Changing Chinese Attitudes toward the Study of Japan: A Historical Perspective

Tao De-min
Professor, Kansai University

James Baxter: Let's begin. I'd like to welcome you to the 46th in our series of Nichibunken Evening Seminars. This is a series that Professor Kimura has long been responsible for, and this year we're using this forum to compare and contrast Japanese studies in different countries. We've already talked about Japanese studies in the United States, Japanese studies in Germany, Japanese studies in Russia, and Japanese studies in France. This evening we're very pleased to be able to talk about China. We have two people to present to us, two distinguished scholars, one from within Nichibunken, one from Kansai University. Professor Yang Xiao-Jie, who is a visiting scholar at Nichibunken this year, is on his way back from a trip to China but hasn't returned to the Center yet, so we're going to go ahead without him. Our guest from Kansai University, Tao Demin, will start us off with a discussion of changing Chinese attitudes toward Japanese studies in China, drawing from his personal experience. I will say only a little about his background, because he's going to tell you about his own life and I don't want to make him repeat, but you should know that he has a very broad background. He began his life and work in China, of course, and then came to Japan to study in Osaka, and then went to the United States, I guess initially as a Postdoctoral Fellow, then as a faculty member in a college in Massachusetts. Three years ago Prof. Tao returned to Japan and took his present position at Kansai University. Prof. Tao, we're delighted to have you with us and we look forward to hearing your story and your analysis of Japanese studies in China.

Demin Tao:

It is an honor to be a speaker here at Nichibunken. However, I'm afraid my English is deteriorating, as I have been teaching in Japanese at Kansai University in recent years, so please bear with me (laughs). Today I'm

going to talk about the changing Chinese attitudes toward the study of Japan from my personal experience as well as from the broad Chinese context.

First I would like to introduce myself. I was born in 1951 in Shanghai's Hongkou district. Before the war, the Hongkou district was a sort of Japanese concession, but I wasn't aware of that fact until I reached my teens. The district is well known because there is a nice memorial park dedicated to the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), who lived his last ten years in the district. Japanese audiences might be interested in the fact that Lu had studied in Japan in the late Meiji period, when he was a young student. There is also a Korean school in Hongkou. So it is rather an internationalized area.

Although there were no official relations between Japan and the People's Republic on the mainland, there were non-official contacts and trade relations between the two countries. My earliest memory about Japan involves some plastic toys made in Japan. I remember it was around 1956, when I was a five-year-old boy, that my mother attended a Japanese industrial exhibition held at Shanghai's Sino-Soviet Friendship Hall. She bought a plastic ball and so forth. Plastic was then a sort of new material, so the beautiful ball attracted me very much.

In 1964 I became a junior high pupil. The school I attended was a key high school attached to Eastern China Normal University. Located in the same Hongkou district, its campus was originally a Japanese school compound. Sometimes, I saw the principal accompanying a few old Japanese visitors. They walked around the campus, trying to identify some old buildings and facilities.

Around 1965, a number of films were produced in China to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War II, or the victory in the anti-Japanese and anti-fascist wars. After viewing a film called "Fighting in the Tunnels" in a nearby cinema, we were asked by our Chinese language teacher to write reflections on it. I liked writing and wrote this time a fairly good piece, which began with a Chinese idiom called "Jingxin dongpo," meaning that my "heart and soul were astonished" by the film. The teacher was an excellent instructor and had once showed a model class (which was with my class) to over 200 teachers in her profession. Because

she read the opening paragraph of my essay aloud to my classmates as a way of recognition, I was very proud of myself then.

One of my classmates was a good friend of mine. His father was a prominent engineer who had a chance to visit Japan and brought back a portable transistor set. Because I had liked radios from my childhood and had experience of making a crystal set myself with the help of my father, this Japan-made transistor radio, highly neat and portable, was very impressive to me, showing an example of the advanced Japanese technology. But when I tried to look inside it, my classmate warned me. He said his father had told him that if you try to disassemble it, it will break immediately," because the Japanese want to keep the secrets of making this sort of exquisite products (laughs).

