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Interesting

Japan in Asia: A History of Images

(very preliminary partial translation)

Reference material for the Shimoda '94

"Japan's Asian Identity" project is a multi-year, research project conducted by the Japan Center for International Exchange since 1993. It aims to respond to growing pressures on Japan to define and articulate its role in the emerging Asia-Pacific regional community. Under the leadership of Yoichi Funabashi, Washington Bureau Chief of the *Asahi Shimbun*, seven Japanese experts will contribute papers on Asia in Japan's foreign policy, security relations, economic relations, historical interactions, Japanese perception of Asia, and grassroots interactions. Like its sister project, "Japan's International Identity," these papers will be published both in English and Japanese.

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Japan in Asia: A History of Images

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How have Japan and the Japanese been seen by the peoples of Asia? There have been many, many discussions of the path Japan followed from the beginning of the modern age to the end of World War II and of the image of Japan created by the defeat. Little has been written, however, about the history of Asians' perceptions of Japan before that time. It is these perceptions, however, that strongly affect Asian views of Japan and its people today. These views are not ones formed during and after the war of 1937-45 but rather gradually over a period of seven hundred years beginning around the fourteenth century. The centuries before had been a time during which Japan assiduously absorbed the culture of China and Korea. In ancient times Japan and the Korean peninsula had such close ties that they apparently shared political interests between rival cliques on both sides. Here I would like to discuss how these Asian countries came to see Japan as a violent state and the Japanese as greedy economic animals, an image that took shape in the fourteenth century and after in the course of major political changes taking place in Japan and complex developments in China and on the Korean peninsula. Those images, formed over a history of seven centuries and unlikely to be erasable in a short period of time, affect its relations with all the other nations in Asia today. Sometimes they grew out of deep-rooted prejudices, and it is important to find out what gave rise to those prejudices. The cause of such ill feeling lies partly with the Japanese, but it cannot be identified only in the emotional traits and behavior of the Japanese. It must be considered in the context of overall history of the Asian economy. Relations between the countries in Asia, when observed in an appropriately broad perspective, show themselves not to be the product of the behavior of states or people in short spans of time, but derive from intimate and continuous contacts between them over a very long period.

The Advent of the *Wokou*

In Chinese histories, records, and stories from about the fourteenth century, one comes across the word *wokou*, "Japanese pirates," (倭寇; Jap. *wakō*) over and over. (The use of this character, which means "dwarf," for *wa*, is infused

with the continental disdain for the "barbarian," short-statured Japanese. The character used by Japanese for *wa* is 和 "harmony.") Up until then, China had not paid much attention to Japan; it was simply one of many "barbarian" lands in its massive periphery. But from around this time, mentions of the *wokou* in Chinese and Korean records noticeably increase, suggesting the beginnings of a new sort of contacts between Japan and other countries in Asia. The contacts, moreover, were not necessarily of the desirable kind. It is the bitter words set down in those very early records, in fact, that are the origin of the images of Japan that prevail today. First, let us look at what Chinese children are being taught about Japan in the schools.

According to *Chūgoku no kyōkasho no naka no Nihon to Nihonjin* [Japan and the Japanese in Chinese Textbooks] compiled in 1988, the section on the Ming dynasty in junior high school textbooks used in China gives the following account of the *wokou*.

From the end of the Yuan dynasty, the provincial rulers [daimyo] of the Kyushu area were constantly causing trouble along China's sea coasts with bands made up of samurai, traders, and pirates. The people living along the coasts called them *wokou*. When maritime defenses became slack around the middle of the Ming dynasty, *wokou* attacks only intensified. Powerful landlords and merchants of Zhejiang and Fujian conspired with the *wokou* to rob and pillage, and then divided the spoils. . . . The attackers murdered people and set fire to their homes after carrying off their booty. They piled the valuables they stole in hundreds of ships and sailed away.

What comes as a surprise to Japanese historians is that Chinese believe the deeds of the *wokou* were not perpetrated by mere pirates, but by "samurai, traders, and pirates" hired by Japanese daimyo. In other words, they are considered not the doings of a handful of outlaws but among the acts of Japan itself; the responsibility for what they wrought, the textbooks seem to assert, lay with Japan (even if not with the Japanese state today). The Chinese who joined the *wokou*, moreover, are called "powerful landowners and merchants." The intent of this passage is to stress that the acts of piracy were not related to the common folk of China but to landlords and merchants (which the People's Republic had destroyed) alone. The part omitted in the quotation

above emphasizes, furthermore, the attacks on the coast aided and abetted by traitorous Chinese merchants and how the people of the coasts armed themselves and battled against the *wokou* alongside the soldiers of the Ming. There is no mention of the widely known fact that the composition of the *wokou* bands was mainly Chinese and Korean, with, in the sixteenth century perhaps 10 percent to 20 percent Japanese, as well as Malays, Thais, and Portuguese. But passages like the above, quite aside from what the facts might have been, clearly attest to the historical role of the *wokou* in forming Chinese images of Japan that continue to prevail today.

Whatever the composition of the *wokou* bands and who they were, their ruthlessness is reiterated in history books and novels. In *Guochaodianhui* by Xu Xue-ju, of the Ming dynasty, it is described how the *wokou* burned granaries and homes, robbed graves, tied babies to posts and poured boiling water over them, captured pregnant women and cut open their bellies after making bets over the sex of the fetus they carried. Historian Ishihara Michihiro², however, notes that these same stories of cruel treatment of infants and pregnant women recur with suspicious uniformity in many history books thereafter: in Mao Yuan-yi's *Wubeizhi*, Ye Xianggao's *Sigaokao*, as well as in the *Huangming liutai zouyi* and *Chouhaitu bian*, and in Zhang Xie's *Dongxiyang kao*, Zheng Xiao's *Huangming siyi kao*, and Tu Shan's *Ming zhengtongzong*. There is no doubt that the brutality of the *wokou* became deeply imprinted on the memories of the people who had suffered their attacks, but it seems odd that the exact same incidents should be recorded by witnesses in every case, making it look as if stories were quoted and requoted over and over. It was that repetition of the image of the *wokou*, nevertheless, that added up to the overall image of Japanese. It was apparently transferred to foreigners in general, moreover, for there are records describing Portuguese as having the custom of eating children. Some Japanese remember the alleged custom of ancient China, incidentally, of cannibal consumption of babies.

