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Abstract: This article presents a detailed analysis of a series of articles by Yamamoto Shichihei, writing as the Jewish author Isaiah Ben-Dasan, entitled *The Japanese and the Chinese*. The articles, written in the wake of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972, present a dramatic revisionist history of Sino-Japanese relations from the founding of the Japanese imperial institution to Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s visit to Beijing in 1972. Yamamoto’s history constructs an extended historical analogy that identifies the main source of discord in Sino-Japanese relations as a lack of Japanese national consciousness and prescribes the recovery of a “real” Japanese national history as the key to peace between Japan and China. Yamamoto’s articles reveal how issues of Japanese national identity, war responsibility and historical revisionism informed perceptions of Japan’s relations with China even before the internationalization of Japan’s “history problem” in the 1980s and 1990s.

Peace through Historical Revisionism Yamamoto Shichihei on Sino-Japanese Relations in the 1970s

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Forty years ago, on September 25, 1972, Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei (田中角榮 1918-1993) stepped onto an airport tarmac in Beijing to shake hands with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来 1898-1976). Tanaka was in Beijing to normalize diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The two countries had been separated on opposite sides of the Cold War but Japanese leaders had moved quickly to improve relations with the PRC after the Nixon shock of July 1971 (US President Richard Nixon's surprise announcement that he would visit to Beijing). Over the next decade Japanese and Chinese leaders reached a series of agreements, including a peace treaty in 1978 and the first of a series of Japanese economic aid packages in 1979, which transformed relations from Cold War estrangement to close cooperation.

This dramatic transformation of the Sino-Japanese diplomatic relationship provoked important changes in Japanese discourse on relations with China. Throughout the postwar period the leaders of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that dominated postwar Japanese politics had pursued a pragmatic and opportunistic policy that sought to improve relations, especially trade relations, with the PRC but stopped short of direct political contacts that might jeopardize the all-important alliance with the United States. The most consistent and potent opposition to this government China policy came from leftists and progressives in the political opposition, media and academia and from the anti-mainstream or "dove" faction of the conservative party. These critics saw the lack of relations with China – Japan's most important Asian neighbor and the main victim of wartime Japanese aggression – as immoral, threatening to Japanese security and, perhaps most importantly, as emblematic of a lack of national independence and Japan's subjugation to the United States in the Cold War alliance.

After the dramatic events of 1971 and 1972, however, as the new government's China policy effectively co-opted opposition policy positions, criticism of government policy increasingly came from the right wing of the conservative movement. These conservative critics chastised Prime Minister Tanaka and the Japanese government for rushing to achieve normalization for their own political gain and for concluding normalization on what they saw as Chinese terms. They especially criticized the Japanese government for having "abandoned" Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 1887-1975) and the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan to achieve the establishment of relations with the PRC. Echoing earlier progressive concerns, they also saw exposed in Tanaka's following Nixon to Beijing and the popular "China boom" of the 1970s an appalling lack of national independence and subjectivity.

Yamamoto Shichihei

Few conservative voices in the 1970s were more conspicuous than that of Yamamoto Shichihei (山本七平 1921-1991). Yamamoto was a Christian and proprietor of the Yamamoto bookstore who burst into Japanese public consciousness in 1970 as the translator and publisher of the book, *The Japanese and the Jews* (日本人とユダヤ人). *The Japanese and the Jews* was purportedly written by one Isaiah Ben-Dasan (イザヤ・ベンダサン), a Jew born and raised in Japan, a veteran of the 1948 Israeli war of independence, who later settled in the United States (Terra Haute, Indiana to be exact).¹ The book's comparison of the unique cultural traits of the Japanese and Jewish peoples tapped into the contemporary fascination with explorations of Japanese national character associated with the *Nihonjinron* (日本人論) genre of popular literature and became an immediate commercial success. *The Japanese and the Jews* topped book sales in 1971 and sold more than a million copies by 1972 when it was translated into English.²

Although it soon became clear that Ben-Dasan was a pseudonym, Yamamoto, writing both under his own name and as Ben-Dasan, became one of the 1970's most prolific authors and commentators.³ Many of Yamamoto's most abiding concerns related directly or indirectly to relations with China, including issues of war responsibility and the Nanjing Massacre controversy. For example, it was partly Yamamoto's public challenge to the work of the journalist Honda Katsuichi (本多勝一 b. 1932) exposing the conduct of the Japanese army in China that sparked the Nanjing Massacre controversy that bedevils relations with China to this day. As Takashi Yoshida points out, Yamamoto's articles criticizing Honda that helped to secure the place of the newly-launched *Shokun!* (諸君!) as one of the premier conservative monthly magazines in Japan.⁴ After the success of *The Japanese and the Jews*, Yamamoto loomed over Japanese public discourse and in retrospect deserves to be considered as one of the most important figures in the Japanese right-wing historical revisionist movement.

¹ Isaiah Ben-Dasan イザヤ・ベンダサン著, trans. Yamamoto Shichihei 山本七平編, *Nihonjin to Yudayajin* 日本人とユダヤ人 (*The Japanese and the Jews*) (Tokyo: Yamamoto shoten, 1970), available in English translation as *The Japanese and the Jews*, trans. Richard L. Gage (New York: Weatherhill, 1972). For details on Yamamoto and Ben-Dasan see, David Goodman and Miyamoto Masanori, *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Stereotype* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 179-82.

² Goodman and Miyamoto, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 179.

³ A search of the Japanese National Diet Library catalog and the *Zasshi kiji sakuin* for "author Yamamoto Shichihei" returned results for 60 books published between 1970 and 1980, and 182 articles (1972-1982).

⁴ On Yamamoto's role in the Nanjing Massacre controversy, see Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, "The Nanking 100-Man Killing Contest Debate: War Guilt amid Fabricated Illusions, 1971-1975," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 26/2 (Summer, 2000), 307-40, and Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Yoshida notes that the Nanjing controversy and the debate with Honda prompted the largest reader response in the four-year history of *Shokun!*, *Ibid.*, 87 and fn. 39.

