

Demeaning *Kokusaika*: Nationalist and Neoliberal Discourses

John W. CASEY*

Popular among progressive Japanese educators during the 1920s, the term *kokusaika* —and its common English equivalent “internationalization”—all but disappeared until government, business, and educational leaders during the 1970s and 1980s embraced it as a popular slogan. In a ceremony held in Tokyo in February 1987 marking National Foundation Day, Nakasone Yasuhiro rallied the nation in his call for Japan’s transformation into an “international state” (*kokusai kokka*). The *kokusaika* label has been attached to projects as diverse as investment funds and environmental NGOs, with a common thread of meaning generally taken for granted. Fifteen years on, with Japan facing its most serious economic troubles since the end of the war, *kokusaika* is still regularly invoked, if not always with as much enthusiasm as in years past. In this essay an attempt is made to understand the term as it is used in popular discourse through a critical analysis which places the term in the broader social framework of “imagined communities.”

Problems Defining *Kokusaika*

A survey in Japan done in the 1980s concerning how *kokusaika* was understood by most Japanese citizens revealed generally vague notions concerning Japan’s increased openness to the

*John William CASEY ジョン・ウィリアム・ケイシー：敬愛大学国際学部助教授 他言語話者のための英語教育

Associate Professor of English, Faculty of International Studies, Keiai University; Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

world or an ability to deal with “foreign” ideas (Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986). In a country often noted for its adaptation and development of “western” science, such thoughts may come as little surprise. Whether referred to as *kokusaika* or the earlier Meiji formulation *datsu-A, nyu-O* (“out of Asia, into Europe”), concern over the merits and drawbacks of an increased interchange with the world outside Japan has often been expressed in a seemingly self-evident, yet curiously obscure language.

Social critics, news reporters and editorialists, corporate spokespeople, academics, and other self-styled “opinion leaders” have, needless to say, played a major role in developing notions of *kokusaika* and images of opening up to the world are recurrent themes in government, business, and academic dialogues both within Japan and in Japan Studies seminars throughout the world. As one Kyoto University professor put it in an address to the Japan Foundation:

“Internationalization means doing away with borders, and today, when there is a continuing increase of population movement across national boundaries, the national border of Japan is becoming increasingly thin and low.”

Similarly, in a paper entitled “Versions of Self-Image: A Japanese Perspective,” Hirose Yoko of the Japanese National Institute of Multi-Media Education evokes the image of a larger group of nations to which Japan might open its doors. She notes, “Japanese often use the word *kokusaika* (internationalization) to signify the desire of many Japanese to become more a part of the ‘world community.’”

In contrast, cultural anthropologist Millie Creighton views internationalization in terms of its possible repercussions on Japanese society. Internationalization, she notes, “has been taken to involve the further opening of Japanese society to foreign influences.”

But it is worth asking if *kokusaika* is quite as uncomplicated a notion as it may first appear. Even in the apparently similar examples above, one senses varying shades of apprehension regarding Japan’s permeable borders, its desire and ability to “fit

in” with different communities, the distressing notion of “foreign” influences, and the need to project Japan’s image abroad.

These concerns hint at what some skeptics (Hall, 1997; Iwabuchi, 1994) believe is a deceptively fluid nature to the use of the discourse of internationalization. They claim, in essence, that *kokusaika* embodies two opposing and contradictory stances, namely: (1) Japan needs to change and open up to the world, and (2) Japan’s unique culture, by definition, precludes it from becoming a truly international country. This seems a rather harsh and perhaps unwarranted criticism in light of the many earnest and often historically quite advanced proposals for international understanding made by Japan for well over a century. Consider this excerpt from a petition to the League of Nations made by Shimonaka Yasaburo in 1920 and 1921:

The education of people, we dare say, is still predominantly influenced by national egoism. So long as egoism is allowed to persist, all other efforts toward peace and understanding, we are afraid, will be of no permanent value. We can not, therefore, too strongly insist that without an international organization of educational influences, which shall effectively counteract all the hidden forces tending toward imperialism and militarism, no league of nations can possibly attain its object. (Lincicome, 1999)

Few proposals at the league that year could have matched Shimonaka’s for insight and sincerity. And yet, the discourse of internationalization has clearly evolved since the 1920s, undergoing the distortions of war and rapid social change. So, what grounds then exist for such skepticism about the intentions of *kokusaika*? And if there is, in fact, an unspoken motive contained in the discourse of *kokusaika*, should it be interpreted simply as common prudence, guarded conservatism, or perhaps something even more self-serving?

In the following sections, I raise some of the principal questions surrounding the notion of *kokusaika*/internationalization (used interchangeably hereafter) and potential problems with its usage. I examine the ideological underpinnings of theories of community and exclusion as they relate to Japan, how the

concepts of *kokusaika*/internationalization fit into this model, and how they are used variously by different individuals and organizations. Examples from editorials, opinion pieces, lectures, promotional material, etc. are used to determine whether and to what extent these terms are drawn upon to maintain discourses of exclusion.

