Civilization and Culture : Japan in Search of Identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Culture" and "Civilization" are similar and yet different concepts which need to be distinguished in academic discourse. In the West, in common sense parlance a culture is often thought to have reached the state of civilization when cities develop and the right of the citizen is recognized. Civilization in this sense came into existence only a few thousand years ago, and millions of years after the birth of human culture. In contrast to this conception of civilization, Umesao Tadao defines civilization as "an integration of society and culture. For a society to exist, there must be land on which to exist. Civilization refers to an integration of all the physical equipment, devices and facilities built on land as well as the entire culture transmitted in the society" [UMESAO 1974: 246]. Thus in Uemsao's sense, culture and civilization lack the diachronic differentiation seen in the Western conception.

Umesao further differentiates "modern civilization" from "civilization," the former referring to "the new, large scale lifestyles designed on the basis of the industrial revolution." According to Umesao "three regions on the globe succeeded in its realization, namely, Western Europe, Japan, and the United States" [UMESAO 1967: 112].

Umesao's view of civilization is born of his ecological approach. Designating the western and eastern ends of the Eurasian land mass as type I regions and the area between them as type II regions, Umesao claims that modern civilization developed only in type I regions and finds reasons for this in the historical and ecological differences between the two.

Ancient civilizations flowered only in the type II regions, whereas regions of type I saw only modest imitations of these ancient civilizations. In the type II regions, colossal empires rose and fell one after another. In contrast, in type II regions, feudalism was established, after which a capitalistic economy, in combination with industrial technology, produced modern civilization. Behind this civilizational history is the ecological history of the enormous expanse of the Eurasian continent, elaboration of which, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. I refer the reader to various of Umesao's publications.

An issue central to this paper is the difference between Japan as a modern civilization and western Europe and its extension, North America (to be abbreviated here as Euramerica) as another. How is this difference to be explained? If the ecological approach explains homogeneity for Japan and Euramerica (both as modern civilizations of Type I), then *ipso facto*, an ecological explanation for the differences between the two would be rather difficult. For example, according to Umesao, one of the characteristics of Japanese civilization is the parallel existence of *washiki* (the "Japanese") cultural style and *yōshiki* (the "Western") cultural style. (Hereafter the two Japanese concepts, *washiki* and *yōshiki*, will be expressed "Japanese" and "Western"—in quotation marks—for smoother reading. Without quotation marks, the terms will be used in their generic sense.) Is this characteristic to be explained ecologically, or is it a problem of cultural history? It is no doubt a phenomenon which should be considered from both approaches but in this paper I would like to focus on cultural-historical considerations. In brief, my argument is that Japan developed its own civilization by contrasting itself with the more advanced Euramerican civilizations and by incorporating their cultural elements.

It goes without saying, as Umesao notes, that Japan did not merely graft foreign culture onto itself. Instead, Japan created its own modern civilization by integrating Euramerican culture with its traditional civilization. It is for this reason that Japan's modern civilization is understandable only by placing it within the context of its own traditional civilization. It is on such an assumption that the following argument is presented.

2. FOREIGN CULTURE AND JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

No civilization in the world is totally unaffected by outside cultures: all civiliza-

tions have gone through millions of years of history, during which time they all have to a greater or lesser extent, accepted and integrated foreign cultural elements.

Japanese civilization is often said to be "pure" or "homogeneous." This means only that from the large-scale introduction of Chinese culture in the sixth century until the middle of the nineteenth, influence of neighboring civilizations was relatively small. This proposition, however, denies or at best minimizes the significance of the imprint of Chinese civilization, which is very, very considerable to say the least. Nor is there any argument about the influence of Western culture upon Japanese civilization in the last hundred years. Again in considering Japan's prehistory, cultural elements from northern, central, and (insular as well as continental) Southeast Asia have all gone to make up essential parts of traditional Japanese culture. Japanese language, rice culture, Buddhism and other essential elements of Japanese civilization all came from abroad. This realization forces upon us a major revision of the thesis of Japanese cultural purity. No doubt, new cultural elements have been forged into a unique amalgam in the Japanese archipelago. No doubt, too, foreign cultural elements have gone through unique transformations. This is natural and predictable. It would be strange indeed if foreign cultural elements did not change but instead remained and persisted in a fossilized condition for hundreds of years. Be that as it may, belief in the purity of Japanese culture—whatever it may mean—will probably remain among Japanese for a long time to come. This belief is an important theme in *Nihonron*, a genre of Japanese intellectual writing on Japanese cultural identity to be elaborated on below.

