A Comparative Perspective of Japanese Culture and Education

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Contents

Chapter V

A Critical Review of Some Stereotypical Theories on the Identity of the Japanese Psyche

The aim of chapter is to review the keynotes shared by many of today's conventionally accepted *nihonjinron* or analytical theories on Japanese national identity and Japanese culture, and to present
a number of questions and counter-evidence vis-à-vis these representative theories, in order to make a more in-depth study of a specific, typically Japanese motive.

The main theories that this paper treats are the so-called "climatology", and "natural environmentalism", and some others which have been evolved from sociological and anthropological viewpoints.

Perhaps never before has the term 'internationalization' become so disseminated a buzzword as in present-day Japanese society. This phenomenon seems to have risen up on a parallel with the prosperity of *nihonjinron* or analytical theories on Japanese national identity which have won their way to rapid popularity in recent years.

If we define *nihonjinron* as "the theories to clarify the thought and behavioral patterns of the contemporary Japanese and to explicate the uniquenesses of Japanese culture and society

which serve as their matrices" (Tazaki, 1980 : 16), the publications featuring these contents are said to have made their appearance in the late 1960's and their numbers were superadded more rapidly in the 1970's.

There still is a growing proclivity among Japanese to jump at new-fashioned epigonic theories which are in full flourish in today's academic and journalistic arena one after another. The prosperousness of these theories itself might explain an aspect of self-debunking and self-conscious Japanese character.

However, at the same time, it may also illustrate our irresistible impulse to grope for or to reexamine the national and individual identity which is yet to be established in this age of 'internationalization'. This has emerged as what we call "the third opening of the country", after a number of great social changes and disturbances such as the Meiji Restoration, nation-wide scrambling for modernization, the involvement in world wars, defeat and devastation, and the frantic struggle for economic recovery. Tazaki (ibid: 17-18) refers to Hiroshi Yonezawa and Eshun Hamaguchi who categorized the multifarious *nihonjinron*, according to the authors' specialties, in *Nihonjinron no Kensho.* Yonezawa's categories are specified as :

(1) ethnological-anthropological approach
(2)socio-anthropological-sociological-socio-psychol

ogicalapproach
(3) psychological-psychiatric approach
(4) linguistic approach
(5) historical approach
(6) philosophical approach
(7) statistical approach
(8) interdisciplinary approach and some others like civilization criticisms and journalistic reviews.

Hamaguchi's classifications were :
(1) contents (functional areas of life space)
(2) analyses of characters or analyses of patterns of culture
(3) observations from inside ; and observations from outside
(4) macro approaches or micro approaches
(5) formative inquiries or functional inquiries

In contrast, Yoshio Sugimoto and Ross Mouer (1982) point out that perfect models of contemporary *nihonjinron* had already been fully provided in pre-war days and that they might fall into three predominant categories.

The first is Japanese *fudo-gaku* or climatology as represented by Tetsuro Watsuji, who associated Japanese culture and national psyche with Japan's distinctive climatic conditions. Watsuji (1935) defines *fudo* as "a general term representing such constituents
as the climate, the weather, the geological and topographical features, and natural scenery of a

region" (Watsuji : 7). He insists that it is this *fudo* as distinct from that of East Asian monsoon that has played a pivotal role in formulating the basal traits of the Japanese and Japanese culture. One of these core traits might be described as "*juyoteki-ninjuteki* "(lit. receptiveness submissiveness) (ibid: 134).

Fudo also served, he argues, to develop some refined "idiosyncratic" dispositions of the Japanese, such as "*omoiyari*" (thoughtfulness and compassion), "*hikaeme*" (modesty), and "*itawari*" (kindness for the weak), among the people who resided within tiny communities symbolized by the term "*ie*" (home) (ibid: 165). Watsuji goes on to argue that this Japanese inimitable individuality forged by Japan's *fudo* will never be eradicated by the concept of global universality.