Manufactured Identity Crisis

The following excerpt from an interview with author and academic Norma Field discusses an article written for *The Chicago Tribune* about the 1998 Nagano Olympics and what she regards as the American reporter's curious lack of imagination. She notes that he

... couldn't get past the consciousness that having a strong national identity, a sense of pride and national identity is not only a good thing, but probably a necessary thing. This article ends up portraying the ambivalence as if it were a pathology instead of suggesting that it might not only be reasonable, but healthy to have a sense of skepticism about national pride.

The assumption here that every citizen of a country should naturally feel an association with some nation-state and its citizens is at the very root of nationalism. Ironically, discourses of national pride, while intended to insure that these feelings remain strong, actually presuppose their existence. Why, one must ask, if people truly possess a natural love for the state, is it necessary to constantly reinforce the notion with symbols and images such as flags and national hymns? Consider the ambivalence many feel about love of the state clearly reflected in the fact that there exist—in both English and Japanese—two separate terms to express the notion: nationalism and patriotism (*kokkashugi*, *aikoku*), depending on whether one is referring to oneself or to someone else. “I am a patriot” one claims rather immodestly, whereas “He’s a nationalist.” Whichever term is employed, the nation and its perceived distinctiveness is the basis for inclusion, and as such, it is crucial

to develop both inclusive and exclusive discourses—the us vs. them rhetoric found in texts as far ranging as mahjong club newsletters and diatribes from the Ku Klux Klan.

It has been suggested by critics of Japanese distinctiveness theory (*Nihonjinron*) that socially-constructed notions of Japanese exoticism along with a heightened vigilance against foreign influences have served to link *kokusaika* discourse with ideas of Japanese uniqueness and identity. Many would see this conjunction of a nominally universalist *kokusai* position and overtly relativist notions of Japanese uniqueness as wholly incompatible. Yet others have argued, convincingly I believe, that the notions work in close concert. Iwabuchi Koichi, in a paper entitled “Complicit Exoticism: Japan and its other,” makes the notable claim that the “popularity of *Nihonjinron* has been inseparable from the discourse on *kokusaika* (internationalization) which has accompanied the impact of globalisation in Japan.”

If, as Iwabuchi suggests, these two contrasting notions have indeed become linked, how then are we to reconcile the often radical claims for Japanese separateness and exclusivity so common in theories of *Nihonjinron* with conflicting notions of openness and integration expressed in most common definitions of *kokusaika*? Iwabuchi offers a possible explanation. *Kokusaika*, he notes,

... manufactures an empty space within the dominant ideology, into which people can invest their own desires differently but positively. The empty space is being filled with “how to” internationalize Japan and the Japanese “correctly”. The popularity of *Nihonjinron* since the 1970s has to be understood in this context of *kokusaika*. *Nihonjinron* tends to function as a “manual” for *kokusaika*.

This notion of how best to “correctly” internationalize Japan is echoed in the hopeful expressions of many social theorists—both within Japan and abroad—concerning the future of Japan. In an editorial written for the centennial anniversary of the *Japan Times*, noted *Nihonjinron-sha* (Japanese uniqueness theorist) Nakane Chie interprets problems with learning

English as having isolated Japan linguistically and psychologically from the rest of the world:

In short, Japan is still enclosed in a world of its own where only Japanese is used and spoken, no matter how eager we are to join the outside world. Unless we make strenuous efforts to make sure that people with adequate English ability take up prominent positions in various fields, it would be difficult to break down a psychological barrier that we may not know even exists. Hence, those who do not speak English—or are not in an appropriately “prominent” position—are condemned to live in an enclosed world behind a psychological barrier. Here we see the claim made earlier of opposing stances within the *kokusaika* discourse—people want to join the outside world, yet they cannot because of some inherent inability.

Hirose Yoko complains of the tendency of many foreigners to view Japanese in a stereotypical manner. Commenting on a particular guidebook used by many Japanese travelers going abroad, she notes:

Although the presentation is very stereotyped and many of its points are rather obscure, if Japanese travelers repeat the account of Japanese culture given in the book and tape, they can satisfy the predictable questions of their foreign friends. In this way, the same old Japanese stereotypes are perpetuated in a vicious circle of disinformation largely divorced from reality.

On the other hand, Japanese are also titillated by such traditional presentations of their society. At the same time that we complain about foreigners misunderstanding real Japanese life, we appreciate the attention. Furthermore, it confirms our cozy insular idea that foreigners cannot possibly understand us anyway.

Internationalization—Constructed Reality?

