Chapter 5

AMBIGUOUS JAPAN: JAPANESE NATIONAL IDENTITY AT CENTURY'S END

Masaru Tamamoto

What follows is not the typical international relations theory paper. While it expresses a way of thinking about Japanese political culture, a set of ideas about how to describe and analyze Japanese behavior toward the outside world, it does so with little explicit effort toward theorizing and generalizing. It is written in a manner more typical of historians and anthropologists than of political scientists. The essay is a "thick description" of the salient features of Japanese political culture which construct the nation's particularities; this emphasis on cultural difference fits somewhat uncomfortably with the dominant impulse of American political science (which claims international relations as its sub-field) to equate scholarship with general theory. Elsewhere in this volume, Thomas Berger presents a more political science approach to Japanese culture and identity and their effects on Japanese international behavior. I leave to the reader the task of determining the pros and cons of the differing approaches.

My essay on culture and identity is sandwiched in this volume of works by political scientists. This situation requires explication for, until recently, culture and identity have been suspect issues in political science. As a general statement, culture and identity matter in the study of international relations. But it is another matter to try to generalize about culture and identity. In the dominant manner of international relations analysis—of the Decartes-Newton mode of thought, of positivism, of scientific theorizing—the impulse is to break down

the object of investigation into its components. But culture and identity, by their nature, make sense only as wholes. When one breaks down what constitutes culture and identity into their components, there is little meaning, for it is not the components but the complex relations between them that matter. Culture and identity are organic wholes and seamless webs. The task of scientific theorizing is to achieve simplicity and clarity, and by them, to make general statements. It is problematic to apply this manner of investigation to culture and identity, which are complex and ambiguous; the idea of counting and measuring cultural identity seems improbable. This is why I find the essay form a compelling conduit for analyzing culture and identity.

Political scientists tend to regard the essay form with suspicion for its lack of scientific rigor. Furthermore, they deem thick descriptions to be wanting in scholarly value. Country and area specialists (apart from the Americans who come under different demands) in political science departments are put increasingly on the defensive, forced to justify their academic appointment and tenure by cloaking their work with general theory thereby acquiring scholarly garb and disciplinary legitimacy. Scientific theorizing and generalizing have their merits, yet there also lies the danger of forcing America's parochial values into the investigation of foreign cultures. Rational choice, for example, is a popular and dominant scholarly methodology in the American discipline of political science. Often, so strong is the impulse to generalize that rational choice theorists fail to consider that different cultures harbor different notions of what is rational, that different cultures have different utility curves.

Historians and anthropologists have known the richness of cultural differences, that identities matter in the behavior of nation states and of men. Cultures are possibilities of differences, and they are differences of possibilities. Belatedly, students of international relations are discovering culture and identity in a new way. The conference, which led to the making of this volume, positing that there are distinct international relations in the Asia-Pacific region, is part of the discovery. In another example, the political scientist Yosef Lapid writes, "(T)he global eruption of separatist nationalism set in motion by the abrupt ending of the cold war has directly and inescapably forced the (international relations) scholarly community to rethink the theoretical status of culture and identity in world affairs."[1] Students of international relations are now paying attention to culture and identity making.

The historian David Landes contrasts how the nature of Muslim and European imperialism differed. He contends that Muslim expansion was motivated primarily by their conviction in god and history. This made the Muslim rush more uncompromising and insatiable. Souls mattered to the Europeans, but rarely did souls count enough to get in the way of profit and loss. European motivation, Landes is convinced, was sustainable profit. So, when colonial resistance and the cost of staying rose, they left. Among the Europeans, the

Catholics held greater conviction in God than the Protestants, and that made for differences in behavior, say, between the Portuguese and Dutch. Between the British and French empires, there was a distinct difference in the pride quotient. The British were quick to leave India when the cost of empire rose, while the French lingered in Vietnam and Algeria, suffering increasing costs, driven by greater pride.[2]

Thus, culture and identity have been salient and obvious factors shaping the history of international relations. Then why did the discipline of international relations tend to underplay the relevance of culture and identity? And why is it that the end of the cold war steers the discipline to (re)consider culture and identity? The answers lie in international relations as sociology of knowledge.

I take the discipline of international relations, dominated by discussions of realism and liberalism and their variants, to be, in large measure, a post-1945 American discipline. In this sense, the discipline can be understood as an expression of American culture and identity, expressing particular cultural sensitivities. The discipline tended to separate the realms of the domestic and international, working on the assumption that international relations and foreign policy were somehow distinct from domestic politics, thereby allowing the analyst to underplay cultural and identity issues. With the end of the cold war the mainstream in the discipline came to "discover" there are domestic constraints to foreign policy. This discovery of the obvious—to those whose thinking had not been constrained by socialization into the discipline—revealed the discipline's surprising innocence as it had been constructed in the cold war context.

I posit that underlying the construction of the international relations discipline was fear (though most practitioners of the discipline were not cognizant). The Cuban missile crisis, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear holocaust, accelerated the discipline's tendency toward positivism and scientific theorizing, toward the pretension of value-free analysis, and toward the separation of the international from the domestic. As justification or criticism, the discipline's primary impetus had been how to account for the cold war, for American-Soviet rivalry, for the nuclear predicament, for the world of mutually assured destruction, for America's complicity in the possible end of humanity. Separating the realms of the domestic and international, and the guise of positivism offered the discipline two coveted assurances and an escape from fear. (It should be noted that while American academics tended to separate domestic and international politics, American policymakers really did not. For American officials, Soviet foreign policy was always a function of Soviet domestic politics—the Soviet Union was not simply viewed as another great power, but as a distinctively ideological power.)

First, if one assumed that culture and identity did not matter, this precluded the usefulness of American policy to alter the Soviet domestic order. That is, irrespective of the nature of Soviet culture and identity, interstate rivalry between

the two super powers would persist. The temptation to orchestrate a concerted effort to change the Soviet Union was much too risky given the nuclear predicament. Its failure could have resulted in the end of humanity. Thucydides became an icon of proof of the permanency of interstate rivalry, of the validity of realist assumptions since time immemorial; therefore of the continuation of the cold war thus human survival. (The discipline's reading of Thucydides tended to focus on the nature of competition between Athens and Sparta, and less on the termination of the Peloponnesian War.) There was no serious thinking in the discipline of international relations about how to end the cold war or, more passively, because the norms of international relations were often thought to be beyond American or any other actors' will and design how it might come to an end. The concern was balance and stability of terror. So the fall of the Soviet Union took the discipline by surprise.

