

THE CULTURAL PARADOX OF MODERN JAPAN: JAPAN AND ITS THREE OTHERS

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This paper will examine the cultural paradox of modern Japan, focusing on the views of civilization and Otherness during the period of the Great Japanese Empire (1868-1945). I will look at modern Japanese views of civilization and how these views reflected modern Japan's perceptions of its major Others: the West, China and the South Seas.² The reason I write in terms of the "paradox" of modern Japan is because the Japan of this period, as the only non-Western, non-Caucasian country to have "succeeded" in modernizing and moving down the path of imperialism, experienced problems that many other countries did not.³

What does the Great Japanese Empire share with other (Western) empires in terms of historical experience? What were the differences? As was the case in other empires, the people of the Great Japanese Empire were prejudiced against the peoples of their colonies – although different empires had different forms of prejudice and, even within a single empire, the prejudices different peoples faced could differ. Following Edward Said, this prejudiced view is sometimes labelled "Japanese Orientalism".⁴ As depicted

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² The South Seas includes today's South-East Asia (a region that was, in pre-war Japan, called *soto-Nan'yō* [outer South Seas]) and the Pacific region (a region that was called *uchi-Nan'yō* [inner South Seas]). Yano Tōru, *Nihon no Nan'yō shikan* (Japan's view of the South Seas), Tokyo: Chūkō shinsho, 1979, p.12. Note that this paper will follow the Japanese (or East Asian) order of family name followed by personal name. I will also follow the conventional appellation of individuals (e.g. Norinaga instead of Motoori).

³ On this issue, see Satō Seizaburō, "Kindai Nihon o dō miru ka" (How should we view modern Japan?), in Nakamura Takahide and Itō Takashi eds., *Kindai Nihon kenkyū nyūmon* (An introduction to modern Japanese studies), Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1977, pp.1-16.

⁴ For an examination of "Japanese Orientalism", see Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, Kang Sang-Jung, *Orientalizumu no kanata e* (Beyond Orientalism), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996, Koyasu Nobukuni, "*Ajia*" wa dō katararete kita ka – *Kindai Nihon no Orientalizumu* (How "Asia" was depicted: The Orientalism of modern Japan), Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2003, Gotō Ken'ichi, *Kindai Nihon to Tōnan Ajia – nanshin no "shōgeki"*

in Said's *Orientalism*, the West created a dichotomy of the West versus the East, and attributed specific characteristics to each, including civilized versus barbaric, advanced versus backward, virtue versus vice, rational versus irrational, and knower versus known.⁵ Japan created a similar dichotomy between Japan and other Asian countries. However, as will be argued here, Japan's Orientalism was in many ways a much more complex ideology than Western Orientalism.

The notion of a "Japanese Orientalism" itself presents an intrinsic contradiction. Orientalism is a negative view of the East, and Japan, even after modernizing, remained an Eastern country and was treated as such by the West.⁶ The Japanese intelligentsia remained highly aware of the prejudiced Western views of Japan and the Japanese, and struggled throughout the modern era to combat these views. One strategy that was adopted here was the attempt to disassociate Japan from the East or Asia. As Jansen notes, referring to Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), it was important for Japan that "it should not be associated in Western minds with a decrepit and backward 'Asia'".⁷ Japan thus had to make great efforts to demonstrate that it was, unlike other non-Western countries, "civilized" and "rational". It is not an exaggeration to say that the entire discourse of the Japanese Empire, even when it does not directly mention the West, was carried out under the impact of the West.⁸

to "isan" (Modern Japan and South-East Asia: The "impact" and "heritage" of the southward advance), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995, and Kawamura Minato, "Koroniarizumu to Orientarizumu – Bōken Dankichi no chikyūgi" (Colonialism and Orientalism: The world of *The Adventures of Dankichi*), reprinted in Kawamura Minato, *Nan'yō Karafuto no Nihon bungaku* (Japanese literature of the South Seas and Sakhalin), Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1994, pp.21-58.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978.

⁶ Japan was forced to conclude a series of unequal treaties with the Western Powers (the USA, followed by Holland, Russia, England and France) in 1858. Japan was stripped of its tariff autonomy and was forced to agree to grant nationals of the Western Powers extraterritoriality in Japan. Revising this treaty was the major diplomatic goal of modern (Meiji) Japanese governments. It was not until 1911 that the unequal treaties were completely revised. This revision was (seen as) a great step forward for Japan, but did not end racial discrimination. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Japan submitted a proposal for the abolition of racial discrimination, a proposal that was rejected. The exclusion of Japanese migrants in the USA, Canada and Australia was one of the factors that lay behind this proposal and its rejection.

⁷ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.427.

⁸ For a work that directly discusses the Western impact see, for example, Hirakawa Sukehiro, *Seiō no shōgeki to Nihon* (The Western impact and Japan), Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1974. Also see Oguma Eiji, *Tan'itsu minzoku shinwa no kigen – "Nihonjin" no jigazō no keifu* (The origin of the myth of homogenous nation: The genealogy of the self-image of the "Japanese"), Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1995, and Oguma Eiji, *"Nihonjin" no kyōkai – Okinawa · Ainu · Taiwan · Chōsen shokuminchi shihai kara fukkō made* (The boundaries of the "Japanese": Okinawa, the Ainu, Taiwan and Korea - from colonial rule to independence), Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1998. Oguma discusses a wide range of Japanese authors with the Western impact in mind.

