

*Social Darwinism and Race Consciousness  
In Japanese-American Relations*

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“When we speak of the race idea we have in mind chiefly the idea as it is used by modern creeds, of the type of National Socialism, in order to integrate a community spiritually and politically.”

Eric Voegelin, *The Growth of the Race Idea*, 1940

On July 8, 1853, four black ships under the command of U.S. naval Commodore Matthew Perry steamed into Uraga Bay, Japan, near today's Tokyo, beginning what former U.S. Ambassador to Japan and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield called the “most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none” (Mansfield 2010). Just two years earlier, Herbert Spencer published his *Social Statics* in London famously quoted by Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in his dissent in *Lochner v. New York* (1905) at the height of social Darwinist influence in the United States. It was of course Spencer who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” in his *Principles of Biology* published in 1864, a phrase later adopted by Darwin among many others, and a phrase used by scholars, politicians, journalists, and virtually everyone else to capture the essence of social Darwinism (Claeys 2000, 227).

This paper has its beginning in the insight that as Thomas Hobbes and fear were “born twins” so also was the U.S.-Japan relationship born with the advent of applying biological theories to political and social realities. This paper explores the relationship between the advent of social Darwinism as a paradigm in the social sciences, as an influence in “public consciousness”<sup>1</sup> both in the United States and in Japan, and as a factor in the development of Japanese-American relations through the end of World War II. Specifically, it begins with an examination of social Darwinism as presented by different scholars and within a variety of intellectual traditions, turns next to a consideration of race as a dimension of public

consciousness in traditional Japanese and American cultures, considers whether and to what extent social Darwinism is a factor in changing public consciousness in both cultures, and concludes with some thoughts on the vital role of imagination in cultivating public or political cultures today and in times to come.

### **Social Darwinism: Ideology or Imaginative Obliviousness?**

“Social Darwinism” is usually conceptualized as an ideology, among others, which came to maturity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and involves, at a minimum, the application of Darwin’s theories regarding natural selection to society, politics, law, and economics. It is an ideology almost always associated with the phrases “survival of the fittest,” attributed to Spencer, and “root, hog, or die,” attributed to Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner. It is also an ideology famously enlisted in support, certainly in the United States, of *laissez-faire* economic theory. Nature itself, according to this world view, teaches the necessity of competition for scarce resources in the interest of adaptation, survival, fitness. This is certainly the context of Holmes’ famous dissent in the Supreme Court case of *Lochner v. New York* (1905) noted above. Writing for the court, Justice Rufus Peckham argued that the “general right to make a contract in relation to his business is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Federal Constitution.” In dissent, Justice Holmes countered that the United States Constitution “is not intended to embody a particular economic theory, whether of paternalism or *laissez-faire*.” And more revealingly regarding what had become a new, somewhat implied ideological jurisprudence on the court: “The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer’s *Social Statics*” (1905). Social Darwinists were also often, though not always, associated with eugenics movements in various parts of the world (Hawkins, 6, 7).

According to Gregory Claeys, in a fairly recent article appearing in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, the origins of the ideology are probably best to be found in Darwin's reading of Thomas Malthus' *Essay on Population* a point of view which essentially turns the "usual" narrative on its head. That is, rather than social Darwinism originating from a positivist application of the methods and insights of the natural sciences (natural philosophy) to society, Darwin midwived his approach to the study of natural selection from his reading of a work on population and economic theory, a work that first suggested to him the idea that "on the whole the best fitted live" (Claeys 2000, 223). Though Malthus clearly had a critique of social reformers like Nicolas de Condorcet, William Godwin, and Robert Owen in mind when developing his ideas on the relation between population and food supply, the later development of social Darwinism saw the enlistment of its central teachings in support of numerous political movements from *laissez faire* capitalism to A. R. Wallace's socialism and even Peter Kropotkin's anarchistic visions of future society. What unites the various forms "is not a specific political stance but the application of the idea of evolution to a higher social type on the basis of social competition between 'fit' and 'unfit' groups and individuals, whose 'fitness' or 'value' to society can be defined in a number of ways" (Claeys 2000, 229). Among the more specifically "Darwinian" dimensions of social Darwinism, for Claeys, are the notions of "inherited characteristics," and a "complex language of race." With respect to the latter, Darwin wrote, in *Descent of Man*, of race in loose terms such as regarding a distinction between "civilized races" and "lower races." In his usage, the terminology of class was never far from references to race, as in, for example, "the poor as a 'race.'" But such references evolved, in the work of others, to a new definition of race "directly attached to skin color, in which ideas of

racial hierarchy and supremacy were wedded to earlier notions of ‘fitness’” (Claeys 2000, 237, 238).

In a recent, more extended study of social Darwinism in European and American thought British scholar Mike Hawkins notes that there is a “vast literature” on the subject and that the precise role of social Darwinism in the history of social and political thought is especially “difficult to answer.” Among Hawkins claims is that there tend to be two dominant views in the literature on the “discursive functions” of social Darwinism. One view regards the ideology as “legitimizing” particular political agendas, such as that of “competitive, hierarchical, bourgeois society.” The second view regards social Darwinism as “multivalent” and capable of being adapted to a “wide range of ideological stances.” For Hawkins, social Darwinism also played a significant role in the development of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and political science. He also finds echoes of the ideology, or certainly references and utilizations in various contexts, in the work of such eminent scholars as Vilfredo Pareto, Max Weber, Lester Frank Ward, and Emile Durkheim (Hawkins 1997, 7-13). For Louis Menand, social Darwinism was primarily “a rather unsubtle justification for existing hierarchies of wealth and power” (Menand 2001, 301). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries social Darwinism “was an omnipresent reality for the practitioners of the social sciences” (Hawkins 1997, 13).