Although it is generally less well-known, and seems to have attracted less attention at the time, Yamamoto also commented directly on the changing relationship with China in the 1970s. Given his prominence, we should consider his take on Sino-Japanese relations. An examination of Yamamoto's work on Sino-Japanese relations can illuminate some important aspects of how relations with China are intertwined with postwar Japanese discourses of national identity and war responsibility.

The Japanese and the Chinese

Beginning in late 1972 through mid-1974 Yamamoto contributed a series of nine articles entitled "The Japanese and the Chinese" (日本人と中国人) to the monthly *Bungei shunjū* (文芸春秋) which was finally published in book form in 2005. The similarity of the series' title to his earlier work, *The Japanese and the Jews*, was not coincidental. Still writing as Ben-Dasan, Yamamoto investigated Japanese national character much as he had in the earlier work, this time through a survey of the history of Japan's relations with China from antiquity through normalization in 1972, and pursued many of the same concerns.⁵ In both works Yamamoto worried about what he saw as a dangerous lack of national consciousness or national subjectivity among the Japanese.

For example, in *The Japanese and the Jews* Yamamoto had warned that Japan's conspicuous economic development made the Japanese likely targets of discrimination and persecution similar to that suffered historically by the Jews,

One reads of restrictions in developing countries aimed at the business activities of Japanese, and the Western press has made much of the concept of the Japanese as economic animals. The Japanese may one day find themselves facing a general hostility that will differ little from that which has inspired the persecution of the Jews in many lands.⁶

Yamamoto lamented that unlike the Jews however, the Japanese were ill-prepared to deal with such persecution. Through long centuries of enduring persecution, the Jewish people had developed a powerful national self-consciousness and an indomitable commitment to national

⁵ Why Yamamoto wrote this series of articles as Ben-Dasan is unclear. In the articles Ben-Dasan does not explain how he came to be so interested in the history of Sino-Japanese relations. The preface to the book based on these articles published in 2005 likewise offers no explanation. In fact, the 2005 book makes no mention of Ben-Dasan whatsoever, even though Isaiah Ben-Dasan appears clearly as the author on the book's cover and in the publication information. Perhaps Ben-Dasan was still better known at this point and Yamamoto sought to capitalize on his alter-ego's notoriety. Alternatively, assuming a foreign identity may have provided Yamamoto some cover in making some of his more controversial points, such as his argument that respect for the Japanese imperial institution constitutes shameless submission to a foreign ideology.

⁶ Ben-Dasan, *The Japanese and the Jews*, 165-66.

self-preservation. Japanese, by contrast, blessed by geography and protected in the postwar period by the US military, had never developed the national consciousness necessary for national self-preservation in the face of the persecution that was likely to follow Japanese economic success. For this state of affairs Japanese intellectuals, politicians and the media bore particular responsibility. “Critics, intellectuals, and men of culture in Japan often resemble fashion models in that they deck their brains in the latest Western ideas ... when the fashion changes, they shed the old and don the new ... in this way they manage to stay on stage all the time.”⁷ Thus, Yamamoto argued that the uncritical acceptance of foreign ideologies was both emblematic of and exacerbated a dangerous lack of national consciousness. It was only through a return to native Japanese cultural traditions, what Yamamoto called “Nihonism” (日本教), that Japanese could nurture the national consciousness needed to secure national survival.⁸

Yamamoto pursued these same themes in “The Japanese and the Chinese.” Yamamoto’s history of Sino-Japanese relations revealed that Japan’s relations with China have, throughout history, been compromised by a lack of national consciousness on the part of Japanese leaders and intellectuals which has made them unable to resist Chinese cultural influence and remain true to Japanese traditions. This submission to foreign cultural norms, moreover, has historically made Japanese policy toward China dangerously subject to emotion and sentimentalism. Yamamoto argued that this emotion and sentimentalism made Japanese alternately submissive toward China, on one hand, and prone to resentment and violent outbursts of aggression against China on the other. As in his earlier work, Yamamoto argued that only through a return to Japanese national traditions through the recovery of a lost national history could Japanese break this cycle. Thus, in the end, it was a lack of national consciousness that explained Japanese aggression toward China, and it was only through a nationalist program of historical revisionism that Japanese could establish truly peaceful relations with China. Finally, Yamamoto contrasted Japanese sentimentalism with the realism of the postwar Chinese leadership much as he had earlier contrasted the weakness of Japanese national consciousness with the powerful Jewish national consciousness.

Yamamoto’s history of Sino-Japanese relations was an extended analogy that illuminates this lack of national consciousness in Japanese relations with China. Yamamoto’s analogy was bent on associating the pro-China sentiment of his own day with wartime Japanese aggression in China by proving that the same lack of national consciousness has animated both affinity for China and Japanese aggression toward China throughout history. The key to Yamamoto’s

⁷ Ibid., 190.

⁸ “Nihonism” as the translation for *Nihonkyō* is from the English-language translation of *The Japanese and the Jews*. The exact content of *Nihonkyō* was not explicitly spelled out. Indeed, it was assumed to be inexpressible and incomprehensible to non-Japanese, including “Ben-Dasan.” It consisted of those unique and purely Japanese traits that constituted a de facto national religion, “an unwritten law that transcends all legal codes,” that governed every aspect of Japanese life and which remained free from foreign contamination. Ben-Dasan, *The Japanese and the Jews*, 102-3. See also, Goodman and Miyamoto, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 181.

analogy was his contention that devotion to the Japanese emperor (尊王思想 or 勤皇思想) was a cultural import from China, not natural or indigenous to Japanese political culture. Therefore devotion to the emperor was, in fact, synonymous with submission to China and vice versa. In this scheme, devotion to the emperor was symptomatic of Chinese cultural influence, even when the defense or aggrandizement of the Japanese imperial institution was used to justify hostility or aggression toward China. At the same time, admiration for China was equivalent to reverence for the emperor, even when identification with China led to criticism of and opposition to the Japanese imperial institution. As Yamamoto put it, “submission (土下座) to China and submission to the emperor are the same thing.”⁹ This device enabled Yamamoto to associate his contemporary leftist and progressive adversaries with the emperor system and Japanese imperialist aggression and to argue that their pro-China sympathies sprang not from a principled reflection on past Japanese aggression in China but from a continued lack of national consciousness that promised a repetition of the mistakes of the past, thereby making pro-China sentiment the greatest threat to peace between Japan and China.