Dealing with a foreign impact, of course, was not an experience unknown to Japan. There is the precedent of the Chinese impact in the pre-modern period. Indeed, as Pollack argues, this experience helped Japan come to grips with the new (Western) impact.⁹ Japan followed a similar line to that which it had shown to its former greatest Other, China. As will be argued here, this was a line that combined admiration and antagonism. As Hirakawa notes, the contradicting slogans of modern Japan, *bunmei kaika* (Civilization and Enlightenment – i.e., Westernization) and *sonnō jōi* (Revere the Emperor and Expel the Barbarians) existed synchronically in modern Japan and within one individual.¹⁰ However, there was a slow but steady change of tide in the *Zeitgeist* of the Great Japanese Empire: admiration was dominant during the early period of modernization, while antagonism was dominant during the Second World War.

Terms such as “dilemma” have been used in the literature to describe the conflict between Westernization (modernization) and Japanese tradition.¹¹ This conflict was further complicated by the notion of “Japanese tradition”. Because of the pre-modern impact of China, “Japanese tradition” was a contested concept. Indeed in the discourse of native traditions, Japanese authors were strongly conscious of China. As Koyasu notes, Japan’s self-recognition was only possible by differentiating Japan from China.¹² Such being the case, there were two types of “tradition”: those which emphasized the differences with China (*kokugaku* and *Mitogaku*) and those which identified with it (*kangaku*). Thus China remained (and still remains) “the Great Other” even after Japan’s modernization.¹³ Japan’s view of China is too complex to be simply categorized as “Orientalism”.¹⁴

The impact of China might in fact be the reason why Japan created a third Other, the South Seas, in the late nineteenth century, in addition to the West and China. Unlike China, the South Seas was depicted as being, and

⁹ David Pollack, *Reading against Culture: Ideology and Narrative in the Japanese Novel*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, p.39.

¹⁰ Hirakawa Sukehiro, *Wakon Yōsai no keifu – uchi to soto kara no Meiji Nihon* (The genealogy of “Japanese Spirit and Western Learning”: The interior and exterior of Meiji Japan), Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1971, p.86.

¹¹ Stefan Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient*, p. 27. Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885-1895*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969, p.190.

¹² Koyasu Nobukuni, “Tōyōteki shakai no ninshiki” (The understanding of Oriental society), reprinted in Koyasu, “*Ajia*” *wa dō katararete kita ka*, pp.127-47, at p.143.

¹³ See Koyasu Nobukuni, “Ōinaru tasha – kindai Nihon no Chūgoku zō” (The great Other: The modern Japanese image of China), reprinted in Koyasu, “*Ajia*” *wa dō katararete kita ka*, pp.149-69.

¹⁴ This is certainly also the case with some Western views of the East. Indeed, there were a number of approaches to the Orient that were free from both prejudice and exoticism. See, for example, Donald Lammers, “Taking Japan Seriously: Some Western Literary Portrayals of the Japanese during the Climax of their National Self-Assertion (1905-1945)”, in Warren I. Cohen ed., *Reflections on Orientalism: Edward Said, Roger Bresnahan, Surjit Dulai, Edward Graham, and Donald Lammer*, Michigan: Asian Studies Centre, Michigan State University, 1983, pp.45-62.

having always been, inferior.¹⁵ As Yano notes, Japan needed an Other that was “definitely inferior”.¹⁶ The concept of the South Seas was thus produced under the (new) impact of the West and the lingering impact of China.

My aim here is to examine the path modern Japan followed in establishing its identity and to analyze its paradoxical and complex nature. In order to do this, I will focus on the age of the Great Japanese Empire, that is the period from 1868 to 1945. However, let us first look at the pre-modern Japanese views of China.

Pre-Modern Japanese Views of China

Though pre-modern Japan had some knowledge of the West, the West was generally viewed as being much less important than China. China was Japan’s most important Other and Japan identified itself within the context of an acceptance of the ideology known as *Chūka shisō* (China-centrism).¹⁷ This ideology divided the world into China and non-China, and viewed this division as being synonymous with the division between civilization and barbarianism. As Graham rightly notes, “Said’s analytical approach can as logically be taken to the Chinese view of the non-Chinese world”.¹⁸ China was viewed as the center of the universe, a view reflected in the term used by the Chinese for their country: “Middle Kingdom” (*Zhongguo*). By accepting the ideology of “China-centrism”, pre-modern Japan also accepted the notion that the relationship between China and Japan was equivalent to that between a civilized center and a backward periphery.

Though there has long been a nationalistic sentiment in Japan, it was not until the late Edo era in the eighteenth century when a distinct cultural nationalism emerged. This cultural nationalism is known as *kokugaku* (nativism) and was to influence the *Mitogaku* (Mito scholarship) tradition of political nationalism. *Kokugaku* emerged as a backlash against *kangaku* (Chinese Learning), then the official form of scholarship in Japan. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), the most famous *kokugaku* scholar, criticized *kangaku* for its stoicism and rationality and instead celebrated the Japanese sensitivity he discovered in *waka* (Japanese poetry) and *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*). He located emotion above reason, because, as Yoshikawa succinctly summarizes, “reality is too complicated, mysterious,

¹⁵ See Yano, *Nihon no Nan’yō shikan*, and Yano Tōru, “Nanshin” no keifu (A genealogy of the “southern advance”), Tokyo: Chūkō shinsho, 1975.

¹⁶ Yano Tōru, *Nihon no Nan’yō shikan*, p.130.

