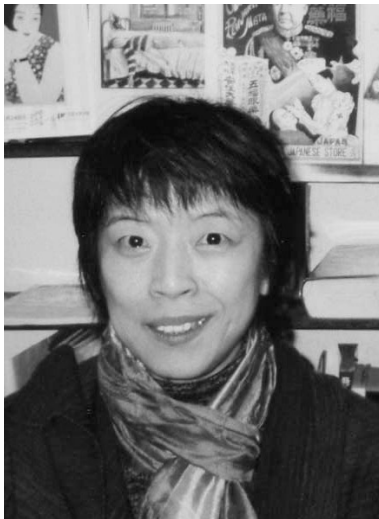


# Chinese Nationalism, The Gaze of Japan, and China's National History

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### **The Gaze of Japan**

As nationalism arises accompanying a desire for a national identity vis-à-vis others, it can be seen in many ways, depending on the relationship between the gaze of its observers and the nationalism itself. In other words, the relationship between the nationalism of a people/state and those observing it will affect both the way the nationalism arises, and how it is viewed. The nationalisms of Japan and China offer appropriate examples of this.

Historically speaking, due to its geographic position close to China, Japan experienced a kind of *Chinoiserie* over an extended period of time, incomparable with the brief experience of Western nations. Thus, from the Edo period Japan's national identity was formed through conscious efforts to break away from China, and this was accelerated when Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. Under these circumstances, in China Studies at the Imperial Universities, only ancient studies, or at the most, studies up to the era known as the Qing Dynasty, were considered worthwhile, and modern

China was not considered worth studying (even today, this tendency somehow continues in studies of so-called "Chinese literature" and "Chinese philosophy"). In this way, Japan's attraction towards ancient China changed to contempt for modern China, and Japan rushed into the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945; after Japan's defeat, its complex towards China unconsciously increased.

At the same time that post-WWII political historians in America were being trained under the influence of John Fairbank et al's research on modern Chinese history, some Japanese specialists of China also began a new era of Chinese studies, based on a critique of prewar days, putting studies of Chinese literature, history, and philosophy within the realm of modern times. People like Nishi Junzō, Shimada Kenji, and, although his style is slightly different, Takeuchi Yoshimi were such researchers, and many young researchers followed them; when I was a student most of my teachers were such people.

I think that it is also no coincidence that Postwar Japan's "New China Studies" resonated with the "New China" born by the Communist Revolution; Chinese Studies in Japan needed to be reformed. In the national history of Post-revolution China, the nationalism that resisted world powers when they began their aggression against modern China is, naturally, highly esteemed. In fact, it was precisely due to the process of fighting against the Japanese imperialist invasion, and resisting Japan, that the Chinese Revolution was able to occur.

### **Moving Away from National History**

However, as China began developing a market economy, and economic development advanced in the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals began to publicly make statements like, "Farewell to the Revolution." In connection with this, the historical view that the nationalism that had arisen in opposition to Japanese imperialism had been preserved throughout the socialist revolution is also beginning to be reexamined.

Even in Japan, a considerable number of researchers are beginning to think that it is necessary to maintain some distance from revolutionary China's national history, which they once cozied up to. My work,<sup>1</sup> which I submitted for publication half a year ago, is this kind of work.

In an ironic twist, the nationalism of modern China has also begun to incorporate social evolution theory, which previously was an important source of intellectual support for the imperialist Japanese invasion against which the Chinese had fought. Moreover, Chinese nationalism has inevitably begun to incorporate elements of racism and eugenics, which are closely connected to social evolution theory. In retrospect, we can see a similar situation in Meiji Japan, where the light of "democracy and science," which were being called for throughout the world, also cast a shadow, consisting of the negative aspects of civilization, including wars of aggression. As is made clear by the current war in Iraq, aggression in Palestine, etc., resolution will only be achieved by confronting the problems head on. Rather than regarding the anti-imperialist, modern Chinese nationalism as something purely positive, we should attempt to convert it into a useful intellectual resource, by pursuing the various aspects of the chain of pros and cons on a more global scale, including Asia, and reflecting upon the different meanings it has in each place.

### The Gender Problem in Chinese Nationalism

One research topic that I think is suppressed due to the consecration of modern Chinese nationalism is the problem of gender. By taking up the problem of abolishing foot-binding, in my work I wanted to show how we can view modern China along the axis of gender. After dismantling the Qing Dynasty, it was considered necessary to "nationalize the body" in the process of reorganizing the state. Since women were subsequently incorporated into the nation as "national mothers," or "national reproductive subjects," it was considered necessary to abolish foot-binding, which had been carried out primarily as fashion through the Ming Qing era.

However, even for reform-minded men, in order for

men who felt an attachment to foot-bound women to be freed from their attachment, they generally followed a process of first having their nationalistic impulses stimulated by missionaries and doctors from the West who criticized foot-binding as a "barbaric custom of backwards China," before they internalized this view and became critics of foot-binding themselves. Through this process, Chinese women whose feet had been bound became symbols of "backwards China," and were considered a "national shame," and "foot-bound hunts" were subsequently sanctioned. In this way, such women were brought to a state of self-hatred, and they suffered much mental and psychological pain as a result. Furthermore, post-May Fourth Movement "new women," and the subsequent "modern girls," would occasionally refer to women with bound feet as "backward women," to highlight their own "newness" to males. Finally, in emphasizing "quality" over number of children in the drive to improve the race, eugenics went directly against Confucianism, which demanded fertility, and ultimately helped establish feminism in China. We cannot discuss feminism without facing this fact.

### How "National" is Chinese Nationalism?

Over the past several years the economic relation between Japan and China has become prosperous; on the political front, however, relations have cooled, and popular sentiment between the two countries has deteriorated. This was especially obvious through various incidents that occurred during the Summer 2004 Asian Cup soccer tournament, when a group of anti-Japanese Chinese spectators caused some disturbances, and various mass media in each country pronounced anti-Japanese or anti-Chinese sentiments.

But as some media emphasized, it would be a serious misunderstanding to believe that the anti-Japanese spectators were part of a larger movement of anti-Japanese nationalism in China. My own experience, when I stopped in Shanghai after attending a symposium in Hunan in late August, affirmed that anti-Japanese nationalism is not a nationwide phenomenon in China. Thus, the question of how "national" modern Chinese nationalism actually is, is a subject that requires further investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> 坂元ひろ子 (2004) 『中国民族主義の神話－人種・身体・ジェンダー』 (The Myth of Nationalism in Modern China: Race, Body and Gender) 岩波書店.