Introduction to the Special Issue: Japanese Studies in Japan and its Vicinities: Economics and Sociology

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Studies of foreign countries often depend on the lure of the image of an unknown market. The lure of the China market led King George III to send his emissary, Lord MacCartney, to China to meet Emperor Jianlung in 1793 and to give the Emperor a letter as well as an enormous collection of gifts. The purpose of this envoy to China was to convince the Emperor to ease restrictions on trade between Great Britain and China. In 1816, in the chronicles of Emperor Jiaqing, foreign countries were categorized in two ways: tributary countries and trading countries. By tributary country is meant a country, usually a smaller and less-advanced country, which pays loyal respect and is compliant and in return is given many rare and precious gifts, and is thus bestowed a position in what is considered as the Pax Sinica (Latin for Chinese Peace). By trading country is meant a country which is devoid of the meaning in the Pax Sinica in Chinese understanding. England was categorized as a tributary country, whereas in English history England was portrayed as one of the Western countries which tried to open the country and ports, thereby expanding its commercial ties. According to the Jiaqing huidian (imperial chronicles) England, Korea, and Vietnam are categorized as tributary countries, whereas France, the Netherlands, and Japan are categorized as a trading countries. During most of the Qing period (1644–1911), Japan adopted the system of trading with foreign countries whereby the Tokugawa central government monopolized external commerce, which traded only with Dutch and Chinese merchants. In 1949, the People’s Republic of China was proclaimed to change the content of history. Instead of tributary-networked Pax Sinica, Western and later Japanese imperialism and colonialism started the destruction of the Pax Sinica which was replaced by Western hegemony spearheaded by England.

What interests us is the lure of the image of an unknown market and its possibilities. Even in the age of informationalization and digitalization, the lure of market is strong. If we take stock values as almost synonymous with the lure of the market, this phenomenon persists. Often among neighboring countries both the lure and risks are strong. It is not necessarily the case that distance exaggerates lure whereas proximity
exaggerates risks. The lure and risks of neighboring countries can be looked at by surveying a collection of academic studies.

This special issue is devoted to Japanese Studies in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong. Though never dramatic as the 1816 and 1949 Chinese understanding of England, Japan as a subject of academic study is carried out from fairly diverse angles both at home and in its vicinity.

The six articles assembled here are divided into two parts: sociology and history; and economics. In the first part, ‘sociology and history’, what follows are two Japanese sociological reviews and reflections on Japanese sociology, and one Hong Kong paper. Yoshinori Kamo gives critical examinations on sociological analyses of Japanese Society in Japan from 2005 through 2010 and also points out problems, such as discrepancy between contemporary social phenomena and sociological research. Kosaku Yoshino intends to clearly locate sociology in Japan on his sociological map by discussing representative works from critical perspectives. Yin-wah Chu reviews the studies of Japanese society and culture performed by Hong Kong-based sociologists and scholars.

In the second part, ‘economics’, what follows are two Japanese works and one South Korean. Yutaka Harada discusses various issues on the Japanese economy, relating to the Great Recession, inequality, budget deficit, and the emerging issues of an aging population in Japan. Asahi Noguchi reviews how domestic and international perceptions of the Japanese economy have changed and examines the characteristics that supposedly are specific to Japan in relation to the causes of Japan’s economic success and failure. Insang Hwang summarizes and discusses the trends and main features of South Korean studies on Japan’s economy and business since the 1960s, focusing on Japanese manufacturing, Japanese corporate governance, the FTA (free trade agreement) issue between Korea and Japan, and Japanese graduate school systems of economics and business.

How Japan is looked at and analyzed in the six articles making up the special issue is left to readers to decide. As depicted in the above descriptions of the Jiaqing chronicles, views can be very diverse.

About the author

Takashi Inoguchi is Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo and President of the University of Niigata Prefecture. He specializes in Japanese politics, comparative political behavior, and international relations. He has published numerous books and articles, amongst which are Japanese Politics: An Introduction (Trans Pacific Press, 2005), Political Cultures in Asia and Europe (Routledge, 2006), Citizens and the State (Routledge, 2008), Globalisation, Public Opinion and the State (Routledge, 2008), The Quality of Life in Confucian Asia (Springer, 2010), American Democracy Promotion (Oxford University Press, 2000), Reinventing the Alliance (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), The Uses of Institutions (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Japanese Politics Today (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and the US–Japan Security Alliance (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). He is Executive Editor of the Japanese Journal of Political Science (Cambridge University Press) and Director of the AsiaBarometer project.