

Yao Wendong (1852-1927) and Japanology

in Late Qing China

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From the mid-Qing period, an increasing number of Chinese began to investigate the conditions along China's periphery. Some of their scholarship exerted a considerable impact on late Qing politics and diplomacy and has been highly rated by scholars of later generations. These include the work of Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905) in Japanese studies, Huang Jingfu 黃景福 in Liuqiu 琉球 (Ryûkyû) studies, and Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792-1841) in studies of China's northern border. However, the majority of these pioneering scholars have now been forgotten. Yao Wendong 姚文棟 (1852-1927) is one such case.

Yao Wendong was not a prominent political or academic figure in late Qing China. He was only a medium-ranking diplomat and a prolific but underrated scholar of area studies.¹ He was also an important but little-studied figure in Sino-Japanese cultural

¹ I have checked over twenty biographies of prominent figures published in late-Qing and early-Republican China and found only one short entry about Yao in Weng Tonghe's 翁同龢 *Jindai renwu zhi* 近代人物志 (Biographies of Prominent Persons in Modern China) (Taipei reprint: Xinwenfeng chubang gongsi, 1978), p. 355. Even his hometown, Shanghai, did not take him seriously. *Shanghai xian xuzhi* 上海縣續志 (Records of Shanghai Prefecture, Sequel) (Shanghai reprint, 1919; Taipei reprint: Chengwen, 1970) has no more than a few words (pp. 964-65) on him under the category of civil service examinations. Yao is completely forgotten by modern scholars. The only academic article on him is provided by Wai-ming Ng 吳偉明, "Yao Wendong, yige beiyiwang liao de Qingmo Ribentong" 姚文棟，一個被遺忘了的清末日本通 (Yao Wendong, a Forgotten Japan Hand of the Late Qing), *Journal of History at New Asia College* 7 (1985), pp. 41-55. Yao is briefly discussed in a number of books and articles. They include: Sanetô Keishû's 實藤惠秀 *Meiji Nis-Shi bunka kôshô* 明治日支文化交渉 (Sino-Japanese Cultural Contacts in the Meiji Period) (Tokyo: Kôfukan, 1943); Satô Saburô's 佐藤三郎 "Meiji ishin igo Nis-Shin sensô izen ni okeru Shinajin no Nihon kenkyû" 明治維新以後日清戰爭以前における支那人の日本研究 (Chinese Studies of Japan between the Meiji Restoration and the Sino-Japanese War), *Rekishigaku kenkyû* 歴史學研究 10.11 (1940) and *Kindai Nit-Chû kôshô shi no kenkyû* 近代日中交渉史の研究 (Studies in the History of Modern Sino-Japanese Interactions) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kôbunkan, 1983); and Lü Wanhe's 呂万和 "Jindai Jiawu yiqian de dui-Ri yanjiu yu wenhua jiaowang" 近代甲午以前的对日研究与文化交往 (Modern Studies of Japan and Cultural Interactions before the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95), in *Zhong-Ri guanxi shi lunwenji* 中日关系史论文集 (Essays in the History of Sino-Japanese Relations) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984). Wang Xiaoqi 王晓秋 also touches upon Yao in his *Jindai Zhong-Ri wenhua jiaoliu shi* 近代中日文化交流史 (History of Modern

interchange and Chinese diplomatic history. He made significant contributions to many facets of area studies. As a Japanologist, he was a prolific writer who authored nine books on Japan. In terms of quantity, no one in Chinese history until his time could compare with him. He was also "the first person in Chinese history to translate Japanese books into Chinese."² As an outstanding geographer, he wrote extensively on the geography of Chinese borders (in the Northwest, Northeast, and Southwest) and neighboring nations (such as Japan, Annam, and the Ryūkyū Kingdom). He was concerned about national defense and provided invaluable suggestions to the late Qing government on military matters. Undoubtedly, Yao Wendong deserves more academic attention. This article is a preliminary survey of his life and thought, focusing on his contributions to Sino-Japanese relations. By examining his performance as a diplomat in early Meiji Japan, as a researcher in Japanese studies, and as a strategist who advocated invading Japan, we attempt to introduce this forgotten Japanologist to readers and locate him in the field of Chinese Japanology.

Yao as a Diplomat and His Cultural Activities in Japan

Yao Wendong was born in 1852 into a Shanghai family with a scholarly tradition in geography. Having passed the provincial examination in 1867, he entered the Longmen shuyuan 龍門書院, a prestigious academy to train diplomats, to pursue his academic interest in geography, diplomacy, and defense. He was lukewarm toward taking the civil service examinations and spent most of his time in preparing himself to be a diplomat. His chance came in 1881 when he was invited by the newly-appointed Minister to Japan, Li Shuchang 黎庶昌, to join the diplomatic mission to Japan as an attaché. Yao arrived in Japan the following year.

Yao did not have a flying start in his diplomatic career. He did not get along well with Li Shuchang and was upset that his suggestions to Li were largely ignored. He sent several letters to the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門 (Office of Foreign Affairs), complaining about Li's dictatorial style.³ In 1884, Li resigned his post because of the death of his mother. The new Minister to Japan, Xu Chengzu 徐承祖, retained Yao at the Chinese Legation. In 1887, Li Shuchang was once again appointed as Minister to Japan, and Yao left Japan for Europe a few months later.

How did Yao spend these six years in Japan? His most important job assignment was to survey Japan's geography. This was the very purpose for which Li Shuchang took him to Japan. Shortly after arriving there, Yao expressed worries about whether he could accomplish this mission:

Sino-Japanese Cultural Interactions) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), pp. 184-91. D. R. Howland also discusses Yao briefly in his *Border of Chinese Civilization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996). Since secondary references are extremely limited, this research relies mainly on primary sources.

