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Global History Seminar (Profs. Akita Shigeru/ Nadin Heé)

The Peculiarities of Japanese History. A Foreign Historian's Perspective



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Concluding remarks: Arnold J. Toynbee on "Japan in World History"

Introduction: General works on Japanese history

The books of Josef Kreiner (Hrsg.), Gomi Fumihiko/Toriumi Yasushi (Hrsg.) and
Brett L. Walker

Space and time in Japanese history

Katō Shūichi, *Nihon bunka ni okeru jikan to kūkan* (Time and Space in Japanese Culture).
Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten 2007

Three conceptions of time

- > Linear conception of time
- > Cyclical conception of time: seasons, calendar
- > Lifetime of individuals

The structure of historical science in Japan:

Space as the defining category

Japanese History

Asian History

Western History

The structure of historical science European universities:

Time as the defining category

Pre-/Proto-History – Ancient History – Medieval History – Early Modern History – Modern History – Contemporary History

1. Theoretical Considerations

Tsuda Sōkichi (津田左右吉, 1873-1961) on Japan and Asia

“New Research on the History of the Age of Gods” (1913): Critique of “Kojiki” (“Report on Ancient Matters”, 712) und “Nihon shoki” (“Chronicle of Japan”, 720); mixture of myths and historical facts

今井修編『津田左右吉歴史論集』岩波文庫2006年、p.216-239:
「日本歴史の特性」 “The Peculiarities of Japanese History”
(1939/46):

- People in regions and on the country side as driving forces of history;
- Egalitarian structures of communities > “natural humanism”
- Adaption of foreign cultures

“Inside” (uchi 内) und “Outside” (soto 外) Parameters of cultural theory in Japan

Karube Tadashi u.a. (Hrsg.), Uchi to soto – Taigaikan to jikozō no keisei (Inside and Outside – The Emergence of Views Towards Outside and of Self Images). Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten 2014 (= Iwanami kōza Nihon no shisō; Vol. 3)

Further Research on the dichotomy of *inside* and *outside*:

Katō Shūichi

、 Mita Munesuke

Maruyama Masao

Yanagita Kunio

“Inside” and “Outside” in Japanese Historiography

Nagahara Keiji, Japanese Historiography in the 20th Century.
Yoshikawa kōbunkan 2003, p.260-262: 「日本国」の内と外

Since the 9th century an emerging consciousness regarding “self”
and “other” among members of the Heian aristocracy:

内 = 神国 = 清浄

外 = 異土 = 汚穢

Source: 村井章介「アジアの中の日本中世」校倉書房1988

a) Self images: Japan as seen from inside

- > 神国 *shinkoku*: Japan as the country of gods
- > 島国 *shimaguni*: Japan as an island country
- > 単一民族 *tan'itsu minzoku*: the Japanese as an ethnic homogeneous people
- > 家社会 *ie-shakai*: Japan as a family-society
- > 皇国 *kōkoku*: Japan as the country of the tennō or the imperial house

b) The foreign view: Japan as seen from outside

> Japan as the enigma, a place of longing

(Marco Polo, the beauty of traditional Japan, the paradise of the East)

> Japan as a closed country

(Engelbert Kaempfer, Immanuel Kant, Herman Melville, Ruth Benedict)

> Japan as a danger

(ancient China: People of “Wa” considered as “barbarians”; the era of imperialism before WW I: the “yellow peril”)

> Japan as a model for development

(positive: modernization theory; negative: the management of financial crises in the past, i.e. Paul Krugman)

Turning Points of Historical Development Between “Openings” and “Closures”

The theses of my book:

1. The historical development of Japan is characterized by a constant change between “openings” towards the outside world and “closures” or “demarcations” against foreign influences.
2. The cultural paradigms of “uchi” and “soto” help to identify the turning points of Japanese history. Shifting perspectives (from “opening” to “closure” and back) can often be linked to processes of political, social, economic or religious change.

2. “Openings”

The introduction of Buddhism and the implantation of the Chinese administrative structure (7th/8th century)

- > Asuka- and Nara-period (592-710 and 710-784): Cities as symbols of domination
- > 538 Korean king sends a Buddha statue to the ruler of Japan, followed soon by the emergence of various Buddhist schools in Japan; the religious aim: overcoming the world as a place of suffering
- > 701/718 Criminal law and administrative law based on Chinese models

2. “Openings”

Japan after the Mongol invasions 1274/81 – an enforced opening

- > The reign of Kublai Khan, 1260-94;
since 1271 Chinese Emperor (Yuan dynasty)
- > 1274 first expedition to Japan; 1281 second expedition
- > The creation of a myth – *kamikaze* (wind of Gods)
- >>>The Mongols did not conquer Japan, but the invasions led to social and political change: the role of warriors, the status of women, and the erosion of the warrior government in Kamakura (1192-1333)

2. “Openings”

Japan after the Opium War, 1840-68

- > 1842 Peace of Nanjing; ends with the system of unequal treaties
- > Japan and foreign ships: from containment by force (1825) to support (1842)
- > 1853/54 Commodore Perry and the “Black Ships”
- >>>1854-68 controversies about how to answer the foreign intrusion led to civil war and the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate.

2. “Openings”

Japan under American Occupation, 1945-52

- > 15 August 1945: end of the war in the Far East and other parts of Asia
- > The policy of occupation:
 - Demilitarization
 - Democratization
 - Decentralization

3. “Closures”

The end of diplomatic relations to China at the beginning of the Heian era (794-1192)

> Characteristic features of the epoch:

Domination of court and aristocracy; cultural innovation, i.e. literature; esoteric Buddhism; rise of private landowners

> Three portals of power (権門) : court aristocracy, bands of warriors, clerics

> 838 last delegation to China

> Strengthening defense on Kyūshū

> 894 official end of diplomatic relations

> Cultural self determination: language and literature, access to academies by privilege (not formally open as in China)

3. “Closures”

The sakoku decrees of the Tokugawa shōgunate

- > since 1549 Christian mission;
- > 1603 establishment of the shōgunate in Edo (today: Tōkyō)
- > 1612 suppression of Christian missionaries and Japanese followers
- > 1633-39 “decrees of closing the country”

Interpretation of the decrees is difficult: How “closed” was the country until 1800? Failure or success?

Privileges for the Dutch VOC in Nagasaki that became a window to the world

3. “Closures”

Nationalism and Pan-Asianism, 1895-1945

Ōkawa Shūmei 大川周明 (1886-1957), chief ideologist of Japanese imperialism and militarism

“The Structure of the East Asian Order – Asia, Europe, Japan” (1925):

“The paradise can always be found in the shadow of the sword. The fight between Western and Eastern powers is a fate we cannot avoid. [...] The Japanese-American war will happen, and Japan’s victory will lead us out of the darkness.[...]”

Concluding remarks

Arnold J. Toynbee in Japan

“The role of Japan in world history” (NHK, 1956)

- Insularity
- Geology and climate conditions
- Topography: Islands and mountains > Predominance of society in pre-modern times

Japan today: more similarities to Western nations than differences:

Modernization not a one-way route;

Hedonism versus precarious living conditions;

Change of a narrative that was based on progress and optimism;

“End of illusions” (A. Reckwitz): war, climate, capitalism.