

Introduction

The essays edited for this volume come from a conference held at the University of Latvia in Riga in late October 2008. Its title, “East Asian Culture in Western Perceptions from the 18th to the 21st Century”, suggests an interdependence limited by the subjective nature of human perception. In other words, it comprises all incoherencies ingrained with the process of perceiving and discerning cultural “otherness”. Beyond the surface of this concept, it might be assumed that the implied otherness is East Asia and the locus of perception the West. However, each of the essays published here proves that this relation is all but diametrical. In general, these essays equally involve reflections on cultural issues in, or related to, East Asia and the critique of Western approaches, which encourage the authors to develop their own approaches. Some emphasise that perception, even if bound to a Western language, is shared not only by Westerners. Some deal with concrete experiences, individual or collective narratives of voyages that can hardly be grasped in a global context of cultural geography, but rather call for new, albeit often futile, conceptions of a space beyond a centric model which always reveals a rather static conception of what is close to the subject (“west”-“here”) and what should be conceived of as distant (“east”-“there”). This motivated me to modify the title of this book from “Western perceptions” to “Western views”, from a way of understanding based on a strict subject-object dualism to a much more deliberate act of interpreting the world by making explicit one’s view on it – by generating one’s *weltanschauung* in an evolving move from time to time and from place to place. The interpretive act, once fully released, stimulates the search for a complex self by learning how to conceive of objective differences as a part of self-understanding.