

International Cultural Exchange

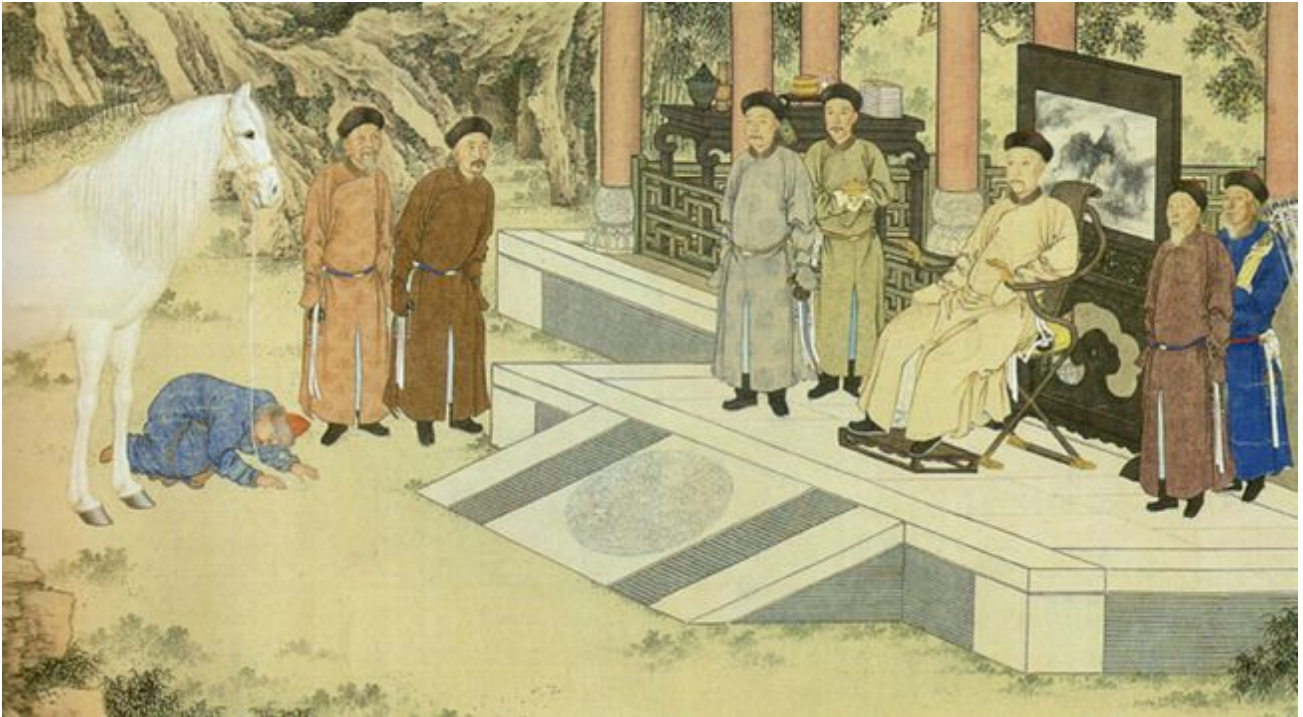
Yoshioka Norihiko

Cultural exchange took place long before imagined communities, which we now refer to as “nations,” were created. As seen in the former tributary system, however, cultural exchange has also been historically deeply related to power struggles across the world.

Today, international cultural exchange as a deliberate practice is oriented towards internationalism, with aims to contribute to world peace and advocate respect for cultural diversity. At the same time, it also continues to be exercised competitively as a way of pursuing “national” interest, based on the strategic concept in international politics of employing soft power, and is therefore frequently discussed within the context of power struggles even to this day.

As the world becomes increasingly divided, international cultural exchange tends to be debated and exercised against the simple binary of whether it should enhance international or national interest. In extreme cases, however, exchange in either direction can become exclusive or fundamentalist in nature, and result in the strengthening of relations only among certain groups of people. As the documentary film *The Social Dilemma* (2020) reveals, if our digital environment is systemized so as to further reinforce, with or without our awareness, our individual beliefs, values and tastes “at this point in time,” and as international cultural exchange begins to increasingly happen online and turn more virtual in this post-Covid world, it will become ever so difficult to deliver information about cross-cultural exchange—whether it be for the purpose of mutual understanding or exercising influence—to the places where we want it to happen most effectively, and encourage participation. We are at a point in history where we

have to reconsider how to prepare even for the “wrong delivery”— sending information out to the wrong destination and causing misinterpretation (a concept that Azuma Hiroki drew from Jacques Derrida)—and how to encourage participation from a diverse range of people.



Handscroll by Giuseppe Castiglione, S.J. (an Italian Qing dynasty court painter) depicting the Qianlong Emperor (1757) receiving white horses from Kyrgyz as tribute, in exchange for Qing silk and cotton.

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tributary_system_of_China#/media/File:Qianlong_Horse.jpg



Cultural facilities of various countries with offices in Bangkok (from left top, clockwise: The Japan Foundation, Goethe Institut, Korean Cultural Center, China Cultural Center)



Culture essentially cannot be ranked but is considered a source of soft power. The competitive power of each nation, therefore, is a topic of interest in soft power discourse and often appears in different forms of ranking.



Pratthana—A Portrait of Possession (2018-)

Photo: Sapanat Somkhanngoen

Organizer: The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Original novel by Uthis Haemamool, Script and Direction: Okada Toshiki

The performance, which premiered in Bangkok and traveled to Paris and Tokyo, was a ground-breaking international cultural exchange event, in which the participants sought ways not only to collaborate internationally in the making, but also to adopt a co-production style.

Related Links

- The Japan Foundation <https://www.jpff.go.jp>
- China Cultural Center <http://cn.cccweb.org>
- Korean Cultural Center <http://www.kocis.go.kr>
- Goethe Institut <https://www.goethe.de>
- British Council <https://www.britishcouncil.org>
- Alliance Française <https://www.institutfrancais.com>