Introduction
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I'm proud to introduce volume four of *Emory Endeavors in History*, with a special theme of transnational encounters in Asia. The articles here treat a wide range of topics, from early modern Korean musketeers to twentieth-century American journalists, but all of them touch on the ways that human beings have interacted across cultural boundaries, the fascinating dance of mutual suspicion and admiration that shaped and continues to shape world history. The authors agree that to understand our world today, we must be cognizant of our deep shared history of connection.

The volume opens with Ethan Carlson’s article “Power, Presents, and Persuasion: Early English Diplomacy with Mughal India.” In recent decades, historians have revised conceptions of European power in Asia, showing that the British, the French, the Dutch, etc., were less influential than had long been believed. Carlson, influenced by this historiography, asks how Europeans, who were relatively poor and weak compared to the Asian states they encountered, attempted to overcome their deficiencies and achieve their interests. Drawing on published accounts of British embassies to the powerful Mughal Empire, he describes three main strategies: power, presents, and theatrics. The last, he argues, turned out to be the most effective, although much depended on the ambassador himself.

Whereas Carlson focuses on diplomacy, Hyeokhweon Kang discusses war. His article “Big Heads and Buddhist Demons” makes a signal contribution to global military history. His starting point is the famous Military Revolution model made famous by historian Geoffrey Parker, who argues that Europe underwent a series of revolutionary developments in warfare in the 1500s and that these developments conferred a clear advantage on European forces vis-à-vis non-European forces. One of the most important of these developments was the invention and effective deployment of powerful muskets. Hyeok’s article shows that, contrary to expectations, Korean armies also fielded powerful muskets and deployed them with tactics quite similar (although not identical) to Europeans. As a result, a Korean musketry force was able to help achieve decisive victories over Russian contingents in two important but little-studied battles in 1654 and 1658. By using Korean sources, he provides new perspectives on these battles, and his work suggests that our understanding of global military history will be revolutionized by a deeper understanding of Asian military history.

While Koreans were shooting at Russians, European Jesuits were struggling to adapt to changing circumstances in China, and Hui Li’s article examines the strategies they adopted and the challenges they faced. The challenges were many. China’s traditional culture was deep and powerful, wielded by literati who were deeply inculcated in Confucian classics and understandably unimpressed by odd doctrines from the other side of the world. Yet the Jesuits arrived in China at a time of tumult, and Hui shows how the Jesuits took advantage of a favorable situation. “The fortuitous arrival of the Europeans at a time of political and social instability in China,” she writes, “…led the Chinese scholar-officials to seek answers in other available religions.” Jesuits did not succeed as much as they had hoped, failing to convert a Chinese emperor or even large numbers of gentry, but by adapting themselves to China’s culture, they did have a significant impact by introducing western scientific, mathematical, and artistic culture to China. Yet Hui shows that this focus on Jesuit
achievements might itself be an answer to the wrong question. The better question, she suggests, is what did the Chinese want from western culture? Her answer is straightforward and compelling: the Chinese wanted useful knowledge. In times of trouble Chinese felt they had much to learn. But as China settled into a Manchú Pax in the eighteenth century and its Manchu leaders sought to stabilize China via a reassertion of the traditional Confucian orthodoxy, interest in western knowledge waned.

It wasn’t until the nineteenth century that Chinese literati once again became attentive to western knowledge on a significant scale, and Daniel Cone’s intriguing essay examines the event that catalyzed this new interest: the Opium War. Cone’s argument is straightforwardly revisionistic. Whereas most scholarship suggests that Britain won the war because of superior technology, Cone sees things differently. “I contend,” he writes, that “it was the incompetency of Qing officials, not the superiority of European warfare, that caused the Qing Dynasty to capitulate.” Qing armies had atrophied by the middle of the nineteenth century, after generations without significant foreign wars. Moreover, the Qing underestimated the power of the British, failing to make proper preparations. Cone makes a compelling case that with a better strategy the Qing could have won the war.

Just as Cone adopts a revisionistic perspective on Qing warfare, Ruchir Patel introduces us to a revisionistic interpretation of 19th-century China’s foreign relations, showing that the Qing Dynasty was much more adaptable and effective in mediating foreign threats and gathering diplomatic information than had long been believed. The Qing adapted rapidly to geopolitical changes, gathering information about western imperial powers, mimicking European indirect imperialism, especially in Korea, and, of course, creating the famous Zongli Yamen, or Foreign Affairs Office. Scholars have increasingly recognized the flexibility of the late Qing state, and Patel’s article explores some of the exciting new discoveries that up-and-coming young scholars have made in their recent Ph.D. dissertations.

Of course, the Qing did end up falling, and one of the men who did his best to hasten its demise was the revolutionary nationalist leader Sun Yat Sen. Sophie Chia’s intriguing article compares Sun to another transitional figure, the famous writer Liang Qiqiao. Why, she asks, did Sun’s nationalism succeed in attracting so many adherents whereas Liang’s ideologies retained only a niche market, as it were? On the surface, one might expect Liang to leave a more lasting legacy. He certainly seemed more favored from the outset, adorned with degrees and honors. Yet it was perhaps Sun’s own feelings of exclusion from China’s powerful and educated elite that led him to adopt a revolutionary ideology that was clear, biting, and popular. Whereas Liang sought nuance, thought in terms of evolution, believed that China’s traditional culture and institutions should be brought gently and slowly into the modern world, Sun argued for immediate revolution. This message resonated, whereas Liang’s work, although read and respected by China’s educated classes, didn’t have the broader impact of Sun’s work. Jia’s persuasive article gives us an entrée into the minds and lives of these two fascinating men.

Sun Yat Sen’s revolution led to the establishment of the Republic of China, which, after a tumultuous beginning, eventually settled into a brief period of stability starting in the late 1920s. Sun’s successor, Chiang Kai Shek, presided over a decade of remarkable growth and cultural change from his capital in Nanjing, yet Chiang’s policies were not all successful or
popular. His infamous New Life Movement is the subject of Jeffrey Shiau’s article. The New Life Movement was meant to develop a new Chinese national consciousness in order to combat a host of perceived ills, including citizen’s disaffection from the regime, licentiousness, official corruption, and extravagant opulence among the wealthy. The movement failed to take root, however, and Shiau asks why. His answer is that the New Life Movement, which was ostensibly a populist movement, was in actuality neither populist nor a movement. It was a series of top-down propaganda efforts, which failed because they didn’t resonate among the populace. It’s a conclusion that in a way mirrors Sophie Jia’s argument about Liang Qichao’s lack of popular resonance.

While Chiang was trying to mold people’s behavior, his rival for the soul of China – Mao Zedong – was bivouacked in dry and remote Shaanxi Province. In those days – the 1930s – Mao and his comrades seemed unlikely unifiers of China. They were diplomatically isolated, short of funds, arms, and resources. Rui Zhong’s clever and persuasive article takes into account this context to examine how western journalists were received in the communist base. Her nuanced reading of sources from both sides – Chinese and western – show two different perceptions of the visits. The communists received the journalists almost as foreign envoys, an odd refraction of China’s traditional tribute mission. The journalists, for their part, saw themselves as either fellow travelers, seeking to portray the communists favorably in the west, or as ethnographers, helping to explain China to western readers. It’s a wonderful article, sensitive to the complexities of intercultural history.

Today’s China is deeply engaged and integrated with the wider world, but so many of today’s relationships have deep historical roots. The articles in this volume will provide insight to anyone wishing to understand China today.