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Studies on Inner Asia* I: The Pre-Mongol Period

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Perhaps the greatest difficulty encountered in the study of Inner Asian history is the profusion of languages used in the region. Writings in more than twenty languages—including Chinese, Turkic, Tibetan and various Indo-European languages—survive from even the region's pre-Mongol period under consideration here. Faced with that diversity, Japanese scholarship on the history of Inner Asia so far has relied heavily on materials written in either Chinese—with which Japanese scholars are quite familiar—or old Turkic.[1] Formerly most prominent within the mainstream of Japanese scholarship in this field were studies in the region's historical geography and its political and cultural relations with surrounding regions based on rigorous critical analyses of historical records compiled in China.

Since the late nineteenth century, meanwhile, research teams from a number of advanced nations, including Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Japan, have recovered in Inner Asia many documents, epigraphs and other records written in a diverse range of languages and scripts. Linguists and philologists in the West have long treated these writings as important primary research materials for the study of Inner Asia. While incorporating the findings of that Western research, Japanese scholars have produced a considerable volume of research on Inner Asia in the fields of history and Buddhist studies based mainly on documents written in Chinese and old Turkic.[2] In short, whereas Western scholars have tended to treat unearthed writings as linguistic and philological data, their Japanese counterparts have generally approached them as material

* Inner Asia is comprised of the Turkestan region of Central Asia and the Mongolian territory of North Asia.

for historical and Buddhist studies.[3] Needless to say, neither bias is desirable; both academic traditions should eschew such predispositions and strive to maintain a healthy breadth and balance in research emphasis and approach. In recent years, in fact, the respective strengths of Western and Japanese scholarship in this field are at last beginning to come together through joint research projects.[4]

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, Japanese scholarship on Inner Asian history has clearly outgrown its former reliance on secondary sources produced in China and is now characterized by the direct scrutiny of written artifacts from the region itself as the true indices of its social and cultural reality. This trend reflects an attempt to grasp Inner Asian history from within, as it were, by focusing on the peoples who lived there, rather than by searching for it in the region's relations with China, West Asia or Europe. Happily, the shift coincided with the new discovery of many Chinese and Uighur texts dating from between the fourth and the thirteen centuries in the Turfan region of eastern Turkestan that quickly spawned a plethora of thematic detailed studies.

In the last few years in particular, the foundations of Japanese scholarship on these unearthed materials have been greatly improved, thereby eliminating many of the difficulties previously encountered in using them as historiographical data. First of all, the text and plate volumes of the collection of Chinese-language documents unearthed in Central Asia and now kept at Ryūkoku University have been published, completing at last the picture of the materials of which only fragmentary reports had heretofore been available.[5] This group of writings, discovered by a research team sent by Ōtani Kōzui (1876–1948) in the early years of the twentieth century, are also intimately related to texts found by expeditions from Britain, France, Germany and Russia around the same time, and favorable conditions are currently being created for the comprehensive analysis of all such materials from Central Asia now dispersed throughout the world.

Second, in an effort to promote the international exchange of information in this field, Tōyō Bunko published a series of English-language reference works featuring photographs and texts of documents preserved or unearthed in Tunhuang, Turfan and other regions, and focusing on a number of specific fields of research.[6]

These developments are the important fruit of many years of effort. In particular, the commentaries provided with the Tōyō Bunko collections surely comprise the most reliable reference material available on the subject, and are especially useful to researchers unfamiliar with Chinese-character script.[7]

Meanwhile, much progress has also been made in the translation and analysis of the old Turkic religious texts, particularly those in Uighur, that were recovered by the Stein expedition and are currently housed in the Oriental and India Office Collections department of the British Library.[8] Important work has also been done in the area of pre-Islamic Uighur history, including studies on Manichaeism[9] and analyses of secular contract documents.[10] These studies represent the current status of old Turkic studies in Japan.

However, one problem with Inner Asia studies in Japan in the past was that this concentration on Chinese and old Turkic texts inevitably produced a vacuum of research on writings in Indo-European languages. More recently, however, Japanese scholars have made marked progress in the study of Central Asian Middle-Iranian languages, a field which was virtually non-existent in Japan until only fifteen years ago. These efforts include the pioneering of serious linguistic and philological studies of Sogdian and Khotanese, primarily by young specialists in Iran studies.[11] While students of Tocharian have yet to emerge, scholarship in important Central Asian languages is being steadily consolidated. Furthermore, although Europe accounts for a sizable portion of all linguistic and philological scholarship in this field, insofar as this research demands a grasp not only of Iranian languages but also of the key Chinese-language materials on Central Asia, Japanese scholars can expect to play an important role in its further development in the years ahead.