Second, the separation of the domestic and international realms helped preserve the sense of American innocence; of its sense of democratic virtue meanwhile being complicit in the threat of destruction of humanity. The separation allowed America, in the main, to avoid the question: If American society is so virtuous, how can it partake in the construction of an international world so maddening? American thinking to underplay the fact that the separation also allowed cold war was, in collusion with the Soviet Union, of American making, as if America was merely reacting to a set of "objective" conditions in international relations. As an outside observer of American culture and identity, I have been struck by the generally veiled manner with which America understands its imperial hegemonic place in international affairs, its role as maker of international rules.

Now the end of the cold war has freed the discipline of American international relations to ponder the meaning of culture and identity. But it remains in an awkward state. One recent and representative effort is *The Culture of National Security*, a collection of essays, which argues that security interests are defined by actors who respond to cultural factors, and asking, for one, why the Soviet Union considered it to be in its interest to withdraw from Eastern Europe. The editor Peter Katzenstein defines culture and identity in the book's introduction thus, and I quote in full:

> The essays refer to *identity* as a shorthand label for varying construction of nation and statehood. The process of construction typically is explicitly political and pits conflicting actors against each other. In invoking the concept of identity the authors depict varying national ideologies of collective distinctiveness and purpose. And they refer to variations across countries in the statehood that is enacted domestically and projected internationally.

> The authors in the volume invoke the term *culture* as a broad label that denotes the collective models of nation-state authority or identity, carried by custom or law. Culture refers to both a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another.[3]

I find these definitions not helpful. They are all encompassing and, in themselves, tell us nothing about the substance of particular cultures and identities. What is required and, that is what the many chapters in the Katzenstien volume do, is to offer thick descriptions of the cultures and identities in question.

"Ambiguous Japan," the title of the essay is taken from the Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe's speech delivered in Stockholm. The title seems to give the false impression to many that I am arguing that Japan is without identity. Japan certainly has identity. But it is ambiguous. This ambiguity comes mainly from Japan's singular success at Westernization and modernization among the non-Western nations. (Of course, modernization is in itself an ambiguous notion.) Other non-Western nations have their ambiguities, but theirs are different in that their ambiguities are often expressions of either continuing or failing struggles to cope with the question of modernity. In contrast, Japan's ambiguity comes from success recently arrived at. In short time, the Japanese should come to be able to accept the nation's place in the world and shed the kind of ambiguity that comes from the idealized imagining division of the world into the West and other, into the modern and not. Japanese national identity is now framed primarily as a member of the G-7, and this categorization allows Japan to free itself from a sense of separation from the West, from the modern, and allows Japan to assume a place in the club of wealthy and democratic nations.

An ambiguous identity is not a monopoly of the non-West. Is Japanese identity more ambiguous than, say, the United States? In the post-1945 context, Japanese identity is more ambiguous because of the compromised state of sovereignty and independence, which stems from Japan's security relationship with the United States. Post-1945 Japanese sovereignty has been divisible and its independence limited. These are symbolized by the continuing presence of the American military on Japanese soil after the formal conclusion of the post-Second World War military occupation. Japan has willfully accepted this status and, under cover of the American security guarantee, continued to cherish its politically isolationist pacifism. Japan's ambiguity comes from the contradiction between its pacifism—symbolized by the "anti-or post-Westphalia" peace constitution which forever renounces the use or threat of use of force to settle international disputes—and the American use of violent means explicitly renounced by the Japanese constitution to provide for Japan's security.

Post-1945 United States, mindful of the lessons of Munich and Pearl Harbor, posed to guard its peace through strength, through enhanced military preparedness as witnessed by the arms race with the Soviet Union. In contrast, Japan after 1945 fell into a psychology similar to what the United States and Europe embraced following the First World War. Like the United States after Versailles, Japan after Hiroshima sought to distance itself from international politics. Like Europe after Versailles, which sought to guard its peace by goodwill as symbolized by the signing of treaties banning war, note the Kellogg-Briand Pact; Japan after the Second World War has hoped to guard its peace by minimum military preparedness and "by trusting in the peace loving peoples of the world" as dictated in the constitutional preamble. It is the juxtaposition between the divergent American and Japanese lessons of the Second World War, and Japan's dependence on the United States as the final guarantor of its security which help make Japanese identity ambiguous. In essence, Japan has had neither will nor interest to actively identify the country's place by its brand of pacifism. It has been pacifism in one country, obscured from the rest of the world, made more visible by American military protection. This veiled pacifism has done little to dispel the universal suspicion of the possibility of resurgent Japanese militarism.

To the extent that the nation's place in and relationship with the international world, pre-1945 imperial Japan, with its more proactive and expansionist foreign policy shape national identity, possessed a much less ambiguous identity. Japan after 1945, in contrast, has been timid in the international political arena and its foreign policy more reactive, thereby leading to a greater sense of ambiguity. Thus, the air and pretension and will to supremacy help lull ambiguity. The United States possesses this sense of supremacy; therefore it is free of the kind of ambiguity that marks Japan. Japan, as argued above, is quite comfortable in the relationship with the United States reigning supreme. Japan deeply cherishes its pacifism. Ever mindful of America's role in guaranteeing that pacifism, it is hard to imagine the contrasts in Japanese and American cultures leading to conflict in the foreseeable future. I contend, contrary to Robert Gilpin's argument found elsewhere in this volume, that, at each turn, as has been the pattern during the past half century, the Japanese government will continue to bend to avert any serious conflict with the United States. The single, most important source of contemporary Japanese national identity is its relationship with the United States. A radical revision of the constitution or even the abolition of the imperial house will not have as much impact on Japanese national identity as will the abrogation, under dire circumstance, of the U.S-Japan security treaty.

