

Contemporary conservative thoughts in Japan: conservative views on morality, history, and social issues

Hiroshi Kaihara

Kami-shinozaki 3-15-3-#203, Edogawa 133-0054, Japan
Email: nrk07868@nifty.com

Abstract

This article discusses the political thoughts of conservatives. What makes their thoughts distinctive is their understanding of the state of the nation: the Japanese people are degenerating. Especially they worry about the youth. Horrendous juvenile crimes, bad manners, school bullying, and declining academic capabilities force them to paint Japan's future gloomily. Conservatives believe that the taproot of these social problems is a lack of morality: they have lost the will to tell what is right or wrong. They believe that morality is possible only when people embrace tradition and history. However, the Japanese cannot have pride in their history and country because of public discourse propagated by America's occupation policies and leftist ideologies. They also believe that public schools must concern not only on students' knowledge but also on their moral characters, such as the will to live. To raise

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pupils and students with moral characters, family must get involved along with schools.

1 Introduction

The rise of Japanese nationalism has been noticed and discussed by several scholars and journalists since 1990s (Matthews, 2003). Prime ministers' visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (Shibuichi, 2005), diplomatic disputes over history textbooks (Ienaga, 1993/94), and the comfort women issue (Park, 2002) are cases in which their influence and opinions came to be known. This article is to go beyond foreign policy issues and discuss more broadly about their political opinions on domestic issues. And this is a review article whose goal is to present their political opinions as accurately as possible. It does not aim at analyzing or putting their opinions in a context of an enormous amount of works on nationalism, conservatism, or other political ideologies. Still, it seems worthy of doing so since they are the most vocal advocates in political debates in contemporary Japan.

Japanese newspapers and magazines generally use a word *hoshu* [the most appropriate English word for it is 'conservative'] to describe nationalists. Therefore, the term 'conservative' will be used to describe them throughout this article. The word *hoshu* should be distinguished from a word *uyoku* [the most appropriate English word for it is 'right-wing']. Although the two words are interchangeably used in Japan, the word *uyoku* [right-wing] sometimes conjures up an image of people who use uncivilized measures (e.g. loud speakers) and actions (e.g. hitting, stubbing, and setting fire) to express political opinions. This is the reason why conservatives do not want to use the term right-wing to describe themselves. Also conservatives should not be associated with violence: they denounce it. And it is important not to insinuate conservatives with 'militarism', 'thought control', or something 'out and out extreme': none of the conservatives advocate suspending civil liberties.¹ Conservatives can be divided into two groups of people. One group is 'hard-core' conservatives. They are those who believe that the post-war political regime (e.g. Article 9 of Japan's Constitution which prohibits war power, a

1 One of the examples of this tendency is provided by Clemons (2006).

historical view of the Tokyo Trial, leftist views of pre-war and feudal Japan as backward and wrong, and permissive individualism) is wrong and should be overturned. The other group is 'moderate' conservatives. They are those who do not feel an urgent need to overturn the post-war regime entirely, but want to see more assertive foreign policy (which may include a revision of Article 9).

Conservatives are not monolithic in their thought. Since covering all strands of their thoughts is impossible, this review article is to focus on the most prolific opinion of leaders appearing in the major conservative monthly publications such as the *Seiron* (sound argument) and the *Shokun!* (Gentlemen!), or newspapers such as the *Sankei Shimbun*, the main hard-core conservatives' platform.² What makes conservatives' thoughts distinctive is their understanding of the state of the nation: the Japanese people are degenerating and the nation is deeply in crisis. Conservatives deplore politicians' lack of the will to pursue national interests in diplomacy, bureaucrats' corruptions, business managers' worship for money, and the people's lack of patriotism. Especially they worry about the youth. Horrendous juvenile crimes, bad manners, school bullying, and declining academic capabilities lead them to paint Japan's future gloomily. Conservatives believe that the taproot of these social problems is the lack of morality: they have lost the will to tell what is right or wrong, they have lost the will to pursue virtues, and they have lost the will to take on anything onerous. They believe that morality is possible only when the people embrace tradition and history. However, the Japanese cannot have pride in their history and country because of anti-Japanese public discourses propagated by the Tokyo Trial, General MacArthur's occupation policy, and leftists' ideologies. These discourses successfully spread an image of the Japanese as wrong people in their minds. Since the end of World War II, leftists have continued to occupy the higher echelon of major public institutions of education, journalism, and state bureaucracy. Moreover, conservatives think that leftists' political agenda of extreme individualism, such as free sex education and

2 The *Seiron* currently enjoys the third largest circulation in a class of monthly magazines, numbering about 80,000 per month (see <[http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%AD%A3%E8%AB%96_\(%E9%9B%91%E8%AA%8C\)](http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%AD%A3%E8%AB%96_(%E9%9B%91%E8%AA%8C))>, accessed on 26 November 2008). The *Shokun!* is the fourth largest, numbering 82,058 per month (see <<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%AB%B8%E5%90%9B!>>, accessed on 26 November 2008). The *Yomiuri Shimbun* is the main platform of moderate conservatives.

gender-free education, are permeating Japan's classrooms. They want to roll back these leftist agenda and go back to basics. And they believe that public schools must concern not only on students' knowledge but also on their moral characters, such as the will to live and challenge hardships. To raise such pupils and students, family must get involved along with schools. For conservatives, parents today seem to escape parenting their sons and daughters in the name of children's rights like self-determination. Strong families are necessary to provide children with moral and educational trainings. However, the current economic trends in Japan make conservatives worry that strong families are dissolving due to the government's wrong economic policies. They want the government to resist the market fundamentalism and globalization which America is vigorously advocating. This review article is to survey conservatives' thoughts on morality, history, education, family, and economy. After that, it will summarize with several comments on the limits and potentials on their thoughts.