Among the more representative early figures whose work expresses with particular clarity the central thrust of social Darwinism, particularly in competitions between societies and cultures rather than within a particular community, which is clearly the thrust of Malthus’ work on population, is Walter Bagehot. Bagehot’s *Physics and Politics*, first published in 1872, opens with a dramatic presentation regarding how by present science “everything is made ‘an antiquity.’” In fact, “man himself, to the eye of science,” has “become ‘an antiquity’” (Bagehot

1887, 2). Bagehot's is clearly a "consciousness of epoch."<sup>2</sup> Following an opening chapter entitled "The Preliminary Age," Bagehot next considers "The Use of Conflict." There he observes three "laws" or "approximate laws" regarding political things: those nations which "are strongest" prevail over others; within nations the "types of character" that are "most attractive" prevail; and "in the most influential part of the world" - he surely has Victorian England in mind - both of the first two laws are "intensified." He continues as follows:

These are the sort of doctrines with which, under the name of 'natural selection' in physical science, we have become familiar; and as every great scientific conception tends to advance its boundaries and to be of use in solving problems not thought of when it was started, so here, what was put forward for mere animal history may, with a change of form, but an identical essence, be applied to human history" (Bagehot 1887, 43, 44).

Half a century later, in 1921, sociologist Harry Elmer Barnes was invited to address the American Political Science Association convention on "Some Contributions of Sociology to Modern Political Theory." Among his claims was that sociologists had come to a fairly consistent agreement that the "distinctive sociological theory of the origin of the state is the doctrine that the territorial state of historic time was a product of war and the forcible amalgamation of lesser groups into one larger aggregate." He cites in support of this view the early eighteenth century work of David Hume and Adam Ferguson and the more recent work of Herbert Spencer and Walter Bagehot. He also cites the most recent work of Franklin H. Giddings and E.C. Hayes all of whom agreeing that in the "period of political origins war was the most powerful factor in the creation of the state" (Barnes 1921, 500) It seems fitting here to note that the earliest conceptualization of Japanese self-identity, an identity that transcended local clans or tribes and suggested the rudiments at least of a Japanese "state," was "*yamato*."

The two *kanji* (Chinese) characters in this conceptualization mean, respectively, “big” (*yama*, today more commonly “mountain”) and “harmony.” The suggestion is clearly that of a participation mystique according to which “Japan” (*Nihon/Yamato*) is a cosmic analogue; that is, Japan is expressive of the larger harmony of a cosmos that is not chaos, a cosmos represented within the boundaries of the Japanese nation/state by the emperor who descends from the goddess *amaterasu omikami*, the full narrative being available in the *Kojiki* which dates from the eighth century. Twentieth century American emigré scholar Eric Voegelin encourages a consideration of such “origins” under the heading of “historiogenesis,” one of the “constants” in human experience, according to which society’s trace their “people, dynasty, even savior, to the beginning, the root of ultimate authority“ (Niemeyer 1989, 109).<sup>3</sup>

And Voegelin’s work, particularly his late work, also suggests a rather different perspective on the larger phenomenon traditionally referred to as social Darwinism. Especially relevant here is Voegelin’s final work *In Search of Order*, volume five of his *Order and History*, a work that for Voegelin was “the key to all his other works” (Voegelin 1987, Foreward). There, writing on Hegel’s “science of the experience of consciousness,” Voegelin presents Hegel as a “representative” of the intellectual confusion of his time, the early nineteenth century, and of “further confusions up to our own time.” Among the further confusions he would certainly place social Darwinism. In a delicate but precise examination of how “consciousness” and the “unconscious” have changed meanings Voegelin adumbrates an “intentionalist deformation” of consciousness such that a resulting “public unconsciousness” could be “socially dominant” yet “deformed by oblivion.” His primary example of what he calls “imaginative oblivion”<sup>4</sup> is Hegel and Hegel presents a particularly complex case. But in Hegel’s construction of a “scientific system” we witness the “abolition of philosophy” as the love of wisdom and the exclusion of

experiences of “existence in the tension of the metaxy” from the experience of consciousness (Voegelin 1987, 54, 55). This prepares the ground for other such systematizations and exclusions, “systems” of thought that would come to take the suffix “ism” among which is social Darwinism. In Japan, the suffix “*shugi*” would come to serve as translation. Curiously, democracy in Japanese is so suffixed (*minshushugi*), as is individualism (*kojinshugi*), socialism (*shakaishugi*), communism (*kyosanshugi*), to name a few. Yet, the teachings of the Buddha are not (*bukkyou*), nor is Christianity (*kirisutokyou*), Islam (*isuramukyou*), or the teachings of Confucius (*jukyou*). Philosophy (*tetsugaku*) is also not suffixed with “*shugi*.” The suffix “*gaku*” simply means “learning” or “to study.” The *kanji* for “*tetsu*,” usually translated simply as “clear,” – *tetsugaku* then meaning at a minimum “clear learning/study” – is a hybrid consisting of “hand” on the upper left, “axe” on the upper right, and “mouth” on the bottom suggestively uniting the other two. *Tetsugaku*, then, suggests, with a little imagination, to “shape,” to “cut/distinguish,” and to “speak” or “speak of.” The *kyou* suffix means to “teach, give lessons, inform.” *Bukkyou*, then, would literally be the teachings of the Buddha, and the others, above and respectively, the teachings of Christ, the prophet, and Confucius. And it is from within these traditions that resistance to the “imaginative obliviousness” of social Darwinism, and to other systemic footnotes to Hegel, Darwin, or Malthus, will be forthcoming both within the United States and in Japan. Representative examples, flowing out of *bukkyou* and a rich literary tradition in Japan, and philosophy in the United States, are briefly examined below.

