

## ŌBA OSAMU (1927–2002)

Shortly before losing Gilbert L. Mattos, the early China field unfortunately lost another most respected member: On November 27th, 2002, Professor Ōba Osamu 大庭脩 died of acute leukemia.<sup>1</sup>

Ōba Osamu was born in Ōsaka, Japan, in 1927. In 1950, he graduated from the East Asian History program at the Faculty of Letters of Ryūkoku University 龍谷大學 in Kyōto. His first work experience as a teacher was gained at the Sanda gakuen 三田學園 high school in Hyōgo兵庫 Prefecture, central Japan, and as assistant professor at the University of the Sacred Heart (Seishin joshi daigaku 聖心女子大學) in Tōkyō. From 1960, he taught at Kansai University 關西大學, from 1965 onwards as full professor and member of the Institute for Oriental and Occidental Studies (Tōzai gaku jutsu kenkyūjo 東西學術研究所). This was to remain his place of employment until he retired in 1997. In the meantime, he consecutively served in the positions of Dean of the Faculty of General Education, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and Director of the University Library. His last position was that of the Director of the Institute for Oriental and Occidental Studies. Even after his official retirement from Kansai University and during his subsequent teaching at the Kōgakkan University 皇學館大學 in Tōkyō, Ōba continued the relationship with his old institute, now as honorary professor.

Besides fulfilling his functions at the university, Ōba was, from 1994, Director of the Chikatsu Asuka Museum 近つ飛鳥博物館 near Ōsaka. This shows not only his extraordinary energy and drive, but also and in particular his academic interests and knowledge that spanned cultural divides. While the majority of Ōba's publications deal with the history of early imperial China, the modern and well worth visiting museum is mainly devoted to a section of the early history of Japan—the Asuka period.

The bridging of Chinese and Japanese culture was a predominant

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1. The German original of this obituary was published in *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde Ostasiens / Hamburg* 173–174 (2003), 19–34, and included a list of selected publications of the deceased (25–34). The pronunciation of a few names and terms has been rectified here. I would like to thank Professor Reinhard Emmerich and Dr. Yu Hong 于宏 for their comments on the original manuscript.

concern in Ōba's academic efforts from early in his career. Trend-setting in this respect were his first two published monographs, *Edo jidai ni okeru Tōsen mochiwatashisho no kenkyū* 江戸時代における唐船持渡書の研究 (Studies on the Scriptures Brought to Japan on Chinese Ships during the Edo Period) (1967)<sup>2</sup> and *Shingi Waō* 親魏倭王 (The Wo Queen who was Close to the Wei) (1971).<sup>3</sup> The first study discusses the transmission of Chinese culture through manuscripts, prints, paintings, and so on, that were smuggled on Chinese junks into Japan in the Edo period (1603–1868), during which time the country had officially closed its borders to the outside world. The second study deals with the circumstances and the impact of Chinese emperors enfeoffing and awarding official titles to Japanese rulers, particularly the enfeoffing of the Yamatai 邪馬台 Queen Himiko 卑彌呼 by the Wei 魏 state of the Sanguo 三國 period. Especially in the field of Chinese-Japanese contacts during the Edo period, Ōba continued to contribute his learned opinions also in later years. In 1986, another monograph on the subject—*Edo jidai ni okeru Chūgoku bunka juyō no kenkyū* 江戸時代における中國文化受容の研究 (Studies on the Acceptance of Chinese Culture during the Edo Period) (1984)<sup>4</sup>—earned him an award from the Japanese Academy of Sciences. In 1997, when he retired, and for this occasion, a list of his publications on early modern Chinese-Japanese contacts was prepared, which was already four pages long.<sup>5</sup>

Most representative of Ōba's work, however, were his studies on the institutional history of the Han dynasty, especially as reflected in the manuscript texts written on wooden slips—the so-called *Han jian* 漢簡 or, in Japanese, *kankan*—that were discovered during the early days of the 20th century. As he himself confessed in the epilogue to his dissertation,<sup>6</sup> he chose the Han period as his field of study because not only one but two of his teachers had quoted the famous historian Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 as stating that the Han period was a good starting point to begin diachronic historical studies, wherever these were eventually headed back or forth in time.

2. Ōsaka: Tōzai gakujujutsu kenkyūjo, 1967.

3. Tōkyō: Gakuseisha, 1971; reprinted 2001.

4. Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1984. A Chinese translation was published by Hangzhou University in 1998.

