

Japan and China: How Different They Are!

by
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Japanese and Chinese personal names have been rendered surname first, in accordance with Japanese and Chinese custom.

The hanyu pinyin Romanization system has been used to translate Chinese personal and place names, with the exception of Wade-Giles translations that are still in common use (e.g., Yangtze River, Chiang Kai-shek).

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— Introduction —

In Chinese, there is an ancient saying: *wàng nián jiāo* (忘年交), meaning “friendship between generations” or “friendship despite a difference in ages.” It is a presumptuous manner of speaking, but I (as a young person) feel such a “friendship between generations” with my conversation partner in this book, Mr. Kase Hideaki.

From the first time we met, Mr. Kase has been my constant instructor in the journalistic life, with the kind understanding of a father. He has also been a good instructor, teaching me about international and diplomatic issues.

When we have met from time to time, whether publically or privately, I have learned about various things, and it has always been full of intellectual stimulation. I have enjoyed our conversations and his touch of ready wit.

What I have always been deeply impressed by in our interactions was Mr. Kase’s surprising level of erudition and knowledge and his deep insight. Cutting through to the true essence of the question with short words laden with a deep sense of humor is Mr. Kase’s style, and I can say nothing but that his sharpness is thrilling.

What is still more surprising is Mr. Kase’s erudition concerning Chinese history and culture and his sharp analysis of the inner psyche of the Chinese.

I was originally Chinese and grew up until my adolescence in China, experiencing first-hand the actual chaos. I have always felt that Mr. Kase saw through to the depths of my heart when we spoke, giving me a sense of intellectual tension.

Naturally time and again Mr. Kase’s provocative theses on China have given even me much to think of concerning the question, “what is China?” I have also learned much concerning “what is Japan?”

Having had these experiences, I recently asked Mr. Kase if, by talking carefully with him, I might be allowed to fully draw out the essence of his theses on China and Japan in the form of dialogues.

He recently granted this overreaching request of mine. I was able to sit down and exchange views with Mr. Kase four times in 2010, from the cherry blossom season through the early summer with its fragrant breezes.

For me, this can only be called an adventure in wisdom — a personal experience that was hard to get.

Each time I made various preparations, made way to Mr. Kase’s house with a do-or-die resolve, and — filled with a sense of trepidation — sat at the table opposite him. When we finished our discussion, there was a sense of relief at “returning alive” from the adventure. In addition, I attained intellectual fulfillment and felt overwhelmed by a supreme ecstasy. I felt like a new man.

In these rich dialogues, Mr. Kase and I kept in mind each of our countries’ long histories and — based on present realities — I believe we were able to talk freely about “what is Sinocentrism?”, “how are China and Japan different?”, “what is behind the beautified image of China?”, etc., until we were completely satisfied.

At least for me personally it was an extremely valuable opportunity to once again

delve deeply thinking about China and Japan. This was a fruitful intellectual exchange that enabled a profound cognizance of the differences between Japan and China.

Setting aside the satisfaction we enjoyed at our spirited discussions, though we carried out these talks and deepened an appreciation of the eternal theme of “China and Japan,” was it productive? Did I succeed or fail in my plans in trying to draw out the core of Mr. Kase’s theses on China and Japan?

I can only leave it to the impressions of those who read this book to determine the answers to these questions.

I firmly believe that this book will be of use to those wanting to understand the Chinese question, or the Sino–Japanese relationship. I would also like to hope all my friends and acquaintances would give this book a read.

Finally, I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, Mr. Kase, who kindly complied with my requests for discussions with a young fellow like me; and the great assistance of Ishii Tatsuo and Ihara Manami of Jiyūsha in everything from the planning and setting of these discussions to the compilation of this book; and all those readers into whose hands this book comes.

Truly, I thank you very much.

— Sekihei Hei

— Chapter One — Recognizable Differences in Cuisine

• China: devoted to food

Kase

Chinese culture is truly unique in the world. There isn't another culture so devoted to the concept of eating.

In the food culture of other countries, for religious, societal, or conventional reasons, there are taboos about some foods that therefore just aren't eaten.

Commandments in Judaism and Islam about food, and Hindu taboos about eating the meat of animals — those are religious factors. Even in Japan, not by religious taboo but by social convention there are lots of things that you should never ever eat.

Sekihei

In Japan, it's mostly due to the influence of Buddhism. In the past, if an animal had four legs, it wasn't eaten, right?

Kase

In Chinese cuisine, though, nothing is out of bounds. China's got the longest menu in the whole world. They even eat bird's nests. And one time, I was even treated to chicken's tongues. How many hundreds of those tiny tongues had to be collected...?

Sekihei

That's so sad!

Kase

Filletted bear paws are also famous.

Sekihei

I was born in Szechuan province, a region known for its pig farming. Pork is eaten a lot, and there isn't one part of the pig that's not eaten. From the tip of its nose to the tip of its tail, everything is used in cooking. Even the ears and tongue.

Kase

And they eat cats.

Sekihei

And they eat cats.

Kase

There is no culture so attached to food, is there?

Long ago, there was a kingdom in ancient China called Zhou. It lasted from 1121

BC to 256 BC. The last king, He, was the thirty-seventh of his line.

According to the chronicles, 4,000 people worked in King He's palace. Of them, 2,171 were cooks and brewers. In Japan, we just can't conceive of such a thing.

And there was a country called Chu. In *Records of the Grand Historian*, China's first national history, compiled by Sima Qian of the Former Han, it is recorded that in the latter part of the seventh century BC, there was a King Cheng who was about to disinherit his son, the crown prince.

The prince learned about his plans, though. He assembled an army, surrounded the palace, captured his father, and was getting ready to execute him.

King Cheng made a last request, saying, "There is one last thing I'd like to eat before I die. Bear paw fillets."

The prince refused, and put his father to death.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] That's a famous story.

Kase

Now, three years ago I was invited to lecture in Hong Kong, and at that time I was taken to a famous Chinese restaurant by my hosts. Afterward, I asked if I could speak to the chef.

I'd never eaten bear paw fillets before, and it was the bear's right paw, the one it used to get honey, and they said that's why it was particularly tasty. I asked the chef, "Exactly how long does it take to prepare bear paw fillets?" And he said, "Three days."

That's just what I thought.

King Cheng had to have been thinking that if he had three more days, someone might come help him, or if the chance presented itself, he might be able to escape...

Sekihei

He was trying to buy time, huh?

Kase

You *know* no one in Japan would think that he just had to have *that* before being killed.

• A Madman's Diary and "I beg you to consume me"

Kase

Lu Xun was a giant in the world of recent Chinese literature. He wrote *A Madman's Diary* [*Kuangren Riji*] and *True Story of Ah Q* [*A Q Zhengzuan*]. When Jiang Zemin was the leader of China and he came to Japan, he even went so far as to make it to Sendai.¹ Lu Xun's house was still standing, and he went to see it.

The thing is, Jiang had never read Lu Xun's works, had he? Even though *A Madman's Diary* is a short book.

When Chinese youth decide they want to know their own country's history, they collect thousands and thousands of books and pull all-nighters reading. As they read,

¹ Lu Xun had studied medicine in Sendai in the first decade of the twentieth century, so Jiang's visit was a sort of literary pilgrimage.

beautiful words like *yi* [義, “righteousness”] and *ren* [仁, “complete virtue”] appear in front of them — and gradually the sky in the east brightens. When their eyes grow tired, the word “cannibalism” jumps off the page again and again.

These youths are tormented by fears that they, too, might be eaten. Lu Xun wrote that Chinese history is one of eating up neighboring kingdoms, and eating up fellow human beings.

Lu Xun’s story, “Medicine” [*Yao*] also had as its theme the fear of cannibalism. If we read the things Lu Xun wrote when he was younger, there’s that line, “I consecrate my blood to Xuan Yuan.”