The second is the folklore model provided by the well-known folklorist Kunio Yanagita, whose life-long pursuit was to establish indigenous studies strictly based on everyday experiences and perceptions of the ordinary Japanese populace, as opposed to foreign- made thought systems. He compiled a tremendous amount of factual information from every nook and cranny of the country and stacked up vast hordes of records of time-honored conventions, legends, customs and events, etc., especially for provincial regions. His monumental exploits in the academic field still have a prodigious power of influence for those who are engaged in historical research on

the Japanese populace. However, because of the thoroughly corroborative attitude and intended illogical nature of his pursuit, there might have been some aspects which were slyly utilized to justify and reinforce the ideological dogma deifying the history of the former Japanese Empire.

The third category is the agrarian sociology model as presented by Kizaemon Ariga, who blazed a new trail in this field of study.

This school of learning acceded to the fruits of Yanagita's folklore, brought their positivistic factors into the investigation of Japanese agrarian societies, and formulated the outcome of those observations as general propositions. Ariga's stance to interpret the concepts of the family and the nation as a concentric circle paradigm seems to have paved the way for some of the eminent *nihonjinron* of today.

All this learning and these theories on the Japanese and Japanese culture confirmed before and during the world wars share the following common viewpoints :

(1) The researchers view Japanese society as an idiosyncratic unified body imbued with supreme harmony and integration.
(2) Japanese society can be characterized solely by internal scrutiny rather than by consistent international collation, where there is a

propensity for stressing Japan's superiority based on concepts lauding Japanese spiritualism.

With the advent of post-war democracy, *nihonjinron* underwent a great transformation. Masao Maruyama (1961), the most prominent thinker at that time, advocated that not only the reformation of the political system itself but also the substantiation of the social system should be the prime and exigent needs, and that this would make possible "the founding of personal individuality in the sense of emancipated, spontaneous individuality with proper judgment and that of ethical, responsible and order-forming individuality" (Maruyama : 63), for the realization of democracy which would intrinsically confront national authority.

Hisao Otsuka is another renowned thinker of this period who, from Max Weber's standpoint, elucidated the urgent necessity of Japan's democratization in the proper context. He denoted that some universal norm for value judgment or "some spiritual criterion that could reunite freedom with ascetic attitude" would make it feasible to direct and redirect individual waywardness and "the admiration of cynical and anti-ascetic epicurean extravagance" (Otsuka, 1969 : 577) to replace the "emotional" power structure in Japan.

After the lapse of thirty or forty years, with Japan's high economic growth and rapid

expansion of its overseas commercial territories, feelings of optimism, self-esteem or even hauteur have begun to surface among the Japanese intelligentsia, and publications which extol the super-excellence of the Japanese nation predicated on its economic success have acquired wide-spread popularity. Today's *nihonjinron* even appear to be in a state of 'atavism' to the pre-war theories which punctuated and revered the peerless distinction of Japanese national character.

Now, let us turn to the main ideas of some conspicuous theoretical lineages "classified by the nature of the phenomenon which each theory concentrates on" (Tazaki : 18). The first is the conceptualization of ideas in conformity with the traditional Judo theory. This is grounded on the so-called Milieu-theory, or natural environmentalism.

In this group are included Sakyo Komatsu, Hideo Suzuki who advocate *doteki-fudo ron* or dynamic *fudo* theory, and Otoya Miyagi who attempts to extract Japanese sectionalism out of Japan's natural conditions, for example "insularity" filled with mountainous scenes. Other theorists in this ramification include Eiichiro Ishida and Hiroyuki Araki, who assume that "rice-based culture" has been the principal agent in forming Japanese national psyche. We can find some references corresponding to this point in the works of Isaiah Ben-Dasan and Shoichi

Watanabe.

The second group views the Japanese mainly in terms of social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology, and focuses on the distinctive features of Japanese human relations and groups. In this category of *nihonjinron*, a variety of key words are employed which signify some Japanese traits concerning human relations and groups; that is, thinking and behavioral patterns in Japanese culture and society. Some of the cardinal terms are '*ba*' [frame], 'fate *shakai*' [vertical society] (Chie Nakane), '*joretsu-teki kaiso*' [ranking hierarchy] (Otoya Miyagi), 'culture of shame' and 'hierarchy' (Ruth Benedict), '*amae*' [dependence] (Takeo Doi), and '*mura-teki kozo*' [village-like organization] and '*taritsusei*' [heteronomy] (Hiroyuki
Araki).