5. "Tōsen mochiwatashisho no kenkyū no genjō to tenbō" shiryō (teinen taishū kinen kōenkai de haifuku) 「唐船持渡書の研究の現状と展望」資料 (定年退休記念講演会で配付) (Materials on "The Present State and Future Prospects of Research Concerning Scriptures Brought to Japan on Chinese Ships"—Distributed at the Valedictory Lecture on the Occasion of Regular Retirement), *Kansai daigaku Tōzai gakujujutsu kenkyūjo kiyō* 関西大学東西學術研究所紀要 30 (1997).

6. (1982), 673; for further information, see below.

One of those teachers, Ishihama Juntarō 石濱純太郎, had himself, however, not followed the advice of the famous role model. Perhaps he shied away because of the relative scarcity of source materials for the study of the early imperial period. Therefore, he placed all further responsibility for his more ambitious graduate student in the hands of Mori Shikazō 森鹿三. This was the man who in 1952 established and headed a working group at Kyōto University for studying the so-called Juyan *Han jian* 居延漢簡 that had been found twenty years earlier along the Edsen-gol (Inner Mongolia-Gansu), and was thereby launching the most vigorous modern Japanese research on wooden slips manuscripts. Between 1953 and 1955, the members of this working group—Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃, Yoneda Kenjirō 米田賢次郎, Ōba Osamu, as well as, a little later, Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正 among them—published more research than was coming out of China during the same time.<sup>7</sup>

After those three years, the interest of academic circles in these manuscript materials temporarily subsided and most members of the working group continued to build a reputation in other subjects. But the youngest members of the group, Ōba Osamu and Nagata Hidemasa, remained loyal to this subject throughout their entire academic careers. The discovery of the first Japanese wooden slips manuscripts (dating to the 8th century) in 1961 provided a renewed interest, this time also among the general public. Although Ōba hardly ever wrote substantial studies on the Japanese manuscripts, he did, much later, try to bridge the gap between China and Japan in this area, too, by co-editing and co-authoring a work that presents a balanced overview of Japanese as well as Chinese wooden slips to an interested general public.<sup>8</sup>

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, Ōba at first distinguished himself by putting forward numerous articles on the history of administration and law in the Qin and Han periods. As was conventional at that time in Japan, these articles were put together and submitted in 1979, with only a limited number of additions, as the author's doctoral dissertation. This was published in 1982 under the title *Shin Kan hōseishi no kenkyū* 秦漢法制史の研究 (Studies on the History of Law in the Qin and Han Periods).<sup>9</sup> This work, certainly the most voluminous and perhaps also the best Ōba ever published in this area of study, draws extensively on manuscript sources, though these—unlike in Ōba's later publications—do not figure in the title of the work. How much Ōba's respective research was appreciated even internationally can be gathered from the fact that not

7. See *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 12.3 (1953) and 14.1–2 (1955).

8. See note 14 below.

9. Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1982. This contains—partly revised—articles that were originally published between 1953 and 1981.

only his dissertation but also many of his later contributions have been translated into Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

After having established himself academically, Ōba followed the example of his teacher Mori and dedicated much of his time and efforts to the education of the next generation of students in the field of Chinese manuscript sources. At more or less regular intervals, he wrote and updated introductory works. The first of these was *Mokkan* 木簡 (Wooden Slips) (1979)<sup>11</sup> followed by the less well known *Mokkangaku nyūmon* 木簡學入門 (Introduction to the Study of Wooden Slips) (1984),<sup>12</sup> then by *Kankan kenkyū* 漢簡研究 (Studies on Han Slips) (1992)<sup>13</sup>—for the main part a collection of his articles of the 1980s that can also be read as a sequel and update to his dissertation—and finally *Mokkan: Kodai kara no messeiji* 木簡——古代からのメッセージ (Wooden Slips: A Message from the Past) (1998).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he, too, like his teacher Mori, organized a working group together with younger scholars, with whom he published some useful reference works on manuscript sources.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that by now it was technically possible to present this data in digital format—a format that Ōba and his group in fact did make use of—the group quite purposefully decided to publish these reference materials in the conventional form of a book.