What is important here is to note that a particularly influential intellectual phenomenon, widely shared on both sides of the Pacific, commonly conceptualized as an “ideology,” suffixed thereby with the English “ism” or the Japanese “*shugi*,” a phenomenon that by all accounts was



related to the promulgation of ideas on “natural selection” and “competition,” ideas most widely associated with and attributed to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, and as anticipated and reinforced by the work of Thomas Malthus, Herbert Spencer, T. H. Huxley, Walter Bagehot, and William Graham Sumner, among many others, is best understood as an example of “imaginative obliviousness” whereby profound philosophical insights regarding human consciousness, as expressed in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas, among others, in a Western philosophic tradition, also among others, had become “forgotten” (rendered oblivious). Among the results of this development was an increased “race consciousness” both in the United States and in Japan, a consciousness that John Dower convincingly argues was the single biggest contributor to the *War Without Mercy* of the mid twentieth-century.<sup>5</sup>

### **Japan (*Yamato/Nihon*) Before Darwin and Perry**

The Japanese experience in ordering society, the Japanese history of order, is the wondrous and complex story over the centuries of the development of a vast cultural landscape as expressed in art, religion, linguistic structures and patterns, myth, and a sense of history originating with a creation narrative whereby Japan (*Yamato/Nihon*) issued forth from the sun goddess *amaterasu omikami*. Politically, however, at the center, is the development of two representatives who can “act for society” in an “existential” sense,<sup>6</sup> the emperor, usually in Kyoto, and the shogun in Kamakura. The shogunate was less “fixed” as an institution – it was nominally a “tent government” (*bakufu*) – and soon moved to Kyoto, and finally to Edo, today’s Tokyo. These two representatives express, on the one hand, and in the person of the emperor, a cosmological style of truth and, in the person of the shogun, an anthropological style of truth<sup>7</sup> which, more accurately, is expressed by a *samurai* class of warriors. The complex relationship between the institutions of the imperial house and the *samurai* class came to embody and express

the syncretistic relationship between *shinto* and *bukkyou* (Buddhism), the latter understood largely (in the West) as zen Buddhism, a relationship called *ryoubu Shinto*.

Within this cultural context, subjects came to enjoy the guidance and protection of the emperor, who represented and reflected a cosmic order, and also counted on the virtues of the *samurai*, particularly as expressed in *bushidou*, the way of the warrior. These virtues were the product of a more differentiated consciousness, a more anthropological style of truth, within which social and political order is preserved and nurtured by *giri*, *seigi*, *yuuki*, *jin*, *reigi*, and *chuugi* – respectively, obligation, justice, courage, benevolence, courtesy, and loyalty. Society, for the *samurai*, was more a macroanthropos dependent on the widespread diffusion of the *bushidou* ethic over time. Daisetz T. Suzuki, author of *Zen and Japanese Culture*, contends that “the spirit of the samurai deeply breathing zen into itself propagated its philosophy even among the masses” (Suzuki 1973, 85). Inazo Nitobe, in his classic study *Bushidou – the Soul of Japan*, similarly observes that *bushidou* “filtered down from the social class where it originated, and acted as leaven among the masses, furnishing a moral standard for the whole people” (Nitobe 2002, 136 ). The traditional way of writing “*samurai*” in Chinese characters (*kanji*) is with a compound of two characters. On the right is a character that indicates a Buddhist temple. On the left is a person standing. Together we have a person standing by a Buddhist temple who, with a little imagination, represents the *samurai* protecting it. The *kanji* for *samurai* is culturally a powerful and highly transparent symbol for the relationship between the warrior/guardians and the place where a love of wisdom takes root, a relationship not unlike that between auxiliaries and philosopher rulers in Plato’s *Republic*, out of the West. Most *samurai* were zen practitioners. In the spring of 1868, among the first actions of the new national government under the leadership of a group of elder statesmen (*genro*) and in the name of the new Meiji

emperor (1867 – 1912) was the promulgation of an order called *shimbutsu bunri*. This order called for the separation of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples and the removal of all Buddhist images from Shinto shrines. This effectively destroyed the syncretism above noted and a movement to abolish *bukkyou*, the teachings of the Buddha, ensued. Over the next several years thousands of temples were closed and/or destroyed. Parallel to this development was the end of the *samurai*, an end usually dated with the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877 led by Saigo Takamori. And it was at precisely this same time that the first social Darwinist assumed his duties at Tokyo Imperial University. Professor Edward Morse, one of the founders of the Tokyo Anthropological Society, gave a series of lectures in 1877 on evolutionary theory, lectures that were published four years later bringing Darwin's theories "to an even larger audience" (Weiner 1997, 105).

As for traditional Japanese culture, there apparently is very little evidence to suggest that the Japanese, or the leadership in particular, were especially "race conscious." According to one scholar, the "categories of inclusion and exclusion on which the Japanese of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) relied to distinguish themselves from other groups of people did not assume a 'racialised' form" (Weiner 1997, 100). The two Japanese terms usually translated as "race" in English are *jinshu* and *minzoku*. The first is written in *kanji* with a simple one stroke character which looks like legs walking (*jin*), a character always translated simply as "man", "person," or "people." The second (*shu*) is a more complex character consisting of two characters, one on the left denoting a "two branched tree" – the radical *nogi* – and one on the right suggesting a "nest of boxes" or the idea of "piling up" or "repeating." Together, *shu* translates rather simply as "kind, class, variety" or "seed" or "species." So, *jinshu* carries the meaning of "variety" or "kind" of "person" or "persons." There is nothing in the characters to suggest anything

particularly biological or spiritual. *Minzoku* is a bit more complex. *Min* is a simple *kanji* meaning “people, nation, subjects” and is the *min* in *minshushugi* the preferred Japanese concept for “democracy.” *Zoku* combines three *kanji* one meaning “direction” and the other two suggestive of a “three branched” tree. *Zoku* is usually translated as “family, relatives, clan, tribe, or race.” In the late nineteenth century, 1884, the Japanese leadership created a peerage or aristocracy by law according to which there were five “ranks:” prince, marquess, count, viscount, and baron. This peerage was called *kazoku* in Japanese with the *zoku* examined here preceded by *ka*, meaning “flower, petal, shining, luster.” The “nobility” were also called *kizoku* with the *ki* denoting to “value, prize, esteem, respect, honor, revere.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the House of Peers or upper house created by the Meiji Constitution in 1889 was called the *kizokuin* (literally the house of the esteemed among us). Though there is nothing suggestive of “race” or “race consciousness” in these terms and characters, there developed a tendency to use the term *minzoku* “as a synonym for the Japanese ‘race’, ethnies and nation.” And this was particularly true in the body of literature that has come to be known as *nihonjinron*, literally debate regarding Japaneseness. Yet, within this literature, there is no “clear conceptual distinction between cultural and ‘racial’ categories” (Weiner 1997, 96).

