

## A TRIBUTE: YANAGIDA SETSUKO

Yanagida Setsuko, a major figure in Song studies for the last half-century, passed away of pneumonia in a Tokyo hospital on July 9, 2006. Well-known for her influential publications on rural society and local history during the Song, she made major contributions to the study of Chinese land tenure and women's history in essays and books that influenced the study of China throughout the world. Demanding on work done by her peers, her teachers, and especially herself, she was unfailingly generous in the time and thoughtful advice she gave younger scholars. Since the 1970s Song scholars visiting Tokyo from China, the United States, and Europe would seek to contact her, as they increasingly came to appreciate her as a scholar and as a human being.

Yanagida Setsuko came to Chinese history relatively late, following a circuitous route that in hindsight seems to have been foreordained by personal and national tragedies. Born in Morioka, Japan in 1921, she was the second daughter and third child of a tightly knit family. Her father held teaching posts in a selection of Japanese cities over the next seven years, until he received an appointment in 1929 to teach philosophy at Taihoku Imperial University (present National Taiwan University). The next ten years of her life in Taipei she often spoke of with considerable happiness. She made friends with both Japanese and Taiwanese at the Japanese primary and secondary schools she attended, she excelled in her studies, and most of all she was happily immersed in her family's life. She would joke about the pleasure of playing net games with her brother Yōichi, the only son in the family, in her father's huge study room at the university; his students were few, and he enjoyed reading his books in the midst of their frolic.

But, as the 1930s wore on, "the China Incident" cast its shadow onto their lives. Her father's reservations about the war were sharply criticized by her school's arch-nationalist principal, and in 1938 with customary foresight he sent his wife and three daughters back to Kyoto. Although he continued to teach in Taipei until the spring of 1941, his son soon joined the rest of the family in Kyoto upon his entrance to Kyoto University, where he studied Chinese history under some celebrated pre-war and post-war Kyoto Sinologists like the young Miyazaki Ichisada (who in 1991 would hand her a term report written for him by her brother some fifty years earlier). In February 1942, three months after completing his graduation thesis on the history of eminent lineages in the Eastern Zhou dynasty, he was drafted into the army. Eight months later he was dead, the victim of a mindless traffic accident. The crowded army truck delivering him to a training ground in Chiba Prefecture carelessly raced around a curve and fell into a roadside ravine, killing him and another among the 23 passengers.

This tragedy affected her family and her own life profoundly. Her mother never fully recovered from the shock, and over the next decade and a half declined into inconsolable grief. Her father, a close disciple of the renowned Kyoto philosopher Nishida Kitarō in his university days, rejected Hegelianism for a committed socialism that had him form and lead various social and political associations to rid post-war Japan of militarism, injustice, and inequality. He edited selections from his son's final diary and distributed it to his friends. Even when half-conscious in the days before his death

four decades later, he still spoke of his son and the number of years since his death. And Professor Yanagida herself had lost her closest friend and confidante, her favorite partner in mountain climbing, and was now obliged to assume considerable responsibility at home looking after her father, her mother, and younger sister for the rest of their lives. Aware of so many Japanese men her brothers' age who had also died in the war, in later years she often wondered if, born instead as a boy, she would have shared their misfortune.

This sense of family responsibility, evident in the family shrine she retained when she moved from the rambling house they rented in Ōmiya to an apartment for herself and her sister in Wakō just outside of Tokyo, permeated her life thoroughly. Though tinged with sadness, it gave her a strength of heart that was equally evident in the opposition she expressed towards war and violence of any sort during the whole of her adult life. While she shared her country's grief over the nuclear horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she never forgot the far greater numbers of East Asians who had died at the hands of Japanese troops during the war. In 1989 she wrote that when NHK screened an image of the Japanese national flag to end its broadcasting for the day, she would instinctively switch off the TV. The Vietnam War in particular outraged her, as did some Japanese politicians' manipulation of the Yasukuni Shrine and its rites for the war dead. Any effort to link learning with a government's military strategy met a prompt dismissal, as when the Ford Foundation offered the Tōyō bunko considerable funds for Japanese research on Modern and Contemporary China Studies and aroused fierce criticism within Japan. She doubtless would have held such views regardless of her brother's fate, but his unnecessary death under these circumstances gave her a capacity to empathize that on these matters turned her beliefs into convictions.

