

LANDSCAPE, LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM IN MEIJI JAPAN*

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It was only at the middle of the 1890s, in the Meiji period (1868–1911) that academic geography came into being with the establishment of geography courses at the Tokyo Higher Normal School. This was followed by the establishment of chairs of geography at the Imperial Universities of Kyoto and Tokyo. Prior to the formation of academic geography, however, there existed a large number of geographical writings.¹ These consisted of 1) works of the so-called Meiji enlightenment writers who, upon the advent of modernization, endeavoured to introduce Western culture into Japan, 2) school textbooks, 3) publications of the Tokyo Geographical Society, which had been founded in 1879 and 4) pioneering works in geography which were widely read among intellectual circles, but especially by geography teachers. Many of these works were overlapping in character; some of the works by enlightenment writers were used as school textbooks in the first years of the compulsory education system established in 1872; and most of the authors who wrote pioneering works of geography were members of the Tokyo Geographical Society.

The Meiji enlightenment authors belonged to the period in which the slogan ‘civilization and enlightenment’ (bunmei kaika) was much to the fore. ‘Civilization and enlightenment’ were considered to be synonymous with Westernization. Most of the geographical writings of these authors were descriptions of foreign countries. Western countries were presented as models for the prosperity that Japan felt she had to attain, while a number of Asian countries—for instance China, whose defeat in the Opium War had had a great impact on the Japanese—were presented as examples of submission to the Western powers; and from examples such as these, Japan was to learn how to avoid making the same mistakes. In

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¹ I have already discussed the geography of modern Japan in the following papers:

Takeuchi, K.: The Origins of Human Geography in Japan, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 15, 1974.

Takeuchi, K.: General Remarks on Human Geography During the Past Fifty Years, Kiuchi, S. (ed.): *Geography in Japan*, University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1976.

Takeuchi, K.: Some Remarks on the History of Regional Description and the Tradition of Regionalism in Modern Japan, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 10, 1978.

Takeuchi, K.: Geopolitics and Geography in Japan, Reexamined, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 12, 1980.

Takeuchi, K.: Two Outsiders: An Aspect of Modern Academic Geography in Japan, Takeuchi, K. (ed.): *Languages, Paradigms and Schools in Geography*, Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, 1984.

Takeuchi, K.: Japanese Geographers: The Dream and the Reality; An Interim Report on the Video Dialogue Programme in Japan, Nozawa, H. (ed.) *Cosmology, Epistemology and the History of Geography*, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, 1986.

these writings, we also find a strong faith in the possibility of economic development. In order to avoid leading to a fatalistic attitude, the backwardness of a people or a country was never ascribed to physical factors such as the climate. For a country such as early Meiji Japan, which was on the point of starting in pursuit of economic development, this manner of thinking was, perhaps, not surprising. For one thing, it serves to explain the fact that relatively few descriptions of the physical conditions and the landscape of foreign countries existed at the time of the early Meiji period. If some environmental or deterministic explanation was forthcoming, it primarily concerned the fact that Japan, like the advanced Western countries, was located in the temperate zone. We can find this kind of deterministic thinking in, for instance, the writings of Yukichi Fukuzawa, and in the detailed account of the mission sent to the United States and Europe from 1872–74, led by an ambassador extraordinary, Tomomi Iwakura, the account being written by his secretary, Kunitake Kume.

School textbooks of the early Meiji period were written from the same viewpoint as that of the Meiji enlightenment writers, but where the textbooks were concerned, the geography of Japan also constituted an important school subject.² It was natural for the Japan of that period, in which agriculture was the most important productive activity, that suitable physical conditions for rice cultivation were made much of in school textbook descriptions. We should note at the same time that the vast extensions of beautiful paddy fields with their elaborate water distribution systems were, in the writings of the text authors, ascribed to the many hundred years of diligent toil on the part of the Japanese people. Besides descriptions of this kind of scenic beauty of the countryside, in which human endeavour was concretized, there were also descriptions on natural beauty. Here, the aesthetic viewpoint was rather traditional; the serene combination of islands or mountains with water, as seen in the renowned Three Famous Scenic Spots of Japan (*Nihon sankei*), Amanohashidate, Matsushima and Itsukushima; all three recall the miniature-type Japanese garden. Mount Fuji is admired for its symmetry and gentle slopes viewed from a distance (on this point, Fuji as depicted by Hokusai is rather exceptional from the traditional aesthetic viewpoint). Thus the countryside and nature were admired according to traditional aesthetic criteria.

