
Review Essays

Focusing in on Contemporary Japan's 'Youth' Nationalism

HONDA Yuki*

Puchi Nashonarizumu Shōkōgun: Wakamono-tachi no Nipponshugi (Petit Nationalism Syndrome: Young People's Japan Doctrine), by Kayama Rika. Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsho, 2002, 208 pp., ¥680 (paperback ISBN 4-12-150062-8)

Warau Nihon no 'Nashonarizumu' (A Sneering Japan's 'Nationalism'), by Kitada Akihiro. Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2005, 172 pp., ¥720 (paperback ISBN 4-14-091024-0)

Fuan-gata Nashonarizumu no Jidai (The Era of Unstable Nationalism), by Takahara Motoaki. Tokyo: Yōsensha, 2006, 256 pp., ¥780 (paperback ISBN 4-86248-019-5)

Since around the turn of the century, the shift of Japan's youth toward the political right and the upsurge of nationalism, in particular, has become the subject of much debate. The fanatical support of the national team in World Cup Soccer tournaments, the singing of the national anthem 'Kimi ga yo' in unison; the 'Japanese language boom', the increase in young people worshipping at Yasukuni Shrine, and the popularity of the comic book *Ken-Kanryū* (Hating the Korean Wave) are but some of the examples cited as evidence of this trend. In this article, I would like to take up some major studies in recent years that deal with this type of youth nationalism, and look back on how interpretations and analyses of this phenomenon have come to proliferate.

As a representative study of Japanese youth nationalism, Kayama Rika's *Puchi Nashonarizumu Shōkōgun: Wakamono-tachi no Nipponshugi* (Petit Nationalism Syndrome: Young People's Japan Doctrine) notes the 'nonchalance' of young people amidst events like the aforementioned World Cup, assigning to their manner of remarking without hesitation that they 'love Japan' the label 'petit nationalism'. As a psychiatrist, Kayama points out that within the background of this type of petit nationalism, which might also be thought of as a child-like 'make-believe patriotism' bereft of any historical awareness, there exist factors such as the lack of an Oedipus complex based on conflict concerning one's birthplace or personal history, a 'split' or 'estrangement' that functions as

HONDA Yuki is an Associate Professor of Comparative Sociology in the Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo. Her research focuses on the sociology of education. She is the author of numerous books, including *Wakamono to Shigoto* (Young People and Work), Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005, and *Tagenka Suru 'Nōryoku' to Nihon Shakai* (Pluralizing 'Ability' and Japanese Society), Tokyo: NTT Shuppan, 2005. She has also coauthored *'Nīto'-tte Iu-na* (Don't Say 'NEET'), Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2006, with Naitō Asao and Gotō Kazutomo. She can be contacted at the Faculty of Education, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan; or by email at yuki@educhan.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp.

*Translated from the Japanese by Reginald Jackson.

a psychological mechanism for attempting to avoid discord and distress, and a mentality that tries to maintain one's personal identity by taking another person to be one's own 'other self' or 'mirror image'.

Kayama also contends that the principal bearers of this petit nationalism are a clever and sophisticated elite class that easily embraces a realist worldview and a middle class attempting to align itself with that outlook. On the other hand, she mentions that with the lower class in France, among people such as those constituting the base layer of support for the extreme right, 'patriots whose patriotism is expressed as dissatisfaction with their nation's society or criticism of the intelligentsia' is set in motion by a feeling of hopelessness and depression; she warns that if hereafter the class gap in Japan widens further and the basic middle-class constituency sinks to become low class, there is a danger not of petit nationalism, but of *radical* nationalism spreading.

