

早稲田法学部 **THEME 16 秋**

P.A.C. O'CONNOR

THE IDEA OF JAPAN [II]

- **Mishima Yukio's suicide, 1970**
- **The Red Army 1972**
- **The Narita airport protests 1978**
- **"Had a weird dream about going to japan..."**

WEEK 3: WONDERFUL, WACKY, WEIRD JAPAN!

Reading 1: Exotic, Menace, Phoenix, WEIRD

MASS MEDIA REPORTING OF JAPAN fell into discernible patterns in the years 1900-1960, where the country was broadly seen as, first, the Exotic, then the Menace, and after the Pacific War, the Phoenix. The historian Richard Storry came up with some variations on these images of Japan in a 1972 article for *The Times*:

1. The Lotus Land
2. The Gallant Ally
3. The Ghastly Menace
4. The Busy Beehive

IN THE LATE 1960s, Japan was indeed deep in the Busy Bee/Phoenix phase, with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics a resounding success in modernizing the national picture, exports booming and the standard of living of ordinary Japanese beginning to compare with that in the United States. But in the early years of the new decade a series of stories came out of Japan which both challenged most people's preconceptions about Japan and yet managed to fit most of the images above.

Reports of Mishima Yukio's suicide in November 1970 immediately referred to Japan's warrior ethic, whose corruption or loss Mishima was protesting. This in turn had connotations of Menace, Ghastly or otherwise, although the defeat of 1945 did not concern Mishima. The activities of the Red Army faction in the 1970s also led back along this well-trodden path to the Menace image, by way of the kamikaze pilots and their willing suicide for a noble cause. At Narita Airport, journalists reporting students and farmers protesting the opening of the new facility bolted on sections of the Red Army and even the Mishima story.

All three stories led back to the Menace, but because these were fundamentally domestic threats, the press seems reached for a new paradigm. Weird Japan gets about 1,340,000 results on Google. 1,340,000 instances of weirdness, from insect eaters to transvestites to onsen eggs to sashimi sea cucumber to junior school decapitations and knife wielding sophomores. The common elements are sex and violence, as they would be anywhere, but because they're Japanese they are weird. Hammond (1997: 87-89) refers to some of these stories:

- The Yokohama bridegroom who ran over and killed his wife after their wedding reception (*Daily Express*, 29 November 1994)
- The Osaka couple who dined free at restaurants by dropping a cockroach into the soup and threatening to call the health inspectors (*Daily Express*, 6 December 1994)
- The Sagawa Issei murder/cannibalism story, which interested the Japanese because his victim was foreign, "It would be very different if his victim had been Japanese," one expert said' (*Sunday Times*, 27 November 1994)
- A story about Yamamoto Samu, whose book about his adventures groping women on the subway made him a TV star, explaining that Japan 'Is a nation addicted to frottage' and that 'Astonishingly, groping is often a group activity, like everything else in Japan' (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1994)

Reading 2: Mishima Yukio's suicide, 1970



MISHIMA YUKIO'S DECAPITATION and ritual disembowelment (*seppuku*) on November 25 1970 could have been foreseen by most of his circle, not just the members of his Tate no kai (Shield Society) militia. Most Japanologists say that many Japanese viewed the incident with derision and scorn. However, his suicide, which he and his assistant Morita carried out after an unsuccessful attempt to draw attention to the decline in Japan's ancestral military values, instead drew foreign attention to Mishima's novels, which were then translated into many languages. Again, authorities on Japanese literature say that Mishima's work remained unpopular among Japan's readers, while others say they rediscovered its merits through Western critiques.

MOST WESTERN READERS (and probably, if we look closer, most Japanese) had difficulty finding a causal link between

Mishima's suicide and his wish to preserve Japan's ancestral military values. If there is an answer, it is probably to be found wrapped in the heavy coils of Mishima's work, in its taste for beauty and death, especially in his three part novel, *Hōjō no umi* (trans. The Sea of Fertility, 1970).

FOR THE AVERAGE JOURNALIST and his readers, however, searching Mishima's works for clues to his death was more than could reasonably be expected. Mishima's death was weird, and it just went to show that no matter how many transistor radios and Walkmans the Japanese produced, they were still wedded to their gory past and always would be. This was, in a way, exactly what Mishima had wished was the case, so his death did help preserve the impression of Japan keeping faith with the old martial spirit, (even if it took the musings of Western journalists and their readers to help the impression take hold).