As for townscapes, we can observe radical changes in the aesthetic tastes of the Japanese. With the 'civilisation and enlightenment' movement, Western townscapes became the model, at least for the ruling class who were responsible for town planning. Monumental Western-style buildings were considered not only as a means of presenting a dignified face, as a nation, to foreign visitors, but also as symbols of the power of the ruling class in the eyes of the Japanese people. In 1871, the government began to construct Ginza Street, pulling down existing buildings belonging to merchants and artisans and lining it with Western-style brick buildings.³ This scheme aimed, on the one hand, at the prevention of fires which several times devastated ancient Tokyo, or Edo as it was then called and, on the other hand, at a demonstration of the national power, again to foreign countries with which Japan had begun negotiations, as stipulated by the shogun, in order to revise the unequal commercial treaties. Moreover, the common people also accepted this new aesthetic cri-

² Takeuchi, K.: How Japan Learned about the Outside World: The View of Other Countries Incorporated in Japanese School Textbooks, 1868–1986, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 19, 1987.

³ For the social history of the city planning of Tokyo, ref. Shibata, T. *Gendai toshiron*, University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, second ed., 1976, pp. 90–92 (First ed., 1967).

teria. Typical types of urban houses belonging to the common people, after the Meiji Restoration, were still built in the form of samurai houses of the past, using wood, mud and paper. In addition to this, to have one or two Western-style rooms was considered a status symbol, except in certain cities such as Kyoto where the inhabitants were extremely proud of their traditional townscape. The Japanese generally had no interest in conserving traditional townscapes, and had no compunctions whatsoever about demolishing the traditional town quarters, and replacing them with structures that were a compromise blending of Western and Japanese styles. It should be noted that this style of building, going back as it does to the very beginning of the Meiji period, still continues to dominate the Japanese townscape.

Thus, in the early years of the Meiji period, under the impact of Western culture, the code according to which the Japanese read the landscape as a text underwent a change. This change was not total in character, because it happened only where the townscape was concerned. We can also observe that the degree of change differed among social groups or classes, and also among places, such as the urban communities of Tokyo and Kyoto. Landscape is certainly a language, but given the changing code or the value system of people, the meaning that this language expresses can also change. The change is not necessarily a structural one and can be gradual. The changing code can be manipulated by a certain social group and/or class; because the landscape contains the artifacts, individuals or social groups can exercise an ideological influence by manipulating the symbolic effects of the built environment, which in its turn, is an expression of landscape as language. The code to the reading of the landscape is variable, in line with the changing value system of the people. Thus, we see that, in the early years of Meiji, the landscape of the countryside and the natural landscape were read according to the traditional language code; but the impact of Western culture, which has continued to wield influence since the beginning of the Meiji period, set the stage for broad structural changes in the language code of the Japanese.

In 1894, Shigetaka Shiga⁴ popularizer of and pioneering researcher in geography, published a book titled 'Japanese Landscapes' (*Nihon fukeiron*). Parts of this book were first published in magazines in 1893 and 1894. The book was a best-seller and was revised several times; the fifteenth and final edition appeared in 1903. Shiga pointed out the outstanding character of the Japanese landscape in comparison with those of China and the West. Together with other books of geography, this work was a major influence in the careers of early academic geographers in the first decades of this century. Shiga received a bachelor's degree in agriculture at the Sapporo Agricultural College, where many Western professors were teaching. He became interested in geography during his college years, and in 1889 had already published an introductory study on geography, 'Lectures on Geography' (*Chirigaku Kogi*). He also joined an investigation trip by warship in the South Pacific and Oceania. In 1887, he published a record of the voyage, 'Affairs of the Southern Seas' (*Nanyo Jiji*), in which he advocated the Japanese advance, in both the economic and political sense,

⁴ Detailed bibliographical and biographical studies have been made by Shokyu Minamoto on Shigetaka Shiga:

Minamoto, S.: Shigetaka Shiga's Geographical Works,—A Bibliographic Survey—(Japanese text with English summary), *Library and Information Science*, No. 13, 1975.

Minamoto, S.: Shigetaka Shiga, 1963–1927, Freeman, T.W. (ed.): *Geographers, Biobibliographical Studies*, Vol. 8, 1984.

in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. From his career before the publication of the 'Japanese Landscape,' we are able to see that he had a profound knowledge of the culture and sciences of the West, but unlike the enlightenment writers of the early years of the Meiji period, he was committed to the Japan of middle Meiji, which was transforming itself into a military power in Asia.