One notable feature of Kayama's argument is that in addition to performing an interpretive analysis that invokes concepts from psychology, she also classifies multiple types of nationalism and indicates the ways in which they correspond to their supporters' social status. Overall, within an argument into which numerous social scientific observations are incorporated, the parts of the explanation that depend upon psychology give the impression of being unsubstantiated. What's more, other discussions besides this one, too, are not based upon reliable data. Indeed, it could even be said that, from start to finish, they put forth a theory of general impressions dependent upon examples and anecdotal episodes. That said, however, this book does grasp a portion of contemporary Japanese youths' consciousness and behavior vis-à-vis 'the nation'. Moreover, there is no disputing that it has had a considerable impact in arousing social interest in such issues.

Nonetheless, the results of a few opinion surveys performed with high-school students as the object of study substantiate the points Kayama makes regarding the correlation between categories of nationalism and social status. For example, (Ōno Michio 2003) points out that a 'soft' nationalism involving a 'disposition of mutuality' (*sōjōsei shikō*) in which one enjoys both Japan and foreign countries can be observed among high-school students in society's elite stratum. Moreover, Kim Akihide's (2001) analysis demonstrate that among students at high schools grouped as having low academic performance rates, the incidence of those who support 'xenophobic nationalism' was high, while at nonspecialized high schools having high rates of academic performance, the percentage of students in favor of a 'nationalism tolerant of foreign cultures' was high. According to Kim's analysis, the percentage of students supporting 'democratic antinationalism' (*minshuteki-na han-kokkashugi*) in specialized high schools with high performance levels is rising; this is a very intriguing detail inasmuch as it suggests a different kind of disposition among Japanese youth toward nationalism.

However, there are some who are critical of Kayama's above-mentioned petit nationalism. For example, (Asaba Michiaki 2004) criticizes the evidence Kayama presents as symptoms of young people's shifting inclination toward the right as being 'further evidence of nationalism's attrition', which is like giving 'the impression of crying wolf when startled by the withering pampas grass'. In rebuttal to this criticism from Asaba, Kayama (2004) goes further to say: 'While it is not really my intent to take up the present state of affairs in a particularly exaggerated manner and lament them pessimistically, the real circumstances can't help but seem even more pressing, regardless of how one thinks about them'. In the same book, Kayama points out that the individual feelings of anxiety and insufficiency at the foundation of youth nationalism are amplified by the mass media as well as the discourse of voluntary restraint wherein no one dares to utter a word of dissent. Kayama's argument, that the anxieties and conflicts of an individual 'me' that get bound together with supporting the 'nation' has a profound persuasive force on people's ideas of nationalism.

In line with Kayama's fears, in the 30 August 2004 issue of the magazine *AERA* an article entitled '20-Somethings' 'Hard' Nationalism' appeared about the symptoms of a petit nationalism evolving

into a 'hard nationalism'. In this article, the results of a 4 April 2004 *Asahi Shinbun* public opinion poll were published that showed a high rate of approval among people in their 20s and 30s for things like Prime Minister Koizumi's Yasukuni Shrine visits to pacify the nation as well as the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces to Iraq. Following from Kayama's work, arguments based on this type of nationalism theory, that attempt to situate contemporary youth nationalism within the circumstances of society as a whole or within a longer historical span, have been developed by several scholars.

Two representative works in this vein are Kitada Akihiro's *Warau Nihon no 'Nashonarizumu'* (A Sneering Japan's 'Nationalism') and Takahara Motoaki's *Fuan-gata Nashonarizumu no Jidai* (The Era of Unstable Nationalism). The former puts forth an argument about the disposition bolstering the 'nationalism' seen in Japanese youth from 1990 to 2000 from a point of view that emphasizes a series of changes in the form of 'reflection' (*hansei*) occurring in each period of postwar Japan. Kitada terms the contemporary youth consciousness that he identifies as projecting simplistically the identity anxieties of 'me' onto 'nation' as 'existentialist romanticism', and he sounds out its origin by examining retrospectively the 'reassessment of one's relationship with the world' (i.e. reflection) occurring in each earlier period.

