitimate form of sociality might begin and change through time, without the medium of writing or via the intervention of a sagely founder. His approach thus contrasted strongly with the later attitudes of Qing officials, whose despair at governing the indigenous population led them to proclaim the ‘raw savages’ as out of joint with their times.

The Sirayans and their past were braided yet again into the histories of other societies in the region: after Dutch missionaries created a syllabary for their language, called Sinkan, their subsequent written records would be rediscovered by Murakami three centuries later and used as a source for crafting the *nan'yō shi* 南洋史 (‘history of the Southern Seas’) curriculum at Taipei Imperial University in Taiwan in the 1930s – by that time, a colonial periphery of the Japanese empire. Tremml-Werner shows how these sources helped Murakami to build a Taiwanese colonial history based on European models, confounding the contemporary compartmentalization of history into Japanese, Western, or Eastern (non-Japanese) history. Murakami’s imperialist attempt to set Japan as a historical actor on an equal plane with Europe ironically turned in part on recognizing the agency and historical presence of the indigenous people of Taiwan.

For our purposes more generally, we might recognize that, when Shen Baozhen used ancient Chinese precedents to resituate nineteenth-century Taiwan amid European, Chinese, and Japanese historical trajectories; or when Chen included the Siraya in a use of the past larger than the one with which he originally began; or when Murakami wrote a history of early Tokugawa Japanese foreign relations using a combination of Japanese, European, and Siamese texts, they all inaugurated something like what we would now call a global history as a means of both doing justice to and also accounting for the pasts they witnessed. In other words, these accounts

<sup>38</sup> For criticisms of this view, see Eric Wolf, *Europe and the people without history* (Berkeley, CA, 1982).

neither merely produced self-representations nor reflected only a deeply interactive exchange of ideas; they also produced histories which themselves shaped and were shaped by the kinds of mutual engagements that characterized their objects of narration. Much of the historical knowledge discussed in this special issue in this sense is co-produced, rather than simply being the product of transference from Europe or indeed from other parts of East Asia.

Collectively, these articles argue that, to be truly global, intellectual history must consider the space of the between. This is not merely a contact zone or a 'middle ground'.<sup>39</sup> It is the intellectual space where actors, in East Asia and elsewhere, are as influenced and constrained (or not) by their own intellectual heritages as by European domination. The actors in this issue often used the European past, but they did so in the same way as Toynbee used the East Asian past: as one element among many which helped build their understanding of the world which they inhabited.

<sup>39</sup> This term is taken from Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 2011), p. xxvi.