

JAPANESE RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN MODERN CHINA

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, two general works on the history of Chinese women have been published in Japan: one a survey of the related source materials [Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai 2004], the other an introduction to the subject [Kansai Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai 2005]. The former work, intended to be used as a college textbook, divides the past 100 years of the history of Chinese women chronologically into about 50 categories and offers Japanese translations of source materials related to each, with additional commentary. The volume is now appearing in reading lists for a number of university lectures. The latter is a very easy to understand historical discourse on the history of Chinese women from antiquity to the present, taking up such topics as marriage, child rearing, and women's education.

The reason behind the publication of both books is no doubt the steadily mounting research being done in Japan on the subject. This research began to accumulate beginning with the publication of *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*, a general history done on the subject from the Taiping Revolution on by Ono Kazuko in 1978. The 1980s was then marked by a treatise by Suetsugu Reiko [1986] on both the history

of Chinese women and their present condition. Then from the late 1990s onward to the present day, the research tended to focus on women in modern China and Taiwan [Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai 1999; Zhou 2000; Hung 2001; Shirouzu 2001; Kansai Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai 2004; Sakamoto 2004; He 2005; Murata 2005].

This article will review trends in the research on the history of Chinese women carried out in Japan from the late 1990s onward, which has focused mainly on analyzing the topics of women and the nation, Chinese women in relation to Japan, and women and the family. This research has not only been done from a strict historical science viewpoint, but also includes such aspects as literary criticism and jurisprudence. The review will also attempt to point out the various problems that need to be addressed in the field, and what researchers should look forward to in the future.

It should also be mentioned that the scope of the research to be discussed is literature that has been published in the Japanese language, thus the title “in Japan.” That is to say, this review will not include the research that has been published in other languages by Japanese scholars, like Chinese and English, out of the conviction that the Japanese literature is not easily accessible to international readers and therefore should be introduced to them. On the other hand, some of the titles reviewed here include research done in Japanese by specialists active abroad and also Japanese translations of foreign language materials. The attached bibliography mainly contains the research done from the 1990s on, but the reader may also find important work done before that time.

THE VESSELS OF RESEARCH ON MODERN CHINESE WOMEN'S HISTORY IN JAPAN

As to those organizations that carry the load for those who chose to study the subject, we should first and foremost point to the Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai (The Society of Historical Studies on Chinese Women; Maeyama Kanako, chairman) and the Kansai Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai (The Kansai Region History of Chinese Women Research Association; Nomura Ayuko, chairman), which are active in eastern and western Japan, respectively, but whose members have been cooperating more and more in recent years.

The former, which is based in the Kanto Plain region around Tokyo, was founded in September of 1977 by four scholars, including

Suetsugu Reiko and Yanagida Setsuko. Today its membership has grown to over 100. Some of the Association's members are students from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan studying abroad in Japan. Its activities include a monthly lecture and yearly retreat, both of which promote reading and discussion of the historiography related to the subject. The Association also serves as a vehicle for exchange with colleagues active outside of Japan and with scholars in the field of Japanese women's history. The Association organ, *Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyu* (The Journal of Historical Studies on Chinese Women), was first published in 1989, and a volume of research has been issued every year since then.

In contrast, the latter group, consisting of about 30 members, is a relatively new organization, founded in 1993, and active mainly in the region encompassing Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe.

The majority of the members of both Associations are women, a phenomenon that characterizes the entire realm of women's history in Japan. Go to any research conference or seminar in Japan dealing with women's issues and you will find an overwhelming number of female participants, sometimes all. However, one glance at the attached bibliography will show that a good deal of the research done to date has been done by men specializing in such fields as women's history and gender studies. While the idea of "the study of women by women" does have its good points, it may be time to reevaluate such a tendency.

Also, in recent years, scholars specializing in other fields of Chinese studies have expressed more and more interest in the history of that country's women. For example, the Chugoku Shakai Bunka Gakkai (Chinese Society and Culture Research Association) held a symposium on the subject of gender, which led to the publication of its proceedings in *Chugoku: Shakai to Bunka* (China: Society and Culture) (No. 13, 1998). Another example is the special issue on Chinese women's history that appeared in the journal of modern Chinese history, *Chikaki ni Arite* (Being Nearby: Discussions on Modern China) (No. 48, Dec. 2005).

WOMEN AND THE NATION

This is a topic that has been the main focus of the field in recent years. In China, the research has been literally built upon the historical study of women's struggle for liberation during modern times. In contrast, Maeyama Kanako [2000] has attempted to reexamine the issue from the viewpoint of gender, taking up statements made by women appearing in source materials dated from the end of the Qing period to the early

1920s. She argues that there were two ways in which women became involved with the Chinese nation: one in their contribution to the revolution (national formation) based on womanhood and motherhood; the other in the movement for women's suffrage (in other words, playing a man's role in politics).