Sekihei

The meaning is “I will give my blood for China.”

Kase

Right. And Xuan Yuan is, of course, the given name of the Yellow Emperor, who is supposed to have been the first ruler of the Han people. According to legend, the Yellow Emperor was born in 4207 BC.

Publication in China seems to have become comparatively liberal since the time of Deng Xiaoping. Kobunsha’s Kappa Books imprint published a translation of a Chinese book that said during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards split into several factions, and from one end of the country to the other they were killing and even eating each other. It was published in Japan in 1993 as *Cannibal’s Banquet* (*Shokujin en’eki*), and was a translation by Kō Bun’yu of a book by Zheng Yi. It was a rather gruesome story, so it didn’t sell too well in Japan.

Some while ago, I used to talk to an old wealthy Chinese man who owned a Chinese restaurant in Akasaka. He had cooperated with Wang Jingmei’s pro-Japanese Nanjing government, so he had had to flee. One time, he sent me a letter. It was skillfully written, but if a Japanese had written it, it would have ended with *keigu* or *sōsō*.² It concluded with *shōsan*.

Sekihei

Shōsan?

Kase

It means “I would beg of you to consume me.”³

Sekihei

[Strong laugh.] I’m sure people spoke like that back in the day.

Kase

When he was young, his family was rich, so he was sent overseas to study at Kyoto Imperial University.

² *Keigu* and *sōsō* are usually simply translated as “sincerely yours,” although they do not actually have any such meaning; they are merely the standardized concluding phrases of a letter. *Keigu* is literally “respect-tool” and *sōsō* is “briefly/hurriedly.”

³ The joke sadly lost in the translation is that the speech used is very polite and humble (think of a self-effacing Victorian shopkeeper addressing a very important aristocratic customer), something that works very well as a humorous point in Japanese but not so well in Chinese or English. The actual Japanese here is “*Dōzo, watakushi o meshiagatte kudasai.*”

Sekihei

Ho-ho! That's the first tier of the Chinese elite.

Kase

There is no one else, any where in the world, that devoted to the matter of eating.

• Food is a religion to the Han people

Sekihei

Mr. Kase, you said that other people had taboos related to food, but that in China there are none.

For the Han people, eating itself is a religion, and food is god. An ancient Chinese proverb says "if the people have food, they become gods." Now, that's not the Christian God, or Allah of the Muslims, or anything like that — the Chinese don't believe in those. The Chinese are not strong in the belief of benefits gained through observing religious precepts, and don't believe in a transcendent God.

As to what they *do* believe in — eating until they are full is one religion. Eating has become central to the culture over the past several thousand years.

Chinese culture has spread out all over in the world, but what comes up everywhere isn't Chinese characters or the *Analects* of Confucius. It's *Chinese food*. And why is that? The common people of China have always been harshly tormented by the political structure on the continent. The Japanese were unending in their adoration of Chinese culture, but for the common people of China there was not a single thing that was outstanding. It was all they could do to stay alive. It was hell.

Yes, Lu Xun wrote of the Chinese history of eating people in his maiden work, *A Madman's Diary*. But the one thing that made the commoners happy, that made them feel fortunate, was that they could say, "today I was able to eat my fill." There was a sense of hopelessness at the base of it.

The success of Deng Xiaoping's reforms was because of that. Unlike the idealism Mao Zedong, Deng placed a strong emphasis on policies that would feed the common people, and he succeeded in governing China.

Kase

Food shows up even in greetings, doesn't it?

Sekihei

There's the greeting, "have you eaten?"⁴

Kase

Not like the Japanese "good morning," "good day," or "good evening"...

Sekihei

In other words, that "have you eaten?" meant an end to the idea of starving peasants. That was a misfortune of China's history.

Kase

⁴ In Chinese, "nǐ chī fàn le ma."

The first time I went to China was in 1979, on invitation by the People's Liberation Army.

General Li Da, deputy chief of staff of PLA held a dinner party to welcome me at the Great Hall of the People, with delicacies from both the mountains and the seas. That was still the time of Hua Guofeng, so everyone — men and women — were wearing “Mao suits.” It was a time when women wore not a smidgen of makeup, and we thought that Communism stressed the importance of simplicity and was unaffected and sincere — but the food was magnificent. Li sat next to me, placing on my plate with long chopsticks one by one each new food that came by. There was so much I couldn't eat it all.

He saw me off at the entrance to the Great Hall of the People, where there was a gigantic luxury car — a Hongqi — that General Li had come in, waiting.

Sekihei

Li Da was a famous soldier. He was an old comrade of Mao's on the Long March.

• A first impression of Communist China was that of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

Kase

The first time I went to Communist China, before Deng Xiaoping's open economy, I thought, “This is a country that has realized Taiping tianquo (a peaceful paradise).” All the people — both the men and the women — were wearing the same humble, dark blue uniforms.

Hong Xiuquan was born in 1814 to a farming family in the Huadu district of the Guangdong province, near the city of Guangdong. He was incredibly gifted from an early age. He took the state civil service examinations four times, but all four times he failed. This was partially due to his being a member of the discriminated Hakka minority, and partially for his poverty leaving him unable to produce a bribe for the Qing officials.

After that, he had a vision. The Christian God appeared to him as Shangdi — China's greatest deity — in a dream. He was given a mission to “save China.” His revelation said, “you are the brother of Jesus Christ.”

At the age of thirty, he created a new Christian sect: the “God worshippers.” Then, at thirty-seven, he gathered poor farmers, laborers, the unemployed, and members of the intelligentsia, and began an armed uprising.

Three years later, in 1850, he occupied Nanjing and changed its name to Tianjing (“Heavenly Capital”). He taught that Heaven was the “Great Heavenly Hall,” and Earth was the “Little Heavenly Hall,” making this Heaven on Earth. All people were equal, and he wanted to make the distinction between rich and poor disappear from the world. A doctrine of equality between men and women slowly spread. Ownership of private property was disallowed. Foot-binding was also forbidden.

At the same time, his military power grew swiftly and amazingly, and the Qing tried to suppress his movement. The forces of his “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” stretched out over fourteen of China's eighteen provinces. The Qing were shaken.

Western Christians, too, admired Hong. Several hundred people, including missionaries, joined him. Still — Jesus doesn't have a little brother.

Sekihei

[Roar of laughter.]

Kase

The army of Zeng Guofan of the Hunan province and the army of Li Hongzhang of the Anhui province fought to suppress Hong. An English general named Gordon joined with them, leading the “Ever Victorious Army” of mixed Caucasians and Chinese.

Sekihei

Right.

Kase

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom forbade the taking of opium, so the British and French supplied the Anhui and Hunan armies with modern military equipment.

Hong was up against a wall in 1864, and committed suicide in Nanjing, which he had renamed Tianjing. That was the end. Since occupying Nanjing, his officers had grown soft indulging in luxuries, and they fell into struggling amongst themselves and lost power. When I first got to China, I thought it was the country of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

Sekihei

What you just pointed out was really spot on. The People’s [Republic of] China and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Nothing changes in China’s history. Hong Xiuquan claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ and took control. But after making a capital in Nanjing, what kind of life did he live?

First, he made a palace, and after moving in, for the next fourteen years until his suicide, he didn’t set foot outside of it. And what did he do inside? First, he got together several hundred handpicked beauties to slake his own lusts.

• **Mao Zedong didn’t read Marx?**

Kase

Saying that, he really does resemble Chairman Mao of the “second Taiping Heavenly Kingdom,” doesn’t he?

Sekihei

He sure does. And all because a Chinese intellectual dropout foully misused Jesus Christ, and tried to take over the country.

Later Mao and his compatriots had the same M.O. — they used Marxism in creating a country. In truth, I doubt whether Mao ever even read Marx.