A simple maxim of the public relations industry holds that the extent to which discourse appears “natural” is a function both of time and of social conditioning. Given the proper

circumstances and a sufficient passage of time, groups often adapt social behavior to extreme limits. To appreciate this subtle fact, one need only consider the success of tobacco manufacturers in the 1930s in convincing American women to adapt clothing fashions to match the colors on cigarette packages.

Language is the most social of all human behaviors, yet rarely do its producers or consumers pause to consider the historical conditions under which a particular discourse enters “mainstream” usage. For most of us, the process by which such discourse is sampled, negotiated, slowly tested, and at some point absorbed into general practice is a seamless, if sometimes chaotic, extension of social life.

Even so, it is this social-historical background which goes into making up the essential components of discourse, even down to the semantic components of a single lexical item. Put in other words, the particular social and economic conditions which influence the means of discursive production and interpretation are essential in shaping a text. And the reverse applies equally; texts are clues used to interpret and reproduce the larger social order.

In any circumstances, but especially during periods of social change, groups are confronted with and will frequently adopt discourses which conform in some respects to their perceived needs. The resulting process through which language becomes naturalized is, to a large extent, an uncontrolled, often unconscious one. Students adopt the discourse and vocabulary of hip-hop artists, university professors adopt business language, and when advantageous, business executives learn the language of high school girls.

In contrast to this natural form of language assimilation, the culture industry (i.e. the public relations industry, the mass media, and other self-appointed “opinion makers”) have defined their business as the purposeful manipulation of meaning and discourse. Discourse can confront us in obvious and easily recognizable ways, as with the cigarette advertisements urging subway commuters to “Smoke, Today,” or it can be as subtle

as gradually understanding mid-way through a telephone conversation that the other party is calling from a cell phone on a high-speed train.

It is due in part to this obliqueness of language—the lack of awareness of how language functions in the background of society—that discourse is able to function in so many conflicting and contradictory ways. Within this context, it is possible to consider ways in which terms such as *kokusaika* might be employed by different groups to achieve their goals.

The question of goals, too, is not simple. Their establishment, whether done alone or by a group, is a process of selection. Goals, like social systems, are not predetermined but rather are negotiated from various points of interest, and in that sense must be viewed as ideological. Any application of *kokusaika* is therefore predicated on the notion of conflicting ideologies. What is potentially beneficial for one group may be less so for another. The process of curriculum building in schools, for example, without first examining the discourses used in constructing its parts will obscure the foundations upon and the processes through which those discourses have been established. Curriculum achieved in this manner benefits some interests disproportionately—typically those with the most power.

Kokusaika therefore cannot easily be understood as an uncomplicated, ahistorical notion—whether or not some complain about “reading too much” into words. First of all, the term is employed by various organizations, writers, etc. in a multitude of senses which include its use as an indicator of how well software has been adapted for the Internet, the extent students understand foreign languages, and the ability of businesses to sell products abroad. Secondly, as noted above, it has been suggested that the term has absorbed notions of exclusivity and uniqueness antithetical to what many commonly assume it to mean. And finally, attempts to somehow put *kokusai* into practice entail the setting of goals which, due to one or another ideological position, may be in stark contrast to stated—let alone underlying—notions of internationalization.

Discourses of Universalism and Relativism

Ruth Benedict, whose eloquent wartime propaganda *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* influenced a generation of Japan culture theorists (including the highly influential Ishida Eiichiro and the aforementioned Nakane Chie), owed a key debt for her methodology to the anthropologist Franz Boas. As the principal proponent of what would later become known as “cultural relativism,” Boas argued that one’s own cultural biases inevitably influence interpretations of different cultures. As a simple rule of thumb, cross-cultural theorists—and tourists returning from foreign locations—draw our attention to the fact that cultural assumptions frequently fail us while traveling abroad. Extreme interpretations, on the other hand, have led to the total rejection of any overarching universal norms by which cultures can be judged and claims that every society must be understood solely on its own terms.

But what were once pleas for patience in understanding other cultures have sometimes led to mere ethnocentrism both on the part of the observed and the observer. This was clearly the case with Benedict’s study of Japan and the plethora of uniqueness theories which sprang up in its wake. Instead of understanding cultural differences as historically shaped by internal and external forces and therefore as flexible, theorists both in Japan and abroad seized upon notions of cultural uniqueness to unify and codify the Japanese culture (Morris-Suzuki, 1987). In a process of complicit self-stereotyping, Japan and the “West” engaged in a game of theoretical nation building Edward Said has called *Orientalism*—a way of conceptualizing the Orient and the Occident which sets up categorical distinctions between the two. Said observes that

