

# U.S.-Japan Relations: the Volatility Thesis Reconsidered (日米関係：流動性理論の再考)

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 本論文は日米関係が流動的であるという筆者が示した提議を前提とするものである。この流動的關係がイラショナルであれば二国間にとって憂慮すべき問題であるという観点から、この流動性に影響を及ぼす要因に注目し、探究する。二国間関係の方向づけはランダムなイベントよりむしろ以下の要因によると考えられる。世論、エリート層の見解、各々の国に対するイメージ・知識・理解度・ステレオタイプ、集団指向（特に否定的傾向）や社会状況（時代の動きに伴った『Cold Peace』の波及）など。

過去25年間の日米における意識調査・一般著書や学術書をデータとして、二国間関係について以下に名称した説を明らかにする。修正主義者の『皮肉な同僚』説、国粹主義的『正統化』と『ショーヴィニズム』説、争議的『運命』説と『同じ基準で測れない』説、『相互関係・認識・不信の悪循環』説、『ゼロ・サム・ゲーム』説、『ヴァージニア・ウルフなんて怖くない』説、『相互依存』と『太平洋縮小』的理想論である。

これらの説を考察することによりこの流動性理論がより明確に提示される。この理論は日米間のより良い理解と解釈をもたらし、二国間関係の向上をも可能とすると考えられる。

## Introduction

In a previous paper,<sup>1</sup> I argued that the relationship between the United States and Japan has been characterized by volatility, by which I meant a mercurial

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elevator of anger and affection that has spanned generations. Two kinds of volatility were distinguished: technical and emotional or, as they were dubbed, "rational" and "irrational". It was shown that over the past 50 years, in particular, technical volatility has been endemic. Emotional volatility, by contrast, has cropped up in sudden outbursts—most notably in the past 20 years. Three crucial factors have stimulated this irrational upswelling: the so-called "trade war" of the 1970s and 1980s, the 50th anniversary of the Pacific War, and the war in the Persian Gulf. One conclusion of the previous work was that technical volatility is not a serious threat to the bilateral relationship; by contrast, irrational volatility is. As a consequence, it is irrational volatility—and the factors which stimulate or mitigate it—which is crucial in determining the course of bilateral relations.

This paper aims at building upon these insights. It identifies and explores the factors which mediate volatility in bilateral relations. It also seeks to clarify the ramifications of the volatility thesis. To achieve these ends, we begin with a cursory review of the volatility thesis.

### **Volatility Explained**

There are two sides to volatility. The first is technical: measurable fluctuations in interest, friendship and esteem held by the people of one country toward those of the other which can be charted over time. I call this technical aspect "rational volatility". The second side is emotional: an intense emotive response (generally displeasure and/or anger) expressed by the citizens of one country toward the other. It is the articulation of such opinions or beliefs which most often spurs the fluctuation that is rational volatility. In effect, the latter is the motor for the former. On these pages this second dimension will be called "irrational volatility".

In the relationship between the Pacific powers, the greatest moments of rational volatility (measured in terms of frequency and degree of movement) have been, by the irrational measure, in a negative direction. As demonstrated in my previous paper, these dips appear correlated to three events: the Pacific and Gulf Wars, and the steadily-accreting socio-economic acrimony of the 1970s and 1980s—sometimes referred to as the "trade war".

From a technical standpoint, volatility in the U.S.-Japan relationship has

been extensive over the past half century. From an emotional perspective, volatility has been and continues to be inflamed by irrational responses within and between the nations. By the early 1990s, rational volatility appeared to reach its profoundest level. This was due, in large part, to past and present military conflict. In order to appreciate this turn—and where it may lead us—let's consider each measure of volatility in greater detail.

### **Rational Volatility**

Since inception, the frame for the U.S.-Japan relationship has been volatility. The particulars, well known to all, are the stuff of high drama. An armed confrontation was both the means and proximate cause for initiating formal relations. After a period of stability, in which both nations remained at a safe distance from one another, a brutal, debilitating, nearly cataclysmic military conflict was waged. One society—virtually devastated—was reconstructed with the exclusive aid and on the political model of the other. Within a generation's time the defeated had completed a mercurial economic ascendancy—to the increasing consternation and at the perceived expense of its socio-political mentor. In its most recent incarnation, the tables have been almost completely turned: the infant has not only surpassed, but in many cases superceded, its political custodian and economic mentor.<sup>2</sup>

During this final period of bilateral descent, the discourse between the nations has deteriorated, becoming more strident and conflictual. This sea change is reflected in analyses, which no longer talk of “economic miracle” and now most often speak of “trade war”.<sup>3</sup> It is now no longer uncommon to hear talk within each nation of a “Second Pacific War” or, even worse, “economic Armageddon”.<sup>4</sup> Among the general populace, a 1991 poll revealed that a hefty 40% of the Japanese and an astounding 80% of Americans perceived the other country as a rival.<sup>5</sup> Even more astounding, when the Soviet Union—yesterday's evil empire—was factored into the equation, Americans perceived a greater threat from Japan.<sup>6</sup> The rivalry figures weren't even close. Japan: 72 percent; the Soviet Union: 20 percent.<sup>7</sup>

On the other side of the Pacific, another measure speaks to the dramatic increase in rational volatility over the past two decades. In a mere 20 years Japanese evaluations of America have shifted from a ratio of 4 positive to 1

negative to a 1 to 1 relationship.<sup>8</sup> More striking, over the last seven years, the drop has been even more precipitous.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, this data is powerful testimony to the great volatility in the contemporary U.S.-Japan relationship. In less than 30 years bilateral attitudes have swung from quiescent high to cantankerous low.

### Irrational Volatility

Japan and America have never been of a singular mind concerning how to regard their relationship. American attitudes have been quite wide-ranging. Sometimes positive; often, as Johnson has shown,<sup>10</sup> group specific; certainly socio-temporal. Mostly, however, American attitudes appear to orbit around one of three (essentially negative) conditions: lack of knowledge, disinterest, and outright hostility. Japanese attitudes, by contrast, have generally been positive. It has only been in the last 20 years that Japanese views of America have shifted. Prior to the 1970s, the average Japanese treated America with a feeling of *amae*, a dependence borne of awe and respect.<sup>11</sup> Vietnam, however, tarnished that view considerably, as did Watergate and the trade deficit. Japanese now more often see America as flawed. It is not uncommon to hear talk of a nation in decline; a superpower that was and will not be again.<sup>12</sup>

Surprisingly, the muscle-flexing exercise that went by the name of the "Gulf War" turned Japanese even more from the United States. They were appalled by the raw power of the American response;<sup>13</sup> above all, they were bitterly stung by American criticisms of their substantial contribution.<sup>14</sup> Distress was soon followed by duress: not long after his army made quick work of the Iraqi forces, President George Bush visited Japan. His stay was punctuated by a graphic, untimely illness, and questionable travelling companions. It left many in Japan with the impression that Americans were uncouth, whining children.<sup>15</sup> The response came in the form of more audible and abrasive criticism. Americans, for their part, have responded in kind, arguing that freed of the cold war with the Soviet Union, America and Japan have passed into the era of "cold peace".<sup>16</sup> Some now fear that irrational volatility has achieved a pitch unrivaled since the Pacific War.

