The Observable Mundane: Vernacular Chinese and the Emergence of a Literary Discourse on Popular Narrative in Edo Japan. By Emanuel Pastreich. Seoul National University Press, 2011. 366 pages. Hardcover $75.00.

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In *The Observable Mundane*, Emanuel Pastreich examines how Tokugawa writers' encounter with vernacular Chinese caused them to reimagine China and the Chinese language, and more generally to conceive of language and culture in new ways. This exposure to vernacular Chinese came primarily in the form of fiction, but also in the form of contemporary spoken language, which Japanese increasingly had the opportunity to study at this time, often from Chinese émigrés who fled to Japan after the fall of the Ming dynasty.

Pastreich describes how the new vernacular narratives imported to Japan in the Tokugawa period "shifted away from the accepted images of China as an amorphous and idyllic realm of the ancient sages or as a setting for refined gatherings of literati and cognoscenti to share poetry and tea," instead offering Japanese readers images of such things as the "rampages of bandits, the cunning of prostitutes and the scheming of petty merchants" (p. 17). This was an alien world to Japanese readers, he notes, but also one that had similarities with new social developments in Japan, where "the urban environment found in Edo, Osaka and Kyoto increasingly resembled the environment depicted in novels brought over from China" (p. 45).

He explains how a philosophical justification for the study of the everyday was provided by the Confucian scholar Itō Jinsai (1627–1705), who rejected the Song Confucian view that the Confucian Way exists as an abstract and universal "principle" (*li* 理, Jp. *ri*) and argued that "the concrete and immediate were crucial for the implementation of a moral order" (p. 165). This led him to "take the radical step of suggesting that the sentiments in the classics are exactly those found in popular songs and vernacular novels" (p. 166). Pastreich links Jinsai's affirmation of sentiment and the common to other phenomena of the culture of the Genroku period (1688–1704), such as the mixture of the *ga* (exalted) and the *zoku* (vulgar) in the haikai poetry of Matsuo Bashō. This connection of Jinsai's philosophy to Genroku culture is supported by Pastreich's description of how Jinsai's son Itō Baiu (1683–1745) gave serious scholarly treatment to the fiction of Ihara Saikaku, and how Hozumi Ikan (1692–1769), a student of Jinsai's son Itō Tōgai (1670–1736), did the same for the puppet theater of Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Pastreich shows how the study of Chinese vernacular narrative similarly developed as a field of systematic scholarly inquiry in eighteenth-century Japan, such as with Oka Hakku's (1692–1767) *Shōsetsu seigen* (Novels in Fine Words) and Sawada Issai's (1701–1782) *Shōsetsu suigen* (Novels in Refined Words), both of which combine annotated collections of Chinese vernacular stories with prefaces that discuss the history and value of Chinese fiction.

In his discussion of Tokugawa discourse on vernacular language, Pastreich assigns a central role to another Confucian scholar, Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728), whose "approach to Chinese language combined the translation of Chinese texts into contemporary Japanese, the study of contemporary Chinese language, and the composition of prose and poems in classical Chinese into a single regimen" (p. 146). Sorai provides a justification for the study of vernacular language in the preface to his *Yakubunsentei* (A Device for Translation), which Pastreich translates in an appendix to *The Observable Mundane* (this translation was origi-

nally published as part of a journal article). Central to Sorai's argument in *Yakubunsentei* is that "Chinese must be understood as a foreign language and not as an elevated domestic discourse" (p. 146). This attitude is reflected in Sorai's rejection of *kundoku* for being a stilted and artificial form of language that at the same time gives Japanese readers a false sense of having understood the Chinese original. As an alternative to *kundoku*, Pastreich explains, for Sorai "a rendering into vernacular Japanese more accurately reflected the content of the Chinese classics because the act of translation is explicit and does not present itself as anything more than a likeness" (p. 144). He notes how the clear separation of Chinese from Japanese meant that Chinese needed to be understood on its own terms, a task that Sorai pursued not only by approaching ancient Chinese as simply the ordinary language of ancient China, but also by promoting the study of Chinese vernacular texts and contemporary spoken Chinese.