The personal incidents I have just mentioned show that there were various non-official Sino-Japanese contacts in the 1950's and 1960's. In September 1972 the PRC and Japan restored official relations, following U.S. President Nixon's surprise visit to China, and the Shanghai Broadcasting Company quickly started a radio course on Japanese language. I was then working at a state farm on Shanghai's suburban island, because China was in the midst of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" and Mao Zedong's policy was to "reeducate" the untrustworthy intellectuals and students by sending them to the countryside. Following the radio course I began my Japanese learning. I remember some texts were very political, including such slogans as "Mo shuseki banzai" (Long live Chairman Mao) and so forth. But after all I got a chance to master a-i-u-e-o, the basics in Japanese language, in that difficult time and place.

Shortly after my job transfer to the Shanghai Youth's Palace Library, Shanghai became a sister city of Yokohama (in November 1973) and Osaka (in April 1974). Many Japanese visitors came, and the Youth's Palace located in the city center was one of the big attractions to them. Those groups came by airplanes used the group name of "Yuko no Tsubasa" (Wings of Friendship), and those by ships used the name of "Yuko no Fune" (Friendship Boat). So I had some chances to talk with the Japanese directly.

After the Cultural Revolution, I was able to receive my college education, and then worked as an assistant researcher at the History Institute of

Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Through "buntsu" (exchanging letters) arranged by the "Chugoku ni hon o okuru kai" (a private Japanese organization for sending used and new Japanese books to China to enhance mutual understanding), I got to know a Japanese gentleman called Masaki Yutaka living in Kawasaki City. Knowing that I was interested in Japanese history, he kindly sent me a dictionary and a bibliographical guidebook. However, when I told my section head at the institute that I had a Japanese pen friend, he warned me, saying that "be careful, do you know his real background?" You can see from this that China opened its door gradually, with caution, to the outside world. That Japanese organization also held a contest on writing essays in Japanese, and my piece won the "Fukutake prize." Fukutake Tadashi (1917-89) was a leading Japanese sociologist who had taught for thirty years at Tokyo University and served then as an advisor to the organization. The prize included his two books on sociology with his own signatures, which was nice.

In 1982, I got into the graduate school of Fudan University for advanced training. My advisor Wu Jie (1918-1996) was a prominent Japanologist and economic historian in China who had studied at Kyoto Imperial University and Tokyo Imperial University during the wartime. He held the history seminars in Japanese and introduced details of the Japanese academic world. So I got to know something about the Todai school and the Kyodai school, as well as the Kozaha and the Ronoha, even before my initial visit to Japan.

My wife was then selected for further training and enrolled in the graduate school of Osaka University after finishing a one-year training course at the so-called "Ohira Gakko," the center for training China's collegiate Japanese teachers in Beijing set up by the Japan Foundation based on the agreement signed by the Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi and the Chinese government in late 1979. For collecting materials for my master's thesis on Anglo-Japanese relations and also in order to join my wife, I came to Japan for the first time as an exchange graduate student at Kansai University in late 1984. Guided by Professor Oba Osamu, I made use of the fine collections at the university. At the same time I contacted Professor Wakita Osamu at Osaka University for possible doctoral study with him. He promised that if my master's thesis were good, he would then consider accepting me as a Monbusho scholarship student. Fortunately my dream

came true in spring 1986. After 4 years of efforts, I published several articles in the major journals in my field and completed my dissertation entitled Kaitokudo Shushigaku no kenkyu (A Study of the Kaitokudo Neo-Confucianism), which later was published by the university's newly established press in 1994.

During my years at Osaka University, I participated in an international symposium on Tokugawa intellectual history and was in the same panel on the Kaitokudo with Tetsuo Najita, Professor at Chicago University who later served as the president of the AAS. Knowing my wish to understand the status of Japan studies in the United States, he kindly arranged a lecture tour for me in fall 1988 to visit a number of leading American universities, including the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford, Chicago, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Cornell, Princeton, Columbia, Yale, and Harvard (because of the tight schedule, I was not able to give the same talk at Stanford and Yale, but I had pleasant conversations with professors there). It was before the Tian'anmen incident of June 1989, and I could clearly see during my travel from west coast to east coast that American scholars were listening to my introduction of the current status of Japan studies in China in the eager hope of getting hints about where China was heading. I was fortunate to get to know Professor Marius Jansen then, and he later invited me to be a visiting scholar at Princeton in 1990. Professor Jansen and Professor Martin Collcutt then recommended me to Harvard as a postdoctoral fellow at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies. In 1992, I got a tenure-track position at Bridgewater State College in southeastern Massachusetts, which is about 30 miles away from Boston. Its predecessor was one of the oldest normal schools in the US, where Izawa Shuji (1851-1917), the father of modern Japan's normal education and music education, had studied for two years in the mid-1870's as a government-sponsored student. I taught courses in East Asian history and Western civilizations for about four years there and then transferred to Kansai University here in Japan.