The third group of main ideas centers on linguistic analysis of the Japanese language from a psychological or psychiatric perspective. Scholars like Shigehiko Toyama, Hideo Suzuki, Gen Itasaka, Takeo Doi, Dean Barnlund, Otoya Miyagi, and Takeshi Naruse might all belong to this phylum. Finally besides these classifications, we may name such philosophers as Takeshi Umehara and Shuichi Kato, who have evolved and presented their own arguments from historical and theoretical points of view.

The objective here is not to expound each of

the above-mentioned theories, but to summarize the keynotes shared by the majority of conventionally accepted *nihonjinron*. This task will be followed by the writer's presentation of a number of questions and counter-evidence vis-à-vis these prevalent potent theories.

Firstly, one conspicuous reference in their assertions is Japanese 'group-ism'. For the Japanese, loyalty to the common pursuits of the group is a matter of the highest priority. The Japanese "are responsive to group attitudes for they are convinced that everyone gains from restraining egoism" (Vogel, 1979 : 98). They are willing to obey the group they belong to and "are much more likely than Westerners to operate in groups"; moreover, "most Japanese will be quite content to conform... to the norms of their group" (Reischauer, 1977: 127).

Therefore, "harmony" within the group is of the utmost importance. In order to maintain this group harmony, one always has to be attentive to the "observance of hierarchy" (Benedict, 1946 : 48), where there exists "the fundamental structure of vertical organization" (Nakane, 1970 : 42). Manifold honorific terms in Japanese as "a respect language" (Benedict : 47) serve to reinforce the group, and by which a Japanese "expresses all aspects of his personality" (Vogel : 48). "Cooperativeness, reasonableness, and understanding of others are the virtues most admired, not personal drive, forcefulness and

individual self assertion. The key Japanese value is harmony" (Reischauer : 135), therefore "consensus" "harmony" "consolidation" and "great personal restraint and consideration for others" (ibid: 137) are the fundamental working principles. The Japanese groups are "strong on nostalgia and sentimentality" (Vogel : 100), and not only the concept of 'privacy1 is lacking, but also "the possibility (of 'contract') just does not exist in Japan" (Nakane: 82).

In sum, Japan has attained a high degree of homogeneity in cultural, linguistic, and racial spheres, therefore the people are disposed to have an endogamous consciousness which sometimes leads to nationalistic conceptions and behaviors.

Some other theorists surmise that this same distinctiveness of Japanese ethos has a lot to do with their natural milieu, particularly with their traditional rice-growing culture since the prehistoric Yayoi period (300 B.C. to 300 A.D.). That is, a society of settled agricultural villages required not only "a high level of technical skill and great patience" (Ishida, 1974 : 132) to produce food for the group's survival, but also the long lasting cooperation and solidarity for the common pursuits of the community, and that these self-effacing
"heteronymous" ideas and behaviors of living up to the expectancy of the group evolved into the absolute norm (Araki, 1973 : 24). This practice lasted over an extended period of time and

gradually became the substantial formative agent of people's character.

Also, the surrounding natural ambience of the Japanese enabled them to give life to their sensitive concepts of nature, i.e., the spirit of living in rapport with nature, peaceful coexistence with nature (Komatsu, 1980: 28), etc. At the same time, because of these almost innate concepts regarding nature, the Japanese traditional psyche is virtually in diametrical opposition to foreign "individualistic" culture and thought, themselves products of a "severe natural and climatic environment." In particular, many Japanese scholars are invariably puzzled in their efforts to interpret "monotheisms" like Judaism or Christianity and the world view of the Old Testament, the product of a rigorous "dry desert *fudo*" that exerts nothing but "a thoroughly opposing and combatant sway" against man (Watsuji : 49).

Now, as stated earlier, we will discuss some questions and counter-evidence vis-à-vis these widely accepted theories and hypotheses of the Japanese national psyche. Some of these theories assert that "harmony" within the group is of utmost consequence in Japan, and members of the group are always willing to maintain this group harmony.