2 Degeneration of Japanese people

Conservatives firmly believe that the Japanese people are degenerating. This acute sense of crisis separates them from not only the leftists but also the centrists, i.e. people who are not so politically opinionated. For conservatives, Japanese politicians only care about their re-election and have no interest in pursuing national interests in diplomacy. Bureaucrats concern only about their sectional interests, while business managers mindlessly seek after money. Observing these selfish leaders, the people have lost patriotism. Conservatives especially take issue of the youth probably because youngsters are the ones who will succeed the nation. Juvenile crimes, bad manners, school bullying, and poor academic capabilities are issues which they often like to discuss.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the number of juvenile murder, robbery, rape, and arson had been at the level of 1,000 per year between 1984 and 1996. But since 1997 the number surpassed the level of 2,000, although the years of 2004 and 2005 were below 2,000. There is a skeptical view on this statistical increase. For example, Hiroshi Kubo argues that the increased number of crimes is due to the change in the standards of counting crimes, not crimes themselves (Kubo, 2006). This might be true. But what appalls the people is the bizarre nature of juvenile crimes.

In May 1997, a 14-year-old student beheaded a pupil in Kobe City, and put the head in front of a school gate the next day. Two papers were attached to the head and provoked the police, saying, 'Let's play the ball'. Subsequently he was captured, and it was found out that he had also killed two other pupils in February of the same year and another in March in unspeakable manners. In July 2003, a 12-year-old male pupil kidnapped a 4-year-old kid in Nagasaki City. Then, he denuded him and dropped him from the top of a building. The kid died. In June 2004, an 11-year-old female pupil slashed the throat of another female pupil with a cutter in a classroom in Sasebo City. In May 2007, a high school student chopped his mother's head and went to a police station with the head in a bag. He only said, 'I wanted to kill whoever it is'.³ People are wondering why on earth these awful things happened. As they study these and other juvenile crimes, they come to learn that some juveniles know that even if they are caught, the police can do nothing because the law protects them. A hijack incident of May 2000 is the case in point. In that case, a 17-year-old youngster hijacked an express bus bound for Hiroshima. He stabbed a female passenger to death and injured two other female passengers in the bus. Before committing these criminal acts, he had written, 'If you are under the age of 14, you will not be arrested. You can do whatever you want. If you want to do evil things, do it now'.⁴ The people came to feel something had to be done, and expectedly the juvenile law was revised in November 2000 to lower the punishable age from 16 to 14.⁵ And it was again revised in May 2007 so that children aged between 12 and 14 can be sent to a reformatory.

Along with juvenile crimes, bad manners of pupils and students become a social problem. '*Gakkyu hokai*' (classroom disorder) is a term describing a situation in which pupils and students chat, scream, and move abruptly, and therefore teachers can no longer conduct lecture in a classroom. Some pupils even hit and throw things and knives onto teachers. Then, they dare teachers, saying, 'Can you hit me? You cannot. If you hit me, I will report to an education committee and you will be

3 *Yomiuri*, 16 May 2007, p. 1.

4 See at <<http://www.cc.matsuyama-u.ac.jp/~tamura/syonennhokaisei.htm>>, accessed on 3 December 2007.

5 The criminal law set the punishable age at 14. But the juvenile law raised it from 14 to 16 due to the consideration of juveniles' future. Thus, the 2001 revision eliminated the difference between the criminal law and the juvenile law on the punishable age.

fired'.⁶ The number of pupil violence against teachers rose by 38% in 2005, surpassing 2,000 cases a year.⁷ Why don't teachers remove such troublesome pupils from classrooms? They cannot because the 1948 directive of the Ministry of Education prohibited removing noisy students from classrooms.⁸ And this directive has been generally implemented and supported by an opinion that pupils have a right to learn. Removing them from a classroom is to deprive them of that right.⁹ And it is a punishment and thus should be prohibited by that right. There seems to be great confusions and disagreements among teachers on what exactly human rights and punishment mean. The disagreements are so large that they cannot take effective measures to cope with class disorder. Parents are no help for teachers. Teachers should blame themselves for the lack of parents' support for them. Some of them are deeply incompetent and corrupt. But there are some parents who make unreasonable claims against teachers. For example, a teacher lets a junior high school student of low academic capabilities to resolve questions of the elementary school level. Then, the student's parent complained, saying, 'My child's pride is hurt'. In another case, a kid rode a bike and hit an elderly. The kid's parent blamed a school, saying 'it is a fault of the school guidance on bike'.¹⁰ Today, teachers worry about being sued from students. One-third of public school teachers in Tokyo buy lawsuit insurance.¹¹

It is only natural that such school environment as class disorder breeds school bullying. School bullying became a social problem in 2006. When Shinzo Abe succeeded Junichiro Koizumi as Prime Minister in September 2006, he, a hope for conservatives, immediately tackled education issues and set up *Kyoiku Saisei Kaigi* [Education Regeneration

6 *Yomiuri*, 14 September 2006, p. 36.

7 *Yomiuri*, 14 September 2006, p. 1. By 'pupils', I mean elementary school students. The number of violent cases in junior high schools was 23,115 in 2005, while that in high schools 5,150.

8 *Yomiuri*, 18 January 2007, p. 2. After World War II ended, there were many teachers who used to be a soldier. The directive seemed aimed at preventing them from letting latecomers stand in a corridor, prohibiting the use of bathroom, or removing noisy students from classroom as punishments.

9 *Yomiuri*, 25 January 2007, p. 1.

10 *Yomiuri*, 18 June 2007, p. 1.

11 *Yomiuri*, 24 July 2007, p. 19.

