OBITUARY

YANAGIDA SETSUUKO 柳田節子 (1921-2006)

Professor Yanagida Setsuko, a middle-period Chinese history scholar and pioneer in the study of Chinese women’s history in Japan, died of pneumonia on July 9, 2006 in hospital in Tokyo. Her interest in Chinese society perhaps stemmed from her youth in colonial Taiwan, but it was only after the death of her elder and only brother toward the end of World War II that she decided to follow in his footsteps. Before he was drafted into the military, he was studying Chinese history at Kyoto Imperial University and had aspired to become a scholar like their father, who was a prominent Marxist philosopher. Professor Yanagida entered Tsuda College in 1947, and then the University of Tokyo (UT) in 1950, only a couple of years after it opened its doors to female students. She was admitted to the graduate school in the Department of Oriental History, UT, in 1953. As detailed in her chronology in Yanagida Setsuko Sensei koki kinen ronshū: Chūgoku no dentō shakai to kazoku 柳田節子先生古稀記念論集：中国の伝統社会と家族 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1993), she took her first academic job in 1958 and retired as professor at Gakushūin University in 1992. She served as a researcher for Tōyō Bunko 東洋文庫 from 1991 until the time of her death.

Professor Yanagida’s historical pursuit initially focused on the status of landed tenants (tianhu 佃戸) in the Song period. One of her central theses was that due to their increased economic power and the stronger social networks that they had among themselves, tenants in the economically advanced Lower Yangzi region were more powerful vis-à-vis landlords than tenants in less advanced areas. Through meticulous analysis of a large number of sources, she showed that there was more than one kind of landowner-tenant relationship in the Song, and those relations could not be understood simply by looking at laws issued from the central government.

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Her works on socio-economic history have been collected in *Sō-Gen kyōsonsei no kenkyū* 宋元郷村制の研究 (Tokyo: Sō bunsha, 1986) and *Sō-Gen shakai keizaishi kenkyū* 宋元社会経済史研究 (Tokyo: Sō bunsha, 1995).

Professor Yanagida’s expertise and interest in economic history and commoners’ lives helped enrich her later research on women in the Song and Yuan era, and at the same time, women’s history enabled her to further explore the issues of state-society relations. Using sources such as the expanded Ming version of the Song dynasty’s court cases (*Minggong shupan qingming ji* 名公書判清明集), records of donors found in inscriptive sources, and government household registration archives, she demonstrated that women could inherit their fathers’ property, and that the government officially allowed this practice far more frequently than some scholars had assumed. We are fortunate to have her collected articles and reviews on women’s history in book form, *Sōdai shomin no onna tachi* 宋代庶民の女たち (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2003), published before she passed away.

She and three other women scholars in Tokyo formed the Society of Historical Studies on Chinese Women (Chugoku joseishi kenkyūkai 中国女性史研究会) in 1977. Until she retired from Gakushuin in 1992, Professor Yanagida hosted its regular meeting every month in her office in collaboration with Ms. Suetsugu Reiko 末次玲子, and they welcomed researchers interested in Chinese women’s history regardless of age, education, nationality or gender. Now comprising more than a hundred members, the group has published several books, issues an annual report, and manages a website.

In addition to being an outstanding historian, Professor Yanagida was also a committed activist throughout her life. She was long active in *Wadatsumi kai* わだつみ会, whose goal is to promote peace in the world through sharing the voices of Japanese student soldiers who died during WWII. She was opposed to the Vietnam War and participated in the movement to protest the decision by a number of Japanese research institutes to accept large grants from an American foundation in the 1960s.

At the time when Japanese universities rarely appointed women to full-time positions, her success was an encouragement to struggling younger female academics. She took every opportunity to encourage us in person, and clearly she considered that it was her mission...