



Introduction: The East-West Debate

Geographical proximity has helped to nurture Chinese influence on Japanese culture and politics. Its writing script and philosophical traditions, as well as the art of ink painting and bonzai, bear the mark of Chinese influence. The China factor was internalized over time and the study of Chinese culture became part of the mainstream of Japanese intellectual traditions. The term *Kangaku* was coined to represent Chinese studies, and Japanese scholars read Chinese poetry and classics the Japanese way, in what they address as *Kanbun*. The point here is to note that many Chinese elements were internalized over the centuries, and, in the process, the Japanese created a “China in Japan” where Japanese awareness of China was entangled with Japanese self-perceptions. Chinese studies became integral to mainstream Japanese intellectual traditions and China scholars in Japan did not need to go to China to have an in-country experience. Indeed, scholars who did visit China in the late nineteenth century found the real China to be a poor shadow of what they were familiar with.¹

In reality China was both an external and an internal factor for Japan. Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868) was confined within a self-imposed isolationist vision, and the China factor then was more vividly a factor internal to Japanese thought, some would say thoroughly assimilated into Japanese culture. This vision was soon complicated by the opening of Japan and the establishment of the first Japanese presence on the continent in 1895. Changing circumstances required a readjustment of Japanese perceptions of China, and this urgency increased as Japanese influence in China expanded. This study proposes to trace that process through the intellectual journeys of one Tachibana Shiraki (1881–1945): journalist, scholar, critic, colonial apologist, and pan-Asian visionary.

The China factor was embedded in Japanese traditions. China, as a cultural element, was often a source for cultural renewal. But Chinese performance in the nineteenth century served more as a negative example—defeated in the Opium Wars and too rigid to adapt to a changing world. The substance of Fukuzawa Yukichi's (1835–1901) call to cut Asian ties was a call to abandon the burden of Japan's Chinese cultural connections,² and this call was contrasted by the renewed search for a Japanese identity in the 1890s which emphasized its indigenous heritage.³ In the East-West debate, Westernization was adopted as a means to attain the end of preserving Japan's identity, of which the China factor could be seen as an integral part. Japanese perceptions of China could not be separated from the East-West debate. A Confucian revival, as represented by the views of Motoda Nagazane (Eifu) (1818–91) and the imperial rescript on education, was a significant part of the national heritage movement of the 1890s.⁴ Chinese elements continued to exert influence in modern Japanese intellectual traditions in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Westernizers of the Japanese Enlightenment movement, entertaining an assumption of Japanese cultural inferiority, highlighted the need to catch up with a civilized West. Such an assumption also generated a desire to remedy this inferiority complex so as to restore national self-confidence. In this enterprise, Naitō Konan (1866–1934) used the China factor to redefine modernity in East Asia.⁵ While historical China could be redefined to serve the Japanese present, contemporary China could no longer be a cultural model. Tachibana Shiraki nonetheless endeavored to bring contemporary Chinese society into the context of the current scene, to revitalize the China factor as an integral part of contemporary Japanese intellectual traditions. Tachibana appealed to his countrymen to keep a finger on the pulse of the Chinese revolution and to appreciate that the future of Asia would be influenced by developments both in Japan and in China. History has since vindicated this perception.

An early advocate of Westernization, Sakuma Shōzan (1811–64), spoke of *wakon yōsai*, of Japanese spirit [and] Western techniques. Sakuma pointed out that China was neither Japanese nor Western, and the social and political relevance of Chinese studies in Japan became suspect.⁶ From late Tokugawa times Chinese studies ceased to be a valued route for upward social mobility, and the leading advocate of Westernization, Fukuzawa Yukichi, openly declared war on the discipline.⁷

The new fashion was Western learning. The foremost Western experts in Meiji Japan were Fukuzawa Yukichi and his colleagues from the Kaiseijo (formerly the Translation Bureau) such as Nishi Amane (1829–97) and Tsuda Mamichi (1829–1908). Fukuzawa started his popular work, *Exhortation to Learning*, by observing that social inequality was not the work of heaven.⁸ This was a direct refutation of Neo-Confucian social theories introduced by Hayashi Razan in the early days of the Shogunate. The observation then was that “Heaven is above and earth is below. The status of upper and lower have been pre-determined, [so] the place of man was likewise.”⁹

For a nation under threat, the search was for equality. Clinging to the traditional social hierarchies and dated Chinese values was counter-productive when Japan was seeking equality in tangible physical terms. If Chinese values could not demonstrate their functional relevance to Japan, then they should be discarded; Fukuzawa Yukichi articulated this view in his *Datsuaron*, a discourse on cutting Asian connections. This was in agreement with the views of Sakuma Shōzan, who pointed out that Chinese and Western values were both foreign, both nonessential, unless they could prove their utilitarian purpose to Japan.¹⁰ The country was seeking its national identity; it was not aiming to be Chinese or European.