Yamamoto’s Historical Genealogy of Japanese Attitudes toward China

Yamamoto traced three distinct traditions in Japanese attitudes toward China through history: 1) the aristocratic tradition of the Japanese court nobility (*kuge* 公家); 2) the warrior tradition (*buke* 武家); and 3) a tradition of populist opportunism. Beginning with the attitude of the Japanese court nobility, Yamamoto points out that the aristocratic families that dominated politics in Japan’s early history were dependent for their own domestic political power upon the prestige of the emperor. They therefore imported Chinese political thought and institutions to bolster the position of the emperor. They elevated the Japanese emperor to a position of equality or even superiority to the Chinese emperor. Over time they took pride in the longevity and continuity of the Japanese imperial lineage as contrasted with the rise and fall of dynasties in China. Thus, while the nobility might appear superficially to resist Chinese authority by insisting on the uniqueness and superiority of the Japanese imperial institution, in fact, they made Chinese cultural traditions the ultimate standard of political legitimacy. They had completely internalized Chinese cultural standards and used them as the measure Japanese civilization. In essence, they made the Japanese emperor the “real” emperor and the Japanese imperial court the “real” central court (*chūchō* 中朝) when judged by Chinese standards and took pride in the fact that the Japanese were more Chinese than the Chinese.¹⁰ As we will see, Yamamoto’s exemplars of the

⁹ Isaiah Ben Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), “Sonnō shisō wa son-Chū shisō kara umareta: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono san” 尊王思想は尊中思想から生まれた：日本人と中国人その三 (The ideology of reverence for the emperor springs from the ideology of reverence for China: The Japanese and the Chinese, part 3), *Bungei shunjū*, 51/6 (1973), 132.

¹⁰ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), “Minchōha Nihonjin to Shinchōha Nihonjin: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono yon” 明朝派日本人と清朝派日本人：日本人と中国人その四 (Ming-faction

court tradition included not only the Japanese nobility that rose to prominence in the Heian period, but also imperial loyalists such as the *kokugaku* (国学) scholars of the Tokugawa period and prewar ultranationalists who agitated for a Shōwa Restoration. Moreover, the progressive pro-China forces of his own day were placed solidly in this tradition. Yamamoto thereby associated his contemporary progressive opponents with both the imperial institution and prewar Japanese imperialism.

In the Japanese warrior (*buke*) tradition, by contrast, Yamamoto argued that domestic political power was not legitimized by reference to either the emperor or Chinese cultural traditions. Warriors like Taira no Kiyomori (平清盛 1118-1181), Ashikaga Takauji (足利尊氏 1305-1358) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康 1543-1616) had come to power by their own abilities and owed their domestic political positions to no external authority. For the court nobles, political power and cultural authority were inseparable. This made them sensitive to any slights to imperial prestige. Warriors, however, were able to separate their own domestic political legitimacy from Chinese cultural authority as manifest in the imperial institution in the pursuit of real political power. Yamamoto argued that this made the traditional warrior approach to relations with China highly pragmatic. Warriors might recognize Chinese cultural authority for practical benefit, especially in order to profit from trade with the mainland, just as they might seek titles bestowed by the Japanese emperor, but they always maintained their own independent political interests and a firm independent national consciousness.¹¹

For example, Yamamoto pointed out that in 1175, when the imperial court wanted to reject gifts and correspondence from the Song emperor because Chinese diplomatic protocol used language addressing the Japanese emperor as an inferior, Taira no Kiyomori, a warrior who dominated the court, intervened and decided to follow Chinese protocol for the sake of maintaining trade relations with the continent. While at first glance this might appear an obsequious submission to foreign demands, Yamamoto argued that Kiyomori's position was merely tactical. As his authority and legitimacy were independent of the emperor, Kiyomori could afford to concede the cultural superiority of the Chinese emperor as a purely tactical measure in the pursuit of national interests. In fact, this was essentially the same way that Kiyomori dealt with the Japanese emperor – respecting the court's cultural authority, but ignoring it in the pursuit of practical political interests.¹²

Similarly, in 1401 the third Ashikaga shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利義満 1358-1408), was willing to accept the title “King of Japan” and enter into a tributary relationship with the Ming dynasty for the sake of trade. While Yoshimitsu's decision went down in subsequent Japanese histories as a traitorous betrayal of the Japanese imperial institution, Yamamoto presents it as an act of pragmatism and independence. Yoshimitsu understood that his was an

Japanese and Qing-faction Japanese: The Japanese and the Chinese, part 4), *Bungei shunjū*, 51/9 (1973), 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 95-96.

independent government, an inheritance passed down to him from the time of Ashikaga Takauji, one that had to be protected, but the legitimacy of which was not subject to any outside standard. In contrast, his detractors at court were beholden to the prestige of the imperial institution, itself a foreign import. Therefore, while Yoshimitsu was willing to recognize the cultural authority of the Chinese Emperor just as he had the authority of the Japanese imperial court, such recognition did not compromise his independence or constitute interference in his own political affairs. Like Kiyomori, Yoshimitsu maintained his independence from both the Chinese and Japanese emperors. Yamamoto argued that this approach of respect for, but independence from, the authority of both the Japanese and Chinese emperors amounted to a “two-Chinas” policy at the heart of the warrior tradition that resisted the authority of both the “external China” represented by the Chinese emperor and the “internalized China” represented by the Japanese emperor.¹³

After unifying Japan in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu continued the warrior tradition. Like his predecessors, Ieyasu followed a pragmatic foreign policy that sought maximum benefit and minimal interference in domestic politics. With the West, Ieyasu sought to carry out relations on the basis of the “separation of politics and religion” (政教分離), favoring trade relations with Western powers, but proscribing Christianity. With China, Ieyasu sought to carry out relations on the basis of the “separation of politics and economics” (政経分離), continuing trade relations with China but refusing to participate in the Chinese tributary system.¹⁴