Only in 1947, at the age of 26, did she enter college, first at Tsuda College for Women, a private school on the western outskirts of Tokyo well-known for the teaching of English. Three years later, upon graduation, she entered the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Letters, the first woman admitted to this bastion of male learning (and the third to enter the University as a whole). Drawn to Chinese history by her experiences in Taiwan and perhaps by her wish to complete her brother's studies, she soon made rapid advances in her study of both literary Chinese and Chinese history. In addition to instruction from a galaxy of famous teachers like Sutō Yoshiyuki, Niida Noboru, Nishijima Sadao, and Yamamoto Taturō, she also had the good fortune to have as classmates some of the most learned and productive sinologists of her own generation. In particular, she remained close to Tanaka Masatoshi, Shigeta Atsushi, and Oyama Masaaki, all men, for the rest of their lives.

The early years of her academic career were marked by the strange discrepancy experienced by many professional women of her generation in Japan and elsewhere, between the high professional regard for her writings and the relatively low status of the teaching job actually allotted her. Initially, she held appointments as a research assistant at the University of Tokyo, at the Tōyō bunka kenkyūjō in 1958-60 and then at the Oriental History Department in the Faculty of Letters in 1962-64. When she finally could gain a full-time academic appointment in 1964 thanks to support from Yamamoto

Tatsurō, it was to Utsunomiya daigaku, a college for future high school teachers on the northern outskirts of Tokyo. A heavy teaching load, minimal administrative staffing in her department, and the demands of many students kept her very busy, and would have broken the will of many other aspiring scholars. Somehow, she found time to publish. More importantly, her publications continued to make lasting contributions to discussions on a wide range of issues then highly controversial in Japanese sinological circles.

In a series of path-breaking essays, written with exceptional clarity and command of the historical sources, she significantly modified the picture of Song rural life imparted by her teachers Sutō and Niida. Whereas they continued to see the Song as a period when a manorial system predominated throughout China, binding tenant-cultivators to their landlords' soil and imposing on them a wide range of burdensome labor duties and other charges, she saw significant regional variations in land tenure practices. Her teachers' view she found to be applicable to the upper Yangzi Valley, but not to the lower Yangzi delta where tiny parcels of land were cultivated by un-bound tenants with few if any obligations to their masters other than the payment of an annual grain rent. Moreover, she quickly showed that the rural population, as evident in Song statistical and literary records, consisted overwhelmingly of peasant households owning a small amount of land and thus obliged to find other sources of income inside and outside of agriculture in order to support themselves. That said, she refused to side with her teachers' critics in Kyoto University, as she found their view of the Song economy and society far too impressionistic and optimistic. In the late 1960s and early 1970s she continued to produce detailed studies of rural life, but from an expanded view of village life. Her research took in issues of irrigation, taxation, sericulture production, the household register system, the role of powerful local families without official degrees, and the adaptation of government-established organizations of rural control to village realities.

She was particularly interested in the interaction between agents of the imperial government and the large number of ordinary peasant households that relied on their own land and perhaps tenancies to eke out a subsistence living in both south and north China. She read widely, and not just to gather materials for her latest research topic. When writing, she repeatedly demonstrated a close reading of the sources, careful analysis, and hard thinking. Her problematique and conceptual framework for this research were shaped early on by her teachers and by her reading of her own generation's writings on both Chinese and Japanese history. While recognizing crucial differences between China and Japan, she accepted the somewhat formalistic notions of state and social organizations current in much post-war Japanese scholarship. Not a Marxist, she largely avoided the jargon that plagued the writings of many scholars of her generation, and in doing so, she kept her eyes continually on the lives of ordinary farmers. As a result, much of her work has survived the critical judgment of the next two generations of Song scholars in Japan.

In addition, she wrote enlightening reviews of Japanese and Chinese research with at times a piercing acuity that must have furrowed the brows of more than a few of her elders and peers. Her criticism was almost always academic, even not hesitating to show the inadequacies of her own teachers' analysis as well as an earlier view of her own. At

the same time, she did not hesitate to point out instances of arrogance, as when she criticized in print the prolific scholar of Tang history Hino Kaisaburō for telling Professor Deng Guangming of Peking University that China should honor him for his lifetime study of its history. That, Yanagida retorted in an article on Japanese-Chinese misunderstandings, made her feel deep shame.