Hong, locked away in his palace, indulged himself in luxuries every day. There was no reason for him to want to go out. There was a bevy of beautiful women surrounding him, and he was supplied every day with the choicest of delicacies. But where was Jesus Christ ever surrounded by hundreds of beautiful women?

Originally, he was just another typical failed test-taker, and probably in his youth he actually had an understanding of things. Then, one day, he suddenly gets power... and China’s traditional consciousness is reborn.

Kase

Hong Xiuquan is one of the big names in China’s 4,000-year history. He pretend-

ed to be the king of heaven, and the social background and his life were certainly interesting.

Sekihei

Things that are interesting are interesting, yes. But the problem is, for Chinese, when one of those big names one day takes power, the common folk cease to matter to them.

All they care about is their own pleasure, unrelated to spirituality, philosophy or religion. Bluntly put, it's all about their physical pleasures.

That's what I mean by saying Hong Xiuquan and Mao Zedong were the same.

Kase

Hong was supposedly basing his movement on Christianity, but looking at the things he did — it was Confucianism, wasn't it? He himself was the “person of virtue,” and as the person with the monopoly on virtue, everyone had to follow him.

Given that, the slogan the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom put out was “follow Heaven and destroy the barbarians.” What that meant was that the Qing dynasty were foreigners to the Han people of China. They had been the kings in Manchuria, and so were the “barbarians” to be destroyed.

Everyone in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom cut off their queues, which had been mandated for the Han subjects to wear by the Manchu Qing. They wore their hair instead like the Han people during the previous Ming dynasty had, so they were called “the long-haired rebels.”

Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang were both ethnically Han Chinese, but Zeng and Li raised banners proclaiming, “protect the teachings of just cause, the teachings of propriety.” And they put the rebels down.

I suppose you could say Hong Xiuquan's “follow Heaven and destroy the barbarians” was the same as the slogan “crush with the Manchu, restore the Han” that was used in the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, which ended the 280-odd year hegemony of the foreign Manchu Qing.

Sekihei

That story of eating of people in *A Madman's Diary* — a story that just should not be — appears frequently in Chinese history. The Chronicle of Zuo,⁵ there are accounts of people exchanging their children with one another to stave off starvation.

Even though the banner referred to a “teachings of just cause” and “teachings of propriety,” it was a cruel and inhuman ideology. It started with neo-Confucianism, but in that “just cause,” for example, a woman was married off at fifteen, but if she were widowed at eighteen, she wasn't allowed to remarry for the rest of her life. What's more, she wasn't ever allowed to touch another man. They had to forever consign to oblivion the springtime of their lives.

If, by chance, this woman had a son, after the death of her husband she had to rely entirely on her son. For the average commoner, under such a societal structure this “just cause” was inflexible.

Kase

I wanted a mother like that, too.

⁵ The *Zuo Zuan*, also called the *Commentary of Zuo*, is the earliest Chinese narrative history. It covers the period 722–468 BC. It was compiled no later than 389 BC.

Sekihei

[Loud laughter.] Yes, but the guy who seized authority indulged in pleasures, while commoners, on the other hand, were forced to live their lives in abstinence.

Today, by raising the question starting from “food culture,” I think you’ve hit the nail on the head on the true nature of Chinese culture. At one sitting, a Chinese emperor would be presented with several hundred dishes. They were all lined up on one long, endless table...

Kase

In the American film *The Last Emperor*, there was a scene like that. At the palace in Beijing’s Forbidden City, servants carrying food from all over the country arranged the plates in rows, with several hundred servants respectfully laying them out.

The emperor takes only a little with his chopsticks. Using the chopsticks on these foods from all over China is a sort of ceremony of unification.

In Japan, with the enthronement of the emperor, there is a ceremony called the Daijōsai. There is no eating or use of chopsticks, but there *is* rice and vegetables from all over Japan, so I guess you could say it’s the same idea.

• Downtown ramen is preferred to fancy, traditional Japanese dining

Sekihei

When I came to Japan, the first thing that shocked me was the food culture. That’s because I was taken aback by its simplicity. But now, I’m totally captivated by it. It’s luxurious. I’ve had Japanese sake, sashimi, sea bream, uni (sea urchin) — there’s nothing like it. It’s bliss.

Seen from the perspective of a Chinese, though, it’s a terribly “lightweight” cuisine. Some time ago, when I worked at a research center in Kyoto, we had some important visitors come over from China. The center’s top people took them to one of Kyoto’s traditional Japanese restaurants, and treated them to a *kaiSekihei* meal.

From my perspective, there is nothing as beautiful as that luxurious and incredibly aesthetic food. After two or three hours of chatting, though, our Chinese visitors had very unsatisfied looks on their faces. It was like, “what *is* this?”

After dinner, I was asked by the center’s top men to show the visitors to their hotel. On the way, it occurred to me to ask, “how did you find the dinner?” All of them replied, “it was totally no good. We weren’t able to eat our fill.”

So what did I do? I took them to a neighborhood ramen place, and ordered each of them a ¥680 bowl of Chinese noodles. All of them were delighted, tucking into their meals, and they returned to their hotels satisfied.

These people were not Chinese common folk. They were prominent leaders with social standing. In other words, how much for each of them at the restaurant...

Kase

Was is about ¥40,000 or ¥50,000 per person?

Sekihei

Yet rather than that, they were most satisfied with ¥680 bowls of ramen. How about that? Chinese cuisine, in other words, is a *physical* thing — as I see it, it’s a

human survival instinct. Rather than being civilized, basically it's right up there with sex.

Kase

Yes, but Chinese cuisine *is* delicious. In Japan, food and sex are considered “secret things,” but putting that extremely close relationship aside, in front of people, a man should not say, “that is delicious,” or “this tastes bad.” That’s how I was raised by my parents.

Sekihei

Ah, I see. It’s that Japanese samurai reserve, then?

Kase

But there’s more. A big difference between Japan and China is that thing of putting out more than you can possibly eat. In Japan, we only put out as much as we are able to eat.

In China, it is rude to eat all the food that is put out. You have to leave something behind. What that meant was that the next person who comes in has a turn to eat.

Korea was a vassal state of China, so until Japan’s annexation of Korea there was a term, *Sojunghua*, or “Little China,” for Korea. They were very proud of copying China, their overlord state, calling this the “yearning for China ideology,” or “*mohua sasang*.” That’s why in Korean they say “put out so much food the table’s legs break.”

Japan is unique in the world in that our court aristocracy and the samurai ruling class ate simply. Those who ate luxuriously were *not* the ruling classes. There is no other country that was like that.

Sekihei

Really? That’s interesting. I’ve learned quite a bit since coming to Japan. For example, there’s the menu of the *daimyō* in the Edo period. It’s written about in many books. It’s really extremely plain — more so even than the food of the underling bureaucrats of China.

Kase

The last shōgun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, habitually had meals of “one soup, one vegetable.” That meant, in addition to miso soup, he had one vegetable as a side dish. Only two times a week would he have a fish fillet or seconds. The meals of the aristocracy, too, were what we would consider “poor foods.”

• The Japanese who have become “I ate it all up” people

Sekihei

I really think that if we look for the difference between the food cultures of China and Japan, it’s definitely a difference in their spiritual cultures.

Religiously, we offer food to our ancestors. But in the hinterlands of the Szechuan province, the splendor of the food we offered competed with its deliciousness.

What really surprised me, having read about it in a book — and I haven’t actually seen it myself — was, for example, that every day at the Ise Grand Shrine, food is offered to Amaterasu Ōmikami. The idea — it is the aesthetic itself. It’s the purity. Just

rice, and some old, traditional rock salt, some seaweed, and radishes — the idea of offering just *that* to a goddess...

Kase

In Japan, you shouldn't leave any food on the table when you're done. You must eat nicely, leaving nothing. If you do leave anything, you are harshly scolded by your parents. That's why we feel guilty when we eat out at restaurants and have food left over, so we have it wrapped up and take the leftovers home with us.