The exceptions to this pattern were the discrimination toward *burakumin*, in traditional Japan, and the marginalization and later research done on the Ainu people of Hokkaido, a combination of activities that began “in earnest” in 1869. The *burakumin*, which literally means persons who live in a hamlet, refers to people in Japan, of Japanese ancestry, whose families traditionally work in the leather or related trades wherein animals are slaughtered for their skins. Because of various Shinto and Buddhist teachings, people engaged in these activities were considered unclean, somewhat impure. Over time, the *burakumin* came to be residentially

segregated. But this prejudice within traditional Japanese culture was not based on race or other biological considerations.<sup>9</sup> With respect to the Ainu, research done in the name of sciences imported from the West, and also conducted often by Westerners in Japan such as B. H. Chamberlain and Edward Morse, concluded that they, alternatively, were “incapable of progress,” “have learned no arts,” have “adopted no improvements,” are “incapable of higher thought,” cannot “concentrate their attention,” lack “moral courage,” are “lazy,” and “strongly given to drunkenness,” among other attributes and tendencies. The Ainu were increasingly classified as “primitive” a point of view nurtured by the “workings of the scientific principle of the survival of the fittest” (Siddle 1997, 136 – 145). Social Darwinism had arrived in Japan, both from foreign academics “employed by the Meiji state,” and from indigenous scholars who were “posted abroad” (Weiner 1997, 105).

### **From *Kokutai* to *Yamato* “Race”**

The Meiji Period in Japan (1868 -1912) was a particularly complex one in which Japan transformed itself, in a very short time, from almost complete isolation from the rest of the world to an empire that at its height controlled virtually all of east Asia and the islands of the western Pacific.<sup>10</sup> *Sonno joi*, “honor the emperor, expel the barbarian” was the rallying expression of the mostly young *samurai* who led the Meiji “restoration” of the emperor, the *go-isshin*, in 1868. In the name of the emperor, numerous changes, most Western inspired, and a new constitution, also Western inspired, came to define a modern, Japanese nation/state. The constitution was officially promulgated on February 11, 1889, the 2,549<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accession to the throne of Japan’s first emperor, Jimmu Tenno, descended from the goddess. The existential “substance” of this new state came to be symbolized as *kokutai*, translated by Joseph Pittau as “the absolute homogeneity of Japanese culture, characterized by the link of loyalty and love

between the people and the emperor” (Pittau 1967, 2). *Kokutai* might better be understood as a construction by the *genro* to reshape public consciousness in Japan better to position the new state in an intensely competitive international arena, a construction drawn from an ancient historiogenetic speculation regarding the origins and cause of Japanese society, a construction that is also a contraction away from the more differentiated insights represented by zen Buddhism and the *bushidou* spirit. And among the effects of this construction was the development, over time, of a new consciousness of the Beyond understood not as something transcendent and clouded in mystery, but as something geographic, cultural, Western, a Beyond understood as *gaiatsu*, outside pressure, and which represented a potentially disastrous threat to what increasingly was conceptualized as the Yamato “race.”

This increase in “race consciousness” was attended by the “immense popularity” of Herbert Spencer’s work in Japan. The first translation of Spencer into Japanese was in 1884. But by the end of the century, “some thirty translations of his works had appeared” (Weiner, 105). Spencer’s influence was such that he was given a draft of the proposed Meiji Constitution by Mori Arinori, then Japanese Ambassador to the United States, while Mori was on a visit to England. Spencer later wrote several letters to Kaneko Kentaro, a member of the committee which drafted the Constitution, in which he complains that his “conservative” advice was not taken seriously.<sup>11</sup> As the Japanese leadership during Meiji proved increasingly successful in carrying out their plan of building *fukoku kyouhei*, a rich country and strong military, they also increasingly credited their accomplishments to a “manifestation of *seizon kyousou* (struggle for survival) and *yuushou reppai* (survival of the fittest)” (Weiner 1997, 110). And “fittest” increasingly referred to the members of the Japanese “family state.” The Japanese term for both “nation” and “state” is *kokka*. This term consists of two *kanji*, the first representing “country”

and the second “family.” According to Kosaku Yoshino, in this “family-nation” members saw themselves as “related ‘by blood’ to one another and ultimately to the emperor.” Race, religion and kinship were “fused together” to create a sense of community and national oneness. This became the “ideological backbone of pre-war and wartime nationalism” (Kosaku 1997, 201). Through numerous and varied expositions such as those at Osaka in 1903 and at Tokyo in 1912 popular and scientific conceptions of racial difference were fused “within a dominant discourse of race.” And this discourse was not only about the Japanese and outside cultures, but about differences within Japan where descendants of the Yamato race were depicted as having a “civilising mission” with respect to resident Koreans, Ainu, and others (Weiner 1997, 115). As *kokutai* as a form of public consciousness developed under the influence of the social Darwinists into a more ethnically defined “Yamato race” there were those who resisted. Among these dissidents was Natsume Soseki, one of Japan’s most revered literary artists.