With the strengthening of scientific ties with China, Russia and Mongolia, Japanese scholars of Inner Asia are enjoying more opportunities to go to the region to conduct research in the field. As a result, previously unknown documents[12] and new archaeological and ethnological materials[13] have been opened, and historical research based on these materials is already under way. With this trend gaining momentum over the last few years, research in this field has moved much closer to its true object and so can be conducted with much greater precision.

A number of interdisciplinary studies incorporating linguistic, archeological and historical expertise are already showing significant results,[14] and this broad approach is expected to expand further to embrace anthropology and sociology. This trend highlights the need for close exchange of information among those working in these separate fields. Recently, an increasing number of scholars are moving freely beyond the boundaries of their own areas of expertise to participate in the activities of research bodies in other fields. However, as each field grows increasingly compartmentalized, the volume of relevant literature specialists are obliged to read in any given

area is swelling at an explosive rate. First of all, then, it is crucial that researchers working in the same fields communicate closely with one another and that a cooperative framework be erected to enable them to undertake joint projects wherever possible. Although only small in scale, two scholarly societies were formed recently for the purpose of promoting such cooperative research on materials excavated from specified regions,[15] enabling researchers to exchange and publish relevant information on their common subject.[16] These efforts represent the first steps beyond the ever-narrowing confines of specialization toward interdisciplinary scholarship incorporating a broad spectrum of specialist knowledge.

Two problems remain, however, regarding these trends in scholarship on Inner Asia. The first is that, although the detailed research methodologies developed in Japan and the West for the study of specific regional societies are being applied effectively to construct the history of Inner Asian regions rich in written artifacts and easily accessible to researchers, historical and cultural research on regions and ethnic groups for which such a wealth of written clues is unlikely to be found is dropping off markedly. One key question to be faced in the coming years, then, is how to fill this gap so as to achieve a greater balance in overall research on the region.

The other problem is that, as the bulk of current research consists of highly specific detailed studies of the many recovered writings, the absence of an overall framework of historical theory has become all too apparent. Of course, some efforts have been made to develop such a theory. Certain scholars have attempted to construct Inner Asian history in the context of a version of North-South relations, that is, by stressing that history unfolded according to socio-political relations between the powerful nomadic peoples of the northern part of the region and the settled agricultural peoples of the south.[17] Alternatively, rather than thus casting the region as an insulated microcosm, other historians place its history in the broader context of world history.[18]

Based on careful study of recovered materials, further efforts must now be made to break the mold of the conventional view of Inner Asia so as to compose a new picture of the region.

Notes

1. An excellent review of the progress of Japanese research in this field is provided in UNESCO Higashi-Ajia Bunka Kenkyū Sentā (The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies) (ed.), *Nihon ni okeru Chūō-Ajia kankei kenkyū bunken mokuroku 1879-1987 nen 3 gatsu* [Bibliography of Central Asian Studies in Japan 1879-March 1987], (UNESCO Higashi-Ajia Bunka Kenkyū Sentā, 1988). Also, Matsuda Hisao, Enoki Kazuo, Mori Masao, and Yamada Nobuo, the leading Japanese scholars of Inner Asian history, have recently published collections of research papers: Matsuda Hisao, *Matsuda Hisao chosaku shū* [Selected Works of Matsuda Hisao], 6 vols., (Rokkō Shuppan, 1986-87); Enoki Kazuo, *Enoki Kazuo chosaku shū* [Selected Works of Enoki Kazuo], 12 vols., (Kyūko Shoin, 1992-94); Mori Masao, *Kodai Toruko minzokushi kenkyū* [Historical Studies of the Ancient Turkic Peoples], Vol. 2, (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1992); and Yamada Nobuo, *Kita-Ajia yūboku minzokushi kenkyū* [Historical Studies of Nomadic Peoples in North Asia], (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1989); and Yamada Nobuo, see note 10 below.
2. Recent historical studies based on Chinese-language documents include Sekio Shirō, "Turufan shutsudo Kōshōkoku zeisei kankei monjo no kisoteki kenkyū" [Basic Study of Turfan Documents Relating to the Kao-ch'ang Tax System], *Niigata Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyū* (1)-(6), 1988-93 (74, 75, 78, 81, 83, 84) ; Shirasu Jōshin, "Turufan kofungun no hennen to Turufan shihaishasō no hennen" [Chronology of Ancient Tombs and the Ruling Class of the Turfan Region], *Tōhōgaku*, 1992 (84), 111-36 ; and Arakawa Masaharu, "Chūō-Ajia ni okeru Tō no kōtsū un'yō ni tsuite" [Transportation in Central Asia During the Tang Period], *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 1993 (52: 2), 23-51. Sekio elucidates the tax system of the Kao-ch'ang oasis state established in the Turfan region, while Shirasu traces the social and cultural changes over five centuries among local rulers who controlled the oasis state. Arakawa examines the system of transportation and trade in Inner Asia under Tang rule.