Sekihei

Ah, so you can't leave behind anything that's been brought out.

I'm also captivated by food. Since coming to Japan, something I remember feeling uncomfortable about in China was that, when you ask "have you eaten," the response that comes back is, "I ate it all up."

In Japan, food is just something you finish up; but for Chinese, the three times a day they eat are the happiest times. When eating out, there is a façade they put on.

And when putting out more than anyone can eat, it would be fair to say that they're trying to show off or make a statement that "no one but me can put out this much food."

But there are many outstanding peoples who have cultures that transcend materialistic desire. Both Christianity and Shintō do. Unfortunately, China doesn't. In other countries, they are grateful for anything, even though they are eating.

In China, conversely, nothing sacred exists outside of food. There is nothing like the purity and simplicity as in Japan's Shintō.

• Shintō is pure water; Daoism is pig's foot soup

Kase

In Chinese culture, there's really no concern for cleanliness, is there?

Sekihei

No, there isn't. In the times of the Wei and Jin kingdoms,⁶ men of letters and noblemen would wear the same article of clothing for half the year, and it became the fashion not to wash it.

Kase

Now, this was about five years ago. I was invited over to the official residence of the American deputy chief of mission, near Roppongi. There were about twenty Americans there, and among them was someone in the travel business — so he knew Disneyland in California and Disneyworld in Florida pretty well.

Before coming to Japan, he went to the Hong Kong Disneyland, and it was filthy. He spoke of how bad it was, and how people would just hock up phlegm, relieve themselves, or just toss just-eaten chicken bones, any old place.

After that, he went to the Japanese Disneyland, and there wasn't a single piece of

⁶ The Wei kingdom (which lasted 220–265) was one of the Chinese kingdoms that rose and fell during the Three Kingdoms period (220–280). The establishment of the Jin state on the bones of the Wei marked the end of that turbulent time. The Jin state would last in one form or another until its fall to the Southern Song dynasty in 420.

garbage *anywhere*. It blew him away, because he couldn't conceive of that even in the American Disney theme parks.

Sekihei

Well, yeah, but, Mr. Kase, Japan really stands out as a rarity as a culture that puts that much importance on cleanliness. I was shocked by my experience at the Ise Grand Shrine. The sanctuary of the Inner Shrine has absolutely no ornamentation. It's just simple, plain *wood*. The wood is just put together to produce that sacred space.

I was shocked by that sensation of purity. Although spirituality and purity are there even in the details in Japanese culture, that is absolutely not the case with China. Even aesthetically, China and Japan are totally different.

Kase

In China, they just pile one thing on top of another, don't they?

Sekihei

That's it exactly. And the food that way, too. In Japan, sashimi *is* what it *is*.

Kase

In Japanese cuisine, we present food stressing the simple taste of the basic ingredients as much as possible. Chinese food, on the other hand, uses all sorts of ingredients, boiling them or frying them or whatever, dumping congealed sauces on them, making flavors nothing like that of the raw materials they started with. That's Chinese cuisine. It's like experiments in metamorphosis. French cuisine is the same way.

The symbol of the Japanese cook is his knife, because it is important for him to cut and prepare the raw materials beautifully. When you tell people from China that the knife is the symbol of the chef, they respond with surprise. In China, they just play a supporting role. Japanese cuisine doesn't use heavy iron pots for anything but making rice.

Sekihei

In Shintō — at Ise Grand Shrine, or just any regular shrine — you stress the importance of purity everywhere, right? When we talk about traditional Chinese religions, we talk about Daoism. Mr. Kase, have you ever been to a Daoist temple?

Kase

I have. It was painted in bright, rich colors all mixed together. To me, as a Japanese, it really solidified that sense of the foreign. For us Japanese, we just don't like those over-emphatic, rich colors. We prefer the natural look of the raw materials, or neutral colors.

Sekihei

That Daoist temple is the messy world of Chinese ramen. You wouldn't even think it's a religion in there. If we were to say that a Shintō shrine is a glass of pure water, the symbol of a Daoist temple would have to be a bowl of pig's-foot soup.

— Chapter Two — The Native Japanese Language Breathed a New Life into *Kanji*

• A new understanding of BC and AD

Kase

The biggest question all over the world — not just in Japan — is, “Where is China headed?”

In 2010, China overtook Japan’s GDP, and had the greatest economic power in the world.

With China seizing the world’s hegemony, American academics, are looking at the old Christian calculation of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini), and are taking “BC” to mean “Before China”...

Sekihei

(Laughs) If that’s so, then “BC” would be “the good old days.”

Kase

So then, the “AD” would be the “After the Day” of China’s seizing the hegemony. So what would it be like? China is a great mystery.

Chinese culture is difficult to understand. And China isn’t just a single country, you know. That’s a major point in understanding China’s culture.

The Chinese Empire began two centuries BC with the Qin and ended in the twentieth century with the overthrow of the Qing. All of those empires were known by the dynastic ruling names, not a country’s name. The Han, the Sui, the Tang, the Song, the Yuan, the Ming, the Qing — all of them were the ruling dynastic names. There wasn’t a *state* name.

Why would that be? It was because the Chinese emperor ruled over the whole world, and they didn’t *need* a country name. There could not have been a country anywhere that was her equal.

Then China lost to Britain in the First Opium War. In 1842, she was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing on board the British warship HMS *Cornwallis*, and for the first time China needed a national name.

Expediently, the dynastic name “Qing” was used to make the name “China.” After that, China had a name.

When we speak of the origins of civilization, it’s the Mesopotamia of the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Indus River Valley, and China.

All those civilizations from Mesopotamia to Egypt, Ancient Greece, and Imperial Rome are now all long gone. Why is it that today only China survives? It’s a mystery.

• *Kanji* is the devil's script

Kase

The things that China has that makes the Chinese — or perhaps that the Han people have that makes the Han people— are Confucianism and *kanji*. I have long maintained that *kanji* is the devil's script.

Sekihei

Ha ha! The devil's script!

Kase

Mr. Sekihei, you may laugh, but Ōkuma Shigenobu, a man who served as foreign minister and prime minister and established Waseda University, was a samurai who came out of the Saga domain. Late in life, he dictated an autobiography that has come down to us. Unlike the autobiography of Fukuzawa Yūkichi, Keiō University's founder, it's not very popular. I suppose that's because Ōkuma went into politics. Anyway, it's an interesting read.

Ōkuma went to Kōdōkan, the Saga domain school. At the age of fifteen, he came to believe “*kanji* is the devil's script,” and he stopped writing *kanji*.

Sekihei

That's incredible. He must've been a genius!

Kase

It really caused a ruckus, so he was kicked out of the school. The lord of the domain, though, recognized that Ōkuma was an eccentric, so he told him to get his ass over to Nagasaki and study English and European learning. Now there's a memorial hall for Ōkuma in Saga City, but there is nothing written by him in *kanji* in it after the age of fifteen.

I think *kanji* is the devil's script, too. When I think of ideographs, though, Mesopotamian cuneiform writing comes to mind. Ancient Egypt used hieroglyphs, looking like little pictures, that show up in pyramids and ruins. China used *kanji*.

In civilizations that used unintelligible ideographs like cuneiform, hieroglyphics, and *kanji*, only the ruling classes could read and write. They had a monopoly on literacy, and a despotic rule over the ignorant common folk.

Of all those, only *kanji* has survived.

On the other hand, literacy spread easily and the literacy rate was high in civilizations using phonograms like alphabets and the Japanese *kana* syllabary. They developed soundly.

What I want to know, though, is why we call it *kanji*. In Chinese, it's *hànzì* — “Han characters.” When those *hànzì* were unified, it was during the reign of the first emperor of the Qin, Shi Huangdi.

The Qin only ruled for fifteen years, though, from 221 to 206 BC. The Han dynasty came after them. But combining the Western Han and the Eastern Han, their empire lasted over 400 years, so *that's* probably why we call them “Han characters.”