These ferocious, cold-blooded *wokou* were described as wearing short robes with short sleeves, as going barefoot and shaving their heads save for tufts of hair on both sides over the ears. They were known for their swordsmanship and great strength. In a popular anthology of fiction compiled in the Ming dynasty, *Gujin xiaoshuo* [Stories Past and Present], there is the story of the "Yang Bao-lao's strange encounter in Shaoxing," which deals with the *wokou*, complete with an illustration that shows men of precisely this

description brandishing long swords held in both hands. Their apparel is Chinese, but their heads are shaved on the top and back, leaving hair on the sides, the same depicted in the histories. This story opens in the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368) as a man named Yang Ba-lao leaves his family in Xian on a business trip to Fujian. His business there is extended and he finds a new wife, who gives birth to a son. Later, eager to return to Xian, he departs Fujian. On the second day of his journey, he emerges from his lodgings to find the road filled with people under attack by *wokou*. Yang tries to escape, like everyone else, but ultimately he is captured by the ruffians. This account makes up the first half of the story. This tale contains a great deal of very specific data about the *wokou*. They are skilled swordsmen, killing people with one slice of the sword like one might chop through a vegetable. They gather their fellows by blowing on a conch shell. After capturing women and raping them, they let them go without killing them. And then there is the following:

But though these women might have escaped with their lives, they are despised and ridiculed for the rest of their lives. In the case of men, only the elderly and children are killed. If a man they capture looks strong, they shave his head, paint him with lacquer, and dress him up like a Japanese man. Should it come to battle, they move along using these disguised Chinese in the lead as shields. . . . That these Japanese invade China is mostly unknown to the rulers of their nation. They are simply bands of poor people from the islands who take to the seas [in search of riches], and like the robbers of China, over there they consider this just another business. When they go out on raids, they form squads whose leader gives himself the title *Daiō* [lit., "great king"], but back in their home country, they revert to the look of simple, anonymous folk. The plundered treasure they divide equally among themselves, presenting one tenth to one fifth to their lord in the home country, and hiding the remainder from each other. Even if one of them ends up being killed by the Chinese, they consider it of no greater import than a slight loss in their business. The sturdy males among their captives are used as servants, their heads shaven and legs left bare in the Japanese fashion. They give them swords and spears and teach them how to fight. The Chinese obey for fear of their lives,

and after six months or a year has passed, they become accustomed to the Japanese way of life, learn to speak the language, and eventually end up being little different from their captors. . . . During the Taiding era (1323-27) of the Yuan dynasty, there were famines in Japan, and many bands were formed to raid and plunder China, and it was one of these that took Yang Ba-lao away with them.²

Of course, this is a fictional account. We do not know how much of this story is in accordance with the facts. The Yuan dynasty in which it is set seems rather too early, but the description is quite close to what the *wokou* were thought to be like at least in the early Ming period. Quite a bit of it is more specific than the history books and seems to be true, such as that the piracy was apparently unknown to the Japanese government, that poverty-stricken islanders joined forces in their search for plunder, and that the provincial lord would be kept silent about the matter with a share of the spoils. The way Chinese men would be taken back to Japan, where they eventually were assimilated and transformed into full-fledged members of the pirate bands has also been corroborated. Gory stories about cruelty to infants and pregnant women do not appear, making one wonder if such tales are not only the product of errors in quotation but of exaggerations by people traumatized by pirate attacks.

The *Gujin xiaoshuo* anthology was published in around 1621 and compiled by Feng Meng-long. Feng was born in Suzhou, Jiangsu province and later became governor of the district of Shouning in the province of Fujian. It is said that the *Gujin xiaoshuo* consisted of already existing stories, but it does seem to include some original pieces by the compiler. We do not know for sure whether the story of Yang Ba-lao is original or not, but neither does it seem to have been written by relying on history books alone.

One question we must examine is whether *wokou* did indeed appear in the fourteenth-century Yuan China in which this story is set. The first record mentioning the *wokou* describes their appearance on the Korean peninsula in 1223. *Wokou* activity began around the peninsula and did not arrive on the shores of the Jiangsu or Zhejiang provinces of China until 1369, among the earliest reports. So, indeed, *wokou* were known in fourteenth-century China. Whether these incidents were occurring from before the Mongol Invasions launched against the Japanese mainland in 1274 and 1281,

the Japanese mainland in 1274 and 1281, whether they were prompted by those assaults, or whether they occurred after the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), is not clear. Even without any records, it is easy to conjecture that *wokou* rampant around the Korean peninsula might head for China as well. Korea suffered *wokou* pirate attacks coming from the south as well as incursions of the Mongols from the north. In 1263, the Korean state of Koryo called on the Japanese government to take steps to suppress the marauders, and it was partly because Japan responded to the request with tighter controls that the *wokou* shifted their attention to China. Another reason must surely have been that in the wake of predatory attacks from both north and south, there was little left to profit from.

Meanwhile, it was also during the Yuan dynasty that Marco Polo carried home with him the rumor of "Zipangu, the land of gold." Japan had exported large quantities of gold ore to Song-dynasty (960-1279) China and the story was transmitted to Europe two centuries later. In 1492, after Spain drove the forces of Islam from the Iberian peninsula, Columbus set off on his voyage in search of Zipangu (Japan). Columbus's ships mistook the Espanola islands of the Americas for Japan, and Cuba for China, naming the "continent" they found the "Indies." So it was around the same time that the earliest images of Japan were implanted in the Eastern and Western hemispheres, in Asia as "the land of pirates," and in Europe as "the land of gold."

The Historical Backdrop

Civil turbulence in Japan was at its height in the fourteenth century. Upheaval and turmoil spread across the country on an even greater scale than during the transition from the courtly rule of the Heian period (794-1192) to the warrior-led regime of the Kamakura period (1192-1333), and these conditions were not unrelated to the rise of *wokou* piracy.