His far-reaching international contacts, his chairing of international

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10. Lin Jianming 林劍鳴 et al., *Qin Han fazhi shi yanjiu* 秦漢法制史研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1991). For later articles see, *inter alia*, Jiang Zhenqing 姜鎮慶 in *Jiandu yanjiu yicong* 簡牘研究譯叢, ed. Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan Lishi yanjiu suo Zhan-guo Qin Han shi yanjiu shi 中國社會科學院歷史研究所戰國秦漢史研究室, 2 (1987). On the other hand, a very critical, polemical response to Ōba's results was formulated by Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, "Ping Da Tingxiu zhu 'Han dai guanli de qinwu yu xiujia' ji qi Zhongyi ben" 評大庭脩著〈漢代官吏的勤務與休假〉及其中譯本 (Review of Ōba Osamu, "The Duties and Vacation of Officials in the Han Period" and its Chinese Translation), *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 12.2 (1994), 359–78; cf. also Liao Boyuan, "Han dai guanli xiujia, sushe ruogan wenti zhi bianxi" 漢代官吏休假、宿舍若干問題之辨析 (Analysis of Some Problems Concerning the Vacation and Lodging of Officials in the Han Period), *Hūgoku shigaku* 中國史學 4 (1994), 61–72.

11. Tōkyō: Gakuseisha, 1979. This was actually a monograph reprint of a series of articles that Ōba had published between 1977 and 1978 in the periodical *Nihon bijutsu kōgei* 日本美術工藝 under the title "Mokkan no hanashi" 本簡のはなし (Talking about Wooden Slips).

12. Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1984.

13. Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1992. A Chinese translation of this work has recently been published by Guangxi shifan daxue, Guilin (2001).

14. Ōba et al., ed., Tōkyō: Taishūkan, 1997.

15. *Kyoen Kankan sakuiin* 居延漢簡索引 (Index of the Han Slips from the Edsen-gol) (Suita: Kansai University, 1995); *Kankan no kisoteki kenkyū* 漢簡の基礎的研究 (Basic Studies on Han Slips) (Kyōto: Shibunkaku, 1999).

conferences,<sup>16</sup> the editing of a new folio edition of the wooden manuscripts from Dunhuang with a set of specially produced photographs,<sup>17</sup> as well as generous financial assistance to Chinese publications in the field,<sup>18</sup> definitely transformed Ōba into a kind of doyen of international wooden slips research. And he was certainly well aware of this situation, as one immediately recognized from his bearing. Ōba Osamu was a generous, open-minded, but also energetic and representative scholar. In an academic field that has induced others to indulge in time-consuming bean-counting, he was the one who got things done. This trait was responsible for not a few original explanations of complex historical phenomena that have invited others to continue in the direction pointed out by Ōba. Particularly groundbreaking was his early completion of the reconstruction of an imperial edict of the year 61 B.C.E., which he published several times.<sup>19</sup> He liked to accomplish work himself. In one of his last manuscripts,<sup>20</sup> he still regretted with unimpeded energy—as well as, perhaps, a kind of gloomy anticipation as far as his own premature demise was concerned—that many caches of manuscripts discovered years ago are still not yet published, so that the joy of studying these documents and texts must be reserved for the next generation.

On the occasion of Ōba's retirement on March 31st, 1997, an anthology of his most recent articles and lecture notes as well as a volume with personal recollections was published.<sup>21</sup> He will be greatly missed, but his published work will remain valuable in the years ahead for its meticulous attention to historical detail as well as for its insight into broader historical issues. On its foundation, future generations will be able build their own interpretations.

Enno Giele

16. See *Kankan kenkyū no genjō to tenbō. Kankan kenkyū kokusai shinpojyūmu '92 hōkokusho* 漢簡研究の現状と展望——漢簡研究國際シンポジウム '92 報告書 (Present State and Prospects of the Research on Han Slips: Proceedings of the International Symposium for Han Slips Research, 1992) (Tsuita: Kansai University, 1993).

17. *Dai Ei toshokan zō Tonkō Kankan* 大英圖書館藏敦煌漢簡 (The Han Slips from Dunhuang in the British Library) (Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1990).

18. Cf. *Juyan Han jian: Jiaqu houguan* 居延漢簡——甲渠候官, ed. Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 甘肅省文物考古研究所 et al., 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994), preface, 4.

19. First in the journal *Shisen* 史泉 26 (1963), then in 1982, 1990, 1992, etc.

20. Published posthumously in *Asia Major* 14.2 (2001, published 2004), 119–41.

21. *Zō to hō to 象と法と* and *Shōwa gannen umaretachi* 昭和元年生まれ達. For both works, see the summary by Ukai Masao 鵜飼昌男 in *Chūgoku shutsudo shiryō kenkyū* 中國出土資料研究 2 (1998), 256–59.