² See Tam Yue-him 譚汝謙, *Zhongguo yi Riben shu zonghe mulu* 中國譯日本書總合目錄 (Overall Listing of Chinese Translations of Japanese Books) (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1980), p. 56.

³ Chow Jen Hwa, *China and Japan: The History of Chinese Diplomatic Missions in Japan, 1877-1911* (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1975), pp. 107, 153.

I, Wendong, received an assignment to study Japan's geography and to report to the Zongli Yamen.... Although I like geographical studies, my research is far from perfect. In particular, I am not familiar with foreign affairs. Hence, it has become very stressful for me since taking this position.⁴

Yao did not disappoint the Qing government. Regarding this official assignment, he finished three important works: *Riben zhi gao* 日本志稿 (Treatise on Japan, a Draft) (1884, 10 *juan*), *Liuqiu dili zhi* 琉球地理志 (Treatise on the Geography of the Ryûkyû Islands) (1884, 2 *juan*), and *Riben dili bingyao* 日本地理兵要 (Japan's Geography and Its Defense) (1884, 2 *juan*, 8 volumes). The *Riben zhi gao* is basically a translation of official historical writings of different domains, focusing on their physical and human geography. The *Liuqiu dili zhi* is a collection of official and non-official writings on the geography of the Ryûkyû Islands translated into Chinese. The *Riben dili bingyao* discusses the ways to attack Japan. Based on the *Heiyô chiri shôshi* 兵要地理小志 (A Brief Account of Military Geography in Japan), published by the Japanese military and other Japanese sources, this is particularly detailed concerning Japan's coastal defense.

As the attaché to Li Shuchang and Xu Chengzu, Yao did a great deal of administrative and secretarial tasks. For example, Li invited many Japanese intellectuals to attend a poetry gathering in Ueno to celebrate the Double Ninth Festival in 1882, and he asked Yao to edit and publish the poems into a book, entitled *Chongjiu denggao shi* 重九登高詩 (Poems for the Double Nine Festival) (1882).⁵ Li also had an ambitious project to reprint some Chinese texts preserved in Japan but lost in China in the *Guyi congshu* 古逸叢書 (Series of Lost Chinese Books in Japan). Li asked the famous classicist and calligrapher, Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 (1839-1915), to be the chief editor of the series, and Yao served as the assistant editor. Yao solicited his Japanese friends for help and achieved impressive results. For instance, he discovered the commentary by Huang Kan 皇侃 of the Liang Dynasty on the *Qianzi wen* 千字文 (Thousand Character Classic) in the Ashikaga Library in 1887. He was then appointed by Xu Chengzu to copy, collate, and publish this precious text.

Besides fulfilling his official duties, Yao also found time to conduct his own research on Japan. He did this mainly because he did not like the way Li Shuchang instructed his staff to gather information about Japan, criticizing them as being piecemeal, inadequate, and confusing. In his official capacity, he could do little to improve the intelligence network, and he gathered a variety of information about Japan on his own. He

⁴ Yao Wendong, *Dongcha zazhu* 東槎雜著 (Miscellaneous Writings during My Sojourn in Japan) (1882). This book was published in a very small quantity and Beijing University has a copy. All quotations from *Dongcha zazhu* in this article are provided by Wang Xiaoqiu of Beijing University, to whom the author wishes to express his gratitude.

⁵ During Li Shuchang's tenure as Minister to Japan, he had held these kinds of gatherings at least nine times. See Sanetô Keishû (trans. Chen Guting 陳固亭), *Mingzhi shidai Zhong-Ri wenhua de lianxi* 明治時代中日文化的連繫 (Sino-Japanese Cultural Links in the Meiji Period) (Taipei: Zhongguo congshu, 1971), pp. 44-51. Records of these meetings can be found in *Meiji Kanshibun shû* 明治漢詩文集 (Collections of Chinese-Language Poems and Prose from the Meiji Period) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1983), pp. 270-72.

was perhaps the first person in Chinese history who planned to compile a book series in Japanese studies, which he referred to as “Dongcha ershierzhong mulu” 東槎二十二種目錄 (Series on Japanese Studies in Twenty-Two Volumes). His Japanese studies series can be classified into five categories: literature (10 volumes), history (5 volumes), geography (3 volumes), economics (3 volumes) and military affairs (1 volume). He was able to finish nine volumes and to publish eight of them. In addition to the above-mentioned four works--*Riben zhi gao*, *Riben dili bingyao*, *Liuqiu dili zhi*, and *Chongjiu denggao shi*--he compiled another five books in a private capacity. These five books are: *Riben kuaiji lu* 日本會計錄 (Economic Data of Japan) (1883), *Zhongdong nianbiao* 中東年表 (Annals of China and Japan) (date unclear), *Mojiang xiuxi shi* 墨江修禊詩 (Poems Composed at the Sumida River) (1883), *Haiwai tongwenji* 海外同文集 (Collection of Foreign Literature) (1888), and *Guisheng zengyan* 歸省贈言 (Words of Encouragement for My Departure) (1889). *Riben kuaiji lu* is a data book which contains figures about Japan's annual budget, revenues, expenditures, and government bonds. *Zhongdong nianbiao* is a table of comparisons between Chinese and Japanese history. *Mojiang xiuxishi* is a collection of poems composed during a gathering in 1883. *Haiwai tongwenji* is a collection of 24 pieces of Chinese prose and verse compiled by the Japanese. *Guisheng zengyan* is a collection of 41 poems put together by Yao's Japanese friends when he left for China to visit his mother in 1886.

