

Crossroads – An Introduction

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In times of globalization, the importance of exchange relations, not only in the sense of diplomacy and trade but also concerning scientific cooperation, questions of migration or cultural and religious transfer and understanding, cannot be overvalued. Open borders – if possible world-wide international networks and cooperation in the fields of science, commerce, and technology – are considered the “Alpha and Omega” of a modern nation’s success. The way of commodities, wars, and people is and was at the same time that of science, technology, culture, religion, and disease. At the same time, as is well-known, every modern nation still seeks to protect her “borders” as well as her knowledge and technologies. Undesired migration of commodities, the transfer or migration of cultural characteristics or ideologies, and of people, even though they may perhaps have constituted part and parcel of a region’s or nation’s success, are restricted or even interdicted. Examples are numerous in all parts of the world. This shows that the vision of free trade and exchange does not always converge with reality. This is not just meant in the sense of a supposedly “iron curtain” that was far more permeable than it may have appeared. Also the promotion of diplomacy, trade, cultural and scientific exchange, and the migration of people across “borders” has by far not always been as fruitful as intended. Strong national or local traditions, sometimes in conjunction with personal disinterest or the search for individual advantages, frequently inhibited a better adaptation of thoughts, knowledge and people. This attests to only some aspects of the wide range and the complexity of exchange relations – in both history and the present.

A thorough look into history cannot only show us how old such problems and developments actually are but at the same time reveal striking differences and similarities between maritime and land borders and routes – which served alternately as more or less permeable inlets for or barriers to foreign knowledge, culture, commodities and people. All this may attest to historical patterns of exchange and transfer across established or perceived borders that have lasted down to the present, although of course the quality of those exchange relations has changed over time.

Crossroads – Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World (縦横—東亞世界交流史研究 / クロスロード—東アジア世界の交流史研究 / 크로스로드—동아시아세계의交流史研究) is designed as an international forum for contributions related to the history of exchange relations in the East Asian world. The “East Asian World” in this context geographically comprises the regions of China, Japan, Korea (core region) and their neighbours or alleged “peripheries” (such as for example Taiwan, Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam etc.), including relevant predecessors (such as the Ryūkyūs, Bohai and Manchuria). As a strict delimitation of East Asia within the greater Asian world is neither possible nor suggestive, the macro region should also in the cultural scientific sense be understood as that part of Asia that has been formed historically by Chinese civilization and in which a coherent intraregional system of political and economic interaction has existed.¹ However, exchange relations and interactions with countries and regions beyond this East Asian world, like India, Russia and all the countries on the Eurasian continent, continental and insular Southeast Asia, regions around the Persian Gulf and generally the macro-region of what is designated as the “Oriental world” – in contrast to “Occidental Europe” – as well as for example interaction with the American or African continent are also part of our focus, as long as there existed important and/or sustainable contacts to the mentioned regions in East Asia. East Asia is thus treated as an entity made up of different countries and regions with similarities, but also with distinctive differences, concentrating on their interconnectedness and exchange relations, while also emphasizing its relation to the macro-regions of Asia, Eurasia and the Orient, but also cross-Pacific interchange.

The focus of contributions will be placed on both continental (overland) and maritime (overseas) exchange relations of bilateral and multilateral interaction structures. The time frame is provided by textual, material and oral sources comprising all politico-economic, socio-cultural and historical developments up to the present. With regard to contents, major emphasis will be placed on the transfer of science and technologies, cultural aspects in their widest interpretation, religions, commodity and

1 See Zöllner (2007), 10. The concept of “East Asia” is undoubtedly complex and not entirely unproblematic. It is for example also considered as a “European construct” or as an “ideological concept that stands primarily for the European imagination of the cultural entity of China, Japan and Korea” and is regarded differently even in its core region of China, Japan and Korea itself. See for example Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (1994), 9-10. However, in order to maintain the concept practically operable, the macro region is here defined geographically and geo-culturally. Explicitly, we speak of the “East Asian world” in order to point the reader’s mind also to cultural similarities that reach beyond the core region.

product exchange, trade, as well as migration and the organisation of functioning networks across continental and maritime borders, all of which have to be defined in their respective historical and cultural contexts. This includes the dichotomy between vision or ideology and reality, a concept that may perhaps best be reflected by the idea of historical China as having perceived herself as the culturally superior centre in the East Asian world, while reality often looked differently. In this context, the journal seeks to promote publications that are exploring both continental and maritime “silk routes” in the macro regions of Asia, Eurasia, and the Orient, in their historical dimensions. The emphasis of the journal, thus, lies on historical studies. But links to the present are welcomed and contributions discussing actual problems will also be considered.

The geographical emphasis on East Asia with both maritime and continental links across Eurasia, Southeast- and South Asia further West, but also further East across the Pacific, has not been selected arbitrarily. East Asia is a region that has recently gained increasing geopolitical importance and in the course of globalization may well become the new world-centre in the future.² *Crossroads* consequently intends both to trace back East Asia’s complex, eventful and sometimes turbulent history with its manifold exchange relations, but also to establish the link to the political dynamics of our present days.

