
Regina Huebner

[Regina Huebner obtained her PhD from University of Cambridge in 2015 with the dissertation “State medicine and the state of Medicine in Tokugawa Japan: Kōkei saikyūhō (1791), an emergency handbook initiated by the Bakufu”. Her research focuses on the history of medicine in Japan, especially the role of early modern home doctor manuals and their political, economic and cultural impact on Japan’s early modern society. Contact: regina.huebner@googlemail.com]

As mentioned in the preface, this book is the “outgrowth of an international, bilingual conference held at the University of Oregon in 1997” (p. xv). The editors, coming from different fields within East Asian history such as medicine in medieval Japan (Andrew Edmund Goble), Korean history (Kenneth R. Robinson), and medieval Japanese art history (Haruko Wakabayashi), reflect the diversity of this collection of essays, which address “aspects of Japanese human and material interactions in East Asia from the late eleventh century through the sixteenth century” (p.1). According to the editors, the volume approaches the subject from two new perspectives: the first relates to the general topic of the overseas relations of Japanese people and institutions within East Asia; the second to the notion of “Japanese history” seen as a concept that goes beyond historical activity on the Japanese archipelago to embrace interactions with its neighbours China and Korea. The editors argue that, although remaining valid, previous historical studies have tended to focus on centrally based political, cultural, and religious elites, and rather ignored the extensive activities at the peripheries of the state, such as at the city of Hakata or on the island of Tsushima. Unlike other English-language books on Japan’s medieval period that tend to see overseas contacts and relations as institutional and diplomatic history, concluding that little state-to-state contact implies little contact in general, the essays in this book seek to challenge this scholarship by revealing the different levels of communication that Japan had with its neighbouring countries (pp. 1-2). This volume thus continues existing scholarship in this field, such as Charlotte von Verschuer’s Across the Perilous Sea: Japanese trade with China and Korea from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2006), which tackles this topic from an economic perspective by looking at the goods traded; and the collection Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries, edited by Mikael Adolphson, Edward Kamens, and Stacy Matsumoto (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i
Reviews

Press, 2007), which addresses the topic from different fields, such as politics, literature, and religion among others.

Similar to the above mentioned compilation, this volume is a loose arrangement of thematically diverse essays covering topics that range from a travel diary, poetry, religion, scroll paintings and the trade in ceramics, to literacy and medicine, which the compilers endeavour to weave together by a common thread. They consciously chose not to use time periods as a classification criterion, but rather to organise the essays under three themes, each covered by three essays. The first part “Inscriptions and Interactions” deals with the diary of a Japanese monk of the eleventh century who travelled to China and wrote down his encounters with Chinese technology and nature. In this essay, Robert Borgen describes the impressions and difficulties of Jōjin 成尋 (1011-1081) while crossing the sea, his experiences with Chinese canals, the exchanges of Japanese and Chinese books as presents, and the acquisition of Chinese calendars, among other things. The second essay by Shōsuke Murai leads the reader into the world of poetry, which enabled its protagonists to establish personal contacts through a form of “unofficial” interaction between Japan, China and Korea in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The composing of verses written in Chinese characters as a means of cultural exchange among Zen Buddhist monks, for example, comprised not only impressions of shared memory of locations or events, but was also used as a means of communication between guests and hosts, and, above all, constituted a new style of poetry (hitsuwa 笔话) in Japan. In the last essay of the first part, Kenneth R. Robinson introduces a detailed account of a trade mission to Chosŏn Korea between the years 1537 and 1540, written by the Japanese monk Sonkai 尊海 (dates unknown). According to the author, this is the earliest extant record of a Japanese travelling in Chosŏn, and provides a glimpse into the regularities of state-supervised interactions, giving detailed information about the Korean government’s treatment of Japanese tribute missions (pp. 71-72).

The second part deals with arts and aesthetics, starting with the essay by Haruko Wakabayashi about the depiction of the foreign Other on illustrated handscrolls, especially the Shikaumi jinja engi 志賀海神社縁起 (History of the Shikaumi shrine) scrolls, after the Mongol invasions of 1274-1281. The author argues that this hostile encounter with the Mongols made it possible for the Japanese to create an image of alien enemies that had not been visualized before, one that would be rehearsed over and over again thereafter. In the following contribution by Martin Collcutt the subject matter is the Chinese Chan Buddhist monk Lanxi Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (1213-1278) and his impact on Chan practice in thirteenth century Japan. Besides transmitting Chan training methods, monastic codes and practices, his engagement resulted also in the construction of an authentic Chinese Chan temple in Kamakura, the Kenjōji. Indeed, Zen (Chan) temples and warrior society were also
influential in the reception of ceramics from overseas, leading to the
development of connoisseurship and the emergence of a Japanese market for
antiques, a topic that Kōji Saeki depicts in the subsequent essay. By relying
on archaeological finds and written records, the author traces the ceramics
trade from the late eighth to the seventeenth centuries, in which Hakata
played an important role as place of transshipment.

