



**JSPS**

Japan Society for the Promotion of Science

## RESEARCH CONFERENCES

ESF-JSPS Frontier Science Conference Series for  
Young Researchers

# Contact Zones of Empires in Asia and Europe: Complexity, Contingency, Causality

Accommodation: Sea Hawk Hotel, Fukuoka • Japan

Venue: Centennial Hall, Kyushu University, Fukuoka • Japan

27 February – 04 March 2010

Chairs: **Lise Hannestad**, Aarhus University, Denmark

**Tadashi Nishitani**, Kyushu Historical Museum/ Kyushu University, Japan

Co-Chairs: **Rüdiger Klein**, European Federation of National  
Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), The Netherlands  
**Koji Mizoguchi**, Kyushu University, Japan

[www.esf.org/conferences/10327](http://www.esf.org/conferences/10327)



## Conference Highlights

*Please provide a brief summary of the conference and its highlights in non-specialist terms (especially for highly technical subjects) for communication and publicity purposes. (ca. 400-500 words)*

The conference brought together some of the leading senior and of the most promising early career scholars in the study of state-formation, ancient empires and centre-periphery dynamics in the ancient world – expertise from Europe and Japan in a unique initiative: the conference asked the senior scholars to lecture about their on-going work and to share their expertise. Together with the younger scholars, chosen by their academic potential and achievements which qualified them to be possible future leaders in their respective fields.

One thematic focus of the conference had grown out of an earlier project of the Union Academique Internationale which looked into cultural contacts (texts as well as material culture) between China and the Mediterranean. With the input of Japanese colleagues, the geographic scope was widened, and – especially in the fields of archaeology and social systems analysis - a stronger theoretical and interdisciplinary approach was encouraged. For ESF, the conference was part of a special effort in 2009/10 to strengthen classical Asian Studies in Europe, and the new contacts with Japanese experts across all fields of the Humanities (and beyond) was very welcome.

The lectures revealed commonalities as well as differences between the cases chosen from various parts of the Eurasian continent and the Japanese archipelago, the questions asked, and the methodologies used. The significant impact which exotic items distributed in a controlled manner by the empire-cores had upon the trajectory of the development of peripheral communities is one of the notable examples. Various manners in which the distributed items, “prestige goods”, were appropriated by the elite of the periphery to increase their authority and to negotiate their positions with the empire-cores attracted keen interests from the participants and sparked some exciting discussions.

The line-up of the senior scholars-lecturers included a biological anthropologist, a physical anthropologist and a climatologist. Their presence helped to make participants realize that the for a history of global patterns of changing cultural contacts, a profound knowledge of climate changes and their impacts on communities can only be reconstructed through close collaborations between climate scientists, archaeologists, historians and their respective ancillary disciplines. A follow-up conference would need to make deliberate effort to build such collaborations and exchanges.

The conference tried to allow as many young scholars as possible to present their on-going researches, through short presentations or posters. Their presentations not only broadened the scope of the conference but also worked as excellent feed-back to the full lectures and ignited lively discussions amongst the young scholars which developed into ideas for organizing long-term discussion groups on specific topics covered and discussed in the conference (for details see below).

Many participants expressed their interest to have a follow-up conference in the near future; this would suggest that the conference created the academic arena in which new facts were shared, novel ideas examined, and future directions discussed, and that it may have laid successfully some foundations for future, cutting-edge international and inter-disciplinary collaboration in the study of ancient civilizations.



I hereby authorize ESF – and the conference partners to use the information contained in the above section on ‘Conference Highlights’ in their communication on the scheme.

# Scientific Report

## Executive Summary

(2 pages max)

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## Scientific Content of the Conference

(1 page min.)

- Summary of the conference sessions focusing on the scientific highlights
- Assessment of the results and their potential impact on future research or applications

Conference participants were welcomed by the JSPS Inspector General and the vice-president of Kyushu University. The introductory session was introduced with a presentation by Raymond Brulet, Univ. Catholique de Louvain, Belgium and delegated representative of the ESF's Standing Committee for the Humanities. The session featured introductory short talks stating the purpose and objectives of the conference by Koji Mizoguchi, Kyushu University, Japan and Rüdiger Klein, European Federation of National Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), The Netherlands, who had stepped in as conference co-chair at short notice, followed by Keynote lecture by Professor Tadashi Nishitani, Kyushu Historical Museum/ Kyushu University, Japan entitled "*The Han Empire and the East Asian world*". The following brief survey of contributions focuses on the full lectures given; however, it would seem that the follow-up will be largely constructed by the junior scholars, whose contributions were mostly of excellent quality and, where they related to the conference theme, are leading to the definition of themes for the follow-up conference (see below).