Sekihei

The Western Han were called “Western” because their capital, Chang'an, was in the west, and the Eastern Han was “Eastern” because their capital, Luoyang, was in

the east.

• It shouldn't be "*hànzì*" — it should be "*qínzì*"

Kase

My thing is, they shouldn't be called "*hànzì*." They should be called "*qínzì*."

Sekihei

Ha ha! Because they were characters created in the Qin dynasty, right?

Kase

When we say "*Shina*" in Japanese, we get a lot of criticism from many people in China. In English, though, it's "China"; in French it's "Chine"; in German, "China"; in Italian, "Cina." In English, the country is "The People's Republic of China."

"China" originally came from India, where it was a Sanskrit reference to "Qin."

Sekihei

That's right. "*Shina*."

Kase

But they get upset when Japanese say "*Shina*."

Anyway, putting that aside... In China, the Chinese language is called "*Hàn'yǔ*" — "Han speech." So why isn't it "*qínzì*" ["Qin characters"] for the writing, "*Qín rén*" ["Qin person"] for the people, and "*Qín'yǔ*" ["Qin speech"] for the language? It's because the Chinese are a bit megalomaniacal, and like larger things. It's because the Qin didn't make it past fifteen years.

Sekihei

They weren't cool enough. [Laughs.]

Kase

That's why they took the Han, who lasted more than 400 years, and so now we have "Han characters" and "Han people" and so on.

Sekihei

While listening to what you've just said, it occurs to me that I have to mention my admiration on how well you know Chinese history. You're not even looking at note cards or anything. If it were me, I couldn't come up with when the Qin dynasty began, or when it fell that quickly. You remember everything.

I heard from someone that you memorized everything in the books you read from the age of fifteen to twenty-five.

Kase

No, no. It's just that China is a neighboring country....

They say "the soul of a child of three is the same as his soul at 100." Even today, the Chinese all maintain that the distant ancestor of all the Han people is the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor, in heaven, is revered as the greatest god.

There are a lot of words for good things that have that same "yellow" character. They include Huang He, the Yellow River, China's second longest; Huang Long, the Yellow Dragon, who appeared as a harbinger of good fortune before the Yellow Emperor; the *huáng páo*, or yellow robe, the outer garment of the Yellow Emperor; the

huáng yuè, the golden axe carried by the emperor when he goes out to chastise or subjugate; and the *huáng wū*, or “yellow roof,” the umbrella over the emperor’s carriage.

The Chinese consider “yellow people” to be better than anyone else in the world, surpassing white people. We Japanese feel discomfort when we are called “yellow.”

Sekihei

That’s because the relationship with Western culture is long, and deeper than China’s.

Kase

I’ve said that *kanji* is the devil’s script — but with the mingling-in of *kana*, Japan was able to dilute the *kanji*’s poison and splendidly neutralize it.

In Japan, when the streets are packed and cars can only move slowly, we say the condition is “*jūtai*,”⁷ and that’s a great expression. Without *kanji*, we would not be able to describe this condition in a single word and with only two characters.

This is also a term in classical Chinese literature. In Bai Juyi’s “Song of Everlasting Sorrow,”⁸ when Emperor Xuanzong, driven from the capital of Chang’an, accompanied by Yang Guifei, reaches Sichuan, there’s a part where his long baggage train, laden with treasure, got delayed. That was the An Lushan Rebellion. Xuanzong was an emperor who expanded the flourishing Tang empire.

Do they say “*jūtai*” in China when the streets are full of cars?

Sekihei

No. They say “*dūse*.”⁹

• *Rubi* are teachers standing off to the side

Kase

To be sure, *kanji* have enriched the Japanese language and have been of great use.

Still, *kanji* in China, where they originated, are pictographs or ideographs, so they are utilitarian, rich, and persistent. Since Japanese itself is simple, after *kanji* entered the Japanese language, they came to be used as virtual phonograms and became distanced from their origins.

Still, when I think of *kanji*, I can’t help but get a whiff of fatty Chinese food. [Laughs.] That the menus in Chinese restaurants are smothered in *kanji* is totally suited, but it’s still cloying. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Ha ha, I see! *Everything* about Chinese culture — including the writing system — has the aroma of Chinese food.

⁷ The normal translation would be “congestion,” as English would say in “traffic congestion.” The word *jūtai* is written 渋滞, and made up of the characters 渋, the root of the verb *shiburu* (to hesitate), and 滞, the root of the verb *todokōru* (to be delayed).

⁸ *Cháng hèn gē* (長恨歌), written in 806, tells the story of the beauty Yang Guifei, and the Tang emperor who loved and lost her.

⁹ 堵塞, conventionally meaning “blocked up.”

Kase

It comes down to *rubi*.¹⁰ Japan is the only country to have the resourcefulness to use small letters — called *rubi* — to provide the pronunciation. No other country has them. They're sure useful. My teacher in middle school told us, "think of them as teachers standing off to the side."

Although *kanji* were originally ideographs, thanks to *rubi*, they have grown all the more closer to being purely ideographical.

The *kanji* to the Japanese and the *kanji* to the Chinese are totally different things.

Sekihei

That's true. Ultimately, in China, *kanji* is more than just a means of communication. From the start it was a means of giving orders.

Orders go downward. Why did Qin Shi Huangdi unify the writing system? Well, he wasn't planning on communication between people, between common folk.

What I mean is, he unified the writing system so that he could communicate his orders throughout the entire country by means of the written word. Thus, since Chinese characters were originally imperatives, there are piles of dense *kanji* with high stroke-counts.

There was little consideration for the aesthetic sensibilities of the people viewing them. They were formed for administrative paperwork. That's where they came from, so from the beginning there was no thought given to using *kanji* reciprocally, or any planning for actual communication.

Shapes for administration and commands — how overbearing! "This is an order! You lot, listen up!" That's where it started.

• Kana that are like a clear brook

Sekihei

On the subject of *kanji* — for example, in Osaka, there's the Takarazuka Kabuki-dan. Their school motto is, "purely, properly, beautifully" [清く、正しく、美しく]. In that motto, both *kanji* and *kana* are used. It's quite lovely. Its appearance — its visual image — is incredibly beautiful.

But, you know, what if all the *kana* were taken away? You'd just have the three *kanji* lined up there: PURE PROPER BEAUTIFUL [清正美]. It would look like the name of a brand of sake. [Laughs.]

The image — the impression — that people get is totally different. From the beginning, *kanji* were used in the form of orders. They were China's governmental letters.

That's why, when writing texts in Chinese, you can't express things really movingly as with Japanese *waka* poetry. This in particular is one of the strong points of the Japanese language. Chinese is an extremely political language!

Kase

Japanese, when they want to deeply touch the heart of the person they are com-

¹⁰ Small *kana* appearing along the side *kanji* (when written vertically) or above them (when written horizontally) are used to provide the reading when it might possibly be questionable or difficult. These are called *furigana*, but they are also widely called "*rubi*" — a term taken from an old English typesetters' term for a very small typeface ("ruby").

municating with, will not say the Sino–Japanese word “*kokka*” when referring to someone’s homeland. They will instead say the native Japanese word, “*kuni*.” Likewise, the word “*seimei*” — “life” — doesn’t move anyone.

Sekihei

So instead it’s “*inochi*” for “life.” I see. I get it!

Kase

Likewise, using the Sino–Japanese “*betsuri*” for “parting” and “*dōkei*” for “longing” are no good. We prefer the native Japanese “*wakare*” and “*akogare*.” I could give you any number of examples like those. If you want to try to court a Japanese woman, you have to use “*Yamato kotoba*” — native Japanese words. You’ll never succeed with *kanji* words. [Laughs.] Even though it’s been nearly 2,000 years since *kanji* came to Japan, they’re still not close to our hearts.

