

Representing the Silk Road: Literature and Images between China and Japan During the Cold War

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Abstract: The essay focused on the TV documentary series *The Silk Road* and discussed the significance of this co-production between China and Japan. Two television stations, NHK and CCTV, provided each other with technical support to create a new image of the Silk Road in 1980. They attempted to rediscover the cultural relationship in Asia. Japanese Oriental studies were either the base for this co-production or the source of trouble. CCTV needed to utilize and overcome Japanese technology and the resources from Oriental studies, to represent national culture and identity through images. On the other hand, Japan once again sought ways to represent the Asian “others.” However, the challenge was making it relative to Orientalism and imperialism. This essay also compares the two versions and suggests that both ancient Asian cultural histories that they represented through images reflected the contemporaneous political situation of the Cold War. In CCTV’s version, the images of the Silk Road became a symbol of the re-establishment of China’s national identity, including the imagination of a “multi-ethnic state” and a “community of cultural memory that unites East and West”. Furthermore, this version also represented the trade with neighboring states. Each of these elements had a realistic role in the political environment of 1980. On the other hand, NHK’s version contains a narrative to prove Japan is the last stop on the Silk Road. Moreover, before this documentary, Japanese literature had long sought the “unknown” of the Silk Road and became a strong intellectual foundation for *The Silk Road*. The narrative of Japan “being a part of the Silk Road, but unlike in colonialism, as a traveler” is what Yasushi Inoue repeatedly expressed in his literary works and appeared to have been passed on through the images of the documentary. Carrying the negative legacy of Japanese imperialism, then being caught between the United States and the Socialist bloc, and having a difficult choice of political identity, Japanese intellectuals refrained from expressing their political positions and chose to describe cultural history from the “traveler’s” perspective. This essay suggests this is an attempt to redefine Japan on the cultural map of Asia and indirectly to break through the polarization of capitalism and socialism in the Cold War.

Keywords: Japanese literature; television documentary; silk road; Yasushi Inoue; NHK; CCTV; co-production

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1. The Co-Production of The Silk Road

In April 1980, *The Silk Road*, a television documentary series coproduced by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and China Central Television (CCTV), was finished in two versions, aired in Japan and China, causing a wide fever for the Silk Road.

Set along the Chinese part of the Silk Road, this series shows us the ancient history and presents human life and culture of the vast area from Xi’an—the ancient Chang’an—to Kashgar, the city on the western edge of Xinjiang province. The NHK camera crew called themselves a “caravan,” traveled along the vast region following three routes, filming the historical heritage and ethnic culture and interacting with the local people.

The documentary opens with a shot of camel caravans slowly crossing the desert at sunset, set to the famous music of Kitarō. An overhead shot swept across the vast abandoned city-states of the desert, then a camel-riding statue appeared, and a group of camels walked in the sand and wind. Finally, several Kazakh women dance in red dresses with snow-capped mountains as a backdrop. The opening credits end with an aerial helicopter shot of the cityscape of Xi'an, where the voice of the actor Kōji Ishizaka tells the audience that "the Silk Road begins in Chang'an and ends in Chang'an." Following this credit, 12 episodes of the documentary take the audiences on three separate routes through northwestern China, from deserts to oases, savannahs, and icebergs, with different landscapes and ethnic minorities that have never been viewed on television images before.

Although China had opened the free market after 1978, the establishment of a diplomatic and economic system had only just begun, and the situation in the western region in PRC during the same period was unimaginable not only for foreign countries but also for the Chinese. Considering that the program was finally realized after a long-term negotiation across political and ideological barriers, it is understandable that NHK chose to promote it as showing "the last unfilmed part on earth (地上最後の被写体)" (Hirao 1980, p. 22) or claim that "the light of modern times has finally entered the closed stage of the Saiki (西域, Western Regions)" (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 7 April 1980).

Photographs and images about the Silk Road have become more affluent four decades since then. However, we still discuss this 1980 series because it is highly symbolic for considering the possibilities of representation and vision in the Cold War.

At the time, the creators of this documentary filmed and produced it under various political restrictions. Some were due to ideological differences between China and Japan, while others were due to military tensions around the border. Nevertheless, why was NHK so motivated to film the Silk Road in the face of so many difficulties? On the other hand, why did China cooperate with NHK but not with media from other countries? It should not just be the result of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China (日中国交正常化) and the atmosphere of Sino-Japanese friendship (日中友好). For both Japan and China, representing the Silk Road should present a new concept of Asian geopolitics and an attempt to explore their position in the geographical space of Asia.