3. THE "SYNTAX" OF JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

Umesao uses the term "syntax," or "grammar" of civilization to refer to modes of integration of foreign culture such as replacement, syncretism, and coexistence. Among them, Umesao takes up "coexistence" as a characteristic feature of Japanese civilization. In other words, Japanese civilization contains "Japanese" and "Western" styles of living which are clearly distinguishable and distinguished.

This does not mean that other processes ("grammar" in Umesao's sense) of integrating foreign cultural elements are absent in Japan. For example, the phonology of the Japanese language has been affected, albeit only slightly, by the introduction of "Chinese (*on*) readings" of Chinese characters in Japanese language. Or, to take another example, the works of modern Japanese composers, such as Takemitsu Tōru and Miki Minoru, integrate traditional Japanese and Western music. These are examples of syncretism. In an earlier time Japanese used carriages (*kago*) for transportation, which were replaced by the rickshaw in the early modern period, which in turn have now been completely replaced by the automobile, the bus, the train and other modern means of transportation. Nonetheless Umesao is right in seeing the parallel existence of the Western and Japanese styles as a major "syntactic" mode of Japanese civilization. This paper concerns this syntactic mode as it relates to Japan's cultural identity.

4. "JAPANESE (WASHIKI)" STYLE AND "WESTERN (YŌSHIKI)" STYLE AS CULTURAL CONCEPTS

Offhand the distinction between "Japanese" and "Western" styles may seem to be objective reality, the labels being merely names for clearly distinguishable phenomena. That this is not so, that on the contrary, the labels apply to culturally conceptualized, arbitrary distinctions is in several senses an important realization.

First of all, it is clear from the examples Umesao cites for "Japanese" and "Western" styles, such as *sake* (Japanese rice wine), living room furniture, clothing and bread, that these terms refer to material objects. Second, these material objects are consumer goods essential to everyday life. Third, in classifying them as "Japanese" or "Western," the process of their production is not so much criterial as are the final products themselves. For example, modern technology has totally automated the brewing process of Japanese *sake* from the initial stage of washing the rice to the bottling of the finished product. This "Western" process, however, has not moved Japanese to change the labelling of *sake* from "Japanese" to "Western." To take another example, even if one knew *sushi* was made by a robot, as it sometimes is nowadays, no one would dream of calling *sushi* a "Western" style food. An evening dress made entirely from silk produced in Japan is still "Western;" but *kimono* made from synthetic material is nevertheless "Japanese."

Fourth, the label "Japanese" does not necessarily designate "made in Japan;" nor does "Western" refer to imported goods. At present the vast majority of the materials used for the New Year's feast (*osechi ryōri*) are imported from abroad. Still in all, *osechi ryōri* remains quintessentially "Japanese." In other words, the origin of the material used for consumer product is not at issue in the designation of "Japanese" or "Western."

The "Japanese" vs. "Western" distinction is not based on objective classification. This is illustrated with the example of cooked rice, which has the "Japanese" or *washiki* designation of *gohan* when served with Japanese dishes, but acquires the "Western" or *yōshiki* designation of *raisu* ("rice") when served with Western dishes. Thus the "Japanese" and "Western" are not labels inherent in the objects to be classified. The classification has a subjective, or arbitrary element.

This subjectivity or arbitrariness does not, however, mean that classification varies from one Japanese to another, nor does it create any argument among Japanese as to whether a certain object should be classified as "Japanese" or "Western." This subjectivity is cultural, yielding a classification upon which Japanese generally agree. In this sense, "Japanese" and "Western" are cultural concepts with a high degree of popular consensus.

Being a cultural classification, the "Japanese"/"Western" dichotomy is, while clear and self evident to Japanese, not always comprehensible to non-Japanese. For example, as Aroutiounov [1966] demonstrates, in the eyes of the Japanese, *ryokan* (inn with *tatami* rooms) is "Japanese," regardless of whether it has Western style chairs or baths in the individual rooms or other Western style amenities. As an

objective phenomenon, *ryokan* combines both Japanese and Western elements. But to be able to talk about a combination, is in itself is a telltale sign of the fact that separate elements of "Japanese" and "Western" styles are already recognized.

5. "JAPANESE" VS. "WESTERN" AND "*ŌYAKE* (PUBLIC)" VS. "*WATAKUSHI* (PRIVATE)"

The pair concepts, "Japanese" and "Western," are correlated in the grammar of Japanese civilization with another pair of Japanese concepts, *ōyake* and *watakushi*, commonly rendered in the dictionary as "public" and "private." The Japanese terms, however, in a certain critical sense, do not correspond with their dictionary translations. *Ōyake* has to do with governance, the societal, the communal, and all else which involves the corporate interest of the body politic, particularly in the arena of social life traditionally regarded as "sacred (*hare*)." Of late, the process of secularization has reduced the area of the "sacred;" still, *Ōyake* refers to formerly sacred areas of life.