Council] in his cabinet. To know more accurately the real situation of school bullying, the government changed the definition of bullying from ‘cases where children are attacked one-sidedly and continually and suffer from severe pains’ to ‘cases where children feel being bullied’. Then, the total number of bullying suddenly jumped from 20,143 in the school year of 2005 to 124,898 in that of 2006, according to a survey of the Ministry of Education:¹² 60,897 cases were reported from elementary schools, 51,310 from junior high schools, and 12,307 from high schools. The number of suicide due to bullying had been zero or one during school years (from April to March) between 1997 and 2005. But according to the new definition, five cases were reported from junior high schools and one from high school in the school year of 2006. Other countries cope with school bullying with various measures. Americans prohibit attendance immediately, Britons use a monetary penalty of £1,000, while Koreans let the police take active roles.¹³ The Japanese seem to follow the American way. The school education law allows school authorities to prohibit students who are delinquent and hinder other students’ study from attending school. But currently, the usage of this provision requires violent acts to prohibit students’ attendance.¹⁴ Policy-makers want to apply this provision in cases where there is no violence acts but clear sign of bullying.

The result of class disorder and school bullying is the decline of academic capabilities of pupils and students. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s world-wide tests on math, Japanese students lowered their score from top to the 10th between 2000 and 2006. Their ranking on reading comprehension dropped from 8th to 15th during the same period. Similarly, their science score dropped from 2nd to 6th.¹⁵ Conservatives have no doubt that the current education policy called ‘*yutori kyoiku*’ (relax education) is the cause of these declines. They propose to go back to basics such as reading, writing, and calculation. To rebuff conservatives’ critiques, defenders of relax education come up with different arguments. Keitaro

12 *Yomiuri*, 16 November 2007, p. 1.

13 *Yomiuri*, 12 December 2006, p. 9.

14 *Yomiuri*, 25 November 2006, Evening edition, p. 1.

15 *Yomiuri*, 5 December 2007, p. 1. The OECD tests 400,000 of 15-year old students in 57 countries and regions every three years.

Kamata, education consultant, says, 'it is not exact to say that Japan's academic capabilities have dropped. Rather, it is that other countries have surpassed Japan'.¹⁶ What? What does he want to say? Kamata asked the OECD, 'what kind of children's capabilities is the OECD trying to test?' The OECD answers, 'we want to test children's capabilities to look for questions and to answer them'. Then, Kamata concludes that the current education which focusses on knowledge accumulation does not work and that education should focus on the power to think. Similarly, Kazuhiro Fujiwara, school master of a junior high school in the Sugunami ward, said, 'it is anachronistic to try to revive the old educational views which focus on reading, writing, and calculations'.¹⁷ Rather, he proposes to emphasize on critical thinking. The power to think critically is important. But how can students develop such capabilities? Can they do that without spending enough time on reading, writing, and calculation? Under the relax education policy, class hours for four major subjects during six years of elementary school dropped from 3,452 to 2,941 h (Yagi, 2005). Along with this drastic reduction, class disorder deprives pupils of quiet environment for study. Conservatives are wondering if Japanese students can be properly trained for their future under such an environment. And they worry about the future of Japan when these students grow up.

3 Morality

The degeneration of the Japanese people, conservatives firmly believe, has been caused by the lack of morality. Today talking about morality becomes a taboo in Japan. It is entirely up to individuals to decide what is right or wrong. Teachers do not talk about, let alone teach, virtuous ways of life. Individual autonomy and independence is the highest goal in education. They provide students with useful information, and let them to choose. They encourage students who are willing to learn, but do not take on those who are not willing (Yoshikawa, 2006). As they grow up, the only moral standard that they can embrace is that 'you can do whatever you want unless you bother others'. That is the only morality that public schools can teach to students. It sounds like J.S. Mill's

16 *Yomiuri*, 5 December 2007, p. 3.

17 *Yomiuri*, 5 December 2007, p. 3.

principle of public intervention. In *Liberty*, he said that society can intervene in personal matters only when a person's action interferes with others. An idea that the state can or should be involved in building the moral characters of individuals is a taboo, according to Japanese leftists. The state is a construction based on contract: it is supposed to prepare material conditions in which individuals can develop their personality fully and freely. Conservatives argue that we cannot have moral principles under such free-floating and permissive environment. For example, high school girls' prostitutions became a social problem in the 1990s. But parents cannot answer a question why they cannot sell their sex for money. Girls get money, adults who buy them are satisfied, and nobody hurts. Government cannot do anything about this, according to Mill's formulation (Nishibe, 2000). And if parents cannot answer this question, what else can they tell children about morality? If they do not have any moral stories to tell to their children, can they have for themselves?

The only way for the Japanese to revive morality is to embrace tradition and history. To this end, Hidetsugu Yagi, professor of Takasaki University of Economy, propagates *tatejiku no shiso* [idea of vertical axis]. We succeed the nation from our ancestors, and have to hand it down to our posterity; we are living with our ancestors, and have responsibilities for our children and grandchildren. His idea comes from Edmund Burke's moral principle, 'always behave as if in front of consecrated ancestors' (Yagi, 2005, p. 376). According to this thought, when asked why high school girls' prostitutions are wrong, conservatives would answer, 'Think your children and grandchildren. You have responsibility for your posterity' (Nishibe, 2000, pp. 597–598). If we can have this sense of vertical axis and responsibilities, we will be able to study our history and country genuinely. What did our ancestors think? What were their predicaments? How did they overcome them? By answering these questions, we will be able to tell what is right, what is important, and what to succeed and hand over. If we do not know what to hand over, probably we cannot tell our children about morality. Moreover, conservatives believe that the state plays a great role in building the people's moral characters. The state is a three-generation enterprise; it is not a contract among atomistic, ahistoric individuals to satisfy their self-interests. The state is responsible for ensuring that the essential traditions of its people are handed over from one generation to another (Nishibe, 2000, p. 381). Thus, the state has to care about the people's morality and

religiosity.¹⁸ And it has to care about the people's patriotism so that young generations can have pride in their country and history. People are not likely to engage in such a three-generation enterprise without pride.

4 History

For conservatives, pride in their own country is crucial for morality. But they deplore that the Japanese do not have pride in their country. To their chagrin, only 10% of young Japanese are ready to fight for their country, while 70 to 90 are so in foreign countries (Nishibe, 2000, p. 458). Why do the Japanese despise their country? Conservatives consider the Tokyo Trial, General MacArthur's War Guilt Information Program, and leftist ideologues to be main culprits. According to them, these culprits successfully brainwashed the Japanese to think that all of Japan's past was wrong and backward. They believe that the Japanese cannot revive spiritually without overcoming the public discourse propagated by the culprits.

