

3841

Trans/Form/Ação

ISSN: 0101-3173

ISSN: 1980-539X

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Departamento de Filosofia

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Trans/Form/Ação, vol. 45, no. 4, 2022, October-December, pp. 137-140

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2022.v45n4.p137>

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COMMENTS ON

“A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON A *MIRROR OF JAPAN* (RI BEN YI JIAN)”

Yi Yang¹

Commented Article: TONG, Jie; MA, Ji. A preliminary study on *A Mirror of Japan* (Ribenyijian). **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, v. 45, n. 4, p. 117-136, 2022.

After Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty's reign, as the problem of Japanese pirates became more and more serious, books devoted to the study of Japan began to be published. Among them, the most important ones are *A Brief Survey of Japan* (Ri Ben Kao Lue), *A Compilation of Japanese Maps* (Ri Ben Tu Zuan), *A Mirror of Japan* (Ri Ben Yi Jian), *A Survey of Japan* (Ri Ben Kao), *A Record of Japanese Customs* (Ri Ben Fen Tu Ji), and *A Biography of Japanese Pirates in Qiantai* (Qian Tai Wo Zhuan). Among them, *A Mirror of Japan* is a special one. In addition, there are also special books to introduce the general situation of Japan, such as *A Collection of Coastal Military Maps* (Chou Hai Tu Bian), *Resistance to Japanese Pirates in Ming Dynasty* (Huang Ming Yu Wo Lu), the *Compilation of Coastal Defense* (Hai Fang Zuan Yao) and the *Continuation of Coastal Defense Category in Zhedong and Zhexi Regions* (Liang Zhe Hai Fang Lei Kao Xu Bian). As Zheng Shungong, the author of the book *A Mirror of Japan*, once visited Japan twice, so many contents in the book are based on his own experience and knowledge. Therefore, his research on Japan had gone beyond the similar literature of the Ming Dynasty in breadth, depth

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<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2022.v45n4.p137>



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and accuracy. Moreover, the record and analysis of the Japanese pirates in the book are of great research value. Before the publication of *Huang Zunxian's Annals of Japan* (Ri Ben Tu Zhi), *A Mirror of Japan* was one of the highest level monographs on Japan in ancient China.

By comparing the same words in “Japanese kaolue”, “Chou Hai Tu Bian”, “Japanese Kao” and “Japan Yijian”, Tong and Ma (2022) also draw a new conclusion: firstly, the message annotation of “Japan Yijian” is closer to the standard Japanese pronunciation, and many of the Japanese original pronunciation are mainly Japanese training (Japanese original pronunciation), or both Japanese training and pronunciation.

Secondly, there are also some mistakes in the “Japanese kaolue”, “Chou Hai Tu Bian”, “Japanese Kao” and “Japanese Yijian”, such as the word “Shao”. The “Japanese Yijian” is marked with the pronunciation of “Xiao” to “make the gills easy”.

Thirdly, the Japanese words used in the first book of Japan are rather biased. For example, the word “head” is used in the first book of Japan, and the words “Atama”, “keshulai”, “kechenglai” and “kechenglai” are respectively used in the first book of Japan, and the pronunciation of the corresponding words in the first book of Japan is relatively rare.

Fourthly, Xue Jun, the author of “a brief survey of Japan”, was born in Ningbo Prefecture. The message in “the preparation of sea charts” was revised by Zheng Ruozheng, the author, who asked Ningbo businessmen and envoys to Japan. Zheng Shungong, the author of *A Mirror of Japan*, is a native of Huizhou. This is reflected in the Chinese pronunciation of the same words in each book. There are great differences in pronunciation due to the differences between Ningbo Dialect and Hui Dialect.

Fifthly, for example, the Chinese word “cow” and the message of “Japan Yijian” are pronounced “bird world”. In other books, it is “Hu Shui”. This should be due to the difference of the author’s native place and dialect pronunciation, which leads to the deviation and discrepancy in the translation of the same Chinese vocabulary.

However, the author of this study focuses on three aspects of the structure of this work and its main content features. The tremendous amount of material given by the work, the author’s personal research and understanding of Japan, and how the Japanese people saw the Japanese invaders are these three key elements. The author intends to present this work, which has not been widely circulated in later generations, for the contemporary reference

(BU, 2019, p. 190). In general, this work gives the impression that there is a lot of ambiguity in the introduction and study of *A Mirror of Japan*, so that this book left me with an impression of uncertainty. For the time being, I cannot have a more holistic grasp of the work. For this reason, I believe that the author's study of the book lacks a regular research paradigm and a complete research procedure.

Tong and Ma (2022) lack a more detailed introduction to the author and the background of the writing of *A Mirror of Japan*. The author only briefly and sporadically makes some introductions, as stated in the text: "There are only a few articles on Zheng Shun Gong's biography and the writing of *A Mirror of Japan*, such as Bian Li's biography of Zheng Shun Gong's hometown, his life story and a textual study of his Ming dynasty mission to Japan." In general, the relevant introduction to the author is the first step in the study of the work. Therefore, the reader lacks a solid foundation when reading this paper and does not seem to capture the source of *A Mirror of Japan*. The author of this paper should have started the paper with a relatively systematic introduction to this area.

When the author introduces *A Mirror of Japan* from the aspect of "great information", I think there are two mistakes: First, because the author devotes a lot of space to analyzing the pronunciation of Japanese, which seems to deviate from the theme of "great information". This seems to be a deviation from the "informative" theme. Additionally, if we follow the author's line of reasoning in this section, we will discover the same departure from the theme, such as the line of reasoning given after the citation of *Japanese Studies*, and we will discover that the author appears to demonstrate that *A Mirror of Japan* is not widely distributed and that the information is extremely accurate and trustworthy (BROKAW, 2005, p. 3-54).

To prove the "enormous amount of information" of *A Mirror of Japan*, the author of this article lists some documents for comparison, as stated in the article: "The largest number of messages recorded in 'A Mirror of Japan' is almost as large as that of 'A Mirror of Japan'. 'A Brief History of Japan' and 'The Coastal Military Atlas' ten times as many and with a slightly more detailed classification." However, the author of this paper gives the example of "Japan Studies" again, but the statement that "[...] it is reasonable to expect that the amount of information recorded in Japan Studies is greater than that in A Brief History of Japan (BROKAW, 2015, p. 210-212). The Coastal Military Atlas, and The Mirror of Japan" seems to suggesting the opposite.

The author of this paper emphasizes the field survey of Japanese geography in *A Mirror of Japan*, but in the actual introduction and argument of Japan, the argument of this aspect is not very sufficient, but only from the point of “preliminary introduction of Japan”, by comparing with other works. The argument is single (BENEDICT, 2008, p. 47). I think that since this point is one of the features of *A Mirror of Japan*, it is necessary to introduce it from a richer perspective of humanities and society, even if the comparison is relatively brief.

The author of this article on “Japanese views and analysis of Japanese pirates” in this section, the relevant content seems to be rarely covered, as stated in the Tong and Ma (2022) text, *A Mirror of Japan* is a very detailed account of Japan. Involves history, politics, territory, products, customs, culture, language and so on (CHARTIER, 1996, p. 1-9). Many of the contents are what Zheng Shun Gong saw and heard after his visit to Japan, which seems irrelevant to the topic. Not only that, the text also introduces the Japanese’s personalities, customs and habits themselves by citing Chinese literature and writings, such as the “Hanshu”, the “Sui Shu”, and the “Study of Writing”. Even if there is a discourse on Japanese pirates, the text also quotes the Chinese Yang Shouchen’s views on Japanese pirates.

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Received: 25/08/2022

Approved: 30/08/2022