While it is somewhat difficult to ascertain the facts quantitatively, it may generally be said that, in the geographical writings of the early Meiji period, there were not very many descriptions of the landscape, either of foreign or domestic origin. In the previously mentioned account of the Iwakura mission, we are able to find very few descriptions of the natural scenic beauty of Western countries, apart from general introductory descriptions of each country the mission visited, which were actually literal quotations from Western writings. As for the landscape of Western countries, to the eyes of the members of the mission who were accustomed to the intensively cultivated scenes of the Japanese countryside, Western scenery where large extensions of fields were kept for the purposes of pasture or the cultivation of fodder, gave the impression of lack of care and poverty. What description there was of the above type of landscape contrasted sharply with the descriptions of the Western townscapes. Kume, the writer of the account of the mission, expresses in unreserved terms his admiration of the magnificence and beauty of the Western cities they visited. Even the clouds of black smoke pouring from factory chimneys and the infernal noise of the underground railway were considered symbols of the industrial prosperity of the West. In this context, Shiga's remarks on the Japanese landscape are noteworthy as the first systematic description of the Japanese landscape. In 1888, Shiga had already written a paper titled 'What the Term "Japanese" Essentially Means,' some of which went as follows:

'Beginning with the conic form of the volcano Mt. Fuji rearing majestically into the sky, covered year-round by snow [in actuality, there are periods in summer when the snow melts entirely or almost entirely], many mountains and many islands covered by greenery, lakes, rivers and other physical characteristics of Japan . . . have contributed to the formation of a sense of nationality on the part of the Japanese people . . . We must learn from Western culture, but we must firmly conserve the spirit of nationality, formed in the admiration of the proper characteristics of the nature of Japan.'

Together with the advocacy of national interests abroad, expressed in 'Affairs of the Southern Seas,' here in this quotation, it is possible for us to discover the background to his book 'Japanese Landscapes.' It was an awakening of modern nationalism that stimulated Shiga to write the book on Japanese landscapes. We are able to ascertain the strong influence of Shiga's books and his thinking on the intellectual circles of the Japan of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. For instance, his influence is to be felt in other people's lectures and in the publications of the Tokyo Geographical Society.⁵ Later on, Shiga's book came to be highly appreciated as a pioneering masterpiece which systematically and with considerable literary skill described the Japanese landscape on the basis of a broad knowledge of the natural sciences.⁶ Recently, however, some of the students of Shiga's writings have discovered that many of Shiga's descriptions of the Japa-

⁵ A detailed examination of the; publications of the Tokyo Geographical Society has been made by Ryujiro Ishida:

Ishida, R.: *Nihon ni okeru kindaichirigaku no seiritsu*. Taimeido, Tokyo, 1984.

⁶ Tsujita, U.: *Jinmonchirigaku no me ga moedashita koro*, Chiri, Vol. 19, No. 5, 1974.

nese landscape are based on B.H. Chamberlain and W.B. Mason: 'A Handbook for Travellers in Japan' published around 1890 at Yokohama (3rd ed., London, 1891).⁷ It is probable that Shiga read other writings of British authors on Japan, who, in the 1880s and 90s found and propagated the Alpine stype of beauty characterizing certain of the Japanese mountains. Minamoto also ascertained the influence of A. Geikie's 'The Scenery of Scotland Viewed in Connection with its Physical Geology' (London, 1865), and repeated references made by Shiga to John Ruskin and John Lubbock.⁸ In fact, Shiga cited numerous Japanese writings as well, including poems of the past 1,000 years emphasizing the beauty of Japanese rivers, lakes, islands or mist-shrouded landscapes; but he cites only a few writings on the beauty of mountains. While Shiga's aesthetical viewpoint with regard to the beauty of the countryside, and also of lakes, islands and rivers, was a generally traditional one, he at the same time introduced a Western code by which to read the mountainous landscape of Japan, and which became a cardinal factor in his emphasis on the Japanese sense of nativity; this, according to him, was formed out of the sentimental attachment of the Japanese people to the Japanese landscape.