The first poison which took the backbone out of the Japanese was the Tokyo Trial. The trial found that Japan was an aggressor, an evil country which conspired to conquer the world. Moderate conservatives such as the former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi accept this view. But for hard-core conservatives, this finding is preposterous; Japan fought for her independence and security. The trial did not recognize communist threats that Japan had to face. But General MacArthur realized this threat when he had to fight against communists in the Korean peninsula. After having been put in Japanese shoes, he testified before a congressional committee of 3 May 1951 that Japan's wars were defensive (Watanabe *et al.*, 2001). Also the trial spread evil images of the Japanese by pointing out the colonization of Korea, the setting up of the Manchu government, invasion of southeastern Asian countries, and massive killings of Asian people. But conservatives argue that colonialism was not Japan-specific: every Western country colonized Asian countries. And if the Manchu government was a puppet for Japan, Chiang kai-shek's government in China was a puppet for Anglo-Americans. Moreover, if Japan was an invader of southeastern Asian countries, so were the UK,

18 Nishibe (2000, p. 386). By 'religiosity', he seems to mean the people's respect for some kind of sacred entity, say, souls of deceased soldiers who fought for the nation.

France, the USA, and the Dutch, since they invaded the region again after having defeated the Japanese there. In fact, conservatives are proud that Japanese soldiers helped or trained independence fighters in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Burma. Horrible pictures of massive killings of Asian people are reprinted and circulated repeatedly in history textbooks, magazines, and the Internet everywhere to prove the evilness of the Japanese. Without doubting the integrity of these pictures, most Japanese get shocked and repentant. But conservatives doubt the pictures and start to examine them. And they argued that these pictures are war propaganda. Shudo Higashinakano of Asia University went to the Nationalist Party History Library, Taipei, and found a top secret document which summarizes the Chinese Nationalist Party's war propaganda activities between 1938 and January 1941 (Higashinakano, 2006). The document shows that the Chinese tried to turn world opinions against the Japanese. It shows that they targeted on foreign journalists such as Archibald Steele of the *Chicago Daily News* and Tillman Durbin of the *New York Times*. Conservatives believe that this top secret and other circumstantial evidences lead to a conclusion that the Nanking massacre, the star evidence of Japanese brutality, is war propaganda. Moreover, Higashinakano and his colleagues went on to examine 143 pictures which have been used to prove the massacre (Higashinakano *et al.*, 2005). After three years of work, they have found many inconsistencies. For example, the direction of one person's shadow doesn't run in the same direction as another shadow in the same picture.¹⁹ Also conservatives argue that the Chinese who were killed by Japanese soldiers were not civilian; they were soldiers in private clothes and thus out of the protection of the Geneva conventions on war (Higashinakano, 2006, pp. 169–201). Although some conservatives think that summary execution of unlawful combatants is something to blame, hard-core conservatives think that there is nothing wrong about it under the international laws of war in effect at the time of the incident. All in all, many conservatives think that the historical view of the Tokyo Trial is wrong and has to be denied (Watanabe, 2007).

19 Higashinakano *et al.* (2005, p. 86). Also another inconsistency is the length of shadow. In winter, when the Nanking incident happened in December 1937, the shadow of a person must be long. But a man slashing a Chinese head, claimed as Japanese, has a short shadow (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

The second poison which eviscerated the Japanese was General MacArthur's War Guilt Information Program. This program was aimed at inoculating the Japanese with 'consciousness regarding the sin of the Japanese state and the origin of the sin' (Fujioka, 1997). He ordered newspapers to carry a series of articles about the Pacific War which were based on the historical view of the Tokyo Trial. He banned books inconvenient to this program, such as Helen Mears's *Mirror for Americans: JAPAN*. When he found some objectionable sentences in a book, MacArthur ordered the book's author to rewrite them. There was no mark remained which suggested his censorship. Moreover, he confiscated about 7,000 books. Most of them are serious academic books such as Kenichi Nakajima's *Biruma no Shizen to Minzoku [Nature and People in Burma]* (Kusaka, 2006). Since he was trying to convince the Japanese that they were an irrational people enough to start a war against such a powerful country like the USA, the existence of these books of high academic quality ran counter to his program. Moral trainings called *Shushin* were prohibited in elementary schools because MacArthur thought they bred fanaticism. And he ridded history textbooks of elements which he thought bred the worship of the emperor.

The Tokyo Trial and MacArthur's program may be effective to transform Japanese mentality. But they are something which happened 60 years ago. After MacArthur had gone, the Japanese were free to undo what he did. It is not a strong argument to attribute the current state of Japanese mind to the American occupation policies. Then, conservatives direct their animus to leftists, which is the third poison to enervate the Japanese. After World War II, leftists, aided by Americans, occupied the highest echelon of major public institutions of academism, journalism, and state bureaucracy. With the institutional power, conservatives assert, they ingrained their leftist ideologies in pupils and students. The pupils and students grew up, and they repeated the same to subsequent generations of pupils and students. Leftists were communists and socialists, and received directives from the Communist International. Their mentalities and arguments were framed by its directives. Especially conservatives take issues of the directives of April 1932. The directives characterize the Japanese state and society as robber, imperialist, militarist, and feudalist. Although the Communist International had constant communications with communist organizations in foreign countries, it was very rare to demonize the state and society of a particular country. Moreover, it gave

detail directives only to Japan and Latin America. In the case of the latter the directive was issued only once, while in the former at least 15 directives were issued (Tanizawa, 1996). Conservatives assume that Stalin was so hateful of Japan because it defeated Russia in 1904. This defeat was unbearable for him because even Napoleon and Hitler couldn't beat Russia. He was so angry that he forced more than 570,000 Japanese soldiers to work in Siberia after World War II., of which more than 50,000 died. But what angered conservatives is not so much Stalin's hatred as leftists' worship of Stalin and their anti-Japanese discourses.