However, when, as Yoshio Sugimoto and Ross Mouer point out, a member in a lower rank within

the same group has received much recognition for his competence and has come to enjoy a good reputation outside the group, what sometimes happens is that feelings of jealousy and enmity toward this man tend to mount among the other members. This implies that "harmony" is no longer a general ethical criterion working perpetually and equally among the members, and, in addition, that the degree of respect for "harmony" diminishes greatly under a particular condition (Sugimoto & Mouer: 170-171). Over and above that, it is by no means rare to hear frequent reports of abuse, slander, defamation, discrimination, prejudice, bullying, and harassment among the members of the same group in many organizations.

A second question may be raised as to why the Japanese, whose distinctive character is supposed to be that of "thoughtfulness and compassion," "modesty," "kindness for the weak," abruptly turn into gruff and reckless egoists in a situation like commuter trains. When facing critical situations, such as the "oil crisis" and "entrance examination war," why do the Japanese begin to bustle around desperately to secure their selfish interest at the expense of their neighbors and friends? We venture to say that there might be some implicit aspect of truth of *nihonjinron* revealed there.

In Western languages, there is only one word for indicating "self", while in Japanese there are many. "No other language might give the first

person pronoun such a variety as the Japanese language" (Morimoto, 1978 : 91). A Japanese chooses the proper first person pronoun according to the situation he/she is in or the person he/she is addressing. This does not necessarily indicate that people venerate "harmony" in human relations or in a group, but rather that it signifies their ingenuity for subtle self-definition or self-expression. "Paradoxically speaking, the Japanese language is a self-centered language. This explains the great attentiveness vis-à-vis others, which is virtually rooted in a hidden motive for putting oneself in a more advantageous position" (Yamashita, 1986 : 178).

In fact, the Japanese may be more "individualistic" and dexterous taxonomists of individuals than Westerners. Y. Sugimoto and R Mouer (188-201) list some typical cases to show how Japanese people are "individualistic" in their ways, compared with Westerners. Take, for example, the heroes in Japanese history or in stories favored by the general public. Nobunaga Oda, Musashi Miyamoto, Zato-ichi, etc. - all these figures are markedly "individualistic" and it is their wiry individuality that has appealed to the people and secured their long lasting popularity; whereas in Western countries not a few heroes and heroines, like Snow White and seven dwarfs, The Three Musketeers, Romeo and Juliet, Robin Hood and his band, and so on, lived and acted depending very much on close human relations or group life.

Concerning sports, the majority of Japanese traditional sports, e.g., *sumo, kendo, judo, kyudo, karate* are centered on individual competitiveness, whereas the majority of Western counter-parts, e.g., baseball, basket ball, soccer, football, volley ball are all team sports.

It is said that the Japanese are lacking in the concept of 'privacy', but every Japanese house has a fine nameplate on its facade and is surrounded by a wall ; this can rarely be observed in a country like America. The Japanese style toilet keeps you free from even an "indirect contact" with others. If you ask Japanese people about hotel rooms, as to whether they prefer to stay in a large room for a group of people or a small room for an individual, almost all of them prefer a small one. This illustrates their strong sense of 'privacy'.

Japanese "individualism" reveals itself in many other facets of life as well. Each individual in a family has chopsticks and rice bowls for his/her own use, while in Western countries knives and forks are shared by a group of people. If you glance round the "hobby section" in a Japanese bookstore, it does not take long to find the great majority of the books there are for individual enjoyments such as fishing, gardening, calligraphy, *shogi,* cooking, golf, and so forth. On the other hand, Western people are the picture of "group-ism." They are actively engaged in a

variety of activities in groups like YMCA, YWCA, Rotary Club, Lions Club, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, sororities, fraternities, volunteer groups, sport teams, etc. In particular, the extensive group activities centering on Christian churches can hardly be rivaled by any such activities in Japan. It may not be an overstatement to say that the Japanese hate "the group" at heart. While it is not infrequent for Westerners to make use of a group tour, the difference between Japanese and Westerner "package tours" is that Japanese members are often led by a leader with a small flag or are provided with badges representing their travel agency; Westerners are not. This is necessary because Japanese are quite insecure when it comes to active and autonomous group solidarity.