Japanese Enlightenment thought turned Chinese values and Western values into a set of opposites. Chinese values were considered outworn and negative, Western values vibrant and positive. In the intellectual scheme of Fukuzawa Yukichi, Europe had advanced to the age of civilization while China was lagging behind in the age of barbarism.¹¹ Japanese victory over China in 1895 was to Fukuzawa a triumph of Japanese modernity over Chinese backwardness, a view widely shared in Japan at the time.¹² Western experts replaced China scholars as cultural high priests, and China scholars were viewed as conservatives who clung to the defunct dogmas of a bygone age.

Chinese elements were too deeply embedded in Japanese culture to allow surgical operations without causing serious damage. A few China scholars tried to redress the balance, to use Chinese values to counter an overzealousness for things European. As the upper classes were dancing to Western tunes, riding in horse carriages, living in splendid European-style mansions, and parading themselves as Westernized worthies, the voice of unease was not far behind. Within government ranks Motoda Nagazane (Eifu) tried to

revive Confucian ethics through prescriptive practices in the school curriculum.¹³ In intellectual circles Shiga Shigetaka, Kuga Katsunan, and Miyake Setsurei were debating the nature of national heritage.¹⁴ In academia, Naitō Konan challenged the assumption that modernity was exclusive to European experience. Naitō refined the concept of modernity, applying European historiographical concepts to Chinese history to demonstrate that features of modernity had been present since the Song dynasty in China.¹⁵ The Naitō hypothesis helped to ensure that the China factor would remain a relevant positive element in modern Japanese thought. There were other thinkers who struggled to revitalize the waning influence of China in Japanese thought. Notable among them were Miyazaki Tōten (1871–1922) and Kita Ikki (1883–1937), men who were intimately involved with the Chinese revolutionary movement and sensitive to the complex historical processes of change in China.¹⁶ To them it was intellectual folly to dismiss China and Chinese influence.

Imperial expansion since 1895 created a new dimension in the China debate.¹⁷ Though China had failed itself, Chinese territory and resources could be used to nurture the Japanese empire. Japan expanded into traditional Chinese spheres of influence in Korea and Manchuria, and then into China itself. The decomposing flesh of the old Chinese empire became the source of strength for a new empire as Japan searched for more treaty privileges, a larger market share, and more territories to conquer. When Japan faced diplomatic containment after 1919, conquests in China became the substance of Japanese responses to break through.

The Japanese presence on the continent after 1895 intensified the China debate. Differences polarized between arrogance and sympathy, and Japan was once again faced with the options of cutting its cultural ties with Asia (Datsua) or of reviving Asia (Kōa). Tachibana Shiraki (1881–1945), an expatriate journalist cum intellectual, played an important role in this debate between 1911 and 1945. History is a continuum. Although the Japanese empire has come and gone, the place of Japan in Asia is a continuing concern. The debate which engaged Tachibana Shiraki from the time he set foot on the continent in 1906 to his demise in 1945, did not end with Japan's crushing defeat in the Pacific War. Many of the fundamentals of that debate remain relevant, and this alone should make a study of the ideas of Tachibana Shiraki worthwhile and exciting. But who was Tachibana and how did he burst into the debates on China and East-West relations?

The Young Tachibana Shiraki, 1905–1925

In April 1906, when Tachibana Shiraki migrated to Manchuria, he was a young man of twenty-four. This decision shaped his future and he spent most of the next four decades in China. According to Tachibana, a conscious choice to migrate was made soon after the Russo-Japanese War and he took up a journalist position in Sapporo in 1905 as a first step toward this goal.

When victory [in the Russo-Japanese War] is assured, our prospects [on the continent] will surpass our dreams. I decided to go to Hokkaidō, for Sapporo is a base for Nakano Tenmon, a person with a vision for [Japanese presence in] Siberia. In Sapporo I joined the *Hokkai Times*, a newspaper owned by Nakano Tenmon.¹⁸

Tachibana was responding to a “continental fever” then raging in Japan.¹⁹ Over two decades later he reflected on youthful emotions and diagnosed himself as suffering from a syndrome of heroic role playing.²⁰ In the days of empire, foreign adventure and heroic deeds fired the imagination of the young and imperialism had yet to acquire the negative connotations it is associated with nowadays.