According to Eiichi Tanizawa, leftists consider the state as a violent mechanism to oppress the people, although they receive welfare benefits from the state as a matter of course. They don't believe that Japan needs defense because peace is there unless it invades foreign countries. They want to abolish the institution of emperor because it is the taproot of the feudalistic mentality of the Japanese. Capitalism is exploitative and thus should be replaced by socialism. They always paint Japanese history negatively, something to be denied. Everything horrible that happened to Japan, say atomic bombs and forced labor in Siberia, must not be complained of because Japan was wrong. No matter what, Japan should continue to apologize to Asian peoples. Finally, Tanizawa argues that leftists never reflect on their past arguments (Tanizawa, 1995). They worshiped Stalin, Mao, Kim Il-sung, and communist states. For example, Kenzaburo Ohe, the 1994 winner of a Nobel Prize on literature, worshiped Mao's China. The dream of communist utopia collapsed when the Soviets bulldozed in Prague in spring 1968 (Hara, 1981), and horrors of Mao's Cultural Revolution started to be reported. But none of the leftists made a critical self-revaluation. Instead, they were determined to lead the public by finding another topic. That is apology diplomacy (Tanizawa, 1995, p. 48). It is Japanese leftists who have been providing Koreans and the Chinese with information with which they can denounce Japan on issues such as history textbook, the Nanking incident, and comfort women. As a result, conservative deplore, the image of the Japanese as wrong people takes root in their minds. There is no wonder why the Japanese have no pride in their history and country.

5 Education

According to conservatives, leftists were able to distort Japanese history because they captured educational institutions in Japan. Leftist teachers

formed a labor union called *Nikkyoso* [Teachers' Union]. As of June 2006, it had more than 300,000 members, and half of them were teachers of elementary, junior high, and high schools. Hisahiko Okazaki observes that it became influential among public school teachers since the 1950s, was the most active for 15 years, and waned by the end of 1960s (Watanabe and Okazaki, 1997). After the leftists' political struggles against the Japan–US security treaty ended in 1970, leftists seemed to lose their ideas and power. But those leftists who participated in the 1970 political struggle became teachers or journalists, and started their ideological struggle anew.²⁰ For example, Motoyuki Ono was the top bureaucrat of the Ministry of Education in 2001. He said in the *Mainichi Shimbun* [News] of 20 August 2001, 'I was engaged in violent student activities in a university. I believed that violence was necessary to defeat the power, and participated in demonstrations. But if you really want to change the world, you have to "get inside the power". So I became a public servant'. Yagi mentions to Patrick J. Buchanan, who argued that Marxists, after having given up violent revolution, entered the establishment (Yagi, 2005, p. 66). He worries that the similar things are happening in Japan too.

Conservatives are critical of leftist education policy. Leftists think that Japanese education is focussed on too much memorization. Then, they advocate *sogo gakushu* [comprehensive study class] to develop pupils' creativity and initiative. It is based on the core curriculum that leftist Americans advocated. In it, students are asked, 'Why are there many bakeries around here?' And students are supposed to think critically and answer it. In the process, students are supposed to learn national language, math, science, and other traditional subjects. But, conservatives doubt whether what students really do is to photocopy books and other materials. If an assignment is given to a team, some lazy students are only looking at other students. Conservatives think that it is preposterous to urge pupils to do critical works when they have not mastered basics yet. Moreover, they worry that comprehensive study class is abused. In an elementary school in Mie prefecture, six-grade pupils had a comprehensive study class whose theme was '*Senso no Gakushu kara Sei Kyoiku e* [From the study on war to sex education]'. In the class, they learned Japan's colonization of Korea, wars in China, and the comfort

20 *Yomiuri*, 24 June 2007, p. 1.

women issue. Then, they wrote essays on the subjects. One pupil wrote, ‘sex is something lovers do. What an awful thing did [Japanese soldiers]²¹ do to innocent girls? [Their] souls are corrupt. It is evil to rape a six-grade girl. This is not a matter of money. Rather, the current Japanese should apologize to the Korean people’ (Yagi, 2005, pp. 84–85). Although conservatives denied the Japanese military’s kidnapping of girls, the goal of the class was clearly to inculcate a sense of guilt in Japanese pupils. The Teachers’ Union picked this class up and propagated it as the model of comprehensive study class.

Another leftist education policy which shocked conservatives is sex and gender-free education. In May 2003, a wife of Yagi participated in their eldest son’s class. She was shocked to see her son and other students forced to repeat, ‘sex, sex, sex!’ (Yagi, 2005). On a blackboard was a drawing of a naked man and woman embracing each other. Some pupils were embarrassed and looked down. Then, the teacher forced them to look at the drawing, lectured that ‘sex feels good’, and explained that there are not only a combination of a man and a woman but also a combination of a man and another man, or a woman and another woman. She felt her son was being tortured in front of her. More grotesque materials about sex education are used in classrooms. It was a matter, of course, that such sex education became a public concern. In July 2003, a Lower House panel took issue of it. Prime Minister Koizumi was surprised, saying that ‘is it necessary to teach this kind of things to pupils? Is it right to go this far? It is too far, isn’t it?’ Behind this extreme sex education is Naohide Yamamoto, founder of 3,000-member organization called *Ningen to Sei Kenkyu Kyoiku Kyogikai* [Research and Education Council on Humans and Sex]. He argues that a utopia that human beings should seek in the twenty-first century is the realization of ‘eros commune’. It is a commune in which there is no regulation on sex and morality: a complete self-determination on sex is realized. Yamamoto admires Wilhelm Reich of *The Sexual Revolution*. Yagi was surprised to find what is written in Reich’s book. Reich believes that the family is the source of conservative ideology, and propagates free sex to destroy the family (Yagi, 2005, p. 145).