A third assumption is that Westerners are confrontation-oriented "dry individualists," whereas the Japanese are harmony-oriented "wet paternalists." Let us check if this statement is true in some concrete cases.

When people are employed in Western countries, recommendation letters are usually taken into serious consideration. In Japan, however, they are not necessarily thought of as the reliable criteria for judging a person, rather the antecedents of a candidate are fully inquired into in many cases. Immediately after being employed, control over the new employees starts, ranging from imposing the strict execution of

clocking in and other minute office rules to the duty of submitting papers certifying the delay of commuter trains or official papers of a written apology when one's behavior deviates from company regulations.

One of the reasons why Western societies do not have such rigid practices may be that the unwritten "fiduciary" relation between labor and management is still alive there. It would be possible to opine that labor-management relations in the West are rooted more in implicit "paternalism" than in Japan. Children in Western countries passing food round and sharing their bread with friends in school or on an excursion are a common sight, while in Japan we hardly ever see children do the same. We assume that the Japanese
distinction of "kindness" and "harmony-oriented paternalism" can again be controvertible here.

It is said that the concept of 'contract' does not exist in Japan. However, the fact is, a Japanese easily loses his temper over the slightest discrepancy in a written contract. When renting an apartment, however short the period of stay may be, signing the contract is unfailingly required in Japan, but in America and in Australia, a lease is sometimes nonessential for a short stay.

Perhaps the evidence will go on and on to show that the degree of trustworthiness between

men seems to be far lower in Japan. How are the Japanese, who praise and glory in their own national spirit, i.e., profound "love of nature" and "peaceful coexistence with nature", able to justify the fact that they have been holding the premier position on this globe in devastating and polluting the natural environment?

The Japanese, as Y. Sugimoto and R. Mouer (201) remark, are "in no way the wet harmony-oriented altruists,... they just have a potent predisposition to be calculating utilitarians", and have a proclivity to constantly consult their own "individualistic" self-centered interests. Therefore, this naturally leads to the unique Japanese human relationship which is grounded in all sorts of red-tape and makes much of "contract", "*tatemae*" formality, the exchange of formalistic papers or presents.

Also, in comparison with Western society, where individuals form the groups usually with an independent motive and free spontaneity, Japanese groups and social organizations have an inveterate nature of being controlled coercively or supervised willy-nilly by an authority. It is no wonder that the Japanese "have needed unrealistic fabulous theories which function as a neutralizer as well as a concealer of the reality, and that these theories serve to render people subject to hypnotic suggestion by advocating 'group-ism', 'consensus', 'harmony', and all the fictional theories admiring these 'distinctive

traits', which are, in effect, diametrically opposed to the actualities of the Japanese" (ibid : 211).

Such constraint, control, manipulation, and standardization from above permeate into every nook and corner of Japan, including the central administrative office, public offices, schools, companies, and even local communities. They take the forms of inspection of textbooks by the government, standardization of school-bags and notebooks in school, and repeated exercises of marching in line, which is required of all students when athletic meets are held.

In many local communities, people are "compelled" to make donations for the Shinto and Buddhist festivals and asked to take part in the Bon dance (for comforting the "returning spirits of the dead"), and more often than not they are forced to participate in the local religious festivals (if you refuse in some regions, you will be practically ostracized from the community), regardless of the individual's personal faith. Through a loud speaker, exhortations are given to the people in the community every day on the proper time for children to come home, on the participation in the Bon dance and early morning group exercises, in addition to advice on answering "yes" (not "no") to your neighbors and seniors. In offices, an admonitory speech is made in the morning meeting, the company song is sung together and instructions read aloud in chorus, and badges are offered to strengthen the

workers' sense of belonging. There is really no end to the list of such concrete cases, which fall under a unified indoctrination and control system in some ways quite similar to a religious rite.

Now, another task is to present some questions or counter-evidence regarding commonly accepted theories on the Japanese along the lines of natural "environmentalism." One of the theories is the concept of *fudo* since T. Watsuji, which is supposed to have served as the formative agent of Japanese national psyche. The other is based on the assumption that traditional rice-based culture since the prehistoric Yayoi period has been a determining factor in forming the unique Japanese character.

