

EAST ASIAN HISTORY: A Tripolar Approach *and* **ANCIENT KOREA-JAPAN RELATIONS: Paekche and the Origin of the Yamato Dynasty**

(Kudara: 2010)

by **Wontack Hong**, *Professor Emeritus*, Seoul National University

that were reviewed as

"His most important contribution to the field so far is the fresh two-volume set comprising one volume on the general history of East Asia and the other on the specific sphere of issues connected with the protohistorical relations between Korea and Japan. These books deserve special recognition not only for their insightful approach but also for their elegant design, with high-quality color pictures, maps, and extracts from primary sources integrated in the whole in a reader-friendly way.

The first of the two volumes is essentially a handbook of East Asian political and cultural history, chronologically arranged, and with a focus on Manchuria, historiographically the most neglected component of the tripolar complex. ... By the "tripolar approach" he means that East Asia should not be viewed from the traditional Sinocentric perspective (= the monopolar approach), nor in a framework involving China and "the unified nomads in the steppe" (= the bipolar approach), but, rather, in terms of a system of interaction between three actors of equal weight, but with different roles: China, Mongolia, and Manchuria. This is a holistic framework conceptualized by Gari Ledyard and Thomas Barfield (as well as by the present author), and as a model for understanding East Asian history it does not seem to have alternatives. Even so, much research is still being done on East Asia in the spirit of obsolete paradigms, which is why Hong's two books certainly serve a purpose as a healthy reminder of how things can also be seen. ... that make the reading of Hong's books so refreshing.

The second volume by Hong is more strictly focused on the protohistorical period, though it also has a modern political dimension. The principal objective of the book is to bring forth evidence in favor of the "Kudara-Yamato model," according to which the immediate origins of Yamato Japan were located in Paekche. The evidence itself is generally well known, extending from historical records to obvious cultural and archaeological parallels, but the problem is that the relevant facts have never been recognized by the Japanese national historiography. This forces Hong to criticize "the claustrophobic narrowness of the Japanese academic tradition" as a whole, a criticism that is certainly justified at least as far as the fields of archaeology and history are concerned. ... The role of Paekche in the early history of Japan is beyond any doubt. ... The political and military ties between Paekche and Yamato suggest an intimate partnership that is best explained by assuming an ethnic affinity. Hong must be right when he claims that "a member of the Paekche royal family carried out the conquest of the Yamato region in the late fourth century," thus laying the foundations of Japan as a political state. Much of Hong's book is devoted to the summarizing of the archaeological, historical, folkloric, and even onomastic evidence in favor of this claim. ... Hong's two books are, in general, much better argued than anything presented by Japanese historians or even linguists during the recent decades."

Juha Janhunen, *Professor in East Asian Studies*, University of Helsinki
Studia Orientalia, 109 (2010), pp. 136-9

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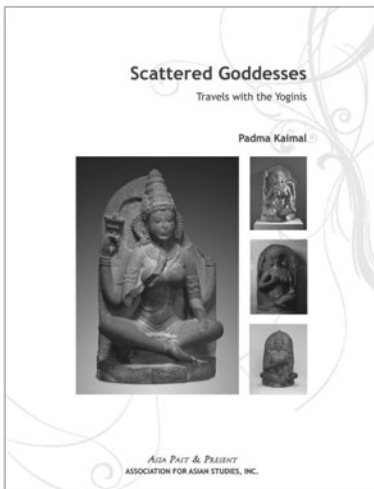
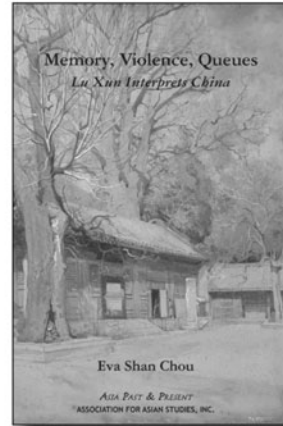
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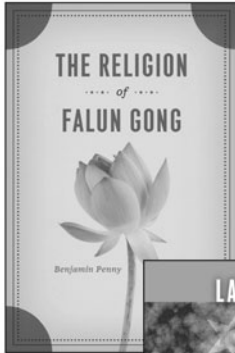
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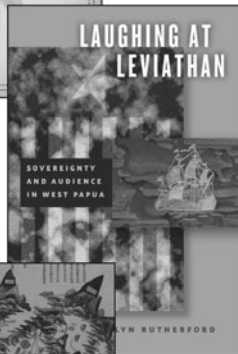


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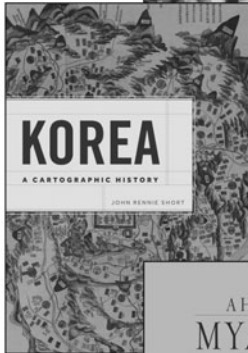
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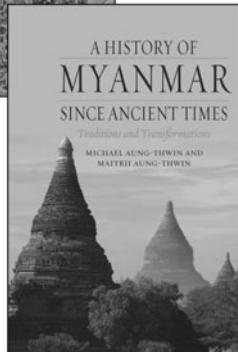
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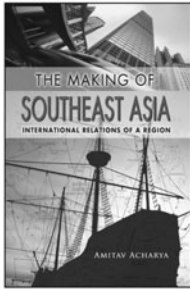
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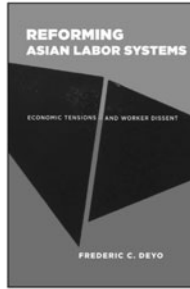
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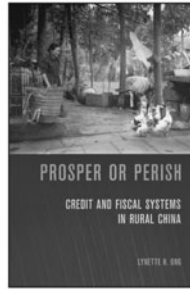




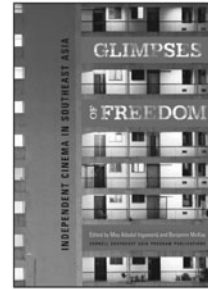
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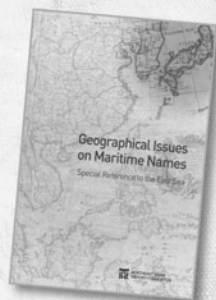
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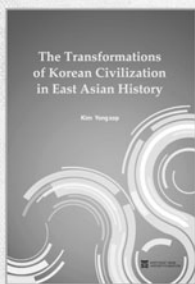
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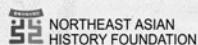
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