The warrior tradition, or “Ieyasu-style” of diplomacy toward China, which constituted the only truly indigenous Japanese and independent diplomatic tradition in Japanese history, therefore consisted of the strict “separation of politics and economics” and a “two-Chinas” policy. Both the “separation of politics and economics” and the “two-Chinas policy” were used to describe the China policy of the postwar conservative Japanese government. Although Yamamoto did not make the argument explicitly, his anachronistic use of postwar political terminology makes clear that he saw the indigenous, pragmatic and autonomous warrior tradition carried on in the postwar period by the conservative government in its approach to China. Yamamoto further described this Ieyasu-style of diplomacy as “peace diplomacy” (平和外交).¹⁵ In this way, Yamamoto associated the most cherished progressive goals of peaceful and autonomous diplomacy with postwar conservative policy toward China, including the separation of politics and economics and the “two-Chinas” policy and implied that it was the progressive opponents of the government and the Tanaka administration’s abandonment of these policies that were the real threat to peace between Japan and China.

Yamamoto also identified one other tradition in Japanese approaches to China: that of unprincipled populist opportunism represented historically by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉

¹³ Ibid., 96, 100.

¹⁴ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), “Sakoku jidai ni okotta Chūgoku būmu: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono ni” 鎖国時代におこった中国ブーム：日本人と中国人その二 (The China boom of the *sakoku* era: The Japanese and the Chinese, part 2), *Bungei shunjū*, 51/3 (1973), 120-23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

1536-1598) and in Yamamoto's own day by Tanaka Kakuei. These opportunists were willing to submit to Chinese cultural authority and political demands for nothing more than their own political purposes, inevitably provoking an anti-China nationalist backlash.

The "Ieyasu style" of diplomacy was contrasted with that of his predecessor Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who after unifying most of Japan after the Warring States period had embarked on two failed invasions of the Korean peninsula at the end of the sixteenth century aimed at conquering all of China. In Yamamoto's analogy, just as the Japanese court tradition represented the pro-China position of the postwar progressives and the warrior tradition represented the postwar conservative line on China, so Tanaka Kakuei was the second coming of Hideyoshi.¹⁶ Like Tanaka, Hideyoshi was a self-made man who rose from humble origins to the pinnacle of political power through his own talents. Yamamoto described Hideyoshi as a man of "decision and execution" (決断と実行), the official slogan of the Tanaka cabinet. Like Tanaka, Hideyoshi had been skilled in the exercise of "money politics," eventually buying himself the position of imperial regent (関白). Due to his humble personal origins (another trait he shared with Tanaka) Hideyoshi understood the common people well. He was sensitive to popular opinion and skillful in its manipulation. After a long period of civil war, Hideyoshi had managed to forge a durable and welcome peace. Just as in the postwar period, Japanese were seized by a popular mood in favor of peace and leisure, except that the tea ceremony, rather than golf, was the fad of Hideyoshi's day. Like Tanaka, Hideyoshi knew the people's desire for peace and leisure and pandered to it to support his own rule.¹⁷

In light of this desire to capitalize on the popular pacifist mood, Hideyoshi's decision to invade China via Korea seems incomprehensible. But Yamamoto suggested that its very incomprehensibility fit a Japanese historical pattern. In a passage that reveals Yamamoto's basic strategy of argumentation, he asks:

Why did Hideyoshi invade Korea? The answer to this question is as unclear as for questions like: Why did Japan invade China in the 20th century? For what reason did they conquer Nanjing? Why did they attack Pearl Harbor? Why did Prime Minister Tanaka and an army of reporters fly off to Beijing?... Why do the Japanese privilege popular sentiment over treaties, so that even when the foreign minister breaks the Japan-Republic of China Peace Treaty with a simple statement at a press conference there is not one expression of opposition or doubt?¹⁸

¹⁶ In fact, Yamamoto included a disclaimer to the effect that he did not intend a direct comparison between Hideyoshi and Tanaka but added that he could not fault his readers if they saw a parallel between the two. He also used Hideyoshi's title, *taikō* 太閤 to refer to Tanaka, calling Tanaka the "present-day *taikō*" (今太閤). Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), "Taikō shiki Chūgoku kōshō no shippai: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono go" 太閤式中国交渉の失敗：日本人と中国人その五 (The failure of *taikō*-style diplomacy with China), *Bungei shunjū*, 51/12, (1973), 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-24.

Yamamoto suggests a moral equivalence between the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations and Hideyoshi's invasion of the continent, the Nanjing Massacre, and Pearl Harbor in their common motivation. While Yamamoto suggested that there was no rational explanation for Japanese behavior, writing as the objective outside observer Ben-Dasan, he put forward his own explanation. He found the answer in an irrationality born of a lack of independent Japanese national consciousness.

Hideyoshi's basic problem, Yamamoto argues, was a lack of national consciousness. Hideyoshi did not clearly distinguish between domestic and foreign politics, between inside and outside, between Japan, on the one hand, and China or Korea on the other. This is revealed, Yamamoto tells us, in Hideyoshi's vision for continental conquest. Hideyoshi planned to simply apply the political principles he had used in unifying Japan to China and Korea. He planned to move the Japanese emperor to Beijing, to make his nephew Hidetsugu 秀次 (1568-1595) imperial regent in Beijing and then simply parcel out territories like Korea as spoils to his vassals. Given this inability to distinguish between the national and the foreign, Hideyoshi had no more qualms about embarking on the conquest of Korea than he did about the conquest of Japan. In fact, Hideyoshi could not see his actions as foreign conquest. Thus, Hideyoshi's plan should not be seen as aggression. Rather, it was another embarrassing example of the lack of national subjectivity on the part of the Japanese. To highlight the peculiarities of the Japanese on this point, Yamamoto pointed out that no Queen of England ever considered moving to India the way Hideyoshi planned to move the emperor to Beijing.¹⁹

Thus, in the end it was the *lack* of an independent national consciousness and the tendency of the Japanese to identify with China that was the root cause of Japanese overseas aggression. Although he was a warrior, in the end Hideyoshi had departed from the pragmatic warrior tradition. In the same way, although he was a conservative, Tanaka had departed from the pragmatic approach to China in order to pander to popular sentiment for his own political gain. Tanaka rushed to normalize relations with the PRC and abandoned Taiwan in 1972 to capitalize on a pro-China popular mood. Tanaka displayed an inability to deal with China as a matter of foreign as opposed to domestic policy similar to Hideyoshi's, an inability that similarly threatened dire consequences. Yamamoto surmised that the Chinese themselves must realize that the greatest threat to China came from those Japanese "who cannot grasp the distinction between Japan and China, who view Korea, Kyūshū and Shikoku as identical, who define China as the 'master' and Japan as the 'follower.'" From the Chinese point of view, of course they must see it this way."²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., 125-26.

