

# A Consideration of Media-Nationalism: A Case Study of Japan after the Second World War

by Yutaka OISHI\*

## Introduction: What is Media-Nationalism?

At present most people receive news via the media, which functions as a 'window' for looking out onto the world. However, people do not simply believe the news precisely as the media reports it. On this point, Walter Lippmann wrote 'For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define and then see' (Lippmann, 1922:81). Audiences receive news filtered through preexisting definitions or images that already exist in their minds. Most of these preexisting elements are historically cultivated and shared with other persons in society. It must be remembered that journalists also operate in this situation.

So then, how are the definitions and images formed or made? This question can be rephrased; what is the 'window' for us when looking back upon historical affairs? Firstly, the answer to the question lies in the works of historians that describe and explain events while building on the basis of original data and documents. Secondly, it can be found in textbooks which offer edited and summarized syntheses of historical works for beginners and students. But the 'window' is not limited to these for most of people. Rather it would be more valid to say that people also generally learn and understand history through novels, films, TV dramas, and others which are involved in popular culture.

We need a new word or concept to frame our investigation into the impacts of media on the audience's views about history, and furthermore on the formation of nationalism. So I'd like to propose the key word, 'Media-Nationalism' to capture this meaning. In modern society mass media have always influenced the national consciousness and nationalism among people in different ways, independent of whether media has done so intentionally or not.

Of course mass media not only delivers news but also novels, films, dramas and other elements to audiences. National consciousness has been historically cultivated and accumulated in the context of each country or society. It has often been visible in newspaper, radio and television news and other mass media, and

\* Director, Institute for Media and Communications Research, and Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Keio University.

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more recently on the Internet which is often treated as 'participatory media'. We can call this situation Media-Nationalism. I would offer the following definition for the term: 'the situation of 'Media-Nationalism' is one in which the diffusion of mass media and new media such as the Internet increase national consciousness and nationalism in a nation-state'. Of course, 'Media-Nationalism' appears in societies where mass media and the Internet are relatively well diffused among the general public.

In relation to it I need to define the concept of 'Nationalism' as follows 'Nationalism is a set of ideas and movements in which people imagine a unit of a nation consisting of region, religion, language and other factors, their forces of cohesion increase, and people try to enlarge their interests'. So then 'Media-Nationalism' is a concept for reconsidering nationalism by placing critical emphasis on the linkage between media and nationalism.

### An Episode of Ryotaro SHIBA in relation to 'Media-Nationalism' in Japan

At Present Ryotaro Shiba is one of the most popular and famous authors in Japan. He wrote numerous books and frequently participated in seminars whose subjects were mainly Japanese history. His works have a considerable influence on Japanese society, which could be termed the 'Shiba-Boom'. In his writings, he provided substantial knowledge and lessons as well as images about Japan to the Japanese people. Next I will discuss the author in order to reexamine 'Media-Nationalism' in Japan, especially after the Second World War.

It should be emphasized that 'Shiba-boom' has increased significantly since his death in 1996. Why has this happened? One answer to the question is that Shiba was given an important status by mass media, not only as an acclaimed author of Japanese historical novel but also as a person capable of diagnosing the sicknesses of Japanese Society. Indeed he commented on many different kinds of political, social, and historical problems. Mass media frequently broadcast his opinion. As a result of this, his fame has been established and the image of Japanese history made by him has been widely diffused and gained popularity among Japanese.

Referring to Shiba's works, one author offered a very interesting opinion, which is summarized below; 'When the readers have come to believe more and more that the contents of Shiba's novels are 'true', they mistakenly believe that they have knowledge about Japanese history through his novels'(Sekikawa, 2003: 139). Certainly mass media has greatly contributed to it. The view of Japanese history suggested by Shiba has given a national identity to Japanese through novels and TV dramas. Mass media as a whole has held Shiba and his works in high esteem, and thus his view of Japanese history has both established a dominant position and become popular.

