Global Concepts? Keywords and Their Histories in Asia and Europe

History/Politics
November 11, 2010

“Conceptualization of ‘History’ and ‘Past’ in the 19th Century Japanese Thought”

Koichiro Matsuda
Professor of Japanese Political Thought at Rikkyo University, Tokyo

Short Abstract
In my paper, I will focus on the roles of the concepts of ‘history’, ‘past’, ‘antiquity’ and ‘time’ played in the political thought in the early modern Japan, mainly in the 18th and the early 19th century, before the Western theories and styles of historiography were brought in. Japan has a long history of historiography which had been under the strong influence of Chinese historiography and philosophy. There appeared, however, noteworthy arguments and controversies over the methods of historiography and the cognition of ‘past’. For instance, considerable numbers of intellectuals were not loyal to the prescriptive method in Zhu Xi’s formation of historiography. For some thinkers, classical antiquity of China or Japan was ‘fact’ rather than the ethical norm or mirror of conduct that one had to reflect on. Others would anticipate the development and prosperity in the future by comparing their contemporary social condition with the ‘past’. There appeared parallels in the Japanese intellectual world of the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ or the controversy over the question of ‘the origin of language’ in Europe. I will also briefly consider the continuing elements and effects of the early modern discourse over the historical thought after the modernization/Westernization of Japan started in the later 19th century.

Suggested Reading


Barry D. Steben, “Rai Sanyo’s Philosophy of History and the Ideal of Imperial
Koichiro Matsuda completed his Ph.D. in Political Science at the Tokyo Metropolitan University, he worked as Associate Professor at the Department of Education of Gifu University and at the College of Law and Politics of Rikkyo University. Presently he is Professor at this College, teaching graduate and undergraduate-level courses in the Political Science curriculum including the history of Japanese Political Thought, the political philosophy of East Asia and the general theory of political science.


**Recent Publications** (All in Japanese)

**Books:**
- *Kuga Katsunan: Jiyu ni koron wo daihyosu* (An biography of Kugakatsunan, a political journalist in Meiji), (Kyoto: Mineruva shobo, 2008)

- *Edo no chishiki kara Meiji no seiji e* (From Edo intellectual to Meiji politics), (Tokyo: Perikansa, 2008),

**Book Chapters and Journal Articles:**

- “Giki to kanshu: Meijiki seijiso ni totteno Tocqueville”, in Matsumoto, Miura, and Uno eds., *Tocqueville to democracy no genzai*, (Tokyo, Tokyodaigaku shuppankai, 2009)


- “Senkanki no hōshisō to ‘dantai’ no rironkōsei”, in Inoki Takenori ed., Senkanki nihon no shakaishudan to network, (Tokyo, NTT shuppan, 2008)

**Recent Conference Papers**

“The Concept of ‘Asia’ before Pan-Asianism”, at ICAS (International Convention of Asia Scholars) 6, August 6-9 2009, Daejeon, Korea, (English)

“Inoue Kowashi (1844-1895) and the (Re)Construction of Legal Terminology”, JSAA (The Japanese Studies Association of Australia) –ICJLE(the International Conference on Japanese Language Education) 2009 Conference, July 13-16, 2009, (English)


“Utility of Rituals in the Discourses on National Security and Political Authority by in the Kaikoku-Ishin Period”, at The 12th International Conference of EAJS(European Association for Japanese Studies) at Salento University in Lecce, Italy, September 20-23, 2008, (English)

“Competition and National Efficiency in Educational Discourse in Japan in the 1850s and 1860s”, at The 15th biennial JSAA conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 1-4 July 2007, (English)

“‘Feudalism’ and ‘Public Spirit’ in the Discourse of Modern Japanese Historiography”, at International Symposium ‘Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia’, Saint Margaret’s College, University of Otago, New Zealand, December 13-15 2006, (English)
Between Europe and Asia analyzes the origins and development of Eurasianism, an intellectual movement that proclaimed the existence of Eurasia, a separate civilization coinciding with the former Russian Empire. The essays in the volume explore the historical roots, the heyday of the movement in the 1920s, and the afterlife of the movement in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The first study to offer a multifaceted account of Eurasianism in the twentieth century and to touch on the movement's intellectual entanglements with history, politics, literature, or geography, this book also explores the European appropriation of indigenous things: curiosity - colonialism in its infancy - converted artifacts - the material culture of Christian missions - murder stories - settlers' curios ethnology and the vision of the state - artifacts as tokens of industry - the name of science.

In the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial world, where photography often functioned as a tool of visual surveillance and codification, body markings, physiognomy, and costume were key determinants in fixing identity and underscoring otherness. Photographers working under British colonial authorities in India compiled vast dossiers of the subcontinent's many ethnic groups, classifications based on their distinguishing physical traits and attires.