Watakushi, on the other hand, refers to matters of personal affair and individual interest. *Watakushi* is often seen as embracing interests opposed to those of *ōyake*. Typically, *watakushi* refers to personal matters or affairs which concern the family in opposition to communal or larger, societal affairs. For the sake of convenience, "public" and "private" in quotation marks will be adopted here for the Japanese terms, *ōyake* and *watakushi*. The conceptual difference between the Japanese terms and their English counterparts should, however, never be forgotten.

Umesao [1981] has observed that from the early days of modern Japan, dress in the "public" sphere was defined as "Western." As a consequence, "Japanese" style clothing came to be confined more and more to "private" areas of life. Umesao credits Yoshida Mitsukuni for noting that it was Itō Hirobumi, the then Prime Minister, who made a political decision early in the Meiji period (1868–1912) to adopt Western clothes at official functions in the Imperial Palace [UMESAO 1981: 350]. This decision firmly established the place of Western clothes in the "public" domain of Japanese social life. But official adoption of Western attire in the Imperial Palace is not the only expression of the "Western" in the "public" sphere of life. Work places, government offices, and schools are all "public" places, and as such, require Western attire. Anyone going to work nowadays in Japanese clothes would be considered out of his or her mind. In "public" places, not only in clothing but in food and shelter, too, Western forms are required nowadays. In entertaining Western diplomats in "public" places, "Western," especially French style food is served, but as the situation becomes more and more "private," Japanese cuisine is more likely to be served. "Public" buildings—such as government offices, schools, and major business offices are all ferro-concrete, with "Western" style interior furnishings. It is only in remote corners of Japan that one might be able to find a Japanese style building serving "public" purposes. Among food, shelter and clothing, shelter and

clothing are more thoroughly Westernized in "public" places, whereas not infrequently Japanese food is still served in "public" situations.

Somewhat different from the above areas of life but still exemplary of the "Western" style in "public" places is music. From Meiji on, music education in schools has focused exclusively on Western music. Until the recent (postwar) revival of Japanese music curriculum in some music academies, the only way one could learn traditional Japanese music was through private lessons. The great bulk of music education in schools today is still comprised overwhelmingly of Western music. Outside schools, too, Western music dominates the entertainment scene. Every December Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is performed all over Japan on an average of just over twice a day. No piece of Japanese music comes close to enjoying this kind of popularity. Among the Japanese youth, the popularity of rock, punk and new wave music overwhelms what little interest they may show for traditional Japanese music.

Thus invasion of "Western" lifestyle in the "public" area has resulted in the almost complete replacement of "Japanese" lifestyles. It looks as though "Japanese" style has come to be, by and large, confined to the "private" area of life.

6. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE "PUBLIC" ("WESTERN") VIS-À-VIS THE "PRIVATE" ("JAPANESE")

Traditionally, Japanese culture has placed the "public" ahead of the "private." Societal and communal interests took precedence over the needs of individual members. This contrasts with Western social philosophy, where individual interest occupies a paramount place in society, and an individual's rights are protected by the constitution or the legal system. In the West, if personal rights must be infringed on for the sake of public good, law must specify the extent of this infringement. In contrast, in traditional Japan, "public" good is prior to personal interest. Infringement of the "public" right for personal resons has been considered selfish and bad. It is only since the adoption of the postwar constitution that personal rights have become widely recognize by law. Legal changes notwithstanding, however, traditional attitudes still prevail in many sectors of social life.

Coming back to the main concern of this section, equation of the "Western" with the "public" and of the "Japanese" with the "private" has necessarily placed the "Western" style above the "Japanese" in the hierarchy of Japanese values. As the highly valued "Western" mode is more and more widely adopted the "Japanese" mode, having lower status, is correspondingly practiced less and less. If a child went to school wearing a *kimono* nowadays, he or she would be ridiculed precisely because of the inferior value assigned to Japanese clothes. Some may argue that the high cost of a *kimono* makes it prohibitive for parents to buy one for their children's everyday use. This argument, however, puts the "cart before the horse." If the *kimono* were considered appropriate for everyday use, Japanese would most surely find ways of mass-producing them inexpensively. In the absence of a mass market,

kimono has become the specialty wear for occasions such as weddings and the January 15th coming-of-age ceremonies, resulting in the generally higher price.

