

Foreword

This booklet is a collection of the achievements of the international conference “Orient on Orient: Images of Asia in Eurasian Countries,” which was held at the Slavic Research Center on 7 - 9 of July, 2010. The conference was a part of the research project “The Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces of Culture,” which is itself a part of the Grant-in-aid for Scientific Research on Innovative Areas “Comparative Research on Major Regional Powers in Eurasia” financed by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

The Eurasian regional powers—Russia, China, and India—have social and spiritual cultures that cannot be explained solely by Western nation-state theory and democratic measures. Through the cooperation of Eurasian cultural researchers, this project will examine the ways in which these countries’ past identities, which are rooted in the idea of spheres of civilization that they led, have had an impact on their current state-identity in the cultural environments of the modern world, as well as the major characteristics of the Eurasian world as a cultural sphere.

The main purpose of the conference was to study changing “Asian” identities in the above-mentioned countries and various aspects of their cultural representation. The participants discussed this problem in various genres of art such as cinema, fine art, opera, ballet, music, literature, and city design. They also paid attention to new aspects of subculture, religion and ideology in the context of globalism, cross-border issues and new cultural perceptions or interactions among these countries. The result of the discussion was in itself rather ambiguous or contradictory: The participants noticed basic differences in the perception and function of such concepts as “Asia”, “Eurasia” and “Orient” among the three countries. This may reflect the difference in their geopolitical positions against the “West” or “Europe,” and hence their strategic usage of “Asian” symbols for the representation of their self-identity. But at the same time, with the development of mass society, reproductive cultures, and information networks, we cannot help noticing the homogenization of Eurasian cultures. In fact several papers touched upon the same type of (re-) constructions of “Eastern” traditions, (re-) productions of “Asian” symbols and their commodification in different Eurasian countries. Maybe this type of ambiguity reflects the reality of the present condition of Eurasian societies. Most of the participants enjoyed a stimulating and fruitful exchange of views on the history and present state of Eurasian culture.

From among the 21 papers which were read at the conference, we include 14 in this booklet. The articles are drastically revised versions of the papers presented at the conference, and reflect the results of these discussions.

We sincerely hope that this booklet will find enthusiastic readers in various parts of the world and contribute to increasingly productive conversations on Eurasian culture.

Tetsuo Mochizuki
Go Koshino
Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University
Co-organizers of the symposium