Several remarkable studies on the series have been conducted in film and literature studies. Bao Xuerui analyzed the video narrative in detail, pointing out such characteristics as the omniscient vision that joined distant views and close-ups, the realism supported by historical documents, and the lyricism expressed by Kitarō's music (Bao 2015). Meanwhile, Liu Ya discussed how the images construct a collective cultural memory of the Silk Road through various cultural symbols (Liu 2016).

In *Coproducing Asia* (DeBoer 2014), Stephanie DeBoer focuses on the topic from a different angle, find of co-production in East Asia. Approaching transnational co-production as "assemblage," DeBoer underscores the dynamics of technologies, new markets, new production locations, new geographic identities, and desires of Asia. In the case of *The Silk Road*, the terms for overcoming the imperial and Cold War past were aligned with the new possibilities of film and media technologies, including multiple negotiations. DeBoer suggests that in the mediating presence of new technologies, the "timelessness" of the Silk Road has been represented as a strategy that obscures more difficult and more recent realities, namely, of a recent past of imperial and wartime encounters and Cold War displacement.

DeBoer's research offers a way to build a frame for considering the representation of "Asia." All relevant elements of this TV series, such as geopolitics, technologies, representation, and identities, are in dynamic negotiation conditions. However, when discussing *The Silk Road* within this theory, some more specific doubts are encountered. How the political and diplomatic relations between China and Japan around 1980 determined this cooperation? How did other regions function in this process, such as the

Soviet Union and the United States? What did China and Japan desire to discover, demonstrate and define through *The Silk Road*? Analysis of these issues might help us to see more clearly the dynamics between cultural creation and the political situation in specific periods of the Cold War.

This essay examines the interactions and the negotiations that took place during the co-production of *The Silk Road*, as well as analyzes the images and related literary works to explore the relationship between political power and cultural representations during the Cold War. We can see that the political confrontations of the Cold War conveyed not only the restriction and censorship of culture but also a geopolitical imperative to redefine the nation, region, and Asia. Under this dynamic, China and Japan tried to rediscover their identities and reposition themselves in Asia history. By investigating the process of co-production, it is possible to get a glimpse of how the media attempted to describe China, Japan, and Asia. Whereas images of *The Silk Road* help us analyze what kind of positioning, or narrative discourse, both sides have found.

2. The Cold War Political Tensions and Images

At first, NHK designed this documentary based on engaging the cultural sphere with political power. In the wake of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1972, NHK director Hajime Suzuki planned a program titled *The Adventures of Marco Polo* and negotiated with China Central Television (CCTV) to cover that event. Nevertheless, the closed circumstances during the Cultural Revolution prevented permission. In October 1978, Deputy-Premier Xiaoping Deng, advocating “reform and opening up,” visited Japan. At that time, Suzuki boarded the special train on which Deng was traveling and managed to talk to Deng’s secretary, passing on NHK’s request to shoot scenes in the Silk Road region. On 31 December 1978, Deng granted the permission, and the co-production plan started (Years of NHK Television. <https://www2.nhk.or.jp/archives/search/special/detail/?d=special002>. The last Access is on 14 December 2022).

NHK was able to get permission to cooperate with CCTV on *The Silk Road* because of the previous civilian exchange. From 1952 to 1972, although there were no diplomatic relations between the Chinese and Japanese governments, cultural organizations such as the Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association liaised with groups in various fields on both sides. They organized a large number of cultural exchanges. Yasushi Inoue, a core member of this organization and the main organizer of these cultural exchanges, was a famous writer who had written numerous literary works on the “Saiki” (西域、Western Region) and constructed a standard image of the “Silk Road” in Japan. *The Silk Road* is also a considerable successor to Inoue Yasushi’s literary works.

There was also a long-established relationship between NHK and CCTV. After Beijing Television’s establishment in 1957 (renamed China Central Television in 1978), it tried to exchange news documentaries with foreign TV stations. However, only seven countries agreed to use Chinese films, including Albania, Japan, Iraq, and Romania. Meanwhile, only Romania, Vietnam, and Japan, specifically NHK, sent films to China (Li 2013). After the Culture Revolution, China attempted to reconstruct the television station, not as a money-making entertainment industry but as a medium to rebuild a new national image and identity (Shiotsima 1980, p. 27). In addition, Japan’s technological advantage was also an important reason. Like many other cultural exchanges under the “Sino-Japanese friendship” framework, CCTV sent staff to NHK to learn new technologies: for example, ways to convert and preserve footage about invaluable subjects such as the Silk Road and hot-to-use equipment to balance the noise recorded outdoors and mix smooth sound sources. These staff, who had both linguistic and technical skills, played an essential role in the co-production of *The Silk Road* (Hirao 1980).