Session 1, "*Empires and their peripheries: interactions, interdependences and Transformations*" was chaired by Koji Mizoguchi, Kyushu University, Japan, and featured lectures by Andreas Mehl, University of Halle (Saale), Germany, "*The Seleucid Empire: an ancient polyethnic empire with different peripheries*", by Kazuo Miyamoto, Kyushu University, Japan, "*Empires and their peripheries: interactions, interdependence and transformations*", Mayke Wagner

DAI, Eurasienabteilung, Berlin, Germany, "*The Khotan Oasis 2000 years ago - A Place where Empires met*".

The session revealed diversity in the system of governance in early empires, the importance of the control of commerce and interactions in their development, and the relationship between the long-term trajectory of their development and the ecological-cultural settings.

Session 2, "*Ethnic identities, language, population movements and social mobility*", was chaired by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, University of Southern Denmark, and featured lectures by Hiroki Oota, The University of Tokyo, Japan, "*How large are the genetic differences between Europeans and East Asians?*", and by Nicholas Sims-Williams, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK, "*The Sogdian inscriptions of Kultobe: a new source for the history of the Kangju confederation and the northern nomads*".

Session 3, "*Environment and food supply*" was chaired by Hiroki Oota, The University of Tokyo, Japan, and featured lectures by Minoru Yoneda, The University of Tokyo, Japan, "*Dispersal of new subsistence from China: Acceptance of rice-agriculture on the Japanese Archipelago*", by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, University of Southern Denmark, "*Patterns of settlement and domination on the Roman fringe*" and by Masanobu Yamamoto Hokkaido University, Japan "*Paleoclimate changes in historical times*".

The sessions 2 and 3 impressed the participants with the significant potential of contributions to the study of ancient history from natural scientific disciplines and vice versa.

Session 4, “*Networks of interaction, production and exchange*”, was chaired by Nicholas Sims-Williams, SOAS London, UK, and featured lectures by Ray Laurence, University of Birmingham/University of Kent, UK, “*Networks of interaction - looking at roads and cities in the Roman Empire*”, by Michael Alram, Coin Cabinet,

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria, “*Coinage, Prestige and Identity - From Rome to Persepolis and China*”, and by Takehiko Matsugi, Okayama University, Japan “*From "ancient" chiefdoms to "medieval" state □ a new perspective on*

*social transformation of protohistoric Japan, the 1st century B.C.-7th century A.D.*”.

Session 5, “*Ritual, symbolism and cosmology*” was chaired by Tatsuhiko Seo, Chuo University, Japan, and featured lectures by Chris Gosden, Oxford University, UK, “*Cosmologies in Conflict*”, by Yoshiyuki Tanaka, Kyushu University, Japan, “*State formation, kinship and the family*”, and by Askold Ivantchik, Université de Bordeaux 3, France and Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, “*Scythian Kings and the Ideology and Symbolism of the Ancient Iranian Kingship*”.

The sessions 4 and 5 showed the importance of properly applying concepts and methods invented in related social scientific disciplines to the study of ancient history and fed back the outcomes to them in the form of concrete data-based case studies.

Session 6, “*Empires and their contested peripheries in long-term and global perspectives*”, was chaired by Andreas Mehl, Martin-Luther-University of Halle (Saale), Germany, and featured lectures by Koji Mizoguchi, Kyushu University, Japan, “*Rethinking “prestige good systems”: the self-organization of complexity and hierarchy on the periphery of the empire*”, by Benjamin Isaac, University of Tel Aviv, Israel, “*The Roman Empire: Core and Periphery and the nature of the imperial frontier*”, and by Tatsuhiko Seo, Chuo University, Japan, “*The Urban Pattern of the Chinese Past*”.