It was in 1336, not long before the beginning of the Ming dynasty, that following the schism between two branches of the imperial line in Japan leading to the division of the court into the Northern and Southern lines, Emperor Godaigo (1288-1339) of the Southern line moved his court to Yoshino, in the mountains south of Kyoto. Resisting the control of the shogunate, he had sought to regain political authority for the court and his own line through the Kemmu Restoration but failed. What does the court schism mean as far as the *wokou* were concerned? The link was not just a matter of

widespread civil unrest opening the way for expanded outlaw activity. It was because, while the power base of the Northern Court, allied with the samurai forces after the split, lay among the settled, agrarian people of the country, that of the Southern Court, determined to assert imperial authority against warlord ascendancy, lay with non-settled, non-agricultural elements including seagoing warriors (*suigun*; i.e., pirates) and outlaws. As far as Japan was concerned, the schism of the Northern and Southern courts meant essentially the demise of imperial authority. After this time, in fact, the court was rapidly transformed into the "symbol" of authority, and the long history of the emperor system as symbol of Japan began. Emperor Godaigo's last-resort source of strength in his battle to assert his power were the seagoing pirates with close links to the *wokou* and the land-based professional samurai bands collectively known as *akutō* (lit., "criminal bands"). They were the comrades of thieves and robbers disguised as mountain priests, bandits and pirates.³ The shogunate clamped down on these outlaw groups as its power grew and, following the Mongol invasion attempts, extended its campaign against them to Kyushu. Nevertheless, non-agrarian elements of the population in medieval times continued to be a very vigorous force with tremendous armed strength at their disposal. It was not surprising that these groups, subject to successive campaigns to suppress them, were willing to cooperate with Godaigo's struggle against the shogunate. The *wokou*, therefore, cannot be dismissed as mere criminals having nothing to do with Japan itself, but must be considered as having counted among the substantive forces in the country of that time. The passage in the Chinese textbooks described above, is probably not seriously mistaken, therefore. It would be true as long as the supporters of Godaigo were relying on the fighting power of the criminal bands—of which the *wokou* must have been part.

Accounts say that when Godaigo's son Moriyoshi entered Yoshino to raise an army, it was mainly *yamabushi* and mountain folk who rallied to his cause. And certainly the success of another son of Godaigo, Prince Kaneyoshi, on his journey to Kyushu, was largely thanks to this network of maritime forces. Pirate forces from Ise, Shima, and the Island Sea supported Prince Kaneyoshi and helped him get to Kyushu. The Kutsuna clan of Kutsuna island were especially hospitable, allowing Kaneyoshi to live there for three years and helping him build his path to Kyushu. Following the death of the Southern court's ideological leader Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293-1354), the Kumano "navy"

threw their support behind Prince Kaneyoshi, and the following year he entered Higo (present-day Kumamoto prefecture) with the support of the Kikuchi clan. In 1361 Kaneyoshi defeated the shogunal forces at Dazaifu and extended his control not only to Kyushu but over Iyo (present-day Ehime prefecture) as well.

The power of the Southern court rose to its peak in 1369, but went into decline thereafter. The year the envoy of the Ming recognized Prince Kaneyoshi as "king of Japan," at the same time calling for the submission of tribute to the Ming and suppression of the *wokou*, was in the middle of the 60-year schism between the Northern and Southern courts. Even though the envoy came to Prince Kaneyoshi as if he enjoyed international recognition as the leader of Japan, the Prince slew him; it was only the previous year, in 1368, that the Ming was founded. The memory of the Mongol invasions was still fresh in Japanese minds. The Ming continued to send envoys and repeat their messages calling for Japanese tribute, and in 1371, after receiving the third envoy, Prince Kaneyoshi finally decided to send tribute to China.

But "King Kaneyoshi" was short-lived; the Ashikaga shogun's general Imagawa Ryōshun (Sadayo) bore down on him, gradually expanding bakufu strength in Kyushu, and detained the Ming envoy who arrived in Kyushu the next year. It was then that the shogunate learned for the first time that Prince Kaneyoshi was known throughout Asia as the "ruler of Japan." This intelligence came as a shock to the shogunate. It was assumed in those days that any ruler incorporated in China's tribute system would declare himself a "king" who had sworn loyalty to the Chinese emperor. In return, it was understood, that "king's" country was entitled to engage in profitable trade with what was then one of the most prosperous, advanced nations in the world, China. Not only that, it thereby enjoyed the shelter of China's military power. While China's credibility as a benevolent benefactor was strained for a time under the rule of the Mongols (Yuan dynasty) it was never a nation that its neighbors cared to antagonize. China's tribute system was the centerpiece of the East Asian geopolitical system; it embraced Korea, Vietnam and the Kingdom of the Ryukyus, and by the Ming dynasty had expanded to include Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and kingdoms as far south as Malacca; in other words the major regions of Asian trade. If King Kaneyoshi had exercised his powers as the king of Japan to request military assistance

from China, the shogunate would find itself forced to fight against Chinese armies. In Japan at that time, it would have had no chance whatsoever.

The shogunate's response was to return 150 Chinese brought to Japan as *wokou* captives as a demonstration of its endeavors to control piracy and calling on the Ming to recognize itself as the regime upon which the title of "King of Japan" ought to be bestowed. The Ming, however, would not accept the name of anyone but "King Kaneyoshi."

There is, however, something very curious about the Chinese documents concerning this period. In all the records and official documents of the Ming, the name of the king is written with the characters in reverse order: *Yoshikane* instead of *Kane-yoshi*. The reason is not clear. To cope with their predicament, therefore, the forces of the Northern Court and the Shimazu clan (who governed Kyushu) entered into negotiations with the Ming using the name of this non-existent king "Yoshikane." For whatever the reason, an imaginary king had been created. It was not long until the imaginary king of Kyushu, Yoshikane, vanished. Kyushu fell into the hands of the Northern Court and the followers of the Southern Court scattered into the mountains and across the seas.