I think my personal experience in some ways revealed the gradual development of the Sino-Japanese relations in the post-war period. Now let me move to the second part of my talk, which I call "Ambivalence and complexity: popular and scholarly attitudes toward Japan."

First I would like to introduce the popular Chinese perception of Japan.

There was a December 1996 poll conducted by the Chinese Youth's Development Foundation and the "Chinese Youth's Daily" newspaper office. 15,000 fully valid questionnaires were selected out of 100,000 received. The respondents were from almost all nationalities and provinces in China, and their average age was about 25 years old. When asked "what does the word Japan suggest to you?" 51% replied "cherry blossom," 58% said "Bushido," 47% "Mt. Fuji", and 6% "Oshin." (Audience laughs) Yeah, there was "Yaohan," too. Then 17% responded by identifying "Yamaguchi Momoe," 49% by "electronic products," 45% by "Atom Bomb on Hiroshima," and 81% by "Sino-Japanese War," 13% by "Aum Shinrikyo and Chikatetsu sarin jiken," 84% by the "Nanking massacre," 36% by "solidarity and diligence of Japanese," 6% by "Kawabata Yasunari" and 15% by "Tanaka Kakuei." So you can see here a sort of ambivalence and complexity in the responses.

To the question of "From what countries and regions has Japan received cultural influence?" 44% answered "America," 29% "Europe," and 91% "China," 9% "Korea," and 11% "Southeast Asia." When asked "What should we learn from Japan?" 88% responded by "business management," 89% by "science and technology," 54% by "national identity and consciousness," 90% by "diligence and devotion," 5% by "strict boss-follower relations," only 2% by "the political institutions." So, you can infer what is the average Chinese perception of Japan. They think they should study Japan's technology and business management, but not its culture as a whole.

Incidentally I would like to mention the latest issue of the "Ryugakusei shinbun" a newspaper for Chinese students in Japan. This is a bi-monthly, and here is the February 1 issue. On the one hand, there is a report about a rapid increase of Chinese students in Japan. The total foreign students in Japan now is around 55,000, about half of which are from China. The number from China has exceeded South Korea and Taiwan. But on the other hand, there is a report warning that "It's no longer peaceful at Osaka Center for International Peace," because this public facility was permitted to be used by the Japanese right-wing groups to hold a conference at which they claimed that the greatest lie of the 20th century is "the so-called 'Nanking massacre.'" But the conference was protested by several Japanese and Chinese groups in the country. So, you can see that Chinese students

want to come to Japan to study, but sometimes they have to face such sensitive history problems.

The next point I want to make is some problems in the academic world. First problem is the Eurocentrism and Americentrism. The Chinese basically tend to worship the West and Western civilization. Although Japan has successfully taken in Western culture and technology, most Chinese think it was only a watered down version, but not a genuine one. Therefore, they consider that learning from Japan is just a short-cut to learn from the West, but never take Japan seriously. For example, there is such an organization in Shanghai called "The Japan Chapter of the Association of Returned Students from Europe and America." Why "Japan Chapter"? That's very strange, right? "Ou-Mei tongxuehui Riben fenhui" (writes on the board), this is Europe, America, and this is Japan, OK ... "Ou-Mei tongxuehui Riben fenhui" (keeps writing on the board, audience laughs) Why are students returned from Japan treated as part of the students return from Europe and America? It's incredible. So you can see the point I just made, the Chinese think the Western Civilization is a genuine one and modern Japanese civilization is just a watered-down version.