Alongside filmmaking technology, the Japanese scholarly accumulation of the history of the Silk Road was also beneficial in this co-production. Writers such as Yasushi Inoue, Ryōtarō Shiba, and Chin Shunshin, or historians such as Kazutoshi Nagasawa,

Takashi Okazaki, Akihiro Fujido, On Ikeda, and Akira Fujieda were involved in this work either as performers or as advisors.

Indeed, NHK was not the only one to provide the technology and knowledge. CCTV and the regional hosts also put in an effort. Since television existed as an institution of propaganda and education rather than a commercial medium in China, every filming on location was a public activity requiring consultation with the regional government or “revolutionary committee.” To present the vast desert and cityscape, CCTV applied for permission and hired helicopters at great expense to provide camerapersons with the opportunity to film aerial footage from Xi’an to Kashgar, which was then edited into several episodes (Hirao 1980, pp. 23–24). The aerial photography presents the cities, grasslands, mountains, and deserts along the Silk Road in a panoramic way. Sometimes the local people gathered and presented the customs of ethnic groups, performing songs and dances, all required multifaceted balance and coordination.

Thus, what images did NHK and CCTV try to produce due to these negotiations? Will there be differences between the two sides when presenting images of the Silk Road? This essay attempts to explore these issues through the following cases.

The images of *The Silk Road* show a double feature. There are narratives of the existence of human history outside of the modern world and beyond time. At the same time, the documentary constantly presents a sense of tension in the contemporary Cold War situation. It is the interplay of the two that makes the images unique.

The most significant one is episode five, “*In Search of the Kingdom of Lou-Lan*.” In this episode, the camera crew traveled across the vast desert searching for an ancient city, Loulan, recorded in the historical sources from the 2nd century BC to the 5th century AD. They march through the sand and strong wind for a long time, with little change in the landscape but uncertainty, as if the viewer could participate in a survival game through the images. In particular, as this area was part of an essential military base, the camera crew had to travel deep into the zone in Military trucks, accompanied by some soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Eventually, they found the ruins of the ancient kingdom of Loulan in the desert and discovered some wooden frames presumed to be the housing of ancient nobles. Furthermore, during the filming and the research of the ruin, Chinese archaeologist Shunying Mu unearthed two other mummies, a young woman in her forties and a little child. The woman’s mummy appeared with a beautiful face, a cloak draped over her body, and a feather symbolizing her new marriage still in shape.

Although NHK and CCTV used similar materials in this episode, the different images they presented during broadcasting can help us comprehend each side’s statement.

Using the BGM, NHK’s images contrast the difficulty of driving through the desert and the relieved feeling of accomplishment. Whereas most of the desert footage is in the distance, when approaching the Loulan ruins, there are more close-ups of individual objects, such as a piece of wood or the face of a mummy. The audience could experience the encounter with the “unknown other” after long hesitation in this episode. When showing the mummy of the young woman, the camera focused on the feathers adorning her hat. The narrator informs the audience that “in this region, it was customary to adorn the hat of the new wife with a feather.” Then it was the mummy of the child, who was in a small coffin with a small case that held some grains of wheat, which the parents must have prepared to save this little child from starvation in the afterlife. The narrator’s voice said, “This child would have grown up big with wheat that did not rot for 2000 years.”

Before this documentary, many Japanese audiences already knew the story of Loulan from Yasushi Inoue’s novel *Loulan* (1958). Loulan was an ancient kingdom guarding the major transportation route on the shores of Lop Nor, which both the Han and the Xiongnu tried to occupy. After a long period of war, the king of Loulan decided to obey the order of the Han and relocate all the people to another place named Shanshan. In Inoue’s fiction, people in Loulan buried all their property in the ground and decided to come back someday, but the previous queen, who did not want to leave, committed suicide. Four hundred years later, when a brave man led his generals to return to Lop Nor in search of

their homeland, the place had turned into a desert without a drop of water. It was not until the early 20th century that Stein discovered the ruins. That is when a mummy, the beautiful queen who committed suicide, reappeared.

In other words, from this past story, Loulan had already been known as a small country struggling to survive amidst the strife of two great powers. Meanwhile, many of the Japanese audience in 1980 would have been knowledgeable about the political tensions in this region. The scope of the military base, which included Loulan, was reminiscent of the nuclear weapons China was developing at the time. In this context, what did the scene of the mummies mean, especially the fictional imagery of their possible stories as told by the narration? The newlywed couple's tragedy, as well as the love of a parent who, while grieving the loss of an infant, aroused the emotions of the contemporary audience through the images accompanied by the rhythm of Kitarō's music. This scene can be understood as a device that simultaneously evokes the fragility of human life and the timelessness of human values.

