

In Memory of the Late Professor Tanaka Masatoshi

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Tanaka Masatoshi 田中正俊, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo, passed away on 4 November 2002 just before his eightieth birthday. He was known not only for his academic contributions to the field of Chinese history, but also for his deep concern about the social responsibilities of scholars. His achievements in Chinese historiography, in spite of their highly academic character based on laborious empirical research, were inseparable from this moral concern rooted in his wartime experiences.

Professor Tanaka was born on 14 November 1922 in Tainan, where his father was teaching at a normal school, and he spent his early childhood in Taiwan under Japanese rule. According to his reminiscences, he already cherished an aspiration to serve as a bridge between Japan and China when he entered the First Higher School in Tokyo in 1941. A literary-minded youth, he was deeply interested in Eastern and Western classical literature as well as music and art. Shortly after he entered the Department of Oriental History at the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1943, he was conscripted for military service and had to leave the campus. He experienced the calamity of war in the Philippines and Taiwan during the final stages of Japan's desperate struggle. He returned to Japan in early 1946, six months after Japan's defeat, and resumed his studies at the University of Tokyo in 1947.

In the late 1940s, a new current of research in Chinese socio-economic history was developing rapidly in Japan to replace the earlier "stagnation theory." Professor Tanaka, actively participating in this new trend, chose the development of the rural silk industry in Ming-Qing Jiangnan as the theme of his graduation thesis. In 1954, four years after his graduation, he began his career as a teacher at Yokohama Municipal University, where he taught and conducted research until 1967. During this period, he published articles on the rural silk industry and popular rebellions in the Ming and Qing periods, including "Minmatsu Shinsho Kōnan nōson shukōgyō ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu" and "Minpen, kōso nuhen." (For further details on these works and those cited below, see the Bibliography at the end of this essay.) Based on a wealth of primary sources as well as a solid theoretical framework, these articles are regarded as among the most influential in Japan's postwar historical research on Ming-Qing

socio-economic history.

Professor Tanaka transferred to the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo in 1967, where he attained full professorship in 1973. He taught at the University of Tokyo for sixteen years. During this time, his sphere of research expanded considerably and came to include modern Chinese history, Sino-Japanese relations, and methodological problems such as criticism of the Asian stagnation theory. His first book, *Chūgoku kindai keizaishi kenkyū josetsu*, was a collection of revised versions of his principal articles on Chinese economic history from the Ming-Qing to modern times as well as critical essays concerning methodology. Among the chapters of this book, the most famous and influential were "Methodological Reflections on Criticism of the Asian Stagnation Theory," "The Disintegration of Chinese Society and the Opium War," and "Western Capitalism and the Disintegration of Chinese Society: On the *Mitchell Report*." In these chapters he discussed how to discover signs of development in the apparent stagnation and subordination of the Chinese economy from the Ming-Qing to modern times. Basing himself on the indigenous development of commercial production from the late Ming onwards, he emphasized the active — not passive — resistance of Chinese peasants against feudalism and imperialism. He dedicated this book to "friends who never returned."

At the University of Tokyo, he trained the next generation of scholars in this field through his energetic guidance. His seminar room was always packed with students, including many from other countries. He spared no pains in discussing and advising on students' research plans and drafts. The detailed comments he wrote on students' reports resembled Emperor Yongzheng's famous "vermillion instructions," though he never forced his opinions on students.

Upon his retirement from the University of Tokyo in 1983, he joined the faculty of Shinshū University, where he served as dean of the Faculty of Humanities from 1985 to 1987. At Shinshū University, he published a long essay concerning the problem of war experiences as well as interview-style reminiscences on his intellectual career. These works were welcomed by a wide range of readers going beyond academic circles concerned with Chinese historiography.

After his retirement from Shinshū University, he taught at Kanda University of Foreign Languages for seven years until 1995. In his last years he published two books: *Higashi Ajia kindaiishi no hōhō*, a collection of essays on methodology, and *Senchū sengo, zōteiban*, which includes reminiscences and comments on war and society. These books were his last messages to younger scholars and friends. Even on his sickbed, he did not stop correcting errors and polishing their style for further revised editions.

Throughout his academic life, extending over more than forty years, he assumed positions of responsibility not only at universities but also in institutes like the Tōyō Bunko and academic societies such as the Historical Society of

Japan (Shigakukai 史學會) and the Association of Historical Sciences (Rekishi Kagaku Kyōgikai 歴史科學協議會). He served as a director of the Tōyō Bunko as well as heading its library section. He also devoted himself for many years to publishing the academic journal *Rekishi Hyōron* 歴史評論, serving as its chief editor. In spite of his great contributions to academic activities, he never pursued honors such as prizes or decorations.

Professor Tanaka wrote in the postscript to his last book published in 2001 that he had long felt that “science” such as that in which he was engaged could not reach the “truth” so directly as “arts” did, and that there might exist a higher level of “scholarship on humanity” directed at the realization of the scholar’s “total personality,” which could not be attained by mere “science.”

It would seem that the tension between “science” and “total personality” was a lifelong issue for Professor Tanaka. On the one hand he was known for his extremely rigorous approach to historical materials. Students were trained in his seminars in how to deal with original sources scientifically. Sloppy research or careless reading was not allowed. His rigorous attitude towards research is evident in an article written as a guide for students in 1974 and entitled “Shakai keizaishi — ronbun no dekiru made” 社會經濟史—論文の出来るまで (Socio-economic history: The process of writing an essay [in Banno Masataka 坂野正高 *et al.*, eds., *Kindai Chūgoku kenkyū nyūmon*]). On the other hand, he also emphasized the importance of the historian’s direct empathy with nameless people of the past. He argued that a sensitive understanding was more fundamental for historians than a rational understanding. His celebrated essay “Minpen, kōso dohen” shows his warm sympathy for ordinary people such as peasants, craftsmen and bondservants in the Ming.

Besides academic works, he left his family and friends charming pictures and poems (including *waka* and *haiku*) which he had been painting and composing from time to time since his youth. His dauntless criticisms of the war of aggression and inhuman conduct were rooted in his delicate sensitivity to that which should be savored in everyday life.

Professor Tanaka made a deep impression on all who knew him and worked with him not only on account of his academic achievements, but also because of his uniquely sincere personality. Proud to have been one of his students, I would like to express my gratitude for his generous guidance and pray with my deepest affection and respect for the repose of his soul.

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