²⁰ Ibid., 127.

National History and War Responsibility

Despite the fact that Ieyasu personally adhered to the warrior tradition in his China policy, Yamamoto argued that in the wake of his death the military government he had established, the *bakufu* 幕府, abandoned this tradition and that the only truly indigenous, independent and peaceful approach to relations with China in the Japanese tradition was abandoned. With the closing of the country to the West, China became the only source of intellectual influence in Japan and imported *sonnō* thought became the dominant political philosophy in Japan. Eventually the *bakufu* itself came to legitimize its rule in terms of neo-Confucian ideals of imperial loyalism, thereby adopting for itself the court tradition of submitting to Chinese cultural norms. Yamamoto identified two main factions in Tokugawa thinking on the China Problem. One was the Confucian tradition associated with the Ming loyalist faction through Asami Keisai (浅見綱齋, 1652-1711) and Takeuchi Shikibu (竹内式部, 1712-1768). As Confucian scholars they made Chinese political thought the absolute standard of value and used it to judge Japanese conditions. The other faction Yamamoto traced through Rai Sanyō (頼山陽, 1780-1832) and Hirata Atsutane (平田篤胤, 1776-1843) and eventually gave rise to the nativist tradition of Mito *kokugaku* thought which was highly critical of the Confucian scholars for their dedication to Chinese teachings and of the *bakufu* for its usurpation of imperial prerogatives. Like the old court nobles, the *kokugaku* scholars appeared superficially tough on China. For example, Atsutane disparaged China as a “country of dogs and monkeys” (犬猿国). Like the court nobles and the Confucian scholars, however, their ideas too were based on an internalization of Chinese standards, “whether China is made the ‘land of the descendants of heaven’ and Japan is an ‘outlaw’ or Japan is the ‘land of the descendants of heaven’ and China is a land of ‘dogs and monkeys’ the logic is exactly the same.”²¹ They simply turned these standards against China itself and concluded that the Japanese imperial house was in fact the real “central court,” more civilized than even the Chinese when judged by Chinese standards. In short, they argued that the Japanese were more Chinese than the Chinese.

This required, however, a rewriting of Japanese history to expunge the foreign origin of *sonnō* thought. As an example of this, Yamamoto took up the veneration of Kusunoki Masashige (楠木正成, 1294-1336), the fourteenth century protector of the southern court of Emperor Go-Daigo (後醍醐, 1288-1339), who became a paragon of *sonnō* virtues in the Mito scholars’ cult of imperial loyalism. Yamamoto points out that a stele erected in memorial to Kusunoki in Mito in 1692 actually bears an inscription from Zhu Shunshui (朱舜水, 1600-1682), a Ming loyalist who fled to Japan at the collapse of the dynasty. For Yamamoto, this fact again proved the susceptibility of the Japanese to foreign ideologies. The Mito scholars seized on Kusunoki as the one person in Japanese history who could compare to Zhu Shunshui and the Ming loyalists in his

²¹ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), “Chūgoku-zō wa gyakuten shita: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono shichi” 中国像は逆転した：日本人と中国人その七 (The reversal of images of China: The Japanese and the Chinese, part 7), *Bungei shunjū*, 52/3 (1973), 250.

devotion to the imperial cause.²² Thus, whether used to support or oppose the *bakufu*, Japanese *sonnō* thought was an import from China, continuing and reinforcing the pattern of making Chinese political thought the ultimate standard for measuring Japanese politics and history. Yet, as with the legend of Kusunoki, the imported nature of these ideals had been erased. Japanese history had been rewritten to conform to foreign standards. The Japanese forgot their true history and their own native traditions.

Although Yamamoto argued that both the Confucian scholars who idolized China and the *kokugaku* scholars who disparaged China suffered from the same basic problem, namely the elevation of Chinese thought to an absolute standard of value, they were not equally culpable in the later deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations in the modern era. The strong anti-Chinese sentiment seen in Atsutane's work, Yamamoto argued, was not really a reaction against China. Atsutane's anger was directed not at China, but at Japan's own Confucian scholars who tried to emulate everything Chinese and used their foreign knowledge to bolster their privileged domestic status. Atsutane's attitude, therefore, was an understandable response to the pro-China intellectuals of his own day. It was a "reaction against the type of Japanese who today wear Mao suits and greet each other with '*ni hao*'.... Then, as now, the Japanese who cause the most trouble for the Chinese are those who view the Chinese as the descendents of heaven and greet each other with '*ni hao*.'" ²³ By extension, postwar anti-PRC sentiment should be seen not as anti-Chinese per se, but as an understandable reaction against the privilege and arrogance of progressive intellectuals and those in the media who used their access to and knowledge of China to bolster their privileged position in Japan. Likewise, responsibility for the failures of postwar Japanese China policy lay with the pro-China progressives rather than their "anti-Chinese" conservative opponents.