Firstly, one of the consequential arguing points of Watsuji's is that the distinctiveness of Japan and the Japanese can be elucidated by Japan's peculiar *fudo* : "the monsoon zone." It seems, however, that representative countries in "the monsoon belt" in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and others are virtually ignored or not seriously taken into consideration in his argument. Concerning Japan's climate itself, the northern part of Hokkaido, located in the Sub frigid Zone, is entirely free from "tropical" heat and humidity in the rainy season ; and Okinawa, a typical subtropical region, has no "great snowfalls" (Watsuji: 135) and has "just a monotonous hot climate which is no longer called a 'summer'" (ibid: 27); Should these districts be

actually considered "foreign lands" (ibid) inhabited by different people with different ethos?

What then of the view that the time-honored rice-based society has exerted a decisive influence on the formation of Japanese ethos and culture as a whole? In other words, in a society of settled rice-growing villages dating back to the Yayoi period, the production of rice as a staple food was a top priority for the survival of all the members of the community and no individualistic behaviors against the community rules were permitted (Araki : 24). The members had to join the communal work day in and day out, and to observe together the common "traditional rice rituals and annual ceremonies" which were "performed in connection with the stages of rice cultivation from planting to harvesting" (Ishida : 36).
In a society like this, the spirit of cooperation, harmony, and solidarity germinates, and the "logic of the group" rules as the law.

The writer is ready to support the significant moment of truth that this theory connotes. However, at the same time, it seems to be a bit far-fetched to try to vindicate everything Japanese out of this simple schema, i.e., rice-growing culture settled agrarian village communities communal spirit of cooperation, harmony, and solidarity group consciousness or 'group-ism'?

As we specified earlier, the Japanese seem to have their own "individualistic" *honne* (true voice) and to have an inveterate pre-disposition to rationally consult their own self-centered interests. In a similar way, extracting the distinctiveness or peculiarities of Japanese mentality and cultural traits from traditional agricultural life itself would also be controversial.

That is, the basis of life of almost all of the Asian countries in the monsoon belt the Philippines, Indonesia, etc. is obviously the same paddy-field rice cultivation. Moreover, the agrarian culture in Europe, as Robin Gill (1985) points out, has a historical tradition of over 6000 years (starting 4000 years before the Yayoi period) and established settled agricultural village communities far more firmly than their Japanese counterparts. Gill goes on to indicate that people in these communities led an extremely close communal group life characterized by reciprocal cooperation and strong solidarity which were hardly rivaled by those of Japanese farmers. In Russian agricultural villages, for instance, the farmers have had more than 300 terms denoting family members and relatives, which illustrates a part of their firm communal spirit (Gill : 28-30).

Therefore, if some phases of Japanese agrarian culture based on irrigated rice cultivation had a decisive effect on aspects of the Japanese national psyche and culture as a whole, we have to make a more in-depth study of a

specific, typically Japanese motive which does not exist in other countries.

The writer surmises that this motive is not paddy-field rice cultivation itself, but rather "the Japanese style form of observing religious rites and the control system inseparably bound up with wet rice production" which offered the original bases for the later power of the unified state, which reigned over the people with political, economic, and religious authority.

This "Yayoi motif", combined with its spiritual substructure, that is, the deep-rooted religious psyche of the foregoing "Jomon" period lasting over 8000 years during which a variety of primitive beliefs like animism, manaism, necrolatry, and nature-worship are supposed to have been ubiquitous, seems to be the prime formative agent of Japanese culture and national character. This intriguing theme will be elaborated on and argued by the writer on another occasion.

Now, another renowned viewpoint is that of the religious argument characteristic of *fudo* theory. Let us briefly review the point of this hypothesis. For people who were born and grew up in a "humid nature" *fudo* like Japan, "dry desert *fudo*" is viewed as "a dismal and horrendous deluge of sand, a sea of rocks and crags" (Watsuji : 48) which incessantly intimidates human beings with "a thoroughly

opposing and combatant sway" (ibid: 49) i.e., as a different extraneous world. Hence, the position that it is hardly feasible for the Japanese to understand monotheisms like Judaism and Christianity, which were created by "desert people," or the historical and religious accounts in the Old Testament which are rooted in a "rigorous" *fudo* called ancient Palestine.