Searching the sources for statements made by Chinese women has been a common theme among other researchers as well. For example, Shirouzu Noriko [2004a] focused on the dual role played by women in the home and in society in her discussion of modernization and the formation of the Chinese nation. Egami Sachiko took up Ding Ling's *Ye* (Night) to reexamine the conventional discussion about the women's movement from the aspect of the novel's main character, an unhappy wife in a farm family. Li Xuanni [2000] analyzed the early writings of Ding Ling and concluded that within the process of China's "national formation," women were forced to choose politicization in male terms. What Shirouzu and Egami seem to be saying is that the roads that were opened to political participation and citizenship did nothing to solve the direct problems facing women at the time, forcing them to contribute rather to the revolution and the nation, consequently, effectively blocking the development of feminism in China. Concerning feminism in China after the Shirouzu-Egami time frame, Akiyama Yoko [2000] discussed the formation of women's studies from the 1980s based on the personal history of Li Xiaojiang.

In contrast to the above research, which deals exclusively with the ideas of women, Sakamoto Hiroko [2004] went into the statements made by men on the subject, thus opening up another way to view gender within the formation of the modern Chinese nation. Through her analysis of statements concerning racial views, Sakamoto was able to show that Chinese nationalism was largely determined by the adoption of Social Darwinism. Furthermore, in the process of analyzing the discourse about foot-binding, a serious issue in the modernization movement, a change in values from feminine beauty to national embarrassment was studied from a number of different angles. Here, the question of eugenics is another important issue in what to do about the contradictions that arise between women as free individuals and ethnic upgrading. Yao Yi [2002] has discussed this point from the viewpoint of birth control.

The above research dealing with women as citizens suggests, as Maeyama indicates, that there existed totally separate male and female patterns, and as Sakamoto argues, that such ideas as nationalism and evolution were even more determinative.

CHINESE WOMEN AND JAPAN

This topic should be divided into two general themes: (1) interaction during modern times and (2) the Japanese invasion of China (i.e. colonialism and military prostitutes).

Mutual Contact

Let us begin with the Japanese idea of “good wife, wise mother” and its transmission to and adoption into Chinese society, which was examined by Jin Jungwon [2003], who focused on the scholar of Chinese philosophy, Hattori Unokichi. The same notion is also taken up in [Yao 1999]. Sugimoto Fumiko [2004] examined how Japanese home economics as observed by a teacher of the science, Cao Min, was introduced into China and then abandoned. Sugimoto [2002] also discussed the introduction of the Japanese idea of “good wife, wise mother” into the women’s education curriculum during the early nationalist period, indicating that the concept was only taught in schools geared to upper class young women.

Concerning Chinese women who studied abroad in Japan, Zhou Yichuan [2000] praised the role that such experience played in their advancement into higher education after their return to China. This reviewer examined the changes taking place in the image of Japanese women portrayed in the magazine *Funü Zazhi* (Ladies Journal), in order to show the influence exerted by western feminism on women’s consciousness in East Asia [Sudo 2005b].

Ishikawa Teruko has done a lot of research on the Chinese YWCA, an international group aiming at socially organizing women, mainly urban women based on the principles of Christianity. Ishikawa clarified the organizational structure of the YWCA in China [2000, 2005] and also examined the image it formed of Japan [2004]. This is important research regarding not only the history of East Asian women, but also the history of western women and religion.

The Japanese Invasion and Occupation of China: Military Prostitutes and Colonialism

Much of the research regarding military prostitutes has focused on the sexual abuse of women from the Korean Peninsula through China to Southeast Asia from the aspect of Japan’s responsibility for the Pacific War. [Egami1999] examines the subject from the aspect of the history of

Chinese women, while Ishida Yoneko [2004], a researcher on the sexual violence perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Army, published a collection of her research based on a rich body of recent Chinese eyewitness accounts and source materials. Kohama Masako [2005] discussed the significance of the Ishida group's research from the perspective of using oral sources. As the research to date indicates, the study of military prostitutes is not only subject matter for studying the history of Chinese women, but also the history of Japanese women, Japan and China in general, as well as Asian history and politics as a whole.

As to the research on colonialism, Shen Jie [2001] offers an overlapping image of women's life arising from divisions along the lines of ethnic group, social class, Japanese in Manchuria and those in Japan. Takemura Tamio [2002] pointed out the introduction of legal prostitution in Dalian as a measure to prevent the corruption of "normal" everyday relationships between men and women in Japanese society and also the cause of a movement to rescue women that soon reverberated within Japan.