¹⁷ For a further discussion of this issue, see David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan’s Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

¹⁸ Edward D. Graham, “The Imaginative Geography of China”, in Cohen ed., *Reflections on Orientalism*, pp.1-43, at p.41.

and strange to be explained by limited human intelligence”.¹⁹ For Norinaga, ancient Japan (in which the Emperor reigned) was superior because it embodied a more humane and natural culture, and therefore was “closer to the truth”.²⁰ China (and the Japan of Norinaga’s time) was criticized for what had been idealized, its civilization, while Japan was lauded for what had been lamented, its lack of artificial (Chinese) culture. (The echoes of Rousseau, the state of nature, and natural man are clear.) For *kangaku* scholars, on the other hand, such nationalism was nothing but a reverse expression of an inferiority complex.

Both *kangaku* and *kokugaku* scholars, though superficially different, developed their discourse within the same paradigm: China was the more civilized and advanced country, while Japan was less civilized (or, *a la* Rousseau, more natural). This pre-modern paradigm was, however, reversed when Japan started to modernize.

***Datsu-A nyū-Ō* and the Modernization of Japan**

By the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Japan could no longer ignore the international political realities in which the West had become too powerful to ignore. In fact, Japan was to witness what was for many Japanese a deeply shocking fact: the exposure of China, perceived as the most civilized and powerful country in the world, as weak and powerless in the face of the West, a “backward” region populated by “barbarians” in the pre-modern view of the world.

At this time, Japanese authors such as Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901) developed a new view of global political realities. This was based on the idea of a civilized West and a backward East, including Japan and China.²¹ Needless to say, this view shared much in common with the depiction of the East by Western Orientalists as criticized by Said. Unlike Said, however, Fukuzawa accepted this view as reflecting the “truth”. Nonetheless Fukuzawa differed from some Western Orientalists in that he did not believe that these realities were set in concrete. Fukuzawa and many of his Japanese contemporaries “did not consider the West inherently superior, only historically advanced”.²² In other words, the fact that Japan was backward today did not mean that Japan was fated to remain backward forever. (In this sense, Befu’s labeling of Japan’s zealous absorption of modern Western

¹⁹ Yoshikawa Kōjirō, “Motoori Norinaga no shisō” (The thought of Motoori Norinaga), in *Kaisetsu* (Introduction), *Nihon no shisō 15 – Motoori Norinagashū* (The thought of Japan, vol. 15, Motoori Norinaga), 1969, reprinted in Yoshikawa Kōjirō, *Jinsai – Sorai – Norinaga* (Jinsai, Sorai, Norinaga), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975, pp.287-308, at p.287.

²⁰ H. Gene Blocker and Christopher L. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001, p.104.

²¹ Fukuzawa’s works consistently show this view of civilization, especially his *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* (The outline of a criticism of civilization), Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1875/1962.

²² Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient*, p.37.

civilization as an “auto-Orientalism” may not be quite true.²³ In Orientalism, after all, the relationship between the Orientalized object and the Orientalizing subject is fixed and unchanging).

Fukuzawa’s “Orientalism” was thus a dynamic concept. To progress was a matter of survival in the late nineteenth century. Fukuzawa encouraged Japan to adopt Western civilization and abandon Japanese (or Eastern) traditions, advocating a policy of *datsu-A nyū-Ō* (Leaving Asia and Joining the West).²⁴ This was in fact the path that modern Japan took at least until the end of the First World War.

Japan’s New Sense of Otherness

Japan’s modernization inevitably influenced and indeed transformed its attitude to other Asian countries, especially China. Indeed, in modernizing Japan, China was no longer the object of admiration, but regarded instead as a “semi-civilized” country. China’s inability to modernize and deal successfully with the Western impact and the political, economic and cultural encroachments on Chinese sovereignty triggered a Japanese contempt for (or pity of) their former greatest Other as a “troubled place mired in the past”.²⁵ Now it was the lack or presence of modernity that determined the superiority of each country.

Japan’s new vision of China very much echoes Orientalism. Chinese were depicted as an immoral, selfish, dirty, two-faced, hedonistic, polygamistic, and egoistic people who totally lacked any sense of a nation.²⁶ China had once represented “reason”, but now was downgraded to the “irrational Orient” from which modern Japan was urged to distance itself. Here, the pre-modern paradigm of a civilized China and a backward Japan was reversed, and replaced with a new view of the world – that of a superior “modern [changing] Japan over unchanging China”.²⁷ The West, on the other hand, became Japan’s most important Other. To acquire Western knowledge and to study in the West meant social success. Jansen discusses the “great optimism” of early Meiji where Japan showed an eagerness to acquire Western culture.²⁸

²³ Harumi Befu, “Geopolitics, Geoeconomics, and the Japanese Identity”, in Peter Nosco ed., *Japanese Identity: Cultural Analysis*, Denver, Colorado: The Center for Japan Studies at Teikyo Loretto Heights University, 1997, pp.10-32, at p.15.

²⁴ Thus pre-modern traditions that could be considered to be uncivilised or irrational, such as *seppuku* or *harakiri* (ritual suicide) and *katakiuchi* (revenge or vendetta), were discouraged. See Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Gakumon no susume* (An encouragement of study), Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1872-76/1978, pp.54-62 (chapter 6).

²⁵ Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient*, p.4.

²⁶ Uchiyama Kanzō, *Kakōroku* (The record of a flower shell), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1960, p.334.

²⁷ Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient*, p.9.

²⁸ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p.460.

