WHERE DID THE ROADS MEET?1

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Introduction

The book under review, which is the revised text of two lectures delivered in Kyoto in 1993, raises several problems. It contains only a rather limited quantity of hard information, e.g. some references to depictions of silk reeling machines, some parts of the process of silk throwing in Europe, the self-crossing à la tavelle, and some good bibliographical information, which is discussed appropriately and within the historical context it deserves. But the rest, as we shall see, can hardly be considered as genuine research. There are too many misinterpretations. On the textual side, it is difficult to believe that the text was edited, because it is flawed by many printing errors and spelling mistakes. And there is no indication that the editor or author asked for permission to reproduce illustrations under copyright.

The two articles published in the book comprise altogether 94 pages: "Pre-modern European Silk Technology and East Asia. Who Imported What?" (pp. 1-69), a technological study; and “The European Quest for East Asian Sericultural Techniques: Matthieu Bonafous and the Translation of the Yôsan Hiroku 養蚕秘録 in 1848” (pp. 71-94), a bibliographical study. This review will focus on the main article, about silk technology. I shall concentrate on Prof. Zanier’s methodological approach and on his contribution to the subject as evidenced in this article. As it happens, Prof. Zanier has fiercely criticized some of the results I have reached in my own research. I think I can demonstrate that most of his criticism lacks substance and can be refuted, and


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hope that my corrections will help promote a better understanding of the matter under review.

_Was There an International Competition in Silk Technology between China and Europe?_

After a lengthy _Introduction_ mainly dealing with Pegoletti’s (14th century) notes on trade, the author describes the purpose of his lecture (p. 7): “What will be presented here is part of a longterm historical frame in which our researches in Pisa have been conducted for the past ten years mainly in order to reconstruct the history of the silk production cycle in Europe from early Renaissance [sic] period to our times, with comparison to developments that were taking place in other silk producing areas of the world, namely those in East Asia, where silk originated and where, in the end, it went back.” This sentence suggests Prof. Zanier’s west-centered approach to the subject, setting out from the western historical context and focusing on Europe. The general attitude of the author becomes obvious in the last part of the sentence: “where silk originated and where, in the end, it went back.” On the same page we find the sentence: “...raw silk appears to have been the first... of manufactured [sic] products in which East Asia has gained (should I say regained?) absolute world superiority” (p. 7). Does he really want to claim that silk disappeared from East Asia or had to regain its position there on the world market?

A few pages further on Prof. Zanier offers a more detailed description of the purpose of his paper (p. 9): “The core of my paper will deal with international competition in silk technology in pre-modern times (by which expression I mean here mainly the 17th and 18th century [sic]) and with transfers that might have occurred between the two leading silk production areas of the time: France and Italy on the one side and China on the other. Within the broader field of silk technology I will focus my attention on two specific production phases: _silk reeling...; and silk throwing..._.

Only in the following sub-chapter, “Silk reeling and silk throwing”, is the real concern stated more precisely. It is based “on the reasonable assumption that some technological exchange took place (most likely in 17th and 18th century [sic]) between Europe and East Asia. The points to be cleared are the extent of