Natsume Soseki (1867 – 1912) has been called Japan’s “national writer.” For twenty years, from 1984 to 2004, his portrait was on the one thousand yen note. Among his most famous works are a trilogy with the individual titles *Sanshiro*, *Sore Kara*, and *Mon, Kokoro*, widely regarded as his masterpiece, and *Kusamakura*, featured here. *Kusamakura* literally means *Grass Pillow*. When the work was translated into English by Alan Turney, however, the title was rendered *The Three Cornered World*. The reasoning was twofold: in the first place, *Grass Pillow* has no connotative meaning in English while *Kusamakura*, to the Japanese ear, is highly suggestive of a meaningful journey. In addition, in the work is a particularly important imagery which for Soseki captures the life of the artist. It is that of a four cornered world in which the corner called “common sense” has been eroded. The artist is then someone who is left to live in the remaining “three cornered world.” One might interpret this remaining “triangle”

(*sankaku*) as follows: one corner is defined by a physical “world” – a place with specific features; a second corner represents a transcendent beyond which cannot be “seen,” and the third could be a consciousness that participates in both, and is shaped by both. This third “point” in the triangle could be “man” (human beings) in the “quest for truth.” But the artist lives in this triangle somewhat outside of society, “after the angle which we may call common sense has been removed from this four-cornered world” (Natsume 1970, 48).

The Japanese that Soseki uses here is *joushiki* usually translated to English as simply “common sense” (Natsume 2004, 38). But a close examination of the Chinese characters suggests a possible connection with the above “corners.” The character for *jou* clearly means an ordinary course of events. The *shiki* character, however, is more pregnant with meaning. The character by itself means to “know” or to “understand”. So, *jou* (common) with *shiki* (understanding) is simply translated as “common sense.” But the *shiki* character is made up of four parts, each of which being capable of standing alone as a separate character. The primary element, or radical, for *shiki*, by itself, means “to say.” Other elements, moving right to left and down, mean, in order, “to stand,” “the sun,” and “tasseled spear.” The compound or hybrid character for “to know,” then, as used in “common sense,” and as used by Soseki in this passage regarding the identity of the artist, consists of four symbols which evoke speech, standing up, the sun, and the act of protecting. Fleshing each of these out a bit we have “to know” encompassing a consciousness of the centrality of speech as essential to “knowing,” of the importance of standing upright in one’s particular place in the world (here, Japan), of the necessity of light, by virtue of which we see, or comprehend, and of the requirement to defend oneself, one’s family, one’s community. Combining these four elements of *shiki* with *jou* we have, from a Voegelinian perspective, a common “sense,” or consciousness, perhaps a “public consciousness,” that



contains a measure (*jou*) of understanding regarding light (*hi*, sun), regarding what it means to be human (*iu*, to say), regarding being in the world (*tatsu*, standing), and regarding defense (*hoko*, tasseled spear), a public consciousness that has become “unconscious” except to the artist whose task is one of renewal. From these considerations, we begin to see a *kanji* character which expresses a cosmion of meaning whereby common sense, a common *nous* or spirit, requires a measured understanding of God/the good, man, the world, and society; in other words, a measured or partial understanding of what Voegelin calls the “It-reality.” The artist, for Soseki, is one who lives in the triangle that is left when this “cosmion” is “eroded” at the “society” corner. It is the artists task, for Soseki, to “say” again, through his/her works, what it means to be “wholly,” “integrally,” “fully” a Japanese person. The imaginative obliviousness of social Darwinism has its foil in the imaginative *anamnesis* and creative resistance of artists like Natsume Soseki.<sup>12</sup>

### **America, Founding Principles, and Race Consciousness**

This sketch of America’s founding principles, and it can only be a sketch, begins with a serious consideration of historian and political theorist J. G. A. Pocock’s contention that the American founding represents something of “the last great act of the Renaissance.” Briefly, the monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements in the Roman/Polybian mixed constitution of antiquity suggested to the founders, perhaps faintly, the cardinal virtues of courage, wisdom, and temperance and to this day, these virtues echo still, though certainly more faintly, in the hearts and minds of those who represent Americans in the primary executive, judicial, and legislative organs of the American state. More broadly, it is certainly not unreasonable to speak of the “articulation” of a United States in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, an articulation that drew on modern conceptualizations characteristic of the European Enlightenment, the works of John Locke and

Montesquieu holding a predominant place, and ancient conceptualizations centered in the idea of a republic and as given new life, a *renaissance*, in the works of humanist scholars, among whom Machiavelli included, in an “Atlantic republican tradition.”<sup>13</sup> This complex body of thought, of both modern and ancient wisdom, includes such particulars, “principles,” as separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, natural rights, citizen armies, private property, especially in land, the need for a periodic return to first principles (judicial review in time), a “mixed” constitution, and the overall and absolute necessity of a widely diffused civic virtue. Modern, auxiliary precautions, such as checks and balances, would compensate for the erosion or poor development of classical virtues among the citizenry. James Madison captured the heart of this complex in *Federalist 51*: “A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”

And certainly in the public consciousness, and depending, largely, on the region and predominant economic structure, whether commercial (north) or agricultural (south), it cannot be denied that there was a “race consciousness” along color lines, black and white and red. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his classic *Democracy in America*, based on his travels and experiences in America in the early 1830s, observed the following regarding “the three races that inhabit the territory of the United States:” “It is obvious that there are three naturally distinct, one might almost say hostile, races.” And among these “widely different people” there exist “the white man, the European, man par excellence; below him come the Negro and the Indian.” Regarding the latter he continues: “These two unlucky races have neither birth, physique, language, nor mores in common; only their misfortunes are alike. Both occupy an equally inferior position in the land where they dwell; both suffer the effects of tyranny, and, though their afflictions are different, they have the same people to blame for them.” And, anticipating perhaps a later more

Darwinian angle of vision: “might one not say that the European is to men of other races what man is to the animals? He makes them serve his convenience, and when he cannot bend them to his will he destroys them” (Tocqueville 1969, 317). This race consciousness was given full, and infamous expression in Chief Justice Roger Taney’s opinion in the *Dred Scott* case. Regarding the “negro” or “those persons who were the descendants of Africans who were imported into this country and sold as slaves” and regarding their status at the time of the writing of the United States Constitution, Taney wrote as follows:

“... they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and whether emancipated or not yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the government might choose to grant them (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*).