Intellectuals with Western experience or training found themselves in an extraordinary strategic position. The same was true of foreign advisers and teachers brought in by the government to organize everything from lighthouses to educational institutions. They were housed in Western-style houses constructed especially for them. They were paid handsome salaries. They taught in English, with the result that the first generation of students drank directly from the classics of nineteenth-century England and America and mastered English in a way that would not be true for their successors, who could profit from the flood of translation that followed. History has seldom seen a time when people threw themselves in the tasks of learning and mastery with such intensity.²⁹

Of course, this enthusiastic intake of foreign (Western) civilization was not greeted by all with cries of joy. In fact, a nationalistic sentiment existed from the beginning of the modernization effort.³⁰ However, it was out of the question to reject Western modernity in the early Meiji period (the late nineteenth century). As Irokawa notes, “[f]or a time any thought of defending traditional culture was scorned as an idle diversion from the critical need to respond to the urgency that faced the country”, that is the threat of colonization by the West.³¹ It is because of this sense of crisis that Japanese Westernizers such as Fukuzawa are sometimes depicted as nationalists.³² It was only after the victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) when Japan (re)gained national

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A well-known example is the Seikyōsha group lead by Shiga Shigetaka (1863-1927), Miyake Setsurei (1860-1945) and Kuga Katsunan (1857-1907). They published the journal *Nihonjin* (The Japanese) and warned of the dangers of a blind imitation of the West. However, even they did not deny the necessity of modernization, advocating not a return to the past, but a successful realization of modernization. See for example, Masako Gavin, *Shiga Shigetaka 1863-1927: The Forgotten Enlightener*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, and Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan*.

³¹ Irokawa Daikichi, cited in Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p.456.

³² Tōyama Shigeki, *Tōyama Shigeki chosaku shū* (The collected works of Tōyama Shigeki), vol. 5, *Meiji no shisō to nashonarizumu* (Meiji thought and nationalism), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992, pp.3-183. Also see Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 8, London: Oxford University Press, 1954/1961, p.593, Fujita Yūji, *Ajia ni okeru bunmei no taikō – jōiron to shukyūron ni kansuru Nihon Chōsen Chūgoku no hikaku kenkyū* (The conflict of civilization in Asia: A comparative study of the “expel the barbarian” policy and conservatism in Japan, Korea and China), Tokyo: Ocha-no-mizu shobō, 2001, and Komata Noriaki, “Seiyō shisō no sesshu – Meirokusha no ‘bunmei kaika’” (The intake of Western thought: Meirokusha and “civilization and enlightenment”) in Nishida Takeshi ed., *Kindai Nihon no aporia – Kindai to jiga nashonarizumu no shosō* (The *aporia* of modern Japan: Views of modernity and nationalism), Tokyo: Shōyō shobō, 2001, pp.36-62.

confidence that a nationalism that emphasized tradition (*Nihonshugi* or Japanism) emerged.³³

The *Mitogaku* (Mito Scholarship) Tradition

As noted above, Japan's cultural paradox could already be seen in the slogans of the Meiji Restoration in 1868: *bunmei kaika* and *sonnō jōi*. These contradictory slogans, however, were not necessarily incompatible at the beginning of modernization. Since pre-modern Japan did not have the concept of a state, Japan needed a national entity to promote a full-scaled modernization.³⁴ The object used to symbolize this unity was the Emperor and the Emperor System. As can be seen in the term "Meiji Restoration", Imperial rule was restored, and Japan made a new start as a Shintō state led by the Emperor. This marks the beginning of the Emperor System of modern Japan.

Mitogaku (Mito scholarship) thinkers were responsible for this so-called "invented tradition".³⁵ *Mitogaku* originated from *Dai Nihonshi* (The Great Japanese History) edited by Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1700) in the seventeenth century and developed when Japan faced the threat of colonization by the West.³⁶ The basic principles of late *Mitogaku* school of thought can be encapsulated in two terms: *kokutai* (the national essence) and *sonnō jōi* (Revere the Emperor and Expel the Barbarians).³⁷ One of the leading exponents of this school, Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863) saw the basis of Western strength as unity based on Christianity.³⁸ He thought it crucial for Japan to also gain a similar unity to "overcome its present foreign

³³ Bian Chong Dao, *Nihon kindai shisō no Ajiateki igi* (The significance of modern Japanese thought for Asia), Tokyo: Nōzan gyoson bunka kyōkai, 1998, p.132. According to Peattie, the generations brought up in Japan after the victory in the Russo-Japanese War were free from the fear or awe that former generations had of the West. Mark R. Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West*, Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1975, p.18.

³⁴ Asukai Masamichi, "Kindai Nihon seishin no seiritsu katei" (The establishment of the spirit of modern Japan), in Hayashiya Shinzaburō ed., *Bunmei kaika no kenkyū* (Research of civilization and enlightenment), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1979, reprinted in Asukai Masamichi, *Nihon kindai seishinshi no kenkyū* (Study of the history of the modern Japanese mind), Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2002, pp.4-31, at p.16.

³⁵ For the concept of "invented tradition", see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

³⁶ As an intellectual tradition, *Mitogaku* is frequently divided into an early *Mitogaku* school and a late *Mitogaku* school. Mitsukuni's *Mitogaku* belongs to the early *Mitogaku*. Our focus here is the late *Mitogaku* that promoted the Meiji Restoration and later influenced *Nihonshugi* (Japanism).

³⁷ Hashikawa Bunzō, *Nihon no meicho 29 – Fujita Tōko* (Japanese masterpieces 29: Fujita Tōko), Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1974, p.53.

³⁸ Yoshida Toshizumi, *Mitogaku to Meiji Ishin* (Mito scholarship and the Meiji Restoration), Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2003, p.73.

crisis”.³⁹ Thus he started to theorize Shintō as a state religion led by the Emperor.⁴⁰ (The echoes of the nationalistic Church of England are obvious here.)

Although *Mitogaku* thinkers were *kangaku* scholars, their insistence on a reverence of the Emperor was due to the *kokugaku* influence (and this attitude was of course not shared by many *kangaku* scholars of the age).⁴¹ Indeed *Mitogaku* is a synthesis of *kokugaku* worship of the Emperor and *kangaku* morality and rationality.