Although it seems that Yao had started writing or compiling the rest of the series, he was not able to finish it. Among these thirteen unfinished works, most noteworthy was that he wanted to systematically introduce Chinese-language literature in Japan to the Chinese. Yao was not the first one who advocated this idea. Tokugawa scholars frequently sent their Chinese-language poems to China for evaluation. One late Qing scholar, Yu Yue 俞樾, selected some Chinese poems by the Japanese and published them as *Dongying shixuan* 東瀛詩選 (Selected [Chinese-language] Poems of Japan) (1883). This may have inspired Yao to compile Chinese-language prose writings by the Japanese. He explained his motive in his “Donghai zhengwen qi” 東海徵文啓 (Invitation for Essay Contributions in Japan):

In retrospect, from the Three Dynasties to the Qing dynasty, many Chinese writings have been introduced to this nation. Scholars of Japan can read and write in Chinese. Although Japan and my nation are neighbors, the exchange of literature by famous authors of both countries is rare. This is such a deplorable thing in Sino-Japanese relations and in the literary circle.⁶

Yao planned to compile a trilogy to introduce Chinese prose writings composed in Japan: ancient and medieval prose as *Riben wen yuan* 日本文源 (Origins of Japanese Prose), Tokugawa prose as *Riben wen lu* 日本文錄 (Records of Japanese Prose), and Meiji prose as *Haiwai wen chuan* 海外文傳 (Collection of Japanese Prose). Unfortunately, he did not have time to edit and publish the quantity of works he had gathered. Otherwise, it would have been an important contribution. Other unfinished items concerned modern Japanese history, the history of prominent Japanese families, the

⁶ In *Qingdai Liuqiu jilu xuji* 清代琉球記錄續輯 (Records of the Liuqiu Islands in the Qing Period, Continued) (Taipei: Taiwan wenxian congkan, 1972), p. 190.

history of the Japanese officialdom, the history of Tokyo, Japanese volcanoes and hot springs, sea and land transportation in Japan, mining in Japan, the history of Japanese arts and literature, a sequel volume on the same subject, and poetry.

In addition to this Japanese studies series, Yao also published a book which includes some letters, prefaces, and short essays he had written, entitled *Dongcha zazhu* 東槎雜著 (Miscellaneous Writings during a Sojourn in Japan) (1884). This book is an important reference for understanding Yao's activities in early Meiji Japan.

During his sojourn in Japan, Yao had an active social and cultural life and spent much time both in reading and at social gatherings. He also wasted no opportunity to expose himself to new experiences in Tokyo. For instance, in 1883 he visited the Seikeikan 成蹊館 Girls School in Tsukimi, where the principal, teachers, and students were all females. This was an eye-opener to Yao, since China did not have girls schools yet at this time. He was impressed by the talent and discipline of the students and by the school uniform and ceremony. He followed the developments of domestic and foreign affairs closely. He was outspoken and dared to express his opinions. For example, he wrote to the Zongli Yamen, complaining that the Chinese Legation received neither adequate funding nor clear directives from the Qing government. In a letter to an official of the Tongwen guan 同文館 (Beijing Translation Bureau), he charged that most of the staff at the Chinese Legation were only concerned about their own interests and were indifferent to affairs of state.⁷

During his six-year stay in Japan, Yao made considerable progress in his scholarship, thanks to both his Chinese colleagues and his Japanese friends. The Chinese who influenced Yao most were Li Shuchang, Yang Shoujing, Chen Jialin 陳家麟, and Huang Zunxian. Among his Japanese friends, Yao was particularly indebted to Hoshino Hisashi 星野恒 (1839-1917), Gamô Shigeaki 蒲生重章 (1833-1901), and Oka Senjin 岡千仞 (1832-1914).

Li Shuchang was a diplomat, historian, and geographer. Before he became Minister to Japan, he spent several years working for the Chinese Legation in different nations in Europe. He wrote *Xiyang zazhi* 西洋雜誌 (Conditions in the West) in 1880 to introduce Western politics, economy, and society to his countrymen. Like Yao, he was also concerned about national defense and asked the government to appoint him to conduct a geographical survey in Russia.⁸ He came to Japan in 1881 as the second Chinese Minister to Japan. However, he seldom wrote about Japan though his understanding of Japan was on a par with the first Chinese Minister to Japan, He Ruzhang 何如璋 (b. 1837), who wrote three books on Japan. His major contribution was the completion of the *Guyi congshu*. Although Li and Yao did not establish a very harmonious working relationship, they shared similar interests in geography, defense, and the compilation of books. Li's expertise in international relations also enlarged Yao's scope of knowledge.

Yang Shoujing was a prominent scholar who specialized in geography and calligraphy. Yang spent a longer time (more than ten years) than any other Chinese official in Japan. He came to Japan in 1877 as an attaché to He Ruzhang and was retained

⁷ See *China and Japan*, pp. 149, 153.

⁸ Li Shuchang, *Xiyang zazhi* (Changsha reprint: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp. 5-19.

by Li Shuchang as counselor. Yang made invaluable contributions to Sino-Japanese cultural interchange. Being a bibliophile, he visited used bookstores and private collections of his Japanese friends and discovered some Tang and Song editions of Chinese books which had been lost in China. With the assistance of Yao and other colleagues from the Chinese Legation, he edited and collated these rare books and reprinted them in China as the *Guyi congshu*. He also wrote several important works on Chinese historical geography during this period. As Yang's colleague and collaborator, Yao must have benefited greatly from Yang's knowledge in geography and bibliography.