I'd like to focus on Shiba's perspective on the Second World War, especially

policies based on militarism. Despite the fact that he intensely criticized the policies made by the Japanese government and military and other political elites again and again, his opinion has been accepted not only by 'liberal' or 'progressive' groups but also by 'conservative' or 'reactionary' ones as well. The reason is that his opinion is rather different from the so-called 'masochism' that tends to criticize or condemn the whole of modern Japanese history. In fact he wrote 'The whole of Japanese history is beautiful in terms of physical and spiritual level' (Shiba,1993: 36) and insisted that the dark age of Japanese society, 1905-1945 (especially during The Second World War), was exceptional, and he even called it 'another country.' Some scholars and writers have criticized his view on Japanese history, claiming that it has contributed to the formation and diffusion of an invalid view of modern history among Japanese that has consequently allowed most of them not to worry about the 'Dark Age' and to avoid facing it directly. I think we can identify one dominant stream of this view of Japanese history that has been formed by mass media. It is typical of the trend of 'Media-Nationalism' in Japan after the Second World War.

I'd like to emphasize that while nationalism is most likely to strengthen the people's national self-awareness and encourage national cohesion, it can also make people critical or aggressive toward the exterior. When the nation-state is the primary basis for nationalism, mass media may encourage or support the aggressive attitude shared among the people.

It is usually said that the surveillance of the environment is the main function of mass media. But it is very difficult for mass media to draw a clear line that separates it from the rationale and interests dominating the nation-state where the media is headquartered, even if mass media claims to seek neutrality and objectivity. And it is very difficult for reporters, especially those belonging to mass media, to execute neutral and objective reporting. For example when the word 'national interest' is used, mass media reports, comments, and opinions are easily included within the rationale and interests of the nation-state. Through this channel, nationalism increases and Media-Nationalism should therefore be considered even more remarkable. In addition we should note that the rationale and interests are usually embedded as well as expressed in messages transmitted through mass media reports.

### **The mechanism of linkage between media and nationalism**

As described earlier, newspaper, radio, and TV, as well as Internet are intimately connected with national consciousness and nationalism. In modern history we can easily find lots of instances in which mass media has contributed to the integration of citizens into their respective nation-states and to the development of nationalism, because the people can typically obtain common information

through mass media. The social process of mass communication has developed in tandem with nation-state building. We can say that mass communication is a necessary condition for the development of nation-state and vice versa.

It should be emphasized that the diffusion and sharing of information influences people not only on a superficial level but also on a more profound one. Next I will examine a case of news reporting as it relates to this point. Firstly, we should notice that events are named by news reports in the form of words, sounds, or images delivered via mass media. The name given to an event must be connected with the meaning and value given to it. Consequently most people's values become more uniform, not more diverse. Because as noted before, most of people get information about social affairs by exposure to mass media, and mass media often tends to deliver uniformed news. Secondly, sharing values can lead to the 'We' feeling among the people. The feeling can form the national identity through which the people (re)discover their belongingness to the nation-state. Thirdly, news media can be very useful for sharing the national image that the people have and identify with. Fourthly, and related to the last point, the mass media can invent a 'They' which is contrasted with the 'We'. In the view of 'We' there are two opinions inherent to the relationship between 'We' and 'They'. One is normative, that 'We' people should coexist with 'They'. The other is that 'They' should be forcibly included in or assimilated to 'We', or that 'They' should be excluded from 'We'. War reporting represents one example of this situation.

When examining the interaction between media and nationalism, and the mechanism of Media-Nationalism as a whole, we should focus on the characters of the function of mass media. Mass media must cut off some components of the affairs of 'reality', and then report as news selected elements that fit in line with stories shared among the people, and lastly construct a 'social reality' which is different from 'reality'. In other words there is a circulation process that consists of the following three stages: The first is that mass media constructs 'social reality;' the second is that 'reality' is made by reflecting the 'social reality;' and the third is that mass media again constructs the 'social reality' by cutting off the 'reality' and reporting the chosen elements. We can recognize the interaction process among the three factors; 'reality', mass media, and 'social reality' (or public opinion). We can easily see this process at work in the political arena. Particularly we have seen many cases in the field of diplomacy and international politics in which the negative image toward foreign countries increases among the people by the mechanism of 'Media-Nationalism' and then the national consciousness and nationalism are reinforced.

I will propose another question; how has the development of informationization, that has been accelerated by the diffusion of many different kinds of information technology and media, and how has it influenced the trend of 'Media-Nationalism'? When considering them the concept of an information society is very useful.