Which element is dominant in the *Mitogaku* tradition, *kokugaku* or *kangaku*? As far as Aizawa is concerned, his *Mitogaku* was close to *kokugaku*, as his stance was that the Emperor was located “above moral judgment”, and that worship of the Emperor was a “natural” emotion, like the feelings of children towards their parents.⁴² This theory was legally formalized by the “two [spiritual] columns” of the Meiji state: the *kyōiku chokugo* or Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) and the Meiji Constitution (1889).⁴³ Thus, the identity of Japan as the Emperor’s nation was established, an identity that was later to have a significant impact on wartime nationalism.⁴⁴

The *Kangaku* Tradition

Even after modernization, some Japanese retained the pre-modern respect for *kangaku*, unable to liberate themselves from the “encumbrances of Chinese and Confucian import” as the modern Japan required.⁴⁵ Indeed, *kangaku* scholars were those who most strongly resisted a spiritual Westernization.⁴⁶ Fukuzawa labelled them “good for nothing” (*muyō no chōbutsu*),⁴⁷ assuming that they were “spiritual obstacles” (*shisōteki shōgai*) standing in the way of modernization.⁴⁸ For *kangaku* scholars, on the other hand, Western civilization was viewed with disfavour as materialistic and pragmatic. Though they approved of the superiority of the material West, they persistently believed in the spiritual superiority of the East. (Indeed, this had been a characteristic view of *kangaku* scholars since Arai Hakuseki

³⁹ Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991, p.133.

⁴⁰ Yoshida, *Mitogaku to Meiji Ishin*, p.66.

⁴¹ Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan*, p.130.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Yatsuki Kimio, *Tennō to Nihon no kindai* (The Emperor and Japanese modernity), vol. 1, Tokyo: Kōdansha gendai shinsho, 2001, p.55.

⁴⁴ Yoshida, *Mitogaku to Meiji Ishin*, p.219.

⁴⁵ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p. 457.

⁴⁶ Hirakawa, *Wakon yōsai no keifu*, p.45.

⁴⁷ Fukuzawa, *Gakumon no susume*, p.20.

⁴⁸ Bian, *Nihon kindai shisō no Ajiateki igi*, p.15.

[1657-1725].)⁴⁹

This view of the West was shared by *Mitogaku* thinkers. However, since it was a synthesis of *kangaku* and *kokugaku*, their position was ambivalent. Indeed, their nationalism was sometimes identified with a return to the *kangaku* tradition. For example, the *kyōiku chokugo* (The Imperial Rescript on Education), a text heavily imbued with the *Mitogaku* view of the world,⁵⁰ is depicted as arguing for a return to Confucian moral values against Westernization.⁵¹ However, *Mitogaku* was also antagonistic towards pre-modern foreign influences such as Confucianism and Buddhism at the time of Meiji Restoration.⁵² Ironically, the exclusive nationalism that was *Mitogaku* was actually based on the *kangaku* tradition.

The South Seas as Japan's Third Other

Compared to Japan's complex and diverse attitude toward China, Japan's attitude to the South Seas was much simpler. Unlike China, the South Seas (in Japanese eyes) did not have a great past to deal with. In fact, the South Seas was consistently depicted as "a culturally backward" or "non-cultured" place.⁵³ The South Seas was of course almost non-existent for Japanese in the pre-modern period. However, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan aimed to become a sea-faring state (*kaiyō kokka*) like the British Empire, and attempted to demonstrate its power by overseas expansion.⁵⁴ The South Seas was one of the targets of this expansion.⁵⁵

Japan's view of the South Seas very much echoes the views of (Western) Orientalism. Just like Western Orientalists, Japan depicted the peoples of the South Seas as "uncivilized", 'inferior', 'lazy', 'dull' and 'dirty'.⁵⁶ *Bōken Dankichi* (The Adventures of Dankichi), a popular comic

⁴⁹ Hirakawa, *Wakon yōsai no keifu*, p.21.

⁵⁰ Yoshida, *Mitogaku to Meiji Ishin*, p.6.

⁵¹ See for example, Gavin, *Shiga Shigetaka*, pp.101-103, and Watanabe Kazuyasu, *Meiji shisōshi – Jukyōteki dentō to kindai ninshikiron* (The history of Meiji thought: Confucian tradition and modern epistemology), Tokyo: Perikansha, 1978, pp.48-69.

⁵² Kojita Yasunao, *Nihonshi no shisō – Ajiashugi to Nihonshugi no sōkoku* (The thought of Japanese history: The conflict between Asianism and Japanism), Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō, 1997, p.51.

⁵³ Yano, *Nihon no Nan'yō shikan*, p.197.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Yano, *Nihon no Nan'yō shikan*, p.63. According to Yano, Japan's first advance into the South Seas was aimed at the inner South Seas where the risk of any clash with the Western Powers was minimal. After Japan defeated Russia in 1905 (a supposedly unbeatable Caucasian nation) in the Russo-Japanese War, however, Japan gained confidence as a "first class nation" and started to advance into the outer South Seas. This meant an explicit challenge to the Western Powers and eventually led to the Second World War where Japan justified its advance under the name of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. See Yano, *Nihon no Nan'yō shikan*, pp.12, 92-97.