Reading 3: The Red Army: that old Kamikaze feeling...

A Kamikaze touch returns to Japanese extremism

By the confession of the single survivor, the three Japanese responsible for the indiscriminate slaughter at Lod airport were members of the Rengo Sekigun (United Red Army), an amalgamation of two left-wing groups formed last year. Their most bizarre impact on the Japanese was last February when five of them, with a housewife as hostage, were cornered by police in a house in the deserted winter resort of Karuizawa. A siege lasting ten days and assembling more than a thousand policemen ended with a day of full television coverage, the death of two policemen and injuries to many more before the revolutionaries were captured.

For some weeks before this denouement the extremist authoritarian leaders of the Sekigun had been doing to death by often horrible means a succession of their own followers. Even the slightest overstepping of rigid discipline was enough, such as the youth who had put nappies for the baby into his wife's rucksack and was executed for thus displaying petty bourgeois tendencies, or the girl similarly polluted by wearing earrings.

This kind of extremism has flourished independently of the left-wing parties. The Japanese Communists were quick to disown the Red Army when it was filling the Japanese press, and the no less Marxist Japanese Socialists who cultivate their relations with China have no more taste for such hysterical behaviour.

What is surprising is that behaviour that seems in some distant way attuned to a Japanese tradition of violence should now be put at the service of a foreign cause in a foreign country. The action at Lod recalls the war-time Kamikaze pilots who dive-bombed warships by direct hits, aircraft, pilot and all. One of the actors in Lod is reported to have killed himself by falling on his own grenade. Since the organization has always glorified violence and since in Japan suicide carries none of the pejorative attitudes associated with it in the West, this action is not so untoward.

Undoubtedly Japanese public opinion reacted strongly to the gruesome Karuizawa story and the sense of shame was impelling enough for the parent of one of the students to resign his job, for another parent to hang himself,

and for others to get hostile telephone calls calling upon them to atone for the crimes of their offspring. Horrifying as these incidents were, there is a good deal in common between the new left and the old right in their feeling that violence purifies rather than debases their objectives.

For many years now the extremist student left in Japan has been adrift from any organized political parties. Fashion has governed their political heroes. Togliatti, the late leader of the Italian Communists, was idolized for a time, and now almost any western Trotskyite or other faction will have its imitators, but in cases such as the Red Army political doctrine has almost disappeared to be replaced by an hysterical authoritarian attitude. There were students demonstrating last September (from the middle-core faction of Zengakuren the student political body) against the Emperor's trip to Europe on the grounds that it was aimed at aggrandizement and territorial expansion. Fifty years earlier, students who would then have been regarded as right-wing were demonstrating against the first visit to Europe of the same figure, then the Crown

Prince, because he would be polluted on alien soil.

The connexion between Palestine guerrillas and Japanese extremists could have been fostered when the Chinese were cultivating the Palestinians. As far back as 1965 Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization had set up an office in Peking where the guerrillas were regarded as Maoists in revolutionary creed and were supported more for anti-Russian reasons than any other. Latterly, since China has been pursuing diplomatic relations with Arab governments, the interest in the guerrillas has fallen, though in March this year a delegation from the PLO was welcomed in Peking.

Perhaps the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine was less patronized by the Chinese—though it has also been Maoist in its sympathies. Of late Japan may have offered more response.

There is no doubt that nationalist sentiment in Japan has been building up in the last two or three years but it remains unfocused on any national objective. Among the radical young undirected passion swings uselessly from one aim to

another. Until three years ago Japanese militarism was the enemy; then international fashion dictated a change and pollution became all the rage.

Tokyo's new airport at Narita brought students out to organize local farmers in refusing to allow the site to be developed. There was violence in this case, too, much more than in the almost ritualized encounters between police and students that have been common in Japan for 20 years. At Narita three policemen were killed and more than 80 injured.