The full implications of Yamamoto's argument become clear in his treatment of the February 26th Incident, an attempted coup meant to "restore" imperial rule that occurred in Tokyo in 1936. Yamamoto dismissed the conventional interpretation of the February 26th Incident as a right-wing movement, pointing out that the rebels never sought to kill leftists and socialists. In fact, their targets were the same as the leftists' targets. Rather, the February 26th rebels were loyalist revolutionaries in the mold of Saigō Takamori (西郷隆盛, 1828-1877), who Yamamoto further compared to Mao Zedong (毛泽东, 1893-1976). Like Mao, Saigō was committed to continual revolution. He sought to carry on the revolutionary phase of the Meiji Restoration even after the Meiji government had abandoned it. Like Mao, Saigō even sought to export his revolution in the 1871 *Seikanron* (征韓論) debate over an invasion of Korea. Yamamoto argued that the February 26th Incident was a replay of Saigō's revolutionary imperial loyalism. Like those who preceded them, however, the loyalism of the February 26th rebels had

²² Ben-Dasan, "Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono ni," 124-25.

²³ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), "Edo jidai no rettō kaizō ron: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono hachi" 江戸時代の列島改造論：日本人と中国人その八 (*Rettō kaizō ron* of the Edo period, part 8), *Bungei shunjū*, 52/3 (1974), 123.

little to do with the real emperor. Rather, they claimed to stand with the people against the government and the traitors they were convinced surrounded the emperor.²⁴ Like Saigō and the earlier *kokugaku* scholars, they used their imperial ideal to oppose the current political system. The rebels' "*sonnō* thought had no relation to the court. It was simply a move from the absolute authority of an 'internalized China' (内なる中国) to an 'internalized emperor' (内なる天皇)." They opposed the existing political system "by identifying oneself with an absolute 'internalized China' or 'internalized emperor.'"²⁵ Yamamoto thus managed to link Mao, a symbol for progressives of Asian national liberation, with the despised emperor system, which itself was the product of the "internalization" of Chinese cultural influence and ultimately led to Japanese aggression against China.

This identification with either China or the emperor, however, allowed for no differentiation between the self and the internalized image. If such a difference is perceived, there are only two possibilities. First, one could admit that one's internalized image was mistaken. In this case, one must submit to the reality of the idealized object and reform oneself as demanded by the external authority. One must "reflect" (反省) and "repent" (懺悔) and accept the external authority's words, ideas and positions as one's own.²⁶ Again, Yamamoto's choice of language has important political implications. Using terms redolent of their association with the war responsibility issue in postwar Japan, Yamamoto makes clear that the postwar progressive approach to China conformed to this pattern of submission. Alternatively, one could, in order to preserve one's internalized image, destroy the real object and remake it in one's internalized image. "The latter is what the February 26th Incident did for the emperor and the siege of Nanjing did for China." The war with China was the "international edition of the February 26th Incident."²⁷ Just as the February 26th instigators did not see themselves as rebels but as saviors of the imperial order, so the Japanese did not see the war in China as a war of aggression but as an effort to save China.

Given the common internalization of China in both the prewar and postwar periods, Yamamoto argued that even in the 1970s, the Japanese had not really changed their thinking on the China problem. They still "cannot conceive of relations with China as Japan in opposition to China."²⁸ They could not conceive of relations between the two as relations between two distinct, independent entities, much less two equal nations. Having identified with, or "internalized" China, when confronted by the real China, which contradicted their idealized, internalized image, Japanese could only submit, surrendering unconditionally, or lash out to reform China in their

²⁴ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), "'Uchinaru Chūgoku' to 'Uchinaru tennō': Nihonjin to Chūgokujin saishūkai" 「内なる中国」と「内なる天皇」：日本人と中国人最終回 ("Internalized China" and the "internalized emperor": The Japanese and the Chinese, final part), *Bungei shunjū*, 52/5 (1974), 167-68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

own image. Japanese “cannot understand that the external China is different than their own internalized China ... when the external China behaves in ways that depart from their own ‘internalized China’ they become like indignant children. Therefore, the cause [of problems between Japan and China] is usually on the Japanese side.”²⁹

In sum, postwar pro-China sentiment sprang from the same source as prewar aggression in China. Postwar idealization of the PRC and popular sentiment in favor of normalization were not based on any meaningful reflection on the causes of the war or on any real change in Japanese attitudes toward China. It was simply another manifestation of the same lack of national consciousness that drove the Japanese to war with China. The servile submission to China of the postwar Japanese progressive intellectuals and the unprincipled opportunists in the Japanese political and business worlds was bound at some point to produce a new round of nationalist indignation at the pro-China forces in Japan and concomitant resentment of China. “Today is a period of ‘China as the descendant of heaven and Japanese submission.’ At some point this will inevitably reverse. This is why I have said that Japanese views of China have not changed at all from the time of the siege of Nanjing. We must deal with this problem now. If we do not we invite a most fearful outcome.”³⁰ All this was the result of a Japanese inability to create a national identity truly separate from and independent of China.

Therefore, the only way to avoid a repeat of past mistakes was to cultivate a truly independent national identity through the study of Japanese history. “The Japanese have erased their own history,” Yamamoto contended, by constantly subjecting it to revision according to foreign standards, whether Chinese or American. Without a real national history, the origins of Japanese behavioral norms remained unclear. Japanese could not understand why they think and act the way they do. They could only react to events emotionally and irrationally leading to cycles of submission and aggression. The Japanese, Yamamoto argued, were a “people with no thought” (無思想の人間), and this is why they just kept repeating the same mistakes in relations with China.³¹ Resistance to foreign ideologies and the study of national history were the keys to a truly independent and peaceful foreign policy. Only by learning their real history (as one supposes Yamamoto has provided it) would the Japanese be able to gain the national subjectivity needed to carry out peaceful relations with China.

Thus, the basic problem in Sino-Japanese relations and the greatest threat to peace between the two nations has always been the *weakness* of Japanese national consciousness. It was only Japanese nationalism that could preserve the peace between Japan and China. The key to peace is the cultivation of Japanese nationalism through the production of a truly *national* history. Yamamoto proposed peace through historical revisionism.

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

³⁰ Ben-Dasan, “Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono shichi,” 250.

³¹ Ben-Dasan, “Nihonjin to Chūgokujin saishūkai,” 174.