   Studies based on old Turkic texts include Moriyasu Takao, *Uiguru Manikyō-shi no kenkyū* [A Study on the History of Uighur Manichaeism], *Ōsaka Daigaku Bungakubu kiyō*, 1991 (31, 32), 1-248 ; Umemura Hiroshi, "Uiguru-bun kasan bunkatsu monjo no ichirei: Chūgoku Rekishi Hakubutsukan shozō K7716" [An Uighur Document for the Division of Family Property: Document K7716 Preserved at the Museum of Chinese History], *Higashi-Ajia komonjo no shiteki kenkyū* [Historical Studies of East Asian Documents] (Tōsui Shobō, 1990); and Katayama Akio, "Tokketsu Biruge Kagan no sokui to hibun shiryō" [The Inscriptions Marking the Accession to the Throne of Bilgä Qaγan], *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 1992 (51: 3), 138-57. Moriyasu elucidates the hitherto obscure Manichaean movement in the Uighur Kingdom after the western transfer of its capital; Umemura explains another aspect of Uighur society through an examination of a document for the division of a family estate; and Katayama delves into the old Turkic inscription. There is also Naitō Midori's *Nishi-Tokketsushi no kenkyū* [History of the Western Turks], (Waseda Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1988), which provides a complete reappraisal of

Western Turkic history based on an extensive study of Chinese texts.

3. Of course, this is only the general trend; there is a comparatively long and rich tradition in Japan, too, of linguistic and philological studies of old Turkic texts. Recently published studies include Takata Tokio, "Uiguru jionshi taigai" [An Historical Outline of Sino-Uighur Pronunciation], *Tōhō gakuhō*, 1990 (62), 329-43 ; and Shōgaito Masahiro, *Kodai Uiguru-bun Abidatsuma-kusharon jitsugiso no kenkyū I-III* [A Study on the Uighur Version of Abhidharmakośabhāsya-tīka Tattvārthā I-III], (Shōkōdō, 1991-93). Moreover, in addition to these treatments of texts in old Turkic, linguistic and philological research on middle-period East Iranian dialects has also been quite vigorous in Japan recently, as I mention later in the present paper.
4. An example is Kudara Kōgi and Peter Zieme, "Uigurische Āgama-Fragmente (1) (2)," *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 1983 (10), 269-318. 1990 (17), 149-64. See also note 10 below.
5. Oda Yoshihisa (ed.), *Ōtani monjo shūsei I, II* [The Complete Ōtani Documents], 2 vols., (Hōzōkan, 1984, 1990).
6. Yamamoto Tatsurō et al. (eds.), *Dunhuang and Turfan Documents Concerning Social and Economic History*, 3 vols., (Tōyō Bunko, 1978-87).
7. There is also Tō-dai Shi (Tonkō bunken) Kenkyū Iinkai (Committee for the Study of the Dunhuang Manuscripts) (ed.), *Toroban, Tonkō shutsudo kanbun monjo kenkyū bunken mokuroku* [Bibliography of Studies on Turfan and Tunhuang Documents], (Tōyō Bunko, 1992). Unlike previous bibliographies of its kind, this work includes a convenient list of all relevant document numbers. Related publications of research papers and commentaries containing many reproductions of texts include Ikeda On, *Chūgoku kodai sekichō kenkyū* [Ancient Chinese Household Registers and Related Documents], (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1979); Ikeda On, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku* [Collected Colophons of Ancient Chinese Manuscripts], (Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 1990); and Enoki Kazuo et al. (eds.), *Kōza Tonkō* [Dunhuang Studies], 9 vols., (Daitō Shuppansha, 1980-92). As far as Chinese language materials are concerned, the above-mentioned works contain the most important reproductions of texts and all the essential information related to this field.
8. Shōgaito Masahiro; see note 3 above.
9. Moriyasu Takao; see note 2 above.
10. See the posthumously published Yamada Nobuo, Oda Juten, P. Zieme, Umemura Hiroshi, and Moriyasu Takao (eds.), *Uiguru-bun keiyaku monjo shūsei* [Collected Uighur Contract Documents], 3 vols., (Ōsaka Daigaku Shuppankai, 1993).
11. See Yoshida Yutaka, "Some New Readings of the Sogdian Version of the Karabalgasun Inscription," *Documents et archives provenant de l'Asie Centrale*, (Dōhōsha, 1990); "Sogudo-moji de hyōkisareta kanji-on" [Chinese in Sogdian Script], *Tōhō gakuhō*, 1994 (66), 271-380; and Kumamoto Hiroshi, "Two Khotanese Fragments Concerning Thyai Padä-tsā," "More Khotanese Letters and Verses," *Tokyo University Linguistics Papers*, 1991 (11), 101-20, 1993 (13), 145-84.
12. One work which presents and examines one such newly discovered text is Mori-