To summarize the argument above, the political significance of the "Western" and the "Japanese" is expressed in the recognition of the former as "public" and the relegation of the latter to the "private" sector of life. As long as the "public" implies power, authority and prestige, the "Western" style will correspondingly symbolize high political status, subjugating the "Japanese" style to a lesser status.

7. INVASION OF THE "WESTERN" INTO THE "PRIVATE" SECTOR

In the above discussion, we have been concerned with the "Western" style in the "public" sector and the "Japanese" in the "private" sector, and have left aside other logically possible combinations, namely, the "Western" in the "private" and the "Japanese" in the "public" sectors.   Let us consider them now.

It is quite clear that the "Western" style has intruded extensively into the "private" area of life.   For example, homes in the Western architectural style are quite common nowadays, many having a ferro-concrete structure.   Most modern homes, whether "Japanese" or "Western" in external appearance, have at least one Western style room and some Western style furniture.   Dining rooms are more often than not equipped with a table and chairs.   A piano, beds, study desks, a stereo set, a television and numerous other "Western" style furnishings have become accepted parts of the Japanese home.   This does not mean that the "Japanese" style has totally disappeared from the household scene.   *Kimono* is worn at home by many.   It is rare even for an architecturally "Western" house not to have at least one *tatami* room.   The fact that in general the housewife wears *kimono* more than the husband is a symbolic manifestation of the fact that the traditional place of a Japanese woman is confined to the "private" area of social life.

The last combination to be considered is "Japanese" *cum* "public."   Due to the success of the policy of Meiji leaders to give "Western" lifestyle a political meaning, at present "public" places are well nigh monopolized by the "Western" lifestyle. Inasmuch as the objectives of introducing things Western—whether it be technology, legal institutions or the educational system—were political, and as political leaders intended to symbolize "civilized enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*) through adoption of Western material culture, retention of the Japanese style in "public" places would have been a political contradiction.   After a hundred some odd years of invasion of the "public" area by the "Western"—with political backing—it is quite understandable that the "Japanese" style has been virtually eliminated from the "public" domain.

In sum, the "Western" lifestyle has not only dominated "public" places but has also invaded the "private" areas.   Thus the "Japanese" style has been virtually erased from "public" life, and is holding its own less and less even in the "private" sector.

8.   CRISIS IN "WESTERN" DOMINANCE

The relationship between the "Western"/"Japanese" and the "public"/"private" dichotomies must be analyzed historically.   In premodern times obviously there was no "Western" lifestyle in Japan, and both "public" and "private" sectors of life were necessarily "Japanese."   From the Meiji period on, the "Western" first occupied "public" spaces and then gradually permeated the "private" areas.   As a result, traditional culture gradually lost ground to "Western" culture.   Now it goes without saying, inasmuch as the "Japanese" style of life is what enables Japanese to identify themselves as Japanese, that reduction of the area of "Japanese" style implies a corresponding shrinkage of the area of self-expression as Japanese.   Furthermore, the problem is not simply in the reduction of the area of the "Japanese" lifestyle, but in the fact that expression of the "Japanese" style in "public," i.e., socially and politically important places is difficult if not impossible; and even in less important, "private" areas of life, it is threatened by the encroachment of the "Western" style. One of the far reaching effects of the decision of the Meiji leaders and also of the adoration of things Western by Japanese is to place traditional Japanese culture in an inferior position vis-à-vis Western culture.   As a serious consequence Japanese are gradually losing areas in which they can express their identity as Japanese.   In other words, Japanese are finding fewer and fewer opportunities to legitimize their being Japanese.   Crisis arise in the fact that they must express their cultural identity with a cultural style which has been defined as politically inferior and also perceived by themselves as such.   In saving the Japanese from this crisis in cultural identity, the genre of literature called *Nihonron* plays a critical role.

9.   THE CONCEPT OF *NIHONRON*

I would like to discuss *Nihonron* as a means of rescuing Japanese from this crisis in cultural identity.   A variety of terms such as *Nihon bunkaron* ("theory" of Japanese culture), *Nihon shakairon* ("theory" of Japanese society), *Nihonjinron* ("theory" of Japanese national character), *Nihonron* ("theory" of Japan), etc. are current, and all refer to one and the same general genre, in spite of the differences in their denotations as indicated in the parenthetical, literal translations above.   A glance at the literature in this field is enough to convince anyone that no clear distinction is conceptually made among these "subdisciplines" of Japanology.   A work presumably in *Nihon bunkaron* according to the promotional commentaries on the dust jacket may freely deal with social structure or national character.   A contribution supposedly in *Nihon shakairon* might well refer to cultural or psychological aspects.   For convenience's sake I shall adopt *Nihonron* to refer to this whole genre.