## Mediating Factors

It is here then—the post Gulf War fallout—where our analysis should begin. Rational volatility has again arisen, stoked by the following forms of irrationality: greater mutual negativity between the Pacific powers; a heightening distrust of Japan by Americans; and an increasing Japanese distancing from America. This movement is noteworthy because, though endemic among Americans for some time, Japanese expression on such a widespread scale is relatively new.

At one extreme, this distancing was captured by the word *kenbei*: a hatred for America. Less harsh, the notion of *ribei*: leaving the U.S. sphere. Even less intense, *datsubei*: seeking greater autonomy from the U.S.

None of these ideas actually commanded the public consciousness. The most widely discussed term sported a 1991 publication frequency of only 1 in 5,000 articles.<sup>17</sup> And though the words fell relatively quickly from wide currency, it **did** seem clear that their impact lingered. Following the Gulf War, Japan actively sought a new sphere apart from America.<sup>18</sup> The direct cause of this quest was clearly a rise in bilateral volatility.

This section is premised on the belief that volatility (and, pursuantly, an increased distancing between the Pacific powers) is the direct result of identifiable factors. Factors which may or may not be operating in conjunction with one another. Factors which, via their expression or suppression, have a strong bearing on the increase or abatement of volatility. A result, which, in turn, has the ability to move the nations closer to or farther from one another.

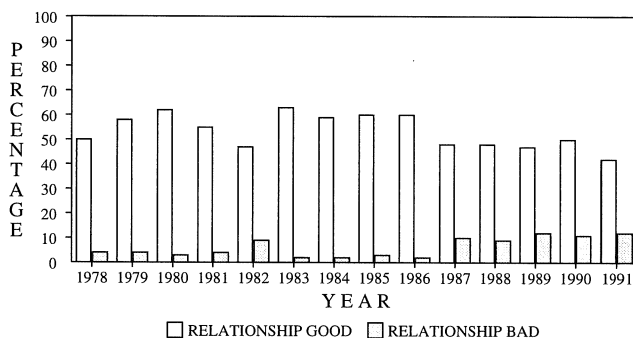
The crucial mediating factors include: mass attitudes; elite beliefs; communication forms and content; and, finally, historic perceptions and endemic cultural beliefs within and between the two societies. In isolation, any one of these factors can influence volatility between the Pacific powers. In combination, these factors can be powerful, indeed. Stated another way: volatility has many allies. To see why, let's consider each factor, in turn.

## Public Attitudes

The titles tell the story: *The Japan that Can Say No, Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe and America, In the Shadow*

of the *Rising Sun*, and *The Coming War with Japan*. Bestsellers on both sides of the Pacific depicting conflict between America and Japan. An accurate appraisal...right? Not necessarily. As it happens, the true state of U.S./Japan relations in the 1980s and 1990s depended on who and what was asked. Opinion stratification could be found at the levels of public and elite, between Americans and Japanese, and even within each grouping—depending upon the time and matters broached.

For instance, during the period that the media reported only conflict, the average American citizen, surprisingly, saw harmony. This is clear from the following data:



**Figure 1. American Views of U.S./Japan Relations<sup>19</sup>**

Such results belie the “collision course” mythology uniformly espoused in elite circles. The percentage of American citizens who believed that the relationship between the U.S. and Japan was good remained consistently high throughout the 1980s—between 50 and 60 percent. It was only in the 1990s that the figure dropped to 40 percent. This, nonetheless, was four times its negative counterpart.

On this same measure, Japanese were less rosy in their estimation of Pacific relations.

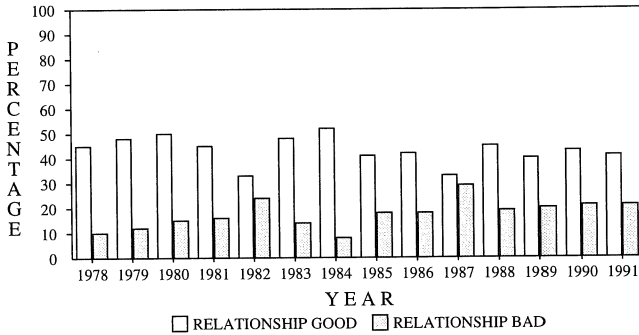


Figure 2. Japanese Views of U.S./Japan Relations<sup>20</sup>

It is true that the mean percentage for positive evaluations over the 14-year period was 42.6—and, thus, almost identical with American's ending percentage. Nonetheless, the American modal response was in the mid-50 point range for the decade and a half, whereas the Japanese modal score was in the low 40s. Most significantly, though, was the ratio of positive to negative evaluations. There, a heightening in pessimism is clearest. Over the 14 years the negative response among the Japanese mass doubles. Even more alarming, though, the ratio between good and bad responses slipped from a 4:1 to 2:1 ratio.

Another indication that not all is right in the Pacific partnership can be spied by comparing the yearly difference in the positive peaks between the two nations. As reproduced in Figure 3, one can see that from 1978 to 1983 the differential climbed from a single to double-digit difference. After a significant narrowing (1984) the gap trebled (from 5.8 to 19.4 percent). Tellingly, though,

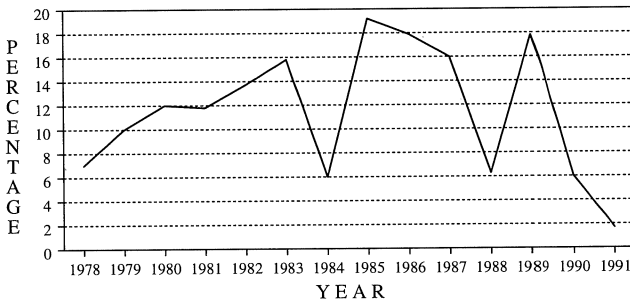
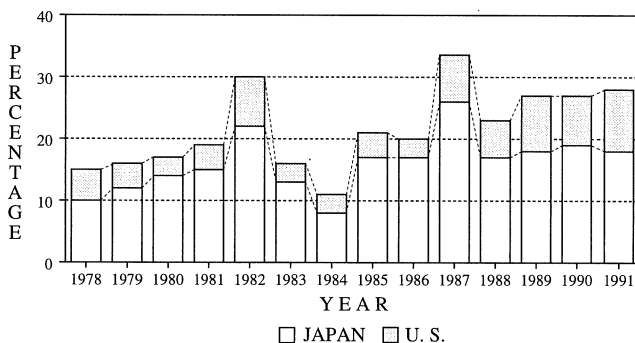


Figure 3. Positive Views of U.S./Japan Relations:  
Comparison of the Difference in U.S. and Japanese Responses<sup>22</sup>

while the mean percentage difference for the 14 years was over 11 percent, by the final year the margin frittered to within the statistical margin of error.<sup>21</sup>

Because of creeping pessimism among both publics, it is worthwhile to explore the negative side of the equation. In general, Americans were consistently less displeased with the current state of Pacific relations than their Japanese counterparts. Japanese negative evaluations were never less than double the American number. Often the figure was three, four—even five times greater. The mean difference for the period was 10.7 percent. Importantly, though, while this difference expanded in the early part of the period (ballooning from a ratio of 2:1 in 1978 and 1979 to 4:1 in 1985 and 1986), it resettled below 2:1 by 1991. In large part this was due to a doubling in pessimistic appraisals by Americans over the 14-year span. These differences are represented below:



**Figure 4. Negative Views of U.S./Japan Relations:  
Comparison of U.S and Japanese Responses<sup>23</sup>**

Evidence of winnowing between American and Japanese perceptions is found in other poll data as well.<sup>24</sup> The *Asahi Shimbun* discovered that over the same 14-year period, Japanese moved from a ratio of four positive comments for every one negative remark about America in 1978 to a 1:1 ratio by 1991. Moreover, the final 10 years of this period saw an even more precipitous drop: from a 5:1 to 1:1 margin.