Tachibana Shiraki was born into a well-established but low-ranking samurai family whose genealogical records extended back to the sixteenth century. His forebears were generally undistinguished, with the exception of two who made some mark as China scholars. Family tales sustained the notion that Chinese studies was a road to social advancement.²¹

Shiraki was the eldest of three children and the only son.²² His father, Tachibana Hakaru, joined the public school system on graduating from the Teachers College of Ōsaka. Hakaru was dedicated to his career in educational service and could spare little time and attention for his young son, Shiraki. He was spared the rigours of parental discipline. While the boy was attending local primary school, grandmother provided care and nurture.²³ In 1895 young Shiraki was entrusted to a maternal uncle in Tōkyō, and he started his secondary education at Japan College in the national capital. At the time Tachibana was suffering from poor health and the attention he required was too much for a busy relative. Young Shiraki was, as a result, withdrawn from Japan College and he left Tōkyō to rejoin his parents.²⁴ As his father was transferred from post to post,

young Shiraki also relocated from school to school. He attended four different junior highs and never settled in one place long enough to be subjected to the influence of any one school or of its teachers. In 1901 he sat for the entrance examinations for the prestigious Fifth Senior High of Kumamoto prefecture and had his first experience of the strong hands of authority. He arrived at the entrance examination late and was denied entry by the invigilator, Natsume Sōseki, the famous literary figure. Tachibana, a determined young man, sat for the entrance examinations again the following year.²⁵

In later life he partly attributed his heroic-role-playing complex to social conditioning in school. He recalled that:

It is not uncommon for an imaginative youth to move from hero-worship to role emulation. For me this tendency lay dormant till age seventeen. Nonetheless, I was suspected of latent heroic qualities in primary school as the consequence of a foolish act. While the new warden was addressing assembly, I burst out laughing. My mind was wandering, but the warden thought it was an open sneer. He summoned me that evening. My sense of foreboding deepened when he bellowed out my name TA-CHI-BA-NA in slow tempo. More frightened than bold, I said that I was expecting the punishment I deserve. Later I was to learn that my apparent boldness fitted in with the warden's image of the gutsy hero, one who was prepared to swim against the tide in defence of principles. In my case, I think he mistook a frightened young man for a potential hero.²⁶

He admitted to a fondness for classical Chinese studies in ninth grade, when he was inspired by his Chinese teacher, and he claimed that his heroic models were drawn from reading biographies in the *Historical Records*.²⁷ His commitment to tradition was such that he rebuked an English language teacher for introducing the Bible in class. The young Shiraki was known for his anti-authoritarian strain and an ability to hold his liquor, and he explained both to be outward expressions of his desire to act out heroic roles.²⁸ Nowadays we explain such behavior as those of a teenager seeking to establish his own personality. Such outward signs of assertive behavior did not auger well for this young man in a highly disciplined society.

His decision to seek a future in Manchuria was related to adverse personal circumstances. A series of misfortunes struck after he left school in 1902. In November corruption charges ruined his father's career, even though the case was later overturned at the high court.

Tachibana Hakaru sought alternative employment overseas and took up a teaching position in China.²⁹ Then in 1903 young Shiraki failed the entrance examinations for Waseda University.³⁰ The young man found himself stranded in Tōkyō with no future prospects and no parental support. His determination to succeed was toughened in adversity and for the next two and a half years he educated himself with daily visits to the Ueno Public Library. His biographer Yamamoto Hideo commented that those days probably gave Tachibana more than a university education.³¹ His personal discipline in self-education was to serve him for life, for Tachibana Shiraki was a self-made man.

He was aware that without formal qualifications it would be difficult to find a suitable career opening in Japan. The lack of job opportunities was probably the main reason for him to seek his fortune overseas. The mass media was coming into its own in Japan by the turn of the century, reporting on the Russo-Japanese war stimulated public interest further and new career opportunities in the media attracted Tachibana. Responding to an advertisement for journalists by the *Hokkai Times* in 1905, Tachibana was happily surprised to be offered a position.³² Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 opened up a new world of opportunities on the continent and young Tachibana migrated to Dairen in April 1906 to work in the *Ryōtō Shimpō* (Eastern Ryō News), another newspaper owned by Nakano Tenmon, his employer in Sapporo.³³ It was reported that Tachibana began learning to speak Chinese in Sapporo, further confirming that his move to Hokkaidō was a stepping-stone toward Dairen.³⁴ When he started work in China, he felt totally inadequate. He admitted later that it took him another eight years before he could comment on the Chinese scene with confidence.³⁵