This idea has a tendency to emphasize the positive aspects of the impact brought about by informationization. It has suggested that the development of informationization would contribute to providing the users with a public sphere where they can express their opinions as well as improve their ordinary lives. Taking this optimistic view to its logical conclusion, I can outline a sequence model, as below:

1. Development and diffusion of informationization.
2. More increase and differentiation of media and its contents (especially in the field of borderless information flow and online public opinion).
3. The people's values become differentiated.
4. The national consciousness and nationalism among the people tends to decline.

According to this model the more variation of media and information, the more useful they will be for repressing nationalism. In contrast with this, there is another view which holds that the development of informationization does not solve many kinds of social problems but rather worsens them or even creates some new ones. This view is called the critical perspective of information society, which emphasizes the serious problems; 'Surveillance society' or 'Digital Divide'. From the pessimistic and critical view I can also summarize by outlining a sequence model that shows the relationship between media and nationalism, as below.

1. The development of informatization.
2. The more media and its contents are concentrated and unified, the more emotional public opinion is expressed.
3. The people's values become unified.
4. The national consciousness among the people tends to grow.

Comparing the two models we can easily see cases of the latter in Japan and other countries, where nationalism grows through media.

### **Some bases of 'Media-Nationalism'**

'Media-Nationalism' is not caused only by the development and diffusion of different kinds of media and their contents. When it is born and grows there must be a base for accepting it within the nation-state. As is widely known, a state consists of land, people, sovereign, and national identity among the people. The "state" sometimes means an apparatus of government and power, sometimes the overall social system subject to that government or power' (Giddens, 1985: 17). The state apparatus is essential for nation building and national development or stability.

In addition the organizations and people who belong to and operate in the nation-state need to regard the institution as legitimate. And the people see themselves as members of the nation-state by constructing and maintaining national identity.

Next I need to refer to the concept of national culture, which consists of national identity, dominant values and ways of life and thinking in the nation state. National culture plays important roles for constructing and maintaining the nation state and the nationalism of the modern society. We can define nation-state-based nationalism as follows: 'Nationalism is a set of ideas and movements in which the people imagine the nation-state, their forces of cohesion are increased, and they try to enlarge their interests.'

In the late of twentieth century, globalization has progressed rapidly, many people, goods, and information often move beyond borders more easily, and interdependency among states has further increased. Consequently nationalism based on the nation-state has transformed. In advanced societies sub-cultures grounded on region, ethnicity, religion, language, generation, gender and others have gained importance and become powerful. The identity rooted in the sub-cultures has become distinct. The members of sub-cultures have begun to reproduce their original or specific nationalisms which often oppose the nation-state-based nationalism. There are many cases where the sub-cultures conflict with the national culture. Especially the problems of immigrants and foreign workers who are not easily included in or assimilated to the national culture have become serious as kinds of 'ethnic problems'. At the same time it has raised the national consciousness based on the sub-cultures. Namely 'even in the age of globalization people try to seek culture relating to their 'roots', which can provide spatial and historical foundations instead of a nation-state that is relatively artificial for the people' (Matsumoto, 2002; 97). The type of nationalism based on the nation-state has changed due to the development of sub-cultures and globalization.

### How has nationalism in Japan changed since the Second World War?

Masao Maruyama who was one of the most important and famous 'opinion-leaders' after the Second World War wrote a very well known phrase in his book, which was 'I'd like to bet not on the 'real existence' of a military Japan before the Second World War, but instead on the 'fiction' of the Japanese political regime's goals after the Second World War' (Maruyama, 1964; 584-585). His opinion, as represented by this quote, has been widely accepted and achieved the predominant position among the public, especially intellectuals. The goal or normative standard of the opinion was 'civil society' and democracy in Western societies. At that time (almost spanning between 1945-1990) many Japanese had negative images of nationalism because they associated nationalism with the sort of radical patriotism that the Japanese people shared up until World War. The words and concepts set

in contrast to nationalism and patriotism has been ‘demilitarization’ and ‘neutral’ among most Japanese. A lot of them have supported them as precious ideas and have insisted on protecting Japanese Constitution, especially article 9<sup>1</sup>.

