In contrast to other contributions in this commemorative issue, this essay is much shorter. Admittedly, JESHO over the years has paid much less attention to East Asia than to the Middle East or India. In a way, this phenomenon may be ascribed to a number of trends that were already evolving at the time of JESHO’s inauguration. During the late 1950s, it became clear that the study of East Asian civilization in the West was following one of two paths. As China and Japan (and Korea, of course) became caught up in the harsh realities of the Cold War, students and scholars seemed forced to choose between two curricula: either examining these countries’ external relations in the 19th and 20th centuries, with the ultimate goals of uncovering the reasons for China’s “failure to modernize” (and its communist-led revolution), and in comparison, the conditions leading to Japan’s successful ‘modernization’;¹) or, remaining bound to, what we may call for lack of any better terminology, “traditional” Sinology and Japanology.

The first approach dominated what was taught in graduate schools in the United States, where in the post-war era rapidly-formed ‘area studies’ programs attempted to fuse language instruction with the study of social science subjects, including history.²) In the best of

¹) For a clear evaluation of the consequences of this approach in American academia, see the important study by Paul Cohen, Discovering History in China (New York, 1984).

²) This is not to say that the study of premodern China or Japan was totally neglected in the USA at that time. One thinks of the fine work by Arthur Wright,
these programs, such as that devised at Harvard University by John King Fairbank for China, and Edwin O. Reischauer for Japan, scholars and Ph.D. candidates were treated lavishly, with generous grants and excellent language training, and for graduate students, even teaching experience. In contrast, institutions of higher learning in post-war Europe continued to maintain the pre-war 'commentarial tradition' so that the study of texts, and their commentaries, remained the dominant mode of learning about the "East". But this situation was not without its critics. As the eminent French sinologist Étienne Balazs remarked in a JESHO article "The Birth of Capitalism in China" (1960), Sinology at the time had become nothing more than 'philological hair-splitting', a repository of private curiosities, preoccupied with external forms and unique events. Calling for a "new vision", Balazs challenged Chinese historians, who wanted to learn about Mao Tse-tung's communist victory, to re-examine China's past, and in particular, the role of capitalism in its early modern history, circa 1000 A.D.

The differences between these two scholarly communities, in the United States and Europe, in their approach to the study of East Asia is relevant to our history of JESHO. As an international journal, JESHO's own development reflected the shifting priorities of scholarship on East Asia. In the early 1960s American scholars were concentrating on themes relating to China's communist take-over and Japan's "Westernization and modernization", and published traditional types of historical narratives that stressed high politics, diplomacy and the lives and thoughts of 'great individuals'. Meanwhile, some European scholars were already following Balazs' appeal and rejecting what he had termed the 'stamp collectors' mentality', i.e. the preoccupation with the marginal or curious aspects of Chinese

Charles Hucker, and Herrlee Creel on China, and John Hall on Japan. Nevertheless, a large majority of publications that appeared on East Asia was preoccupied with the China-Japan comparison, either directly or indirectly.