Tachibana was socially marginalized and temperamentally assertive. His constant relocation from school meant that he was not subjected to the imprint of family, teacher, or school.³⁶ Independence of mind was not a recommendation in a society where conformity and group loyalty were considered higher social virtues. He had no formal credentials to claim a place in the sun, either in the elite world of bureaucracy or in the world of literary attainment. He engaged in social and political commentary on China with little chance of being heard by the official world which he aspired to influence. His family connections led him neither to a place in an imperial university nor to a bureaucratic career. While preparing himself to be a man of letters, he did not aim for a literary career. Writing novels and composing poems were viewed as trivial pursuits

unbecoming of serious scholars, serious in the Confucian sense of dedication to public affairs. Political commentary was of greater appeal. Yet in this endeavor, Tachibana found himself a voluntary exile on the continent for most of his professional life. Nakanishi Katsuhiko suggested that Tachibana was critical of the state when he left for Manchuria, and that he might not be the fervent nationalist he later claimed to be.³⁷ He started as a young journalist writing about a society he knew little about for a readership of expatriates and emigrés who were brought up to despise the backward Chinese. Every Japanese success helped to strengthen this prejudice and to deepen their commitment to Japanese expansion. Perhaps Tachibana was venting his frustration against the establishment indirectly by criticizing the anti-Chinese prejudices of his readers.

However, the social circles he kept did not reflect this anti-establishment attitude. In Dairen new friendships were formed with Kaneko Setsusai and Ōkita Saburō, both drawn to the continent by the prospects of Japanese expansion. At the *Ryōtō shimpō* (Eastern Ryō News), Kaneko wrote the Chinese-language columns, while Tachibana and Ōkita reported in Japanese. Kaneko was an older man who came to Manchuria in the late nineteenth century to serve as an interpreter in the Japanese army. He was a veteran of the Sino-Japanese War and of the Russo-Japanese War. When the *Ryōtō shimpō* was established by Suenaga Jun-ichirō in Dairen, Kaneko returned to civilian life and settled in Manchuria.³⁸ In 1906 Ōkita Saburō and Tachibana Shiraki were both in their late twenties and were recruited by Nakano Tenmon, who fired them with expansionist fervor. The two young men worked closely together, both were married in Dairen, Ōkita in 1908 and Tachibana in 1911, and the two young families lived in adjacent premises as well.³⁹

Kaneko Setsusai had a reputation of being a *shishi*, in this context meaning one who was dedicated to Japanese expansion. To Kaneko Setsusai, the two young recruits were promising converts. He cultivated close friendship with the young recruits, and generously gave his retirement benefits to Ōkita to help the young man to pay for marriage expenses and to set up house. After retiring from the *Ryōtō shimpō*, Kaneko became the chief editor of the *Taitō Nippō* (Great East Daily) and helped to establish the journal *Shintenchi* (New World) in 1926.⁴⁰ The latter was one of the major publication outlets for Tachibana. In 1923 Kaneko became the commander of a paramilitary group, the Continental Youth Corps (Tairiku Seinendan), earning himself a reputation of being a Japanese zealot, of being the Tōyama Mitsuru of Manchuria.⁴¹ Whatever his own sympathies

were, Tachibana's social and professional contacts during his early years in Dairen were known advocates of continental expansion.

Tachibana was not deeply involved with China issues until after the 1911 revolution. His biographer noted that between 1906 and 1911 Tachibana hardly touched political topics. Tachibana himself noted that his early years in Dairen were spent reporting on village conditions in Manchuria.⁴² There was a marked discrepancy between a professed inclination for continental expansion, and an absence of active political discourse during his days with the *Ryōtō shimpō*. One would suggest that young Shiraki had not yet committed himself firmly to a position, he was still in the process of developing an intellectual understanding of China and Chinese society.

Nakanishi Katsuhiko noted that Tachibana had an independent spirit and found it difficult to conform to conventional views of the time. He suggested that Tachibana was critical of the state because of attempts by a state institution to victimize his father in a corruption charge.⁴³ Nakanishi referred to a short story Tachibana submitted as part of his application to the *Hokkai Times*. Tachibana adopted a familiar *uba sute* (abandoning old folks) theme to depict the dilemma of a young farmer on receiving his conscription papers. Caught between patriotic duties and filial obligations, the young farmer committed suicide. Commenting on the short story, an editor of the *Hokkai Times* told Tachibana it was not the task of a journalist to weaken public trust in authority this way.⁴⁴ Nakanishi suggested that the writer of such a story clearly exhibited anti-authoritarian tendencies and this was in character with past behaviors.⁴⁵ Nonetheless Tachibana adapted well to the new world in Dairen. He was sought out and cultivated by colleagues with expansionist sympathies, and one suspects that Tachibana deliberately hid his anti-authoritarian strain by refraining from commenting on political controversies. No writings of his during 1905–11 are extant, and Tachibana noted later that he deliberately avoided political commentary to concentrate on less controversial issues, observing and reporting on the daily life of rural communities.⁴⁶ Before 1911, his deliberate avoidance of political commentary reflected a personal uncertainty on what stands to take. But his independence of spirit and early estrangement from the state gave him a certain detachment, an ability to transcend current Japanese subjectivity in observing the Chinese scene. His intellectual assertiveness could not be stifled for long. In direct reporting he began to appreciate his own freshness of vision, expressing his dissatisfaction with Japanese arrogance toward the Chinese and Japanese ignorance of contemporary

