



Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry

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arise from the bombing is achieved purely through formal means—that is, through his conflation of the modernist rhetorics of agrarian myth and of the irony of hope that is always shattered. To engage his work ethically means that we must engage it aesthetically.

The attacks by Nakagami Kenji, Karatani Kōjin, and others on atomic-bomb literature are a challenge to the view that it is morally wrong to engage such literature on terms other than those sanctioned by the intrinsic significance of the events. Their argument is that too often the meaning of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is debased by an insistence on an absolutist, unambiguous interpretation of it. Treat feels that this attack is not fair because it supposedly ignores the practical reality of the threat of nuclear war, and because, for him, a transcendent view is not unviable. Moreover, he is certainly justified in stating that those two days in August 1945 “contest our aesthetics of the poem and the novel; our philosophies of the subject; our politics of the modern and postmodern world” (p. 400). Yet Treat’s arguments against those Japanese who deny literary status to atomic-bomb literature (pp. 114–20) imply an abstract set of criteria running counter to the humane skepticism that makes a moral criticism possible. To assert the events of August 1945 as absolutely central to culture, and to confidently endorse the abstract notion of the individual as potential victim or aggregate target, is to close off understanding by putting us at an ethical ground zero.

Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry. By Kosaku Yoshino. Routledge, New York, 1992. viii, 270 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by
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Many students of modern Japan have been left jaded by encounters with a century or more of *Nihonjinron* navel-gazing about the alleged uniqueness of all things Japanese. At this point, it’s hard to generate sufficient outrage to deal with yet another contribution to the cause or to muster empathy for another anti-*Nihonjinron* critique. The beast may yet be alive, but being all heart and no mind, it seems futile to imagine that there is any single point into which one might drive the fatal stake.

Nonetheless, it is worth checking one’s impatience to consider Yoshino’s recent study. It does not add much to our appreciation of the methodological silliness, ideological effects, or historical stages of the past half-century of *Nihonjinron* writings that we have not already learned from such analysts

as Kawamura Nozomu, Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, Aoki Tamotsu, Winston Davis, and Harumi Befu.¹ Instead, Yoshino pursues the nature and significance of *Nihonjinron* in two other directions that are worthy of our attention.

First, Yoshino is concerned with both the production and the reception of claims of national uniqueness, with the circulation of messages between those who write and talk these claims and at least some of those fellow Japanese who may or may not believe what they read and hear. To this end, he surveys well-known examples of the *Nihonjinron* output and also reports on extensive surveys and interviews with business executives and high school principals who read, listen to, and watch the books, magazines, and TV shows that purvey this *interi*-prose. Both the educators and the business people report a wide range of motivations for their interest, including personal reflections, pedagogical uses, and instrumental needs for cross-cultural communication and workplace social relations. Interestingly, the business people appear to be much more generally attuned to the *Nihonjinron* literatures; Yoshino is no doubt correct in relating this to the cultural idioms by which business creeds were framed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Yoshino's terminology of a "thinking elite" who produces and educated professionals who consume is rather too unidirectional and obscures what is surely a more mutually interactive relationship. Indeed, there is a delightful moment in his interview with a principal, Mr. J, who told Yoshino bluntly:

You academics do not seem to contribute much to this field. I read books written by leading businessmen because their books are more interesting. Businessmen write more convincingly than academics because they actually do business with foreigners and thus learn the hard way what it means to be Japanese. (p. 151)

The second value of the study is to remind us that claims of national uniqueness are not themselves unique to Japan; they are universals of modern nation-statemaking. Influenced particularly by the writings of Anthony D. Smith on nationalism, Yoshino sets *Nihonjinron* within a comparative sociology of knowledge about the ideological foundations of mod-

1. Kawamura Nozomu, *Nihon bunkaron no shūhen* (Tokyo: Ningen no Kagakusha, 1982); Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986); Aoki Tamotsu, "*Nihon bunkaron*" *no hen'yō: sengo Nihon no bunka to aidentitii* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1990), Winston Davis, "Japan Theory and Civil Religion," in his *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 253–70; and Harumi Befu, "Nationalism and *Nihonjinron*," in Befu, ed., *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), pp. 107–35.

ern nationalism (especially in chapters 3, 4, and 10). With reference to Turkish, Indian, and several European cases, he identifies late Showa *Nihonjinron* as a secondary nationalism or “resurgent cultural nationalism.” His conclusion distinguishes this from an awkwardly termed “prudent revivalist nationalism” of the same decades, which harks back more directly and more ominously to the “emperor system” ideology that constituted modern Japan’s primary nationalism.

This distinction too seems to force a more nuanced field of nationalist sentiments and claims into a rather rigid conceptual opposition, but at least it begins to disaggregate what many critics of *Nihonjinron* are apt to lump even more indiscriminately. Indeed, Yoshino rouses us from our exhaustion with *Nihonjinron* and demonstrates that much remains to be done toward analyzing the rhetorical conventions, substantive varieties, and institutional structures of late Showa cultural nationalism.

The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan. By Germaine A. Hoston. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994. xii, 628 pages. \$85.00, cloth; \$24.95, paper.

Reviewed by
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In *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*, Germaine Hoston wishes to explore the accommodation of Marxism as a revolutionary strategy to what are called “non-Western” national identities. Of particular concern to the author is the way in which “Marxism” placed “native” revolutionaries in tension with their own national identities during the 1920s and 1930s. The concepts of “nationality,” “nation,” and “nation-state” were vague enough in Marxism, the author argues, to enable Chinese and Japanese “Marxist” theorists to make numerous accommodations and adaptations to their own societies in the period before the Second World War. According to Hoston, “Marxists” in East Asia thus attempted to reconcile a new nationalist vision of the state with a commitment to an internationalist socialist revolution.

To reach this fairly straightforward conclusion, the author has compiled just about everything even remotely related to the “national question” in China and Japan in an indigestible volume that lacks both rigor and concision. The topic itself, although already flogged to near-death in the political science literature, might have revealed some interesting insights, but is