10.   CONTENTS OF *NIHONRON*

In its bare essence, *Nihonron* purports to demonstrate the uniqueness of Japanese culture, society and national character.   This is not the place to elaborate on the

contents of innumerable *Nihonron* essays.   It will suffice to give a few examples so
that the reader may have some notion of what *Nihonron* is about.

    The group orientation of the Japanese has been made much of by numerous
writers, especially those analyzing Japanese business practices [HAZAMA 1971; INUTA
1977; IWATA 1978; CLARK 1979].   Self-sacrificing dedication to company goals is
supposedly an illustration of this quality of Japanese social character.   Hierarchical
ranking of members who emotionally depend on each other is regarded as the basic
structure of Japanese groups, ultimately deriving from the traditional family system
[NAKANE 1967; DOI 1971; HAMAGUCHI 1977].

    Themes much touted in *Nihonron*, for example, are that Japanese value harmony
in human relations [HAMAGUCHI 1977] and with nature, that their essential com-
munication is performed non-verbally (*ishin denshin* or *haragei*), and that their
aesthetic orientation includes valuing rustic simplicity (*wabi, sabi*) and melancholic
empathy with nature (*mono no aware*), etc.

    The point is that these and many other characteristics are claimed to be uniquely
Japanese.   This claim implies two things.   First, it summarizes the general beliefs
of Japanese as to how Japanese society is put together, verbalizing what the less
literate intuitively feel but are unable to codify and at the same time informing those
less informed what they should believe with respect to the "shape" of Japanese culture
and society.   Secondly, in addition to this "informational" function, this cosmology
has a normative function.   It gives instruction in such areas as ideal human relations
and aesthetic standards.   Being normative, it exhorts Japanese to behave according
to the format prescribed in *Nihonron* and to believe, if they do not already do so, in
the truth of this cosmology.

11. MUTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF LANGUAGE, RACE AND CULTURE IN *NIHONRON*

    One fundamental assumption in *Nihonron*, often buried in semi-consciousness,
is that Japanese language, race and culture are mutually implicative.   That is, being
Japanese means being descendants of those who have lived on the Japanese islands
for generations and have shared their genes, or as Japanese put it, share their "blood
line (*chi* or *Kettō*)."   To be Japanese likewise implies that those who have lived on the
Japanese islands and shared their blood speak the language their ancestors have
spoken from time immemorial.

    Until recently with relatively small and minor exceptions, this language was not
spoken by any other ethnic group; nor was it spoken outside the Japanese archipelago.
Furthermore, the genetically Japanese people spoke only the Japanese language as a
native tongue.   Likewise until recently, when they began migrating to North and
South America, Japanese people never adopted another, entire culture in place of
their own.

    Thus, to be Japanese is to have descended from Japanese and to speak the
Japanese language as a mother tongue and to possess Japanese culture.   Similarly,

speakers of Japanese as a mother tongue have all descended from "genetically" Japanese people who have lived on the Japanese islands and practiced Japanese culture. At the same time, those who have practiced Japanese culture are native speakers of Japanese and descendants of Japanese living on the Japanese islands. Thus in the minds of Japanese the following equation holds:

Japanese archipelago ≡ genetic Japanese ≡ Japanese culture ≡ Japanese language.

The small exceptions are the Ainu and foreigners in Japan who have learned to speak Japanese and Japanese immigrants abroad who have adopted foreign cultures and languages. While important for the evaluation of the validity of *Nihonron*, the status of these minorities for the present discussion is not critically important.

12.   THE UNIQUENESS OF JAPANESE CULTURE

Of course every culture in the world is unique in its own way; Japan is no different from any other culture in this respect. *Nihonron*, however, argues for two specific ideas about Japan's uniqueness.

For one, Japan's uniqueness lies in its specific qualities, observable nowhere else in the world, such as harmony, cooperation, verticality of social structure, emphasis on non-verbal communication and appreciation of such aesthetic concepts as *wabi* and *mono no aware*. These cultural concepts or at least their concatenation in a particular configuration as found in Japan is obviously unique as claimed.

Secondly, Japanese are fond of actively claiming their cultural uniqueness. They may not all agree on the specific contents of what make them or their culture unique and some may not even be aware of what these uniquenesses are. But their fondness of talking about their uniqueness, whatever the substance of the claimed uniqueness might be, is so widespread and firmly established that one may even characterize this fondness as a national sport.

13.   EVIDENCE OF *NIHONRON* AS A NATIONAL SPORT

It is not possible to have an accurate assessment of the extent to which *Nihonron* literature is read. No bibliography has ever been compiled which covers the subject in all forms of publication in this genre.