... a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts

concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on

Seen in this sense, the opposing relativist-universalist framework which Japanese and western cultural theorists employ to define one another seems best suited to the causes of ethnocentrists and racial theorists. There are no vulgarisms or epithets here, no ill-mannered slurs. And yet the ultimate effect of this type of discourse is to distance the foreigner from the interpreter’s viewpoint—whether or not this is the conscious intention of the producer. Thus, Frank Gibney, author of *Japan: The Fragile Superpower*, offers this explanation for Japan’s persistent hesitancy in “opening up” to the West:

To my mind it is a ghost. A well-revered ghost, it is hallowed by tradition. Its still lively persona, amazingly tenacious, fastened his hold on this country three centuries ago and remains disinclined to let go. Tokugawa Ieyasu, of course. In so many ways Japan—for all its democratic freedoms and technological modernity—is still Tokugawa’s country. The cast of mind the shogun fastened on his subjects—an imposed docility—is hard to break. It has weathered (and hindered) two sweeping reforms in the past century and a half. It is now haunting the advocates of a “Third Opening.”

Many Japanese will sense in this description a cultural no-man’s-land demarcated between them and the West. Note the “ghost,” a mythical spirit often evoked to explain away phenomenon which do not easily fit into our world view. This particular ghost is defined by its “tenacious” ability to keep the Japanese from straying from “tradition.” Opposed to any real current forces of repression in Japanese society which might be working against people’s freedom, we are offered a particular “cast of mind” and a (self?) “imposed docility.”

Compare Gibney’s quote with the following passage by Nemoto Jiro, former chairman of the Japan Federation of Employers Associations (Nikkeiren):

Unlike countries in Europe and America that value the single-minded pursuit of progress and development, Japan values the search of harmony and consensus. Such a national trait should

become all the more important in the future In the 130 years we took to modernize Japan, we have always had our feet well-anchored in both the East and the West. As we explore the unknown territory of a global age, we would do well to keep sight of Western values like freedom and discipline while working to fuse them with our own passion for harmony and consensus.

Here the contrasts between East and West are even more clearly defined. While Japan values “the search of harmony and consensus,” Western countries, we are told, seem obsessed with the more mundane “progress and development.” And these are not so much activities, we are assured, as “national traits” which can only intensify in the future. Values, it seems, are somehow permeable, though, since Western ones like “freedom and discipline” can actually be fused with more traditional Japanese “passion(s) for harmony and consensus.”

In both cases above, we can see the process of a universalist view serving to define a cultural relativism which Japanese uniqueness theorists—both Japanese and Western—then use to impose distinct cultural values on the nation and its people. Although generally viewed as relevant only in Japan, some in business and government circles, harking back to (or perhaps presaging?) “Asianist” doctrines (*toashugi*, *toyoshugi*), have attempted to relate these values to a wider Asia. In veiled references to rightist politician Ishihara Shintaro and Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington, former Ambassador to the United States, Kuriyama Takakazu, disapproves of efforts by individuals he claims

. . . seek to identify their idea with the notion of “Asian values,” as opposed to “Western values,” as preached by certain political leaders in Asia. They refuse to recognize that certain fundamental human values are universal in nature. They tend to overplay the uniqueness of various cultures and values. In this sense, they certainly share a common ground with the American scholar who prophesies the “clash of civilizations.”

As I have noted, much of the discourse connected with *kokusaika* deals with questions of “opening up, integration,

crossing borders, foreign influences,” all nominally suggestive of a universalist approach to the world. Still, there appears to be a marked increase in theories of particularity which speak to discourses of relativism. This movement toward one pole while holding fast to another is characteristic of a number of *Nihonjinron* theorists. Nakane Chie, whose powerful images of a Japanese “vertical society,” although somewhat dated, still remain influential, states categorically that “. . . there seems not to exist such a homogeneous society as Japan in the contemporary world” (Nakane, 1988).

Tsunoda Tadanobu, whose popular books detailing Westerners’ inability to hear the cries of cicadas, while delighting some Japanese readers, baffle Western—and many Japanese—scientists. Peter Dale (1993) points to the incongruence of Tsunoda’s simultaneous appeal to the universality of scientific norms on the one hand and his insistence that science is culture-bound on the other. In terms reminiscent of what wartime linguist Ekoyama Tsuneaki called the “divinely endowed Yamato language” (*Keigoho*, in Miller, 1990), Tsunoda insists that Japanese, while clearly a natural human language, remains wholly unique. Commenting somewhat inaccurately on comparative linguistics, he notes:

In Japanese, pure consonants are not used and thus words invariably end in vowels. That’s the sort of peculiar language it is, and in this regard it differs profoundly from Western languages. Miller (1982) notes how cultural theorists have promoted the link between race, culture, and language with a

. . . myth that argues that there is a need for foreigners to learn the Japanese language but also simultaneously . . . that the Japanese language is so uniquely difficult that it is all but impossible for anyone to learn it, whether Japanese or foreigner.