Many of Pastreich's attempts to explain how Sorai differed from earlier scholars, though, are not convincing. He writes, "Previous scholarship privileged literary Chinese and made the authority of the language of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* the basis for moral action in a universal homogenous plane. Sorai, however, treasured archaic Chinese, since without that language there is no bridge spanning the shifting sands of time and connecting the present to the 'way of the ancient kings'" (p. 150). The contrast between historicism and abstract moral universalism is valid in describing Sorai's position, but Pastreich's argument about language here is unclear, given that the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* are themselves archaic rather than literary Chinese, at least as these designations are usually applied. Also, he does not offer evidence to support his assertion that earlier scholars saw the moral content of Confucian texts as deriving from their language itself, a view that he contrasts with Sorai's "separation of content from language" (p. 150). Tokugawa followers of Song Confucianism sometimes used vernacular Japanese to explain Confucianism, so it is hard to say that they saw the content of Confucian texts as necessarily wedded to a specific form of linguistic expression.

Moreover, by focusing almost entirely on *Yakubunsentei* and not looking at the broader range of works that brought Sorai to intellectual fame in the eighteenth century, Pastreich ends up overstating the extent to which Sorai promoted vernacular language and flattened out textual hierarchies. He writes, for example, of Sorai's "requirement that the Japanese vernacular language be used in the annotation and teaching of the Chinese classics" (p. 142). It is true that in *Yakubunsentei* Sorai advocated the use of vernacular Japanese as a provisional pedagogical tool, but Pastreich's characterization of Sorai ignores the fact that his *Rongo chō* (Clarification of the Analects), *Daigaku kai* (Interpretation of the *Great Learning*), and *Chūyō kai* (Interpretation of the Doctrine of the Mean) are all written in Chinese. He also argues that Sorai "stepped out of the confines of Confucian annotation that relies on textual authority and into the space of literature" (p. 156). While Sorai did encourage his students to read a wide range of texts, this did not amount to an abandonment of notions of textual authority, as he saw the study of certain canonical texts as the only means for people of later times to access the Way of the ancient sage kings.

One of the most compelling aspects of *The Observable Mundane* is its exploration of how the reception of Chinese vernacular narrative generated new forms of fiction and textual interpretation in Tokugawa Japan. For example, *Engi kyōgiden* (The Vernacular Tale of the Righteous Courtesan) is a story set in the Osaka pleasure quarters, but written in vernacular Chinese, in which Sawada Issai "took great pleasure in inserting every imaginable narrative convention from the *huaben* genre" (p. 230). By the late eighteenth century, Pastreich writes,

"Chinese vernacular narrative became oddly intertwined with a return to the refined and classical in the writings of Takebe Ayatari, Tsuga Teisho, and Ueda Akinari," a step in the development of the *yomihon* genre (p. 212). Pastreich argues that the adoption of conventions of Chinese vernacular fiction occurred within scholarship on the Japanese classics as well, noting how the Kokugaku (national learning) scholar Hagiwara Hiromichi (1815–1863) applied the critical vocabulary of Qing studies of Chinese vernacular fiction to his interpretation of *The Tale of Genji*, which involves "re-reading the monogatari as a Chinese novel" (p. 83).

Also of great interest is Pastreich's discussion of how these uses of Chinese vernacular fiction were connected to new ways of imagining Japan and its relationship to China. Not only did this fiction expose Japanese readers to a much broader vision of Chinese civilization, but the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 to the "barbarian" Manchu, Pastreich comments, created uncertainty about the relationship of Chinese civilization to the geographical space of China, thus "provid[ing] a remarkable opportunity for Japanese to define for themselves what China signified and to adapt sections of that cultural tradition in the construction of their own cultural identity" (p. 46). In the course of the eighteenth century, he writes, "the significance of vernacular Chinese translation shifted from a transparent response to the desire for new literary genres to a complex literary activity using a foreign vernacular to reconstruct and reexamine Japan itself" (p. 89).