Darwin’s *Origins* was, of course, published on the eve of America’s Civil War where race consciousness was certainly a major dynamic on both sides. It is perhaps a particularly poignant example of “imaginative obliviousness” that the Supreme Court, in a series of cases in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, would interpret the post Civil War 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in such a way as both to “forget” its origins in giving Dred Scott citizenship and “intend” instead that it justify liberty of contract in the service of economic, commercial development. This is the context of Holmes’ dissent in *Lochner*. Most prominent among those whose influence shaped this development, not only in jurisprudential circles but in the mainstream of American culture, was Herbert Spencer.<sup>14</sup> Mike Hawkins, in his recent study of social Darwinism in European and American thought illustrates the “tremendous popularity” of and “enthusiasm” for Spencer in America by quoting from a letter to Spencer written by Edward Livingstone Youmans, “one of his (Spencer’s) most fervent admirers and popularizers in the United States: “I am an ultra and

thoroughgoing American. I believe there is great work to be done here for civilization. What we want are ideas – large, organizing ideas – and I believe there is no other man whose thoughts are so valuable to our needs as yours are” (Hawkins 1997, 105, 106).

For Hawkins, Spencer’s significance is to be found in two features of his work. The first is simply his popularity which extended far beyond the United Kingdom and the United States and included Japan, as noted above. More important was Spencer’s concept of “primitive humans.” Spencer portrayed the primitive as “immoral, irrational and aggressive” and this in order to contrast “individuality, freedom and morality” which would evolve through a “logic of differentiation, specialization and individuation.” He constructed an “evolutionary continuum” within which problem groups in modern society could be substituted for and equated with “pre-historic man.” Consequently, “children, women, inferior social ranks and tribal social cultures could all be substituted for pre-historic man, depending on the context in question” (Hawkins 1997, 98).

The context of Japanese/American relations in the unfolding of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was increasingly defined by aggressive, even imperialistic foreign agendas on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. In 1895, Japan defeated China in the first Sino-Japanese War and just ten years later, amounting to what Irokawa Daikichi has called a “rupture in world history” (Irokawa 1986, 216), they defeated Russia, destroying the Russian navy in the battle of Tsushima Straits. In a peace brokered by President Theodore Roosevelt, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the Japanese gained new territories in Russia and in China. During the same period the United States defeated Spain and gained Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Social Darwinist rhetoric and conceptualizations, particularly regarding natural selection, survival, fitness, and the meaning both of “the primitive” and “civilization” provided particularly

“imaginative” justifications, veiled with the authority of science, by virtue of which the age old consciousness of “blood and soil” assumed the dimensions of a heretofore unimagined force.<sup>15</sup> Overseas expansion “seemed to confirm the belief that history was a racial struggle and that the white race would eventually eliminate the black and yellow races” (Malik 1996 , 117). A potentially disastrous combination of “race, imperialism and democracy” had the effect of muting internal, domestic tensions involving potential conflicts between labor and management, rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged, and concerning gender and race relations, tensions attendant to the evolution of industrializing, “modern,” and “civilizing” nation-states. Kenan Malik, in his comprehensive study of *The Meaning of Race* quotes Cecil Rhodes: “If you want to avoid civil war you must become imperialists” (Malik 1996, 116).

Japan’s defeat of Russia was particularly problematic in the West. The ascension of Japan “emphasized the distinction between white and other races” (Malik 1996, 118). Despite his admiration for the Japanese, the potential of a war with Japan, especially as he was all too often cautioned by the German Kaiser, was much on the mind of President Theodore Roosevelt. This was the background to his decision in 1907 to send an American naval fleet on a world voyage.<sup>16</sup> According to Malik, Roosevelt was “ever keen to promote America’s role in defending the white race” (Malik 1996, 119). It was during Teddy Roosevelt’s presidency that anxiety over a “yellow peril” reached its zenith. Japan’s ascendant role in East Asia and the Pacific was further complicated by emigration policies. A Malthusian population pressure was growing in California and tension between white Americans and Japanese immigrants reached the floor of the U. S. Senate and the inner recesses of the White House. The rhetoric in the Senate was clearly inspired by the social Darwinist literature as any reading of Henry Cabot Lodge’s long speech on immigration restriction, in 1909, would illustrate (Lodge 1909). Lodge

ends his speech with a quotation from Thomas Bailey Aldrich's poem *Unguarded Gates*, the highlight of which reading "O liberty, white goddess! Is it well to leave the gates unguarded" (Lodge 1909)? Between 1882, with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and 1924, the year of the Johnson-Reed Act, or Immigration Act of 1924, the U.S. Congress passed a number of laws the clear intent of which being to restrict immigration on racial grounds. In addition, President Theodore Roosevelt agreed to a Gentleman's Agreement in 1907, specifically to restrict Japanese immigration and the United States Supreme Court ruled, in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) first, that the Naturalization Act of 1906 limiting naturalization to "free white persone" and persons "of African descent" was constitutional and, second, that Ozawa was not a Caucasian or "white person" but was of an "unassimilable race" (*Ozawa v. United States*). Twenty-two years later, in *Korematsu v. United States*, in a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court will uphold President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 which interned over one hundred thousand Japanese-Americans in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Justice Frank Murphy, in his dissent, wrote that such an exclusion "goes over 'the very brink of constitutional power' and falls into the ugly abyss of racism" (*Korematsu v. United States*). These are but illustrations of policy decisions and public perceptions at the highest levels of American government during the early and formative years of Japanese-American relations.