Ambiguous Japan's relationship with Asia has been markedly problematic. It has to do with the enduring uneasiness stemming from Japanese imperial aggression. It has to do with Japan's historical inability to regard other Asian nations as equals. And, more recently, it has to do with Japan's distaste for the Chi-

nese will to supremacy. China and the United States, two most influential countries affecting Japan's place in the world, are driven by a similar will to supremacy. Japan lives comfortably with the American one but is reluctant to acknowledge the Chinese claim. The more China asserts its claim, the more Japan will be driven toward the United States to foil and counter. While, elsewhere in this volume, David Kang argues that a central system, with China at the center, is rising in East Asia, I would contend that, for Japan as well as South Korea, there is already a central system in place with the United States at the center, and that the American centered system will strengthen in proportion to any, especially political and military Chinese claim to supremacy.

To understand any culture and its identity, one must be immersed in its life. Its interpreter must experience a long period of socialization. One must have distance, to figuratively step outside of the cultural realm to be able to recognize and define its identity. It is in the comparison with others, through the ability to identify differences, that definitions of cultures and identities can be made meaningful. A person who knows only one culture has a difficult task trying to identify that culture's identity. As cultures have different pride quotients, they also have different tolerances for ambiguity. What follows is an essay on Japanese ambiguity, about the kind of cultural ambiguity for which America would have little tolerance.

I. REQUIEM FOR JAPANESE THOUGHT

"I live as a novelist marked by the deep wounds of Japan's ambiguity"[4] Kenzaburo Oe told the Swedish Academy in accepting the 1994 Nobel Prize in literature. He depicted how Japan's ambiguity casts a dark shadow over the country's achievements in modernity, and how it traps the intellectual class, a trap from which no modern Japanese intellectual has been able to escape.

This ambiguity, Oe explained, began in the late nineteenth century, when Japan opened itself to the international world, bringing—to an end more than two centuries of seclusion, and embarked on a frenzied path of modernization. To this day, even after Japan's arrival at modernity, this ambiguity wields tremendous power and continues to tear apart the country and its people. In the international realm, Oe fears, Japan's ambiguity means isolation and the inability to relate to the rest of the world.

Japan's modernization posited the West as model, but Japan is situated in Asia, and the Japanese have sought to preserve their traditional culture. On the one hand, this ambiguous path pushed the country and its people into the role of aggressors in Asia. On the other hand, Japanese culture, which is supposed to have become completely open toward the West, remains obscure, if not incomprehensible, to the West. Furthermore, this ambiguity has led to Japan's political, social and cultural isolation in Asia.[5]

In this way, Oe iterated an enduring theme in the history of modern Japanese thought (*Nihon shiso-shi*), which saw its beginning with the country's opening to the world. The primary goal of Japanese thought has been to establish a national identity in an alien world. Torn between the idealized poles of the West and Asia, the Japanese intellectual search for identity has been an elusive affair. Because the search has been framed between two imagined extremes, there is no way to reconcile the two; thus any definition of Japan can only be a paradox. While this sort of dualism has been a common feature of non-Western political thought in the modern era, peculiar is the lack of a structured ideology of native authenticity in Japanese thought. In the Islamic world, in contrast, the glory and purity of the prophet Muhammad stand as the source of native authenticity; for the Muslims, history since Muhammad is understood to be a history of decline, and the idea of recovering a glorious and pure past becomes an important source of selfhood. In Albert Hourani's depiction, "With the full articulation of the message of Muhammad in a universal community obedient to divine command, what was significant in history came to an end."[6] In this sense, there is in Japan an absence of selfhood; there is no past to recover, no tradition to conserve. The modern creation of the emperor myth in the late nineteenth century was an attempt at establishing authenticity, but the very amorphousness of the imperial institution then and now attests to the difficulty of fabricating a tradition to preserve the Japanese self in the quest for modernity. Note that the dominant counter to the West in Japanese thought is not Japan but Asia, a concept, which begs satisfactory definition. Japan, to borrow the imagery of Roland Barthes, is an "empty center."[7]

In 1935, in the midst of Japan's rebellion against the Western international order, when the country ostensibly stood united behind the banner of emperor, philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji, astutely and defiantly observed, everybody knows what the Japanese spirit (*Nihon seishin*) is, but once you question it, you begin to realize that nobody knows what it is.[8] Who are the Japanese? asks and answers social critic Shuichi Kato in a 1957 essay: The Japanese are a people who continuously and tirelessly ask who are the Japanese?[9] Watsuji and Kato were two of the leading thinkers of twentieth-century Japan. Conservative Watsuji spanned the pre-1945 imperial order and the postwar democratic transformation, and liberal Kato has been a champion of postwar democracy. While their political orientations differ, both must agree on the amorphousness of Japanese national identity, for that is the essential quality of modern Japanese thought of which they are part.

To become modern with the West as model has been the core sentiment of Japanese thought. Every piece of thought on national identity, profound and trivial, has had to be a comparison between Japan and the West. Even the urge to reject the West and to establish Japan's distinctiveness necessarily has been framed in terms of the confrontation with the West. Therefore, contribution to

Japanese thought demanded knowledge of Western thought, even if distorted and cursory. Japanese thought generally has been articulated in categories, which are assumed to be intelligible to Western thought. Thinking about national identity, thus, becomes the reification of a Western audience. In this way, Japanese thought has been the "work of translators."[10]

The tragedy for Japanese thought so obsessed with Western thought is that, while Japan looked toward the West, the West cared little about Japan. This is one central reason for the ambiguity of Japanese thought. Given the manner with which Japanese thought addresses a reified Western audience, true legitimacy can be conferred only through recognition by Western thought. Japanese thinkers have been unable to find their images in the eyes of the West. Cultural distance and language barrier are two obvious reasons. But the real problem lay with the essence of Japanese thought: Why would Western thought be interested in investigating "translations" of itself? What universal significance, applicable beyond Japan's narrow concerns, can there be in "translations" which cannot be found in the original?