Chen Jialin and Yao were like-minded colleagues. They both wanted to write a treatise on Japan. Chen, due to his problems of time and language, only managed to write down his experiences in Japan in 37 entries, publishing them as *Dongcha wenjian lu* 東槎聞見錄 (Things Heard and Seen in Japan) (1887). These writings cover history, geography, economy, society, religion, education, and the military, stressing the importance of modernization. He shared many similar interests and views with Yao. For example, they both underestimated the military strength of Meiji Japan.

Yao's relationship with the most prominent Japanologist in his time, Huang Zunxian, is interesting. Huang was the counselor in the first Chinese Legation under He Ruzhang. His departure and Yao's arrival were close in time. Sharing similar research interests in Japan, it would have been a shame if these two Japanologists had missed the chance to meet one another. Nevertheless, there were ties between their respective scholarship. When Huang published his *Riben zashi shi* 日本雜事詩 (Poems on Miscellaneous Topics on Japan) in 1879, Yao was still in China and might have read it. Yao wrote *Riben zhi gao* (1884) and Huang wrote *Riben guo zhi* 日本國志 (Treatises on Japan) (1894). Indeed, they may have influenced each other.⁹ They also had many Japanese friends in common, including such prominent figures as Oka Senjin, Gamô Shigeaki, Shigeno Yasutsugu 重野安繹 (1827-1910), Ono Kozan 小野湖山, Mori Shuntô 森春濤, Mori Kainan 森槐南, and Miyajima Seiichirô 宮島誠一郎 (1838-1911).¹⁰ These men represented the best Japanologists in late Qing China. Huang produced two brilliant works on Japan which exceeded Yao's work in quality, whereas Yao finished nine books on Japan and outnumbered Huang's in quantity. We can hardly

⁹ Huang started his book earlier (1879) than Yao, but Yao finished his book earlier (1884). They might have treated each other as competitors and followed the progress of the other closely. Sanetô Keishû believes that in terms of the name of the treatise and the annals, Huang was influenced by Yao. Yao completed his *Zhongdong nianbiao* in 1884. Huang also added the *Zhongdong nianbiao* in his *Riben guo zhi* in 1887. Huang at first referred to his book as *Riben zhi* and Yao to his book as *Riben guo zhi*. Later, Yao changed the name of his book to *Riben zhi gao*, and Huang renamed his book *Riben guo zhi*. See *Mingzhi shidai Zhong-Ri wenhua de lianxi*, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰ See Zheng Ziyu 鄭子瑜 and Sanetô Keishû, eds., *Huang Zunxian yu Riben youren bitan yigao* 黃遵憲與日本友人筆談遺稿 (Remaining Drafts of Brush Conversations between Huang Zunxian and His Japanese Acquaintances) (Tokyo: Waseda daigaku shuppanbu, 1968). See also Wai-ming Ng, "The Formation of Huang Tsun-hsien's Political Thought in Japan (1877-1882)," *Sino-Japanese Studies* 8.1 (October 1995), pp. 9-14.

find anyone in this period who can match them. Because Huang was better known, Sanetô Keishû 實藤惠秀 has dubbed Yao "the Second Huang Zunxian."¹¹

Other Chinese who might have influenced Yao during his stay in Japan include Xu Chengzu, Yu Xi 余璠, and Huang Chaozeng 黃超曾. Xu Chengzu served as the third Chinese Minister in Japan from 1884 to 1888. Being familiar with English and Western studies, Xu won the respect of many Meiji Japanese, and he improved Sino-Japanese relations during his tenure.¹² Xu trusted Yao and gave him a free hand in pursuing his research on Japan. Yu Xi was the Chinese consul in Yokohama who did a remarkable job protecting the interests of Chinese residents.¹³ Like Yao, Yu was also interested in translating Japanese books into Chinese. Although he did not find the time to do this, he supported and encouraged Yao's Japanese studies project and even wrote the preface for Yao's *Liuqiu dili zhi*. Huang Chaozeng was Yao's colleague at the Chinese Legation. Under orders from Li Shuchang, Huang visited 37 places in Japan and wrote the *Dongying youcao* 東瀛遊草 (Essays on Travel in Japan) (date unknown). Yao could have acquired a handful of first-hand information from Huang.

Yao kept a close contact with Japanese intellectuals.¹⁴ Chinese officials and Japanese scholars met regularly and they exchanged poems and ideas in written conversation. Yao attended the functions of a literary group, Reitakusha 麗澤社 (Society of Mutual Benefit), founded and chaired by Shigeno Yasutsugu. The Reitakusha met at least once a month, each time usually bringing together more than 40 scholars, mainly Japanese poets and some Chinese officials from the Chinese Legation. Huang Zunxian was at one time an active member of this group. After he left, Yao took his place and enjoyed a fine reputation as a master in prose and verse. The Japanese praised them as "Liang cizong" 梁詞宗 (Verse master) and "Dawenzong" 大文宗 (Great prose master). One interesting episode occurred after Oka Senjin asked his beloved student, Katayama Sen 片山潛 (1859-1933), to study under Yao. Katayama treated Yao as his teacher and showed him great respect. He wrote:

People say that you [Yao] are talented and knowledgeable and your writings and scholarship are beyond compare. They say that you are particularly familiar with the changes in foreign affairs and are fond of discussing the situation of the world.... Your writings are so delicate and superb. If some scholars of my country have the opportunity to know you, they call it "reaching the Dragon Gate" [i.e., reaching the ultimate].... I, [Katayama] Sen, will study hard. One day when I become famous, I will travel abroad. I will first visit Shanghai in the great Qing dynasty to pay my tribute to you. This is a way to repay the indebtedness I owe you today. Alas! Although I, Sen, am not good, you are the first one to make me realize that there are many talents abroad.¹⁵

¹¹ *Mingzhi shidai Zhong-Ri wenhua de lianxi*, pp. 69, 86.

