The Cold War and Beyond in East Asian Studies

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JUST BEFORE COMING TO THE CONFERence on the Relation between English and Foreign Languages in the Academy, I saw an exhibit at the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum in Santa Fe titled *Who Stole the Teepee?* Combining historic with contemporary objects, the exhibit probed not only the theft of tradition announced in its title but the possibility that "we" (Native Americans) or "our ancestors" had been more than willing to sell it. Such speculative reflection resonates with the way in which we who study East Asia have dealt with our relatively stable isolation: while complaining of language and literature colleagues' indifference, if not contempt, toward our endeavors, we have also prided ourselves on the difficulty of our languages and the ancientness of our civilizations, the source of an arcane body of knowledge requisite for even basic literacy. If all foreign language and literature scholars feel subordinate to the empire of English, East Asianists are not only beyond the pale but are often proud of it. Underlying this orientation is an important historical feature: even allowing for the mixed case of China, this region was not colonized by Great Britain. This has meant that it lacks a bourgeoisie that grew up speaking English. I shall return to colonial history below.

In the United States academy, East Asian cultures and societies are most often admitted through a rubric known as area studies. Area studies is a cold war product, the result of a process in which the world outside North America and western Europe was carved up into areas of study in accordance with United States strategic interests. This notwithstanding, areas were understood as objects of study with a self-evident coherence inhering in geography. The case of East Asia, one of the best-established such areas, is illuminated by the example of Eastern Europe and its recent transformations. Like East Asia, Eastern Europe has languages considered difficult, whose mastery was thought necessary for ongoing surveillance and for unlocking the historical and cultural secrets that would presumably explain the need for surveillance in the first place. As with East Asia, changing circumstances led to changing priorities: with the dissolution of the Evil Empire, it seemed as if United States military interest might cede to the desire for economic dominance. Eastern Europe in the 1990s, like East Asia, could be newly appreciated for its educated, inexpensive workforce. Yet we cannot assume that this shift in priorities represents a stable trajectory other than the drive to perpetuate dominance; and the study of policy-defined areas will necessarily be affected by the oscillation between economic and military interests and their frequent collusion.

The establishment of area studies was a vast undertaking, involving not only significant outlays by the United States government—the creation of a bureaucratic infrastructure to administer institutional and individual grants, for instance—but the commitment of resources by major foundations, Ford being especially rominent among them. Yet just as authors' intentions cannot govern the fate of their writings, so enormous an enterprise was bound to exceed and even contradict its founding goals. It would be safe to say, for example, that most students who in the late 1960s and early 1970s took advantage of National Defense Language Fellowships to study Chinese or Japanese had no intention of putting their knowledge in the service of United States intelligence. Nor would they have had to. Presumably this is also the case with the languages of Eastern Europe. If one justification for

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study was succeeded by another—the military by the economic—not only on the part of sponsoring institutions but also on the part of learners, that does not cancel the fact that useful and important scholarship on the region was produced and that students were able to study the literature, history, religion, art, and social practices of places to which they might otherwise not have had access. At its best, area studies has, on the one hand, given a home to scholars of familiar disciplines who wished to study unfamiliar objects and, on the other, suggested the possibilities of the interdisciplinarity touted in parts of the humanities and social sciences from the late 1980s, culminating in cultural studies. But in the case of area studies, which are buttressed by serious language training, interdisciplinary work is more like the traditional field of classics.

In the mid-1990s, as strategic interests momentarily receded, the area studies enterprise was massively discredited. The objections tended to be knee-jerk, though not untrue—namely, lack of methodological rigor. This was an old accusation revitalized by the charge of failure to enter the age of theory, a failure seen as compounding if not confirming the never surmounted ideological offense of area studies' origins. It is worth noting that this discrediting and defunding coincided with the discourse of globalization at a fever pitch, the discourse of TINA (There Is No Alternative)—in the memorable formulation of Margaret Thatcher—and the view that any manner of business could be conducted in English around the globe. We need to be mindful of this recent history as we witness the new interest in learning Arabic and studying Middle Eastern civilizations. In foregrounding area studies, I don't mean to suggest that the study of European languages and literatures—or even English—is free of strategic and economic interests. It is rather that the complex interplay among national and multinational military, economic, and ideological interests and a putatively noninstrumental scholarship is often more vivid in the parts of the world defined as areas.