For conservatives, leftist education policies are too individualistic, anti-traditional, anti-statist, unpatriotic, and scornful of basics. They

21 I insert [Japanese soldiers] and [their] to make the sentences understandable.

worry that such education policies will degrade Japanese students and destroy the nation. Then, what are conservative education policies? They emphasize on basics, virtues, and the will. Their emphasis on basics is similar to that of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Thatcher deplored in her memoir that so many students graduated without mastering basics. Similarly, Reagan thought that America was in crisis and that education was a key to revive the nation. And he created an 18-member council on education and let them to find facts on students' academic capabilities. The council report found low basic skills and gave some recommendations to improve them. Japanese conservatives want to reverse the relax education policy which drastically reduces class hours, and want students to spend more time on the Japanese. Another conservative initiative on education is to revive pre-war education on virtues, which General MacArthur abolished after the war. Conservatives believe that the fundamental problem of today's students is the lack of the will to live and challenge hardships. They do not have the will to draw a healthy and youthful plan for the future. Their eyes are cloudy and their backbones are bent; they look already old. Kimindo Kusaka, who was born in 1910 and thus knows the pre-war education, opines that it emphasized knowledge, emotion, and the will harmoniously, while the post-war education ignored the will.²² Kanji Nishio, a literature professor of the University of Electro-Communication, argues that an education which overly emphasizes knowledge will enervate the power of the soul. He, citing Alan Bloom, believes that students, before believing anything, have already learned how to doubt faith. Such students may be smart, but they have already lost a passion to live (Nishio, 1993). Similarly, Susumu Nishibe argues that the power to learn depends on a strong will. Fully prepared educational facilities will not work for vigor-less students (Nishibe, 2000, pp. 421–422). To nurture the will to live, conservatives advocates the education on virtue. Nishibe advocates teaching virtues through the reading of classics. Yagi advocates the revival of the pre-war moral teachings of Shusin. Leftists liken Shusin with the pre-war militaristic fanaticism, but a textbook for moral trainings lists up interesting stories to teach morality. For example, there is a story about the mother of General Nogi who won the deadly land battle against Russia in 1904. If there was any food which the general could not eat, she made it every

22 By 'emotion', he means poems, music, and other arts (Kusaka, 2004).

meal. All members of his family had to eat it, and thus he felt pressure and got used to it (Yagi, 2005, pp. 218–219). Yagi likens Shushin with William J. Bennett's *The Book of Virtue for Young People* or Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*. If Shushi cannot help reminding the military, it may be rearranged in a modern style. Hiroyuki Yoshiie, who dropped out of a school, but became a teacher and then an Upper House member in 2006, advocates the recital of virtues for children. He says, 'Either the words of Yukichi Fukuzawa or those of Kenji Miyazawa can be used.²³ Everyone recites them together. Common goals and understandings are necessary. Personality is all right, but no organization²⁴ without common foundation'.²⁵ Teruyuki Hirota, a professor of Nihon University, opposes bringing morality back to classrooms since pupils who have personal problems will simply pass moral class.²⁶ That may be so. Then, what is leftist's solution? Hirota urges more fund for schools. Will more money work for students who lack motivations to study? Conservatives are skeptical about that, guessing from the experience of Tony Blair who spent more money on education but did not achieve a remarkable success.²⁷ They believe bringing morality back to classroom is worthy of trying.

6 Family

Conservatives believe that the dissolving of family is another cause of social problems relating to pupils and students. Parents do not teach their children what is wrong or what is right: 65% of the respondents to a public survey think that parents do not teach rules in society;²⁸ nor do they prepare a family environment where children can read and study. For conservatives, family functions seem to deteriorate. Yagi succinctly summarizes their faith in the institution of family, saying that 'It is at family that culture is conveyed over generations; it is a place where the

23 Fukuzawa was an educator (1835–1901) and Miyazawa was a poet (1896–1933).

24 He means a classroom by the word 'organization'.

25 *Yomiuri*, 8 January 2007, p. 1.

26 *Yomiuri*, 24 July 2007, p. 15.

27 When Blair announced his resignation in May 2007, Robert Thomson of the *Times* opined that Blair's increase of money for education and health failed to satisfy the public and ended up with strengthening vested interests, quoted by *Yomiuri*, 11 May 2007, p. 9.

28 *Yomiuri*, 19 November 2006, p. 1.

next generation of the people is raised. If family functions improperly, crimes rise and social order declines' (Yagi, 2005, p. 175). Nishibe argues that family has linguistic, political, economic, and socializing functions (Nishibe, 2000, pp. 613–615). Children acquire linguistic skills through their parents (linguistic function). Family makes various decisions, from such mundane issues as family trip to more serious ones such as inheritance, family business, or children's careers (political function). Family provides material bases so that family members can learn and play an active role in society (economic function). And family deals with various troubles like quarrels between a wife and a husband, emotional conflicts between parents and children, or troubles between family members and their schoolmates and co-workers (socializing function). Children learn through these family functions, and will become a wholesome adult. He believes that a child is likely to become delinquent if he or she does not experience these functions. And if family is dissolving, children are unlikely to experience them. Public school authorities of Takeo City in Saga observe that behind school bullying are poverty and abuse in family.²⁹

What leftists are doing is dissolving this venerable institution of family, according to conservatives. Individual rights or children's rights are all right, but parents are responsible for scolding their children when they go wrong. Japan ratified a treat of children's rights in 1994. Children's self-determination became a buzz word since then. A proponent of the treat argues that what parents should do is to inform their children of their welfare, let them choose to satisfy their needs, and help them to be independent. But conservatives think that children are likely to make immature decisions; parents must be parenting. Especially they deplore that even though mothers know their daughters selling sex for money, they pretend not to know and talk merrily in the kitchen (Sengoku, 2001). Mothers do not have courage to scold daughters; they justify not scolding in the name of children's right of self-determination. Conservatives wonder whether the Japanese abuse such respectable ideas as privacy or self-determination, so as to avoid heart-wrenching engagements with their delinquent children. They believe leftists' emphasis on self-determination is misplaced.