During this same span, other measures tell us, American discontent was on the rise. The dismemberment of the Soviet superstate prompted a skyrocketing in rivalry figures with Japan. More, with the intensification of Pacific eco-



nomic conflict and the impending 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, American trust in Japan plummeted precipitously.<sup>25</sup>

Viewing this data in aggregate a strong case for a heightened state of volatility is suggested. Judging only by the initial years of the present decade, citizens on both sides of the Pacific appeared to subscribe to the notion that the two countries were now going *Head to Head*.

### Elite Beliefs and the Intellectual Context

The last section presented contradictory portraits: on one side, evidence appears to support a case for a creeping rational volatility at the popular level; on the other, by the completion of the 14-year period under study, irrational volatility was virulent among the general public. It is in this disjunction—the slow versus the fast burn—that the dangerous friction between nations resides. Thus we ask, just how are such popular perceptions born? How do they foment and mature? The answer lies in the major institutions of social communication: news media, academia and politicians.

To see this, contrast the positive dimensions summarized above with the litany of (generally-negative) concepts conjured by the academic and popular press over the past decade: revisionism, techno-nationalism, *kenbei*, the capitalist developmental state, the Japan that can say 'no', cold peace, economic hot war, nationbashing. In each case, the view from the information elite was that, by 1990, Japan and America had undergone another swing in the rational volatility barometer. In reality, each concept was nothing more than another irrational stimulus.

One reason that so many horrible things were being written about the bilateral relationship was that the institutional and intellectual climate was primed for it. As one Washington-based Japan expert put it: "It's easier to get published if you complain about the Japanese. It's easier to get an advance, to get into magazines, if you beat up on Japan".<sup>26</sup> Academics hungry for publication credits, journalists eager for a by-line, pundits anxious to be seen on the small screen, rushed to get into the attack queue. This meant that, in actuality, much of the talk about a trade war was merely an artifact of "fads in academic and publishing circles".<sup>27</sup>

America's revisionists and the daily bashers on both sides certainly contrib-

uted to a darkening public perception. Yet, there is little empirical proof to support the dire warnings that the two countries have passed into an era of "cold peace" which would chill the Pacific for 40 years.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, this has apparently become the prevailing expert opinion.<sup>29</sup> There has been no substantiation of the claim that there is "a fate theory hidden between the lines (of popular consciousness) that Japan and the U.S. will periodically fight against one another".<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, such allegations daily fill the pages of the popular and academic press. In their continued publication and distribution we find persuasion, attitudinal reproduction and, ultimately, self-fulfilling prophesy. With such messages simmering in the public stew, it is little wonder that first irrational, then rational volatility have again boiled to the surface of bilateral relations.

### Attention versus Neglect: Knowledge, Perceptions, Stereotypes

It is not only the content of intellectual attention paid to bilateral conflict; it is also the frequency that is significant. In this regard, a true informational imbalance exists between the nations.<sup>31</sup> Not only do Japanese media pay a great deal more attention to America than the U.S. media does to Japan, but the stories reflect a more hyper-sensitive and, increasingly, hypercritical stance.<sup>32</sup> The effects of this coverage emerge clearly in the images held about each nation by the other.

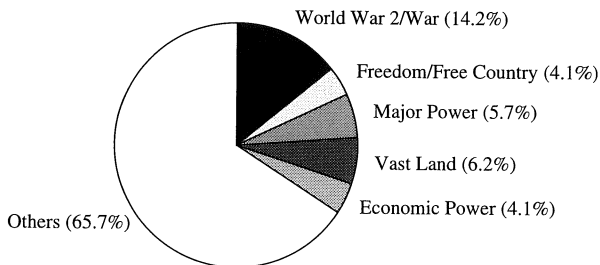
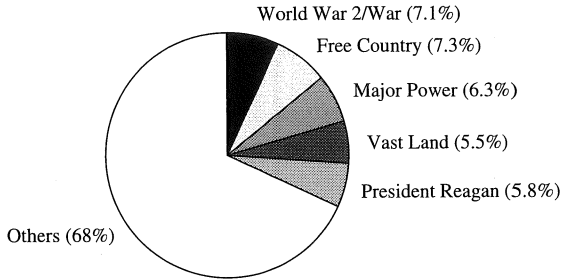
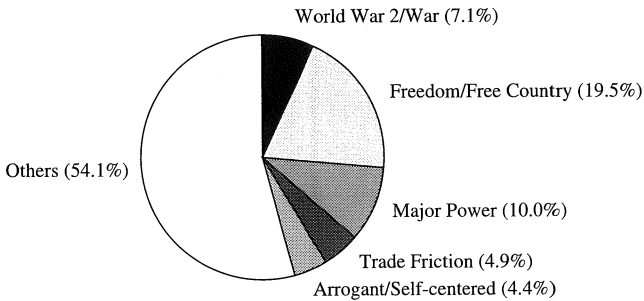


Figure 5. Japanese Images of America, 1978<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 6. Japanese Images of America, 1983<sup>34</sup>**



**Figure 7. Japanese Images of America, 1990<sup>35</sup>**

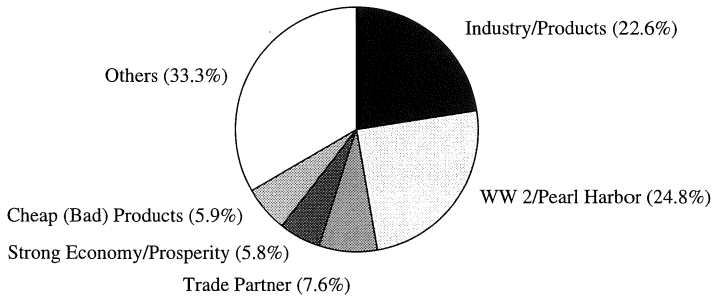
This data demonstrates two things: (1) an overall consistency in images held by Japanese about America, and (2) a sudden negativity in the images held. As for the former, images tended either toward the factual (President Reagan), the positive (free country) or neutral (major power, vast land). True, “war” can be viewed as a negative—as opposed to a factual—evaluation. Yet its salience declines over time (from 14.2 to 7.1 percent)—suggesting that it had more to do with fact (i.e. the Vietnam war) than subjective evaluation. Moreover, its salience declines despite the fact that images of America became increasingly negative. Were war-mongering to be a subjective evaluation, one would expect it to be high on the charts during a period of negativity.