Japanese Sentimentalism versus Chinese Realism

It should be pointed out that Yamamoto did not imply that China or the Chinese were to blame for the Japanese predicament. He never transferred responsibility for the lack of Japanese national consciousness to a foreign other. For Yamamoto, this responsibility always rested squarely with those Japanese who did not resist foreign influence.

In fact, Yamamoto rarely commented on China itself. When he did, it was usually to contrast Chinese realism with Japanese emotion and sentimentalism. One of the deleterious effects of the lack of an independent Japanese national consciousness, he argued, was a conspicuous tendency in Japanese diplomacy to privilege emotion and popular sentiment over international legal conventions or a rational analysis of international conditions. This, in turn, made Japanese weak in international negotiations and vulnerable to manipulation. This sentimentalism on the part of the Japanese contrasted sharply, Yamamoto claimed, with the realism of the Chinese leadership. Zhou Enlai, he argued, would never look to Japan for validation or emotional gratification. Zhou judged his own success by the standard of Chinese national interest. Yet Japanese intellectuals and politicians had long looked to China for validation, and in the postwar period many still sought emotional gratification in approval from Zhou Enlai. Of course, this weakness on the part of the Japanese was not lost on Zhou and the Chinese leadership. They were well aware of the fact that the key to dealing with the Japanese was to first control Japanese public sentiment. Once the PRC gained the support of Japanese public sentiment, the Japanese government would always privilege gratifying that sentiment over any objective national interests or legal obligations. This contrast between Japanese sentimentalism and Chinese realism, Yamamoto argued, was basic to the history of Sino-Japanese relations. Just as Japanese popular sentiment had pushed the Japanese government to reject peace offers from the Nationalists and to attack Nanjing in 1937, so in 1972, swept up in pro-China sentiment fanned by the media, Japanese unilaterally broke the 1952 treaty with Taiwan in order to achieve normalization with the PRC.³² Even if they were manipulative and threatening, for Yamamoto the Chinese were in possession of an enviable realist sense of national interest that Japanese lacked.

Conclusion: National Identity and War Responsibility in Japan's Relations with China

Yamamoto's articles, published over the course of more than a year, have an often rambling and repetitious quality as he jumps between historical periods. This combined with extensive quotations in classical Japanese with no notes and little guide to pronunciation may account for why they seem to have garnered less attention than his other writings in this period as well as why they were not published in book form until 2005. Given this, along with the

³² Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), "Subete wa hajimeta gotoku ni owaru: Nihonjin to Chūgokujin sono ichi" すべては始めた如くに終わる : 日本人と中国人その一 (Everything ends just as it began: The Japanese and the Chinese, part 1), *Bungei shunjū*, 50/16 (1972), 153, 160.

strained logic of Yamamoto's analogies and his transparent submission of history to political expediency, why should we take Yamamoto seriously? Despite the inelegance of his presentation, many of Yamamoto's core concerns and conclusions are in no way unique and offer important insights into how relations with China are inseparable from Japanese nationalist discourse and issues of war responsibility.

First, Yamamoto was not unique in seeing Japan's relations with China as emblematic of a basic lack of Japanese national consciousness. Japanese across the political spectrum came to a similar conclusion. For example, Takeuchi Yoshimi (竹内好 1910-1977), who shaped the attitude toward China of postwar progressives like Maruyama Masao (丸山眞男, 1914-1996), made a similar argument in his seminal 1948 essay, "Chinese Modernity and Japanese Modernity" (中国の近代と日本の近代). Takeuchi argued in this article that the failure of Japanese modernization, culminating in Japanese aggression in China and ultimate defeat, was the result of Japan's failure to develop an independent national consciousness in the modern period as the Japanese adopted one Western ideology after another in what he called an effort to become the "star pupils" of Western modernization, including, of course, Western notions of imperialism.³³

Etō Shinkichi (衛藤藩吉, 1923-2007), one of Japan's most respected China studies scholars, identified a "love-hate" pattern in Japan's relations with China that in some ways is similar to the pattern of submission and aggression put forward by Yamamoto. Etō saw the history of Japan's relations with China dominated by cycles of "love" and "hate" in which Japanese identified with and idealized China out of respect for Japanese notions of Chinese culture followed by periods of intense disappointment and resentment when contact with the real China inevitably failed to live up to this idealized image. Like Yamamoto, Etō even identified the *kokugaku* scholars of the Edo period as the exemplars of this trend.³⁴

Like Yamamoto, many in Japan who identified a lack of national consciousness in Japan also saw an admirably powerful national consciousness in China. For example, Takeuchi contrasted the lack of Japanese national consciousness with the power of Chinese nationalism which been nurtured in the struggle against Western and Japanese imperialism and was the key to the success of Chinese modernization. In 1976 Kano Tsutomu, editor of the *Japan Interpreter*, contrasted the power of Chinese national consciousness with the situation in Japan. Throughout modern history, Kano argued, Japan had confronted a relatively weak China. After normalization,

³³ This article was reprinted in 1964 in *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 as one of the seventeen most important articles of the postwar period. On Takeuchi see, Takeuchi Yoshimi (trans. and ed. Richard F. Calichman), *What is Modernity: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and Lawrence Olson, *Ambivalent Moderns: Portraits of Japanese Cultural Identity*, (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 46-58.

³⁴ Etō Shinkichi, "Evolving Sino-Japanese Relations," in Etō Shinkichi, *Selected Works on Modern Japan-China Relations* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 2005), 1-20; and Etō Shinkichi 衛藤藩吉, "Nit-Chū mochijai o sonchō suru no ron," 日中持味を尊重するの論 (The argument for respecting the national distinctiveness of Japan and China), *Bungei shunjū* 59/7 (1981), 100-1.

for the first time Japan faced a strong, unified China. China was in possession of a powerful national consciousness, one that provoked in the Japanese a new concern for their own national identity:

Japan is suddenly faced with a giant who not only retains Eastern values and integrity as a nation but has also accomplished far-reaching social reform. The fact of a new China has forced Japanese to look back upon their cultural heritage and reconsider the path of their modernization, not in terms of Western standards but through a reassessment of indigenous values. In this sense, one can say that the current *Nihonjinron* boom is an echo of the China boom that has been going on for the last several years.³⁵

Unlike the Japanese, the Chinese are assumed to have resisted Westernization and maintained a pure “Eastern” identity while modernizing. Like Yamamoto, Kano held progressive intellectuals most responsible for Japanese failure to maintain an independent identity. Japanese Marxists, Kano argued, had never been able to assimilate Marxism into the native Japanese ethos, and “a Japanese Mao Zedong never appeared to blend a Western system of thought with native tradition.”³⁶ Thus for Kano, as for Yamamoto and Takeuchi, the Chinese were exemplars of the national consciousness that Japanese needed to regain. The PRC was in possession of the national subjectivity that postwar Japan lacked.