This essay will consider these representations in relation to the growing desire to overcome national and ethnic discourses in Japan because of the Second World War and post-war experience. Before discussing this issue, attention should also be paid to CCTV's episode *"In Search of the Kingdom of Lou-Lan."* This version was edited to twice the length of the NHK version, using more material and narration, and broadcast in China in 1980.

At the beginning of this episode, trucks were traveling through the desert. The camera did not focus on the various difficulties the crew encountered but preferred to describe the diverse landscapes of the desert. The following narration, for example, depicts the journey through the sand and wind. "I was not annoyed by the bumpy road. Amidst the unusual bumps, the nostalgia deepened. More than two thousand years ago, wasn't it here that Zhang Qian walked along, accompanied by horses' hooves? More than 1800 years ago, wasn't it here that Ban Chao led the soldiers and horses galloping to the West? In the 13th century, Marco Polo and his companions departed for the interior of China! How many wonderful and magical stories have been left behind for us! They forged this bridge of friendship across Central Asia with their sweat."

In the scene showing the child's mummy, the narrator says, "In every tomb, we could find a small woven blue near the body. The baskets contain wheat grains, indicating that wheat was abundant here in ancient times." When the camera focused on the female mummy, the narrator said: "The three feathers on her hat are unique and make her look like an ethnic minority."

Apart from this, the documentary does not spend extra time asking the audience to imagine the story of these two mummies but turns to show artifacts excavated from the ruin of Loulan, including bamboo slips with Chinese characters and silk with Han Dynasty motifs. Rather than evoke emotion in audiences with a sentimental narrative, as NHK's version does, CCTV suggests more historical evidence to portray the history of ancient China's culture and exchange with the West. The mummies symbolize the timeless value of human beings in NHK's version. However, in CCTV's version, they become more of a symbol of the historical existence of an ethnic group that had a solid connection to Chinese civilization.

The difference between the two interpretations of the same materials stems from the different perspectives of CCTV and NHK on the Silk Road. Next, this essay attempts to demonstrate this by analyzing two sides of the co-production.

3. Images of Multi-Ethnic China

In the co-production of *The Silk Road*, CCTV and NHK were expected to recreate a vision of Asian cultural relations and illustrate the position of China and Japan on it.

It seemed manageable to redefine the relations between China and Japan. Junyue Sun suggests that kentōshi (envoys to Tang China, 遣唐使) evolved as a symbol of "the two thousand years of friendship and exchange between China and Japan." Inoue's novel *Tenpyō no Iraka* (The Roof of Heavenly Peace, 天平の薨, 1958) was published in 1957 and

repeatedly performed as a play in Sino-Japanese friendly-interaction events in the 1960s and 1970s. Both PRC and Japanese society were trying to agree that, compared to the temporary imperialism and war in the early 20th century, friendship and civil exchange were the essences of the Sino-Japanese relationship (Sun 2021, p. 84).

However, when considering *The Silk Road*, it becomes clear that China and Japan had different aims in depicting the more comprehensive Asian relationship in this documentary.

CCTV was more focused on building an image of a unified multi-ethnic nation and emphasizing the shared national identity of the various ethnic groups.

This purpose was also to be seen in the filming of Loulan. None of the Japanese got the chance to approach the area of Loulan because it is a top-secret military base where people are strictly forbidden to enter. At first, even CCTV was strictly forbidden from entering the area, but for this one-time opportunity to capture Loulan on film, CCTV persistently negotiated with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and received permission. Some Chinese staff with cameras were allowed to enter yet had to be accompanied by PLA soldiers. Indeed, without the military's maps, vehicles, helicopters, and professional staff, it was impossible to survive in the desert. The PLA was responsible for monitoring the cameras to ensure that the images of Loulan would be preserved as evidence of valuable Chinese historical sites without revealing important national security information. In the CCTV version of "*In Search of the Kingdom of Lou-Lan*", there was some footage showing archaeologists excavating and studying ancient artifacts from Loulan. The narration told the audience, "in order to study the history and the culture of China, archaeologists in Xinjiang have paid a great price by persevering in the sand and wind."

This narrative, in which the CCTV version combines various details of the Silk Road with Chinese national cultural identity, was also relevant to the situation during the Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union.