Which brings us squarely to the second point. Unlike 1978 and 1983, 1990 could be called the watershed year for negativity. Uncomplimentary impressions (“trade friction” and “arrogance”) joined with the old stand-by, “war,” to dominate the top five images. Together, the three painted a dark portrait. Sig-

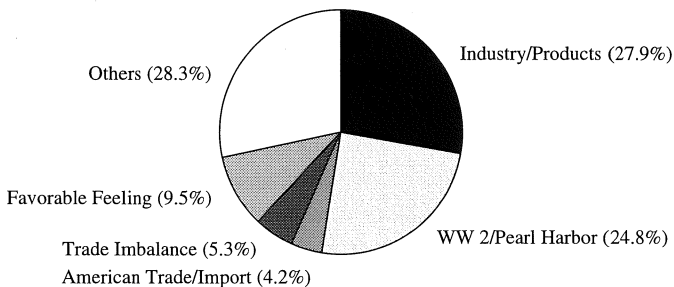
nificantly, until 1990, no manifestly emotional, presently conflictual image cracked the top five. Moreover, at no time prior to 1990 did an item pertain to American character.

For Americans, a different story emerges. Taking the cue from newspapers, interest has always been low. Not only have most Americans ignored their Pacific partner, ignorance has been high.<sup>36</sup> An indication of the extent of this ignorance can be found in a 1982 poll in which only 57% of American citizens knew that Japan had a free election system; a full 34% believed that the country was attached to the Asian continent; and an astounding 47% agreed with the view that Japan was “still a feudalistic society, bounded by old traditions and customs”.<sup>37</sup>

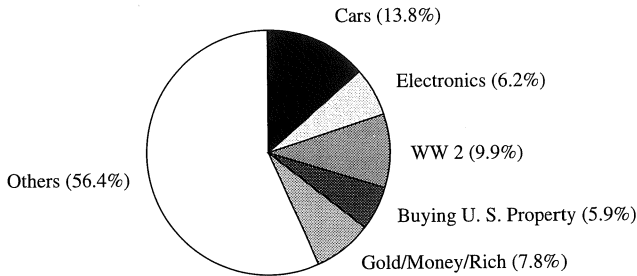
This lack of information comes through, as well, in image data. As the following figures suggest, for many Americans, Japan remains a place full of cars and gold, and a country that was a military rival 50 years ago.



**Figure 8. American Images of Japan, 1978<sup>38</sup>**



**Figure 9. American Images of Japan, 1983<sup>39</sup>**



**Figure 10. American Images of Japan, 1990<sup>40</sup>**

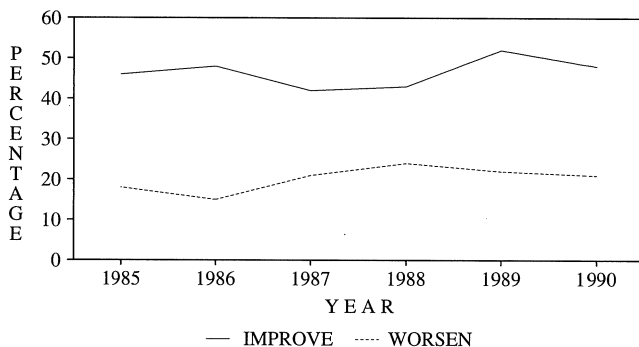
That is not to say that Americans were totally unattuned to Japan. As the 1980s unfolded, we see, American images of Japan became more informed, more specific, and clearly unified around an economic image. Consider the case of “industry/products,” for instance. In 1978 it was the second-most salient image for Americans; by 1983, it had ascended to first place. In 1990, the image disappeared entirely,<sup>41</sup> replaced by more informed, specific categories. Thus was it that “cars” shot into first place (mentioned by 13.8% of the respondents) and “electronics” climbed to fourth (6.2%). More tellingly, seven out of the top 10 images in 1990 concerned trade or economic matters. This is compared with only five of 10 categories in 1978 and four of 10 in 1983. Over all, then, American images of Japan appeared to crystallize over the two decades into a decisively economic view.

While not patently so, American views of Japan constituted an explosive medium, one in which stereotypical images would be more likely to yield to conflictual impulses and in which the public would be less insulated from the possible up-cropping of highly emotional volatility. This for a complicated set of reasons. First, because general ignorance of Japan remained high; second, because specific knowledge (to the degree that it was present) coalesced around matters economic; third, because economic matters (as opposed, say, to military ones) tended to push Americans in a negative (i.e. more irrationally volatile) direction; and fourth, because general interest in and, therefore, a perception, say, of mutual interest and connection to Japan remained low.

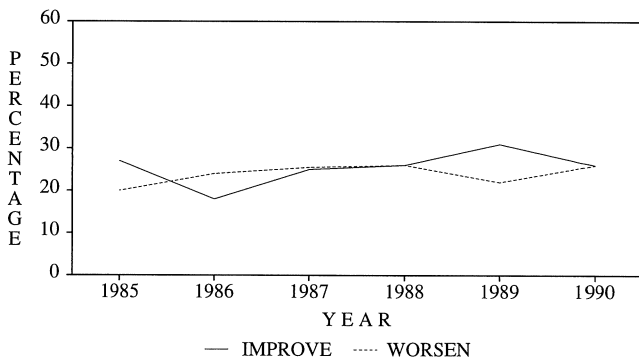
It may be these factors which accounted for the high level of pessimism that persisted among Japanese. Such factors, however, make it hard to fathom the sustained optimism demonstrated by Americans throughout this period.

### Pessimism versus Optimism in Bilateral Relations

Despite an increasing tendency among the American mass to associate Japan with economics, and in the face of escalating trade deficits and elite claims of inequities in economic relations, American public attitudes toward future Japanese-U.S. relations remained inexplicably positive. A majority have consistently responded that the economic relationship between the two nations will improve. This stands in stark contrast with their Japanese counterparts, whose pessimism over the last decade has been as constant as it has been deepening. These positions are reflected in the following figures:



**Figure 11. American Views of the Economic Relationship between the U.S. and Japan, 1985-1990<sup>42</sup>**



**Figure 12. Japanese Views of the Economic Relationship between the U.S. and Japan, 1985-1990<sup>43</sup>**

Comparing attitudes in each nation, we find that about one in four Japanese respondents and one in five American respondents consistently assert that a negative economic turn lurks on the bilateral horizon. However, striking differences are also present. For one, Japanese respondents are divided equally between positive and negative evaluations. Americans, by contrast, have remained consistently positive in their estimation: with negative views a constant two times less than positive ones. This optimism is utterly at odds, of course, with the reality of a skyrocketing trade imbalance and deficit. Moreover, it runs directly counter to expert opinion which has unfailingly depicted the relationship between the U.S. and Japan as volatile.

A second measure of incongruity between Japanese and American estimations of the bilateral future concerns military matters. The question centered on America's willingness to come to Japan's defense in the event of military assault. In 1979, a 19% gap existed between those Japanese who believed America would and those who believed America would not. Six years later the differential had shrunk to a meager 7%. For Japanese, volatility was apparently close at hand.