The session re-examined three important concepts in the study of ancient history, namely the prestige-good systems, core and periphery in world systems, and urbanization, and revealed that ever-increasing data and the relevant contextual information demanded us to reconsider not only the way we applied the concepts but also the contents of the concepts themselves.

Session 7, “*Conclusions and Perspectives*”, was divided into two parts, “*Tour de Table: conclusions and perspectives (young scholars)*”, chaired by Chris Gosden, University of Cambridge, UK & Koji Mizoguchi, Kyushu University, Japan, and “*Panel Forward Look Session*”, moderated by Rüdiger Klein. The comments and discussions all pointed to the importance of continuing international and inter-disciplinary dialogue, and it was unanimously agreed that many more conferences and study gatherings of this nature were necessary in order to ensure the fruitful reproduction of the discourses.

## Forward Look

(1 page min.)

- *Assessment of the results*
- *Contribution to the future direction of the field – identification of issues in the 5-10 years & timeframe*
- *Identification of emerging topics*

One origin of the conference had grown out of an earlier project of the Union Académique Internationale which looked into cultural contacts (texts as well as material culture) between China and the Mediterranean. With the input of Japanese colleagues, the geographic scope was widened, and – especially in the fields of archaeology and social systems analysis - a stronger theoretical and interdisciplinary approach was encouraged. For ESF, the conference was part of a special effort in 2009/10 to strengthen classical Asian Studies in Europe, and the new contacts with Japanese experts across all fields of the Humanities (and beyond) was very welcome.

An earlier event in May 2009 (Humanities Spring) on Asian studies had expressed the need for more work (and hence: more investment in the building of the necessary linguistic and methodological specialisations) on narratives of cultural encounters; means and patterns for the transmission and transformation of knowledge; interaction of human and natural environments; focus on border-crossings. All these themes were also highlighted during this conference. From a more theoretical point of view, some preparatory exchanges had expressed . While Japanese scholars insisted on (and demonstrated the benefits of) a closer integration of natural and social sciences into the study of the topics listed above, European senior participants had suggested in the run-up to (and throughout) the conference to address also a number of issues that would have direct consequences on the academic preparations of future scholars: they include an acknowledgement of the crucial task to study the polyethnicity of empires, the role of Central Asia as concourse of empires and cultures, as well as reflections on the relationship between the increasing specialization of daily research work (partly based on ever more sophisticated analytical and hermeneutic techniques) and the need to produce “master narratives” able to interpret and synthesise new knowledge. Discussions agreed that if specialists do not manage to join forces to produce academically well-grounded narratives addressing concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> there would be a risk to lose the authority

to provide such interpretations to a broader public (and, ultimately, to curricula) to non-experts (journalists, ideologues, etc.). It should be emphasised that Japanese presenters (as well as one US-based speaker) were less reluctant than Europeans to engage in such higher-level analysis.

The lectures revealed commonalities as well as differences between the cases chosen from various parts of the Eurasian continent and the Japanese archipelago, the questions asked, and the methodologies used. Especially the younger European scholars were intrigued by the strong integration of natural and historical sciences in the Japanese research context. The significant impact which exotic items distributed in a controlled manner by the empire-cores had upon the trajectory of the development of peripheral communities is one of the notable examples. Various manners in which the distributed items, "prestige goods", were appropriated by the elite of the periphery to increase their authority and to negotiate their positions with the empire-cores attracted keen interests from the participants and sparked some exciting discussions.

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The conference tried to give as many young scholars as possible an opportunity to present their on-going research, through short presentations or posters. Their contributions not only broadened the scope of the conference, but also functioned as feed-back to the full lectures and ignited lively discussions amongst the young scholars which then developed into ideas for organizing long-term discussion groups on specific topics covered and discussed in the conference.

Many participants – senior and junior - found new contacts among their peers and expressed their interest to have a follow-up conference in the near future. The conference created an arena in which new facts were shared, novel ideas examined, and future directions discussed, and that it may have laid successfully some foundations for future, cutting-edge international and inter-disciplinary collaboration in the study of ancient civilizations. Such follow-up would be timely, since also the EU science policy initiatives on Asia failed to adequately reflect on the necessity of better exploring the common and diverse historical origins and trajectories of social formations East and West.