What is important to recognize in this succession of events is the deep involvement of the *wokou* not only in the power struggles going on within fourteenth-century Japan but in the context of international relations as well. Their beginnings do go back to the 1200s, but it was not until around 1350 that they are regularly identified as *wokou* and that their activities suddenly grew vigorous. This time falls almost exactly midway in the period of the struggle between the forces of the Northern and Southern Courts, when Godaigo's resistance of bakufu-backed authority was at its peak. As mentioned above, it was the "criminal bands" (*akutō*) of which the *wokou* were part that provided the backbone of the armed might at the disposal of the Southern Court. In *Ajia no naka no chūsei Nihon* [Medieval Japan in the Context of Asia], Murai Shōsuke states as follows:

Japan's fourteenth century was the age of the *akutō*. We can tell that there was some connection between the *wokou* and the *akutō*, as suggested in a shogunal message addressed to Imagawa Ryōshun, steward (*shugo*) of Ōsumi [present-day southeast Kagoshima prefecture]: "It is told that the criminal bands of your territory have been

marauding along the Korean coast; you should strictly suppress them." Judging from this observation, as well as from the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221 and the first appearance of the *wokou*, the Kannō Disturbance of 1350-53 and the growth of the bands, as well as the coincidence of their most active period with the battle over Kyushu between the forces of the Northern and Southern Courts, we can detect an organic relationship between the *wokou* and the social developments and political processes going on within Japan at the time. It is also easy to imagine how *wokou* piracy flourished when maritime defenses slackened at the end of the Korean state of Koryo (935-1392) and in the transition between the Yuan and the Ming. It was to be the new developments in political change and international relations in all three countries—Japan, Korea, and China—that eventually transformed the *wokou* into peaceful traders and travelers.⁴

Chinese and Korean efforts at "international relations" with Japan consisted of little more than requests of Japan to suppress the *wokou*. That was the ultimate purpose, in fact, of the Ming in calling for submission of tribute. But save for a very short period in the time of Prince Kaneyoshi and under the regime of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, Japan did not comply. No other of its rulers were recipients of the *guowang* ("king of the state") title. Japan remained determined not to enter into any kind of ruler-follower relationship.

In 1419, Korea launched an attack on Tsushima intended to root out the *wokou* at their home base. The Muromachi shogunate immediately sent an envoy whose ostensible purpose was to request a complete copy of the Buddhist scriptures, the *Daizōkyō*, to find out the facts of the situation and settle the trouble. Buddhist scriptures had been sent from China in the tenth century and were not reprinted in Japan until the Edo period (1600-1867), but in Korea they had been repeatedly reprinted. Scriptures had been presented by China to Japan and Korea and by Korea to Japan to spread the virtues of Buddhism, acts which also clearly attested to the pecking order of civilization in East Asia. In the following year, 1420, a Korean envoy named Song Hee-kyung traveled to Japan bringing the *Daizōkyō*. In the diary of his journey, *No Song-dang*, Song described his terror of the pirates his mission encountered while travelling through the Inland Sea. As he discovered, piracy was not only rampant outside Japan but preyed on the ships from Korea and

the Ryukyus that passed through the Inland Sea. Song describes what happened as they neared Kamagari on the Inland Sea.

It is a place with Eastern and Western groups of pirates. Ships coming from the East, if they have an Eastern pirate aboard, are not molested by the Western pirates. Vessels moving from the west with a Western pirate aboard need not fear from the Eastern pirates. So we paid 7 *guan* of Song silver to purchase an Eastern pirate to ride the boat.⁵

Apparently violence and plunder were not the pirates' only stock in trade. In this case, their aim was to collect tolls, and they had a system according to which all a vessel wishing to pass safely had to do was pay a certain amount and board a member of the pirate band. The account says "purchase" a pirate to come aboard, but it probably meant having a pirate ride with them temporarily. There is also something of the meaning in this word "purchase" of the actual sale of human beings that went on in those days among China, Japan, and Korea. When the *wokou* went to the shores of China and Korea for plunder, the two things they mostly carried away were rice (grain) and people. They used the rice to make up for shortages in the taxes due their lords and sold their captives as laborers or hired them out as soldiers until their next expedition.

Another, crueller case of the sale of human beings was that of Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's sale of imprisoned *wokou* to China. This transaction, which occurred when Yoshimitsu sought to incorporate Japan into the tribute system, won him the title of "king" of Japan. As evidence of his regime's campaign against the *wokou* he handed over to the Chinese a large number of "*wokou*," and as a "thank you present" in return he received 1,000 silver taels, 15,000 copper *guan*, and a generous amount of brocade cloth. Copper currency was a necessary in those days. As for the fate of the *wokou* hostages, they were taken back to China and allegedly boiled to death. Most of the "*wokou*" turned over to the Chinese, it is said, were retainers of the Southern Court and pirates who had cooperated with them.⁶

On the same day of the voyage through the Inland Sea, Song Hee-kyung's diary also notes that among the people of Kamagari who came to see their ship he observed priests who looked, acted, and talked like Koreans. He does not explain more about these priests, but his account and other documents suggest that not only in Tsushima and Kyushu but throughout the

Inland Sea area, there was considerable coming and going of people from China and Korea in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in connection with *wokou* activities. Many Japanese took up residence in China and Korea, and numerous Chinese and Koreans were settled in Japan, it seems. It should also be noted that contacts between the Korean government and the daimyo of the western provinces of Japan continued steadily throughout the turbulent years of the Sengoku period ("Warring States," 1467-1568). Although foreign relations in the formal sense may have been largely concerned with the containment of the *wokou* menace, exchange on the government level, as well as on the *wokou* level, between Korea and Japan flourished for a long time up until Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of the peninsula in the sixteenth century (1592, 1597).

Korea's efforts to keep the *wokou* at bay were not limited to diplomatic negotiations. Beginning in 1426 it opened three ports to Japanese trade: at Pusan, Jae, and Yeon. It established Japanese trading houses in each of the three ports and placed Japanese (mainly people from Tsushima, which incidentally was the home base of many *wokou*) in charge of the trade. This step seems to have been aimed at turning the *wokou* into legitimate traders. The trade was, therefore, placed under strict control. The severity of the regulations inevitably led to frequent smuggling. Indeed, without such smuggling, the people of the island of Tsushima, for whom the Korean peninsula had been a major source of food, could not have survived. In the face of increasingly tighter controls on trade, rebellion broke out among the Japanese in the three Korean ports in 1510. For the Korean peninsula, the insatiable appetite of the Japanese for trade was a problem second only to the violence they perpetrated.