yasu Takao, Yoshida Yutaka and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum, "Kikushi Kōshōkoku jidai Sogudo-bun onna-dorei baibai monjo" [A Sogdian Contract for the Sale of a Female Slave from the Period of the Gaochang Kingdom under the Rule of the Qu Clan], *Nairiku-Ajia gengo no kenkyū* [Studies on the Inner Asian Languages], 1988 (IV), 1-50.

13. Although information relating to archeological research on Mongolia is less abundant in Japan than that on Chinese-ruled eastern Turkestan, among recent publications in that area are Shiga Kazuko, "Mongoru kōkogaku jijō ryakki" [A Note on the Archeology of Mongolia], *Kodaigaku kenkyū*, 1990 (121), 51-7; and Hayashi Toshio, "Mongoru kōgen ni okeru kodai Turuku no iseki" [Old Turkic Architectural Remains on the Mongolian Plateau], *Tōhōgaku*, 1991 (81), 166-79.
14. The fruit of one such interdisciplinary effort is Kuwayama Shōshin (ed.), *Echō ō go-Tenjikukoku den kenkyū* [Huichao's *Wang Wu-Tianzhuguo Zhuan* Record of Travels in Five Indic Regions], (Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1992).
15. The Toroban Shutsudo Bunbutsu Kenkyūkai (Society for Research on Turfan Relics) (Arakawa Masaharu, Sekio Shirō, Shirasu Jōshin, Katayama Akio and Machida Takayoshi) focuses on Chinese language documents from the Turfan region, while the Seinen Tonkō Gakusha Kenkyūkai (Young Tonkologist Society) (Moriyasu Takao, Yoshida Yutaka, Kumamoto Hiroshi, Takeuchi Tsuguhito and Takata Tokio) concentrates on those in such non-Chinese languages as Uighur, Sogdian, Khotanese and Tibetan.
16. In addition to the regularly issued *Toroban shutsudo bunbutsu kenkyūkai kaihō* [Bulletin of the Society for Research on Turfan Relics], there are two scholarly journals devoted to Inner Asia studies: *Nairiku-Ajia gengo no kenkyū* [Studies on the Inner Asian Languages] published by Chūō Yūrashia-gaku Kenkyūkai (Society of Central Eurasia Studies); and *Nairiku-Ajiashi kenkyū* [Studies on Inner Asian History] published by the Nairiku-Ajiashi Gakkai (Society of Inner Asia Studies).
17. Mano Eiji, et al., *Nairiku-Ajia* [Inner Asia], (Asahi Shimbunsha, 1992).
18. Okada Hidehiro, *Sekaishi no tanjō* [The Birth of World History], (Chikuma Shobō, 1992).