

Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia The University of Tokyo Newsletter Autumn 2024

Special Interview

Professor Shigeto Sonoda,
Department of Pioneering Asian Studies



●An Encounter with the Sociology of China

— You are known as a sociologist. In more detail, what kind of research have you been engaged with?

It's hard to answer the question "What kind of researcher are you?" If I had to pick three keywords, I might say "business," "Chinese society," and "external recognition." I had wanted to study sociology since I entered university. When the time came to choose my major and supervisor, I joined Professor Ken'ichi Tominaga's research group without any hesitation. One of the first exchange students from Peking University had just arrived at the same research group. Looking into it, I learned that sociology was banned in China between 1957 and 1979 as a 'bourgeois science'. I became close with the international student, and heard from him that, "Professor Tominaga will be invited to China next year." I intuitively thought it would be interesting, so in 1984, when I was a first-year Master's student, I traveled with Professor Tominaga to assist with his lectures at Nankai University, which was to soon become the base for the revival of Chinese sociology.

At that time, people were extremely cautious of foreign researchers, so it was difficult to even visit rural areas. But what could I do? This was my first research interest in research. How would China change as it opened up, and accepted a 'foreign' field such as sociology? In order to examine this theoretically, I used the concept of "globalization," which had not yet gained widespread acceptance at the time, to formulate a working hypothesis about how Chinese society would change. This was the starting point of my research.

●Looking at Asia Through Business

— How did your first research on business begin?

I became a lecturer at Chuo University in 1990. After the Plaza Accord in 1985, Japanese companies started FDI to Asia in large numbers. In the early 1970s, Japanese companies faced strong opposition, especially in Thailand and Indonesia. However, during the investment firestorm of the 1980s, Japanese companies were not told to "go home." What was the reason for the lack of opposition that had occurred before? I was interested in the question of what employees working at Japanese companies thought about the way local people were treated. There were no management scholars doing such a thing, because such research could only be approached in the 'Area Studies' style.

So, in 1991-92, I was commissioned by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry to conduct a questionnaire survey of more than 10,000 local employees in five regions: the three Southeast Asian countries of Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia; followed by mainland China and Taiwan. We made various discoveries, one of which was a re-examination of the "contact hypothesis." The contact hypothesis stated that when people who are likely to hold prejudices against each other come into contact, they will come to understand each other better and their prejudices will weaken. However, though we found that the contact hypothesis held true between Thai employees and Japanese managers at Japanese companies in Thailand, the opposite was true in China. In China, the more Chinese employees had contact with Japanese people, the less favorably they viewed Japanese people. Social psychology and sociology are academic fields that ask about certain "universalities," and the contact hypothesis is one form of this. However, if the interactions (contact) between Japanese and Thai people and between Chinese and Japanese people are different, then the resulting theory cannot be seen as universal. In particular, with regard to China, the reality differs from the contact hypothesis, so it becomes necessary to understand what kinds of corporate and work views Chinese people have. At that moment, I became convinced that it was important for the sociology of China to look at Chinese society beyond the company, but from this vantage point. This was, in fact, completely new territory. (The book "中国人の心理と行動 (The Psychology and Behaviour of the Chinese People)" describes a theory of the Chinese based on research findings on corporations and Chinese society.)



The Psychology and Behaviour of the Chinese People
(『中国人の心理と行動』)
Edited by Shigeto Sonoda
Issued 2001,
NHK BOOKS

●Chinese Society Opening Up

—Here, we're moving from studies on business to research on Chinese society?

Through the late 1990s, sociology developed throughout China. Local researchers began to acquire effective methods and techniques to understand their own society. This also created an environment ripe for collaborative research. We conducted large-scale questionnaire surveys in four cities in China to ask ordinary citizens about their values and lifestyles. One interesting result was that, when asked yes or no to the question, "Do the Party and the government know what is best for the people?", nearly 90% answered 'yes', recognizing the legitimacy of the Party's rule. When interviewed, many people answered that the standard of living had improved due to reform and opening up, and that, although they had their own opinions about the Party's methods, they were basically satisfied.

In response, some researchers made critical comments, saying, "In China, where there are political taboos, there is no way that everyone will speak their true feelings." This really annoyed me. I wondered whether the "intellectuals" that researchers rely on to create their own stories really represent ordinary citizens. Frustrated by this, I conducted surveys three times in 1997, 2004, and 2012, roughly every eight years, to give a longitudinal perspective, but the results were the same. By the third survey, even the researchers who had initially been critical started to understand the situation. In any case, China was opening up to the outside world, and an era arrived in which Chinese researchers could collaborate and think together with foreigners like me. This continued until around 2010. (The book "不平等国家 中国 (Unequal Nation: China)" uses this data to explore a wide range of social issues, including class, education, and gender.)



Unequal Nation: China
(『不平等国家 中国』)
Edited by Shigeto Sonoda
Issued 2008,
Chuko shinsho

●Toward Research into "External Recognition"

—And so this leads to research into "external recognition"?