The Sino-Soviet split began in 1957 and deepened following the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the CCP continuously criticized Soviet revisionism, while at the same time, the USSR criticized China's tacit acceptance of US activities. On 2 March 1969, the Sino-Soviet border conflict occurred near Zhenbao (Russia: Damansky) Island on the Ussuri River, adding further tension to Sino-Soviet relations. In contrast, China had begun to ease its relations with the United States and Japan, trying to discover a breakthrough in the polarized situation between socialism and capitalism. At this time, Hajime Suzuki planned *The Silk Road* as part of the "Sino-Japanese Friendship" campaign, which coincided with the filming of the vast area bordering the Soviet Union. As a result, this became an opportunity to renew the image of the Chinese national cultural community.

There is another factor of national identity that this work encompasses. It is a multi-ethnic national identity. Yuzhang Pei, a Chinese producer, later noted that when the CCTV and NHK directors discussed the location plan, Pei insisted on filming a Mongolian group in Xinjiang. The NHK staff did not understand at first. However, Pei told them that "the Mongolian people have a patriotic history of rebelling against the oppression of the Russian Tsar and returning to their homeland" (Pei 1981). This story was reflected in the ninth episode, *Through the Tian Shan Mountains by Rail*. The descendants of the Mongolian group returned to Chinese territory from Tsarist Russia in the 18th century. In the episode, they appeared playing the violin, the instrument obtained via the Silk Road, and singing and dancing. Put another way, this scene showed the Sino-Soviet tension from the side, which compelled CCTV to emphasize the multi-ethnic unity near the national border.

Besides, the images of the Chinese border with Pakistan contrast with tension with the Soviet Union. In the last episode, "*Two Roads to the Pamirs*", twelve trucks full of cargo arrived in Kashgar from Gilgit (Pakistani territory) in Kashmir. The Kashgar citizens greeted the Gilgit merchants in a friendly manner and began trading. The narration tells the audience that Kashgar has been a hub of art and trade between China and the West from ancient times. After trading, the men of the Gilgit caravan joined in the dancing at a

welcome banquet. In Kashgar, Muslims pray in the mosque and sing and dance during Ramadan. The day ended with formal discussions between the Gilgit merchants and the Chinese authorities in charge of trade, culminating in a friendly handshake. The final scene of this episode and the series is where the camera crew says goodbye to the Gilgit caravan at the border between China and Pakistan. In the uninhabited highlands, covered by a perpetual snow cover, the Gilgit caravan disappeared into the sunlight, waving to the Chinese and Japanese staff. This ending visualizes the insurmountable boundaries while simultaneously conveying the message of hope in the human connection that it might one day be possible to cross. Through this episode, the audience can observe the impression of a multi-ethnic China living in friendship with its neighbors.

The most explicit scene of the Sino-Soviet split is in NHK's version. In the last episode that NHK aired, the camera crew was traveling with the Gilgit merchants, moving closer to Tasshqurghan, a town in the west of Xinjiang, when they came across some Tajik militia who were holding a military exercise. From deep within the expansive Gobi Desert, a Tajik area surrounded by the borders of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, Tajik militiamen and militiawomen rode swiftly toward the camera on horseback. Next, they dismount their horses, plop down on the dune area, and hold their guns at the ready. The narrator explains, "Since the Afghan conflict, it is strictly forbidden to make gunshots during exercises. Therefore, they are not even allowed to discharge empty guns." As the narrator explains, the eeriness of the scene is vividly conveyed through the quiet repetition of the practice of holding guns and aiming them. The camera, which captures the faces of the soldiers as they move about, brings several Tajik women into close-up. Contrary to the brightly colored clothes, hats, and scarves they wear, their faces, burnt by ultraviolet rays, look grim.

Instead of using this footage directly, the CCTV version focused on the daily activities of the Tajiks in the residential area, the peaceful streets, and the bustle of weddings, showing their stable life in the region. However, does not this excision of tense scenes reflect that the actual situation on the Sino-Soviet border (including the border with Afghanistan) was still an intractable issue for the Chinese media in 1980?

As mentioned above, the NHK version focuses more on "human values" in telling the history of the Silk Road. Compared to the Chinese political aspirations in this context, was the NHK's representation also intrinsically connected to Cold War politics?

4. Repositioning Japan in Asia

Both in the images of *The Silk Road* and the surrounding meta-texts, it can be regarded that the filming and production by NHK was not only a process to build a new image of Asia but to explore a new perspective and narrative to represent Japan. In other words, NHK's challenge was positioning itself within this representation of Asia.

The series won numerous accolades as soon as it was broadcast in Japan. However, there has also been sharp criticism. Hani, a senior documentary director, criticized the series for the use of angles as arbitrary and flimsy. According to him, high angles, such as a hawk searching for prey, or vindictive low angles, such as a bugbear crawling on the ground and advancing, were haphazardly mixed and incorporated without much thought. In his opinion, the documentary could have "discovered the incredible vitality contained in the time and space of Central Asia," but, unfortunately, it became a "long music album," drowning out the local people's authentic voices with Kitarō's music and Ishizaka's narration (Hani 1980, pp. 13–14).

