

Obituary

ŌBA OSAMU (1927–2002)

Ōba Osamu was born in Kyoto, and three months later his family moved to Osaka, where he grew up. Virtually his entire academic life was tied to the Kansai area. He studied East Asian history at Ryūkoku University, affiliated with the True Pure Land Sect of Buddhism, in Kyoto. After serving in a number of teaching positions in the 1950s, he took up a post at Kansai University in Osaka in 1960. After retiring in 1997, he moved to Kōgakkan University in Ise, Mie Prefecture, where he served as president until his death on 27 November 2002. He was a visiting professor at numerous Chinese universities as well as at Princeton University, and he lectured at countless academic venues around the world.

Ōba was not the first historian to examine early modern Sino-Japanese cultural relations, but he was one of the most active. Since the 1967 publication of his magisterial and award-winning *Edo jidai ni okeru Tōsen mochiwatarisho no kenkyū* (A study of books transported [to Japan] from China in the Edo period) (Suita: Kansai daigaku, Tōzai gakujutsu kenkyūjo), he spent over three decades producing sophisticated, detailed studies of Sino-Japanese cultural interactions in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. This work resulted in volumes such as *Edo jidai no Nit-Chū hiwa* (Little-known Sino-Japanese relations in the Edo period) (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 1980)—translated serially in the journal *Sino-Japanese Studies* from issues 8(1)(October 1995) to 13(1)(October 2000)—and most recently *Tokugawa Yoshimune to Kōkitei* (Tokugawa Yoshimune and the Kangxi emperor) (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1999). Works in the Sino-Japanese field outside the early modern period include *Shin Gi Waō* (The ruler of Wa who submitted to the Wei) (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, [1971] 1989), *Kodai chūsei ni okeru Nit-Chū kankei shi no kenkyū* (Studies in the history of ancient and medieval Sino-Japanese relations) (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1996), and *Kanseki junyū no bunka shi: Shōtoku Taishi kara Yoshimune e* (A cultural history of the importation of Chinese texts: From Prince Shōtoku to Tokugawa Yoshimune) (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1997). He also oversaw the republication of numerous Japanese- and Chinese-language studies in these fields. However, certainly one of his greatest contributions was the nurturing over four decades of extraordinary graduate students and young scholars, such as Matsuura Akira and Tao De-min, to name just two, who both presently teach at Kansai University.

Ōba pursued a parallel career as one of the world's most outstanding and productive scholars in the deciphering and explicating of writings on carved wooden strips that dated from as early as the Han dynasty. His many works include *Mokkan* (Writings on wooden strips) (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1979), *Mokkan: kodai kara no messēji* (Writings on wooden strips: Messages from antiquity) (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1998), and *Kankan kenkyū* (Studies of Han wooden strips) (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1992). Of more general interest, he has written *Shin Kan teikoku no iyō* (The glory of the Qin and Han empires) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977) and *Shin Kan hōsei shi kenkyū* (Studies in the history of Qin-Han law) (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1982). Finally, Dōhōsha published two volumes of Ōba's collected essays to honor him upon retirement in 1997: *Shōwa gannen umaretachi* (Those born in 1925) and *Zō to hō to* (Elephants and laws).

A number of his works have appeared in Chinese translation, which underscores the extraordinary esteem which three generations of Chinese scholars have accorded Ōba. He consistently stressed the importance of Sino-Japanese relations in order to overcome the biased view that Japan's advanced, modern, and scientific culture and society derived solely from Western learning. For him, the foundations of Meiji modernization lay in Kangaku, or Chinese studies of the Edo period. This point seemed nonsensical to many Japanese, he argued, only because they substituted misguided common sense for proper historical understanding. Later Tokugawa and early Meiji Japanese learned about the West largely through classical Chinese materials, many of which were Western works translated into Chinese by missionaries and their Chinese collaborators. This close attention to the key role played by texts in Sino-Japanese cultural encounters was the crowning achievement of Ōba's career.

For Ōba Osamu, we were all scholars sharing a passion for learning; this was a naïve but altogether liberating sensibility. Although it was always clear who knew more about virtually all topics, Ōba flaunted no sense of hierarchy with colleagues, visiting foreign scholars, or students of any nationality. His passing leaves a gaping hole.

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