Emphasis will consequently be placed on the interconnectedness of the various regions along the two “silk routes”, rather than on the regions themselves, a focus of research that has rather been neglected in historical research of East Asia. *Crossroads* thus intends to pay close attention to the changing dynamics of exchange relations between so-called “empires”, or imperial centres, and “peripheries”. The use of a wide range of sources from archaeological findings to texts, documents, and pictorial material, to linguistic evidence, will be a hallmark of the approach. In the sense of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, we would like to speak of “connected histories”, “entangled” or “shared” rather than “comparative histories”.³

Empires are political unities which have an extensive territory, or are comprised of a number of territories or states ruled by a single supreme authority, like an emperor. As a rule, they are characterized by high levels of cultural, economic and technological development, concentrated in

2 This is also reflected by discussions about an East Asian integration, beginning with a uniform market and gradually developing a closer political and military cooperation, similar to the European Union. Even ideas like an East Asian currency (similar to the Euro) have been raised.

3 Subrahmanyam (1997).

their core regions rather than their peripheries. China, India, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire are examples of that. A periphery by contrast is “the outside boundary or surface of something; an outer boundary” or, in other words, something surrounding the centre. The idea of periphery implies not only that it is less important, lying somewhere in the distance without having much influence on and connections with the centres, but also that it is less developed culturally, economically and technologically. *Crossroads* intends to challenge the historical models of imperial authority and seeks to show that the idea of “high cultures” versus “underdeveloped peripheries” is only partly true, focusing especially on the complex commodity, human and knowledge networks across continental and maritime borders in the East Asian world.⁴

Conventionally it has been assumed that a pattern was established whereby knowledge and finished products flowed from the imperial centres to the peripheries, whereas people generally migrated in the other direction, from the periphery to the centre. Highly developed empires are said to have had a profound influence on their peripheries (neighbouring nomadic or half-nomadic societies as well as smaller and weaker countries). Reality, however, often looked quite differently; each case has to be investigated. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how goods, knowledge, and ideas moved from peripheries to the imperial centre, or between empires (which was often only possible through the peripheries), or to the movement of individuals or groups from empires to their neighbouring peripheries. The actuality of “peripheries” and their relations to empires as well as the need for a reconsideration of key areas and their border and adjacent regions has recently repeatedly been emphasized by politicians like the former German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier⁵ or the former Chinese head of state, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997). And India has just emphasized the common history of “two of the old civilizations” India and Iran (Persia).⁶

Borders as well as concepts of borders of course differed according to time and geographical space. They were not static entities but shifted constantly. Borderlines, too, have not always been clear-cut demarcations throughout history, but are rather a largely modern phenomenon. As Naomi Standen has argued in the context of the tenth century China-Liao border, “territorial understandings of borders, ethnic understandings of

4 A recent publication addressed some of these issues focused on “Atlantic empires” on the American Continent. Cf. Daniels/Kennedy (2002).

5 Steinmeier (2007).

6 “Indien als Iran-Versteher”, *FAZ* (30.04.2008), 6.

identity, and moralistic understandings of loyalty obscure the political, cultural, and moral realities”.⁷ In this context, one should distinguish between both conceptual and real “political” borders, even though “political” may not always mean “belonging to a nation-state” or country, but will also have to be understood in the sense of belonging to a political leader or ruling group. Under the term “border” we would like to understand both the conventional modern linear divider which can be drawn on maps – and which, although not always and not continuously, also existed in the past – and border regions meaning a loosely defined geographical area between two or more different countries, peoples, or human settlements belonging to different political rulers or powers. In this context, the East China Sea, for example, will be understood as the border between China, Japan, the Ryūkyūs, and also Korea.

Consequently, the qualitative characteristics and developments of continental and maritime “border crossings” between East Asian empires and their real and alleged peripheries and between empires (via peripheries) of knowledge and ideas (primarily scientific, but also cultural and partly religious), products, and people are of major importance. It is thus the aim of this journal to promote publications, discussions and research to related topics and bring to light the historical dimensions of these areas.

With few exceptions past publications have concentrated more on the politico-economic and socio-cultural particulars and characteristics of one (micro or macro) region or country than on exchanges and transfers between them. In addition, there is no common international forum or journal that combines relevant competences and provides contributions of scholars in both Asian and Western countries who treat these issues historically. For the first time, thus, the East Asian world (as macro region as well as its different areas and countries) and its manifold historical relations among its regions as well as with the world “beyond” shall become an object of research. Young scholars with hitherto little experience or few publications are particularly encouraged to present their contributions and discuss scholarly problems in our online platform. In this context it is planned to establish an online blog as a forum for discussion.

The language of the journal will be English, not least in order to guarantee a best world-wide distribution and acceptance in the scholarly world. At the same time, all contributions will be provided with abstracts in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (the main languages of the East Asian

7 Standen (2000).

world). In individual cases, in particular when contributions investigate bi- or multilateral relations between the East Asian world and other regions or countries, such as for example Central Asia, India, Iran, countries in the “Oriental world”, or also Latin America, abstracts in other languages will also be considered, as for example Russian (the main language in the Eurasian world), Hindi (the official language of India), Arabic (the main language in the Oriental world), Turkish, Persian or Spanish or any other language that is spoken in that part of the world.

We hope that the nature of *Crossroads* as an online journal will also foster and promote exchange among scholars world-wide working on related topics. Except for being a forum for single, conference or collective publications, *Crossroads* thus further intends to create a common internationally functioning publication and discussion platform, focusing competencies and promoting exchange between scholars in the East and West.

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