But as there was resistance in Japan, as briefly illustrated above by Natsume Soseki's reflections on "common sense" and the role of the artist, so also was there resistance in the United States. Among this group were members of a "metaphysical club" recently examined in fine detail by historian Louis Menand. Particularly influential in promoting the point of view in post Civil War America that "ideas should never become ideologies" were Oliver Wendell Holmes, William James, Charles S. Pierce, and John Dewey. And particularly noteworthy in this

exceptional mix of jurists, educators, and philosophers was William James, the “man of two minds.” James, in Menand’s telling, “worked most of his life to defend simultaneously held worldviews – modern science and religious faith” (Menand 2001, 73-75). James believed in a “risk assuming decisiveness” and that “the universe” would “meet such a person halfway.” He believed that “certainty” was “moral death” (Menand 2001, 75). In the course of his life he studied painting, chemistry, anatomy, natural history, medicine, psychology, and, most famously, philosophy. With respect to Darwin and the growing influence of Darwinian inspired ideas regarding biological applications to other areas of life, James, as a young man, “liked the ideas but hated seeing them treated as the exclusive truth.” He was “Darwinian” but not “a Darwinist” (Menand 2001, 141). Later in life James would see the “real lesson” in Darwin’s work that “natural selection” had produced in human beings the “capacity to make choices incompatible with the ‘survival of the fittest’” (Menand 2001, 146). In 1897, James was invited to give the speech dedicating the monument on the Boston Commons dedicated to Robert Gould Shaw, leader of the 54<sup>th</sup> Union brigade of African American soldiers. In his speech he said that Shaw’s courage was “the kind of valor to which the monuments of nations should most of all be reared, for the survival of the fittest has not bred it into the bone of human beings.” Wars do not save nations, he continued, rather improvements come “by speaking, writing, voting reasonably, by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks” (Menand 2001, 148). This is the teleological language of Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero before Darwin, Spencer, and Bagehot, with their scientific “certainties.”

## Imagination Matters

Cornell West, in *Race Matters*, begins his Preface by recalling a recent trip that he and his wife had made between Princeton and New York City and his reflections on a morning lecture he had given on Plato's *Republic* and an afternoon one on W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the juxtaposition of Socrates' descent to the Piraeus and DuBois' thoughts on the "color line" being the "problem of the twentieth century" West was "haunted" in a "mysterious way" by the "classic twosome" of Plato and DuBois and how together they "posed the most fundamental challenges to my basic aim in life: to speak the truth to power with love so that the quality of everyday life for ordinary people is enhanced and white supremacy is stripped of its authority and legitimacy" (West 2001, xi). Similarly, one might juxtapose how, in a mysterious way, the teachings of zen Buddhism and classical Western philosophy converge on the seminal importance of imagination in the life both of the mind and of the polity.

Among the most famous works in Japanese literature is Basho Matsuo's (1644-94) *Oku no Hosomichi*, usually translated as *Narrow Road to the Deep North*. *Hosomichi* clearly means "narrow road" or "path" or "way." *Oku*, however, is a more highly charged symbol which is perhaps better translated as "heart" or "interior" and has the connotation of "deep inside." *Oushi*, for example, means "deep truth." The translation as "deep north" is probably due to the fact that Basho wrote his *haiku* while on a journey to the northern parts of Honshu, Japan's main island. Daisetz T. Suzuki, however, in *Zen and Japanese Culture*, explains how Basho's *haiku* art represented nothing less than a "revolutionary alarm" which gave the form "a new start." What defined this new start was "Basho's insight into the nature of life itself, or into the life of Nature, which forms the background of his verse." What follows is Suzuki's analysis of what is



probably Basho's most famous *haiku*, if not the best known the world over. The original is as follows:

Furu ike ya  
Kawazu tobikomu  
Mizu no oto

Suzuki's translation to English is rendered this way:

The old pond, ah!  
A frog jumps in:  
The water's sound!

With a little imagination the reader can intuit here that the above *haiku* "does not express ideas but . . . puts forward images reflecting intuition." For Suzuki, Basho's "old pond" is the poet's imaginative response to a question posed by his zen master: "what is there even before the world came into existence?" The pond "lies on the other side of eternity." There is "nothing more ancient." No "scale of consciousness" can "measure it." The poem points to a Cosmic Unconscious which is "the principle of creativity" where "is deposited the moving force of the universe" (Suzuki 1973, 239, 240).

The Japanese for "imagination" is "*sou**zou*." The *sou* character consists of a compound of "tree," upper left, "eye," upper right, and the "human heart" under both. The *zou* character is a compound of a "person" standing, on the left, and an "elephant" on the right. The *zou* character is clearly for drama, or size. The *sou*, however, is suggestive of both seeing (eye) and feeling (heart) things of nature (tree), of the importance of both the cognitive and experiential or intuitive dimensions of existence. The zen Buddhist tradition in Japanese culture, in the Japanese experience of order in history, both draws on and reinforces what is pregnant in

ordinary language. Imagination is encouraged and nurtured by a rich artistic tradition which includes, and perhaps especially includes, literary artists like Natsume Soseki and Basho Matsuo. It is a primary source of resistance to imaginative obliviousness such as one finds in social Darwinist interpretations of reality imported from the West.

Among the most famous works of philosophy in the West is Plato's *Republic*. And among the most widely read, analyzed, quoted, and appreciated parts of Plato's classic are books six and seven where one encounters the divided line and cave allegories. At the beginning in the stages of cognition which both allegories illustrate is imagination (*eikasia*), from which belief, understanding, and knowledge follow, well or poorly. Imagination, "sanctioned by its usage in the philosopher's language since antiquity" also plays a fundamental role in Voegelin's theory of consciousness. It denotes the "ability" to "find the way from the metaleptic experiences to the imagery of expressive symbols." For Voegelin, however, imagination is also "a structure in the process of a reality that moves toward its truth." In Voegelin's most concise formulation: "Through the imaginative power of man the It-reality moves imaginatively toward its truth" (Voegelin 1987, 38). Whether examined from a zen Buddhist or a Western philosophic perspective post Hegelian speculations such as social Darwinism and other isms, or *shugi*, are less failures of imagination than corruptions which take the form of elaborate systems founded upon imaginative obliviousness – the forgetting of *joushiki* (common sense), or the It-reality.