American respondents provided a stark contrast. Despite accreting economic antagonism, supportive American responses **increased** over the six-year period by a considerable margin. From a scant 8% differential in 1979 to

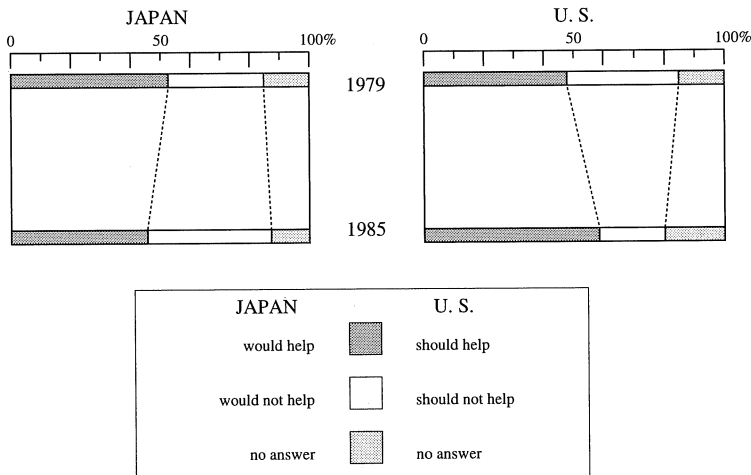


Figure 13. Views of the U.S./Japan military relationship<sup>44</sup>

a 27% gap in 1985, Americans increasingly believed their country should come to the aid of Japan. During an increasingly volatile period, Americans were clearly moving toward a more supportive posture vis-a-vis Japan.

Whether for love, strategic interest, imperialism or habit, this data reveals American loyalty toward Japan. Such an image runs counter to the combative posture that is so often depicted in the academic and popular press. More than anything else, it supports the notion (so often articulated on both sides of the Pacific) that Japanese harbor “ever-present fears that the world is about to gang up on and exclude (them).”<sup>45</sup>

This is a significant perception gap. One which, if allowed to persist—certainly on the Japanese side via elites and their organs of communication—could lead to a dangerous increase in volatility between the nations. It is **not** the case, the data tells us, that Americans are backing away from the bilateral alliance—despite all the negative things that the public hears from the Japanese media and American publishers. It **is** the case, the data informs, that Japanese **believe** America is in the process of moving away from its commitment to Japan. Clearly, such a contradiction carries with it a volatile potential.

Of significant note is the apparent distinction Americans are able to make between economic and military affairs—a separation Japanese may not be able to appreciate in their estimations of their Pacific partner. As much as Americans appear to harbor contempt toward Japan on economic measures, there is an on-going—even deepening—assumption that their country should remain loyal to and supportive of Japan on military matters. For their part, as faithful as the Japanese have been toward the United States (more so than to any other nation in the past 50 years), there is a demonstrable assumption that America is not going to remain so aligned. Optimistic and pessimistic outlooks, therefore, emerge as key variables in the mediation of volatility.

### Negativity

There is further evidence that Japan can breathe easier when contemplating the U.S. alliance. While it is true that Americans have generally been negative about the trade war,<sup>46</sup> image data (presented in Figures 8-10) challenges the negative slide thesis. Such data reveals a **decrease** in American negativity over time. Surprised? Consider that in 1978, 42% of the Americans sampled offered



a negative view of Japan, including “World War II,” “Pearl Harbor,” “cheap (bad) products,” “untrustworthy,” and “overcrowding”. In 1983, the number dropped to 37%, most notably comments about the war, the “trade imbalance” and a generic “unfavorable opinion”. By 1990, the figure had slipped all the way to 28%, with negative images centering on old stand-bys (the Second World War and the trade imbalance), and two new entries: “buying U.S. property,” and “competition”.<sup>47</sup> This last figure compares favorably with Japanese negatives toward America, which, as we saw earlier, have been on the upswing. And, though lower than American figures, the Japanese numbers have remained constant over time.<sup>48</sup>

What this data suggests is that negative views—which are often critical in exciting volatility—can also be employed in the abatement of irrationality. Essential in such a move, certainly, is the existence of positive sentiment, but also the circulation of such sentiment by elites via their vehicles of information dissemination.

### **The “Cold Peace” Era: The Search for a New Relationship**

One reason that Japanese negativity may have remained unchanged is, paradoxically, because of the large change in modern attitudes. Shintaro Ishihara has harped on how much the postwar mentality of occupation and defeat has persisted to the present, but others couldn’t disagree more. “There is a great deal of resentment toward Americans in (sic) the occupation now emerging,” Gibney wrote over a decade ago. “Resentment that is fueled...by the acerbities of the trade dispute and frequent table-pounding on the American side”.<sup>49</sup>

Another factor in this steady negativity is the emergence of a new complicated relationship. Complicated because it calls for rivals to also be allies. Complicated because it requires the nations to work through their resentments. Complicated because it demands that countries smooth over any outbursts of volatility.

Complicated, perhaps most of all, because it calls for nations that once stood in a dyad of inequality to rebalance their roles. To some this is only fair and proper. In the words of the Liberal Democratic Party’s International Bureau Chief, Kunio Hatoyama: “Japan has become a major economic power and now we want to become a major political power”.<sup>50</sup> To others this was an unrealistic

fantasy. Ogawa Kazuhisa, a Japanese military analyst, has written:

Japan remains a closed society and as such it cannot establish good relations with the U.S. or any other country. During the American occupation of Japan, General MacArthur once said the Japanese nation was like a 12-year-old boy. Right now I would say Japan is like an 18-year-old boy. In more than 45 years, it has matured only about six years.<sup>51</sup>

There are elements in this characterization which just may be true. For instance, like an 18 year old, Japan is seeking a measure of autonomy and appears to want to move out on its own. In the words of one American observer, "Japan is in the early stages of a great shift in thought and action about its role in the world".<sup>52</sup> Like an 18-year old, Japan is also making noises that it deserves respect.<sup>53</sup> For many years, some argued, Japan was treated as if it was a "half-country". Such a status, "bothered only a few intellectuals until the Gulf War, which brought the Japanese face to face with their impotence and even irrelevance in non-economic fields as world-shaking events unfolded".<sup>54</sup>

All of this reflects the fact that a set of historic perceptions appears to be at work. Perceptions stronger than institutions of information transmission and power; stronger than any one group of people; more powerful than endemic cultural beliefs;<sup>55</sup> more persuasive than an apparent human need to organize eras in terms of conflict, ideas in terms of oppositions, practices in terms of mutual exclusivity; perceptions even more significant than the human tendency to cleave national powers. The perceptions to which I make reference are those which cast Japan as a half-country; as a child still maturing; as impotent in the true order of things. These are the same perceptions which see America—accurately or not—as the world's protector. Such perceptions—and their resulting fallout—have possibly done as much as any other factor in the bilateral mix to ratchet up the contemporary level of volatility between the nations. In the concluding section we will consider the implications of such volatility for the future.