The slaughter at Lod by bringing so much unfavourable international publicity will certainly stimulate Japanese hostility even more than in the Karuizawa case. Evidently in Japan the Red Army can find no cause worthy of their dramatic dying and they succumbed to the appeal of Arab guerrillas for an action wanton in its cruelty, politically purposeless and likely to bring down on other Japanese heads a censure that will electrify rather than calm the country at a time when the political atmosphere is already brittle.

Richard Harris

The Times June 1st 1972: A journalist connects up the dots in an attempt to discover the purpose and philosophy of the Red Army Faction [Sekigun-ha]. He connects the slaughter at Lod to the Narita protests but this leads nowhere. He detects a spirit of noble but aimless sacrifice which he associates with the prewar kamikaze, but then what? He tries and fails to connect the Faction to right-wing nationalism. Who can explain such a Japanese phenomenon?

Reading 4: The Narita airport protests



Riot police turn out in force to evict protesters who destroyed equipment at a building at Tokyo's new Narita airport over the weekend.

**The Times ,
May 15 1978**

Something of the old martial spirit here, as the security forces move into formation to protect Japan's £1,500 million investment in its new international airport from thousands of militant students and furious farmers.

Japan mobilizes police for airport opening

From Peter Hazelhurst
Chiba, Japan, March 17

Japan mobilized 15,000 police today to guard the new Narita international airport 41 miles north-east of Tokyo, which is expected to open on March 30, and is under the threat of sabotage, violent demonstrations and protests.

Squads of armed riot police began to converge on the gleaming £1,500m complex today as local farmers and radical students threatened to sabotage it when international flights are diverted from the crowded airport at Haneda next month.

The farmers and the students, estimated to number 30,000, have stalled for seven years the opening of the new airport, which was completed at an original cost of £560 million in 1971. As the cost of maintaining the huge unused white elephant mounted to £60,000 a day early this year, Mr Takeo Fukuda, the Prime Minister, announced that the airport will open by the end of March.

In seven years of bitter clashes, four policemen and one demonstrator have died and many others were injured as the Government tried more than 10

times to open the airport.

Today Narita airport seemed to be preparing for a long siege rather than the opening ceremony.

Barbed wire has been thrown round fuel tanks and other key facilities. Riot police patrol the perimeter, and more police guard the rail shipments of aviation fuel and oil from Kashima.

Meantime train drivers have refused to transport the fuel shipments and the Government has pressed senior managers into service as drivers.

On Monday an oil train col-

lided with a truckload of home-made petrol bombs which fortunately did not explode.

The police are not taking any chances now. Helicopters and armoured vehicles will escort oil trains and police will also be deployed along the track.

Riot police will patrol the motorway to the airport. As students today threatened to disrupt traffic, patrol cars were posted along the route. Japan's Maritime Agency was also placed on a war footing today, deploying three armed patrol boats to guard the oil tanks and loading facilities at ports nearby.

The Times March 18 1978: Japan mobilizes against a threat that seems heavy with past associations.

Reading 5: Plus ça change...

WHAT NOW? Whatever weird meant in the past, in our millennium, the word seems to operate best in the limited territory of young white American males, viz.:

"Had a weird dream about going to japan

I love japan. I really want to go there to see all the cool high tech gadgets. I've heard that japanese technology wise; is 1 year ahead of the US! I had a dream today heh, that I went to japan and purchased the new nintendo DS that has not been released out in the US for \$220. Also, is the nintendo DS out in japan yet? I can't wait till it gets to america! I'm saving up to go to japan, as well as the nintendo DS!"



Or there's [Gaijin In Japan: Weird Japan Experiences](http://pub26.ezboard.com/frealdiscussionboardfrm13) [Welcome to the Club! Gaijin in Japan is for foreigners who are living and/or working in Japan. The information within may be volatile, highly confrontational or just plain opinionated...] See <http://pub26.ezboard.com/frealdiscussionboardfrm13>

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, these people are intimately involved in reporting Japan now. These are the masters of the new media, and they can't be ignored.

QUESTIONNAIRE	CLASS NAME	WEEK No.
NAME	STUDENT No.	DATE
1. WHAT WAS THIS CLASS/FILM ABOUT?		
2. WHAT ARE THE MAIN QUESTIONS IT RAISES?		
3. WHAT IS IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS SUBJECT?		
4. ANY OTHER COMMENTS?		