The programme comprised a long plenary foresight session, which was moved from the habitual lecture theater to the main hall: here all participants could assemble in a circle – a opportunity for more direct and experimental exchanges, presentations and statements on future perspectives welcome and used by all present, especially the young scholars.

A more formal final session, led by participants selected by the two coordinators to reflect the variety of disciplines and approaches present, articulated the following issues:

Integration of natural and historical sciences (as well as social systems analysis) has been recognized as having potential, but needs to be further explored; especially the hermeneutic potential of linking new data derived from scientific techniques and new aesthetic appreciation derived from access to larger databases needs to be further demonstrated;

The responsibility of experts to produce new knowledge for 21<sup>st</sup> century curricula and publics; this includes, for Europe, proclaiming and defending Asian studies as a central feature for cultural studies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century;

The necessity to rest cultural interpretations on a solid knowledge of environmental, economic and social realities;

The necessity to continue studying, next to the symbols of power, also the machinery of extending and maintaining power (warfare and defense; taxation and administration; internal and external means and vehicles of communication, incl. language);

The necessity to make better use, for collaborative research, of the tools available for digital humanities research;

The necessity to find ways to include, in future research funding initiatives, the relevant academic expertise from collections and museums;

The necessity to create frameworks for collaborative comparative research on similar phenomena in different empires (if only to revise and sharpen the analytical tools and related conceptual terminologies).

At the end of the conference the following initiatives had been proposed/agreed upon (mainly among the young scholars):

Creation of an online space to share and exchange articles, ongoing work and information about upcoming opportunities, incl. exchanges about the relevant journals to be followed at both ends (to be coordinated from Leiden);

Preparation of a conference volume (coordinated from Halle/Melbourne);

Preparation of small working groups focusing on a handful of themes on which new contacts had been established or existing ones had been expanded during the conference (incl. a separate group in Japan would aim at better networking Humanities junior scholars from across the country);

Preparation of two projects for submission for European funding as core for emerging networks;

Preparation of a follow-up conference (in Europe, possibly Oxford).

In addition, the wish was articulated to have financial support for better sharing of resources and translations of at least abstracts of articles (from Japanese and some of the less-frequently read European languages), as unlike the natural sciences, Humanities scholarship is still conducted and published in national languages.

▪ Is there a need for a foresight-type initiative?

In the wider ESF context, this conference must be seen as part of the exploration of new perspectives for classical Asian studies. It is hoped that a strategy paper will eventually emerge that will assist ESF member organisations, as well as other European (and, possibly, Asian) funders to structure their funding initiatives in the Humanities.

Pending such a paper, no specific foresight activity is necessary at this stage, but it would be welcome if some of the suggestions that have emerged from this conference could be included in such a paper.

In the JSPS, it might be worth considering to include programmatic initiatives in the programme of inter-agencies initiatives currently pursued with external partners.

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## Atmosphere and Infrastructure

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▪ *The reaction of the participants to the location and the organization, including networking, and any other relevant comments*

The extremely full programme, with close to 20 full lectures, more than 40 short presentations, and some 20 posters, made this a very taxing, if unusually wide-ranging conference. However, conference days with lectures, presentations and discussions programmed from 9am until after 10pm were perceived by some as excessive; by the same token, this helped to create a certain continued tension which resulted in a constant search for opportunities, plans and projects for follow-up activities. There was no decline of interest in attendance throughout the 5 days.

The local organization was perfect, the hotel excellent, the timing for transfers realistic and well-scheduled, the venue very appropriate, the equipment well staffed and operated. JSPS and Univ. of Kyushu staff were praised for their helpfulness and the warm welcome they extended to the visiting scholars. The visit to one of the national historical museums in the hills outside Fukuoka was welcome as a break from the demanding programme, yet relevant to the overall theme. The programme comprised a long plenary foresight session, which was moved from the habitual lecture theater to the main hall, assembling all participants in a circle, and providing an opportunity for more direct and experimental exchanges, presentations and statements on future perspectives welcome and used by all present, especially the young scholars (for some of the initiatives proposed, see above)..

### Sensitive and Confidential Information

This report will be submitted to the relevant ESF Standing Committees for review.

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**Date & Author:**

K. Mizoguchi / R. Klein (summer 2010)