Moreover, leftists advocate the use of separate last name by husband and wife, the end of tax exemption for housewife, and the end of the

29 *Yomiuri*, 10 May 2007, p. 15.

difference in inheritance between a legitimate child and an out-of-wed child.³⁰ They believe that all these measures are intended to treat each individual as equal. Each husband and wife should be able to have whatever name he or she wants. Tax exemption should be equal whether a wife works outside or not. It is unfair to punish an out-of-wed child since illegitimacy is not the child's fault. The leftist arguments seem good, intending equality for all. But conservatives worry that these measures will dissolve the institution of family. Is child happy when the child has a different name from the mother's or the father's? Does the end of the tax exemption accord with the majority's policy preference? According to the 2000 family survey of National Institute of Social Security Research, a research institution of the Ministry of Welfare and Labor, 90% of the respondents wanted to raise their children by themselves. Ending the tax exemption will defeat the majority's policy preference. Will wives be happy to see an illegitimate child having the equal share with their legitimate child? It is said that female Diet members supported the current difference in inheritance due to the worries that the practice of concubines would revive and the status of wife would be threatened if there was no difference between legitimate and illegitimate children (Yagi, 2005, p. 177).

For conservatives, some leftists seem to really want to dissolve the institution of family. For example, constitutionalist Yoichi Higuchi is the case in point. Article 24 of the Japanese Constitution articulates that laws regarding family matters should be based on individual dignity and equality of both sexes. He interprets this provision as aimed at dissolving family. And he praises the progressive nature of the constitution that has such a clause (Higuchi, 1997). To repel leftist attacks on family, Yagi advocates revising the constitution to include a clause protecting the institution of family (Yagi, 2005, p. 157). Italians, Germans, the Spanish, and other peoples have such a clause. In fact, when the draft of the current constitution was deliberated in 1946, criminal law scholar Eiichi Makino advocated the family protection clause, believing that the bonds of family would be weakened as Japanese society was industrialized.³¹ But Diet members rejected the proposal believing that Japanese families

30 According to Article 900, Section 4, of the civil law, an out-of-wed child can receive half of the inheritance that a legitimate child receives.

31 Quoted by Yagi (2005, p. 159).

were solid. For conservatives, the dissolving of family is obvious by now, and it is high time the constitution included the family clause.

7 Economy

Conservatives feel that Japanese families are dissolving and recent economic trends seem to aggravate that. Strong families are impossible without stable and rich bread-winners. What the Japanese government is doing seems to decrease the number of such bread-winners. Masahiko Fujiwara of Ochanomizu University denounces Junichiro Koizumi's neo-classical economic reforms. He says, 'Abolish all regulations, and fight fairly. And winners can take all. That is the American way. But for Japanese eyes, a first-grade pupil and a six-grade pupil cannot fight fairly. That is cowardice, and against the essence of *samurai* spirit called "*sokuin no jo* [respect or compassion for losers]". Tears, compassion and sympathy for the weak and losers. These are conservatism'.³²

Not all conservatives are against market competition or deregulation. One of vocal conservative supporters of economic reforms is Kimindo Kusaka.³³ But generally conservatives are against neoclassical economic reforms and globalization. For conservatives, American-led globalization and economic reforms are destroying Japanese ways of economic affairs. For example, Japanese ways of corporate management had three distinctive features: corporate trade union, life-time employment, and seniority in wage and promotion.³⁴ It has been said that these are the cause of Japan's post-war economic growth. But Nishio deplores that extreme market competition has destroyed life-time employment and consequently workers' loyalty to company.³⁵ Although not all workers enjoyed life-time employment even during the high time of Japanese ways of corporate management, it is true that companies refrained from hiring full-time workers during the depression of the 1990s. Instead, they used part-timers and dispatched workers because these labors were much cheaper than full-time workers. As a result, 30% of men and 40% of women of their late twenties are not able to find full-time employment

32 *Yomiuri*, 22 November 2006, p. 4.

33 See his multiple books: Kusaka (1989a), Kusaka. (1994), Kusaka (1997).

34 Kimindo Kusaka says that James C. Abegglen was the earliest to make these arguments. Kusaka (1989b).

35 *Yomiuri*, 24 November 2006, p. 4.

(Yagi, 2005, p. 382). Moreover, although psychological factors seem more salient than economic reforms, the issue of NEET (the not-in-education, employment, or training) became a social problem. The Ministry of Welfare and Labor estimated 620,000 NEETs in 2006. Unstable and poor bread-winners are not likely to marry, let alone have a family. The ministry surveyed a relationship between employment types and marriage. The survey assumed the number of full-time workers married and aged between 20 and 34 was 100, and then found that the number for part-time workers of the same age cohort was about 50.³⁶

Then, what are conservative solutions of the economic woes? Yagi advocates that schools help pupils and students to pay attention to their future career (Yagi, 2005, p. 392–396). Haven't public school been already doing that? What else? Conservatives have many words to criticize the government's economic policies but few words to solve economic woes. But this does not make the government or leftists any better on economic issues; they do not have any good policies, either. After the 2007 Upper House, which gave a defeat to the ruling parties, what the government has done is to placate angry constituents whose vested interests were threatened by Koizumi's cuts of public works.³⁷ For example, the government pledges new subsidies to inefficient small farmers.³⁸ The subsidies will cost 110 billion yen. To make money, the government does not raise tax but issues bonds. This means that the government has increased the world's largest public debt further for future generations to pay. On economic issues, the government seems to be irresponsible. Leftists are not doing any better. Zenjiro Ono of the University of Osaka advocates more public works because public works are better than no work for willing and able workers (Ono, 2006). Naohiko Jinno of the University of Tokyo and Taro Miyamoto of the University of Hokkaido advocate more welfare programs such as paid holidays for child-care or re-education (Jinno and Miyamoto, 2006). Is a return to another big government a solution? What kind of new administrative measures do they conceive to cope with almost endless cases of corruptions and wastes of public money? Wasn't one of the main factors which had

36 *Yomiuri*, 8 August 2006, Evening edition, p. 1.