¹² See *China and Japan*, pp. 160-71.

¹³ Noriko Kamachi, "The Chinese in Meiji Japan: Their Interaction with Japan Before the Sino-Japanese War," in Akira Iriye, ed., *The Chinese and the Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interactions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 67-72.

¹⁴ According to my count, Yao made the acquaintance of at least 36 Japanese intellectuals.

¹⁵ Included in *Haiwai tongwenji*. Quoted in *Mingzhi shidai Zhong-Ri wenhua de lianxi*, p. 69. Katayama later became an advocate of socialism.

Yao's relationships with Japanese scholars were reciprocal. Yao commented on their works and taught them some Chinese, whereas Japanese scholars provided him with information, lent him books, and translated Japanese sources into Chinese for him. These services were extremely important for Yao, because he did not understand Japanese and there were no such talents in the Chinese Legation.¹⁶ Yao invited many Japanese scholars to help him with the translation. There were at least twelve Japanese scholars helping him. In particular, Nakane Shuku 中根淑, Oka Senjin, Tsukamoto Meigi 塚本明毅, and Kitazawa Masanari 北澤正成 did the majority of the work. In the nine books compiled by Yao, there is not a single one which did not receive assistance from the Japanese. Assistance came in various forms: editing, translation, data collection, writing, proofreading, writing prefaces, and publication. Yao was impressed by the performance of these "research assistants." He wrote: "They are familiar with geography and history and can give guidance without preparation. They often rectify my mistakes."¹⁷ Yao only associated himself with the Japanese who knew Chinese and communicated with them in written Chinese. Since he relied so much on them for Japanese, Yao made no serious attempt to study the Japanese language himself.

Yao as a Scholar and the Characteristics of his Japanology

Among Yao's writings on Japan, *Riben zhi gao*, *Riben dili bingyao* and *Dongcha zazhu* are the most important. Yao wanted to be the first Chinese to conduct a comprehensive survey on Japan, and *Riben zhi gao* was his most ambitious work.¹⁸ This text consists of ten *juan*, each on a particular region of Japan: Tōkaidō, Tōsandō, Hōkurikudō, Sanindō, Sanyōdō, Nankaidō, Saikaidō, Hokkaidō, Kinai, and the two capitals. Each *juan* discusses 24 aspects of the region: territory, geography, history, local

¹⁶ Like Huang Zunxian and other Chinese officials in Japan, Yao had no knowledge of the Japanese language and did not study it in Japan. He relied heavily on the reading of the *Kanji* 漢字 (Chinese characters in Japanese) and on the translations by his Japanese friends. During the tenure of He Ruzhang, the Chinese Legation had the post of *Dong fanyi* 東翻譯 (Japanese translator). However, this post became vacant when Li Shuchang became Minister to Japan. It seems that the Chinese Legation failed to find an appropriate candidate to fill this position. Hence, compared with the times of Huang Zunxian in Japan, the importance of Japanese scholars in providing translations increased during of Yao Wendong's tenure. See *Qing Guangxu chao Zhong-Ri jiaoshe shiliao xuanji* 清光緒朝中日交涉史料選輯 (Collection of Historical Materials on Sino-Japanese Relations from the Guangxu Reign of the Qing Dynasty) (Beijing: Beijing gugong bowuyuan, 1932), *juan* 5, entry 20, p. 22. D. R. Howland suggests that Yao learned to speak Japanese. See *Borders of Chinese Civilization*, p. 233. However, I cannot find any textual support for this view.

¹⁷ *Dongcha zazhu*. See footnote 4.

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, Weng Guangping 翁廣平 (1760-1843) had already written a treatise on Japan in his *Wuqi jing bu* 吾妻鏡補 (A Supplement to *Azuma kagami*) (1814). However, it was never published and very few people knew of its existence. When Yao was writing his book in Japan, Huang Zunxian had not finished his *Riben guo zhi*. Hence, Yao was in a position to become the first Chinese to finish and publish a treatise on Japan.

administration, population, land, taxation, prefectures, the military, schools, famous places, mountains, flatlands, rivers, lakes, harbors, capes, islands, reefs, lighthouses, ships, buoys, factories and products. The language barrier was the most serious problem in his scholarship. Yao wrote:

Since the abolishment of domains by the Meiji government, the publications by the government and in the private sector began to grow. ... However, the Meiji Japanese insert *kana* into their writings which I find difficult to read. I, Wendong, have gathered many Japanese books and hired translators to compile *Riben guozhi*.¹⁹

Yao finished the draft of this work and named it the *Riben zhi gao*. He had used more than 100 books as references and extensively consulted his Japanese friends on every detail. Hoshino Hisashi believed that this book was better than any other work on Japan by a Chinese and strongly recommended it to the Chinese. In the "afterword" he wrote for the book, Hoshino noted:

Zhiliang 志梁 [Wendong's literary name] has been in Japan for many years as a diplomat. He translated the geography books of my country and put them together into a great synthesis.... This is such an excellent text in economic geography.... In the past, the writings of the Chinese were flowery, paying more attention to the writing style than the content. Therefore, their words were decorative and empty.... Their narratives on foreign affairs were particularly misleading... Now, Zhiliang has written this book. When his countrymen read it, they will realize that a new nation has been born in the East.²⁰

In the book, Yao also provided a useful bibliography and an acknowledgment to give credit to his Japanese friends. Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838-94) wrote the preface and Hoshino Hisashi penned the afterword. Following a standard practice, he sent a handwritten copy to the Zongli Yamen, hoping that the government would publish it in an official edition. Unfortunately, the Qing government was not interested in the book and Yao also failed to find a private publisher.²¹ The text remained unpublished and only a few handwritten copies circulated. If this work had been published, Yao would have secured a more prominent place in modern Chinese history.