One publication which has attempted to compile a list of full volume monographs, leaving aside articles in periodicals, is *Nihonjinron*, edited by the Nomura Research Institute [1978], which lists titles in *Nihonron* published from 1946 to 1978. It is far from being complete, yet it lists a total of 697 titles. According to the compilers of the bibliography, at least until the time of this compilation interest in *Nihonron* was steadily on the increase. From 1978 to the present, publications have continued to increase. Virtually everyday one sees some articles on the subject in newspaper or weekly or monthly magazines of mass circulation. Almost every week a newly published book or two are advertised and touted to be a new and fresh *Nihonron*.

Nihonron is not a post-war phenomenon by any means. Its roots go back to

Meiji, when Japan launched its modernization program, and even beyond, when Japanese scholars, such as Motoori Norinaga, were trying to identify what was essentially Japanese, especially in contrast to China. Since our immediate concern, however, is the current state of affairs, we shall leave historical considerations for another occasion.

14. THE BASIS FOR *NIHONRON* POPULARITY

Popularity of *Nihonron*, past and present, has at least two bases. First, since the middle of the last century, Japan has been forced to engage in intercourse with Western nations and adopt on an increasingly massive scale their practices and institutions in military, political, economic, technological, educational, artistic and many other areas, so much so that the everyday lifestyle of the Japanese—clothing, housing, meals, transportation, etc.—has by now a great deal in common with that of Westerners. This verisimilitude of Japan with the West, at least in the minds of Japanese, has necessitated some mode of clearly separating Japanese from others at a conscious level. *Nihonron*, whose very purpose is to claim Japan's uniqueness, thus is not just a convenient vehicle, but a necessity for self-identification.

A second compelling reason for the popularity of *Nihonron* lies in Japan's deep-seated feeling of inferiority towards Western nations. This feeling developed out of the technological superiority of the West which forced open Japan's ports. This was graphically symbolized in the arrival along the coast of Japan of the ironclad battleships of Western nations in the mid-1800s, with guns pointing towards the land. Japan had no choice but to swallow its pride and rescind its two-and-a-half century long policy of isolation. The inferiority feeling that was planted in the Japanese mind has never completely left the land of rising sun. What is interesting about *Nihonron* is that the claimed uniqueness of cultural institutions defies comparison. For what is unique is qualitatively different from anything else and therefore does not permit comparison. If unable to be compared, along a common yardstick with other cultures, especially Western nations, then Japan cannot be regarded as inferior, since inferior/superior labels imply comparison along a common measure, such as the strength of the army or the gross national product. That is, the uniqueness argument inherent in *Nihonron* enables Japanese to obviate the issue of Japan's perceived inferiority.

15. THE EMPIRICAL VALIDITY OF *NIHONRON* THESES

Whether the propositions about claimed unique qualities of Japan are empirically true is not an issue in this paper. What we are interested in is the fact that Japanese people maintain their belief in the truth of these propositions, whether the propositions are true or not. We are concerned as to why these beliefs are sustained.

Prima facie, these propositions do sound plausible—that Japanese are group-minded, whether in family, company or community; that they love nature, its roots

being found in their religious beliefs; that they proverbially communicate with non-verbal means; etc. We have heard these assertions *ad nauseum* from generations of scholars on Japanese culture, both Japanese and Western.

But there are good reasons to accept these claims with a grain of salt, if they are meant to be empirical representations of the behavioral reality of Japanese. One finds too many exceptions to these "rules" for one thing. For example, in broken families, labor disputes and for the roving lone wolves (often in occupations glossed as *jiyūgyō*), groupiness seems to have left the scene. Rampant environmental destruction necessarily belies the nature loving thesis. Verbocity in such entertainment genre as *manzai* and *rakugo* as well as in modern TV and radio talk shows scarcely remainds one of the supposed Japanese penchant for non-verbal skills.

Space does not allow elaboration of a full-fiedged critique of *Nihonron*, nor would it be proper to do so in this context. Interested readers may consult other sources such as Aizawa [1976], Befu [1980a, 1980b], Sahashi [1980], Mouer and Sugimoto [1980], and Kawamura [1982]. What is important here is that belief in the truth of the uniqueness of Japanese culture is conscious and salient in the minds of Japanese, and that propositions in *Nihonron* constitute an ideology which orients and guides the attitudes and thinking of the common people and serve as normative imperatives for their behavior.