Perhaps more than any of the above examples, what brought the issue of Japanese cultural relativism to the fore were trade conflicts between Japan and Western countries—especially the United States—during the 1970s and 1980s. Both universalist and relativist rhetoric was employed in

attempts to prove how either “universal notions of free trade” or the “unique Japanese market economy” should prevail. Hall (1997) characterizes the struggle in the following manner:

As the United States and Europe began to lose patience and as domestic resistance built up in Japan in the 1970s, Japanese intellectuals spun their theories of “uniqueness” to justify special treatment for their country. However, when European and American revisionist writers in the late 1980s joined this exploration of Japanese dissimilarity, Tokyo cried “Foul!” and complained of Western cultural absolutism.

In Hall’s view, Japanese intellectuals constructed these theories as a result of pressure from outside to open up Japan’s tightly controlled markets and distribution system. He seems to be implying that although the pressure itself was foreign, the doctrines of uniqueness formulated in response were purely homegrown. Yet they may well have been encouraged by the type of discourse found in documents such as *Japan 2000*—a CIA-sponsored study advocating notions of Japanese cultural relativism with such claims as:

The concept of “universal truths” in the Western paradigm has long been taken for granted. The *Japan Paradigm*, on the other hand, disallow[s] the existence of any set of absolute rules. In Japan the struggle for economic power is paramount. The group, by extension, Japan as a nation (the largest group), must win at any cost. In their value system almost any tactic is acceptable. (In Barrel and Tanaka, 1995)

Actual concerns about Japanese consumers appear to be of less importance to either side of this argument than considerations of profit. What is important to note is the complicit manner in which Japan and the West appear to use each other as the means of constructing a framework for a universalist vs. relativist discourse.

As a final point of interest regarding the question of universalist and relativist views, it may be worth noting the suggestion made by some that most of the world’s principal religions view themselves as universalist in the sense that they are not, for the most part, culture bound. Hence they accept adherents

from among any nationality or ethnicity. Among major industrialized nations, Shinto, in contrast, arguably Japan's state religion (considering its ties with the emperor and the country's war memorials), seems to find itself alone as a relativist religion tied to one country and one ethnic group. Lacking any particular missionary intent or wider calls for adherents, discussions of internationalization seem to have little relevance for the many shrines which dot the hillsides of Japan. Writing in the *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Michael Pye points to the connections between proselytizing and internationalization:

Many of the popular new religions and at least some of the traditional Buddhist denominations such as Jodo Shinshu convey a sense of universalism, by which is meant that they are understood to address a common human condition which is not restricted to Japanese people. As a result they engage in overseas missions, with varying degrees of success. This understanding of the wider appropriateness of one's own religious belief for others fits in neatly with the current awareness of Japan's place as part of the wider network of nations.

To sum up, in this section I have attempted to illustrate how Japan and Western countries apply—consciously or otherwise—a universalist-relativist framework to their relationship which functions to define much of the discourse used between them. In Japan this framework acts to produce discourses of distinctiveness which then facilitate the reconstruction of exclusive social patterns. *Kokusaika* discourse appears, in essence, to embody the contradictory nature of this framework.

Uchi-soto—Which Side Are You On?

An issue that many vocal critics claim puts the lie to *kokusaika* discourse concerns the restriction of numerous businesses, schools, clubs, and other institutions in Japan to Japanese. One infamous sign on a Shinjuku night spot is still spoken of by many long-time foreign residents: “Club International—No Foreigners.” If that sign has since been removed, many others

have replaced it in cities and towns all across Japan. Stories of foreigners being tossed—ceremoniously to be sure—out of shops and restaurants, rejected by banks for credit cards, or refused entry to hotels and public baths are so commonplace now that even the foreign press, once eager to learn of such incidents, has recently begun to cool to the news.

Some critics note with poignant irony that while apartheid has been steadily dismantled in Johannesburg, its specter has reappeared in Tokyo. Although many of these same critics conveniently overlook the frightening resurgence of right-wing, anti-foreigner extremism in Europe and North America, if the Japanese discourse of internationalization is to be understood in any sense as universal, exclusion of foreigners is an issue that calls out for attention.

In such a climate, how does the rhetoric of openness, free exchange of ideas, desires to join the world community, accord, say, with the exclusive hiring practices of businesses and schools in Japan? Historically, companies with tightly organized hierarchical structures and expectations of loyalty have been hesitant to accept any outsiders into their midst, much less foreigners. The public school system, too, tightly controlled by the conservative Ministry of Education, employs as few foreign teachers as seems possible. In 1994, out of a total of 57,488 full-time teachers at 98 national universities, only 279 were foreign nationals. Clearly, *kokusai* discourse does not appear to live up to *kokusai* reality in this case. While questioning an Education Ministry official during a session of the Diet, Kamiyama Kazuto of the Social Democratic Party/Goken Rengo spoke to this subject:

At such a time as this, is there really any reason among the universities of Japan why we have to continue a system that gives the impression of discrimination, despite the fact that we are increasingly into an age of internationalization?