Oe struggles to break out of the mold of the "translator" and to reach out to the world. He belongs to the category of Japanese writers whom he describes as those who learned from world literature, then created Japanese literature and, if possible, yearn to offer feedback to world literature. As to what is meant by world literature, he identifies French, German, English, and Russian literatures; the "world" in characteristically Japanese fashion emphasizes the West.[11] Oe seeks a sense of totality with the world and universality for Japanese literature and for Japan. Only then can Japan's ambiguity be shed. He is, of course, not so naive as to imagine the transformation of Japan into a part of the West or any other. He notes, Americans and Indians and other peoples have religions which give them the sense of transcendence, and that gives rise to visions of world order in America and to the Gandhi creed in India, but the Japanese who lack religious commitment are bound by the practicalities of reality. He stresses, "I do not have a religion, and I wish to die without being caught by one."[12] What he wants is the ability to relate to the world, and he abhors the Japanese tendency toward nihilism.

Oe's Nobel prize speech, "Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself," was a deliberate attack on the other Japanese Nobel laureate in literature, Yasunari Kawabata. In 1968, Kawabata, dressed in kimono, spoke in Japanese at the Swedish Academy on "Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself," displaying his personal brand of mysticism, quoting lines from a medieval Zen monk. For his turn, Oe, speaking in English, derided Kawabata's nihilism, pointing out that the Zen poem Kawabata quoted sings of the beauty of the impossibility of representing truth with words. Rejecting this kind of parochialism, Oe identified himself with the humanism of William Yeats, William Blake, W. H. Auden, George Orwell, Milan Kundera, and others, stressing decency, innocence and sanity as desirable values of hu-

manity. This identification was not made as an equal; Oe concluded by depicting himself as a writer from the world's periphery.

Oe's speech would have made a suitable entry in a recent book by Hiroshi Minami, Japan's leading social psychologist. It is a masterful compilation of and commentary on Japanese thinkers on national identity since the mid-nineteenth century.

Minami concludes that one constant in Japan's psychology and national character throughout the turbulent modern experience is uncertainty of the self: The Japanese people lack self-assertiveness and are imbued with the spirit of submissiveness, making them fearful of power yet prone to authoritarian behavior; these characteristics manifest themselves in Japan's particular emperor system and sycophancy, including the admiration of the West.[13] There is no future for Japan by strengthening its national egoism (read the emperor system), argues one of the last entries in Minami's study. It is an argument made in 1991 by a Japanese Christian who posits that the Christian spirit respects human rights and is the necessary antidote to Japan's national egoism.[14] As those familiar with Japanese intellectual history will recognize, it is the kind of argument which could have appeared anywhere in the chronology of modern Japanese thought, the kind of argument which contrasts a "superior" Western idea to an "inferior" Japanese quality, prodding Japan to alter its inadequacy. In a sense, the dominantly self-critical mode of Japanese thought, whose self-criticism rose to elevated heights after the disaster of the Second World War, has served as tonic for national self-improvement and encouraged Japan's achievements in modernity. At the same time, by its incessant revelation of Japan's inadequacies and suspicion of native qualities, Japanese thought, whose task ostensibly is to establish a national identity, has helped perpetuate its ambiguity.

Today, there is great discrepancy between Japan's intellectual ambiguity, on the one hand, and its social achievements and economic power in the world, on the other. There grows a gulf between Japanese thought and the assumptions of society. At the twentieth century's end, Oe's depiction of Japan as the world's periphery struck many Japanese as a curious utterance. Society no longer recognizes the West as model; the one constant in the turbulent history of modernizing Japan had been the assumption that the world would continue to provide models from which it could pick and choose. Now, Japan has arrived at modernity. The West has begun to look toward Japanese thought and literature as well as management and manufacturing techniques. Even Oe admits that Japanese writers are no longer isolated; this admission came naturally after his receipt of the Nobel Prize. When in 1968 Kawabata became the first Japanese recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature, Japan still mindful of Western recognition stood jubilant; it was a moment of national celebration and honor. By 1994, Japan was no longer needy of such national recognition; Oe's honor was more personal

and less national. In this can be read the final chapter of Japanese thought as it had been constituted for 120 years.

II. MODERNITY AS TECHNIQUE OVER REASON

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another."[15] Thus Immanuel Kant defined Enlightenment in a 1784 essay. The modern West has been framed by the Enlightenment project. Its modernity has been propelled by efforts to implement ideas about progress and reason, and characterized by universalizing and rationalizing impulses. While, with the passage of time, reason tended to disappear into technique in the West, in Japan, modernity has always been about technique.

The pursuit of modernity for Japan, a non-Western latecomer to the concept, has involved, above all, a concern with the nation's status in an alien world. The purpose of technique has been to elevate Japan in world history by generally accepting the universalizing claim of the West and to find the meaning of Japan by imagining an actual context of modernity. By dissociating culture from modernity, non-Western Japan could hope to become modern, that is, to parallel the achievements of the West but not to be of the West.

This Japan is often described by outside observers as goal-oriented, but the nature of Japanese goals is fundamentally incompatible with the transcendent nature of Western Enlightenment. Japanese goals are immediate and defined by particular historical situations. The Japanese are a people who ask "how" and not why. To question why is anti-social and often creates embarrassing situations. *Rikutsu* is one Japanese word for reason; when used to describe a person, it means argumentative, not reasonable. To speak of truths and principles is frowned upon and little understood; at best, it is tolerated as the whim of ivory tower intellectuals. There are always those who wish to inject higher ideals into what they see as a world of compromises. But the essence of society in Japan is compromise; it is a compromise among men and not of principles. Reflexivity marks and distinguishes the West's Enlightenment project, but reflexivity without reason is mere technique.

"He believed that remote ends were a dream, that faith in them was a fatal illusion; that to sacrifice the present . . . to distant ends must always lead to cruel and futile form of human sacrifice. He believed that values were not found in an impersonal, objective realm, but were created by human beings, changed with the generations of men; that suffering was inescapable, and infallible knowledge neither attainable nor needed."[16] This description, which aptly fits Japanese sensibility, is how Isaiah Berlin portrays the skepticism of the

nineteenth century Russian publicist Alexander Herzen. Applying this description to Japan today, a rather successful society by world standards, one can recognize the virtue of Japanese flexibility and the achievements this flexibility has accorded.