According to Kitada, the first half of the 1960s and 1970s in Japan was a period of political reflection evident in the intensification of the student movement; and the Mt Asama Villa Incident fomented by the Red Army in 1972 represents the pinnacle of this period of 'reflection'. As a result of the limits of this type of 'self-criticism' as self-reflection being felt strongly by people, in the following period of the mid-1970s until the start of the 1980s a 'lack of reflection as protest' arose against the kind of reflection typical of the 1960s, expressing itself in the form of an irony (or parodic turn) of consumer society. But afterward, during the 1980s, 1960s had already been forgotten and the consumer society-like cynicism, which did away with the 'as protest' part of the phrase, spread in popularity having assumed a self-perpetuating, institutionalized guise.

Kitada states that 1990–2000 was a period in which the cynicism reversed as the 1980s' nonreflection turned to further reflection and, through that shift, a kind of romantic 'emotion' (*kandō*) capable of connecting people to others was yearned for; and the nationalism of this period, too, was evoked as a romanticized object. But what is significant is the continuation of a formalized cynicism during this period, and that, on that point, nationalism too ends up being nothing more than simply 'source material' selected to suit the needs of the moment. In this sense, at the same time that Kitada demonstrates fixed support for Asada's observation of contemporary youth nationalism as 'nothing special', he also makes clear with regard to Kayama Rika's recognition of the danger involved that precisely because it is a nationalism supported not by thought, but by a grassroots feeling that guides devotion, it is not an unfounded concern.

Kitada depicts a social consciousness that moves of its own accord within Japanese society, one that proceeds to change as it drags along the inheritance of a former epoch. This type of analysis makes possible a multifaceted understanding concerning what kinds of meanings nationalism holds for contemporary Japanese youth. However, in Kitada's analysis, the perspective attentive to social strata, as pointed out by Kayama, falls away almost completely. As for how extensively the mixture of romanticism and cynicism he depicts in Japanese youth has been observed (i.e. what kind of social group possessing particular features has become the bearer of that amalgam) that much is left undemonstrated. This weak point is intimately related to Kitada's technique of employing specific pundits' remarks and posts on the electronic bulletin board *2Channeru* in order to add to his interpretation as he strings together particular cases and episodes.

On the other hand, Takahara Motoaki builds upon the arguments of Kayama and Kitada, elaborating an analysis that adds the perspective of factors like macroeconomic shifts and employment

changes. Takahara emphasizes the pluralism within any country's nationalism, differentiating in particular between the 'rapid-growth type' of nationalism called forth to foment things like a nation's development and citizens' sense of unity, and the 'individual anxiety type' of nationalism held by that class of people put into a state of unease with the shift toward a technologically mobile society. Namely, he argues that within the context of society's progressive change from mass production to rapid consumption, amidst bureaucracy's shift to individual management and the widening income disparity where everyone was once 'entirely middle class', that social stratum comprised of young people, in particular, cannot help but feeling extraordinarily disconcerted in terms of the infrastructure of their daily lives and their outlook for the future. That unease and dissatisfaction is being expressed not toward their own country, but instead as hatred toward countries like Korea and China: this, asserts Takahara, is individual anxiety type (*kobetsu fuan-gata*) nationalism. Frequently, this is manifested on the Internet in the form of caricatured portrayals of other countries, which he calls 'nationalism-cum-hobby' (*shumi-ka sareta nashonarizumu*).

Additionally, Takahara also states that the fact that these two distinct types of nationalism show an uncanny alignment is peculiar to Japan. Because the rapid-growth type of nationalism constituting the foundation of a Japanese kind of 'corporate ideology' produces a stratum of unsettled youth outside the bounds of the 'company' as the cost of preserving the stability of that elder generation residing within the 'company', it should be intrinsically opposed to the individual anxiety type of nationalism harbored by that group of young victims. However, Takahara takes a critical tone in pointing out that to those participating in the system, as well, the relationship between these two age groups is not recognized or differentiated clearly and, consequentially, the latter is subsumed conveniently into the former.