The assertion of historical and cultural specificity is stressed by Pastreich in his discussion of Ogyū Sorai, and he brings up a similar issue in his treatment of *Tōwa zanyo* (Essentials of Vernacular Chinese), a work by Okajima Kanzan (1674–1728), who was an instructor of spoken Chinese at Sorai's academy. In this work, Pastreich explains, "cultural similarities are discovered only with recognition of profound cultural difference. A process of misunderstanding . . . leads to eventual harmony at a distance" (p. 103). Pastreich shows how China was sometimes used to defamiliarize Japan, such as with Kanzan's *Taiheiki engi* (Vernacular Rendering of the *Taiheiki*), a reworking of the *Taiheiki* into language similar to that of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He comments, "Most likely the appeal lay in the oddly defamiliarizing effect of reading a famous Japanese text as a popular Chinese novel" (p. 108). Another type of defamiliarization occurs in *Heian karyūroku* (Record of the Flowers and Willows of Heian), a vernacular Chinese account of the Kyoto pleasure quarters by Matsumuro Shōkō (1692–1747), who "takes the extraordinary step of including glosses using Chinese characters to represent the phonetic quality of the Japanese terms he records," thus "imagining what Japan would look like if viewed from without" (p. 240). Pastreich also suggests a link between the "foreignness" of the pleasure quarters and that of vernacular Chinese, commenting that "perhaps we can venture to say that the pleasure quarters appealed to writers such as Sawada Issai and Matsumuro Shōkō because it served as the internalized alien within the domestic cultural continuum" (p. 251). A different direction, that of refamiliarization, is taken by Oka Hakku, who "was a pioneer in the effort to create a comprehensive system of Japanese equivalents for vernacular Chinese expressions, allowing vernacular Chinese texts to be read as Japanese with little resistance. The unfamiliar Chinese was effectively being domesticated by means of an expanded version of the *kundoku* system" (p. 192). Pastreich argues convincingly that this interplay of defamiliarization and refamiliarization of foreign terms bears much similarity to the creation of new vocabulary in the Meiji period in response to Japan's encounter with the West, and he also notes that "Chinese vernacular expressions . . . were frequently used in the Meiji period for the renderings of Western European terms, and continue to be used today" (p. 275).

One of Pastreich's central arguments about the impact of vernacular Chinese fiction in the eighteenth century is that for Japanese readers of the time, "the concept of literature expanded to include texts using vernacular language or treating banal topics" (p. 280). There is an ahistoricism, though, in how he takes for granted the notion of "literature" as a category, and does not adequately examine in what sense such a category existed in the first place for Tokugawa readers. In some places he translates the Japanese term *bun* 文 as "literature," concluding that because the monks of the Five Mountains in the Kamakura period, and Ogyū Sorai in the Tokugawa period, saw Confucian texts as falling within the rubric of *bun*, they therefore considered these Confucian texts to be "literature" (p. 127, p. 142). Such a line of reasoning is misleading, though, as in these figures' discourses *bun* had a complex range of meaning that cannot simply be reduced to "literature."

It is almost inevitable that the occasional typo or other such minor error will find its way into any book, but the editing of *The Observable Mundane* is notably subpar. Misspellings, typos, and grammatically garbled sentences abound. Japanese names are given in a haphazard mixture of Japanese and Western name order. In the bibliography, Pastreich even miscites one of his own articles, giving a different title from the one it was actually published under.

Despite its weaknesses, *The Observable Mundane* provides important insight into the diverse roles played by vernacular Chinese in Tokugawa Japan. It shows how "China" was far from an unchanging, homogeneous entity in the premodern Japanese imagination, but was something that Japanese writers engaged with dynamically and conceived of in new ways throughout the Tokugawa period. The volume brings to light aspects of Tokugawa culture that have received little attention to date in English-language scholarship, and it should therefore appeal not only to Tokugawa specialists, but also to a broad range of readers interested in both modern and premodern Japan.

Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 1640–1868. By Robert I. Hellyer. Harvard University Asia Center, 2009. 300 pages. Hardcover $39.95/£29.95/€36.00.

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The study of Japanese foreign relations in the early modern period has advanced rapidly over the past several decades, with credit for much of this activity going to Japanese scholars such as Yasunori Arano and Kazui Tashiro. Seminal work by non-Japanese researchers such as Ronald P. Toby, however, has taken the field in new directions, and without question *Defining Engagement*, by Robert Hellyer, is another important and original contribution to this branch of Japanese history.

Hellyer has fully absorbed previous scholarship by Japanese historiographers and on that basis proceeds to offers a comprehensive new narrative of the history of Japan's foreign relations spanning the entire Tokugawa period, from the very beginning of the sixteenth century to the Meiji Restoration.

As a narrative history rather than simply a presentation of new information, the book is an engaging read, and its structure and arguments are both well organized. Following the introduction, chapters 1 and 2 set out the framework of Tokugawa foreign relations through