### **Conclusion: the Ends of Volatility**

The notion advanced here—of volatility built around particular events such

as the Pacific and Gulf Wars—is not to say that Japanese and Americans have never experienced anger at, distrust of or dislike for one another at any other time. Indeed, the history of Japanese-American relations is peppered with incidents of crossed swords. To name a few: the anti-American sentiment which arose in 1952 following the conclusion of the Security Pact, the subsequent American push for Japanese rearmament, the 1954 “Bikini Incident,” heightened American involvement in Vietnam in 1965, and the pending return of Okinawa in the late 1960s.<sup>56</sup> Almost monthly, isolated incidents—such as the Yoshihiro Hattori case<sup>57</sup>—crop up to create tension between the nations.

What this paper has tried to show is that emotional surges in the relations between the Pacific powers are not the result of random events. They may be precipitated by certain key moments, but they stem from a certain logic—two logics, in fact. Logics which may be prompted by an inherent incommensurability between the respective countries’ societal structures, values and practices. Logics which certainly arise and are repeated time and again. Logics resembling Braudel’s *longue duree*.<sup>58</sup> In this paper, I have tried to distinguish between these logics and explore some of the factors which mediate their expression. In such a way, a frame might exist for better interpreting, understanding and improving U.S.-Japanese relations.

Why is such a frame important? For one reason, in its absence, friction festers, propelling acrimony to often absurd extremes. We have seen this again and again over the years, where (lacking a construct capable of perceiving volatility) Americans and Japanese struggle to account for relations between their nations. In the past this has prompted any number of narratives—each with their own, distinct consequences.

For instance, one of the most widely told, volatility-inspired stories has been the “ironic bedfellow” scenario.<sup>59</sup> This tale—also called “revisionism”—tells of two societies which, while insisting on intimate linkage, have remained utterly different on a vast array of socio-cultural measures.<sup>60</sup> From religion to social structure, economic theory to so-called “models of man,” psychology to social psychology, child-rearing practices to education, class to gender, house work to office work, America and Japan operate in diametrically opposing ways. History has repeatedly shown that the two countries’ ways of organizing, thinking and behaving are separated by more than an ocean. The results may not be surprising, but the continuing expectations of harmony and closure are.

From the nationalist perspective, volatility has opened into stories of justification and chauvinism. Stories, on the Japanese side, about cultural uniqueness, unquenchable resilience and ultimate superiority.<sup>61</sup> Stories, on the American side, about a nation's power to guide, to control, to serve as model for emulation and development.<sup>62</sup> Stories, on the Japanese side, about the failure of American institutions and the sterling success of Japanese ones.<sup>63</sup> Stories, on the American side, about the unacceptable configuration of the Japanese world: full of oppressive social scrutiny, archaic cultural values, and undemocratic political and economic practices.<sup>64</sup>

Such stories consistently emerge from the texts, surveys, and speeches which are part of the on-going social discourse. These materials, in turn, are the well-springs for many of the misunderstandings that then ratchet up the level of volatility between the nations. Everyone can recall versions of such stories. The *Rising Sun* story, the *Japan that Can Say 'No'* story, the "Containing Japan" story, the *kenbei* story. Each of these stories has a subsequent impact on the stories crafted by the other side. None exists in a vacuum.

Surprisingly, these are not the most disturbing stories. That distinction is reserved for tales projecting the ends of volatility as, themselves, an ending. Stories which see economic competition as severing ties—even precipitating actual war. Among these are Webber's prediction of 40 years of "cold peace," Ishikawa's "fate theory" of conflict, and Friedman's and LeBard's prediction of armed conflict. Credence is lent to such stories by the incommensurability stories, touched upon, above. Americans, we are told, have no true comprehension of Japan "and hence no solidly grounded fundamental commitment to a Japanese-American alliance. There is, in short, almost a higher degree of potential volatility in American attitudes toward Japan than in our (U.S.) attitudes toward Europe".<sup>65</sup>

On the Japanese side, stories can be even bleaker. Japan, we are told, possesses a restless desire to claim her long-awaited due. Long saddled with a lingering "postwar mentality,"<sup>66</sup> Japanese attitudes are changing.<sup>67</sup> "One of the most striking changes in attitudes in Japan in recent years," this story goes, "has been the increasingly open desire of Japanese to be accorded some measure of respect by the United States".<sup>68</sup> In a word, this story tells of a Japan bristling at the bit. Following years of second-class treatment by its Pacific partner, and in light of a perceived American decline, there is now a collective desire to redraw the bilateral balance.<sup>69</sup> Awaiting the righting, this story is

chock full of impatience. Displeasure with American treatment of Japan, as well as rising feelings of contempt for and condescension toward its post-war ally.<sup>70</sup>

A different story tells about two countries which find themselves in a special sympathetic relationship. Sympathetic in the sense of one nation's behavior being conditioned by, then in turn influencing the actions of the other nation. Johnson has advanced such a story, referring to continual "spirals of mutual interaction and perception".<sup>71</sup> However, as with other authors, quoted above,<sup>72</sup> Johnson's story easily degenerates into a darker scenario; one featuring a "spiral of mutual distrust".<sup>73</sup>

Another kind of tale addresses the changes within the nations and, as a result, the severe repercussions arising when the Pacific powers interact. In particular, one such story goes, due to perceptible changes in Japanese society, the country "is more like a jungle (now). No one compromises and it's become a 'strong-win' society. America has become weaker due to such thinking and recently Japan is becoming that way. Japan is throwing away all the values that have made them strong and, instead, is introducing these collapsing American values".<sup>74</sup> This bodes poorly for the future prospects within Japanese society, as well as its on-going interactions with America.

This interactive perspective is at the core of another kind of story about America and Japan. It is perhaps best reflected in the claim that "today's American public perception of U.S.-Japanese relations is often that of a zero-sum game: if Japan wins, America loses".<sup>75</sup> What such a story neglects is the obvious reality: if the Japan-U.S. relationship is any kind of game theoretic *heuristic*, it is an iterated prisoners' dilemma, wherein repeated plays are demanded of the competing players. The hallmark of such contests, game theorists note, is the ultimate emergence of cooperation under threat of mutual destruction.<sup>76</sup>

To date it would seem that Japan and America have neglected this logic. Each treats the other as if the present game is a static, one-shot encounter. Each acts as if the losses in any particular game will equal the gains. Furthermore, each presumes that such gains can only be purchased at the expense of the other. To recognize that these assumptions are invalid—that they do not have to be so—is to crack the cover of an entirely new text.

What sort of story might that be? According to those we have just considered, one which can only be told by dual narrators. One in which Japan would

be allowed to take the lead on economic burden-sharing—thereby assisting in American economic recovery. At the same time, a story in which America would be allowed to remain in charge on international politics and military security—thereby retaining its standing as the so-called “senior partner.”<sup>77</sup>

There is another, similar, story that can be told. It is of a Japan and America which, throughout a long, volatile history have remained paired; they have endured. Like George and Martha in Edward Albee’s classic, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, the two have managed to find every divet—both real and imagined—in the bilateral road and have still somehow remained connected. They have more or less careened down the path in the same cab, at the same pace. More, because they have survived this treacherous stretch for so long, they will remain so for years to come. The best of travel companions.