In his description of Japanese landscapes, Shiga's formation as a geographer played an important part, though there were a certain number of mistakes and/or misunderstandings (for instance, Shiga considered all steep mountains to be volcanoes). But we should note that in his numerous writings on geography, such as the 'Lectures on Geography' and many other texts used in his classes at the Tokyo Semmon Gakko, which later became Waseda University, do not contain discussions on the landscape, either in the sense of scenery or in the sense of the terminology later adopted by the landscape school in geography. Shiga used the term *fukei* (landscape) in the context of the expression of political thought, not in the context of his pioneering geographical writings. Moreover, in his geographical works, Shiga invariably wrote in an environmental context, but he was expressly opposed to environmental determinism.

Shiga's geographical writings exercised a strong influence on one of the 'outsider' geographers of the beginning of this century, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.⁹ Makiguchi, however, did not accept the word *fukei*, in Shiga's sense of a concept accompanied by nationalist connotations, as a valid geographical term. Some of the early academic geographers such as Takuji Ogawa, chairman of the Department of Geography at the Imperial University of Kyoto and Naomasa Yamazaki at the Imperial University of Tokyo greatly appreciated the geographical works of Shiga for the popularizing role they filled; but at no time did they adopt Shiga's concept of *fukei* in their early scientific writings on geography. In fact, later on, in the 1920s and 1930s, when the term 'landscape' or *Landschaft* was introduced into the academic geography of Japan, they adopted the term *keikan*, which has a more abstract meaning than *fukei*; the latter term is marked by a more visual type of connotation, while it excludes the phenomenological or humanist interpretation.

⁷ On this issue, ref.:

Mita, H. *Yama no shisoshi*, Iwanami Publishing Company, Tokyo, 1973.

Nakagawa, K.: The Genealogy of Guidebooks for Japan Written in English (Japanese text with English summary). *Map, Journal of the Japan Cartographers Association*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1975.

⁸ The influence of English writers on Shiga is pointed out by Minamoto in Minamoto, op.cit., 1984.

⁹ There are many writings of Makiguchi. Here, I referred to the reprint edition of the first edition (1903) of 'Jinsei chirigaku' (Geography of Human Life) annotated by Shoji Saito, published by Daisan Bunmeisha, Vol. 1 in 1983 (Vol. 2 is not yet published).

When Shiga published his 'Japanese Landscape,' there was no question that he used this term with the sentiment of a Meiji nationalist. In the intellectual history of Japan, Meiji nationalism developed into a way of thought based on the advocacy of imperialism, accompanied by the strengthening of the military and the expansion of the Japanese colonial empire. We should remark here that the political thinking of Shiga did not follow the general intellectual trends all the way, as they developed into this chauvinistic and extreme form of nationalism. In 1920, after he had accomplished several trips to many parts of the world, he proceeded to write a number of geographical works and travel accounts in which we are able to observe the changes that took place in his ideological stance, which now differed from that taken in his early writings. Instead, he relativized the Japanese landscape, pointing out scenes similar to those found in foreign countries, and also indicating scenes in foreign countries that resembled scenes in Japan. This contrasted with the school textbooks in which growing emphasis came to be placed on specific features of the Japanese landscape, culminating in the state-compiled geography textbook for the fifth and sixth years of the elementary schools of 1943.

The young Shiga had a sort of optimistic perspective with regard to the economic and political expansion in the international sphere, but we find a setback of a sort in his late writings, especially in the book *Shirarezaru kuniguni* ('Unfamiliar Countries') published in 1925, two years before his death. In this book, he recognizes the growing difficulties revolving around Japanese emigration to the American continents and of the expansion of trade with many countries; and he emphasizes the necessity of an internationally-minded attitude on the part of the Japanese. From his writings, we know that his second visit to South Africa in 1922, twenty years after his first, was a critical experience for him. For, during the twenty years up to that time, racial discrimination had become intensified and he met with the experience of people refusing to serve him dinner. As a Meiji intellectual, from the beginning Shiga had a healthy international perspective and, with the accumulation of experience abroad and in the circumstances of increasing anti-Japanese sentiments, his international outlook caused him to adopt a different position from that of the intellectual leaders of imperialist Japan, after World War I. Racial discrimination against coloured people, including the Japanese, was one of the major concerns of the older Shiga and, moreover, from his works we learn that he tended to favour arms reduction in the 1920s.

Shiga was the first author to read meaning into the Japanese landscape, and the ideologue-thinker who gave nationalist connotations to the Japanese landscape. But the ensuing codification of the Japanese landscape went farther than he had intended it to go, and in another direction.