

International Lecture of the Eurasia Foundation, Fall Semester 2022

Series Lectures (1): “Asian Community: The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology”

Topic: Taiwan-Japan Relations and Japan Studies

The first speaker of the 1st International Lecture of the Eurasia Foundation in 2022 of Chinese Culture University, is Professor Shing-ching Shyu, who is the Chair Professor of President Duan-Mu Kai at the Soochow University, Visiting Professor of Department of Japanese Language and Literature and Distinguished Chair Professor at the Chinese Culture University. Professor Shyu delivered a speech entitled “Taiwan-Japan Relations and Japan Studies.” Professor Shyu looked at Taiwan-Japan relations from three perspectives: “politics and diplomacy, economy, education and culture.” As conclusion, he reviewed Japan studies in Taiwan and put forward strategies for the development of Japan studies in Taiwan.

Taiwan-Japan Relations in Politics and Diplomacy

Taiwan-Japan relations refer to the relations between Japan and Taiwan after the government of the Republic of China (ROC) moved to Taiwan in 1949. From 1945 to 1972, the ROC and Japan had established formal diplomatic relations and set up embassies in both sides. The background of this development was a Taiwan-Japan alliance aiming at “containing the expansion of communist forces” under the leadership of the United States. Japan’s China policy at that time was based on Shigeru Yoshida’s “Yoshida Letter,” the main content of which was that the US government asked the Japanese government to recognize the Kuomintang authorities as the only legitimate government representing China.

After the formation of the 1955 system, Shigeru Yoshida’s China policy had been challenged, and controversial issues continued to arise between Japan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). After the 1960s, although Japan’s ruling party, Liberal Democratic Party, had not officially recognize PRC, as both sides increased their economic and cultural exchanges, PRC’s interference in Taiwan-Japan relations became more apparent.

Although Japanese politicians, like Shigeru Yoshida, Nobusuke Kishi, Eisaku Sato, Yasuhiro Nakasone and others, still held a pro-Taiwan position, pro-China forces emerged among Japanese politicians. The PRC’s entry into the United Nations made Taiwan lose

its original diplomatic status. In 1972, Japan and the ROC broke the official diplomatic relations. After the severance of diplomatic ties, Taiwan and Japan still maintained friendly relations among the people and bilateral trade and cultural exchanges between the two sides continued to develop.

After the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, Taiwan donated more than NT\$7 billion, the largest amount in the world. After that, the relationship between Taiwan and Japan warmed up. In 2017, the Japanese representative offices in Taiwan officially changed its name to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, and the official interaction has become more active.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe indicated on December 1, 2021 that “if something happens to Taiwan, it means something happens to Japan.” The current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has continued the Abe’s policy position toward China and adopt the position of “pro-US, friendly to Taiwan, and balancing against China.” Cabinet members recruited and retained many pro-Taiwan figures, and the interaction between Taiwan and Japan has become closer.

Economic Taiwan-Japan Relations

Taiwan and Japan have maintained a closed economic and trade relationship. In 2021, Taiwan and Japan became each other’s third largest trading partners. Imports from Japan to Taiwan were 56.1 billion, and exports from Taiwan to Japan were 29.2 billion. Taiwan’s imports from Japan have been far greater than its exports to Japan for many years.

Various forms of Taiwan-Japan economic and trade conferences, such as the “Taiwan-Japan Economic and Trade Conference,” are still held virtually, despite that the COVID-19 epidemic disrupted mutual visits between Taiwan and Japan. This highlights the importance of Taiwan-Japan economic and trade relations.

Taiwan is currently applying to join the “Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP),” and also seeking Japan’s supports to jointly promote the “New Southbound Policy,” which aims to create a new cooperation model of mutual benefits and win-win cooperation with ASEAN and South Asian countries and to establish an “economic community awareness.”

Taiwan-Japan Relations in Education and Culture

The number of international students between Taiwan and Japan is considerable; the “working holiday” system started in 2009 has allowed a considerable number of young people to experience living in Japan. Many high schools in Taiwan and Japan have chosen both countries as the first choice for educational trip to overseas.

In spite of frequent exchanges, the mutual understanding between Taiwan and Japan still needs to be strengthened. Currently, there are 40 Japanese-related departments in Taiwan, and Japanese education is developing as vigorously as other countries in the world. However, Japanese studies in the higher education platform is still insufficient.

At present, the problem of Japanese studies in Taiwan lies in the lack of integration: scattered research organizations, lack of connection between Japanese language education and Japanese studies, and the need to improve the channels for further studies. How to take root in Japanese research and cultivate talents who can respond to various aspects of communication, cooperation and negotiation is an critical task.

Development Strategies of Japanese Studies in Taiwan

To maintain “Taiwan-Japan friendship” in the long term, it is necessary to cultivate enough talents who understand Japan and Taiwan in the next generation. The strategies proposed by Professor Shyu are: to establish an organization specialize in Japanese studies, organize a planning committee for the “Enhancing Japanese Studies Project,” promote an integrated Taiwan-Japan joint academic research, establish a system for rewarding doctoral students engaged in “Japanese studies,” seek the supports of the “The Japan Foundation,” and actively seek to conclude cultural agreements with Japan. It is important to establish foundation from the educational level in order to sustainably develop the Japanese studies in Taiwan. Through these studies, we can have better understanding about Japan, so that the good Taiwan-Japan relationship based on “Taiwan-Japan friendship” can sustain.

(Web link:)

(Written by: Chung, Chi-Ju, Assistant Professor, the Department of Japanese Language and Literature)