China fostered by that arrogance. Tachibana Shiraki was harboring thoughts of molding Japanese attitudes, of acting as a social critic. His independence of spirit would make it increasingly difficult for him to echo conventional views which he regarded as baseless.

Tachibana himself felt ill-prepared for the task of interpreting Chinese society. Knowing little Chinese and dissatisfied with his school-training in Chinese studies, Tachibana had to equip himself so that he could comment with confidence. This intellectual preparatory period began in earnest in 1913 when he moved to live in Beijing to take up a post as the chief writer of the *Nikka Kōron* (Sino-Japanese Review). There he sought the company of a fellow journalist and scholar, Nakano Kōkan. Nakano was one or two years younger, and was keenly interested in studying popular culture and religion. He became Tachibana's mentor as the latter began systematic studies of Chinese society.⁴⁷

The choice to study popular culture soon after the 1911 revolution seemed incongruous for a young journalist. Was this another instance of a deliberate choice to stay away from the political issues of the day or could this be explained in terms of intellectual diffidence? Tachibana was probably not yet ready to comment on current affairs. But it was also explicable in terms of his anti-authoritarian strain, for he chose to study popular culture rather than the political history of the Chinese elite. One of his first theoretical contributions was to point out that Chinese politics was not the exclusive concern of the elite. This early orientation toward popular culture promised a fresh point of view.

His initial concern was with practical methodological problems. These concerns were later aired in the *Monthly China Review* (*Gekkan Shina kenkyū*) in 1925, when he spoke of positivism and the scientific method. He turned to Western methodology, anthropological approaches in particular, in this early stage.⁴⁸ The study of popular religion was therefore not escapism but a different route to a deeper and broader understanding of China.

By 1916 Tachibana felt intellectually confident enough to launch his first major effort at updating Chinese studies for Japanese readers. He and Nakano Kōkan collaborated to launch the *Shina kenkyū shiryō* (Source Materials on China). The journal was not geared to popular taste; it was principally a translation journal focused on legislation of the Republican government in Beijing, as well as selected academic papers on matters such as local taxation and finance. The two journalists aimed at compiling basic research materials to assist Japanese scholars. In two years some ten volumes were published at

irregular intervals.⁴⁹ These translations attested to his sophisticated command of the Chinese language, demonstrated his analytical power, and established him as a China expert to be watched. By 1918 one can no longer say that Tachibana was a man without credentials, and these were solid publications rather than university degrees.

Learning on the job, immediate professional demands pointed the path for Tachibana. He made a study of rural Chinese society his vocation and he made sure his facts were right by collecting empirical data on location. Searching through classical texts and contemporary observations, Tachibana emerged as a self-taught man intent on understanding Chinese rural traditions. As he grew in confidence, he questioned the opinions of Naitō Konan and Max Weber. He shared Naitō's faith in rural China, but questioned Naitō's support for traditional gentry leadership.⁵⁰ And he was a strong critic of Weberian thought for suggesting that Confucianism was secular and nonreligious in character.⁵¹

In his analysis of Chinese religion and political thought, Tachibana distinguished between the theism of Confucian thought and the atheism of classical Daoist thought. To him theistic Confucianism was the value system of the Chinese ruling elite, and that Daoism opposed Confucian theories by demolishing their theistic foundations.⁵²

His intellectual discourse on China began with an exposition of classical Confucian and Daoist ideas. He explained Confucianism as a theistic creed, believing in an ultimate supernatural force, Shangdi. Central to Confucian thought was the theory of the mandate of Heaven, that power was divinely ordained. Zi Si in the *Zhongyong* (Golden Mean) moved beyond the theory of divine right and used ethics as a standard to regulate the actions of rulers. Mencius equated public opinion as a manifestation of the mandate.⁵³ Confucian political thought combined these three positions to state that power was divine, ethical, and based on public support. But Confucian thought became the ideology of an authoritarian government when Dong Zhongxu focused on divine and arbitrary power.⁵⁴

Tachibana approached classical Daoist thought through the sayings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. These were founded upon metaphysical assumptions. Daoist metaphysical thought began with the unitary assumptions of *shuwu* (metaphysical space) as the source of all power and creation. Later Daoist thought adopted the dialectic of yin and yang.⁵⁵ Whatever the merits or otherwise of Daoism, one of its primary aim was to refute Confucian theism as a means of

liberating the Chinese mind from the theistic assumptions of their rulers. But the Daoist masters themselves were high intellectuals, not plebians.