In what follows, I focus on Japanese studies, with which I am most familiar, but let me begin with some comments about the study of China and Korea. There are historical reasons that make it appropriate to see these modern nation-states as composing a region, such as the implications of sharing and adapting Chinese script for well over a millennium or the consequences of Japanese military and economic domination more recently; but at the same time, each nation-state belongs to the area (Northeast Asia—an idiosyncratic designation) in its own way, and generalization can be grievously misleading. Of the three, the study of China alone has a history antedating postwar United States area studies because of China's venerable place in the European imaginary. In the area studies configuration, sinology was transmitted and advanced by the large number of Chinese scholars who fled the revolution. This gave Chinese studies an enviable critical mass from the outset; but this background, as well as the inaccessibility of the People's Republic of China until after the Cultural Revolution, unsurprisingly had ideological implications, including the near-absolute valorization of the ancient over the modern in literary study, as if in symmetrical contrast to political science's focus on communism. Did the Chinese classics serve as academic (ornamental) cover for the strategic (serious) study of a political system to be discredited and overcome? as emblem of an ancient humanism awaiting redemption? In any case, the arduous acquisition of the sinological skills needed for the study of classical texts constituted the core of graduate study. Philology as sinology at once represents a priceless treasure trove of knowledge and serves a gatekeeping function. It provides residual support for the pillar of pride in isolation that I referred to earlier, not only in Chinese studies but in a phantasmatic notion of Asian studies. It is hard for the marginalized to relinquish claims to distinction; hence, the sobering tenacity of self-chosen orientalism.

The opening of the People's Republic of China to an influx of scholars, journalists, entre-

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preneurs, and tourists in the past two decades; the numbers of young Chinese studying abroad; the extraordinarily rapid changes brought about through the promotion of a market economy; the staging of high-profile international events (the Beijing Conference on Women, the 2008 Summer Olympics); and dramatic archaeological finds—all have played a part in stimulating the study of modern and contemporary China in the humanities and have given a new vitality to the study of its ancient civilization. (A most reductive account would observe that China has become the market incarnate and therefore, symptomatically, Chinese language study has drawn students away from the study of Japanese after the bubble burst in Japan in the early 1990s.)

As for the Korean peninsula, it has been a commonplace to say that the cold war never ended there. Massive immigration to the United States beginning in the 1970s and rapid economic growth produced a hunger for the study of Korean language and culture in the United States. Korean money became available to fund such study, but the rapidity of these developments meant the lack of a ready supply of scholars and teachers. Then came the International Monetary Fund crisis in 1997, which forced many students to pick up and go home and, of course, constricted the availability of funds from Korea for the support of Korean studies in the United States.[1] Even though recovery has been diagnosed, the fitfulness of United States policy—its penchant for pronouncing North Korea a rogue state—continues to give Korean studies a strong strategic tinge. Nevertheless, the visible numbers of Korean immigrants, their levels of educational achievement and considerable affluence as a new immigrant group, make it likely that Korean studies has a sturdy basis of growth in the United States.

As with China and Japan, and perhaps all the more because of recent immigration, we cannot think of Korean studies in the United States separately from developments on the peninsula. Can the belated coming of Korean civil society, the uncertainty of the economic situation, and the even more dramatic uncertainty attendant on being central to United States military interests be anything other than burdens? Or, more immediately, is the belatedness of Korean studies itself merely a handicap? Without wishing to minimize the difficulties, I believe that each of these burdens alone and in combination can also become ethical and intellectual strengths. To begin with, there is something salutary about intellectuals being aware of, having to be wary of, the social and political determination of their knowledge production, neither accepting nor resisting it in the first instance, but recognizing it. Moreover, since Korean civil society was not ushered in without a struggle, the memory of that struggle—however perishable such memories are in times of prosperity—together with the ongoing excavation of colonial and wartime (World War II and the Korean War) history, should serve as a bulwark against a blithely commodified theory or cultural study. Additionally, belated and necessarily rushed development seems to have precluded the entrenchment of premodern philological studies that were the prerogative of the privileged. Indeed, Korean studies now would benefit from the development of premodern scholarship, and its arrival under these circumstances could also effect a stimulating dislodging and reconceptualization of Chinese and Japanese premodern literature and scholarship. Such a process could be even more productive than the unlikely reconfiguration of Korean studies' relation to English language and literature. Whether it is more plausible is difficult to say.