¹⁹ *Dongcha zazhu*. See footnote 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.* This was an overstatement. The quality of the work cannot be compared with that of Huang's *Riben guo zhi*. Huang spent more than nine years in writing the book, whereas Yao finished his *Riben zhi gao* in merely two years.

²¹ Publication was not easy in this period. For instance, Huang Zunxian finished his *Riben guo zhi* in 1887 and sent handwritten copies to the Zongli Yamen, Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), and Zhang Zhidong 張之洞. However, the government was not interested in publishing the book. With the help of Xue Fucheng, Huang's book was finally published in 1895. See Wang Xiaoqiu, "Huang Zunxian *Riben guo zhi* chutan" 黃遵憲日本國志初探 (A Preliminary Analysis of the *Riben guo zhi* of Huang Zunxian), in *Zhong-Ri wenhua jiaoliu shi lunwenji* 中日文化交流史輪輞集 (Essays in the History of Sino-Japanese Cultural Relations) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992), p. 234.

The next most important book was his *Riben dili bingyao* which was "the first book on Japanese geography by a modern Chinese."²² Based on *Heiyô chiri shôshi*, published by the Army Ministry in Japan, and a number of other Japanese sources, Yao spent an entire year compiling this work. As he pointed out: "Japan is an island nation. All the important places are located on the seashore of the islands. Hence, I compiled *Riben dili bingyao* to explain the geography of its coastal areas. I spent more than a year in writing this book."²³ This work was no ordinary geography book, but indeed a "military manual" to be used to attack Japan so as to regain the Ryûkyû Islands. It was also a response to the publication of *Shinkoku heiyô chirishi* 清國兵要地理志 (Military Geography of Qing China) by the Japanese government.

In fact, after the Ryûkyû Incident, the calls for attacking Japan were becoming louder. For example, General Wang Zhichun 王之春 and Chen Qiyuan 陳其元 already advocated this measure a few years before Yao. Nevertheless, Yao's *Riben dili bingyao* represented the apex of this current of thought.

His *Dongcha zazhu* is also worth mentioning. It consists of his personal letters, prefaces and afterwords, and 24 short essays, providing the best firsthand sources for understanding his perceptions of Japan. Unlike his prose and verse in other collections, these essays had a greater significance to Yao:

I have spent a considerable period of time in Japan. My Japanese friends always ask me to show them my own essays. This summer, I took a trip home and many Japanese reminded me of the same thing. Thus, my younger brother Wennan selected some of my essays for publication in movable print. Neither do I dare to expose anything confidential, nor do I include anything that is not serious.²⁴

Since most of Yao's writings were compilations or translations of Japanese sources and he left few words of his own, the *Dongcha zazhu* is effectively the most important reference for understanding his life and thought.

Compared with other Chinese Japanologists in the Qing period, Yao's research on Japan had the following four characteristics:

First, the quantity of his writings was unprecedented. Most of the Qing researchers left only one or two works on Japan, but Yao finished nine books. According to my count, during the 22 years from the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868 to the Yao's departure in 1889, there were 31 works on Japan written by thirteen Chinese authors. Yao Wendong topped the list with nine books; Wang Tao 王韜 (1828-97) and Wang Zhichun were distant seconds with four books each; Huang Zunxian, He Ruzhang, and Fu Yunlong 傅雲龍 wrote three books each; Li Xiaoyuan 李筱園 two books; and Jin Anqing 金安清, Gong Chai 龔柴, Zhuang Gongwei 莊公禕, Wang Yongni 王詠霓, Chen Jialin, and Huang Chaozeng, one book each.

Second, Yao had an ambitious research plan. Exceedingly few Chinese authors had any sort of research plan for studying Japan. Huang Zunxian and Chen Jialin each had a plan but they only wanted to write a treatise on Japan. Yao's research plan was much

²² *Mingzhi shidai Zhong-Ri wenhua de lianxi*, p. 82.

²³ *Dongcha zazhu*. See footnote 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

larger in scale and more comprehensive. He intended to write 22 books to introduce different aspects of Japan from history, geography, politics, and economics to literature, military affairs, and even tourism. Satô Saburô has remarked that Yao had "a comprehensive research plan in Japanese studies."²⁵ Yao was perhaps the first Chinese who had the idea of publishing a Japanese studies series. His plan was thoughtful and realistic. For example, when he was planning to write a history of Japanese art and literature, *Riben yiwén zhī*, he was already thinking about the sequel. His categorization of Japanese literature into three types was systematic and useful.

Third, the majority of his works were either compilations or translations. *Riben zhī gāo*, *Liúqiú dìlǐ zhī*, *Riben dìlǐ bīngyào*, and *Riben huìjī lù* were mainly translations of Japanese sources; the rest of his writings were his compilations of verse and prose. Yao himself actually did not write much by himself. This partly explains why Yao could be so prolific and finish nine books in six years. Strictly speaking, Yao was not a creative and gifted writer, but a skillful editor, organizer, and compiler.

Fourth, Yao's works on Japan were basically the products of a strong research team comprising both Japanese and Chinese scholars. Yao was handicapped by his lack of knowledge of the Japanese language and had to depend heavily on the services of Japanese scholars. Among the nine books which Yao wrote, Japanese scholars provided the data and translation for five, wrote prefaces for three, helped to find a publisher in Japan for five, and took part in the actual writing of six.