It is doubtful that the journal *Shina kenkyū shiryō* (Source Materials on China) was self-supporting, for Tachibana continued to edit and write for a number of newspapers in the Beijing, Tianjin, and Jinan area to support himself. In 1918 he accepted a commission from the Japanese army to act as a war correspondent in Siberia. No writing resulted, for he was struck down by alcoholic poisoning from overindulging in vodka and suffered a stroke.⁵⁶ This brought about a mid-life crisis. The stroke left him partially paralyzed and he could no longer write with his right hand. He faced death for the first time. Even as he recovered, medical opinion gave him a life expectancy of no more than seven years. This tragedy almost robbed him of his writing career and Tachibana had to reorganize his life. He even contemplated abandoning his scholarly interests on China.⁵⁷ He resigned from his positions in a number of newspapers and retired to Dairen. There he continued as a freelance writer, contributing reflective articles on subjects such as human character and women.⁵⁸ His sense of religious conviction deepened as he found his own personal message from the *Zhongyong* (Golden Mean). He interpreted the *Zhongyong* as a religious text based on the belief of one true god and the presence of godly qualities in every human being. The Dao or the meaning of life was to give this godly quality full expression.⁵⁹ That is to say the meaning of life was preordained, and the task of man is to get on with the task whatever the circumstance. As Tachibana revived faith in his own calling, the shadow of death disappeared. In work he found life. Physical disabilities became merely incidental obstacles to overcome. He never allowed his physical handicap to interfere with his writing or his travelling.

Intellectual Make-up

His ideas were influential amongst right-wing, left-wing, and moderate political circles. On the right, Tachibana was a staunch supporter of Japanese empire. On the left, Tachibana was a critic of the military and its high handed actions in China, as well as offering an alternative strategy of winning the trust of rural China. To the cautious compromisers in the middle such as Konoe Fumimaro, Tachibana was a like-minded moderate whose idealistic vision of a reformed Japan charted a middle course to reestablish the institu-

tional authority of the state. How was an outspoken journalist able to generate trust from such a wide spectrum of political interests?

This was not an achievement by someone set out to woo the trust of left, right, and center. It was not Tachibana who tried to ingratiate himself to specific political interests. His mind was problem-centered rather than politics-oriented. It was in his changing visions of how to deal with the China and continental questions that others found common cause with him. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and politicians of different hues found common cause in Tachibana's ideas. In reading his writings, one should steer clear of political stereotyping and avoid labelling him as inclined more to the left or to the right, for this would distract us from his preoccupation with China and the continent.

The problems which Tachibana dedicated his mind to were those of Japan. Muno Takeshi suggests that "the limitations of Japan were the limitations of Tachibana," and this concept provides us with a viable and consistent approach in evaluating the life and work of Tachibana Shiraki.⁶⁰ In a comparable manner the summation of Tachibana's ideas is aptly presented in the subtitle of the third volume of his *Collected Works—Japan's Destiny in Asia*. Tachibana tried to merge Japanese expansive energies with the cause of pan-Asianism. In this endeavor he traversed the limits of socialist internationalism and Japanese imperialism to establish his own ideal world of a united Asia under Japanese leadership. To Tachibana, any attempt to separate the destinies of Japan and Asia was counter-productive, and his criticisms of the military were based on this perception.

Where was Tachibana to seek inspiration for an alternative model? Bearing in mind that he was a self-made journalist who learned on the job, the ideas of Tachibana were inseparable from the progress of his own life-experiences. While this work does not pretend to be a biographical study, a sketch of his life-story is an essential introduction to the development of his ideas.⁶¹

Attempts to interpret the thought of Tachibana are bound to be controversial. His intellectual make-up was complex and defies simple categorizations such as modern or traditional. He was an eclectic intent on absorbing a range of influences to advance his understanding of China. He denied that he was a scholar, saying that his work was not driven by a desire for knowledge for its own sake. He saw himself primarily as a political commentator and an educator, dedicated to educating his Japanese readership and to influencing the course of Japan's China policy.⁶²

Tachibana had a positive modern outlook. He believed that through scholarship and observation one could obtain a correct understanding of Chinese thought and society. In his writings on the study of China, he was full of optimism for sinology as a scientific discipline and unsparing in his admiration for European contributions to sinological traditions.⁶³ Sinology was influenced by scientific methods and assumptions, and Tachibana was particularly interested in the use of empirical data to test and substantiate those assumptions. He consciously turned to Qing empiricism and the sinological publications of the Dōbunkan (Chinese language school for Japanese students), to the surveys on local customs compiled by the Japanese in Formosa, and to village socioeconomic surveys published by the Research Department of the South Manchurian Railway Company.⁶⁴ His positive modern outlook was built upon the diverse influences of European, Chinese, and Japanese scholarship.