Sekihei

What that means is that, ultimately, *Yamato kotoba* have breathed a new vitality into *kanji*, right?

Kase

It’s that “purely, properly, beautifully.” Those are *Yamato kotoba* in that motto.

Sekihei

That word “purely” — *kiyoku*. It leaves you with a good feeling, doesn’t it?

On the other hand, Chinese *kanji*, upon entering Japan, became empty shells. With the Japanese *kana*, though, they are able to function.

Yamato kotoba breathed a different vitality into them. With the *kanji* for “life” now being read — in Japanese — as “*inochi*,” that pleasant echo and nuance brings a new life to it. *That* is Japanese beauty, and a superb part of it.

It’s like our previous discussion about food, with the contrast between the sticky Chinese cuisine and the simple, visually beautiful Japanese cuisine.

Kase

Kana are like a pure brook, here and there striking hard rocks called *kanji* and sending up a beautiful spray.

It is in *Yamato kotoba* that the perpetual life of the Japanese is secured.

• Japan rejected eunuchs and foot-binding

Kase

You’ve said that the original Chinese *kanji* were oppressive, and a harsh disposition lives in them. Throughout Chinese history there were eunuchs and there was foot-binding. Eunuchs were a custom from people who raised horses and cattle and so on. They castrated horses, cattle, and sheep.

Confucius said, “you received every inch of your body from your parents,” so you shouldn’t even harm a single hair on your head in the slightest. Despite that, there were eunuchs, and women were made to bind their feet. Confucianism went astray.

In Europe, boys were castrated so they could sing in church choirs, but in 1878 Pope Leo XIII prohibited the admission of new castrati into choirs. The repulsive cus-

tom died out after that.

Since there were castrati until fairly recently in Europe, the love of Christianity, too, must have been a thing of outward appearance. The West, too, was a truculent civilization.

Sekihei

Wow. That's a surprise. So there were eunuchs in Christendom, too?

Kase

They raised stock animals in Europe, too, so, yes.

Sekihei

Well, well. That's where... that's where I see Japan's uniqueness. The eunuch system was introduced even in Korea, during the Joseon dynasty. Only Japan obstinately rejected it.

Kase

Until the Japanese annexation of Korea, eunuchs were the power in the Joseon court.

Sekihei

Now, I know the basics about this, but they were also in the West?

This is the first I've heard of them in Christendom. When I think about the reasons for it, rulers in both China and the West were considerably removed from the people from ancient times and had an absolute existence oppressing the people.

In the case of the West, there was a single absolute God, and all the people had to worship Him. In the case of China — it was the emperor. So all the people had to worship the emperor.

Kase

Because he was the Son of Heaven.

Sekihei

The Son of Heaven, yes! I suppose it's only natural to be willing — for the Son of Heaven — to cut off what matters to a man. But only in Japan is there no such culture. The goddess is enshrined in Ise Grand Shrine. Amaterasu Ōmikami is worshipped.

But Amaterasu Ōmikami has never ever made such a demand of people. She doesn't oppress people. She doesn't require people to be sacrificed, either.

For example, when going to worship Amaterasu Ōmikami at Ise Shrine, all you need to bring is rice, salt, seaweed, and maybe some sake. Civilizations having the taking of a human life and offering it up as a sacrifice to the gods or to the emperor — those are Chinese or Western civilizations. That is *totally* different from the Japanese culture.

Kase

It's the food and alcohol offerings to the gods. For Japanese gods, if you offer meat — even if it's fresh — it's a pollutant and would surely be disliked. Fish are okay, though.

Sekihei

Right! And that, right there, is the aesthetic of Japan. The rice that is offered to Amaterasu Ōmikami is cultivated on exclusive shrine lands for that purpose.

Kase

Most shrines in Japan have their own lands set aside for their own rice cultivation, but lately they've grown fewer and smaller. It's too bad.

Sekihei

How the concept is different in China is that, in China's case, of course there's ancestor worship. And what do you offer on religious festivals when you honor your ancestors? Pig's heads. Whole chickens. Things that smell of blood. It is not a world where there is a sense of purity transcending the mundane. It has the atmosphere of our departed ancestors and their living descendants both just tucking in and digging at greasy foods together, in the same way.

• Viagra and “mistresses” at the graves of one's ancestors

Sekihei

Recently in the Chinese news I read a strange story about tomb-sweeping day.¹¹ It's April fifth.

Kase

On April fifth in 1976, 100,000 came to mourn Zhou Enlai, who died in January that year. They assembled in Tiananmen Square, and there was a riot.

Tomb-sweeping day has taken place in China for several thousand years, but under Mao Zedong it was forbidden.

Then, around that time, it became openly done and the tradition was reborn.

Sekihei

That's right. In other words, worshipping a person who had passed away. It corresponds to the O-Bon festival in Japan. On tomb-sweeping day, everyone goes to visit the tombs of their ancestors taking offerings to them.

The problem is, giving offerings is fine — but what did we give the ancestors this year on tomb-sweeping day? Everyone would be surprised. It was really something else.

Alcohol or pork, that would be fine. Of course, money was the first thing, but just Chinese *renminbi* wouldn't do. Of course, again, it was play-money, fake bills made for that purpose. Also, fake dollars and Japanese yen.

Everyone has a cell phone now, so now we are offering up model cell phones to our ancestors.

Kase

What? But your ancestors wouldn't know how to use a cell phone, would they? [Laughs.]

¹¹ The holiday where Chinese visit and pray at the graves of their ancestors has many names in English translation: tomb-sweeping day, ancestors' day, clear bright day, and even the *qingming* festival. In Chinese, it is *qīng míng jié* (清明節) and is usually held around April 5.

Sekihei

[Explosive laughter.] Ha, no, but if that were all it would be okay. *Viagra*. That is, medicines that men could take to get energy for sex. That's what we're seeing offered at graves!

Kase

Chinese are very progressive, aren't they? Men like their sexual enhancement drugs...

Sekihei

They like 'em.

That is, people who are *alive* like them — but to offer them to your ancestors!... And what's more, that merchants are selling different kinds of them...? I guess Chinese are just good at business.

And what is really booming? In addition to sexual aid medicines being offered to our ancestors, there are dolls made in the likeness of women, with the word “mistress” written on them, that you can offer up. [Laughs.] And, no, I'm not kidding, either.

That kind of news came out on the Chinese internet. Although they're both called ancestor worship, the Japanese reverence for their ancestors is totally different. No matter how odd he may have looked, no Japanese would offer an ancestor *Viagra* or an inflatable love doll. [Laughs.]

In Asia, regardless of whether it's Confucian or Buddhist, there is a tradition of holding events to give thanks to your ancestors. Closing your eyes and joining your hands in prayer toward your ancestors — that's where our ethics that correctly govern our bodies is born. Originally, ancestor worship was a moral and ethical act.

Kase

In Japan, the foods that have been offered to the gods are afterward taken down and everyone eats them. We call it “*naorai*” — a “ceremonial feast.” I presume it's the same in China...?

Sekihei

Yes, they're eaten by everyone.

Kase

Well, I suppose that means you can use the love doll yourself, then, too? [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Hey, that's it! They're showing their own wants! Their own shocking desires.

Kase

Taking *Viagra*, and then there are those cell phones — if they were the real McCoy, they'd be useful.

Sekihei

Oh, they're useful.

• “Wedding certificates” for a Korean star at mother’s grave

Sekihei

In China, originally, ancestor worship was the only “religion.” There really was no religion.

It’s the same in the Confucian world. Through reverence of your ancestors, you can correct your conduct. The idea is sort of, you can make apologies to your ancestors if you have done something bad. With that as the lever, you can live your life on an ethical norm.

Now, however, we’ve become a world where we’ll offer up Viagra to our ancestors. Conversely, it doesn’t matter however bad a thing we may have done — now that we’ve bribed our ancestors, we don’t have to worry about being scolded.