Such a story is seldom, though occasionally, heard. It is the kind of story that declares the American-Japanese relationship as essential for both countries. Without America, it has been argued, Japan would have no ally, no “reliable friend on earth”. To lose the United States, would be the “ultimate nightmare” for Japan.<sup>78</sup> In turn, the United States cannot do without Japan. It depends on Japanese capital “to finance industrial investment and to cover the national debt,” it depends on the products that Japan makes, and it depends on the jobs that Japanese money—both directly and indirectly—furnishes.<sup>79</sup>

The conclusion of such a story is rosy, indeed. It tells us of a shared sun—not one that sets on one country as it rises on another. It argues, in the words of Reid, that “the Pacific is shrinking.” It tells us that commercial and cultural ties between the Pacific powers are multiplying. It tells us of cultures that more and more interpenetrate. Roots that connect. It is a story that suggests stability, rather than conflict. It is a promising tale that, in many ways, paints a future far different from the present and worlds removed from the past history of irrational volatility that has characterized the relationship between the United States and Japan. It is a story which seeks to overcome the endemic volatility that punctuates virtually every interaction between the Pacific partners. It is a story whose conclusion has yet to be written.

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## Notes

- 1 "From Pacific War to Gulf War: The Volatile Modern History of Japan/U.S. Relations," *Occasional Papers Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Tohoku Association for American Studies* (December 1992).
- 2 On reconstruction and custodianship see, from a wealth of such accounts, Bradley M. Richardson and Scott C. Flanagan, *Politics in Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company); On supercession, see Clyde Prestowitz, *Trading Places: How America Allowed Japan to Take the Lead* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1988).
- 3 See, for instance, Shintaro Ishihara and Akio Morita (trans. by Frank Baldwin), *The Japan That Can Say No* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp.40-41.
- 4 See, for example, George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).
- 5 Source: *Asahi Shimbun* (November 1991). See also Charles Krauthammer: "No New Enemies for the U.S.," *Time* (March 23, 1992), p.52.
- 6 See Charles Wolf, "Jr., Demystifying the Japanese Mystique," *The New York Times* (May 26, 1991), F11.
- 7 Source: *Business Week* (March 1991).
- 8 Source: *Asahi Shimbun* (1971; 1982; 1991).
- 9 From a 5:1 ratio in the positive direction.
- 10 Sheila K. Johnson, *The Japanese through American Eyes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- 11 See, for instance, Frank Gibney, *Japan: the Fragile Superpower* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1985), pp.118-120.
- 12 For American versions of this perspective, see William S. Dietrich, *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: The Political Roots of American Decline* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Thomas R. Zengage and C. Tait Ratcliffe, *The Japanese Century: Challenge and Response* (Hong Kong: Longman Group, Far East Ltd., 1988).
- 13 Yasuo Tanaka, as quoted in Shingo Ueji, "Kyorikan [Reisengo: Nihon to Amerika, Daiichibu: 3]," Part I, 3rd installment, *Asahi Shimbun* (September 27, 1991), p.1.
- 14 Iwao Nakatani, "Tbitsuna Yakuwaribuntan," *Voice* (August 1991), p.102.
- 15 Leslie Gelb, "Foreign Affairs: Whining, Excuses, Hysteria," *The New York Times* (June 23, 1991), p.E15.
- 16 Alan Webber, editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, as quoted by Mitsuko Shimomura in "American Views of Japanese: The Hidden Truth Behind 'Japan Bashing'," Part 4, *Asahi Shimbun* (January 10, 1990), p.4.
- 17 For instance, during that year *Asahi Shimbun* published 100,656 articles in its morning and evening editions. Of that number, only 10 were about *kenbei*. Twice as many (22) could be classified as *hanbei*. As for *ribei*, *datsubei* and *kyobei*, each weighed in with one article apiece. *Bubei*, another *kenbei* derivative, failed to receive any newspaper attention. The ever-popular Nihon Tataki (Japan bashing) was published in only 19

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- articles. *Han nichi kanjo* (Anti-Japanese sentiments) could be found in only 22 articles. However, of these, only 13 centered on American sentiment against Japan. To put this discussion in better perspective, there were 6,449 articles published about America in 1991.
- 18 Ueji, *op. cit.*
- 19 Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun*. Question: "Do you think that the relationship between Japan and America is good at present?" Responses: Very Good, Good, No Problem, Bad, No Answer.
- 20 Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun*. Question: "Do you think that the relationship between Japan and America is good at present?" Responses: Very Good, Good, No Problem, Bad, No Answer.
- 21 Even so, given the considerable differential between bad and good evaluations for both countries, as well as the comparative ratio of bad evaluations between the countries, this was not a very meaningful development.
- 22 Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun*. Question: "Do you think that the relationship between Japan and America is good at present?" Responses: Very Good, Good, No Problem, Bad, No Answer.
- 23 Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun*. Question: "Do you think that the relationship between Japan and America is good at present?" Responses: Very Good, Good, No Problem, Bad, No Answer.
- 24 Source: *Asahi Shimbun*, "Nichibei Rikai Fukamatta ga Kachikan no Sa Nezuyoku," (November 1, 1971), p.14; "Boei-Tsusho Seamaru 'Rakusa' Nichibei, Uemuku Tagai no Hyoka," (November 8, 1983), p.12; "Keizai Shinshutsu de Tainichi Shinrai Teika, Tenkanki no Nichibei Ante ni Kitai," (November 24, 1990), p.8.
- 25 Such distrust emerges most clearly in the following longitudinal data. From 1978 to 1991 Japanese listed America as the nation they most trusted. Over that 14-year period the average was 53%. More, the level of trust improved by over 15%. Americans, by contrast, never chose Japan first. Nor second. Nor even fifth. Japan's average yearly position, in fact, was tenth. The average degree of trust Americans felt: a mere 19 percent. Even worse, over the last few years Japan's position has been slipping. Strikingly, it has fallen 7 places and 13 percentage points over the past decade. Obviously, this data reveals an immense "trust gap" extant between the nations. Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun*.
- 26 As quoted by Reid, *op. cit.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Alan Webber, as quoted by Mitsuko Shimomura, "American Views of Japanese: The Hidden Truth Behind 'Japan Bashing'," Part 4, *Asahi Shimbun* (January 10, 1990), p.4.
- 29 See, for instance, the recent thoughts by Chalmers Johnson, the dean of revisionists. "The post-Cold War reality," he says, "is that a very significant change in the global balance of power has taken place. The center of gravity has moved from the United States to Japan and East Asia.... This shift of economic power...has not been accompanied by a commensurate shift in economic leadership...that portends conflict", "quoted in Chai Kim Wah, "U.S., Japan Forging New Economic World Order, Analyst Contends," *The Japan Times* (Thursday, January 14, 1993), p.19. See also a May 1993 study by Richard Cronin of the United States' Congressional Research Service, which comes to similar conclusions.
- 30 Yoshimi Ishikawa, "Nihon Tataki, Kangei Subeshi," *Voice* (August 1991), p.84.
- 31 Consider that the *New York Times* reported on Japan only 2,000 times in 1990. Contrast this with over 8,700 stories about America during the same time period in the widely-circulated *Asahi Shimbun*.
- 32 For instance, one American analyst asserts: "There is not a day when there is not an article on America in the



