

*Matsumoto Morio*

# A KALEIDOSCOPE of CHINA

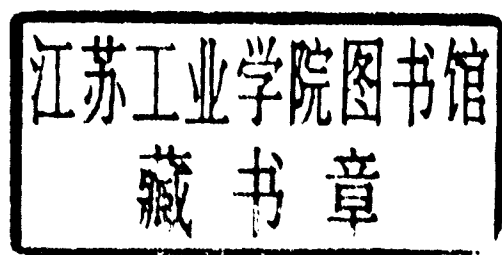


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# A Kaleidoscope of China

By Matsumoto Morio

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# Contents

Preface: Innovative Views towards China ( <i>Kokubun Ryosei</i> ).....	7
Author's Foreword .....	9
Government Leaders I Met .....	13
Dialect and Interpretation 14	
Film <i>Deng Xiaoping</i> 16	
Zhu Rongji, Hero of Reform 19	
“Powerful Woman” – Vice Premier Wu Yi 22	
Qian Qichen's <i>Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy</i> 24	
Proverbs Troubling Interpreters 27	
Developing Northeast China and Liaoning Governor Bo Xilai 29	
WTO and China 32	
Politics and Society in Modern China .....	35
Coalmine Accidents and “Serve the People” Mentality 36	
A TV Play Called <i>Liu Laogen</i> 38	
Fireworks and Couplets 40	
Thoughts on Moon Cake 43	
Courtyard Houses in Beijing 44	
Is National Opera House “Chinese Style West Function”? 47	
China's First Manned Space Flight 50	
Inferior Milk Powder Case 52	
“The Man-Han Banquet” 55	
Green Food 58	

<b>Travel across China .....</b>	<b>61</b>
Pingyao Ancient City 62	
The Mecca of Chinese Revolution 65	
Liquor: Fragrant or Fake? 68	
Jiuzhaigou Valley: A Lost Land of Mysteries 71	
The Writings of the Dongba Ethnic Group in Lijiang 74	
The Hometown of Lychees 77	
Hot Springs of Conghua, Guangdong 81	
The Cluster of Memorial Archways in Mountain Huangshan 83	
Whispering Waves of Gulangyu in Xiamen 87	
The International Beer Festival of Qingdao 90	
Mount Tai 93	
Harbin's Ice and Snow Festival 96	
Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang 99	
The Ancient City of Jiaohe in Turpan 102	
The Multi-Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang 105	
 <b>A Colorful China .....</b>	 <b>109</b>
The Chinese Riot of Colors 110	
Xu Fu's Journey to the East 112	
Expressing Thanks and Apologies 115	
Asking for Directions 118	
<i>The Romance of Three Kingdoms</i> and Japanese Investments in China 120	
Qin Hui – The Evil Prime Minister of Feudal China 123	
 <b>Proud Chinese Artists .....</b>	 <b>127</b>
Huang Zhou – the Patriotic Painter 128	
The Great Wall Concert 131	
Chinese Lutanist Yang Jing 133	

Mr. Wang's Folk-custom Museum	136
Seal Cutting Master Feng Youwen	138
Twelve Men Band	141
The Friendship between China and Japan .....	145
Rehe – A Historical Site	146
International Tea Culture and Appreciation – Tangetsu Ryu	149
The Dance Play – <i>Great Dunhuang</i>	153
The Person Who Built a Primary School in Qinghai Province	156
It Will Take a Hundred Years to Foster a Person	158
<i>Nipponia Nippon</i> Protecting	161
Working in China .....	165
The Great Hall of the People	166
The Diaoyutai State Guesthouse	168
The Living Fossil – Meat <i>Lingzhi</i>	171
Tibet and the Sacred Mountains	174
Suzhou New Area: Fetch in Foreign Capital	177
Analysis of Chinese Economy .....	181
How to Analyze Chinese GDP Survey	182
Foreign Exchange Certificate and <i>Renminbi</i> Exchange Rate	185
Can China Rely on Her Own Resources?	187
The Reality of Income Gap	191
The Yellow River Runs Dry	193
The Pollution Management in Shanxi Province	195
Garbage Disposal and Commercial Opportunity	198
The Project of the Century – the Three Gorges	200
Abandoned Buildings and Bubbles in Real Estate	203
The Scheme of ASEAN and FTA – Hope and Reality from the Upfront	205



# **Preface:**

## **Innovative View towards China**

**T**his is just the twentieth year of my acquaintance with Mr. Matsumoto. I remember when I first met him I was a guest research fellow in University of Michigan when Mr. Matsumoto came to visit the university. Afterwards he himself also became a guest research fellow there for one year. But it was a pity that then I had already gone back to Japan and thus missed the chance to work together with him. However, since then, I have kept receiving his copied letters reporting his recent conditions and activities.