Nevertheless, the close observation required by Hani was unfeasible during this filming process, which was full of political negotiations and tensions. The director Suzuki commented that when a Japanese cameraman tried to close up on the Chinese farmers to capture more of the expressions and acts of local individuals, CCTV staff perceived that Japan was trying to convey the "real poverty-stricken China" (Suzuki 1980, p. 188). Although NHK staff from the outside felt they were trying to explore "energy" in the local people, it offended Chinese staff. CCTV staff that they felt offended. Indeed, holding a

camera and observing is a one-sided act towards the film's subject, aggressive or even violent. From this unexpected occurrence, we can recognize that in the eyes of the Chinese producers, the Japanese partners still unconsciously had a Western perspective and a sense of Orientalism.

It is necessary to know that the wide-ranging concern of the Silk Road in Japan and the detailed information provided by intellectuals and writers are inseparable from Orientalism and Pan-Asianism since modernization. Toyo Shi (The Oriental History), especially the studies about the Silk Road, flourished in Japan in the first four decades of the twentieth century and provided the theoretical basis for the Japanese imperial domination in Asia. Overcoming imperialism and Orientalism has been an essential issue in post-war Japan.

This essay places *The Silk Road* into the representations of the Silk Road from the 1950s to 1980s to see how cultural figures have attempted to rediscover Japan's position in Asia and overcome the imperial frame and what they have achieved.

In *The Silk Road*, three famous writers, Yasushi Inoue, Ryōtarō Shiba, and Chen Sun-sin, played essential roles as performers and advisors. Each episode features one of them following the camera crew into the location, sometimes present in the image and looking over the landscape, sometimes giving commentary on the cultural heritages. Moreover, the contents of the series are from their past literary works. Episode 1 *Glories of Ancient Chang-an* relates to Chen Sun-sin's *Shin Saiyuki* (*New Journey to the West*, 1975) (Chen 1975), *Shiruku Rodo e no Tabi* (*Journey to the Silk Road*, 1977) (Chen 1977), and so on. Episode 2, *The Art Gallery in the Desert*, and Episode 5, *In Search of the Kingdom of Lou-Lan*, received widespread attention when aired because Yasushi Inoue's two novels, *Tonko* (*Dunhuang*, 1959) and *Loulan* (1959), have been popular in Japan for over 20 years. Episode 11, *Where Horses Fly Like the Wind*, reminded Ryōtarō Shiba's *Mongoru Kiko* (*Journey to Mongolia*, 1978).

As the most famous historical novelists in Japan, what they have in common is that they have both a knowledge base of Japanese Oriental studies and a keen grasp of the reader's point of interest. The former came from their education in Japanese Oriental studies in the 1930s and 1940s. Yasushi Inoue graduated in 1936 from the Faculty of Letters, Kyoto University, an essential academic institution that built the foundation for studying Oriental history in Japan. Chen Sun-sin studied Hindi and Persian at the Osaka School of Foreign Languages in 1941, where Ryōtarō Shiba later studied Mongolian. The latter stemmed from their connection with journalism.

Here, Yasushi Inoue should be the most appropriate example for discussion. Inoue's writing seems to refer to Toyo Shi in his novels from the 1950s. Nonetheless, many stories and characters seem to be distancing themselves from Japanese imperialism. While it was a prewar principle to prove that Japan was the most orthodox inheritor of Asian history, Inoue's novels include the philosophy that the concept of the nation-state itself is invalid in the place of the Silk Road. Inoue's novel *Loulan* (楼蘭, 1950), mentioned in this essay, could be understood as a critique of the oppression of the weak by powerful political forces. It is also a story about minorities who lost their lives with the establishment of robust unified regimes.

This theme is also evident in another Inoue's novel, *Shikoson* (漆胡樽, lacquered barrels, 1950.) The protagonist of *Shikoson* is a journalist investigating the source of a pair of black lacquered barrels after visiting the exhibition of Shōsō-in treasures at Nara National Museum, Nara, originally a storehouse for storing the treasures since the Nara period. He learns how the barrels kept changing owners during the war years in the western frontier of Ancient China and were finally brought to Japan by chance by the Tang envoy around 778. Inoue conceived *Shikon* after visiting the Special Exhibition at Shōsō-in as a reporter for the Mainichi Shimbun (Daily Newspaper) in 1949 (Liu 2020, p. 22). Nevertheless, this novel is not a work to popularize historical knowledge. As Yamada argues, the Exhibitions of Shōsō-in Treasures in the late 1940s were intended to comfort the Japanese after the Second World War and to allow them to rediscover their place in

the ancient civilizations of Asia. It was a kind of device for editing national memory. However, Inoue detached the perspective of the discourse from being about “the origin of the Japanese culture” (a symbol of collective memory and national identity) by repeatedly emphasizing in the text that this is “only a personal imagination about history” (Yamada 2009).