Let us start with a simple-minded query. Supposing that it is hardly possible for people to appreciate the ideas and cultures taking form in a different *fudo*, it follows that the Japanese would not be able to understand foreign literary works like Anne of Green Gables or Little House on the Prairie either, not to mention the movie Superman. Similarly, all the scholarly achievements on foreign cultural spheres by Karl Marx and Max Weber, among others, would totally lose their academic grounds also.

Sadao Asami (1988), an expert in the Old Testament and history of ancient Israel, states that if the Old Testament, as the *fudo* theorists describe, were "the product of dry desert people," we would come to the conclusion that not only the Anglo-American people but also the Jews themselves would not be able to understand the book (Asami: 106). For, Asami explains, in the beginning of the 6th century B.C., the generations of the Jews who brought the Old Testament into existence had already moved to verdurous places along the Euphrates River in Babylonia, which

was the very picture of agrarian culture fully blessed with springs and plentiful food.

Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that they had already left the "dry desert" *fudo* in Palestine before Christ and dispersed to the Middle East, north Africa, and all corners of Europe. They have been leading their lives up until today in many different areas which are in no way the "dry desert."

To be more precise, the people in the Old Testament went through their "desert" life for just 40 years during the 2000 year period from ancient Abraham to immediately before Christ. Besides, the only "desert" period they suffered was of "negative significance" for them, because it was imposed on them by God as a punishment for their infidel behaviors. The Old Testament depicts Palestine, the "promised land" bestowed by God, as a place blessed with abundant springs in the valleys and mountains and with copious fruit and cereals.

Asami shows us a variety of data which indicate the Old Testament people were closer to the "sea" than the "desert." For example, according to his investigation, the word "sea" appears far more frequently (350 times) than the word "desert" (250 times) in the Old Testament. This makes us aware of the fact that ancient Israelites were much more familiar with the ambience connected with the sea than that of the

desert, a point which can also be substantiated geographically. If one looks at the map of Palestine, one finds the average distance between the main cities in Palestine and the Mediterranean Sea is approximately 40 kilometers, an interval which could with little difficulty be covered within a day.

Still another commonplace proposition is that it is "the rigorous desert *fudo*" that gave birth to the "monotheism" (Watsuji : 56-57). In fact, however, it is just the other way around. The Arab world before Islam was characterized completely by the dry desert, and out of this very desert *fudo* emerged nothing but myriads of poly-theistic religions, the veritable pandemonium of millions of gods not a monotheistic personal God. It was also in commercial cities like Mecca and Medina that Islam, the monotheism, was born, not the "desert"; and, geographically speaking, Indonesia, a typical country in the "monsoon zone," not the "desert", is a fervent nation of Islam.

Looking again into the Japanese "distinctive character" argument, we find that the *fudo* theory basically asseverates that the Japanese surpass other nations in their "rare" inimitable spirit of "receptiveness and submissiveness" with refined humane quality of "thoughtfulness and compassion," "modesty," and "kindness for the weak," which precisely constitutes a characteristic feature of Japanese national psyche. Overseas people like those in some Asian

countries, however, perhaps would not possibly be able to appreciate this popularly accepted Japanese theory. Even in the 16th century, both Frois, a Spanish missionary, and Rodrigo, a Spanish Governor General of the Philippines, wrote in their journals during their stay in Japan that what really frightened them as Westerners was that "the Japanese easily slew people with a nonchalant air" (Gill: 332-334), incidents which should not be thought of as just chance occurrences.

We hope these Japanese character theories are not trying to justify all the infernal acts of the former Japanese army, which employed every possible means of atrocity and barbarity in other Asian countries, by pleading that it was just their past anomalistic fault. We hope these beautiful theories will not parry or brush aside such inveterate problems in Japan as the everlasting "sex tours" to Asian countries or the still rampant racial discriminations. Gill, referring to a remark by Yuji Aida, has stated, "Aida (who hates Westerners) mentions that the occupation of the colonies by the Whites was by far 'the most atrocious' compared with the eastern (Japanese) 'generous' occupation. I am curious to know what will happen if we introduce his supposition to the Filipinos and the Indonesians, who unfortunately suffered the occupations both by the Whites and the Japanese in the past" (ibid: 171).