According to Takahara, young people's internal individual unrest and dissatisfaction manifests itself outwardly as nationalism. As such, with regard to such aspects as the recognition that those anxieties are encouraged by the escalation of society's increasing fluidity and widening income disparity, his argument shares much with the view Kayama designates as 'petit nationalism syndrome', and again, there is also commonality with Kitada in terms of pursuing the origin of the contemporary situation through its historical background. But Takahara himself, nonetheless, criticizes Kayama's psychological explanation, calling it 'a posture in which the emergence of the problem is reduced to the individual', whereby aspects like social structural background and latent intergenerational conflicts of interest are spelled out more on just the outer surface. Even on the point of presenting 'rapid-growth type nationalism' as a category of nationalism, Takahara draws a line between people like Kayama and Kitada's viewpoints and his own.

The existence of these two types of new and old nationalism, along with their possession of convergent aspects despite their being dissimilar, is demonstrated through Oguma Eiji and Ueno Yōko's fieldwork, conducted at a branch of the Society for Creating New History Textbooks (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*). However—according to Takahara—(Oguma and Ueno 2003), like Kayama and Kitada, merely place stress on describing the background rather than diagnosing such things as the actual circumstances of Japanese youth nationalism evident in the anti-Korean and anti-Chinese discourse on the Internet, with the result that a frequently mentioned symbolic phenomenon is no more than remarked upon briefly in the text.

In this essay, I have introduced the work of Kayama Rika, Kitada Akihiro and Takahara Motoaki as the principal arguments concerning youth nationalism in contemporary Japan. While employing psychology, the successive transformation of societal consciousness and societal structure, respectively, as explanatory schemata for macrocosmic shifts, these three scholars also present youth nationalism as being tied to individual anxieties, insouciance or an inclination toward romantic feelings, hobbies and elements of play—all aspects that evince the characteristic of a kind of common 'lightness' their works all share.

However, one other feature common to these youth nationalism theories is that they do not place significance on the task of making conclusively clear the configuration of things like the level and type of nationalism among contemporary Japan's youth as a whole. Instead, they take prominent, pinpointed matters and incidents as the grounds upon which each of their respective interpretations or explanations is constructed. Rather than term these 'features' of the theories, then, it might be more apt to call them limitations.

With regard to this point, Suzuki Kensuke (2006) makes some interesting observations based on social survey data. According to Suzuki, the results of numerous surveys concerning the presence of patriotism showed that more than young people, the feeling of love for one's country strengthened as age increased. In addition to this, a survey aimed at college students found that only 6% of them had read the comic book *Ken-Kanryū*, and those who frequently followed *2Channeru* did not exceed roughly 10%. Based on these findings, Suzuki makes the following conclusions regarding young people's patriotism: 'First, it's a small strata of society; second, if you examine this small strata, it appears to be merely an expression of opposition to adult society that is distinct to youth; third, if you examine the vast part of society, it is something closer to a kind of nativism (*kokyō-ai*) than patriotism (*aikokushin*)'. He then warns that the mass media's demagoguery is far more dangerous than any threat posed by young people's beliefs.

In actuality, according to an *Asahi Shinbun* public opinion poll, as well, which was carried out in December 2006 (*Asahi Shinbun*, morning edition, 25 January 2007: 16), the percentage of respondents who indicated that they felt 'a great degree of patriotism' was correspondingly higher with age, with less than 10% of people in their 20s answering positively to this item. The percentage of respondents agreeing with the views that 'Japanese people should have love for their country' and 'love for one's country should be taught in schools' was, in addition, generally lower with younger people. The former notion was supported by 63% of the total survey participants and by 46% of respondents in their 20s, while the latter notion was supported by 50% of the total sample population and only 34% of people in their 20s. If these findings do indeed show Japanese nationalism to be a problem, then they speak to the fact that—more than young people—nationalism among the middle aged is a trend that deserves closer scrutiny.