At the same time, it describes a Japan without core values, a Japan which can swing from liberal internationalism to militarism and imperialism, then to politically isolationist economics—which is a rough description of the swings in Japan's orientation in the world during the twentieth century. Of course, one can readily identify countries within the Western Enlightenment tradition with similarly upsetting international experiences during the turbulent twentieth century. In a comparative evaluation of Western great powers, only the United States and Britain are arguably exempt. Still, what matters in a reflection of contemporary Japanese national identity is the fact that a large proportion of the Japanese intellectual class regards the country's paucity of core values and transcendent reason for the swings, in general, and specifically for Japan's disaster in the Second World War.

Masao Maruyama, a key contributor to post-1945 Japanese thought, whose evaluation of Japanese militarism and ultra-nationalism of the 1930s and early 1940s has helped set the dominant tone with which the country has come to understand that past, argues that the Japanese, despite great dedication and sacrifice, could not even make themselves into good fascists. The social fact of dictatorship is one thing, Maruyama wrote a few months after Japan's unconditional surrender in the Second World War, but this should not be confused with the consciousness of the dictators: "Dictatorship as consciousness ought necessarily be linked to awareness of responsibility, but this awareness was lacking in both the military and bureaucracy."[17] Whether in pursuit of fascism, liberalism or any other political arrangement commonly understood in the West as an "ism," in the Japanese society of compromise where technique suffices for reason, scant is the sense of the philosophical underpinnings of political orders, of the responsibility and fidelity toward an ideal as political goal and social good, and of the need to question why. Even the Russian skeptic Herzen, struggling with life in the periphery of the Enlightenment West, believed in reason.

Echoing Maruyama half a century later, Oe asks why there are so few political leaders with creed in postwar Japan, why Japanese politicians and bureaucrats do not seem to mature through the process of reflection, choice, and design, why they do not struggle with the realities of life to hone for the improvement of their personal creeds and, in the end to see in the quality of their creeds their lives' worth. Japan's bureaucratic mandarins are reputed for their excellence, but when you begin to peel off their layers of excellence which are their bureaucratic techniques, like an onion (bamboo shoot in the Japanese imagery), there is nothing at their cores. You find no creed, no ideal, which ought to be what gives meaning to the life of an individual. Bound by the value

of concrete, immediate goals of identifiable living individuals and their organizations, they remain untouched and unmoved by great historical goals such as liberty, equality, human rights, and human solidarity. When such principles are approximated in Japanese society, that is only a coincidental result of the exercise of bureaucratic technique. Oe laments, there is no habit in Japan of seeking out men of upstanding character to shoulder the responsibility of political leadership.[18]

Societies that emphasize technique over reason place great value on the process of how things are done. Observance of socially accepted rules of process often becomes more important than the result of human activity. To have followed procedural rules with sincerity and good faith often excuses less than desirable result. Societies imbued with these characteristics tend to be ceremonial and ritualistic. In Japanese life, rituals acquire authority, and power flows from them. While rituals serve to preserve social order, at the same time, they tend to obscure the purpose of human activity and the reason why. Heavily ritualistic Japan is a society saturated with the logic of technical procedures. The oft heard complaint of a foreigner that Japanese society is closed attests to the importance of rituals in Japanese life. Whether for a foreigner or native, knowledge of rituals and ceremonies that constitute daily life is the prerequisite for acceptance into society. Such knowledge is acquired only through a long and constant process of socialization, for in Japanese society which emphasizes relations among identifiable individuals and their organizations, its rituals and ceremonies are discrete and in constant flux.

There is certain efficiency in societies which emphasize the question how over why. It allows men with conflicting motives to work together. But there are drawbacks. Japanese society at this century's beginning displays an exaggerated dependence on procedural technique as societal norm, and that has diminished the value of honor and morality in public life. Pervasive corruption in politics is manifest; there is neither shame nor guilt among politicians, only the search for technical leeway to prolong their political lives. This amorality extends to how the country deals with the international world. When Korea raises the issue of Koreans forced to serve as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers during the Second World War, the Japanese government carefully considers which agency, preferably a nongovernmental one, should dispense monetary compensation. In this way the question of accountability is avoided to the extent possible. Korea is raising the issue as a moral problem, Oe blasts, but Japan is reducing it to a technical problem.[19] Exaggerated reliance on technique leads to moral ambiguity.

Societies that discourage personal creed have little room for dissent. Societies unaccustomed to dissent witness little debate. In these societies, there can be no tradition of exile. Japanese society, imbued with these characteristics, has tended to place a high premium on conformity, consensus, and community. For

communal men without a strong sense of personal creed, there is no identity outside of community. Such men become adrift morally and psychologically when shunned from community. Banishment from communal life was considered severe punishment in traditional Japan; exile had been the fate of criminals. "Oe is a foreigner!"—this has become the battle cry of Oe's critics, who abhor what they see as Oe's submissiveness toward the West. The critics argue that his writing is incomprehensible, for he is merely using Japanese words to compose foreign language prose; that his political creed of democracy and pacifism is foreign, for these were imposed upon Japan by a foreign conqueror after the defeat in war; that few Japanese had read him before the Nobel prize, and it took this foreign recognition for his discovery in Japan. What is notable about the furor surrounding Oe's Nobel prize is that a real intellectual debate has ensued between supporters of Oe and their critics; furthermore, the act of branding one's enemy a foreigner, the act of banishment from Japanese community, no longer seems to be an effective weapon as it had been not so long ago. Societal norms are changing; values and lifestyles within society are becoming increasingly diverse; and diversity is giving way to the development of personal creed. Dissent and debate are beginning to erode at consensus and conformity. Just as the weak sense of "national" celebration of Oe's award points to the evolution of a new Japanese identity, so too does the weakening of the meaning of banishment from community that is Japan. If communalism has been a source of Japanese ambiguity, dissent and debate are antidotes. A Japan in which morality and honor acquire heightened value may be in the making.