These letters arrive generally once every one or two months, with titles changed according to his change of work places. In the very beginning, the letter was named "Letter from Michigan"; later it was named "Letter from New York"; and then after he had gone to China, the title shifted to "People's Monthly." Ever since the first letter, these copied letters have never failed to arrive periodically. I admire very much this spirit of perseverance.

When Mr. Matsumoto was in Hong Kong, the letters were named "Letter from a Mountain Village," containing local information blended with his unique and incisive thoughts. I have heard that a series of his essays were published in a weekly magazine. So I guess probably this book that has taken one and a half years to finish is a collection of those essays.

Mr. Matsumoto can speak Chinese even better than some native Chinese and has been in the diplomatic front line dealing with foreign affairs concerning China for almost thirty years. I thought that in this book he might talk about some secrets during his diplomatic life. But to



my surprise, this book contains purely essays that make you feel that you are chatting idly with the author about China. So this book is faithful to its name – “A Kaleidoscope of China.”

This is a book with a brand new view towards China. I strongly advise people that are fed up with stereotyped descriptions of China to read this book and get a better understanding of this country.

Kokubun Ryosei  
Director of East Asia Institute, Keio University

## Author's Foreword

**I** have been in connection with Chinese culture for thirty-five years now.

In 1971 I entered Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and in 1976 I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. The period in between may be called the start up stage of my connection with China. Then I furthered my study in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong for two years, and went back home to continue working in the China Section of the Asian Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. I was mainly in charge of the Sino-Japan economic transactions and I also did translation work for leaders for as long as sixteen years. This period is the expansion stage of my connection with China. Since 2001 until recently, I have successively worked as the director of Consular Section, Finance Section and Cultural Communications Section of the Japanese consulates in Beijing and in Hong Kong. And I think this is the mature stage of my connection with China.

During these periods, I took part in events that have had great influence on Sino-Japan relationship and also on China itself. For example, the start of loans from Japan to China, the sign of agreement on protection of investment between both countries, China's entry into the World Trade Organization, etc.

Looking back on these experiences, my deepest impression is that the mutual understanding of both countries deepens as their cooperation relationship develops day by day.

The essays included in this book were originally written for a Japanese magazine published in Hong Kong. But when I have written more than seventy essays, the magazine suddenly stopped publication, so I stopped writing. Taking a comprehensive look at my essays, I think they are more or less of some value. So when the magazine invited me to

collect them into a book, I happily accepted the invitation. This is how this book, a book named *A Kaleidoscope of China* published by the Japanese publisher Tabata Publishing House, has come into being.

Some Japanese professors declare that they have been to everywhere in China and gained a perfect understanding of China in every way. But I am afraid they don't know what they are talking about. Needless to say, no two Chinese persons look exactly the same. As Mr. Hou Baolin, the famous cross talk master, has once said, "If every one looks the same, who needs to go to photo studios?" And what's more, China is a country with such large territory and rich resources. So this book is named "*A Kaleidoscope of China*," indicating that I still don't know enough about China. What I see are things I have never seen before and I am amazed by them.

I love traveling and have been to countless places in China. But each time keeps bringing me fresh impressions and unexpected gains. For instance, once I passed a little village dwelled by people of a minority nationality, I saw an old lady sitting on the stone steps in front of her house, so I went up to chat with her. Although I was a stranger to the place, she was very kind to me. Her warm smile has been engraved in my heart.

During the construction process of the friendship between China and Japan, there are always countless people that are devoting their efforts without being known. Many scholars that I am acquainted with are this kind of people. And among them only a few have been mentioned in my book. Plus, I have only recognized a limited part of their contributions. But I believe it is right through the consistent efforts of all these people that the frequent transactions between the two countries have gained a strong support.

My descriptions in this book are mainly based on my own experiences, and thus can not represent the view of the general public. Besides, I don't want to directly refer to the contents of my work. Some friends have suggested me to disclose something unknown to outsiders

in the book, for example, the details of some discussions on high-end meetings, which will definitely draw in readers. But I choose not to adopt these suggestions.

I simply hope that through these ordinary essays, I could help more Japanese to better understand China and better appreciate the contributions of those nameless people to the Sino-Japan friendship. I would feel more than happy if readers with more knowledge than I do can think further and develop more view points that I had neglected after reading this book.

Matsumoto Morio



# Government Leaders I Met

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## Dialect and Interpretation

**I**t was a long time ago, over thirty years ago, when I studied Chinese in college and did interpreting for several times. I called it interpretation, but actually, the things I translated were far from what I had learned at school, and therefore, I always did the job awkwardly, but I did accumulate precious experience from such interpreting activities.