What is particularly unfortunate in the Japanese-American relationship is that because of its beginning coinciding with social Darwinist and kindred speculations, with the development of presumptions that policies follow paradigms, that systematic thought "precedes deed as lightning precedes thunder" (Voegelin 1987, 51), rich traditions in Japanese cultural experience, particularly in the literary arts as inspired by zen Buddhist insights, were slow to penetrate

Western consciousness and the classical and renaissance traditions of the West, much of it being in footnotes to Plato and Aristotle, went virtually unseen by Meiji and later Japanese intellectuals and political leaders. Further to midwife a fuller consciousness of both traditions, for each, and to imagine the possibilities of comparing and contrasting the equivalence of experiences and symbolizations deriving therefrom remain among the greater tasks of scholars in all of the arts and sciences in all parts of the world.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>On the meaning of “public consciousness” as used here see Voegelin 1987, pp. 57 – 64.

<sup>2</sup>On the sense in which “consciousness of epoch” is used here, see Voegelin 1975, pp. 3-6.

<sup>3</sup>For an introduction to and overview of Voegelin’s work see Sandoz (1981), Cooper (1999), Embry (2008), Federici (2002), Germino (1978), Niemeyer (1989), and Voegelin (1989). On *historiogenesis*, in particular, see Voegelin, *CW*, vol. 17, *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. IV, *Order and History*, ed. Michael Franz (1974; Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 108-66; and Voegelin, *CW*, 28: 52-58. See also Thomas Hollweck, “History as Open Horizon: Eric Voegelin’s Search for a Post-Imperial Order,” in Charles R. Embry and Barry Cooper, eds., *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics: Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 327 – 329.

<sup>4</sup>On Voegelin’s use of “imaginative oblivion,” see Voegelin 1987, pp. 61, 62. Voegelin’s reference to Hegel’s act as “imaginative oblivion” strikes this reader as somewhat awkward. A slight modification of the phrase to “imaginative obliviousness” is thereby suggested, the suffix “ness” indicating a “state,” “quality,” or “condition.”

<sup>5</sup>See Dower 1986, especially Chapter One on Patterns of a Race War.

<sup>6</sup> An essential distinction in Voegelin’s Walgreen lectures in Chicago, which came to be published as *The New Science of Politics*, was that between elemental and existential representation. Elemental representation refers to outward forms by virtue of which all societies develop institutions which represent the various strata of society and which attempt to provide for basic defense and, in various ways, for the legislative, administrative, and judicial functions of government. As a symbol in political reality “representative” institutions refers to popularly elected assemblies and/or chief executives. Scholars who study electoral processes, redistricting procedures, institutional checks and balances, voting behavior, party competition, and the like are examining the particular dynamics involved in elemental representation, in Voegelin’s distinction. These dynamics are important in a well-ordered society. A careful study of such dynamics is necessary but insufficient to a proper understanding of politics, however. More important is existential representation. And this concept is more elusive in Voegelin’s work, particularly interpreted in light of insights in the *Ecumenic Age*. For Voegelin, existential representation is related to articulation. Articulation is that “process in which human beings form themselves into a society for action” (Voegelin 1962, 27-51). The result of this process is the creation of a representative or representatives who can act for a society. One might interpret existential representation in light of Voegelin’s later works as follows: it is the representation of a distant, historic beginning and, perhaps, a transcendent beyond; of a clear sense of order, disorder, and propriety in the concrete consciousness of representative persons in positions of authority in particular societies reflecting particular civilizational patterns.

<sup>7</sup>“Styles of truth” is a basic conceptualization in Eric Voegelin’s work and refers, primarily, to his distinction in the *New Science of Politics* between and among cosmological, anthropological, and soteriological “styles.” For a full discussion, and regarding compact and differentiated experiences, see Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), especially Chapter II: “Representation and Truth,” 52-75. On the cosmological style of truth in particular, see also Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, (hereinafter, *CW*), vol. 17, *The Ecumenic Age*, vol IV, *Order and History*, ed. Michael Franz (1974; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 126, 127. In addition, see Charles R. Embry, *The Philosopher and the Storyteller* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), especially Chapter 2: “The Attunement of the Soul:” Eric Voegelin’s Search of Order, 34-49.

<sup>8</sup>The Japanese-English character dictionary used for all of these terms is Nelson 1994. For a study of how Japanese *kanji* often function as “metaphor” see Hiraga 2006.

<sup>9</sup>For a good overview on the traditional and evolving attitudes in Japan regarding the *burakumin* see Hah and Lapp 1978.

<sup>10</sup>For a comprehensive analysis of the complex and nuanced world of Japanese thought during the Meiji Period (1868 – 1912), see Gluck 1985, and Irokawa 1986.

<sup>11</sup>For a full account of this correspondence and of the influence of Spencer in Japan see Nagai 1954.

<sup>12</sup>For a more complete examination of Soseki’s literary art as “resistance” to Westernization and modernization in general, see Hoye 2005.

<sup>13</sup>This phrase is in the subtitle of J. G. A. Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment*. See Pocock 2003.

<sup>14</sup>Hofstadter 1944, is the classic study of social Darwinism in American thought. On social Darwinism in general, see also Crook 1994; Halliday 1971; Himmelfarb 1962; Hodgson 2004; Kowmer 2004; and Wells 1907.

<sup>15</sup>On how “blood and soil” have always been factors, in various ways, in instances of genocide throughout world history see Kiernan 2007.

<sup>16</sup>On December 16, 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt sent “the Great White Fleet” of sixteen new battleships, painted white, on a world voyage that visited twenty ports over a fourteen month period.

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