Oe, as we have seen, posits that Japan's ambiguity began with the advent of modernity, after which Japan has been unable to reconcile the meaning of the West and itself. True independence for Japan cannot be attained until every Japanese acquire the spirit of "independent self-esteem" (*dokuritsu lison*), warned Yukichi Fukuzawa, Japan's foremost Enlightenment thinker, writing in 1875 soon after the country's opening to the world. He likened Japan's antimodern character to that of a palace maid, envious, scheming, and sycophantic, struggling for improvement of one's status in a world where objective rules for promotion do not exit, where winning the personal favor and whim of the palace lord is key.[20] Fukuzawa's warning continues to find resonance in contemporary Japan. Returning to Kant, Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity.

III. FAREWELL AMERICA

There is no precise equivalent of the word identity in Japanese; some use the English word. Others prefer the word *shutaisei*, whose Japanese-English dictionary definition is commonly given as subjectivity, independence, identity of existence, or the rule of individualism. None of them corresponds exactly with

the Japanese term. Most Japanese thinkers are agreed that Japan lacks *shutaisei*, and many argue that Japan is in need of one. But nobody seems to have a satisfactory idea of what a Japan with *shutaisei* may be, or what it takes to bring *shutaisei* to Japan. Still Japanese thinkers see *shutaisei* everywhere in Western political thought and practice: in individualism, liberalism, Marxism, pacifism, autonomy in action, and freedom in thought and expression. Given this muddled Japanese conception of national identity, Masao Miyoshi, a Japanese-born naturalized American arid literary critic, offers clarification: "The uncritical pursuit of *shutaisei* in Japan may be still one more example of Japan's gestures toward Westernization, and thus ironically proof of its lack of *shutaisei*.[21] It takes one with Japanese sensibility but with cultural distance to cut through the mire of Japanese thinking on national identity.

That Japan has no national identity is, of course, a curious proposition. It certainly has values, its own language, and art and literature and customs. Its economic, social and political structures and manners are distinct from those of other countries. It has a national history. Why then do the Japanese today think of their country as lacking in identity? The answer lies with the end of World War II.

August 15, 1945, the day Japan surrendered unconditionally to the United States, is the singular source of contemporary Japanese national identity. The Japanese continue to refer to the era after 1945 as *sengo*, the postwar era. *Sengo* does not simply denote a time frame; it embodies a historical consciousness. The postwar era has been an era in which Japan embraced America as the dominant model. In the Japanese penchant to seek out models in its pursuit of modernity, one hitch has been the inability to recognize models in the abstract; models have necessarily been identified with concrete characteristics of certain countries. Democracy, an important theme in postwar Japanese thought, for example, has held meaning in the context of American democracy and Japan's relation with America. Postwar Japanese national identity has been bound by its images of America, images which, according to Oe, has evoked in the Japanese the feelings of "shame and envy."[22]

It is in the context of America as model, as Kant's "guidance from above" that the Japanese understanding of *shutaisei* holds meaning. The concept of *shutaisei* first arose during the height of the Second World War in the Pacific. It was the Kyoto school of philosophy that coined the term in the search for an ideological justification for the country's pursuit of the Asian co-prosperity sphere. Only in the way that a culture without a firmly articulated native tradition and authenticity can, the Kyoto school imagined Japan's transcendence of modernity (*kindai no chokoku*). Whether the Kyoto school was anything more than a cover for Japan's brute aggression is a topic of continuing debate. It was generally understood that on August 15, 1945, the guns of America defeated Japan, while America's *shutaisei* triumphed over the Japanese one. Henceforth, Japan

that opted for willful subservience to America, especially in international politics, looked toward America as the embodiment of *shutaisei*, as the model which points to the full recovery of Japan's *shutaisei*, when time came.

In this sense, we begin to understand what Japan's *shutaisei* has meant in postwar thought. It essentially points to the ideology of great powers, to the ability of one power to impose its ways on others. America possesses *shutaisei*, because of its victory in the Second World War and its consequent ascendance to super power status, and because of its brand of liberalism, its democracy and capitalism, which have acquired global relevance. *Shutaisei* thus is achieved when native ideas expand toward universal significance. So it was that the wartime Kyoto school imagined a world order led by Japanese values. In postwar Japanese thought, *shutaisei* became overlapped with the more enduring question of modernity: To become modern meant the attainment of *shutaisei*.

America as Japan's model has been a paradox. America's highly principled ways, its legalistic tendency, and its faith in the transcendent relevance of its values contrast with the more amorphous, particular, and ambiguous Japanese ways. Between America, whose founding document guarantees the right of the "pursuit of happiness," and Japan, whose constitutional guarantee is mere enjoyment of a "cultured life," there is a gap. The American belief in perfection could not mean much in the Japanese world of compromise.

Furthermore, postwar Japan clearly lost the stomach for the harshness of international politics. If *shutaisei* comes from great power status, Japan's orientation in the world during the past half century has pointed to the explicit denial of such ambition. Japanese society is now one that wants to be a "Denmark" or "Netherlands." It harbors no desire for national greatness in international politics. It wishes to enjoy the material benefits of hard work. It wants to be a wealthy and orderly small power, whose per capita gross national product and equitable distribution of wealth mean more than aggregate gross national product as measure of comparative national power. The psychology of Japanese society today does not match the large proportion of the world's wealth the country commands. Rather than as a source of challenge, as it had been until recently, the world outside increasingly appears as a source of intrusion: Why must Japan continue to dole out large sums for foreign economic aid when the economy is doing badly? Why must the economy be deregulated if the majority of the people are content with things as they are? Why must Japan break its postwar policy of "pacifism in one country" and dispatch troops abroad for United Nations peacekeeping operations and become embroiled once again in international politics?