16. *NIHONRON* AND *TATEMAE*

Then why is it that Japanese accept *Nihonron* as an ideology when it does not truthfully reflect reality? The pair Japanese concepts of *tatemae* and *honne* may provide a clue to this question. *Tatemae* refers to ideals, what is proper, the etiquette book behavior as it were, or *ex cathedra* pronouncements on public occasions by such individuals as the head of the state or company presidents. *Nihonron* as an ideology ultimately belongs to this realm of *tatemae*. *Honne*, on the other hand, exists in the realm of down-to-earth attitudes, real feelings and private intentions. While discrepancy between the ideal and the real exists inevitably in all societies, some such as American society, regard this discrepancy as dishonest or unethical, worthy of moral chastisement. Japanese, on the other hand, do not always expect the two to coincide, and the cultural concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* allow such discrepancy. (This does not mean that *honne-tatemae* discrepancy is rampantly condonned. Situations in which this discrepancy is allowed are circumscribed by cultural rules which are intuitively understood by Japanese but ill-codified.) No one is surprised if a politician publicly pronounces selfless dedication for the betterment of humanity and then wheels and deals in private for personal gain. Inability to appreciate this discrepancy is in fact regarded as a sign of lack of social sophistication in Japan.

It is the nature of ideology that contrary evidence does not shake the believer's faith in it. When prophecy fails, it is not because of faulty ideology, but due to extraneous circumstances. What goes for belief systems goes for *Nihonron* as an ideology as well.

17. INTERNATIONALIZATION AS THE "EXTERNAL" BACKGROUND FOR *NIHONRON* ·

Why is *Nihonron* so popular in Japan? Two sets of factors, external and internal, may be identified. External factors may be summarized under the rubric of "internationalization" [BEFU 1984]. While the word *kokusaika* (internationalization), and related words like *kokusaijin* (internationalist), *kokusaisei* (internationality), *kokusai-shugi* (internationalism) and *kokusaikan* (international sense) have been around for a long time, their wide circulation in the media is a more recent phenomenon, being evident since around 1970. Before that date, one seldom saw these terms being used. Instead, *kindaika* (modernization), *seiōka* (westernization), *ōbeika* (Euramericanization), *bunmeika* (civilization), and their cognates were commonly used to cover roughly the same semantic domain as "internationalization."

What is this sementic domain, then? What phenomena are covered in common usage by the terms *kokusaika*? An examination of newspapers and popular magazines with a wide circulations reveals the following usage.

(1) Foreigners coming to Japan either to establish residence or as tourists.
(2) Financial investment from abroad, resulting in contact of foreign businesses with Japanese.
(3) Similarly, Japanese investment abroad, and establishment of Japanese businesses overseas.
(4) Japanese going abroad as students, businessmen, their dependents and tourists.
(5) Acquisition of foreign languages by Japanese.
(6) Associating with foreigners.
(7) Loosening of the standards for naturalization of foreigners.
(8) Studying of Japanese language and culture by foreigners.
(9) "Exporting" Japanese culture (in the sense of fine arts and literature) abroad.

When these events are seen in small volumes nothing much need be made of them, and is. When the volume increases, however, they take on an "international" dimension.

Every year hundreds of thousands of foreigners come to Japan, and even larger numbers of Japanese go abroad. With increasing contact with both foreigners and foreign cultures, Japanese are inevitably made aware of the differences between themselves and foreigners, and are forced to question what Japanese culture is vis-à-vis these foreign cultures. Also, as they painfully experience the difficulty of learning foreign languages, the difficulty of associating with foreigners, and the difficulty of adapting to local cultures in foreign countries, they cannot help but recognize in sharp relief the differences between Japan and foreign cultures and question what it is that makes Japan so different. *Nihonron* answers these questions regarding self-identity and cultural identity for the Japanese.

One should not lose sight of the fact that *Nihonron* presents an image of Japan

which is created for the purpose of establishing an identity to separate Japan conceptually from Western cultures.   It selects certain cultural traits at the expense of others and exaggerates them.   It is not an objective account of Japanese culture.

If it were indeed an attempt to be objective in its claim for uniqueness of given traits, comparison should be made with cultures of all different parts of the world. Instead, *Nihonron* merely compares Japan with Western countries.   This fact is intimately related to Japan's heavily one-sided intercourse with Western Europe and the United States in the last century.   Not only has Japan's international contact been largely with the West, but the West has served as Japan's primary reference point for the last hundred years.   These two facts are directly related to one another, that is, the reason for the contact with the West was that Japan wanted to reach the West's technological level of advancement and absorb the culture of this reference group.   Japan's internationalization, thus, has had a heavily Western bias.   This is quite evident, for example, when we see Japanese attitudes toward the major non-Western foreign ethnic group in Japan, namely, Koreans.   While their number (approximately 660,000) constitutes by far the largest majority (86%) of foreign populations in Japan, no Japanese would regard a Korean's presence in Japan's as an indication of Japan's internationalization.   The fact that the term *gaijin* ("foreigner") in a narrower, but more popular sense designates only Caucasians is another indication that internationalization as a concept assumes the West as Japan's reference group.   *Nihonron* then is a genre which seeks Japan's uniqueness through comparison of Japan with the West, rather than through a global comparison of all cultures of the world.   As long as the West is Japan's reference group, this bias is unavoidable.