The third part “Prescribing and Prescriptions” addresses Chinese texts as
intellectual activity and practical guidance. Ivo Smits introduces the reader
to the literary preferences of two twelfth century Japanese courtiers,
Fujinawa no Yorinaga 藤原頼長 (1120-1156) and Fujinawa no Michinori 藤原
通憲 (1106-1159) by assessing the earliest extant catalogue of a private library
owned by Michinori. It reflects the Japanese focus on texts already known:
besides the Chinese classics and dynastic histories, he also possessed
Japanese histories and legal codes, texts on medicine, music, etiquette and
Chinese poetry collections of Japanese poets. Texts are also the main topic of
the next essay. By contrasting the different approaches to editing medical
texts, Hiroshi Kosoto presents an overview of Northern and Southern Song
medical publishing. In the Northern Song printing was sponsored by the
imperial state, whereas in the Southern Song medical editions were more
often the result of individual initiatives. He depicts in particular the
compilation and publication of medical texts that turned out to become
crucial in the further course of Japan’s medical history, as well as for China,
since some of these texts became lost in China but are still extant in Japan.

Finally, in order to give a more comprehensive picture of the effects of
these diverse interactions that represent the overall topic of this collection, I
shall examine in more detail the last essay by Andrew Goble. It shows how
the adaption and assimilation of medical knowledge from the continent,
enhanced by the Song printing revolution, triggered a new understanding
of medicine in medieval Japan. Goble’s study centers on the Ritsu sect monk
and physician Kajiwara Shōzen 梶原性全 (1265-1337) from Gokurakuji
temple in Kamakura, and his works Ton’ishō 頓医抄 (Book of the Simple
Physician, 1304) and Man’anpō 万安方 (Myriad Relief Prescriptions, 1327).
His investigations into these manuals reveal the changes in medical practice
in Japan in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from the mere adaption
of medical knowledge that was typical for the preceding era of court
physicians, to the active testing and expanding of medical knowledge by
Buddhist priests. They also expose the trade routes of medicinal drugs, an
itinerary that Goble called the “Medical Silk Road”, originating in the
“Western regions” that extended as far as the Middle East (p. 232). We find,
for example, recipes that derive from the Arab and Indian traditions in one
of the Chinese sources Shōzen used when writing his manuals, the Taiping huimin heijiu fang 太平惠民和劑局方 (Formulary of the Pharmacy Service for
Benefiting the People in the Taiping era, 1107-1110; in the following
abbreviated as Hejiju fang), a text that was already introduced in the preceding essay by Kosoto and is further elaborated on by Goble. By testing diverse formulas and comparing their ingredients with different versions of the Hejiju fang, Shōzen contributed to the re-assessment of medical practice in medieval Japan. His engagement with the materials available to him illustrates how newly arrived knowledge or know-how changed present patterns and stimulated a new understanding of theory and practice. The Hejiju fang is a good example of the way in which received knowledge, or to put it into more general terms, newly acquired immaterial and material objects, transformed and enriched existing cultural, economic or political activities, whether or not these took place at the periphery or centre. Regarding the Hejiju fang, its impact can be traced well into the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when the eighth shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (r. 1716-1745) felt the importance of issuing a revised edition in order to make it available to a broader audience (Fukui, pp. 89-91).

This compilation is not only a valuable source for the reader interested in these topics, but for all those who have a general interest in the medieval period of Japan that goes beyond a mere introduction. The essays of Murai, Saeki, and Kosoto, which were originally written in Japanese, have been carefully translated and annotated with further useful English language references for those interested in the topic but without knowledge of Japanese. Yet the strength of this volume, the study of a specific period of Japan’s past examined from different angles and topics, is also its weakness. As the editors’ note in their introduction, since a considerable amount of time had passed between the conference and publication of this volume, during which perspectives about and approaches to the historical study of Japan have changed significantly, they felt the need to update the research in this field by including new approaches. This explains why some of the essays deal with developments and interactions within and outside of Japan in which the center-periphery idea is mentioned rather casually or only implicitly, and the focus is more on their particular topic. Nevertheless, this collection of essays is a valuable resource for readers who are interested in medieval Japan and want to know more about the activities and contacts of Japan within and outside its borders in that specific period.
References