Caught between society's willful innocence of international politics and America as model of *shutaisei*, Japanese thought on national identity floundered, unable to reconcile the two. Meanwhile, notably since the early 1960s, the meaning of modernity for society at large became increasingly associated with material culture, the production and consumption of things. In this con-

text, modernity could be arrived at when Japanese products based on advanced technology became world competitive. In this context, too, America was the model. Because of the Japanese tendency to associate models with concrete countries, the proof of arrival at modernity had to come from America; it was not something Japan could simply claim. In the late 1930s, Japan's nominal per capita gross national product surpassed that of America. At about the same time, the American government began to deal with Japan Primarily as an economic competitor. When America categorized Japan as a major economic threat, notably under the Clinton administration, that to Japanese eyes was a concession of equality. Japan became modern.

The arrival at modernity is at once intellectually liberating and onerous. As long as modernity was at issue, by definition, Japan could identify models in the outside world. It was through these models that Japanese thought articulated signposts for the nation's future. According to the Japanese understanding of the order of things, Japan arrived at modernity because there are no more outside models; as a result, for now, Japan has lost its image of the future.

The dissipation of America as model leads to the Japanese recognition of the varieties in American life. As long as America was heralded as model, there was a strong tendency to ascribe to America monolithic characteristics. Different Japanese would harbor different images of America, but each image tended to be a gross simplification and reduction, whether it be America as the model for capitalism, democracy, or imperialism. Now, with the arrival at modernity, Japanese views of America are increasingly subtle and complex, reflecting the realities of American life. This recognition, the ability to consider complexity in others, comes in large measure from the growing diversity in Japanese life itself. What this does is to prod Japanese thought to reconsider the plurality of cultures and the plurality of modernity.

The cultural approach to the clarification of national identity in Japanese thought is not new. It has been a distinct feature of Japanese thought since the mid-nineteenth century. One common cultural approach has been the study of poetry, bound by the particularity of language and essentially untranslatable. The cultural approach has aimed to establish Japanese distinctiveness, to locate sources of identity which are not comparable, thus free of value judgments in relation to others, yet as good as any other. This is in one sense a healthy recognition of the plurality of cultures. As long as the Japanese continued to consider their country as less than modern, the cultural approach could not satisfactorily tackle the question of modernity: If Japanese culture is as good as any other, why does Japan lag behind the West in wealth and power? Begging this question, in a less than modern Japan, the cultural approach stood as a failed attempt to escape the burden of world history.

In a modern Japan, an equal in the achievements of modernity, investigation of cultural pluralism begets new life. Japan has become modern, yet it is not the

same as America. This simple truth frees Japanese thought to reconsider culture not as an escape from world history but as an effort to forge a world history that is more cognizant and tolerant of cultural differences.

IV. JAPAN AS AN ASIAN COUNTRY

The arrival at modernity brings with it another paradox. Because Japanese national identity had been largely understood as a comparison, in a world without models, Japanese thought loses bearing. Instead of forging an identity with universal and inclusive qualities, in a Japan that has finally achieved the historical pursuit of modernity, in a Japan that has approximated the West's claim to universality, Japanese thought tends to retreat toward specifics. Without a comparison to gauge its status in the world, Japanese thought as it has been constituted will tend to claim the singularity of its experience.

Who are the Japanese? It is time for Japanese thought to stop seeing the country in comparative terms and ask what it is that the country and its people want to be in the world. While many thinkers no doubt will continue to be bound by old categories and habits, henceforth any socially and politically meaningful contribution to Japanese thought will add to the invention of a new set of categories and assumptions. There has occurred a "paradigm shift."

Looking foward, it seems clear that Japan's relations with Asia will play a critical role in forging a new national identity. Much of this will be led by the internationalization of economic activities in the Asian region. For Japan, whose dominant impulse for over a century had been to "escape Asia," to borrow the nineteenth-century Enlightenment thinker Fukuzawa's imagery, the old question of equality resurfaces. Many of the problems of Japan in Asia have been results of the inequality of power between Japan and the rest of the Asian countries since the late nineteenth century. The history of the region, in one sense, has been one of Japanese domination and Asian rebellion. Even today, there is no regionalism akin to that of Europe where Germany, France, Italy, and Britain hold relatively equal power. Asian regionalism is more like the North American Free Trade Agreement in which the United States dominates Canada and Mexico.

The last time Japan was seriously and fully engaged with Asia was during the Second World War. It was raw imperialism. The ideology of Japan's Asian co-prosperity sphere as articulated by the Kyoto school of philosophy had at its core the notion of equality. The war was understood to be that between "haves" and "have-nots," its purpose to bring equality to the international world of inequality. As things turned out, Japan was interested only in equality between itself and the Western imperial powers. In the way Japan treated Asia, the co-prosperity slogan of equality among Asians was a brutal joke. A country can only present to others values that it possesses. Japanese society during the Second World War was an unequal place, divided by social class, its distribution of opportunities,

wealth, and power rather skewed. This Japan could not understand the meaning of equality.

Japan today is a rather equal place. The class system was abolished after the war; opportunities and wealth are fairly evenly distributed. This Japan has the chance to forge an Asian regionalism based on the idea of equality. But there is still a hitch. The Japanese sense of equality is predominantly that of sameness, not the equality of rights. In a society that emphasizes consensus and conformity, the lowest common denominator is the measure of equality. It continues to be shaped by Fukuzawa's "envy of the palace maid." To be like others is understood as equality. Until Japanese society further develops the idea of equality of rights and recognizes the value of diversity, Japan in Asia will continue to face difficulties. What do the Japanese want? Oe wants relativism that is universally tolerant.

Still, when rights are confused with general principles, where rights become ends in themselves, in the absence of guiding principles, there grows a tendency for individualism to run amok and civility to disappear. Oe's Japan needs to identify a set of guiding principles, which capture his desire for decency, innocence, and sanity for our world that is coercive and hierarchical. In Western thought today, there is confusion of rights and principles. So, at last, after more than 120 years, universal significance for Japanese thought moving beyond the struggle with the meaning of modernity can be forged by articulating a set of principles which is authentic in the Japanese context and which disentangles the Western confusion of rights and principles.