The second problem is rather a sort of old fashioned or out of date Sinocentrism. The 1996 poll has showed that most Chinese thought that Japan received heavy cultural influence from China. And some Chinese scholars tend to liken Japan to a container: in ancient times Chinese stuff was put in; in modern times the European and American stuff was put in. They never realize Japan's originality and its own value. This sort of problem is also revealed by an old phrase called "dobun doshu," meaning the same race and same writing system shared by China and Japan (writing). The same writing systems means the kanji system. Even kana also derived from the parts of Chinese characters, right? So they don't pay much attention to understanding Japan's originality and characteristics, only trying to figure out the similarities and to identify the Japanese way of copying the ancient Chinese culture. That's the sort of old-fashioned Sinocentrism.

The third problem is the official ideology. Here I mean Marxism-Leninism and other dogmas which also influenced the Chinese attitudes toward Japan.

However in the scholarly world there have been changes in the approaches toward Japan. Here I mainly use the examples I personally

know, and especially those from Shanghai. First I want to mention the earliest departure from the official ideology, which was the recognition of the high growth of postwar Japanese economy in the early 1960s in China. In East Asian region, the early 1960s was a very difficult time in terms of the Cold War tension between China and Taiwan, and also between China and Japan. Most scholars then were using Leninist theory on imperialism to analyze Japanese economy and politics. But Professor Jiang Zehong at Fudan University published an article in 1962 in the "Journal of Economic Studies" that recognized the high growth rate of the postwar Japanese economy. Japan had just started take-off then, and the doubling-of-income plan was fulfilled some eight years later, around 1970. Right at this starting point of the take-off, Jiang was already aware of it. But the more important thing here was that his article, although doubted and criticized by some conservative scholars and editors, was supported by Premier Zhou Enlai as well as Liao Chengzhi who was in the charge of Japan affairs. And that was why Jiang was able to publish his article openly. There was at this time a sort of division even at the highest level of Chinese government, and such leaders as Mao Zedong were still in the grips of a revolutionary fever; but leaders like Zhou Enlai and Liao Chengzhi began to open their eyes to the West and to neighboring Japan.

Second, again in Shanghai in the early 1960s, Huang Yifeng and Jiang Duo published an article making comparisons between the Meiji Restoration and the Chinese self-strengthening movement in the late Qing, and recognized the successful experience of Meiji Japan's modernization programs. Recognizing Japan's Meiji Restoration was not something new. The late-Qing reformers including Emperor Guangxu already took Japan as an example for the Hundred-Day Reform of 1898, and Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the 1911 revolution and founder of the Republic of China, also stated from a broad East Asian perspective and held that the Japanese revolution was the first step of the Chinese revolution, and the Chinese revolution was the second step of the Japanese revolution. But it was not easy for Huang and Jiang to maintain such a view in the political context of the early 1960s. Here I would like to mention a leader's name called Hu Yaobang, who lost his position before the Tian'anmen incident. Hu praised an essay written by Yoshida Shigeru for the 1967 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on the occasion of the hundred anniversary of the

Meiji Restoration, entitled "Japan's decisive Century" (Nihon o ketteishita hyakunen). As the party's general secretary, Hu showed his attention to Japan's modern experience and his enthusiasm in modernizing China by recognizing Yoshida's essay.

Third, a conference I personally attended in Zhengzhou in 1983 was important. The conference theme was the modernization experience of the major western powers. Professor Luo Rongqu at Beijing University introduced the development of the modernization theories in the United States, and I made a presentation surveying its spread in Japan and other western nations. But right before the conference, the conservative CCP leaders launched a political campaign to "clean the spiritual pollution from the West." I remember we were able to have open-minded discussions on the first day. But when the secret news arrived at the conference hotel, from the second day, people began to be close-mouthed on the sensitive issues in order to avoid trouble. Otherwise, you were likely, you know, to be charged. So it hasn't been easy to look at things Western objectively at all times in China. Sometimes the progressive leaders would encourage you to do so, but sometimes the conservative leaders would stop you from doing that.

Next, I'd like to talk about some efforts made by Chinese scholars to discover the originality and merits of Japanese culture. I think it is possible to characterize their attitude as "free from Sino-centric or Euramerican-centric views."