The believers in Japanese graceful character

traits may perhaps quote “the low crime rate” in Japan. However, we regret to point out that this is also controvertible. With the recent economic growth, the crime rate in Japan has been skyrocketing. Moreover, Japan’s crime statistics do not always reflect de facto situations. Jon Worohoff (1990), an international economist, ventures to point out, by citing the words of H. Takano, the editor of Insider, that Japan’s crime statistics published by the authorities are not necessarily to be trusted and that this seems most applicable to rapidly growing drug-related crimes. While “the amounts of drugs intercepted expanded massively, the number of arrests did not, with only 20,000 drug users and traffickers arrested in 1986 although it was estimated that as many as 600,000 people took ‘speed’” (Woronoff : 127).

Also there are “certain social hang-ups that affect the collection of statistics. Victims of crimes, especially robbery and burglary, can expect bothersome snooping which may keep them from complaining” (ibid). In addition, when it comes to “rape, most women find the police interrogation and general attitude too offensive to contemplate” (ibid : 128), which could strongly induce the underreporting of the crimes. Woronoff goes on to indicate, by quoting A. Ishii’s and H. Takano’s surveys, that actual criminal activities were much larger in number than the official ones, as much as 11 times for burglary, 24 times for shoplifting and 54 times for assault and battery. Although

the police estimate says that active professional criminal organizations (boryoku-dari) had collected ¥1 trillion in income in 1985, which even the gangsters themselves do not believe, the actual amount should be much closer to ¥ 7 trillion. It may appear that if any Japanese sector is truly "No. 1," then it is "organized crime."

In the population at large, "Ramping stocks, spreading rumors to boost prices, and buying on insider tips is quite commonplace among investors" (ibid: 131). In addition, "Tax evasion seems to be a national pastime, especially among farmers, doctors, dentists and lawyers, real estate agents and building contractors" (ibid). And the general public has gotten sick and tired of hearing about the never-ending bribery scandals and "structural corruption" of the politicians, to the extent that they are inclined to feel that these are no longer serious "crimes", and lean towards forgetting the fact that all these manifestly reflect phases of peculiar Japanese traits. Regarding the welfare which should be the embodiment of "*itawari*" and "*omoiyari*" spirit, there are "dreadfully few charitable organizations, most of them sponsored by the small Christian community. As for politicians, they not only do not care about the interests of the 'people' as a whole, they do not even bother speaking to them except at election time," nor "do the rich... display much commiseration for the poor" ((ibid: 176).

Needless to say, no nation, no race, or no

individual is without shortcomings. Japan has definitely its own virtues and excellences in a variety of fields, such as art, architecture, etc. But when we advocate the tenet that "we Japanese should take more pride in Japan and Japanese culture in today's international society," which phases of Japanese culture, on what grounds, are we proud of, and how do we make a vaunt of them? — this point does not appear to be disambiguated at all. Lacking prudent soul-searching predicated on positive corroboration, we seem to lean toward a mere subjective and intuitive narcissism, or toward a smug autistic state of mind somewhat similar to that of the mid-war period. This is obviously totally against the connotation of "internationalization" and falls short of real active and cross-cultural cooperation with other nations.

Theories on culture do need some kinds of hypotheses. However, as long as they are propagated as if they were complete and impeccable thoughts based on historical and social actualities, they might be in danger of turning into a lop-sided and illiberal, sometimes nationalistic, ideology. *Nihonjinron*, at least in their basal academic stance, should entail corroborative research with coherent international collation plus the objective analysis of our own virtues and vices with unpretentious self-scrutiny that is free from any personal prejudices.

To be international is not just to be able to speak English, nor to act in a presumptuous manner by deifying or idolizing the relative attributes of a given culture. To be an international person would, perhaps, be, in line with what Y. Sugimoto and R. Mouer state : "to always make your cosmopolitan personality precede your Japanese personality," and to cherish an independent spirit in your heart as "a member of the global human community" (227).