On Decontextualization and Recontextualization in East Asian Cultural Interactions: Some Methodological Reflections

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Abstract: In the history of cultural interaction in East Asia, decontextualization and recontextualization can readily be observed in the exchanges of texts, people, and ideas among the different regions. When a text, person, or idea is transmitted from its home country into another country, it is first decontextualized and then recontextualized into the new cultural environment. These processes of decontextualization and recontextualization I refer to as "a contextual turn." The present paper discusses methodological problems involved in the study of decontextualization and recontextualization. Section 1 introduces the paper. Section 2 then clarifies that "East Asia" is not an abstract term ranging over the countries of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, but rather refers to the dynamic, real process of concrete cultural interactions among these living cultures. On the dramatic stage of these interactions, China plays the role of the significant other to the many other actors. China is certainly not the sole conductor of the symphony of East Asia. Section 3 shows that the methodology of the history of ideas can be used when studying the phenomena of decontextualization. But one can easily become ensnared in what I call "the blind spot of textualism." Section 4 provides an analytic discussion of an effective methodology for studying recontextualization that involves looking at the concrete exchange of texts, people, and ideas against a specific historical background, and then highlighting the subjective emotions of the intermediate agents in these cultural exchanges as the agents navigate the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization. This paper concludes by stressing that East Asian cultural interactions are dynamic processes and not static structures. Therefore, in our study of the history of cultural interactions in East Asia, we must seek a dynamic equilibrium between textualism and contextualism, as well as between fact and value or emotion.

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2 Politeness in East Asia In order to better understand politeness and its use in intercultural encounters, empirical studies on politeness in authentic intercultural interactions are required (see for example Spencer-Oatey, 2008). To this end, it presents two authentic incidents of intercultural interactions between Mainland Chinese and British interactants. While some people find cultural differences intriguing, a lack of understanding and not being able to make sense of actions and behaviours exhibited by another person all too often leads to a feeling of disorientation, frustration and helplessness. Let us turn to some of the writings on East Asian interactional conventions to explore what they Taking as its focus the cultural products emerging out of East Asian societies as they experience modernity, the workshop confronts existing theoretical frameworks and methodological issues relevant to the study of artistic production and consumption. Website: http://cas.uchicago.edu/workshops/artpoliticseastasia. East Asia: Politics, Economy, and Society. This workshop focuses on current social science research on East Asian societies, particularly the People’s Republic of China, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. The scope of the workshop is truly interdisciplinary, as we attract students and faculty...