The founders of Japanese studies in the United States were men who learned the language in the context of wartime military service. Among them were several gifted translators who, through their renderings of modern Japanese literature that were published by commercial presses, created a taste for certain authors among a general readership—a taste that would be cultivated cinematically as well. Indeed, they effectively canonized writers such as Yasunari Kawabata (eventually a Nobel Prize winner),

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Yukio Mishima, and Junichiro Tanizaki. The translations of scholars such as Donald Keene and Edward Seidensticker projected an aestheticized and agreeably exotic humanism. Their contribution to the rehabilitation of the erstwhile enemy reinforced United States postwar priorities, which had quickly shifted from the democratization of Japan to its economic revival as an ally and pillar of freedom amid revolution in China and outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula. Power's touch is such that these three writers, having acquired international stature, were in turn canonized in Japan, lending new status there to its own modern literature. The translators who enjoyed commercial success with modern literature were also scholars of premodern literature. These translations were heavily annotated and most assuredly not directed at a broad readership. One could say those were happy days for Japanese studies, combining public popularity with arcane seriousness—as represented by literature, that is.[2]

And this brings me back to an issue I touched on in the case of China, namely, the ideological and practical division of labor effected by the humanities and social sciences. In the former, here represented by literary studies, scholars engaged in New Critical close readings when they were not translating modern texts. The painstaking annotation of classical works also precluded attention to contemporary, including prewar and wartime, contexts of reception and reproduction. For historians, modernization theory similarly worked to facilitate Japanese rehabilitation by confirming that Japan had been on the road to liberal modernity when it was derailed by wrongheaded militarists. For the political scientists and sociologists who wished to pry open Japanese society, literature's utility was as a source of information. Between the critics for whom literature had nothing to do with sociopolitical life and the social scientists for whom literature was only sociopolitical, the dynamic contradictions of both the literature and the society went unheeded.[3]

If we fast-forward to the 1990s, we find new divisions with institutional variation: some version of poststructuralist theory has invalidated the old pursuits of translation and philology in the humanities, causing practitioners to dig in their heels; the dominance of rational-choice theory in the social sciences has dismissed the need for any local knowledge (certainly in its incarnation as area studies). The intellectual contempt for translation and philology has been unfortunate for both scholarship and teaching: it has resulted in what is surely an ironic separation between textual and theoretical study and has cut off the flow of new translations that appealed to a reading public and that produced students of Japanese literature in the first place. The widespread sense that theory comes from the West and texts (raw material) from Japan misplaces and misunderstands theory. That translation of and critical response to Saussure, whose belated reception surely stands at the head of the theoretical turn in literary studies, came in Japanese (in 1940–41) a good seventeen years earlier than in English should give some pause. Accidental and not-so-accidental filiations tended to separate American philologist-translators from theoretically active Japanese scholars, thus reinforcing the theory and textual study split referred to above, which in turn contributed to and was accentuated by the commodification of theory.

New developments with hopeful overlap include the emergence of cultural studies, the keen interest in colonial history and its aftermath, and film studies. It is difficult to overemphasize that Japan was the regional colonial power; it would also be an oversimplification to refer to this as non-Western colonialism. The colonial relation is a valuable nexus for the study of what is meant by such terms as *the West* and *the non-West* and for intraregional study, such as the excavation of a shared modernism in the context of Japanese domination. Translation into English can be invaluable here at the same time that Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speakers study one another's languages. In film and media studies,

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special mention must be made of the genre known as anime. I think it not unreasonable to say that animation has been the principal artistic medium in Japan for some time; it is assuredly a popular medium and genre, but that has not precluded either aesthetic or intellectual refinement. It has also been widely disseminated overseas. Indeed, anime is no longer Japanese in the eyes of many of its followers; at the same time, it appears to have become a chief factor attracting young people to the study of Japanese language, replacing the semblance of assured economic gain as the leading motive—a provocative and welcome phenomenon.