Foreigners who succeed in learning Japanese and “proper” behavior claim they are often greeted not with the expected acceptance but rather with suspicion. In one notable case, Gwendolyn Gallagher, a university instructor in Hokkaido,

was fired from her teaching job after more than twelve years because she was no longer considered “fresh.” The university argued in court that the longer foreigners remain in Japan, the less desirable they become due to their increased familiarity with Japanese society.

“Freshness” aside, the fact that a university could seriously make such statements in a court of law and not be reprimanded by the Ministry of Education and the justice system reveals something about the selective use of *kokusaika* rhetoric. *Kokusaika* here, in its association with “freshness,” summons up images of foreign imports which, if kept too long, go bad. Hall’s claim that “Japanese still tend to view *kokusaika* as an internationalization of things: of railroads and jets and hamburgers . . .” would seem to put foreign workers on the same level as fast food or auto parts.

Before continuing, a word of caution regarding terminology might be added. The *uchi-soto* distinctions so often noted in comparisons between Japan and the West have been variously translated as “inside-outside” or “public-private.” How closely these terms overlap in meaning is a question that merits some examination. Nakagawa Nobutoshi notes that:

“*Seken*” tends to be equated to *soto* (the outside) of an organization, while “public” tends to have more universalistic connotations. In other words, Anglo-American “public” obligations seem to be applicable to what members define as the *uchi* affairs in Japanese organizations. This should make the moral discourses over “whistle blowing” very much different in the U.S. and in Japan.

Whistleblowing, it is implied, may be a foreign import, and one many Japanese are unaccustomed to employing. On the other hand, this attribution of what is, in essence, company loyalty might also be taken as simply another means of keeping people in their place.

Kokusaika—A Neoliberal Slogan?

Among the recurring themes in the discourse of internationalization are those of “opening up,” “breaking down borders,” and the “free exchange of ideas.” Since the business world is at the forefront of much of the debate over internationalization, it should come as little surprise that the mottoes of the neoliberal agenda of free trade fit comfortably within *kokusai* discourse. That business discourse has so easily “colonized” the discourse of art, education, music, government, and others speaks not simply about the natural workings of language but also about the power of corporations in present society. “Trans-nationals” are by definition internationally-minded organizations, since most of their concerns are to do with buying from and selling to different countries. For the most part, governments in industrialized countries share their interests, and hence share a common discourse. “We speak the same language” is not an uncommon remark for a government official to make to a corporate head. Kodama Kazuo, counselor for public affairs at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, had these telling comments to make during an address at Georgetown University:

On the political and economic levels, internationalization means the formation of borderless economies in which there is a free flow of things, capital and people, with the ultimate result of true globalization in which there is a single world market. It also means that the market will expand, particularly from the introduction of the market economy to formerly socialist economies, or the introduction of capitalism in China. And politically, it means the spread of democracy to every corner of the globe (sometimes called “the victory of freedom and democracy and the end of the history” by F. Fukuyama).

One detects a similar tone in a remark by Miyoshi Masaya, former president and director general of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren): “We have advocated the internationalization, and now globalization, of the

Japanese economy.”

Is internationalism then to be thought of as globalization—the opening of the world to the free market? Is internationalization actually neoliberalism in sheep’s discourse? If not, what distinguishes these concepts? Nemoto Jiro, commenting on internationalization and the future of Japan, notes with apparent envy that European governments are

... pressing for more flexible labor practices as they wean the people from a generous welfare system, all in the name of a European currency union. Britain, however, has chosen not to be tied by the European single-currency project, for the time being, opting instead to place higher priority on education reform and employment. All in all, this marks a transition from welfare to work, something Nikkeiren has championed all along.

Clearly for Nemoto, *kokusaika* implies an opening up of Japan and one with advantages for business that have been held back for too long by such undesirable elements as a “priority on education and employment” and a “generous welfare system.” Is *kokusaika* then to be taken as a means for Japanese corporations to free themselves from such restrictions? This notion of disinvesting in Japan’s *human* capital in order to promote *investment* capital would seem to be in stark contrast to many *Nihonjinron* theories, which place importance on national pride and dignity.

But even while internationalization is trumpeted as the wave of the future, many abroad—and within Japan—remain suspicious that the “opening up” of Japan may be intended as a purely one-way concept. So Executive Director of the Swiss Asia Foundation Jean Pierre Lehmann is able to claim, without apparent fear of contradiction:

As the buzzword of *kokusaika* (internationalisation) became omnipresent in the Japanese business lexicon of the 1970s and 80s, it was clear, indeed emphatically so, that the term meant internationalisation *from* Japan, not internationalisation *to* Japan. (Emphasis added)

Tokai University Professor Karatsu Hajime seems to

confirm these suspicions with his linking of internationalization and Japanese exports. He notes:

The fact that products bearing Japanese brand names are as noticeable as ever on the global market indicates that Japanese overseas production has been increasing and the internationalization of the Japanese economy is in progress.