Yao as a Strategist and His Military Views

Yao Wendong's attitudes toward Japan underwent considerable changes. Before he came to Japan, he advocated Sino-Japanese military cooperation to resist the threat from the Western powers and Russia. After arriving in Japan, he began to realize that Japan was by no means an ideal partner for China because it had territorial ambitions in China. When China strove to resist Russia in the North, Japan became a threat in the East. He compared Japan to a "naughty child" who needed to be taught a lesson by China:

I, Wendong, used to think that if China goes to war with Japan, the West will take advantage of it. After I came to Japan, I no longer regarded the idea of going to war with Japan as unreasonable. Japan is like a naughty child who acts irresponsibly if we are lenient. If we do not use punishment, Japan will not rectify itself... Now, Russia is waiting for the opportunity to invade us from the North... My country will focus our defenses in the North. Japan is situated in a crucial location. I am worried that Japan might attack us someday.²⁶

Japan's invasion of the Ryûkyû Kingdom was a clear warning shot. How to reclaim the Ryûkyûs from Japan and how to discourage Japan's ambitions for Chinese territory were important issues for the late Qing Chinese. Experience told Yao that peaceful negotiations would not lead to any tangible results and only military strength

²⁵ *Kindai Nit-Chû kôshô shi no kenkyû*, p. 10.

²⁶ *Dongcha zazhu*. See footnote 4.

counted in the international arena. Hence, he agreed that sending troops to Japan was China's only option:

Now, the situation is that power is more important than reason. Envoys from different nations have tried to negotiate with Japan in order to reach a peaceful solution but in vain. Even if their tongues are broken, Japan still turns a deaf ear... Regarding the Ryūkyū case, if we want Japan to return two of its islands, only war and not negotiation can achieve this. Recently, both the ministers in the capital and the public have been paying attention to this issue and many advocate sending troops to Japan. I think this is the only way to protect our national pride.²⁷

How was China to prepare for this military campaign? Yao believed that the most important thing was to understand Japan, in particular its geography and politics. *Liugu dili zhi* was written to demonstrate that the Ryūkyū Kingdom was never a part of Japan historically or geographically. *Riben dili bingyao* was meant to be used as a source of tactics for invading Japan and reclaiming the Ryūkyū Islands. In a letter to the Bureau of the Military in Beijing, he underscored:

Japan and our country are neighbors. Our officials and scholars do not pay attention to Japan's geography and its current affairs, because we look down upon it as a small country. If the war breaks out between the two countries, China will not know what to do. I, Wendong, regardless of my poor ability, have searched for books in this country [Japan], and translated and compiled them into a book entitled *Riben dili bingyao*. It aims at providing military tactics for the future.²⁸

Yao suggested two tactics for attacking Japan: The best tactic was to swallow Japan and make it a vassal state of China. The second best option was to demonstrate China's military strength by sending a punitive expedition to Japan. Then Japan would not dare to offend China again. He held:

Now we have the opportunity to send troops to Japan and to make it a province of China and our vassal state in the East. Together with Taiwan, Japan will become a military base for China. This is the best tactic. If not, we should threaten Japan with our military powers and then give it a warning. Then, Japan will not dare to rebel and we will not have to worry anymore. This is the second best tactic.²⁹

Yao was insightful enough to point out that the decisive battles between China and Japan would be in the sea. Because Japan was an island nation, if China wanted to attack it, China had to send its fleet to Japan. Geographically, the west coast of Japan was the most direct and convenient target, but Yao reminded his countrymen that China should not attack Japan from the west coast because it would be heavily guarded. This was the main reason why the Yuan troops failed twice to invade Japan. The correct way to attack Japan would be from different directions. If so, Japan would be unable to defend itself because it

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

has such a long coastlines, and Chinese troops could land at different places easily. This was the reason why the British, American, and Russian fleets won over Japan.

The four islands of Japan are not large and they are surrounded by the sea. The crucial military factor lies not in the land, but in the sea. During the Pinghu Battle of the Yuan period, [the Mongols] only attacked the west coast and thus Japan could concentrate its defenses and won the battle. In the Tokugawa period, the American warships entered Uchiga and Shimoda, the Russian fleets advanced into Ôsaka and Masada, and the British navies sailed into Hakodate and later Nagasaki. They moved here and there and did not show a fixed pattern. Thus, Japan failed to defend its entire coastline and collapsed by itself. The entire nation of Japan was shocked. Rai Sanyô 賴山陽 [1780-1832] remarked: "We were lucky that Yuan troops only attacked us from one direction. If they had come from different directions and blocked our traffic, our troops would have been at loose ends and its damage would have been beyond imagination." This is such an accurate judgment. All strategists and geographers should know this.³⁰

Yao pointed out that during the late Qing period, Sino-Japanese sea traffic followed two main routes. The first route was from Shanghai to Nagasaki, from Nagasaki to Kôbe via the Inland Sea, and finally from Kôbe to Yokohama. He stressed that under no circumstances should China take this route to attack Japan because of the many islands in the Inland Sea. The Japanese would be able to dock and hide themselves in the islands, waiting for the opportunity to ambush the invaders. Moreover, the Straits of Shimonoseki was a natural trap. It was so narrow that once the fleet entered, it could hardly retreat and would easily be annihilated.