All things, it would appear, were determined by the *wokou* problem. The I (Yi) dynasty (1392-1910) itself was established in response to the violence of Chinese banditry and Japanese piracy. The previous Koryo dynasty had succumbed because, while struggling against pirate predations, it had become the victim of incursions by bandits of the Hongjin ["Red Hood"] Buddhist society of Han stock in China. I (Yi) Song-gye founded the I dynasty after having first completely suppressed these threats to national security, and the Hongjin bands went on to found the Ming dynasty.

The *wokou* were certainly pirates, but the leaders who emerged at the time of dynastic change in China were also outlaws. The rebel group of Zhang

Shi-cheng struggled to the end against first Ming-emperor Zhu Yuan-zhang, himself a former Hongjin rebel hero, and Shi Nai-an, who earlier compiled the *Shuihuzhuan* [The Water Margin or All Men Are Brothers] belonged to this group. And it is said that remnants of Zhang Shi-cheng's bands joined forces with *wokou* to plunder the coasts of China. If the Southern court of Japan had emerged victorious, moreover, there is no doubt that the image of the *wokou* would have been depicted very differently in the history books.

Murai Shōsuke believes that the Japanese traders whose activity expanded throughout Southeast Asia from the fifteenth century were also the decendents of *wokou*.⁷ There were the three Japanese trading centers in Korea, through which the merchants of Tsushima funneled their trade. In the fifteenth century, which was the peak of Ryukyuan trade, Japanese trade with Southeast Asia was possible only by relying on the Ryukyus. Korean captives were returned to Korea in exchange for goods or were sold in the Ryukyus. The *wokou* did not bring back large numbers of captives from the Chinese coast or the Korean peninsula simply to act as shields in their next battle, but because they were merchandise of high commercial value.

The *Wokou* and the Development of the Asian Trading Sphere

It was not long before *wokou* ships grew into large fleets, manned mostly by Chinese, Koreans, Malays, Thais, and Portuguese. There must have been many aboard of mixed blood as well. Japanese now accounted for the minority, about 20 percent. In parallel with that development, the scope of activities of maritime traders (*kaishō*) expanded to Southeast Asia and the Muslim world. It is not possible to clearly distinguish between *wokou* and maritime traders, but one can easily imagine that as the East Asian regimes agreed on the necessity of suppressing piracy and government campaigns to eradicate it were stepped up, Japanese pirates gradually shifted to legitimate commerce and ultimately to ordinary maritime trade. It is probably these former *wokou* who laid the foundations of what later became Japanese communities (*Nihonjin-machi*) in Southeast Asia. In 1510, as mentioned earlier, Japanese merchants based at the three ports in Korea rose in revolt against strict Korean trade regulations. The anger of the ordinarily docile merchants was ignited by the battle over trading rights. Inasmuch as commerce and armed force were inseparable in those days, it must have been difficult to draw a clear line between the *wokou*

and maritime traders, but in any case, the transformation of the *wokou* into legitimate merchants was the shared goal of East Asian countries.

It was around this time in Europe that the Moors were driven from the Iberian peninsula. Granada, their last stronghold, fell in 1492, the year Columbus set sail for the Indies. The 700-year struggle between the Muslim and Christian world came to an end, and Europe became a completely Christian sphere. In 1510, the same year as the Japanese traders' revolt in Korea, Portugal occupied the western Indian state of Goa. That was also the year that the native peoples of Africa began being captured and shipped to America as slaves. Just as the slave trade was about to end in the Pacific, it was begun by Europeans and Americans over the Atlantic Ocean. Malacca was captured by Portugal the following year and became the center of commerce in Asia. The fall of Goa and Malacca into European hands, the development of silver mines in South Africa, and the flow of Africans to North America as slaves brought about sweeping changes in the world economy.

The sixteenth century was a time of profound and widespread transformation. Since ancient times Asian trade had been indispensable to Europe's economy, but had been dominated by Muslim traders. Now the Portuguese elbowed their way in. Afonso de Albuquerque, commanding a fleet of European ships, defeated Muslim armies in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, gaining Portuguese control of three key commercial pivots of trade—the Island of Hormuz, Goa, and Malacca.

Silver, another factor responsible for global change, was the pillar of the China-centered tributary trade in East Asia. Around 1530 Japan introduced the cupellation method of ore refinement from the Korean peninsula and began producing large quantities of silver. The Iwami silver mine (in what is now Shimane Prefecture) developed by Kamiya Jutei, a wealthy trader from Hakata in northern Kyushu, was in particular the mainstay of Japan's international trade. Kamiya felt keenly the importance of silver in Asian trade. Toward the end of the 1530s, 200 tons of silver was flowing out of Japan every year in the course of its trade with China alone. It is said that the China-Japan trade constituted the largest in volume of any bilateral trade in the world at that time, and it was the core of the far larger Asian trade sphere embracing the Ryukyus, Korea, and Southeast Asia as well. The Asian commercial sphere intersected at Malacca with the commercial zones of India,

the Arabian Gulf, and Eastern Africa. Where Gujarati and other Muslim traders had once been dominant, now the Europeans wedged themselves in.

As discussed above, world trade in the sixteenth century was heavily dependent upon the East Asian commerce centering around China. Professor Hamashita Takeshi, known for his research on the Chinese tributary trade in global perspective, presents the following insights:

In the sixteenth century when Europe sought to penetrate Asia, there was intense demand for silver in Asia, and its trading sphere was based on a silver currency system unique in world history. If we reexamine history with this factor in mind, then it is possible to reverse the widely-recognized relation of historical cause and effect. In other words, it was Asian demand for silver that led to massive silver mining in the Americas, [not vice versa].⁸

Looked at this way, Europe did not "discover" Asia, nor did Europe's development of South America transform Asia. Asia's natural resources and Chinese technologically advanced manufactured goods (silk, cotton, porcelain, etc.) attracted European entry into the East Asian trade, by accident resulting in the discovery of the Americas. Hamashita is right. The goal of Columbus's 1492 voyage was an island country named Zipangu (Japan) rich in gold east of China as described in *The Book of Marco Polo* (1298). Vasco da Gama's great voyage, inspired by the legend of Prester John's Christian kingdom in Asia, resulted in the European discovery of India. Columbus's expedition led ultimately to the location of silver mines in South America, and it was in order to conform with the currency standard that governed the China-centered trade that these mines were developed and the mercury amalgamation process invented.