⁵⁶ Yano, *Nihon no Nan'yō shikan*, p.154.

of the 1930s, is a typical example. This comic helped to shape a prejudiced view of the South Seas that Yano Tōru has famously called the “*Bōken Dankichi* syndrome”.⁵⁷ Dankichi is a Japanese boy who was cast away on the coast of the South Seas and who, as a civilized person, became King and ruled over the native savages.⁵⁸ The natives are depicted as a dark, ugly, lazy, and dull people who walk around almost naked. On the other hand, what identifies Dankichi as “civilized” is his wristwatch and shoes. However, as Kawamura notes, watches and shoes were the products of a Western modernity that Japan had only gained recently.⁵⁹

Of course, “Western modernity” was not the only foundation stone upon which Japanese Orientalism was grounded. As Yano notes, Japanese foreign policy has been oriented towards the “intellectual judgment of seeking ‘rationality’ in other countries”. Pre-modern Japan found “rationality” in China as did modern Japan in the West. Yano says that this admiration for “rationality” is the result of the influence of *Shushigaku* (neo-Confucianism). In any case, unlike China and the West, Japan did not expect “rationality” of the South Seas.⁶⁰ The South Seas was thus looked down on from the viewpoints of both “Western modernity” and *kangaku*.

At the same time, however (and again in a reflection of the Western Orientalist discourse), Japan idealized the South Seas as a place that “retained the virtues Japan was losing in the (rapid) process of modernization”.⁶¹ Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) is a typical example.⁶² He romanticized the South Seas as a place free from the vices of civilization, vices such as rationality and inhumanity.⁶³ What is interesting is that he is not only antagonistic towards Western modernity and the *kangaku* tradition, but also towards written texts – including Japanese classics such as *The Tale of Genji* – that *kokugaku* scholars admired.⁶⁴ Yanagita called his own study *shin-kokugaku* (new nativism).⁶⁵ This is not because he followed the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kawamura, “Koroniariizumu to Orientariizumu”, p.25. Needless to say, this theme is also seen in Western literature – Robinson Crusoe and Friday providing an obvious example. *Bōken Dankichi* may have been influenced by Western literature on the South Seas.

⁵⁹ Kawamura, “Koroniariizumu to Orientariizumu”, p.25.

⁶⁰ Yano, “*Nanshin*” *no keifu*, pp.192-93.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.64.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Yanagita Kunio, *Kaijō no michi* (The ocean road), Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1961/1978.

⁶⁴ Yanagita Kunio, “Chihōgaku no shin-hōhō” (A new methodology of local research), a lecture given in 1927 and reprinted in Yanagita Kunio, *Seinen to gakumon* (Youth and study), Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1976, pp.140-59, at p.145. “Any serious youth should repent the fact that Japan has overestimated scripts as a country of East Asia until recently ... We trusted books so much that we often missed the most important things”.

⁶⁵ See Yanagita Kunio “Aratanaru Kokugaku” (A new nativism), originally a lecture given at Ise Jingū Kōgakukan in August 1931, included in Yanagita Kunio, *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* (The complete works of Yanagita Kunio), vol. 28, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1990, pp.77-95.

kokugaku tradition of studying the Japanese classics, but because of its admiration for purity and nature, the characteristics of native Japan.⁶⁶

Thus Japan's views of the South Seas, both negative and positive, were based on the assumption of a civilized (or modernized) Japan and a backward (or natural in a positive sense) South Seas.

Re-examining *Datsu-A Nyū-Ō*

Since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the (general) path Japan took was the *datsu-A nyū-Ō* (Leaving Asia and Joining the West) line as advocated by Fukuzawa Yukichi. Japan's interest was focused on the West, and Japan's major concern was to become Western, or to demonstrate to the West that Japan was a "civilized" country unlike other Asian (and non-Western) countries.

At one point, however, this line was explicitly re-examined. Japan in fact became the most consciously "Asian" nation as symbolized in the wartime slogan, "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere". By the time of Pacific War, Japan had come to reverse the slogan, *datsu-A nyū-Ō*, advocating instead a "*Nihon kaiki*" (Return to Japan),⁶⁷ and adopted a "narrow-minded aggressive nationalism".⁶⁸ In other words, the sentiment of *sonnō jōi* took precedence over that of *bunmei kaika*. What brought about the change?

Stefan Tanaka notes that Japan realized that the Westernization policy failed "to accommodate Japan as an equal" to the West.⁶⁹ Indeed, Japanese came to realize that Japan remained an inferior Other to the West even after modernization.

Pyle interprets the change as "the intense need felt by the Japanese for a national identity".⁷⁰ According to Hirakawa, it is natural for a "backward" country to claim spiritual superiority over "advanced" countries.⁷¹ Even if one country borrows material techniques from advanced countries, it cannot easily borrow spiritual culture.

This change, of course, did not take place suddenly. As seen earlier, there were groups (the *kangaku* and *Mitogaku* schools), from the beginning of the era of modernization, which believed in the spiritual superiority of the East over the West. Their stance appeared to have been justified when the disaster of the First World War stimulated people (and not only Japanese) to entertain doubts about modernity itself. Since the struggle for supremacy among empires killed so many people, the philosophy of free competition,

⁶⁶ The *kokugaku* methodology was inherited by individuals such as Tsuda Sōkichi who will be mentioned below as a *Nihonshugi* (Japanism) thinker.

⁶⁷ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p.601.

⁶⁸ Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan*, p.188.

⁶⁹ Tanaka, *Japan's Orient*, p.45.

⁷⁰ Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan*, p.189.

⁷¹ Hirakawa, *Wakon Yōsai no keifu*, p.31.

that is liberalism, came to mean death and destruction.⁷² Here the erstwhile way of progress was re-examined and a new philosophy was required.