The Higashi Ajia Kindai Joseishi Kenkyukai (Modern East Asian Women's History Research Association), which has continued regional joint research since October 2000, opened discussion into the formation of the nation-state and national identity from a woman's perspective, focusing on women's history during the colonial period [Hayakawa 2001]. The journal *Rekishi Hyoron* (No. 612, 2001) featured a section on how women under the Japanese empire responded to its various policies and how their lives were changed as a result. Issue No. 624 (2002) featured a section on the image of the Japanese empire held by women in its East Asian colonies.

The history of Taiwanese women within the context of Japan could offer another perspective on women in a colonial setting, but the subject continues to be pursued in the context of Taiwanese history [Yu 2005]. A treatment of how women's education was conducted in Japan during the colonial period can be found in [Yamamoto 1999], while the work of Hung Yuru [2001] departs from the traditional framework of rule and subordination in colonial regions to focus on the aims and hopes of individual actors in the colonial environment. Miyazaki Seiko [2003] takes up the case of Japanese-style Maiden's Association active in Taiwan around 1930 to argue that while subordinating the island's women to the colonial order, these groups also offered them opportunities for gaining literacy and recreational activities.

The above research dealing with the aims and hopes of individual

actors in colonial society shows the importance of rethinking the conventional framework of colonial control and subordination.

CHINESE WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

To begin with, the Kansai Chugoku Joseishi Kenkyukai [2004] published a collection of papers on women and the family from the standpoint of gender, many of which will be reviewed in this section. The research to date has viewed Chinese women within the context of four different family relationships: husband-wife, father-daughter, mother-daughter, and as the member of a family in general.

Concerning the first, research has been done on both successful and unsuccessful relationships, beginning with Takeuchi Rika's study [2004] of the widow of Kuomintang liberal Liao Zhongkai, He Xiangning, who followed in her "husband's" footsteps in the political arena. Nishikawa Mako [2002] took up the husband-wife relationship between the son of Liang Qichao, Liang Sicheng, and his wife Lin Huiyin (both architects) from the viewpoint of two people's relationship based on sharing knowledge. As an example of a couple not sharing knowledge, Nishikawa [2004] cited the case of the marriage between intellectual Hu Shi and his wife, Jiang Dongxiu, who differed on their ideas about love and marriage, causing them a great deal of grief. Bao Jialin [2004] offered the possibility that the reason for the divorce of the poet Xu Zhimo was the sexual involvement between his wife and his father. Concerning free marriage during the 1920s, from an analysis of *Funü Zazhi*, Hsu Huichi [2005] concluded that statements about the free marriage fad of the time were merely the product of idealism on the part of men.

Turning to the father-daughter relationship, in her examination of Yuan Xuefen and Shanghai musical drama (*Yueju*), Nakayama Fumi [2004] described the excellent relationship Xuefen enjoyed with her father and also argued very interestingly that the drama itself had a daughter-like existence within the Communist Party. The present reviewer [Sudo 2005a] examined the relationship between Liang Qichao and his oldest daughter, Sishun, in studying the differences in their ideas about women.

With regard to the mother-daughter relationship, Shirouzu Noriko [2001] reexamined the roles of mother, widow and paramour in terms of generational and sexual control. Focusing on matriarchal authority within the system of patriarchy, Shirouzu took up the case of the

autobiographies of such figures as novelist Huang Luyin in approaching the problem of why Chinese writers continue to describe “conflict” and “subordination” between mothers and daughters. Shirouzu also did a literary comparison of Japanese and Chinese novels describing the “new family” [2003], while Hamada Maya [2004] analyzed birthplace, marital household, and marriage from the standpoint of “daughters.”

Concerning the family itself, Kakehi Kumiko [2004] focused her research on the female household of the late Qing period poet and politician Huang Zunxian, while Narita Shizuka [2004] analyzed cases of women choosing to live at home or to form all-female communes, and Liu Xiaojun [2004] described the frustration and longing of women working in child care facilities who were unable to have families/homes of their own. Iwama Kazuhiro [2005] discussed the debate which first arose in the west concerning what was the most important social role of women from the 1920s on: the home, work, or the revolution.

From the above multi-faceted research on women and the family, an image emerges concerning the family as something other than an institution of oppression. In other words, the analysis offered seems to be questioning the rather rigid concept of “patriarchy” in modern China.

OTHER RESEARCH THEMES

Zhang Jing [1995] took up the issue of free love in conflict with the idea of the family by analyzing the degree to which western ideas about love were adopted into China, based on literary works of the time. Other literary approaches can be found in research on women authors and the image of women as depicted in literature [Shao 1996; Irei 1999b]. Research concerning feminism includes [Akiyama 2004; Akiyama et al. 1998], Akiyama’s Japanese translation of women’s studies expert, Li Xiaojiang’s work [Li Xiaojiang 2000] and Barlow’s research on Li [2001].