Kawakatsu Heita interprets Europe's subsequent industrial revolution "not [as] a universal stage of human history following agrarian development, but as a response to Asian civilization."⁹

From International Piracy to Trade

By the sixteenth century the *wokou* had already become international pirates. Most of them were Chinese, as mentioned above, along with Koreans and

others; Japanese made up only 10 or 20 percent. The Japanese government's *wokou* suppression measures had obviously taken effect. The fate of most Japanese *wokou* was one or more of the following: death by boiling along with captured retainers of the Southern Court; sale as a slave; conversion to legitimate trade, or as was often the case during the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98), incorporation into navies owned by local daimyo. But the *wokou* culture, if it might be so called, that had developed over a long history, remained, and the Chinese stepped into this established form.

The association of the *wokou* moving about in large fleets of junks with members of different nationalities on board with Japan gradually waned. The Chinese chronicle *Mingsi* (completed in 1735) states in its account of Japan for the year of 1554, "Usually, three out of ten were really Japanese, and seven out of ten copied the Japanese." Also, the *Huangming siyikao* says, "Since the *wokou* came to Chekiang province, people in Chekiang, Kuangtung, and the region south of the Yangtze River copied them. The pirates were mostly Chinese, with one or two out of ten Japanese." Other Chinese documents mentioning the sixteenth-century *wokou* say more or less the same thing, that 90-100 percent of the *wokou* were Chinese. In actuality, there were also Koreans, Thais, and Portuguese among them.

These *wokou* were no longer easily distinguishable from maritime traders. Clamping down on the Japanese *wokou* had been the key issue of Japan's East Asia diplomacy, and as the campaign gradually proved successful, the days when one could make money purely by superior force became numbered. Armed force was not as crucial for the international *wokou* as for Spain and Portugal, which colonized Asia, Africa, and America through military force. Later, with only two exceptions, there were almost no moves among Asians to use arms to colonize other Asian nations. One exception was Toyotomi Hideyoshi's attempt to conquer Korea and China in the late sixteenth century. The other was Japan's colonial scheme—as large-scale as those by European powers—during the Pacific War, and this scheme failed, leaving painful scars of aggression in the nations of the region even today. This is similar to what has resulted from the colonial policies of European powers. Their former colonies of Asia, Africa, and South America are all suffering today from economic difficulties and internal ethnic strife.

The launching of the colonization policy of the regime of Toyotomi Hideyoshi was the result of the introduction of firearms, which had begun to be manufactured in Japan in large numbers. There were other factors behind this policy, of course, among the most important being that the Japan-China trade, which had boasted the largest volume in bilateral relations in the world, had collapsed in the wake of European intervention, and especially the influx of silver from South America. This situation was invited, says Hamashita Takeshi, by the nature of the East Asian trade sphere and Chinese demand for silver. The silver from South America produced through the colonization and exploitation of South America, the invention of amalgamation process, African slavery, and the enslavement of native South American peoples brought about drastic changes in the trade situation in Asia. Asian nations like the Ryukyus, which had depended solely upon trade with neighboring countries, quickly went into decline. The power of the Muslim traders diminished. Japan began shifting its attention to the Southeast Asian region as a base for trade activities in Asia, but that was too late; when it then attempted to follow in the colonial footsteps of the European powers, its decline became inevitable. China, using Manila as its base, began absorbing the silver brought by Spanish galleons. The price of Japanese silver marched downward. Asia was not the only region that underwent such great changes. After the passing of the great plagues, Europe's population rose, causing food shortages and widespread unemployment; to make matters worse, the influx of South American silver and Asian products triggered galloping inflation. This inflation spread worldwide, and eventually Japan, too, entered a long-term state of inflation.

Unlike today, the changes did not come about suddenly, but occurred very slowly over a long period of time. Japan did not become poor overnight because of South American silver. Rather, it grew dangerously active out of impatience. Its externally directed aggressiveness was partly due to the greatly-expanded but unstable, uncertain, and unpredictable developments in the world economy described above. Japan and the world were experiencing the totally unfamiliar; they had no way of predicting what might happen.

Another factor behind Japan's impatience and aggressiveness was Christianity, which arrived in Asia with determined intentions, bringing instability and then wealth in its wake. The foreign religion appeared in Japan just as the country was about to attain, under Oda Nobunaga and after his assassination Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the national unification that was the

prerequisite for economic stability. At such a crucial time, what leader would not feel threatened in face of a faith that spread quickly throughout the country and won four hundred thousand believers within a brief period of time? As is well known, Christianity in Japan was severely suppressed, but it is also true that some Japanese Christians were active participants in the government effort to colonize Asian nations, were involved in trade with Southeast Asia, and were enthusiastic developers of Japanese mines. They were, in short, among the driving forces of the expansionist Japan of the time. A third major reason for Japan's aggressive foreign policy was its large-scale production of muskets and other firearms.

Hideyoshi's military expedition to the Korean peninsula was a consequence of the mass production of muskets. Both the Portuguese who first brought firearms to Japan at Tanegashima island in 1543 and the Spanish Jesuit, Francis Xavier, who came to propagate the Christian faith in 1549 arrived in Japan aboard one of the *wokou* ships of the great Chinese pirate Wang Chih. These ships were probably smuggling ships, judging from the records describing Chinese junks bound for Japan carrying Portuguese in those days. The Chinese-led pirate groups based at the Shuangyu port of Liuhengdao island near Ningbo and the Yue port in Fujian were joined by Portuguese and Japanese around 1540. Wang Chih was a Chinese *wokou* among the pirates based at Shuangyu, but since he was apparently proficient in finance and transactions using bills, it is more likely that his group was one of the maritime trading operations engaged in smuggling. Records state that he went to Japan in 1545 and brought back three Hakata merchants including one named Wasuke Saimon, but it is likely that he shuttled back and forth all over the seas of the area in the pursuit of his trade. Wang also had a base on the Gotō group of islands off western Kyushu, where he was apparently known as Gohō (lit., "Five Peaks"). The site of one of his residences can still be found today on Fukue, one of the islands there.