37 See my article 'Japan's Political Economy and Koizumi's Structural Reform', available at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/24008gn324088352>.

38 *Yomiuri*, 18 December 2007, p. 9.

supported Koizumi's economic reforms the people's anger against political corruptions which siphoned off tax money under the name of public works and welfare programs? On economic issues, leftists seem to have a short memory. All in all, all camps, conservatives, the government, and leftists, do not seem to have any good economic policy.

8 Conclusion: limits and potentials of conservative thoughts

This review article surveyed contemporary conservative thoughts in Japan. Instead of trying to analyze, it aimed at presenting their opinions accurately. In summary, conservatives think that the Japanese people are degenerating because they have forgotten morality. Only way to revive their morality is to have pride in their own country and history. To do so, the Japanese historical view which was propagated by the Tokyo Trial, General MacArthur's War Guilt Information Program, and leftist ideologues must be overturned. Another major tool to revive morality is a reform of education. It must spend more time on basics, not on sex and gender-free education. No matter how much information students accumulate in their mind, it is of no use as long as their heart is empty. Thus, not only basics but moral trainings should be a concern of public education. To support children, family must be solid. Parents must not evade parenting in the name of children's rights such as self-determination. To provide stable and rich bread-winners to families, Japanese economy must not follow America's economic policies such as market fundamentalism and globalization.

Conservative political views presented in this review article seem as reasonably consistent as those of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. However, their dreadful understanding of the state of the nation, i.e. the Japanese people are degenerating, might alienate Japanese centrists. All the anecdotes and statistics that conservatives use and are referred to in this article are true. But how to evaluate them in the context of the current state of the nation is more complex. For example, Naoyuki Agawa of Keio University thinks that Japan is not bad and that the people should be proud of their nation as it is.³⁹ All world-wide statistics show that Japan is indeed one of the safest, richest,

39 *Yomiuri*, 6 January 2007, p. 4.

and rule-of-law nations. According to an *Asahi Shimbun* [News] poll of December 2006, 94% of respondents said that they were happy to be born in Japan. And 78% of them answered that they were patriot greatly or partly.⁴⁰ Shocking juvenile crimes, class disorder, school bullying, and poor academic performance are all real, but the people seem to be satisfied with the current Japan.

Just as trying to move mountains, conservatives have a hard time in convincing centrists to embrace their assertions. Centrists are not ready to abandon the *status quo* to remedy specific social ills. The cost–benefit analysis seems to tell them to tolerate the ills to maintain the *status quo* that gives them the unprecedented level of liberty, safety, and affluence. Unfortunately, conservatives’ public opinions conjure up among them an image of war and a fear of disruption of economic relations with the USA and Asian countries. And leftists never refrain from playing up on it. This is another reason why centrists do not go along with conservatives. Moreover, centrists wonder, ‘what is the tradition?’ or ‘should all traditions be maintained?’ For example, some conservatives seem to think the Japanese ways of economic management are Japanese tradition. But Kimindo Kusaka points out that workers’ loyalty to company is not a Japanese tradition: it was created by the pre-war military authorities (Kusaka, 2006, pp. 42–51). Before the 1930s, business managers treated workers like thieves; they were body-checked when they got in and out of factories. And they were paid weekly because it was thought that if they had been paid monthly, they would use it in one day. Managers did not see workers as a rational being that was able to draw a long-term plan and to behave accordingly. Being treated as such, workers had no reason to be loyal to their company. The military worried that such a bad relationship between managers and workers will have a negative effect on Japan’s industrial productivity. Then, they started to argue that each of the Japanese was a child of the emperor, and ordered business managers to treat workers as regular workers and to pay them monthly. Kusaka argued that this reform had a great effect. Workers cheered, increased self-esteem, and worked hard for their company. Only business managers and politicians who received political funds from companies were unhappy with this reform. As the depression of the 1990s forced companies to treat workers as part-timer, a future business–labor relationship

40 Quoted in an article titled ‘Seeking Right Nationalism’, *Yomiuri*, 14 February 2007, p. 19.

can be like that before the 1930s. This anecdote reminds us that what is called tradition or morality is quite transient. If so, the people may not think that all traditions should be maintained all the time.

A collapse of the Abe administration in September 2007 might give another evidence for conservatives' difficult ideological battle in Japan. Some attributed his failure to centrists' rejection of stark discourses of conservatives (Hosaka, 2007). Yagi admitted that conservatives are still a minority in the current Japanese political thoughts, and pledged a comeback (Yagi, 2007). Indeed, conservatives are not the mainstream of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Although it is a defeat for conservatives, Abe's demise is far from endorsing leftists' thoughts of internationalist, permissive, and welfarist liberalism. Conservatives' emphasis on morality, family, and community will have some appeal. Local governments start to realize the importance of family and community. For example, the Edogawa ward relies on *hoiku mama* [child-care mothers] as one pillar of its population policy. They are middle- or old-aged people who have already finished the upbringing of their own children and are commissioned by the ward to take care of newly born babies in their own house. The reason why they get involved in the ward's population policy is that its public kinder gardens are not to receive newly born babies. The ward wants parents to raise their baby at least for one year by themselves. If parents cannot do that, *hoiku mamas* take care of their babies. This policy has three benefits: first is to save the ward's budget, second is to foster bonds between babies and parents, and third is to give a sense of being relied onto people who like taking care of babies in their nature. Due to this and other financial supports to child-rearing families, Edogawa ward successfully puts its average birth rate at 1.34. This was the top among the 24 wards of Tokyo whose overall birth rate was 0.98 (Yagi, 2005, pp. 164–165). The family- and community-friendly ward prospers, while other wards which ignore them shrink. This fact might show that conservative emphasis on morality, family, and community will have appeal among the Japanese people. If centrists put more priority on these values, conservatives will revive in Japanese political thoughts.

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