Yes, at that time, there were many local researchers interested in domestic issues in China, so I thought I would examine how China is viewed from the outside. This is the question of "external recognition". At that time, Japan-China relations were very bad. When trying to understand how Japanese people see China, the topic is China, but it is also important to understand the mentality of the Japanese. It uses sociology and social psychology, but also has the flavor of Japanese studies. The same can be said about, for example, how Thai people see China. You cannot analyze Thai people's perception of China without understanding Thai people and Thai society. However, even if you understand Thai people's perception of China, you will need to compare it with other regions, for example, to find out why similarities in perception between Japan and Thailand were not found in other Southeast Asian countries. Of course, this makes the project too large for one person to handle. It is not impossible for one person to research "business", but research on multiple regions requires the cooperation of many people. I had begun studying "Chinese society" in collaboration with Chinese colleagues, but as the academic environment in China matured, I was no longer needed. In research on foreign recognition, on the other hand, different people will have different images of China. And there is also the issue of who sees and who is seen. As the viewer changes, the image of China changes. These problems cannot be addressed without pooling the wisdom of many people. The idea of Global Asian Studies (GAS) was born as an extension of this research.



●The Goals of Global Asian Studies (GAS)

—What are the aims of GAS and what kind of activities does it undertake?

Prior to the establishment of GAS, there were two programs at the Institute: Network for Education and Research on Asia (ASNET), which networked Asian studies researchers on campus, and Global Japan Studies (GJS), which promoted dialogue between Japanese studies experts both in Japan and abroad. For some reasons, both programs were scheduled to close by 2022, and GAS was established to inherit and develop the aims of these two programs. The JF-GJS initiative inherits GJS and promotes dialogue with Japanese studies researchers overseas.

The main mission of the GAS initiative is to strengthen research collaboration with the wider Asian region, including dialogue between Asian studies researchers in Japan and Japanese studies researchers in Asia. GAS has two unique features. Firstly, Asian studies programs at Asian universities often include research on their own country. However, Japan has historically been excluded from the umbrella of Asian studies in Japan. GAS, and the IASA more broadly, challenges this convention and proposes a Global Asian Studies that includes Japan. Secondly, programs titled "Global" Asia Studies are often designed with a specific region and a specific academic field in mind. GAS is unique in drawing upon expertise at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, across a wide range of regions and disciplines. Professor Takahiro Nakajima, Director of the IASA, has proposed further research on the "Tokyo School," delving into the positive and negative legacies of academic history at the University of Tokyo. Few people are engaged with Tokyo School studies. Compared with the Kyoto school, for example, it is more comprehensive, diverse, fluid, and is particularly difficult to grasp. But using this concept to look back on the footsteps of our predecessors working under the banner of Asian studies will further develop Global Asian Studies.

●The Asianization/Universalization of Asian Studies

—In the interview with Director Takahiro Nakajima in the previous issue, we spoke about the Asianization and Universalization of Asian Studies. What are your thoughts on this?

The concept of the "Asianization of Asia" was proposed by economist Toshio Watanabe (professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology, later president of Takushoku University) in the early 2000s. It is a concept that refers to the fact that (East) Asia, which previously existed only as an idea, has become a reality as flourishing trade strengthened its internal interconnectivity. I started to use the term "Asianization of Asian Studies" in 2017 and 2018, when I was the president of the Japan Association for Asian Studies, to refer to the shift in who talks about Asia.

When the gravity of knowledge production change, agenda setting also changes. I mentioned earlier about the expansion of Japanese companies into Asia. But now, people from Korea, China, and Southeast Asia are meeting across national borders as consumers and producers. The issues that were important to Japan in the 1990s have become applicable to regions across Asia. Ultimately, research questions are influenced by the intellectual climate of the observer. This means that we need to weave into our research the obvious fact that what you see differs depending on where you are looking from, which has been a blind spot in social science until very recently. The Asianization of Asian Studies will also lead to a greater awareness of these differences and to related intellectual practices. Regarding the "universalization of Asian Studies," it is difficult to put into practice. Perhaps we can conceptualize universalization like a vanishing point. Although we don't know whether it really exists, by believing that it does, a research agenda is born and concrete ideas are generated. There are many exceptions to ideas often thought to be universal. China and Asia provide a wealth of examples. By universalizing phenomena that have been considered exceptions provides an opportunity to look back on what was wrong with our previous assumptions.

—Listening to your words, I feel that your research history is the history of modern China. Thank you very much.

(Interviewers: Haruka Ueda, Jiyeon Kim, Pattajit Tangsinmunkong. Photos: Masatsugu Nokubo)

News

At IASA, five divisions (Pan Asian, East Asian, South Asian, West Asian, and Pioneering Asian Studies) are advancing research in their respective fields. Various joint projects are carried out in collaboration with partners (inc. GAS and EAA).

【UTSA】 From Asian knowledge to global knowledge! The University of Tokyo Studies on Asia Book Series launched!