The mid-1970s then saw an important change in the focus of her research and in her academic reputation. Recognized inside and outside of Japan for being the major scholar that she was, she was appointed Professor of Chinese History at Gakushūin University in Tokyo in 1976. Holding this post until retirement in 1992, she hosted an increasing number of foreign students and scholars anxious to consult with her. She presented papers at international conferences in Paris and the United States and was asked to teach as Visiting Professor at a major American research university (she declined principally for family reasons). During the 1980s and early 1990s she made overseas trips for conferences and field research six times to China, once to South Korea, once to Taiwan, and once to the US. More comfortable in English than most of her Japanese colleagues, she was often invited back and had to turn down the offers due to her family and teaching responsibilities.

During these years she combined her interest in rural China and especially land tenure, with the budding study of Chinese women's history. The issue of women's property rights during the Song dynasty had exercised her teachers' generation, with Niida arguing strongly for their existence at least in south China against the claims of his colleague Shiga Shuzō in the Faculty of Law at Tokyo University and against many other Japanese sinologists who thought the traditional Chinese family was far too "patriarchal" to allow for such rights. Yanagida's research led her in this instance to support Niida's view, and especially when the late Ming edition of the *Qingming ji* was published, she found much further evidence to support her earlier argument. In 1977 she joined several other women scholars to form a research group for the study of Chinese women's history. In fact, her publications in the 1980s and 1990s saw her develop a wider analysis of the claims that Song women had on landownership, and not just through dowries or inheritance. She several times mentioned to me that her views on this issue were in part prompted by her observations in youth and later of the admirable strength of Chinese women, especially wives.

It was through these later writings that she attracted attention from a younger generation of Japanese women historians. They knew of her academic accomplishments and sharp mind but were somewhat unprepared for the warmth of the welcome they received when they approached her about their research. Though few of them shared her interest in Chinese history and even fewer in Song China, these differences mattered little, when it came to helping them find ways to improve their studies and launch their academic careers. She seems to have instinctively understood the obstacles that stood in their way to gaining a full-time academic appointment. So she found them space at Gakushūin to run regular seminars and discuss their research, she introduced them to major male scholars of her generation, and she always found the time to encourage them in their work. She did not stretch her own research interests into the newer dimensions of

women's studies, but was untiring in her support for those women engaged in this research. She did so, in order to help them enjoy greater academic success than had been possible for her in the Japan of her youth. In gratitude, they put together *Chūgoku no dentō shakai to kazoku* (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1993), a fine festschrift in her honor with 35 contributions from Japan, the US, and Britain.

To many Japanese men in her youth, her academic accomplishments and intellectual rigor were somewhat daunting, so much so that some confessed to find the clarity and directness of her writings and speech unnerving. Yet, at Utsunomiya daigaku faculty meetings her colleagues, all male, would all pay close attention to her interjections out of the belief that they had something to learn from her. As many admitted when they got to know her, she was a remarkably warm human being. Beneath a natural reserve that she wore with grace, she was happy to be happy. She usually refrained from talking about herself unless asked, but she did not hesitate to share her pleasures. She sang both traditional and contemporary popular songs, adored cats, liked to watch baseball and golf, collected Japanese dolls, loved sashimi and Kyoto pickles, and enjoyed her bottle of beer. Frugal all her life, she gave regular donations to Japanese charities, including one that supports education for Chinese orphans. Typically, her friends learned of her charity only when its recipients mentioned it at her memorial service last September at Gakushūin.

During the first years of her retirement her research showed no signs of abating, and she continued to write some important studies on women's property. But, the last decade brought its toll of physical problems, especially the rheumatism that afflicted her hands, and her younger sister's death greatly saddened her. In and out of hospital the past few years, she confided to me in September 2006 that she had thought she might die earlier that year when her health had suddenly deteriorated. She pulled through, however, only to need further hospitalization in the spring of 2007. Recovering, she returned home and then unexpectedly caught pneumonia and passed away suddenly back in hospital. The many who knew her will miss her sharp wit, the smiling eyes, the pensive turn of her head, the depth of her learning, and the breadth of her humanity. She taught as few teachers do, to the heart, to the mind, and to the spirit.

#### Principal Works

宋元郷村制度の研究 (創文社, 1986)  
 わだつみの世代を生きて (創文社, 1992)  
 宋元社会経済史研究 (創文社, 1995)  
 宋代庶民の女たち (汲古書院, 2003)

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