Preface: Traditions of East Asian Travel

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As is certainly true elsewhere in the world, the East Asian region has its own traditions of travel and travel writing (Fogel 1996: 13–42; Strassberg 1994). These date back many centuries and until relatively recently continued to influence the ways in which men and women actually travelled (how they moved from place to place, what itineraries they followed, and the like) and the genres of travel writings that they produced (prose, poetry and combinations of the two, e.g. Yosano 2001). Tracing the origins and influences of these traditions as well as understanding the impact exerted by Chinese traditions on those of Japan and elsewhere in the region remain important scholarly desiderata.

In the essays that follow, we have less wide-ranging goals. We aim at demonstrating the power and potential of travel writing within the literary traditions of early modern and modern China and Japan. These temporal frames are purposefully vague. It is, however, generally agreed that China entered a qualitatively new era in numerous areas of culture, society and economy in the Song dynasty (960–1276), one that many associate with modernity and most would be willing to accept as early modernity. Japan, most agree, entered early modernity in the Tokugawa (or Edo) period (1600–1868) and modernity with the Meiji era (1868–1912).

The Song era provides the background for the essay by James Hargett on the Chinese literary master Su Dongpo (1037–1101) and his travel poetry. Steven Carter takes a remarkably similar phenomenon of travel poetry writing for Edo-period Japan by looking at a number of works by Reizei Tamemura (1712–74). Both examine how travel necessitated the

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composition of poetry and how the poetry produced fitted within sets of conventions.

These essays are followed by a fascinating twist on the developing tropes of travel writing, that of women in the Edo period. Laura Nenzi examines a number of extant travel poems by women of samurai households, largely from the eighteenth century. Her piece particularly complements Carter's in showing the similarities and differences between men and women of the Edo period.

Two essays confront topics from the middle of the nineteenth century when the world of East Asia underwent a great shock and awakening. The West emerged on the scene not just as adversary but in a predatory and largely unwelcome way. Marion Eggert charts the travel narrative of Lin Qian who visited the United States in the 1840s and acquired English, well before that became a common or even desirable career move. I follow with a look at the first modern voyage to China sanctioned by the Japanese government, that of the *Senzaimaru* to Shanghai in 1862, including how it was used in a recently discovered film of 1944 by the great director Inagaki Hiroshi (1905–80).

Finally, we have two essays from the turn of the last century. Hu Ying examines the travel account written by Shan Shili (1856–1943), a woman who followed her husband first to Japan and then to several European countries, again at a time well before this practice would have had any semblance of the ordinary. Susanna Fessler takes a close look at one of the domestic travelogues of the well-known writer, Tokutomi Roka (1868–1927).

As a group these essays offer insights into how different East Asians travelled, what they looked for and what they felt comfortable finding, and the ways in which they wrote up their impressions of the sights and sounds. Although the topic of travel and travel writing by Chinese and Japanese writers has attracted increased interest of late among scholars in the West (see for example Vaporis 1994; Teng 1999), it remains largely virgin terrain with vast tracts – fields and sub-fields – awaiting scholarly examination. We hope this volume may serve as an impetus for others to pick up the necessary implements and set to work in this field of inquiry.

References

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