- Japanese newspapers. But, it's all on negative things like how bad American products are, about the 'no good America theory', or the crime/drug/racial problems. The Japanese view of America is only of one color" (Alan Webber) quoted in Shimomura, op. cit.
- 33 Source for Figures 5-10: *Yomiuri Shinbun* "Nichibei Rikai Fukamatta ga Kachikan no Sa Nezuyoku," (November 1, 1978), p.14; "Boei-Tsusho Seamaru 'Rakusa' Nichibei, Uemuku Tagai no Hyouka," (November 8, 1983), p.12; "Keizai Shinshutsu de Tainichi Shinrai Teika, Tenkanki no Nichibei Antei ni Kitai," (November 24, 1990), p.8. Question: "When you hear the word (Japan/America) what's the first thing that comes to mind?" Note: No single category within "Others" is greater than 3%.
  - 34 No single category within "Others" is greater than 5%.
  - 35 No single category within "Others" is greater than 4%.
  - 36 See Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind: the Goliath Explained* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1987), pp.176-177. As a rule, he argues, Americans have never had much comprehension of Japan.
  - 37 Source: "Kakuhaizetsu wa Kyotsu no Negai, Tsuyomaru Tainichi Yuko Mudo," *Asahi Shinbun* (April 13, 1982), pp.12-13.
  - 38 Source for this longitudinal data is the *Yomiuri Shinbun*: "Nichibei Rikai Fukamatta ga Kachikan no Sa Nezuyoku," (November 1, 1978), p.14; "Boei-Tsusho Seamaru 'Rakusa' Nichibei, Uemuku Tagai no Hyoka," (November 8, 1983), p.12; "Keizai Shinshutsu de Tainichi Shinrai Teika, Tenkanki no Nichibei Antei ni Kitai," (November 24, 1990), p.8. Note: No single category within "Others" is greater than 5%.
  - 39 No single category within "Others" is greater than 4%.
  - 40 No single category within "Others" is greater than 5.6%.
  - 41 "Products" dropped to eighth place, at 4.6%; "industry" fell all the way to eleventh, at 3.8%.
  - 42 Source: *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Question: "Do you think that the economic relationship between Japan and the U.S. will: Improve Very Much, Improve a Little, Not Change, Worsen a Little, Worsen a Lot, No Answer."
  - 43 Source: *Ibid*.
  - 44 Source: *Yomiuri Shinbun*. Question (to Japanese Rs): "If Japan is attacked by another country, do you think the U.S. will come to its aid or do you not think so?" Responses: Will Help, Will not Help, No Answer. Question (to American Rs): "If Japan is attacked by another country, do you think the U.S. should come to its aid or do you not think so?" Responses: Should Help, Should not Help, No Answer.
  - 45 James Fallows, "Containing Japan," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1989), p.40.
  - 46 Recall the indicators reported earlier: Americans revised their designation of Japan over twelve years—from "partner" (1978) to "ally" (1983) to "competitor" (1990).
  - 47 Source for this longitudinal data (as in the previous note) is the *Yomiuri Shinbun*: "Nichibei Rikai Fukamatta ga Kachikan no Sa Nezuyoku," (November 1, 1978), p.14; "Boei-Tsusho Seamaru 'Rakusa' Nichibei, Uemuku Tagai no Hyouka," (November 8, 1983), p.12; "Keizai Shinshutsu de Tainichi Shinrai Teika, Tenkanki no Nichibei Antei ni Kitai," (November 24, 1990), p.8.
  - 48 For instance, the number of respondents offering negative images of the U.S. stood at 19% in 1978. Twelve years later that percentage had dropped all of one point to 18%.
  - 49 Gibney, op. cit., p.368.
  - 50 As quoted in Ueji, op. cit., p.1.
  - 51 As quoted in Ronald E. Yates, "Japan Expanding Asia Role: Neighbors Wary in Face of Past Militarism,"

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*The Chicago Tribune* (June 17, 1991), p.10.

52 Oberdorfer, *op. cit.*

53 See Leslie Helm, "Student Becomes Teacher: Miyazawa Strives for Balanced Dealings with Clinton," *The Japan Times* (April 21, 1993), p.17, cols. 4-6.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Here reference is being made to claims that America and Japan are "mutually distrustful nations with an apparent commitment to the certainty of mutual understanding." Such claims go hand in hand with so-called "fate theories of bilateral conflict" which have been widespread in the last decade.

56 Sources for this short list include: Richard Storry, *A History of Modern Japan* (London: Penguin, 1982, reprint of 1960); and Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1978).

57 Hattori was a 16-year-old exchange student who was shot and killed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in October, 1992. He mistakenly approached the wrong home in search of a Halloween party. The homeowner, in response to his wife's fearful call for assistance, drew a gun, shouted "freeze," then shot Hattori as the young boy allegedly failed to comply. The 31-year-old homeowner was subsequently acquitted by a 12-member jury.

58 See Fernand Braudel, *The Structure of Everyday Life: Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century* (translated and revised by Sian Reynolds) (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

59 See Clyde Prestowitz's analysis in Mitsuko Shimomura, "Reisei na Ronso Shiyo, 'Nihon Tataki' no Shinso, Amerikajin no Nihonkan," Part 10, *Asahi Shimbun* (January 18, 1990), p.4.

60 For some excellent grounded examples, see James Fallows, *More Like Us: Making America Great Again* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

61 On *Nihonjinron*, see Karl van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (London: MacMillan, 1989), pp. 263-272; on the fallacy of such thinking, see Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Routledge, 1986).

62 See, for example, Joel Kotkin and Yoriko Kishimoto, *The Third Century: America's Resurgence in the Asian Era* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1988).

63 See, for example, Thomas R. Zengge and C. Tait Ratcliffe, *The Japanese Century* (Hong Kong: Longman Group (Far East) Ltd., 1988); Ezra Vogel, *Comeback: Case by Case: Building the Resurgence of American Business* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1985), pp.15-17.

64 See, for example, on the social, Edwin M. Reingold, *Chrysanthemums and Thorns: The Untold Story of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); on the political economic, Jon Woronoff, *Politics: The Japanese Way* (Tokyo: Lotus Press, 1986).

65 Christopher, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

66 Ishihara, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

67 See, for the litany of changes and their alleged effects, Edwin P. Hoyt, *The New Japanese: A Complacent People in a Corrupt Society* (London: Robert Hale, 1991).

68 Christopher, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

69 See, for instance, the view offered by Masaya Miyoshi, Director General of *Keidanren*, in Don Oberdorfer, "Japan: Searching for its International Role," *The Washington Post* (June 17, 1991).

70 On each of these attitudes see Christopher, *op. cit.*, pp.311-313; see also Gibney, *op. cit.*, p.411.

71 Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.167.

72 For instance, Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp.291-292.

73 Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

74 Bill Totten, a twenty year resident of Japan and president of a Japan-based computer software firm, as quoted in "Taidan: Nichibei Masatsu wo Koete; Nichibei Kankei—Shinjuwan kara 50 Nen," *op. cit.*, p.39.

75 Peter G. Peterson, chairman of the Blackstone Group, as reported by Rowen, *op. cit.*

76 On this point, see Robert Axelrod's excellent book, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

77 Rowen, *op. cit.*

78 Reid, *op. cit.*

79 *Ibid.*