In sum, Japan's internationalization has forced a large number of Japanese to come in contact with the West, with the result that these Japanese are led to ask who they are vis-à-vis Westerners and what Japanese culture is in comparison with the West.   These questions directly relate to the identity crisis arising out of the overwhelming dominance of the "Western" life style in Japan.   In fact these "external" factors add to the urgency of resolving the identity crises.

As I have argued above, it is *Nihonron* which attempts to rescue Japan from this crisis by defining who the Japanese are and by establishing Japan's cultural identity. It further proves to Japanese that internationalized as they are, they still retain essential characteristics as Japanese and that Japan, Westernized as it is, still possess its unique *geist*.

18.   DOMINANCE OF THE "WESTERN" STYLE AS AN "INTERNAL" FACTOR IN THE POPULARITY OF *NIHONRON*

For the popularity of *Nihonron*, internal, or "domestic" factors must also be considered, namely the superiority and the increasing dominance of the "Western" life style in Japanese civilization.   As argued above not only does the "Western" style have politically (i.e., in the "public" domain) more prestigious status than the

"Japanese" style, but it has been permeating the "private" sector of daily life.   Correspondingly, the area for expression of Japanese life style has been further reduced for the vast majority of Japanese.

Take the typical daily routine of an average white collar worker.   With an alarm, he gets up at 6:00 a.m.   Getting out of his bed and changing from pajama into his suit, he proceeds to shave with an electric razor.   In the dining room, glancing at his digital watch from time to time, he washes down his ham-and-egg breakfast with coffee.   Putting his shoes on, he dashes out to the nearest bus stop.   Reaching his office in a ferro-concrete building, he sits at his desk all day, carrying on his assigned tasks.   For lunch he goes down to a basement restaurant for a hamburger steak. On his way back from work he might stop by at a favorite bar with his colleagues for a shot of whiskey or two.   There, they might discuss the performance of their favorite baseball teams.   On the train back home, our average salary man would read an evening newspaper, printed with the latest computer technology.   For his dinner at home, he would drink beer as he relishes a mini steak from Australia.   After dinner, he would enjoy a Beethoven symphony on a stereo as he has his dessert of cake and black tea.   At 11: 00 p.m. he would watch the news and weather forecast on television.   Before retiring, he would go to the family Buddhist altar and thank the Indian-derived deity that he is one hundred percent Japanese.

In this daily routine, this average white collar worker's life is filled with "Western" gadgets, machines, and objects.   Repeating a routine of this sort every day, many Japanese are not even aware that it is basically Western.   However, once they ask themselves who they are as Japanese, the answer to this question cannot help lead them to seek the "essence" of their culture.   It is reality that Japanese culture has become so removed from everyday life that it needs to be sought out.   What is problematic is that it is not easily discovered, for the essence of Japanese culture does not consist of physical objects such as chopsitcks, *kimono* and folding fan.   It is instead abstract and symbolic; as such it is not amenable to perception by the five senses or readily demonstrable.   All the more, for this reason, the spread of "Western" life style in daily life creates an identity crisis among Japanese.

19. *NIHONRON* AS A CHALLENGE TO THE DOMINANCE OF THE "WESTERN"

Through a circuitous route, I have demonstrated the relevance of *Nihonron* to the "Western"/"Japanese" dichotomy in Japanese civilization.   The function of *Nihonron* is to rescue the "Japanese" style from its inferior status and demonstrate the merit of the "Japanese" culture by crystalizing the essence of Japanese culture and making this essence readily comprehensible to ordinary Japanese, and to remove Japan from the possibility of invidious comparison with the West through the claim of incomparable uniqueness of its essence.

Domestically, political "backseating" of the "Japanese" style and further invasion of the "Western" style into the "private" sphere of social life is likely to continue

into the foreseeable future.   Externally, Japan's Westernization and internationaliza-
tion must perforce continue if Japan's economy and the current standard of living are
to be sustained.   This suggests that the crisis in cultural identity among the masses
is also going to stay, and if anything, will be intensified.   Thus *Nihonron*, too, will
most likely continue to be in vogue for some time to come.

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