It was natural for Japan, a modernized but non-Western country, to assume itself in a privileged position to solve this problem. Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) attempted to synthesize both Western and Eastern philosophy in order to overcome what he perceived to be the limits of Western modernity. Indeed “the new culturalism of 1930s proposed that Japan was appointed to lead the world to a higher level of cultural synthesis that surpassed the Western modernism itself”.⁷³

What is known as the ideology of “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” can be interpreted as a proposal of a “better” solution that aimed to replace the modern Western principal of liberalism. Japan naturally relied on its traditions. However, as noted above, because of the pre-modern Chinese impact, there were two distinct views of “tradition”: a uniquely Japanese one and a Chinese (Eastern) one. The former took a *Mitogaku* approach and “differentiated” Japan from China, while the latter adopted a *kangaku* approach and identified Japanese traditions with *kangaku*. (It is possible to replace this dichotomy with that of *Nihonshugi* or Japanism and *Ajiashugi* or Pan-Asianism. However, since both ideologies are deeply intertwined, I will not use these terms here.)⁷⁴ What is known as the ideology of “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” is a mixture of these two approaches.

***Hakkō ichiu* and the Japanese Solution**

The very vocabulary of the ideology of “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”, *hakkō ichiu* (literally all corners under one roof – in other words, global unification under the Japanese Emperor) and *kokutai* (the national essence),⁷⁵ demonstrates a great *Mitogaku* influence.⁷⁶ Indeed, it was an ideology that advocated the expulsion of Caucasians and the establishment of “an Asia for Asian people” under the leadership of the Japanese Emperor. In other words, it was a global version of *sonnō jōi*.

⁷² On this matter I have followed Hiromatsu Wataru, “*Kindai no chōkoku*” ron – *Shōwa shisōshi e no ichi shikaku* (On “overcoming modernity”: A history of Shōwa thought), Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, 1989.

⁷³ Tetsuo Najita, “Japan’s Revolt against the West”, in Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi ed., *Modern Japanese Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.207-272, at p.208.

⁷⁴ On this matter, see Kojita, *Nihonshi no shisō*.

⁷⁵ Matsuo Shōichi, *Nihon fashizumu shiron* (A historical analysis of Japanese fascism), Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppankyoku, 1977, p.184.

⁷⁶ As noted above, *kokutai* is one of the key words of the late *Mitogaku*. *Hakkō ichiu* was a concept developed by a *Mitogaku* thinker, Fujita Yūkoku (1774-1826). See Seya Yoshihiko, *Mitogaku no shiteki kōsatsu* (A historical analysis of Mito scholarship), Tokyo: Chūbunkan shoten, 1940, pp.197-201.

According to Eizawa Kōji, the Pacific War was a conflict between the Japanese world-view of *hakkō ichiu* and the Western (Anglo-Saxon) world-view of liberalism.⁷⁷ Since the disaster of modernity was supposed to originate in a liberalism which permits all to claim and pursue their own self-interest, Japan proposed an altruistic totalitarianism called *hakkō ichiu*. Though it was a vertical relationship, like other totalitarianisms, it was supposed to be superior – superior not only to liberalism but also to other forms of totalitarianism such as socialism – as it was based on the natural love between father and son. Japan's *kokutai* was supposed to be a family state with the Emperor as national father. Moreover, the idea of a family state was extended onto the global level.⁷⁸ Indeed, the *hakkō ichiu* slogan implied that the patriarch of this global household would be the Emperor, that the leader would be Japan.⁷⁹

Here, Japan's source of pride was the purely “Japanese” culture of government propaganda. This explains why Japan attempted to impose Japanese culture on the peoples of its colonies, forcing on these peoples the Japanese language, the Shintō religion and worship of the Emperor.⁸⁰ This imposition was carried out in the name of *hakkō ichiu*. Whatever the geopolitical realities, in terms of propaganda and ideology, Japan was attempting to extend the benevolence of the Emperor to other Asian countries and “save” them from the spiritual and physical invasion of the West. (*Nihonshugi* is a similar ideology, but unlike *hakkō ichiu*, it was supposed to be a “uniquely Japanese truth” that was only valid in Japan, and therefore was devoid of the element of foreign expansion. Indeed, *Nihonshugi* thinkers such as Tsuda Sōkichi clearly criticized the foreign expansionism of *Ajiashugi* exponents).⁸¹

Eastern Solution

For some “imperialists” such as Naitō Konan (1866-1934), this “Japanese” solution was not convincing.⁸² As a thinker with a *kangaku* sentiment, he

⁷⁷ Eizawa Kōji, “*Dai tōa kyōeiken*” *no shisō* (The philosophy of “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”), Tokyo: Kōdansha gendai shinsho, 1995, p.207.

⁷⁸ Eizawa, “*Dai tōa kyōeiken*” *no shisō*, p.210.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.207.

⁸⁰ The manner of this imposition was much harsher in China and Korea than in the South Seas. This may be explained by different types of prejudices in the Great Japanese Empire. Since the Japanese were less prejudiced against fellow East Asians, and believed they could be transformed into “Japanese”, their rule and assimilationist policies may have been harsher. At the same time, it is also possible that Japan was determined to destroy the East Asian world order of China-centrism, in which China was seen as a father, and Korea as an elder brother.

⁸¹ Kojita, *Nihonshi no shisō*, p.171.