Nonetheless, while the percentage of people answering 'I feel pride at my being Japanese' was its lowest within the 30-and-younger age tier polled in the '2005 Global Value System Survey' conducted by the Dentsu Research Collective, among those below 29 years of age, it had once again increased moderately, making for results slightly different from those of the Asahi survey. Notably, when one looks at the progression among all age groups on the same issue (e.g. 1990: 62%, 1995: 60%, 2000: 54%, 2005: 57%), no general increase is evident.¹ In addition, according to the findings of the 2000 survey, which included 60 countries worldwide, there were only three nations with percentages lower than Japan, which was close to the bottommost level.²

On the other hand, however, according to the results of Manabe Kazufumi's (1995) comparative survey among 23 countries on the issue of affection toward one's country (Manabe 1995), the percentage of respondents expressing affection for their 'country' (*kuni*) was 95% in Japan, making it the second highest among all 23 countries. In this manner, depending upon the survey entries'

1. See <http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/~honkawa/9466.html>.

2. See <http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/~honkawa/9465.html>.

wording or the period when they were conducted, Japanese people's nationalism exhibits differing aspects. However, the trend that nationalism is strengthening in Japan among young people especially, at the very least, cannot be observed from these data. To be sure, this type of questionnaire can capture no more than the mere surface of societal phenomena or people's consciousness. In order to grasp the real circumstances, a methodical investigation that makes the most of the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative data is needed.

However, what we might reconsider is whether or not nationalism among young people is really a problem at all. Instead, is not the foremost problem that the efforts of politicians and the mass media to drum up and exploit nationalism can be observed more and more blatantly? Regardless of what types of changes might hypothetically be seen among young people from this point forward, we should probably take them to be the product of intentional manipulation or incitement. In order to suppress and control the violent recklessness of nationalism, in addition to removing to the fullest extent possible the fundamental factors causing young people's internal unease and dissatisfaction, a constant critical investigation of policy and media, which possess ample power to influence society, has become crucial for the future of contemporary Japan.

References

- Asaba Michiaki. 2004. *Nashonarizumu: Meicho de Tadoru Nihon Shisō Nyūmon* (Nationalism: An Introduction to Japanese Thought through the Classics). Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho.
- Kayama Rika. 2004. *Watashi no Aikokushin* (Patriotism of 'Me'). Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Kim Myonsu. 2001. 'Kōkōsei no Itadaku Nashonarizumu' (Nationalism as Embraced by High-School Students). In *Gendai Kōkōsei no Keiryō Shakaigaku* (Computational Sociology of Contemporary High-School Students), ed. Ojima Fumiaki. Tokyo: Minerva Shobō: 183–201.
- Manabe Kazufumi. 1995. 'Nashonaru Aidentiti no Kōzō' (The Structure of National Identity). *Kansai Gakuin Daigaku Shakai Gakubu Kiyō* (Kansai Academy University Sociology Department Bulletin) 82: 145–156.
- Oguma Eiji and Ueno Yōko. 2003. *'Iyashi' no Nashonarizumu* (A Nationalism of 'Healing'). Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan-kai.
- Ōno Michio. 2003. 'Nashonarizumu no Shosō' (Aspects of Nationalism). *Monogurafu/Kōkōsei, vol. 69, Kōkōsei kara Mita 'Nihon'—Nashonaru-na Mono e no Kankaku* (Monograph/High-School Students, vol. 69: A Sense of 'Japan' as a National Entity as Viewed by High-School Students). Tokyo: Benesse Mirai Kyōiku Sentā: 45–49.
- Suzuki Kensuke. 2006. "'Aikokushin' o Kataru nara Shiminteki Gimu mo Katate' (If One Speaks of 'Patriotism', Speak Also of Civic Duty). *Senki* 1238: 4.