Judging from these comments, one might infer that *kokusaika* is in fact code for what in the age of nation-states was commonly called imperialism and colonialism. In a classic model of Gramscian capitalist hegemony, transnationals are seen as using internationalization's association with student exchanges and sister cities to boost their corporate image, while simultaneously advancing goals of increased market share abroad.

Despite their association with international trade, and discounting public relations efforts on their behalf, corporations have rarely been viewed as being either culturally sensitive to other nations or concerned with the long-term ecological fate of the Earth. International trade is—by the admission of many corporate managers—aimed solely at turning a profit. Any good in the way of internationalization which accrues from international trade is a happy advantage to be sure, but purely a byproduct.

Accusations then that Japan and the Japanese are not international may arise, at least in part, due to the fact that many of the dealings between Japan and other countries are done not on a personal level but through corporate mediation. Fair or not, both foreigners and Japanese have come to accept the stereotypical view of the inept Japanese businessman abroad. In a gross generalization, the common insensitivity of the business sector is thus transposed onto the nation as a whole, making Japan appear to be a nation of eager and calculating—but certainly not quite “internationalized”—business people.

Ironically, Ronald Dore (1999) contends that reformist (i.e. “internationalizing”) corporate spokespeople in Japan are now urging deregulation, liberalization, and other free market doctrines on the public by appeals to nationalist interests. Never mind that the benefits of a reform agenda will accrue mainly

to the top ten percent of the public. *Kokusaika* and Japan's national pride are at stake, they insist. Dore goes on to ask about the reformers: "How could they be accused of being self-serving when it is not themselves but 'Japan' they are worried about?"

Conclusion

Such cynical judgements of *kokusaika* are not difficult to find in recent years. The label has too often been abused, as witness the many examples provided in this essay. The business press and the archives of foreign policy journals abound with texts waiting to be analyzed. Some examples will surely express sincere plans for internationalization unhampered by egoistic notions of national vanity or personal greed. Others will reveal a convoluted rhetoric of internationalization of the type discussed so far—intended to bolster narrow nationalistic or corporate aims through the persistent management of national identity.

As with the process of Orientalism, construction of an overarching national persona may begin with common misperceptions, media distortions, or simple prejudices. Nevertheless, these images are maintained by mutual reinforcement between the cultures involved. Just as Japan is not the mythological country of geishas and kimono-clad children found in outdated Western picture books, neither is it the clean, one-dimensional tradition of origami and *bon* dances which many Japanese travelers like to present while abroad. In other words, Japanese (no differently than Americans and others) are complicit in keeping convenient myths about their own society alive. *Kokusaika*—although clearly still a contested notion—appears to be one of the tools that has been used to advance nationalist and exclusive discourses.

Whether *kokusaika* develops an increased association with theories of nationalism and neoliberalism, or becomes a truly independent notion based on a realization of basic human

aspirations and solidarity among world communities, is a question that will become increasingly important for Japanese—and those residing in Japan—to answer. Nationalist and neoliberal discourses seem to have proved temporarily workable but ultimately uneasy partners with internationalization. An alternative discourse put forward in 1923 by Shimonaka Yasaburo based on human equality and the equality of ethnic groups proposes “viewing one’s fellow countrymen through the eyes of humanity, instead of viewing humanity through the eyes of one’s own countrymen.” What current “internationalist” has stated it with such clarity?

Left out of the current analysis but no less important are questions about the nature of Japan-bashing: What does it mean? Is any criticism of Japan, Japan-bashing? Is criticism of Japanese nationalism merely a continuation of colonial discourses of oppression? How do claims that the discourses of *kokusaika* and nationalism are associated relate to Japan’s war-time legacy and its relations with its former colonies in Asia?

As distinct as these questions may be, they contain in them the core idea of nationalism and how it is defined. As an imagined notion, nationalism is not, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has claimed, a sudden revelation about the splendor and mystique of one native land. Nationalism, he observes, “. . . invents nations where they do not exist. Politicians are adept at planting such inventions or imaginings in the minds of their people, especially in times of loss or crisis or change.” Those discourses can be resisted and others substituted in their place. And in this, perhaps, rests the ultimate challenge of *kokusaika*.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Dan LaBranche and David Shea for reading and commenting on various drafts of this paper. Any inaccuracies in the text are mine alone.