However the reality of Japan has become estranged from the peace-oriented concepts of the global community. Certainly Japan has adopted the policy for light armament but has subordinated itself to the U S. for its national security. The Japanese have certainly reached a consensus on the point that the peace-oriented concepts are one of the most important ‘national goals’. But there is inconstancy within the consensus or national goal. In fact many Japanese approve of the lightly armed force (only for self-defense), while they want to maintain the Japanese Constitution (including article9) (NHK Hoso Yoron Chousajo Hen, 1982; 172-175).

Aside from political and foreign issues, the Japanese government and the private business sector have made tremendous efforts to accomplish economic growth. Japan has achieved expert status in the field of economics in the world while maintaining the goal of a pacifist state. As Japan gained more economic power and international influence there appeared an opinion that has been called ‘Japanese revisionism’. It has insisted on reassessing and emphasizing characteristics of Japanese society including traditional culture. Needless to say the view has had a close relationship with the economic growth. It also suggests another view that is much different from the mainstream of public opinion. The main opinion was that catching up with Western societies in the field of economics was national goal in Japanese modern society. Referring to ‘Japanese revisionism’ Takeuchi wrote below. “The traditional institutions and consciousness were given a negative image as inferior and pre-modern. But they have subsequently come to be admired when it is recognized that they contribute to the rapid modernization in Japan as a ‘magic card’” (Takeuchi, 2005; 265). The perspective of ‘Japanese revisionism’ has provided Japanese with the opportunity for reconsidering nationalism, particularly in the field of politics.

The social trend or climate of opinion has become remarkable in the 1990s when the international community has so dramatically changed, particularly due to the end of Cold War. For example the conservative faction in Japan began to insist that Japan could no longer maintain the policy of ‘one-state-pacifism’. The policy has meant that Japan has a tendency to preserve its own peace and security without making an active contribution for resolving armed conflicts overseas. They also began to assert that the Japanese should recognize the necessity of national consciousness and nationalism, their national (or ethnic) identity, and the national interest.

Furthermore the Japanese government advocated the three principles and policies that should be gradually accomplished (Nakasone et. al.1992; 258-264). These are ‘statism’ in the political sphere (the state should actively play its proper roles), ‘liberalism’ in economics (deregulation should be promoted), and

'internationalism' in the global community (the state should become more open to the global society). This stance is closely related with the revision of Japanese constitution. That document asserts that Japan should contribute to the global community not only in the field of economics but also of international politics and global security, and insisted that the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) should be dispatched overseas in order to achieve it. The opinion has caught the people's attention and has been gradually accepted among them.

### The change of consciousness and feeling of nationalism in Japan

In the 1990's, Japanese people were very shocked by the collapse of the bubble economy, and the public opinion transformed rapidly. It has encouraged the change of national consciousness and nationalism. I will mention some evidence about it below. Looking to the research result of the question, 'confidence in Japan', the affirmative answer to it has decreased. For example the answer to 'Do you think Japan belongs to first rank states?' has gone down from the peak of 57% (1993), then to 49% (1993), 38% (1998) 36% (2003) (NHK Hoso Bunka Kenkyujo Hen,2004; 115-118). It also explained that the change has been mainly caused by the economic breakdown. This evidence reveals the reason that confidence in Japan has mostly been based on and supported by the economic success.

In addition a key factor that has influenced Japanese national consciousness and nationalism was the Persian Gulf War (1990-91). It encouraged the Japanese people to discuss how Japan should contribute to global security (in this case, of Middle-East region), and then to reconsider and further criticize the Japanese policy of 'One-State-Pacifism'. When the people were asked 'What policy should Japan adopt after Persian Gulf War', 61% of people answered 'Japan should play an active role for resolving international conflicts'. Needless to say, an active role signified 'dispatching the JSDF overseas'. Below are some related opinions (Asahi Shinbun, 19 June, 1991).

1. The JSDF should not be dispatched overseas; 21%.
2. The JSDF should be dispatched only for limited operations, such as disaster relief and other non-military operation; 46%.
3. The JSDF should be dispatched and permitted military operation only under the command of UN (ex. Participating in Peace Keeping Operation of UN); 23%.
4. The JSDF should participate in the force operation (ex. Multi National Force in Persian Gulf War); 5%.
5. Others and NA; 5%.