Second, Yamamoto’s mode of argumentation reveals an important aspect of the war responsibility issue in thinking about Japan’s relations with China. Conventional wisdom holds that one of the legacies of Japanese aggression in China is that a sense of war guilt, or war responsibility influences Japanese attitudes toward China so as to make Japanese desperate to improve relations with the PRC and to make Japanese more amenable to Chinese positions. For example, Etō Shinkichi argued that a sense of war guilt drove Japanese, especially older Japanese, to assuage their guilt by defending China. In 1972, as preparations for normalization proceeded, Etō warned that the Japanese were falling into another bout of “love” toward China fed by war guilt and exacerbated by leftist ideology, an uncritical media and a business community in the thrall of the China market. This made it unlikely that the Japanese government would be able to effectively pursue national interests in relations with China and gave China an upper hand in negotiations: “In this sense, as always, China is strong, Japan is weak.”³⁷

Of course, we can’t deny feelings of guilt or responsibility on the part of postwar Japanese or the possibility that such feelings motivated Japanese to work for improved relations. But it should be pointed out that this is just one possible, and certainly not the only, outcome of reflection upon the war responsibility issue in relations with China. The China scholar Nakajima

³⁵ Kano Tsutomu, “Introduction: Why the Search for Identity,” in Japan Center for International Exchange ed., *The Silent Power: Japan’s Identity and World Role* (Tokyo: Simul Press, 1976), 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ Etō, “Nit-Chū no mochiaji,” 101.

Mineo (中嶋嶺雄, b. 1932), for example, acknowledged that he had a responsibility to work to avoid another war, but argued that this responsibility could not be fulfilled through what he saw as the Japanese progressives' and the Japanese government's submission to the demands of the Chinese Communist dictatorship.³⁸ In light of Yamamoto's arguments, we also need to be aware of the *rhetorical* utility of the war responsibility issue in debates about China policy. Here the importance of the war responsibility issue is its utility in associating one's position on China policy with the fulfillment of Japan's war responsibility and contributing to peace while associating one's opponents with past aggression. While Yamamoto explicitly rejected any argument for basing policy toward China on moral considerations, Yamamoto's entire analogy is structured around this rhetorical strategy. His history of Sino-Japanese relations is rewritten to associate the pro-China forces of his day with past aggression against China and with the Emperor system they criticized. Even careful scholars like Etō Shinkichi could not resist this rhetoric. Etō argued that postwar leftist ideologues reminded him of wartime "puritanical patriots." Therefore, we should not naively assume that the issues of war guilt or war responsibility primarily or necessarily result in compromise and amenability to Chinese positions.

Finally, attention to Yamamoto is warranted because his ideas about the nature of Japan's relations with China arguably still resonate. The idea that Japanese policy toward China has been compromised by a lack of national consciousness that has been manipulated by an opportunistic political and media elite and that makes the Japanese emotional and unable to resist Chinese demands is today commonplace. Reflecting on the state of relations near the end of his career, Etō Shinkichi concluded: "Honestly speaking, I think that in the second half of the twentieth century Japanese have been too passive. In the twenty-first century we should increase the instances in which [Japanese and Chinese] can freely engage in discussion without becoming emotional."³⁹ The idea that Japanese need to escape the psychological burdens of modern history and nurture a more powerful national consciousness also forms an important subtext of the movement to make Japan a more "normal" country. For example, Kitaoka Shin'ichi (北岡伸一, b. 1948), a scholar of international relations, former Japanese ambassador to the United Nations and author of the book, *Becoming a Normal Country* (「普通の国」〜) argued that "the recent mounting evidence of nationalism in Japan is merely a backlash against the excessive oppression of these feelings since the country's defeat in World War II."⁴⁰

³⁸ Etō Jun 江藤淳, Nakajima Mineo 中嶋嶺雄, Nishi Haruhiko 西春彦, Kobori Keiichirō 小堀桂一郎, Takeda Taijun 武田泰淳, "Shinpojiumu: Chūgoku kindai hyakunen no jitsuzō to kyozō," シンポジウム：中国・近代百年の実像と虚像 (Symposium: China, 100 years of modernity: The real image and the false image), *Kikan geijutsu* 季刊芸術, 5/3 (Summer 1971), 50-51.

³⁹ Etō Shinkichi, *Nijisseiki Nit-Chū kankeishi* 二十世紀日中関係し (The history of twentieth-century Japan-China relations) (Tokyo: Tōhō shobō, 2004), 265.

⁴⁰ Kitaoka Shin'ichi, "Is Nationalism Intensifying in Japan?" *Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry (JTTI)* 20/1 (January 1, 2001).

Reflecting, perhaps, the continued relevance of Yamamoto's ideas, his series of articles was finally published in book form in 2005 (now with extensive notes), coming out just in time for the wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations in Beijing and other Chinese cities in the spring of that year. The forward to the 2005 edition asserts its contemporary relevance: "Thirty years on, looking at the problems that still endlessly strain bilateral relations, we believe that this book again has no small meaning in today's world."⁴¹

⁴¹ Isaiah Ben-Dasan (trans. Yamamoto Shichihei), *Nihonjin to Chūgokujin: Naze ano kuni to matomo ni tsukiaenai no ka* 日本人と中国人：なぜあの国とまともに付き合えないのか (The Japanese and the Chinese: Why can't we truly get along with that country?) (Tokyo: Shōdensha, 2005), 4.