Once a Chinese delegation came to make a study tour in a chemical factory in Japan, where they lived for three months. I was responsible for the arrangements related to their everyday life and served as an interpreter for them as well. The delegation was to acquire the installation and maintenance skills of the ethylene production equipment of Shanghai Jinshan Petroleum & Chemical Corporation. I took care of three gentlemen, Mr. Wang, Mr. Jiang and Mr. Wu, who were all from Shanghai. Jiang was young and spoke mandarin, while Wu, being more advanced in years, spoke with a strong accent, and used a lot of technical jargons, which I could hardly understand. That was my first frustrating experience of being confronted with the dialect hurdle when doing interpreting.

But I was moved by the spirit of those Chinese technicians. They worked truly hard, not motivated by the socialist system they lived with, but by the innocent and proud heart to make contribution to their homeland by acquiring the state-of-the-art skills.

One day, Mr. Wu, who was making an effort to acquire the special welding skill for high voltage pipe, told me that his arms hurt severely. Later I knew that he reviewed what he learned in daytime by putting himself to practicing operating the heavy welding machines every night. He was close to 60 years old at that time!

Later I was admitted into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, working as a professional interpreter. Thus I had a good many opportunities to get in touch with Chinese government leaders and got tongue-tied heaps of times because of dialects and accent.

In January 1980, Li Qiang, former Minister of Foreign Trade of China, visited Japan. He was from Changshu, a city in East China's Jiangsu

Province, close to Shanghai. I had before stayed in Shanghai to learn Chinese, but I could not understand his dialect at all. The worst thing was that he spoke fast and in a low voice. Even the Chinese interpreter also had to get very close to hear him.

Hua Guofeng took over the post of premier after former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai passed away in January 1976. He visited Japan in May 1980. Sitting in the bulletproof car on the way from Haneda Airport to the hotel, he greeted me directly, when I was sitting on the folding chair as the interpreter. He asked me, "Where did you learn Chinese?" From that I could feel Chinese leader's care to their underlings. Hua was from Jiaocheng of North China's Shanxi Province. It is a coincidence that when I studied Chinese in Fudan University, my Chinese roommate Mr. Yan was the fellow townsman of Premier Hua and so I was accustomed to his accent. I well remember the dialect Premier Hua used to call former Japanese Prime Minister "Daping Zhengfang," the Chinese pronunciation for Ohira Masayoshi, as "Prime Minister Taiping." Shortly after the visit to Japan, Hua gave away the premier post to Zhao Ziyang, who was from Central China's Henan Province.

It was easier for me to understand Premier Zhao. Before his formal visit to Japan in May 1982, I got the chance to meet with him for several times in Beijing and later often sat together with him in some meeting occasions. I feel that with the lapse of time, what he said became easier for me to understand. I wonder whether it's due to the necessary skills of premiers or my improved understanding.

Accent and dialect are difficult to deal with for interpreters. However, after years of practice, I draw the conclusion that it doesn't matter whether it's mandarin with accent or dialect, which may sound a little irresponsible.

I still remember once when I was watching in Shanghai the Yue Opera, a famous local opera originated from East China's Zhejiang Province famous for the Shaoxing Wine, a Chinese person from North China sitting behind asked me for the meaning of lines, saying, "What did he say just now?" So even native Chinese cannot understand the dialect!



In spite of that, in practical interpretation occasions, when you heard the dialect, you had to do the translation any way although you don't understand at all, a really hard job to deal with.

Though Japan and China use the same Chinese characters, the pronunciations are different. Therefore the names of Japanese often create the trouble. If pronounced in dialect, it would be more difficult for translation.

In August 1977, Mr. Fu Hao, the former Chinese ambassador to Japan, who's from Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, talked on the topic of "old friends" with his Japanese friends. I cannot remember the scene clearly now. Probably I strived to remember the Chinese character Ji in the name of Jiqi (Isozaki). Besides, I confused similar names like Ichimura and Nishimura, Watanabe and Watabe, Kato and Kato. Because they mentioned many people I never met in their conversation, I was much worried as I translated, a really hard time for me.

## Film *Deng Xiaoping*

The film *Deng Xiaoping*, with the life stories of Deng Xiaoping, "the general designer of China's reform and opening to the world," as the theme, has been shown publicly in the country. According to Ding Yinnan, director of the film, it took nine years to write the playbook by making over fifty versions based on various times of studies. More than one hundred people had been interviewed for the writing of the play.

The film starts with the scene that Deng Xiaoping and Ye Jianying were formulating the strategies of China's reform and opening to the world in a house of the Central Military Commission situated in the Xishan Mountain of Beijing, under China's turbulent political situation in 1976.

1976 is a year with great changes for China. I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan that year, and was assigned to work as a trainee in the Chinese section of Asian Bureau. In that year Chinese leaders Zhou