Inoue’s most famous historical novel is *Tonko* (Dunhuang 1959), a fiction about how people hide the relics of Dunhuang, which has been a historical mystery for decades. In Song Dynasty, the protagonist Zhao Xingde stumbled into Western Xia (西夏), a new kingdom between the Song and the Hui-falcon (Uyghur) regions. Zhao Xingde happened to learn the Western Xia language and, by chance, went to Dunhuang, where he saw the murals of the Mogao Caves and met the local people who transcribe the Buddhist scriptures. To preserve these scriptures during the war, he directs the monks to hide them in the Mogao Caves. Zhao finally disappears in the war, and no one knows where he goes, but when Aurel Stein, the renowned explorer, arrives in the 20th century and finally discovers the scriptures in the caves.

From these works, Inoue found a way to engage with history. That is, to observe from the perspective of an independent traveler, focusing on how the historical materials that carried the traces of human cultures moved during the war between nations and reappeared later.

Of course, Inoue’s method does not always coincide with the other two writers, Ryōtarō Shiba and Chen Sun-sin. Instead, Shiba tries more to perceive history from an ethnic or national perspective. Writing a separate essay to discuss the differences between the two writers is necessary. What can be suggested here is that *The Silk Road* inevitably incorporates most of Inoue’s methods when describing the connections between Japan and the Silk Road. In this series, Japanese photographers called themselves “caravans,” who that travel to the locations, interact with the locals, and do not over-interpret by using their language or gaze.

In episode X, *Journey Into Music: South Through the Tian Shan Mountains*, the camerapersons travel to Kucha, the land of music, and try to locate the origin of traditional Japanese music by watching a local folk song and dance performance. They showed photos and sounds of Japan’s national treasure, the Shōsō-in lute, to the Uighur performers, and finally found that the sound of dombra is like the Shōsō-in lute. Here, connecting the sound of dombra to the Shōsō-in lute includes Japanese culture in the historical network of the Silk Road music or Asia cultural network. This interview examines Japan as the last stop of the Silk Road; however, NHK does not link this scene to the discourse that “Japan is the inheritor of an ancient Asian culture.” Instead, after the footage of the daily lives of contemporary Kucha people enjoying music, the video shows the caravan continuing to move.

Throughout the series, NHK used this approach. In other words, it is a method of telling the story of the transmission of culture from the ancient Silk Road to Japan by comparing the sites investigated in the Silk Road coverage, in particular the murals and patterns of artifacts, with the treasures preserved in the Shōsō-in in Japan, and showing the similarities through the images. However, when the narrator tells the stories, he often introduces them by saying, “this is a pattern that was also found in the Shōsō-in,” with very few words, such as “Japanese culture” or “our country.”

Through these representations, we can notice that NHK attempts to discover the networks of cultures in history and to record the daily lives of contemporaries. Japanese staff observed, filmed, and delivered the details to the Japanese audience about the tensions near the Cold War borders but strived to avoid explaining and interpreting much or even prolonged gazing.

This detail shows that with this series, NHK is trying to rediscover the Japanese as “travelers” to reach out to the “other” in Asia. Furthermore, an examination of the literature from a decade ago reveals that travelogue preceded influenced this framing. After the liberalization of travel in Japan in 1964, there was an upsurge in Silk Road

tourism, but it was limited to the Central and West Asian regions outside China. Only after the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972 did a few Japanese intellectuals get permission from China to visit the region from Xi'an to Xinjiang.

Within this context, writer Chen Sun-sin made two trips along the Silk Road in 1973 and 1975, from Xi'an to Lanzhou and Urumqi. It was one of the routes that later overlapped with NHK's production. After this visit, Chen Sun-sin wrote two travelogues, *Shiruku Rōdo e no Michi* (The Road to The Silk Road, シルクロードの旅, 1977) and *Shin Saiyuki* (New Journey to the West, 新西遊記, 1975). *Shin Saiyuki* combined the writer's visit with the classical Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. Each chapter records the sites visited by the writer and then tells the reader the story of what the monk Tan and his apprentices in *Journey to Ancient India* experienced at the exact locations. All these fictional stories are famous in Japan, such as the story of the Sun Wukong (Monkey King) borrowing a banana fan to help the Tang monk cross the Flaming Mountain. Through this unique form of a travelogue, Chen Sun-sin connected the present Silk Road to the Western region in memories.