The research on the political and legal aspects of women in China is also accumulating [He 2005], while the study of women of ethnic minority descent has begun in recent years [Matsumoto 2001; Shimbo 1999], and in the field of culture Endo Oriie [1996] has covered script used exclusively by women in Hunan Province.

An international joint research project [Murata 2005] was formed by fourteen scholars with many different perspectives to analyze the magazine *Funü Zazhi*. The research results were not only published in Japan, but also in Taiwan in Issue No. 12 of the journal *Jindai Zhongguo*

Funü Shi Yanjiu (Research on Women in Modern Chinese History). The cataloging results may be found in database form at <http://archwebs.mh.sinica.edu.tw/fnzz/>. Such efforts should also be praised for providing an important international forum for studying the history of Chinese women.

SUMMARY AND PROSPECTS

Most of the above-mentioned research has in some way or other attempted to analyze its subject matter in terms of “gender,” a concept that has also been introduced into the history of Japanese women and the history of women in general. It was in 2004 that the Nihon Jenda-Shi Gakkai (The Gender History Association of Japan) was founded and wrote in its statement of purpose that gender, “being a central concept of scientific study, is becoming more and more involved in our efforts to build new paradigms of knowledge in the 21st century.” The founding of the Society can be said to symbolize the universalization of (or at least a progressive step in the process of universalizing) the concept of gender as a scientific term in Japan.

As for the field of the history of Chinese women and its introduction of gender into its research, it seems to have chosen to allow its members to deal with the concept on an individual basis instead of adopting one established theme. Two attitudes dominate. The first is the idea of gender consciousness in the research, in which focus is placed on the position of women in comparison to that of men. The second runs along the line of Joan W. Scott’s *Gender and the Politics of History*, understanding of gender as “the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences,” imparted by political power structures. In the opinion of this reviewer, it is the first attitude that can be found in the historical study of Chinese women more than the second.

Within such a trend, there is the very thorough discussion by Takashima Ko [2003], which prefers not to employ definitions of gender consciously (in the opinion of this reviewer), but rather pursue an empirical approach to the subject. Takashima states, “A lot of research on the Wuxu Restoration (1898) has been done, but almost all of it focuses on the women’s liberation movement and lacks diversity” [ibid., 90], meaning that the abolishment of foot-binding has only been considered from the standpoint of women’s liberation. Instead of focusing on foot-binding *per se*, Takashima set out to verify the formation of the westerner-led “Tian zu hui 天足会” (Society for Natural

Feet) founded by an Englishwoman Alicia Little and the “Bu chan zu hui 不纏足會” (Society Against Foot-Binding), led by Chinese intellectuals. The two groups did not cooperate with each other in the movement, because “they were locked in a conflict over the control of women as a political resource.”

Takashima is very worried about the fact of accepting uncritically the research to date that purports foot-binding as oppression against women. This same view can be seen in Dorothy Ko’s study [2005]. Such anxiety over the research also casts doubt on the gender conscious approach that accepts “women as oppressed people” to be self-evident.

This is not to say that casting doubt upon ideas and notions that have been considered to be *a priori* assumptions is completely absent from research based on the gender conscious approach. For example, Maeyama Kanako has attempted to reexamine the whole field of the modern history of Chinese women, which has been built upon the image of a history of human liberation, and Hung Yuru [2001] has indicated the importance of reexamining the dichotomy of “rulers and ruled” in the historical study of Taiwan. Furthermore, Sakamoto Hiroko [2004] has argued that more is at stake than emphasizing gender in studying the history of women; rather, she has discussed the creation of a nation (citizenry) in her analysis of China’s adoption and reformation of such western ideas as nationalism and Social Darwinism. On this point, Takashima Ko states, “If we do not begin considering relations between China and the West, the real character of the Society Against Foot-Binding will never be understood”[2003, 90]. In other words, it is necessary to deal with the international character of the history of women in modern China, since, as such scholars as Sakamoto and Takashima have stated, the Sino-Western power structure played a very important role in that history.

On the other hand, according to the definition of gender that Joan Scott has in mind, “the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences,” gender is the result of a power structure which includes kinship, the economy and national politics. It seems that she either has not considered the impact of international relations, or merely does not give that aspect much attention. In any case, the influence of China’s modern era foreign relations on the history of its female population is an issue that should be seriously studied in the future. However, we should not simply accept a fixed definition of gender and proceed from there, but rather open up a critical debate over what that concept actually implies within the context of the history of women in modern China.

Let me conclude this review by stating that the research discussed

above is only a sampling of the excellent work that has been done to date and had to be selected due to limitations imposed on the length of the article.

—Originally written in Japanese

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