The theory is, our ancestors have done the same bad things we did, so no matter what bad things *we* do, it doesn’t matter. I think today’s Chinese society is already near its end.

Kase

Well, you can say it’s near the end, but really, haven’t they been doing exactly the same thing all along since the beginning?

Sekihei

Oh, brilliant!

But getting back to tomb-sweeping day.... It seems there are also people who take photos of a famous Korean actor, or make a certificate for their wedding to a Korean star, and offer them at the graves of their late mothers. They are offering up *wedding certificates*. [Laughs.] What a brilliant idea!

Kase

Yes, but that’s a *fake* wedding certificate, right?

Sekihei

Of course it’s a fake. There’s no way a famous Korean star would marry an old Chinese woman. Especially a *dead* old Chinese woman. But the idea — it’s interesting, isn’t it?

Anyway, what I see as the problem is this: having taken ancestor worship to that point, it has totally lost its ethical and moral meaning. In fact, I’m worried that, to the contrary, we might actually be encouraging *bad* things.

With our ancestors happily gulping down Viagra and taking lovers into their arms, it doesn’t matter what *we* do. That’s the logic of an accomplice....

• The hidden aim behind “simplified characters”

Sekihei

You know, I really think Korea’s having done away with *kanji* was a mistake. I think it would have been better if, like Japan, they mixed *hangul* — like *kana* — with the *kanji*.

Kase

They've completely stopped using *kanji* in newspapers and magazines in Korea.

That word for constriction in traffic — *jūtai* — well, Japan was ahead in motorization and coined the “*kanji*-word” *jūtai*. Koreans then borrowed it, but in Korean it's pronounced *jeong-che*. The character we pronounce as *jū* is in Korean *jeong*, and the *tai* is *che*. But if you ask a Korean what the original *kanji* for *jeong-che* is, most of them would get a funny look and say, “I don't know.”

Sekihei

That's true, *kanji* do have a convenient aspect.

Kase

In the People's Republic of China, though, they use a simplified form of *kanji* that they call *fāntīzì*. It's completely different from the original *kanji*. For example, take the word *Chūka*, meaning China. That “*ka*” is written like this — 華 — but the simplified form has it written with “change” over “ten,” this way: 华. So that means “change ten times,” I guess. [Laughs.] Even the “*kan*” in “*kanji*” is changed, from this — 漢 — to this: 汉.

I've been invited to China by the People's Liberation Army and gone seven or eight times, and have been shown around all over the country.

One time, at a banquet in Beijing, I met an old Communist Party boss who was fluent in Japanese. Thinking to broach a harmless subject, I said, “both Japan and China have created many simplified forms for *kanji*, but in the interests of mutual understanding between our two countries, wouldn't it be better to talk it over and do it in a unified manner instead of just making them all separately?” “Oh no,” he said, “we made the simplified forms so that people wouldn't be able to read the dangerous materials written before the people's liberation.” That is, before the communist revolution.

Sekihei

Mr. Kase, you are *amazing*. You've brought out the true face of the Communist Party government. That right there is a key point of the ideological training of the Chinese Communist Party.

Kase

Why is it that although Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Rome have all fallen, China still remains?

In ancient times, China gave birth to printing, gunpowder, magnets, compasses, paper money, and the blast furnace. It's said that paper was discovered by Cai Lun of the Eastern Han in the second century. Paper entered Europe in the twelfth century. Until then, Europeans used vellum or parchment.

When Europe entered the Age of Discovery, Vasco da Gama and Magellan rounded Africa's Cape of Good Hope and reached Asia. But in the fifteenth century, Zheng He, a Ming eunuch, was admiral of a large fleet that voyaged seven times to Africa and back, and he made a map showing the more than thirty countries they visited.

The displacement of the ships of Christopher Columbus on his expedition to America was at best 200 tons, but ships in Zheng He's fleet were 7,000 or 8,000 tons.

Despite that, as we neared the modern age, the impact of the Chinese civilization on the world was zero. Why was that? It was because of the Chinese civil service ex-

ams. People were so totally caught up in preparing for the harsh civil service examinations that took place throughout China, that their ability to think with originality was stolen from them.

Sekihei

That's it exactly. I believe that, also.

• It was “pressure scrolls” and “calamitous officials” that hindered China’s growth

Kase

“*Yājuàn*” [压卷] — literally “pressure scroll” — is a word that comes from the examination paper of the person receiving the highest grade in the civil service exams being placed at the very top of the mountain of other examination papers, and forcing them down.

The examinations to promote men of genius continued for 1,300 years — from the time of Emperor Wen, the founder of the Sui dynasty, to just before the fall of the Qing.

From the end of the sixth century to the twentieth, the whole country was caught up in an examination hell, and no Pasteur, Edison, Einstein, Renoir, or Cezanne emerged from China.

Sekihei

They may have been Confucius’ ideals, but it was Japan’s samurai who made it real.

Kase

Japan revered purity, and was gentle, so eunuchs and foot-binding never made their way in.

Now, during the Nara period, when Japan was copying the Tang legal system, for a time we tried conducting civil service examinations. Fortunately for Japan, it was quickly done away with.

Speaking of purity: in China there were practically no officials who were clean and took no bribes. It’s probably no different now.

From long ago, there was a saying in China: “*shēng guān fā cái*” — “be promoted and gain wealth.”

There are some words in Chinese that have no parallels in Japanese. “*Qīngguān*” [清官], literally “clean official,” is one of them. “*Guānhuò*” [官禍], meaning “calamitous official,” is another. When they entered Korean, they became “*cheongri*” [清吏] and “*gwanjae*” [官災], and they are still used there.

Even today in Korea there are shamans called *mudang* who can be found at *jeomjip*, which are fortune-telling houses. They are all over the place, even in Seoul. They sell *jip* — paper amulets to ward off misfortune. There are many varieties of them. There are amulets for protection against fires, protection against floods, amulets to keep your husband from having an affair....

One of these was an amulet for protection against *gwanjae* — disastrous government officials. I bought one in Seoul and brought it home.

Throughout history, in Japan, officials have been clean and didn't behave improperly. That's why the Japanese language lacks such words as "clean official" and "calamitous official."

To avoid offending the officials, Koreans used to carry their "protection against calamitous officials" amulets in the sleeves of their jackets. Now they just carry them around in their wallets.

Although Japan has imported many words from China, it didn't seem that there would be any need for "clean official" and "calamitous official," so those words weren't borrowed.

— Chapter Three —
**Sentiment-Sharing Japanese Poetry and
Narcissistic Chinese Poetry**

• **Chinese poetry — nothing but personal experiences**

Sekihei

Why wasn't Japan corrupted by Chinese culture the way Korea was?

Kase

While Korea was on an extension of the continent, Japan was defended by the sea. It might also be because from around the Jōmon period,¹² Japanese had done nothing but work hard at farming, and they were a gentle people.

For example, if we look at Chinese poetry, it's all about personal experiences, whereas *waka* and the later *haiku* are all communal experiences. Western poetry is just like Chinese poetry.

Japan's culture has always been one of harmony, unlike China's, which is individualistic — a culture of the self. I suppose that's why we didn't grow used to a style of expression like the Chinese have.

Let's consider a poem by Li Bai, a major Tang-dynasty poet I've always admired. With the dawn of the Tang period, he was acclaimed as the greatest poet of the six dynasties. His "Drinking Alone Under the Moon" goes:

Amongst the flowers is a pot of wine.
I pour alone, with no friend at hand,
So I lift the cup to invite the shining moon;
Along with my shadow, a fellowship of three.

Elsewhere, in a poem called "Bringing in the Wine," Li Bai wrote, "I only wish I could be forever drunk and never sober up." Man, that's lonely.

Li Bai, is popularly called one of the "boozing poets."