⁸² Joshua Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan (1866-1934)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1984, p.xvii. Fogel notes that “Naitō has often been identified as an imperialist or even as one whose scholarship served as a

identified Japanese tradition with the *kangaku* tradition. What mattered was the defence of China, the heart of Eastern spiritual values, against the threat of Western materialism.⁸³ To realize this defence, he believed that it was crucial to strengthen (modernize) China to save China from its present decay. He was confident that China would prove to be more successful than Japan (or any other Asian country) because of its rich cultural and historical resources.⁸⁴ For him, China was, from first to last, “us”.⁸⁵

There was also a group known as *Ajiashugisha* (Pan-Asianists) who identified with Asian countries and tried to save them from Western invasion. Okakura Tenshin (1862-1913) was a leading exponent of this group.⁸⁶ He distinctively differed from traditionalists with *Mitogaku* sentiments in that he viewed the original source of “Japanese” tradition as lying in Confucianism and Buddhism, both imports from China.⁸⁷ In this sense, he was very close to Konan. However, he was crucially different from Konan in that he believed that Japan embodied in a condensed form the virtues of Asia.⁸⁸ Other *Ajiashugi* thinkers followed the same line, which explains why *Ajiashugi* advocated the notion of an Asia led by Japan. (Nishida’s position is perhaps similar to Okakura. Nishida “saw Zen insight as a possible solution”. Zen is, needless to say, an imported, but very Japanified, set of moral values).⁸⁹

What is popularly known as the ideology of “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” is a mixture of *Mitogaku* nationalism and *Ajiashugi*’s sense of mission to save Asia from the West. It is deeply regrettable that it turned into a discrimination of the Other (Orientalism) under the cover of “us”.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the cultural paradox of modern Japan, focusing on Japan’s identity and its sense of Otherness. As a modernized Asian country,

cosmetic cover for Japanese imperialist encroachment on the Asian mainland”. In his book, Fogel challenges this view.

⁸³ Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, p.67.

⁸⁴ Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, p.48.

⁸⁵ Mizokami Akira, “Tsuda Sōkichi”, in Egami Namio ed., *Tōyōgaku no keifu* (The genealogy of Oriental history), Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1992, pp.157-167, at p.164. Here Mizokami compares Tsuda and Konan, noting that Tsuda regarded China as an (inferior) Other while Konan identified with it.

⁸⁶ See Kojita, *Nihonshi no shisō*, and Zhao Jun, *Dai Ajiashugi to Chūgoku* (Great Asianism and China), Tokyo: Aki shobō, 1997.

⁸⁷ Kojita, *Nihonshi no shisō*, p.51.

⁸⁸ Okakura Tenshin, *Tōyō no risō* (The ideal of the East), Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, 1903/1986. Here Tenshin talks about the “miraculous talent” (*fushigi na tensei*) of the Japanese to unite the virtues of Asian (by which he mainly meant Indian and Chinese) civilizations.

⁸⁹ Blocker and Starling, *Japanese Philosophy*, p.140.

or as a non-Western Westernized country, Japan experienced a dilemma between modernization (Westernization) and tradition. Japan first took a *datsu-A nyū-Ō* line, and adopted the notion that modernity was synonymous with civilization. Meiji Japan admired the West because of the presence of modernity, while looking down on other Asian countries for the absence of it. This is what is called “Japanese Orientalism”.

For some “traditional” people, however, modernity was not identified with civilization. Since they only viewed modernity as materialism, they believed in the spiritual superiority of the East over the West. This position appeared to have been at least partly justified after the disaster of the First World War, when modernity came to mean destruction. It was quite natural for Japan, as a non-Western modernized country, to assume it was in a privileged position to solve the problems of modernity.

What is known as the ideology of “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” is the proposal of a solution to the perceived problems of modernity. There were some sincere attempts to overcome Western modernity, such as that of Nishida. Unfortunately, however, these attempts turned into a “narrow-minded [and] aggressive nationalism”.

Japan’s conflict between Westernization and tradition is further complicated by Japan’s contested notion of “tradition”. Indeed, because of the pre-modern impact of China, Japan could not help but be conscious of China when mentioning “tradition”. Some identified Japanese tradition with China (*kangaku* scholars and *Ajiashugisha*), while others identified it with a rejection of the Chinese influence (*kokugaku* and *Mitogaku* scholars). Perhaps because of this lingering respect for China, Japan needed a Third Other, the South Seas. Unlike China, the South Seas was viewed as “definitely inferior”. The contested notion of “tradition” was later to influence the diversity of positions in “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”.

It is possible to explain the Japanese love-hate relationship with the West from the two major traditional views of the Other: admiration and antagonism. In other words, it can be viewed as a modernized form of the relationship between *kangaku* rationalism and *kokugaku* emotion.

There were two forms of antagonism to the West: to denounce the “rational” West from the viewpoint of “Japanese” emotion, or to reject the “material” West from the viewpoint of Eastern spirituality. Yanagita’s admiration for purity and nature, and *Mitogaku* (and *Nihonshugi*) worship of the Emperor are the examples of the victory of emotion over the reason. On the other hand, Konan rejected the West because the Eastern spirituality was deeper and hence superior if rationally thought of. Moreover, the Westernization policy can be viewed as a *kangaku* line. As noted above, Japanese foreign policy, because of the influence of neo-Confucianism, was oriented towards the “intellectual judgment of seeking ‘rationality’ in other countries”. It was precisely because modern Japan found “rationalism” in the West that it admired the West as a paragon, while despising China and the South Seas.

The problem of identity as a non-Western Westernized country and also the universal question of modernity were distorted by fascism, and Japan was eventually beaten by, and reconverted to, Western liberalism. Despite the manifold benefits of Western liberalism, however, the problems of identity and modernity remained. To reject the entire discourse of pre-war Japan as totalitarianism simply because wartime Japan was totalitarian, is to risk throwing away the proverbial baby with the bathwater. It is perhaps time to re-examine the pre-war historical experience and discourse and once again address these problems. It may not be until then that we find a better solution without repeating the mistakes of the past.

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