It was hardly accidental that firearms should be introduced and Francis Xavier arrive at just this juncture in time. The tribute trade revolving around China excluded Europeans, essentially preventing them from any sort of business without teaming up with Chinese traders. By this time, firearms were important trade items handled by Chinese and Portuguese *wokou*, and it is without doubt that they deliberately moved to sell them in Japan. Japanese themselves, of course, were among them. So, far from Portuguese being the

ones to discover Japan, it was Japanese themselves who planned the introduction of firearms. Whether or not they had Japanese *wokou* bring the Portuguese to Japan, we do not know, but it does seem certain that Wang Chih and his Japanese henchmen thought a good market lay in Japan and piloted a group of Portuguese merchants to Tanegashima.

24 Considering how quick Japanese artisans were to copy the rifles brought into the country and the astonishing speed with which firearms were produced thereafter, the *wokou*'s hopes of a mass market for European-made weapons must have been quickly dashed. Rather than pay out large sums of silver, the Japanese determined to manufacture them domestically, an approach to economy that continues even today. No longer capable of surviving on the basis of local resources, Japan chose the path of technological development for manufacturing and domestic production of goods. Some 3,000 rifles brought victory to Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu in the decisive Battle of Nagashino (1575) against their mutual rival Takeda Katsuyori. Hideyoshi formed brigades armed with rifles for his invasion of the Korean Peninsula, which had failed by 1598. And finally, Ieyasu united Japan by using firearms at the final battle of the Sengoku period, Sekigahara (1600). Firearms brought the medieval period to an end. The Battle of Nagashino was the world's first organized battle centered around the use of cannon. Cotton came into use for fuses and for light-weight armor. Replacing the linen (*asa*) that had been the main material of commoner Japanese apparel until then, cotton transformed many aspects of life from the sixteenth century onward.

The proficiency in copying and speed of production demonstrated by Japan in the case of firearms was unprecedented anywhere in the world at that time. Its firearms copies, in fact, were among the few technologies that China and Korea imported from Japan. As Japan's firearms production technology spread, a *wokou* chief named Shingorō is said to have transmitted the technology to China, and guns were later introduced to the Korean peninsula via Tsushima.¹⁰

Production of firearms steadily grew. On Hideyoshi's expedition to Korea in 1592, the rate of firearm issue vis-à-vis the number of troops was only 14 percent; for the battle of Sekigahara (1600), it had grown to 40 percent. Gun production could not rely on locally produced materials alone. Domestic steel being in short supply, Japan began importing steel from the Coromandel coast of India, Fujian and Thailand. Lead for bullets, too, had to be imported; some

is said to have been ordered even from England. The saltpeter needed for making gunpowder was also hard to find in Japan and therefore largely imported from Southeast Asia and England.¹¹ Temple bells were melted down to collect steel for arms manufacture, but some scholars believe Hideyoshi's famous sword hunt, ostensibly to disarm the populace, was also launched for that purpose. As was the case with the Ming dynasty of China and the I dynasty of Korea, the unification of Japan by the shogunate based in Edo in the early seventeenth century occurred in the context of global economic conditions, trade, diplomacy, and competition in the advanced technologies of the times.

Looking again from the Asian perspective, Japan at this time seemed to be squandering its gold and silver on a massive buying binge: it imported large amounts of raw silk and silk cloth from China, deerskin from Thailand, and steel, lead, and saltpeter for manufacture of arms. So great was the Japanese appetite for raw silk that around 1570 Macao established a trading association to regulate the Japanese trade through a system called the *armação*. In Japan, a consortium of Japanese merchants was formed to maintain favorable prices of raw silk called the *itowappu*. The image of Japan that became established among merchants at the time, was of a country without technology but possessing sufficient economic power to play a dominant role in Asian markets.

Meanwhile, the fact that the *wokou* were not Japanese pirates, but maritime traders made up mostly of Chinese began to become well known. At long last, Japan had fulfilled its promises, going back to the thirteenth century, to China and Korea to suppress and control the *wokou*. But if East Asians thought this meant an end to the Japanese menace, they were to be disappointed: Suddenly they had Hideyoshi's wild scheme of conquering all of Korea, China, and Southeast Asia to contend with. So far, no convincing explanation has been found for how he could have decided upon such a plan, launched without, as the Koreans say, the "slightest justification for invasion." If we look at how Hideyoshi pacified the principalities that had kept Japan in turmoil for a century, however, we can see that it was the perfectly natural extension of that process. It simply carried forward the "attack and conquer" mentality that had prevailed throughout the Sengoku period, the notion of conquering one territory after another as long as the power to do so remains. The possibility that the situation might be different in a different country

never occurred to Hideyoshi and his followers. They assumed that people and values were the same everywhere in the world, and thought that they could pacify the peoples of other lands as easily as those of Japan by force of arms. Discussing the reasons for Hideyoshi's defeat in Korea, Udagawa Takehisa offers the following conjectures regarding his naval power.

The Sengoku daimyo sought to establish naval forces headed by hereditary direct vassals and separated from the territorial and consanguineous bonds that prevailed in the old pirate bands in order to avail themselves of seagoing military power under their direct control. Naval power of this kind was developed by provincial lords all over the country during the Sengoku period. The same was true with the Toyotomi regime. The way Hideyoshi built his navy for the 1592 and 1597 invasions of Korea was exactly the same as for his domestic campaigns, suggesting that he considered battles fought overseas no more than an extension of domestic warfare. The sluggish performance of the Japanese navy in those invasions is probably attributable to that pattern of thinking.¹²

Even regarding the naval forces required to maintain a steady supply of materiel, armaments, and food to troops sent to fight on the Korean peninsula, Hideyoshi continued to think in domestic terms. The reason he was capable of deeming the conquering of all Asia as a reasonable plan was because of this illusion of endlessly-extending "domestic rule" that grew out of his ignorance of the world. The kind of thinking that conceives of everything within the insular context of Japan itself we are often accused of today can therefore be traced back not just to the seclusionist Edo period (1600-1867), but even to the time of Hideyoshi.