The opinion pool also had the question, 'Do you think that foreign people see Japan as reliable country?' The affirmative response, 'Yes', had decreased; from 45% (December, 1990) to 35% (June, 1991). But the negative response, 'No', had gone up; from 44% (December, 1990) to 55% (June, 1991). In my view the research results might suggest that the positive response to 'Dispatching JSDF overseas' has been correlated with the decline of confidence in Japan and the desire to regain foreign nations' confidence in Japan. The majority of Japanese seemed to want to recover the trust by foreign countries by playing active roles in resolving international conflicts (i.e. dispatching JSDF to overseas).

The trend of public opinion has in turn encouraged the disputes over the Japanese Constitution which forbids the dispatch of the JSDF overseas. And it has increased the number of opinions favoring the revision and reform of the Constitution. The affirmative response to the question, 'We had better amend the Constitution', has increased from 33% (1991) to 50% (1993) (Yomiuri Shinbun Yoron chousabu, 2002: 49). Furthermore regarding the reform of the Constitution, the proportion of positive images (e.g. 'future oriented' (28%), 'independent' (14%), 'realistic' (29%)) was larger than that of negative ones (e.g. 'restoration' (8%), 'expansion in armaments' (10%) (Asahi Shinbun, May 3, 2002).

But we should recognize that many Japanese have not regarded the reform of Constitution as the most important issue for the present. For example when the people were asked 'What issue should politicians deal with?', most of them mentioned 'economic development', which has risen from 21% (1993) to 48% (1998), lastly to 48% (2003) (NHK Hoso Bunka Kenkyuujou, 2004; 72-74). From this public opinion data, we can conclude that most Japanese would like to be proud of economic superiority in the world. In other words nationalism in Japan has been closely related to the consciousness and feeling of economic power. This economic confidence, however, has decreased because of the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan, rapid development of Chinese economy, and restoration of U.S. economy. As a result of this the national consciousness and nationalism based on economic prosperity have 'drifted'.

Another factor that has caused the decrease of confidence has been the fluctuation of self-image among Japanese. Although most Japanese believed that their own society has been much safer and more peaceful than any other countries, serious events and crises happened in Japan in 1995. These consisted of the 'Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (January)' and 'Sarin gas attack on underground Tokyo (March)'. Certainly most Japanese consider the great earthquake to have been a natural disaster and the sarin attack the work of the radical new religious group called 'Aum Shinri Kyo'.

But most Japanese were extremely shocked by these events, for they forced the Japanese to realize that their society is more dangerous and fragile than they had previously assumed. These two events caused Japanese confidence in their own

society decrease. In fact this conclusion is supported by the results of the following opinion pool about the sarin attack (Mainichi Shinbun, June 11, 1995). People were asked; 'Do you think that there is a relationship between these two situations; one is that Aum Shinri Kyo has acquired many adherents, especially young generation, and committed immoral actions; the other is that there are lots of social problems to be solved in Japan. 61% responded in the affirmative while 19% responded in the negative. Thus many Japanese thought that their own society produced the felony group.

There has been a decrease of confidence in safety and peace as well as economics in Japan. It has in turn led to the decrease of the pride of their society and the fluctuation of nationalism that was based on economic success. Then the people began to recognize the importance for Japan to establish a powerful position in global community with strong orientation toward a nationalism based on economic power.

Given these difficult times, the opinion advocating a policy of contribution to the global community has become the norm. Both the Japanese government and the people thought that dispatching the JSDF overseas was one of the best ways to contribute to the global community and to make Japan more appealing to foreign countries. Japanese public opinion gradually accepts and supports the policy of dispatching the JSDF to Iraq and other countries where serious conflicts exist. It is one of the most important aspects of nationalism in Japan.

### 'Media-Nationalism' after 'September 11 Terror Attacks' in Japan

The 'September 11 Terror Attacks', following Afghanistan War and Iraq War have the common characteristics of a 'Television War'. In particular, the pictures of the terror attacks, which happened September 11, 2001, have appeared on TV again and again. The serious and tragic event and various reports about it invoked the inferior collective memory among Japanese that originated from the Gulf War.