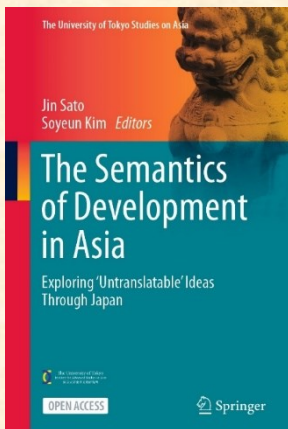


In addition to GAS activities, the University of Tokyo Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia has recently launched the book series The University of Tokyo Studies on Asia (UTSA). This major project, led by Professor Yasuhiro Matsuda, will serve to disseminate excellent studies on Asian Studies conducted by scholars based in Asia to researchers and students around the world. The first and second volumes of the series have now been published open access by Springer.

[https:// www.springer.com/series/17024](https://www.springer.com/series/17024)



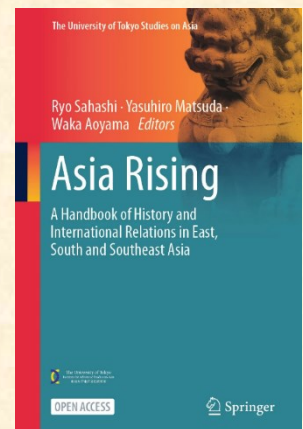
This activity will be partially funded by donations made to the IASA Foundation. We hope that you will support us to build on the excellence that Institute has achieved over the past 80 years of research on Asian studies to disseminate Asian studies rooted in the Asia experience to scholars, students and young people around the world, and to do so free of charge to provide learning opportunities to all. Information on donations is provided at the bottom of the newsletter, below.



Jin Sato and Soyeun Kim (eds.)
『The Semantics of Development in Asia:
Exploring ‘Untranslatable’ Ideas Through
Japan』
X+ 243 pages, Published May 2024



Ryo Sahashi, Yasuhiro Matsuda and
Waka Aoyama (eds.)
『Asia Rising: A Handbook of History and
International Relations in East, South and
Southeast Asia』
X+ 304 pages, Published September 2024



【International Exchange】 A collection of Chinese paintings from throughout history—

Zhejiang University donated further volumes of "Chinese Paintings Throughout History." This series contains 12,405 representative masterpieces of Chinese painting, in the highest resolution available in paper printing. In July 2024, 132 new volumes were donated, bringing the total collection held by IASA to 231 volumes. This is expected to further stimulate research into Chinese art.



Prof Xiaoming Jin (Zhejiang University) and Prof Takahiro Nakajima (IASA) at the Donation Ceremony.

【Training】 Passing on techniques for organizing Chinese classics—

The Institute holds "Long-term Training in Sorting Chinese Books" every year for library staff from around the country. This training, which has been running continuously since 1980, aims to allow participants to acquire a wide range of knowledge about Chinese books through lectures and individual practical training by experts from inside and outside the Institute. This year, Professor Emeritus Yasushi Oki, Associate Professor Kyuichi Uehara, and Associate Professor Mikiyasu Yanagi from the Institute gave lectures and individual instruction during the first week of each training period in June and September.



Associate Professor Kyuichi Uehara advises participants.

【High school student visit】

Looking to the future of Asian studies—

To cultivate future leaders of Asian Studies, the IASA regularly welcomes visits from high school students. In August 2024, 48 students from Kumamoto High School visited the Institute as an extracurricular activity. Associate Professor Mikiyasu Yanagi (Chinese Buddhism) gave a lecture and provided a tour of library stacks. This visit seems to have fostered interest in studying at university. We trust that these seeds of Asian studies will one day blossom. We also welcomed visits from high school students from La Salle High School and Nara High School.



Associate Professor Mikiyasu Yanagi showing high school students around the IASA library.

People

Kai Vogelsang was appointed as Visiting Professor in the Department of Pioneering Asian Studies.

【Inaugural Research Seminar & IASA Seminar】

Kai Vogelsang's inaugural research seminar entitled "The Social Origins of Confucian Thought" (moderator: Director Takahiro Nakajima) was held on 25th July 2024. Rereading Confucius' Analects from a sociological perspective, Vogelsang's interpretation positions Confucius as a historical symbol placed within the new social structure of the time. The lively discussion touched on comparisons with other cultures (such as the Islamic sphere), the interpretation of Confucius by Qing Dynasty philosophers, and the plurality of concepts of ritual.

Kai Vogelsang received his PhD in Chinese Studies from the University of Hamburg in 1997. After working in education and research at universities in Germany, China, and Japan, he has served as professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Hamburg since 2008. His publications include *China and Japan: Two Empires Under One Sky* (Alfred Kroner, 2020) and *A History of China* (Reclam, 2012) (all in German). He will serve as Visiting Professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia from July to October 2024.



Call for Contribution to the IASA Fund

We appreciate your warm support for the IASA's activities.

* Benefits for both the IASA Fund and UTokyo Foundation will be applied to donations to the IASA Fund. Please refer to our website for further details.

* Please note that shipment of gifts of appreciation will be limited to locations within Japan.

<https://utf.u-tokyo.ac.jp/project/pjt180>



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