The travelogues of the Silk Road in the 1970s share a standard narrative structure. The writers travel through historical heritages while remembering and reuniting themselves with travelers from the "past" recorded in historical materials or classical literature. In these travelogues, there are two kinds of historical figures often cited by writers; one is Buddhist monks like Fā-Hien (法顯, AD337-422) and Tang Sanzang (玄奘, AD602-664). The other is Zhang Qian (張騫, BC164-114), who traveled to the West from the Western Han Dynasty.

As a purveyor of religious culture, the monk traveled alone to India to seek dharma, trying to bring peace and save humanity by means other than war. This aim was in line with post-war Japanese writers. Zhang Qian set out for the West as an emissary of the Han Dynasty and blazed the trail between the Han Dynasty and the West. His travels were originally a political mission to give the Han Dynasty a partner in the West to fight the Xiongnu. However, he became a prisoner of the Huns and, accidentally divorced from Han, spent ten years in the West, returning to the Han Dynasty as a transmitter of the Culture of the Other. There is a tragedy in Zhang Qian that is both used by the Dynasty and abandoned by it, and this is something that Japanese intellectuals like to identify with Zhang Qian. The figures they cite are mobile and, in moving, can be intensely political and military tensions kept at an appropriate distance.

Carrying the negative legacy of Japanese imperialism, they were caught between the United States and the Socialist bloc and had a difficult choice of political identity at times. Therefore, many writers refrained from expressing their political positions and chose to describe cultural history instead. This mobility of the "traveler's" perspective was efficient and convenient for them during the Cold War. Back to the documentary series, the NHK images followed this narrative from a "traveler," presenting the desert landscape with the narrator assimilating himself with the Tang Sanzang, Fā-Hien, and Zhang Qian.

Recalling the episode of Loulan, CCTV used a similar technique in their narrative to express nostalgia for the ancients and finally lamented the longevity of Chinese culture. Does this not show that this work emerged from cooperation, division, and negotiation? With the support of their respective techniques, CCTV and NHK assembled the same material. They edited it with the political reality of the Cold War in the process of representation to find their depiction of Asia and the positioning of China and Japan.

5. Conclusions

The essay focused on the TV documentary series *The Silk Road* and discussed the significance of this co-production in the Cold War. The co-production was both an opportunity for NHK and CCTV to provide each other with technical support and historical experience to create a new image of Asia and a process of discovering the different identities and discourses of each.

In CCTV's version, the images of the Silk Road became a symbol of the re-establishment of China's self-identity, including the imagination of a "multi-ethnic state" and a "community of cultural memory that unites East and West." Also, CCTV positively portrayed trade with neighboring states, which was understandable in the political situation in 1980, such as the split with the Soviet Union and the reviewing of the relationship with capitalism.

On the other hand, the Japanese version contains a narrative that proves Japan is the last stop on the Silk Road, as an attempt to redefine Japan on the cultural map of Asia and indirectly to break through the polarization of capitalism and socialism in the Cold War. This feature might become more evident with respect to the various activities to protest the US-Japanese Security Treaty in Japan over the long post-war period. Besides, Japanese literature had long sought the "unknown" of the Silk Road and became a solid intellectual foundation for the images of The Silk Road. Famous writers such as Yasushi Inoue and Chen Sun-sin incorporated a narrative of Japan "being a part of the Silk Road, but unlike in colonialism, as a traveler." Later travelogues also used this structure repeatedly and finally influenced the documentary.

From the 1990s, with the opening of the Chinese tourist market, many Chinese and Japanese traveled the Silk Road in person. At the time, the function of cultural representations instead of unfolding imagination seemed not so obvious. Besides, representations of the Silk Road are also increasing, and the literature from the 1950s to the 1970s and the documentary in the 1980s were gradually forgotten.

In the 2020s, COVID-19 restricted human mobility especially travels, and more people will reconsider the obviousness of traveling across borders. On the other side, the various tensions in the region among China and India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, as well as the Russian war against Ukraine, have made us realize once again that the Silk Road is not just an ideal image of cultural exchange and movement, but a region that contains various tensions.

These images and literature from the 1970s and the 1980s are worth recalling again as cases to consider not only the landscape and people of the Asian border, the relationship between region, and culture, but how we should find perspective when depicting and observing Others, how to represent and position ourselves.

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