I guess I should divide the Chinese scholars into two groups of the senior scholars and the junior scholars. The senior scholars' contributions are mainly in the history of Sino-Japanese relations, and they were trying to take a more balanced view of that history. Because ancient Chinese historians had recorded the early Japanese history in the histories of Han and Wei and so forth, contemporary Chinese scholars are still benefiting from these source materials. This is also because they have solid reading knowledge that prepares them to handle the materials. But the important change has been that they not only look at the early Japanese history from the traditional viewpoint of the tributary system, but they are also trying to look at it from the viewpoint of cultural and economic interchanges. For example, Professor Wang Zhongshu offered an influential hypothesis on the puzzles of the location of Yamatai-koku and the producers of "the hundred

bronze mirrors" with the name of a Chinese era. Professor Hu Xinian made a good point concerning the political sense and cultural talents of the kentoshi, the Japanese envoys and student monks to the Tang China. Professor Ren Hongzhang discovered some indirect but interesting relations between the Emperor Kangxi of the Qing dynasty and the Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune of the Edo period. Professor Tan Ruqian, originally at Chinese University of Hong Kong and now at Macalester College in Minnesota, compiled a comprehensive bibliography of Chinese translations of modern Japanese books and recently wrote an article arguing the Chinese indebtedness to modern Japanese culture. Professor Wang Xiangrong studied the Japanese teachers hired by the late Qing government, in Beijing as well as in local provinces, emphasizing their roles in China's modernization programs. And finally at National Taiwan University in Taipei, Professor Huang Junjie has organized several research projects on Japanese Confucianism, in which I am also involved.

I'm not going to give further details about these contributions. Rather I'd like to introduce a junior scholar who takes a postmodern approach to Sino-Japanese relations in the modern times. A graduate of Fudan University and a Ph.D. from Cornell, Lu Yan is now teaching at the University of New Hampshire. I met her in May 1999 at a workshop held at UC Santa Barbara, and was impressed by her paper. She made a comparison of Jiang Baili (1882-1938) and Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), two Chinese students in the late Meiji Japan. Jiang was awarded with a fine sword by the Meiji Emperor in recognition of his outstanding records at the Rikugun shihan gakko (The Military Cadet Academy). Zhou was a brother of the famous writer Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren's pen name), and he himself was also famous for his writings. I want to read some passages from her paper.

Lu wrote that while there were two "assessments [that] defined Japan's role differently, they seem to be built on similar assumptions. Both place Japan within a political narrative of Chinese nationalist revolution and Chinese modernization, thus Japan is perceived more objectively as either a medium or a place, or more subjectively as a willing benefactor in that process." What she was trying to do is to "test the limit of its scope and to venture into the possible realm beyond." She pointed out that "with a wide spectrum of that experience in mind, the essay focuses only on two cases:

the case of Jiang Baili, which in my view illustrates best one end of this spectrum that may be called a tightness antagonistic acculturation; and the case of Zhou Zuoren, which exemplifies the other end of the spectrum that may be called reciprocal acculturation." And finally she concluded that "both the cases of Jiang Baili and Zhou Zuoren, therefore, reaffirm and reject at once the argument of the existing scholarship. Indeed, Jiang Baili came to Japan with the goal of modernization, and became politicized there, and left Japan westernized. Yet the pattern of his thought and behavior differs little from that of a traditional loyal statesmen, therefore, culturally, it extends an existing mode rather than breaking from it."

"Zhou Zuoren came to Japan with a similar goal, but he was not politicized in the same way as Jiang or other radical revolutionaries, whose aim was cast at either replacing or strengthening the existing state power. He did not become westernized, either. But his seemingly retrogressive fascination with premodern Japanese literature originated from a more inclusive cosmopolitan spirit, which was potentially a powerful alternative to the narrowly focused, state-centered, and conflict-oriented nationalism. From Japan he returned with a firm conviction: beyond nations there is culture and humanity."