CONCLUSION

Japan is certainly not without identity or empty at the center. There is an identity, but its is ambiguous. This ambiguity comes mainly from Japan's singular success at Westernizing and modernizing among the non-Western nations. Other non-Western nations have their ambiguities, but theirs are different in that their ambiguities are often expressions of either continuing or failing struggles to cope with the question of modernity. In contrast, Japan's ambiguity comes from success recently arrived at, and in a short time the Japanese should come to be able to accept the nation's place in the world and shed the kind of ambiguity that comes from the idealized imagining/division of the world into the West and other, into the modern and not. Japanese identity is now framed primarily as a member of the "G-7," and this categorization allows Japan to free itself from a sense of separation from the West, from the modern, and allows Japan to assume a rightful place in a club whose members share the world's highest per capita incomes.

Still an ambiguous identity is not a monopoly of the non-West. Is Japanese identity more ambiguous than that of the United States? In the post-1945 con-

text, Japanese identity is in one sense more ambiguous because of the compromised state of sovereignty and independence that evolves from Japan's relationship with the United States. Post-1945 Japanese sovereignty has been divisible and independence limited. These are symbolized by the continuing presence of the American military on Japanese soil after the formal conclusion of the post-Second World War military occupation. Japan has willfully accepted this status and, under cover of the American security guarantee, hidden behind the United States and cherished its pacifism. This stance in international politics certainly has helped shape Japan's political culture specified in this essay. The ambiguity comes from the contradiction between its pacifism—symbolized by the "anti or post-Westphalia" peace constitution which forever denounces the use or threat of use of force to settle international disputes—and the American use of violent means explicitly denied by the Japanese constitution to provide for Japan's security.

Post-1945 United States, mindful of the lessons of Munich and Pearl Harbor, posed to guard its peace through strength, through enhanced military preparedness as witnessed in the arms race with the Soviet Union. In contrast, Japan after 1945 fell into a psychology similar to what the United States and Europe embraced following the First World War. Like the United States after Versailles, Japan after Hiroshima sought to isolate itself from international politics. And like Europe after Versailles, which sought to guard its peace by goodwill as symbolized by the signing of treaties banning war, note the Kellogg-Briand pact, Japan has hoped to guard its peace by minimum military preparedness and "by trusting in the peace loving peoples of the world," as dictated in the constitutional preamble. It is the juxtaposition between the divergent American and Japanese lessons of the Second World War, and Japan's dependence on the United States as the final guarantor of its security, that helps make Japanese national identity ambiguous. For, in essence, Japan, the people and government, has had neither will nor interest to actively identify the country's place in the world by its brand of pacifism. It has been pacifism in one country obscured from the rest of the world, and more visible has been the logic of American military protection. (In this sense, prewar imperial Japan with its more proactive and clearly expansive foreign policy was a drastically less ambiguous place. Also, this veiled pacifism does little to dispel the universal suspicion of Japanese militarism.)

So deeply cherished and embedded in Japan is pacifism in one country, it is hard to imagine the contrasts in American and Japanese cultures to lead to conflict in the foreseeable future. At each turn, as has been the pattern during the last half century, the Japanese government should bend to avert conflict with the United States, the guarantor of Japan's politically isolationist pacifism. The United States does not trust other countries, but it is convinced that others can and should trust it. The United States has a preponderant military presence in East Asia supported by a network of bilateral security treaties, the American-Jap-

anese being key. The United States is not prepared to leave the region; it cannot trust the countries in the region to forge a workable order that is not detrimental to American interests. So the American-Japanese alliance is not about to erode soon. As the preceding discussion indicates, Japanese political culture is dependent on the security arrangement with the United States, thus will remain ambiguous as long as the United States continues to command preponderance in East Asian security affairs.

Within that framework, given the way regional integration proceeds through growing economic interdependence, Japan will continue to play a major part. In the long run, with economic interdependence and attendant cordiality in relations among states, the efficacy/need for American security guarantee for Japan and the region should diminish. Then, Japan's pacifism in one country will have a chance to expand beyond the border, and that will help clarify Japan's ambiguous identity.

ENDNOTES

1. Yosef Lapid, "Culture's Ship: Returns and Departures in International Relations Theory" in Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996) p. 4.

2. David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1998) p. 393.

3. Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p. 6.

4. Kenzaburo Oe, *Aimai na nihon no watashi* (Ambiguous Japan and myself) (Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 1995), p. 8.

5. Oe, *Aimai na nihon no watashi*, p. 8.

6. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1793–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 8.

7. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. By Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

8. Tetsuro Watsuji, "?oku nihon seishin-shi kenkyu" (Study of the Japanese spirit), in *Watsuji Tesssuro senshu*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1962), p. 281.

9. Shuichi Kato, "Nihon-jin to wa nanika" (What is a Japanese?), in *Nihon-jin to wa nanika* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976), p. 8.

10. Naoki Sakai, "Nihon shakai kagaku hoho josetsu" (Introduction to Japanese social science methodology), in Iwanami Koza. *Shakai kagaku no hoho*, vol. 3. *Nihon shakai kagaku no shiso* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993), pp. 1–37.

11. Oe, *Aimai na nihon no watashi*, p. 209.

12. Kenzaburo Oe and Ryosuke Yasui, "Tokubetsu raidan: shoshin kara nigerarezu ni kita," (Dialogue: unable to escape the beginning), *Sekat*, January 1995, p. 39.

13. Hiroshi Minami, *Nihon-jin ron: mesji eara konnichi made* (Theory of the Japanese: from Meiji to the present) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1994), p. 392.

14. Minami, *Nihon-jin ron*, p. 389.

15. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. 41.

16. Isiah Berlin, "Introduction," in Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett, abridged by Dwight Macdonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. xiii.

17. Masao Maruyama, Gendai seiji no shiso to kodo (Thought and behavior in contemporary politics) (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), p. 24.

18. Oe and Yasui, "Tokubetsu raiden," pp. 36, 42–43.

19. Ibid., p. 44.

20. Yukichi Fukazawa, *Bunmei-ron no gairyaku* (Outline of civilization), 47th printing (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1987), p. 25.

21. Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 97.

22. Kenzaburo Oe, Kujira no shimesu suru hi (The day the whale becomes extinct) (Tokyo: Kodansha bungei bunko, 1992), p. 201.