As a result of it, as described above, the majority of the Japanese public opinion has agreed with more active contribution to the world community in the military as well as the economic field. It should be emphasized that the war reports by U.S. media generally adopted a binary scheme, 'terrorists and its supporters' vs. 'U.S. forces and its supporters'. The former was portrayed as evil enemies, and the latter as lawful allies. Most of the media and the majority opinion in Japan followed the same scheme. Then when Japan decided to join the 'Coalition of Willing' for attacking Iraq as well as Afghanistan, most Japanese recognized themselves as one of the important member of U.S. supporters. Japan thus reproduced and reinforced the values that formed the 'We' feeling belonging to U.S. supporters, but most Japanese regard Afghanistan, Iraq, and Islamic countries less as enemies than simply as a 'They'. In addition a terrorist group, 'Al-Qaeda' and its leader 'Osama

bin Laden' have been regarded as symbols of 'Enemy', 'Evil' and 'They' by most of Japanese as well as Western people.

Some Japanese and its media questioned the legitimacy of Afghanistan and Iraq War, and sending the JSDF to Iraq, and criticized a series of policies executed by Japanese government in accordance with U.S. policies. But as described before, the supporters of sending the JSDF to Iraq has increased in tandem with the international or national serious anxiety caused by '9.11 terrorism'. The results of a public opinion pool conducted just after sending the JSDF to Iraq show an increase in the number of Japanese who support the JSDF's continued deployment; the question was "Do you support the opinion that Japan should continue sending the JSDF to Iraq, or not?" The answer "Yes" was 50%, "No" was 32%. (Asahi-shinbun, April 17/18, 2004). As media reported the issue again and again, emphasizing the situation of the U.S. and her allies, and expressing the necessity of joining them, the climate of opinion has certainly changed and has been reinforced. It can be interpreted as growing into 'active nationalism'.

Another aspect of the change in the climate of public opinion is that most Japanese wish to maintain a secure society. We can call this 'negative nationalism'. Some media reported that Japan was targeted by the terror (but fortunately it has not happened yet in Japan). Some Japanese were killed and abducted in Iraq. In addition in 2004 terrorists attacked trains in Madrid, and yet others attacked London's subways and buses in 2005. Through a series of media reports, most Japanese have again come to recognize the position that Japan should occupy in the global community and understand the importance of a secure nation. Now the Japanese have become more aware that Japan is a member of advanced countries and U.S. allies, and they advocate not yielding to terror.

Needless to say national security is a point of national interest and the climate of opinion after the '9.11 attacks' in Japan began to resonate more with this prioritization. In referring this I need mention other serious problems that have been caused by North Korea. Since Prime Minister Junichirou Koizumi suddenly visited North Korea 2002, many different kinds of Japanese media have eagerly reported the threats of the country again and again. Indeed the country has some threatening elements for Japan, including nuclear weapons and the abduction of Japanese people. As Japanese media has actively reported these aspects Japanese nationalism has been elevated. It is another important aspect of 'Media-Nationalism' in recent Japan.

## Conclusion

Most Japanese have come to believe that their nation needs to take more responsibility for global security than before. They have recognized that the way of achieving this goal is to contribute in the military, as well as political, economic

fields. In other words they have come to appreciate the limitation of 'one-state-pacifism', mainly because Japanese media has repeatedly reported the pressing issues. Then the trend of public opinion has been linked to the formation of national consciousness and nationalism. This is a typical example of the present situation of 'Media-Nationalism' in Japan.

Of course some Asian countries, especially China and South Korea, have expressed their fears about this trend. Because they were seriously damaged by Japanese invasion during the Second World War. As Japan has had a unique position in Asia, it has attached greater importance to U.S. than other Asian countries. But Japan now needs to listen to the opinions of Asian countries more than ever before because Japan has become deeply involved with them. How does Japan cope with this and establish a relationship of mutual-respect with Asian countries although it continues to maintain its orientation to the U.S. This is the most important issue in the conditions for the rise of 'Media-Nationalism' in Japan, especially for the media.

## NOTES

Article 9 in Japanese constitution states:

1. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.
2. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

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