It was true that Zhou married a Japanese woman and loved Japanese food, clothes, and houses. But I'm not going to dwell on the food and clothes, rather I would like to touch Zhou's perception of Japanese houses as quoted by Lu. Zhou said, "I like the Japanese style house very much. It is not that I only like ancient stuff. . . . What I like is its usefulness that especially suits simple life." In his eyes the four-mat, yonjo or yojohan (laughs), furniture-less tatami room in a boarding house served all kinds of purpose with a short-legged small table for writing, which is the kotatsu, "the whole room became a big desk for paper and books." "It could be a spacious living-room to entertain six or seven guests and allow them to sit wherever they pleased." "There is no need for a sofa, because one can lie down right there when one is tired. It converted to a bedroom when bedding was taken out of the closet and laid out on the floor." On the contrast, a "Chinese apartment made one feel confined, as little space is left after bed, table, chairs, trunks and shelves are put in." These passages clearly showed Zhou's appreciation of the Japanese values and sensibility.

I would like to stop here and make some concluding remarks, or offer a very brief historical overview. China probably has the longest history of Japan studies in the world, because early Japanese history was recorded in China's dynastic histories. But generally speaking until the late 19th century Japan was considered a so-called "Eastern barbarian" state and the level of its civilization was perceived as not as high as contemporary China. Only a relative few open-minded writers and scholars were aware of the merits of Japanese people and their culture. For example, the famous Tang poet Li Bai (Li Po) valued his friendship with the talented Japanese student Abe no Nakamaro, and the famous Song scholar Ou Yangxiu praised the Japanese technology of making fine swords and Japan's role in preserving ancient Chinese books. During the Ming Dynasty, the Japanese pirates and Toyotomi Hideyoshi began to challenge the Chinese world order in the East Asian region, and China was greatly disturbed and shocked by these "troublemakers." Therefore some Chinese scholars began to take Japan seriously, and a number of books on Japan's history and culture were produced. During the two decades before the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95, China studied Japan as both a potential rival and a potential collaborator, because both countries then were trying to gain big-power status in order to survive in an increasingly imperialistic world in which the law of the jungle prevailed. As you know, contrary to the expectations of some Western observers, China lost its war with Japan. But this was not due to the significant difference in the number of battleships and cannons, rather it was because of its weakness in training of troops, poor coordination among regional military leaders, and inferiority of its network of military and political intelligence. After the war China came to a new appreciation of Japan's success in modernization and sent hundreds of students to Japan for westernized training and preparation to adopt Japanized western legal and educational systems. But unfortunately Sino-Japanese relations got worse again after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and finally another war was fought, mainly because of Japan's unceasing expansion on continental China and the rise of Chinese nationalism and American influence in China. When China became a republic rather than a Japanese-style enlightened monarchy in 1912, the republican form of government symbolized China's departure from the Japanese model, and it was a big shock to Japan. Partly because of China's disorder, for about two decades after the

founding of the Chuka Minkoku (Republic of China), Japan refused to use this official Chinese name in its diplomatic documents, and instead called China the Shina Kyowakoku as a way of denying its full legitimacy. The increased American influence in the Chinese government that was a byproduct of the return of Chinese students from the United States—symbolized by the political marriage between the Japan-trained nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and the Wellesley graduate Song Mei-ling in 1928 at a turning point of Chiang's unification and modernization programs—also made Japan feel uneasy about its share in China. (Song's father was a Christian missionary. Her brother Song Zi-wen, a graduate of Harvard and a Ph.D. from Columbia, was for years the Financial Minister. During WWII he was China's Foreign Minister based in the US and played a key role with first lady Song Mei-ling in lobbying President Roosevelt to support China. For Chiang Kai-shek, getting married to Song Mei-ling and making the connection with her family was so desirable that he even agreed to be converted to Christianity.) A series of conflicts from the "Twenty-one Demands" of 1915 to the "Manchuria Incident" in 1931 finally led to the second Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45, and Chinese studies of Japan in this period were predominantly studies of the enemy, except such cultural studies done by Zhou Zuoren, Dai Jitao and others based on their personal experiences. And this situation was going to last until the 1960's as consequences of the influence of the Cold War. I've already mentioned the major changes and gradual developments since then. It is my sincere hope that China's study of Japan in the 21st century as a whole will follow these changes and developments to become a meaningful study of a partner as well as a competitor in a positive sense.