In this modernist approach, in this belief that knowledge and truth were absolute and attainable, Tachibana Shiraki was scathingly critical of traditional Japanese scholarship on China. His starting point was that his countrymen lacked a sound basic understanding of Chinese thought and society. He ascribed this short-coming to two influences, traditional scholarship on China and contemporary anti-Chinese prejudice.⁶⁵ Tachibana rejected simplistic assumption that China was a Confucian society, and derided the industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi for suggesting that China could be understood by reading the Confucian classic *Zhongyong* (The Golden Mean).⁶⁶ At a time when Japan was discarding Neo-Confucian thought in favor of Western utilitarian values, when the Japanese Enlightenment dismissed Neo-Confucian assumptions out of hand, to put China in Neo-Confucian dress was to cast China in a negative image.⁶⁷ "Chinese" acquired the connotation of being archaic, and China was seen to be living in an irrelevant past. But this was a connotation which traditional Japanese China scholars could not repudiate. Many of them travelled in China, seeking to enrich their intellectual life with first-hand experience. With each passing decade, their fondness for China became increasingly soured, for they could not find in contemporary China the China they discovered in classical literature.⁶⁸ Japanese China scholars were dismayed by the contemporary scene in China, for China was not as modern as Japan and China had, moreover, betrayed her own past. Tachibana noted that with each Japanese success in war, Japanese esteem for China declined further. He noted that Japanese perceptions were driven by factors

internal to the Japanese psyche, and that Japanese understanding of Chinese thought and society was not based on sound empirical data.⁶⁹ Tachibana aimed to reestablish a positive, modern, and objective understanding of China. In this task he was driven by the belief that events in China would have important bearing upon Japan's future. He engaged in scholarship with a keen awareness of its contemporary political relevance.

Periodization

Tachibana passed through a number of conscious changes during his intellectual development. Ōgami Suehiro, in his epilogue to the volume *Shina shakai kenkyū* (A Study of Chinese Society), identified three stages of intellectual development.⁷⁰ This was written in 1936, so the periodization scheme did not cover the later years and one can add a fourth stage. Tachibana took up distinct roles in each of these phases, beginning as a "semi-scholar," and continuing as a political commentator, a politician, and a visionary in turn.

In the first stage, covering the period 1906–25, Tachibana dedicated himself to the study of Chinese society. The young journalist had little knowledge of the Chinese language and his background in early Chinese history was of little relevance for understanding contemporary Chinese society. In his initial efforts to update his knowledge on China, he turned to the methodologies of the social sciences, and he looked for inspiration in European and American scholarship.⁷¹ It was through his experiences and empirical studies in the villages of Manchuria that Tachibana came to the conclusion that there were distinct limits to the application of Western scholarship in studying Chinese society. He distinguished between Western and Eastern traditions of social organization, contrasting between societies based on individual and community values.⁷²

The 1911 revolution heightened his interest and he moved to Beijing in 1913 to study popular religion with Nakano Kōkan.⁷³ Both believed that national consciousness was historically evolved and could be understood through popular culture.⁷⁴ They were intrigued by the long history of China and sought, through popular culture, to understand the durability of Chinese society. In this early phase Tachibana did not make a clear conceptual distinction between popular consciousness (*minshū ishiki*) and national consciousness (*minzoku ishiki*). Tachibana tried to establish that popular Daoism was the

repository of a Chinese community consciousness and that Daoism had an innate ability to assimilate competing cultural influences such as Confucianism and Buddhism.⁷⁵

The distinction between popular consciousness and national consciousness was clarified in the second phase, covering the period 1925–31. During this period Tachibana moved beyond analyzing Chinese society to become a political commentator. There was no sharp intellectual break as such, and his growing knowledge of Chinese society gave him insights which were markedly different from those of other Japanese commentators at the time. His essay on the May Thirtieth movement surprised his Japanese audience with its sympathetic call to support Chinese nationalist aspirations.⁷⁶

In this second phase, the political commentator was influenced by Marxian methodologies. His essay on the May Thirtieth movement distinguished between mass or popular consciousness (*minshū ishiki*) and national consciousness (*minzoku ishiki*).⁷⁷ His writings on Daoism were mainly on popular consciousness. In regard to national consciousness he said:

