

Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2021 Semester
The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (1)
Title: Japan Studies in Taiwan: Past, Present and Future

President Shin-Chin Shu, who have just received the Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendations, delivered a speech entitle “Japan Studies in Taiwan: Past, Present and Future” for the first lecture of Eurasia Foundation International Lecture at Chinese Culture University (CCU). President Shu first mentioned the origin of this course, explained what is Japan studies and described the history of Japan studies in Taiwan. Taking his own contribution to Japan studies as an example, President Shu then discussed the future directions and issues of Japan studies in Taiwan.

What is Japan Studies: From the perspective of the world

President Shu pointed out that Japan studies in Taiwan started quite early. Even after Taiwan and Japan broke off diplomatic ties in 1972, both countries maintained close exchanges for a long time in all aspects of economics, culture and education. Japan studies and Japanese language education are two sides of the same thing. The sub-divisions of Japanese of the Oriental Language and Literature Department, established in 1962, was the first Japan studies institution in universities in Taiwan. There are currently 40 Japanese-related departments in Taiwan showing that the development of Japanese language education in Taiwan is as vigorous as other countries in the world. However, the higher education platform that extends to other aspects of Japan studies is still insufficient. From the “definition of Japan studies,” Japan studies can be divided into “Japanology,” “Japanese Studies,” and “Japan Studies.” Among them, “Japanology” is a discipline that studies Japanese language, culture, and history. The establishment of “the Asiatic Society of Japan (日本アジア協会)” in Yokohama during the Edo period, which was established by the Dutch people from Dejima, Nagasaki, was an important milestone. “Japan Studies” is the general term for all the research related to Japan. Taking the United States as an example, the works of Japan studies in the second half of the 19th century focused on its mystery and exoticism. It was not until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor that the United States began to pay attention to Japan. The US government commissioned the anthropologist Ruth Benedict at the end of World War II to write the classic book in Japan studies *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, which analyzed the character of the Japanese nation. This book has been well-received since its publication, though its content was not perfect and criticized by some scholars. In the 1970s, the United States became more active in cultivating Japanese experts in political and economic disciplines. In the latter half of the 1980s, some scholars advocated the concept of “re-examining Japan.” Following this, President Shu introduced statistics related to Japan studies in Europe, America, and Asia, the literature related to Japan studies in the world are equally divided in different disciplines: 35% are in social sciences discipline, 35% are in humanities discipline, and 30% are in language and literature discipline.

Japan Studies in Taiwan: Retrospect and Development

The first important stage of Japan studies in Taiwan was the period from 1952 to 1972 when Taiwan and Japan had formal diplomatic relations. This stage mainly focused on Taiwan-Japan politics, diplomacy, economics and trade, though humanities and social

science research had not developed in a systemic way. The second stage, from 1873 to 2006, after Taiwan and Japan broke normal diplomatic relations, Japan studies in Taiwan gradually evolved into a different track from previous research direction. The main trends in the second stage focused on the exchanges between universities or research institutions and humanities research began to show its strength. Both Taiwan and Japan devoted many efforts in Japan studies in the mid-1990s. On Japanese side, in addition to the Sumitomo Foundation, the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association (then “Interchange Association (Japan)”) established the “Japan-Taiwan Exchange Center” to mainly focus on colonial literature. On the Taiwanese side, the Academia Sinica established “Northeast Asian Regional Studies” project. In 2010, President Shu held the “Thinking and Practice of Mutual Understanding between Taiwan and Japan” forum to reflect on the possibilities of Japan studies in Taiwan. In this forum, President Shu invited the former head of the Japanese Culture Agency Aoki Tamotsu to deliver a speech. The discussion in the forum showed several important directions: the importance of cross-national and regional research; the integration of talents from Taiwan’s solid Japanese language education; East Asian countries join hands to make horizontal connections with research institutions around the world; and the establishment of dialogue platform between humanities and social science.

Japan Studies in Taiwan: Should be in line with the current trend and have complementary functions

President Shu mentioned that the current problem of Japan studies in Taiwan lies in the lack of integration: the scattered research organizations, the lack of connection between Japanese language education and Japan studies, and the pathways for further studies need to be improved. In recent years, countries in the East Asian region have political frictions due to incompatible perception of history and territorial disputes. Recently, due to the raging COVID-19 pandemic, human health and safety have been under threat. Taiwan faces the similar issues as Japan in terms of earthquakes, disasters, fishing rights, and medical treatment. Thus, it is an important to think about how to take root in Japan studies, in order to cultivate talents who can respond to various aspects of exchanges, cooperation and negotiation. Principal Shu believes that “the stones of those hills may be used to polish gems.” For example, Taiwan’s high-speed rail adopts Japan’s Shinkansen system, and Japan’s policy over declining birthrate and aging population can be good reference for Taiwanese decision makers. Principal Shu reminded students that their understanding of Japanese culture should not only remain on the surface, but should also absorb the experience of Taiwan and Japan to complement each other.

Japan Studies in Taiwan: Present and Future

President Shu, who established the Center for Japanese studies of National Taiwan University, is dedicated to cultivating a new generation of Japanese researchers, promoting the dialogue between humanities and social sciences and the establishment of academic networks. In recent years, President Shu have accomplished many important things, including ① National Graduate Students Research Camp; ② the publishing of Japanology Research Series: 35 volumes have been published so far and these books on Japanology are unique because of their Taiwan’s perspective; ③ International Academic Forum: Inviting distinguished scholars to co-host or join the international academic forums. Among them, the Japan Research Forum (2015), the 4th East Asian Consortium

of Japanese Studies (2019), and the 6th Asian Future Forum Pre-Conference (2021) all gained remarkable result, increasing the visibility of Taiwan, providing young students with opportunities, and building academic network. At the end of the speech, President Shu put forward the following suggestions on the future prospect of Japan studies: seeking a joint research pattern, cultivating Japan experts, Japan studies in Taiwan opening up to the world, and establishing a national-level “Center for Japan Studies,” integrating five major aspects of humanities and social science, politics, economy and trade, technology, and industry. In the relationship between Taiwan and Japan, it is difficult to achieve breakthrough in the level of political, diplomatic, legal, and national defense; while in the level of culture, tourism, education, industry, and economy it would be easier to improve relations. For Taiwan, the significance and value of Japan studies lies in knowing ourself and Japan, enhancing substantial relationships, constructing a platform for academic exchanges between Taiwan and Japan, and becoming a think tank for government departments to promote Taiwan-Japan relations. President Shu encouraged young students to become Japanese expert and contribute to the establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between Taiwan and Japan.

(Web link:)

(Written by: Huang, Hsin-I, Associate Professor, Department of Japanese Language and Literature)