References

- Aldwinkle, D. (1996), *Academic Apartheid: The Final Word*, <http://www.issho.org/writings/aa.html>, Foreign Academics in Japan Site.
- Anderson B. (1991), *Imagined Communities*, Verso.
- Barrel, T. and Tanaka, R. (1995), *Higher Than Heaven: Japan, war and*

- everything*, Private Guy International, NSW, Australia.
- Benedict, R. (1946), *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Creighton, M. (1997), "The Importance of 'Perception Gaps' Between Japan and the West," *Asia Pacific Report Newsletter* of the Institute of Asian Research University of British Columbia Vol. 22, No. 2, Fall 1998.
- Dale, P. (1986), *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, London: Croom Helm.
- (1993), "The Voice of the Cicadas: Linguistic Uniqueness: Tsunoda Tan'anobu's Theory of the Japanese Brain and Some Classical Perspectives," *Electronic Antiquity: Communicating the Classics*, November 1993, Volume I, Number 6.
- Dore, R. (1999), "Japan's Reform Debate: Patriotic Concern or Class Interest? Or Both?" *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 88, Winter 1999.
- Field, N. (1998), "Who Needs National Identity?" in *Japan Made in U.S.A., Zipangu*, New York.
- Gibney, F. (1996), "Put Ieyasu's ghost to rest; let the Third Opening begin," *The Japan Times*.
- Gottlieb, N. (1998), "Language Nationalism? Kanji on the Internet," *South Pacific Journal of Psychology*, 10: Asia-Pacific Language Research Special Issue.
- Hall I. P. (1997), "Japan's New Cultural Push toward Asia: Partner, Hegemon, or Perpetual Outsider?" *Pacific Rim Report* No. 3, June 1997.
- (1996), Upper House Education Committee Interpellations, 7 and 21 May 1996, Issho Kikaku Website.
- Hirose, Y. (1991), "Versions of Self-Image: A Japanese Perspective," Japanese National Institute of Multi-Media Education, from a review of *The Japanese Version*.
- Ishihara, S. (1999), *The Japan That Can Say No! Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Iwabuchi K. (1994), 'Complicit exoticism: Japan and its other' Who Imagines 'Japaneseness'? : Orientalism, Occidentalism and Self-Orientalism, Continuum: *The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1994).
- Kamiyama K. (1996), Interpellations in the Education Committee of the Upper House, on the 7th and 21st of May 1996, Diet Record (Sangiin/Bunkyo Iinkai Kaigiroku No. 7, pages 16–20 for 7 May; and No. 9, pages 9–11 for 21 May 1996).
- Karatsu, H. (1996), "Japan's economic growth benefits Asia," *The Japan Times*.
- Kodama K. (1999), remarks made at Georgetown University, March 4, 1999.
- Lehmann, J. P. (1998), "Asian Perspectives on Globalization and Intra-Regional Dynamics," Swiss Asia Foundation, January 1998, Lausanne.
- Lincicombe, M. E. (1999), "Nationalism, Imperialism, and the International Education Movement in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, No. 2 (May 1999), pp. 338–360.
- Lummis, D. (1982), *A New Look at the Chrysanthemum and the Sword*,

- Shohakusha, Tokyo.
- Miller, R. A. (1982), *Japan's Modern Myth*, New York: Weatherhill.
- (1990), “Levels of Speech and the Japanese Response to Modernization” in *Tradition and Modernization in Modern Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively.
- Ministry of Education, Statistics (2000), [monbu.go.jp / stat-en / em09010.html](http://monbu.go.jp/stat-en/em09010.html), September 1, 2000.
- Miyoshi, M. (1996), “Japanese capitalism needs overhaul,” *The Japan Times*.
- Mouer, R. and Sugimoto, Y. (1986), *Images of Japanese Society: A Study in the Structure of Social Reality*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nakagawa N. (1995), “Social Constructionism in Japan: Toward an Indigenous Empirical Inquiry,” pp. 295–310 in *Perspectives on Social Problems*, Vol. 7, edited by J.A. Holstein and G. Miller. Greenwich, CN: JAI Press. 1995.
- Nakane, C. (1967), *Tate Shakai no Ningen Kankei: Tan'itsu Shakai no Riron* (Interpersonal Relationships in a Vertically Structured Society: A Theory for Understanding a Homogeneous Society), Tokyo: Kodansha.
- (1996), “Can Japan break free of a closed society?” *The Japan Times*.
- Nemoto, J. (1996), “Consensus and single-minded pursuits,” *The Japan Times*.
- Pye M. (1996), “Shinto, primal religion and international identity, National identity and religious diversity in Japan,” *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 1, No. 1 (April 1996).
- Said, E., *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Tsunoda T. (1993), *Uno to Sano*, Shogakukan, Tokyo 1981, in Dale, P. (1993), *The Voice of the Cicadas: Linguistic Uniqueness*.