When China is conquered by aliens, national consciousness is sustained by the masses rather than the elite. The elite may serve the new masters to oppress their compatriots. From the perspective of the masses, these conquerors and Chinese elites were concurrently their class enemy and their national enemy. It is this dual enmity which helps to sustain popular national consciousness. When these two enemies are inactive, popular national consciousness would become inactive also.⁷⁸

This interpretation of Chinese nationalism bore unmistakable Marxian influences. At the same time he was deeply interested in the political ideas of Sun Yatsen. Sun's contrast between Eastern ethical politics and Western power politics paralleled Tachibana's suggestion that Eastern and Western societies were organized on different principles.⁷⁹ After Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek) coup in April 1927, Tachibana became less optimistic of the outcome of the Chinese revolution. He was critical of the Comintern and the Chinese Communists for promoting class struggle, saying that this tactic did not suit China. He supported Sun's advocacy of social harmony, not merely as an accommodation of conflicting class interests, but as the ways and means of attaining the One World utopia, an ultimate classless society spoken of in Confucian idealism.

In 1931 Tachibana went through his third intellectual trans-

formation when the political commentator was drawn increasingly into politics. During the 1925–31 period Tachibana and Yoshino Sakuzō were the two prominent public figures who had spoken out in support of Chinese nationalism. Tachibana was critical of Japanese expansionist policies and his incisive comments attracted the attention of the editors of the *Chūō kōron* (Central Review), who published his article on Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and Feng Yuxiang in the October 1930 issue. But this foray into public debate in Japan proper ended that same year when his article on the Chinese Communist Party was rejected by the left-wing journal *Kaizō* (Reform).⁸⁰ His intellectual independence was also compromised after the collapse of the *Gekkan Shina kenkyū* (Monthly China Review) in October 1925. Deprived of an independent platform to express his views, Tachibana accepted a paid position from the Research Department of the South Manchurian Railway Company.⁸¹ His political support of the Chinese nationalist revolution notwithstanding, Tachibana became a paid functionary of a colonial institution with a formal charter to expand Japanese influence. His asserted “defection” to the Kwantung Army in 1931 was but a move from political commentary to political action.⁸² Between 1931–39 he lent his intellectual weight to Japanese expansionism and advocated autonomous self-rule for Manchuria. He was trying to build a socioeconomic structure in Manchuria which could accommodate Japanese nationalism and Manchurian autonomy. This was a viable position as long as the Kwantung Army was uncertain of its hold over the Manchurian populace and used the ideas of Tachibana to encourage local collaboration. When Japanese bureaucrats in Manzhouguo were confident of their administrative and political grip, the Kwantung Army ceased to support the concept of autonomy for the indigenous populace.

The tensions between Tachibana and the Kwantung Army came out into the open in 1936. They differed on social and economic policies. The Kwantung Army put a five-year industrialization plan into action, while Tachibana continued to argue for a rural emphasis and a “long-term economic plan.”⁸³ By this time Tachibana was little more than a voice in the wilderness. His flirtation with politics continued with an unsuccessful attempt to influence the military in northern China and with a rural cooperative movement that he inspired in northern Manchuria.⁸⁴ But even as his disciple Satō Daishirō was launching the rural cooperative movement in earnest, Tachibana was incapacitated in hospital, nursing a broken leg.⁸⁵ For all practical purposes Tachibana was a spent force in Manchuria by 1936, with little influence and out of the limelight. He was denied a footing in

Manchurian politics, and his disciples who continued the effort soon felt the weight of suppression and died in prison.

Such reverses would have broken the spirit of lesser men. Tachibana, though, returned to Japan and turned his mind toward a political vision for the future, writing on the reorganization of Japan.⁸⁶ But his interests were wider than Japan; he wanted to reform his native country so that it would be better fitted to lead a New East.⁸⁷ The basic logic of Tachibana was that the empire did not exist to serve Japan, but that Japan existed to serve the empire. He transcended the narrow bounds of nationalism and envisioned an idealized empire. He attempted to write Japan large by suggesting that the Japanese *kokutai* (national polity), focused upon the unifying force of the Tennō (Emperor), could be the foundation of a New East which combined the strengths of Japan, China, and India to bring about a Eastern revival to counter Western dominance. Military reverses only strengthened his belief in a political solution. He died in Manchuria during the chaotic days of defeat, yet retained his optimism about Japan's destiny in Asia to the last. His career began with the onset of empire in 1906 and his life ended with the collapse of empire in 1945. This was a turbulent period in Sino-Japanese relations and a study of the ideas of Tachibana Shiraki will add depth to our understanding.