The second route was from Hong Kong to Yokohama via the Pacific Ocean, and then from Yokohama to Tokyo. This was an ideal route to attack Japan because the Japanese fleet would find it extremely difficult to stop the invaders on the high seas. Once Chinese troops landed in Yokohama, their victory would be certain. Knowing that Japan would station troops heavily in Yokohama, Yao suggested some strategic plans to facilitate the attack. The modified tactic was that the main force would attack Yokohama from the Pacific Ocean, and five supplementary forces would simultaneously launch their attack at different parts of Japan. These supplementary forces were as follows:

- (1) from Korea to conquer Tsushima, Iki, and other outlying islands;
- (2) from Nagasaki to conquer Saga;
- (3) from Manchuria and Sakhalin to conquer Hakodate and then sail down to Yokohama;
- (4) from China to land in Niigata and then march to Tokyo by land; and
- (5) from Fujian and Taiwan to conquer Kagoshima, and from Kagoshima to Nagasaki and Tokyo.

Yao further detailed the ways to conquer the six national strategic points of Japan: Tokyo and Yokohama as the fortresses in East Japan, Ôsaka and Kôbe as the fortresses of central Japan, Nagasaki as the fortress of South Japan, and Shimonoseki as the most important fortress of Japan. He believed that if the Chinese troops conquered these six

³⁰ *Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao* 小方壺齋輿地叢鈔 (Collection of Documents on World Geography), ed. Wang Xiqi 王錫祺 (Shanghai: Zhuyitang, 1877-97), vol. 53, p. 8177.

places, all of Japan would fall into their hands. Each of these places had its own natural barriers. If the Chinese take them, the fall of these six places will be just a matter of time. These natural barriers are Uraga for Tokyo and Yokohama, Akashi, Kafuto, Yûra, and Naruto for 'saka and Kobe, Yamakawa for Nagasaki, and Tsushima and Iki for Shimonoseki.

These strategic ideas were generally concrete and insightful, grounded in his expertise in geography and his extensive research on Japan.³¹ If China really had wanted to attack the Japanese homeland, this book would have been an invaluable reference. His book was taken seriously by the Chinese government and became Yao's only book published by the Zongli Yamen. Regardless of its quality and usefulness, however, the book has three major shortcomings.

First, Yao was imbued with Chinese chauvinism. He suggested invading Japan so that China could concentrate on its Russian campaign, comparing it to Zhuge Liang's 諸葛亮 famous tactics: "In order to conquer the central provinces, we should first pacify the Southern barbarians." He still held to a China-centered ideology and regarded other nations as barbarians. In the preface to the *Riben dili bingyao*, he strongly supported the Qing's military actions in Taiwan and at its Northwest border and regretted to see that China missed "three golden opportunities of the last 200 years" to conquer Southeast Asia, Russia, and India. He added that the occupation of Japan would be the fourth opportunity that China must not miss.³² These sorts of ideas were imperialistic, unrealistic, and irresponsible.

Second, Yao's ideas were contradictory and unjust. While condemning Japan's action in the Ryûkyû Islands, he asked China to send troops to turn Japan into a Chinese province. Was this an eye for an eye? Historically speaking, the Ryûkyû Kingdom was never a Chinese territory, but only a tributary state. It would have been just for China to help the Ryûkyû Kingdom to restore its sovereignty, but not to use the Ryûkyû incident as a pretext to invade Japan and swallow the Ryûkyû Kingdom.

Third, Yao was blinded by nationalism and did not fully understand the situation in China and Japan. He overlooked the problems in the Chinese government and overrated Chinese military capabilities. He claimed that "our Northern Fleets can resist Japan and Russia, and our Southern Fleets can resist the United Kingdom and France."³³ Although he witnessed the progress of Meiji Japan, his nationalist pride made it difficult for him to accept the new international order in which Japan and China were equals. His biggest mistake was that he underestimated the military capacity of Japan. In contrast, Li Shuchang was more realistic: "Our fleets, with the exception of Zhenyuan 鎮遠 and Dingyuan 定遠, were not better than the Japanese fleets. I am afraid that we are not superior to the Japanese."³⁴ The Sino-Japanese War proved that even Li's observation was too optimistic, not to mention Yao's.

³¹ However, D. R. Howland points out that the data in Yao's book were somewhat outdated and problematic. See *Borders of Chinese Civilization*, p. 175.

³² *Xiaofang huzhai yudi congchao*, pp. 8177-78.

³³ *Dongcha zazhu*. See footnote 4.

³⁴ See Li Shuchang, "Chushi dachen Li Shuchang michen Riben jinri qingxing pian" 出使日本大臣黎庶昌密陳日本近日情形片 (Memorandum on the Recent Situation in Japan, Secretly

Concluding Remarks

Yao Wendong made important contributions to Chinese Japanology and Sino-Japanese cultural interchange. He should be remembered as the first Chinese to translate Japanese books and to promote a Japanese studies series, the most prolific Chinese Japanologist of his time, and an early promoter of Sino-Japanese research collaboration. However, there were several major shortcomings in his scholarship. First, Yao was not an all-round scholar, and his primary interest was geography and its military implications. He did not have a clear and systematic view of such important matters as Japan's tradition, the Meiji reforms, and Sino-Japanese relations. He was so chauvinistic and conservative that he hesitated to admit the success of Japan in modernization and the lessons this held for China. Second, Yao did not make the best use of his six-year stay in Japan. His activities were mainly confined to Tokyo, and thus his understanding of Japan was less than complete. His Japanese friends were mostly scholars of Chinese literature and conservative intellectuals, and their ideas did not represent the new intellectual and cultural currents in Meiji Japan. To make matters worse, Yao did not study the Japanese language and could hardly read Japanese sources without the help of his Japanese assistants. All of these shortcomings handicapped his scholarship and deprived him of the sort of reputation achieved by first-rate Chinese Japanologists.