And then there was the equally wild notion: If we gain control of all Asia, then the raw silk, silk textiles, leather, medicines, spices, as well as the steel, lead, and saltpeter needed to make firearms that we cannot produce in Japan but must import from abroad would be ours to begin with. This was the essence of the colonialist thinking of Europeans of that time. Hideyoshi must have known that Portugal and Spain were doing exactly that in their colonies around the world. Of course, if Hideyoshi had successfully pursued his plans of conquest, colonizing the whole of Asia by military force and

exploiting its resources, Japan would not be what it is today. Japan is what it is today because it could not simply swipe valuable resources from the rest of Asia. It became a developer of advanced technologies because its own technological resources were the only ones it could exploit. It would have been a horrendous task, moreover, to maintain control over colonies in the face of independence movements, eventually allow them independence, and help them rebuild their economic and cultural strength thereafter. The problems the world faces in the ex-colonies of Africa and South America, would have been duplicated in even more serious form throughout Asia. Indeed, Hideyoshi could not have had a worse idea.

Hideyoshi's belief that other countries were no different from Japan indicates that he did not carry on the tradition of diplomatic relations Japan had cultivated with China and Korea over many centuries, and his fantasy to colonizing Asia arose from his ignorance and misunderstanding of the tribute system that had been the basis of the China-centered order in East Asia. Hideyoshi had risen from the rank of footsoldier in the army of Oda Nobunaga, and though having attained the most powerful seat in the land, remained an uneducated, uncultivated man, frivolous and easily dazzled by the new and novel. He was victorious in the survival-of-the-fittest struggle of the times, but assumed power without any knowledge of what previous rulers had accomplished, only minimal knowledge of Japan's foreign relations, and completely unread because he could not read or write the Chinese characters that were the international lingua franca of East Asia. This was the dreadful sort of man who had succeeded in unifying medieval Japan. There are some successful leaders who are aware of their shortcomings and gather around them people of knowledge and wisdom to compensate. But Hideyoshi was not that kind of man. He even sentenced some of his greatest confidantes—like the famed tea master Sen no Rikyū—to death. Nevertheless, Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi continue to be admired by many Japanese as models of forceful leadership.

Hideyoshi's expeditions were known in Japan as the "Wars" of the Bunroku and Keichō eras, but in Korea they were called the *Waran*, using the old derogatory character for "Japanese." This promptly revived the collective memories of the *wokou*, augmenting and firmly implanted the association of the marauding aggressors with Japan. To invade Korea meant fighting with other Asian nations under the tribute system. Hideyoshi's troops had to confront not

just Korea but the soldiers of the Ming (and not only barbarian tribes like the Mongols but the Han people themselves), as well as Thailand, Myanmar, India, Tibet, the minority peoples of the Chinese interior, Portuguese, and all manner of allied Asian armies. If Hideyoshi had only known what the tribute system was, he might have been able to judge from the beginning whether his ambitions could stand up to the combined firepower of the whole continent. China's tribute system was no mere trading association; it was a security treaty scheme designed to guard the stability of the Asian international order, and China made it its duty, as long as it was able, to eliminate disturbances to this order by individual countries. Japan's enemies knew that war is not won on the front lines alone. Support forces for supply of food, armaments, and other provisions are required and supply roots must be maintained. The first thing the Korean navy did was to cut the Japanese army sea supply routes. Hideyoshi's navy was a squadron of boats reorganized from pirate and *wokou* bands. The Korean navy was a disciplined, trained naval force that had been created more than a century earlier to deal with the predations of the *wokou*.¹³ The Japanese defeat was a foregone conclusion.

At the front lines on land, the Japanese forces were battered by a combined army of Chinese and other troops. After I Song-gye drove the *wokou* from Korea's shores and gained control over Chinese banditry, the I dynasty prospered in peace for a long time. When the Japanese army advanced into Korea, the court was apparently completely unprepared and the emperor and his officials were indecisive in the face of the invasion. But after the Japanese had advanced as far as Pyongyang, they suddenly withdrew. The massive number of weapons made from temple bells and samurai swords were used only for desperate defense in a futile battle, and the economic strength and leadership of the Toyotomi was soon spent. Both the way the Japanese fought this war and the way they negotiated terms with China after the cessation of hostilities (though defeated, they attempted to get China to cede part of the peninsula to Japan) implanted in Asian minds the image of Japanese as violent and of Japan as a terrorist nation incapable of normal dialogue according to the rules of international diplomacy. The war reimposed the old vicious pirate image of the *wokou* on that of the state of Japan in Asian minds, undermined the economy with excessive military expenditure, and threw the country back into civil war. That image was so indelibly imprinted that it remained throughout early modern times. The

M actions of Japan's militarist government from the 1930s until the end of the war in 1945 simply strengthened these old, old images.

Japan's Entry into East Asia

As mentioned, Toyotomi Hideyoshi sent his troops to the Korean peninsula twice. The first expedition, in 1592, was ordered to fulfill his fantasy of ruling China and the rest of Asia. The attempt failed and his troops withdrew, but the conditions Hideyoshi proposed for settlement with the Ming during the peace negotiations were about as presumptuous as they could be. One, a princess of the Ming dynasty should be sent to become the consort of the emperor of Japan. Two, an exchange of visits of government ships and trading vessels between the Ming and Japan. Three, a pledge of friendship at the state ministerial level between Japan and the Ming. Four, the southern half of Korea be ceded to Japan. Five, a prince and one or two state ministers of Korea were to be held by Japan as hostages. These sound more like threats than terms of peace from the defeated party. But after the proposals were rejected, in 1587, Hideyoshi again dispatched an army to invade the peninsula. Though willing to abandon his plans for control of China, his objective this time was to force Korea to cede territory to Japan. He was frustrated again. The Japanese troops withdrew in 1598 and so did the Ming troops between 1599 and 1600.

During the war that spanned seven years, Ming dispatched more than 200,000 troops, spent 8 million taels, and carried tens of thousands of dan of grain into Korea. Japan sent some 300,000 troops, of whom 100,000 were reportedly killed or injured. After the invasions, the rice harvests in Korea fell to less than thirty percent of normal times, and arable land was reduced to one-fifth.¹⁴ The population decreased drastically too, as a result of the war and starvation. It is even said that exhaustion from the war with Japan was partly responsible for the Ming dynasty collapse in 1644 in the face of Mongol incursions. The Toyotomi family, whose power was also greatly weakened by the war, was easily overcome by Tokugawa Ieyasu and his allies and destroyed. The Tokugawa family had not sent troops to the Korean peninsula. The invasions, conceived by an egotistic dreamer had ravaged the human and other resources of East Asia and, worst of all, solidified Chinese and Korean images of Japan.



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