It is not only as a revitalizer of Japanese language and cultural study that anime is important. Its widespread popularity—the sense that it is symptomatic and constructive of current social urgencies—makes it the sort of object of study that can link a peripheral (Japanese) with a dominant (English) academic enterprise. Another candidate for such a role is Asian American literature. It is my impression that most Asian American scholars have preferred affiliation with the empire of English departments rather than ghettoized East Asia programs. Who can blame them? Not only would a reverse preference compound minority status, but the glorious specialization of East Asianists is presumably uninviting. This does not cancel the fact that all parties—and therefore academic literary study in the United States—would be invigorated by this sort of active boundary crossing.

The crisis of literary and language study, representing a general crisis in the humanities, is hardly a United States phenomenon alone. In Japan, liberal education requirements have been steadily dismantled over the past decade. The dominance of rational choice, a highly abstract mode of analysis invalidating the need for particular cultures and societies, has been widely exported. There is no quick-fix solution to the devaluation of language and literary study, for we would need nothing less than a different society; and many if not most of us would surely not want such a society to represent a return to a decontextualized valorization of the humanities. Is there a way we can begin to think together the problematic relation of foreign languages—especially the so-called exotics—to English, and the humanities generally to the social sciences? I see a hint in John Guillory's recent discussion of the Sokal affair, in which he offers a provocative history of the humanist disciplines' effort to compete with the natural sciences, but most especially the social sciences, for the authority to address fundamental human concerns. Arguing the limits to the analogy between "literary representation and social construction" (485) as the critical force at the heart of cultural studies, Guillory concludes that "the positional skepticism of postmodernist literary and cultural studies is a losing strategy in the conflict of the faculties" (501). Literary study prior to New Criticism had two scientific modes, philology and literary history, but subsequently, with the occasional exception of structuralist-inspired work, it has defined itself as an interpretive endeavor antagonistic to science (480n23). Guillory proposes "an interpretive human science" as the undeveloped possibility lying between the "social sciences and the humanities polarized between naturalistic and interpretive methodologies" (507). What might such a science look like? And does it need to be called a science? Presumably Guillory, harkening to science's etymological core in knowledge, selects this term as a counter to postmodernist skepticism as reflex. The achievements of recent humanistic skepticism toward ideological normativity might now be inflected and substantiated by the pursuit of knowledge available through linguistic and literary study—and well beyond the world of English. We might begin this unified task by elaborating the observation of Samir Amin, Egyptian economist and director of Forum Tiers Monde in Dakar, that "the modern world culture is not Western but capitalist" (222).

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Notes

[1] The role of foundations based in East Asia (government-affiliated in Korea and Japan, private in Taiwan) has been enormous in the development of East Asian studies. As with United States government funds, we cannot reduce the consequences of such sponsored research and study to ideological service, especially when there are reasonably autonomous selection committees.

[2] For more on the postwar United States reception of Japanese literature, see Field 232–41.

[3] On the dynamic of literature as ornament and as information in area studies, see Chow, "Politics." This essay, a valuable critique of area studies generally, is especially fine on the teaching of literature as resistance to such instrumentalization (132). In a later essay by Chow, such specificity is dissolved in an affirmation of the mutual implication of cultural studies and poststructuralist theory ("Theory").

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From Imperialism to Collaboration: How Do We Get There?

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I WANT TO BEGIN WITH SOME ANECdotal facts:

Item: a first-year seminar on multiethnicity in New York is taught at Barnard College only by the English faculty.

Item: a senior seminar on epic and romance in the Middle Ages, announced in the fall 2002 offerings of the University of Michigan's English department, will include works by Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, but the only texts to be read in the original language are in Middle English.

Item: a comparative literature course on modernism, magical realism, and postmodernism at the University of Michigan for fall 2002 will read texts by Proust, Kafka, Mann, Borges, García Márquez, Tekin, Calvino, and Pamuk in English only.

Item: a graduate course on the lyric essay taught this spring in the English PhD program of the City University of New York lists Keno, Shei Shonegon, Montaigne, Proust, Leiris, Pessoa, Rilke, Simone Weil, Barthes, Ponge, and Borges among the authors to be read, in English only.

Item: a graduate seminar on the theory and the practice of literature scholarship and criticism offered by the City University of New York PhD program in English (spring 2002) features Bakhtin, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva—more or less half the theorists to be read for the course—in English only.

These anecdotal items are symptomatic of the rampant privileging of English to the exclusion of readings in the original languages at col-

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