He poured his wine all alone, and speaking of human pride, sighed at the brightly shining moonlight. Ultimately, these are Li Bai's personal experiences.

Sekihei

That's true. The things expressed in Chinese poetry are ultimately all personal.

¹² The Jōmon period (c. 14,000–300 BC) was an early society named from their predominant remaining artifact — pottery. "Jōmon" means "rope pattern" and comes from the designs commonly used on their work. It is widely believed that the Jōmon people created the world's earliest known pottery (dated to the fourteenth millennium BC) and some of the earliest known ground-stone tools.

• *Waka* and *haiku* — loving communal experiences

Kase

In a poem of Kakinomoto no Hitomaro in the *Man'yōshū*, the moon also makes an appearance, but Hitomaro says, “On the eastern plain is seen a flickering of glowing dawn; looking back, I see the moon setting in the west.” Then there is Bashō’s famous *haiku*, “An old pond — a frog jumping in. The sound of water.” These are straightforward, and anyone who saw those things — you, me, anyone — could have written them. Everyone can share these common impressions. And it’s because Hitomaro, Bashō, us — we’re all Japanese.

Western poetry is also about strong personal experiences. That’s why I don’t like it. Unlike the Chinese, living in a culture all about the self, Japan has been a culture of harmony since the beginning. That’s why the Chinese style of expression didn’t fit in well with us.

Sekihei

I guess so. That *haiku* of Bashō’s about the frog — I suppose anyone who heard the frog could have written it. It’s clearly not a personal piece.

Kase

Japan is not a culture of the individual with that “I, me, my” fixation.

Sekihei

I see. Japan takes communal experiences to be good things. Japan admires them.

Although China is also a part of the Pacific culture, given China’s individualism, I suppose ultimately we should say they’re closer to Americans or Westerners than Asians.

There was also that absolute power of a single emperor. It’s easy to understand the issue if we compare the Chinese emperor to the Japanese emperor. The Chinese emperor was all about himself.

Kase

That’s true.

Sekihei

“This country is all mine, and I am everything to the country. The country, the whole realm, it’s all mine.”

That’s the polar opposite of the emperor of Japan, right? For the Japanese emperor, the realm is not a personal possession; it’s a place to pray for the good fortune of all men.

Kase

That’s right. The national characters are very different.

Sekihei

A minute ago you mentioned that Chinese poetry is all personal experience. In the

Japanese language, there's this common usage. There's "XYZ was believed,"¹³ there's "XYZ was thought," and so on — but we have to wonder: who is believing it? Who is thinking it? But it's not that. *Everyone* is thinking it.

In Chinese, though, there's no such thing. There is absolutely no usage of any such expression as "XYZ was believed." In Chinese, one absolutely has to say "I believed."

Kase

You can say the same about every language in Europe.

English is full of *I*'s. When writing in English, only "I" is written in capital letters; all the other pronouns — you, he, she, they — are all written with lower-case letters. It's like you're swaggering, so when you write "I," you have to make yourself small. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

That's right, English *is* the same way. In Japanese, you can go several pages on standard composition paper without a single "*watakushi*" [I] showing up. That's because everyone is thinking of communal experiences. But you can't do that in Chinese. You just can't help but say "*I* believed XYZ."

A friend of mine who came over to Japan as student from China just can't break the habit, no matter how much he studies Japanese. He'll never break it. Whenever he talks in Japanese, he always starts with "*I...*".

Kase

When you write essays or letters in Japanese, you try to suppress egoism as much as you can, and you try as much as possible to avoid writing the word "I." Starting things with "I," "I," "I" just comes across as vulgar.

Sekihei

Right, right. You don't write "I." But in China, it's impossible *not* to. That friend of mine — his whole life, he's never been able to overcome that habit. When he starts, it's always "I think" or "I believe."

• The Chinese who don't get drunk and the Japanese who act as if they are

Kase

When I'm out with Chinese people, many are Communist Party officials and military officers. The way Chinese and Westerners drink alcohol is exactly the same.

Sekihei

Oh? How's that?

Kase

¹³ This is a hard concept to translate exactly. In Japanese, the subject is often unexpressed. This is only very rarely possible to do in English, but when done it is similar to the extremely informal written expressions where one may write "Glad to hear you're okay" — where the unspoken subject (the person who is glad) is "I." In poetry and literature, this "missing subject" can create considerable leeway in interpretation and emotive response.

Japanese, like Koreans, prefer to act as if they're a little drunk even when they're not. That way, everyone can enjoy themselves. In Japan, sake is said to be a sacred drink, and sake drunk behind the rope curtain [at the bar's door] can also be said to be so. In getting drunk together, we can lose ourselves, and all of us thereby becoming one is a divine act.

Sekihei

I see.

Kase

Chinese and Westerners, even when they're totally wasted, will pretend they *aren't*.

Sekihei

That's right! Yes!

Kase

When we're drunk, even if we lose control and cause a big ruckus, the next morning we say, "Last night was really fun. Let's do it again soon."

Sekihei

I see.

Kase

But for those guys who drink however much and still don't get drunk, we feel awkward around them and say, "That guy — he's really no good at hanging out."

Alcohol is the same for Japanese and Koreans. That's why when we drink, we get along fine. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Koreans are the same way?

Kase

But for Chinese and Westerners, when they get drunk and lose themselves, they get really embarrassed.

Sekihei

I get it. I suppose I should drink a lot, too... You're right, though, drinking in Japan is enjoyable. Sitting at the table drinking, you're allowed to get drunk, as long as you don't make a really big slip. It really helps you fit in with your friends.

When you're drunk, it becomes a kind of communication, and a mutual sense of understanding increases.

You've said that China is a politico-centric society. Great people with a lot of power can't be drunk no matter how much they've had. This is because of an obsession for preserving their sense of dignity.

It's a compulsion. They have to emphasize themselves, and they have to do it all the time. I mean, the Chinese have a deep sense of dread about losing themselves.

• People of like minds: Chinese and American disputes

Kase

Westerners are exactly the same. Spain, Italy, and countries in the Mediterranean region are more tolerant, though.

Sekihei

Westerners *are* like that. They really haven't got a great sense of self. If they did, they could get completely wasted and totally let themselves go tonight with no concerns about ruining themselves.

What that means is that Chinese and Americans are actually alone. And in that isolation they have to invent themselves as strong.

It's really sad that there's just not going to be any satisfactory outcome for the recent strategic Sino–American talks and whatnot, no matter how much dialogue takes place.

The Chinese government is also the same way. If you look at disputes between the Americans and Chinese, they're the disputes of people of like minds. The feeling you get is that they're both thinking, "I'm number one!" Then again, that's China's very basis, after all.

Kase

Both Chinese and Americans are trying to put themselves out there as people to deal with. And they're both always right.

It is only natural that they become garrulous and egoistic. So, for example, if they want ten of something, they'll ask for twelve, thirteen, fourteen, or even fifteen of them.

Japanese people don't do that. Even if there's something we want, rather than going on about it or making a strong request, we try to get our counterparts to sympathize with our needs.

If we want ten, we get them to sympathize with a need for just seven or eight — and then, in our hearts, we hope that our counterpart will increase it another two or three. This is because ours is a mutually sympathetic society.

Sekihei

Japan, which did not bring over civil service examinations, eunuchs, and foot-binding, is really quite good when compared to the Korean neighbors.

To pick up on the one good thing from continental China that fits with Japanese standards, consider this: Confucius' ideals were realized by the samurai of Japan. The Japanese seriously put into practice those things Confucius was talking about, so *bushidō* — the samurai code — was born.

It was a fascinating phenomenon.

• The envoys to the Tang who didn't bring back sheep or pigs

Kase

The *kanji* used to write the word "beautiful" — *utsukushii* [美] — is a combination of the *kanji* for big [大] and for sheep [羊] — because they considered big sheep

beautiful. Strangely, however, the Japanese envoys to the Sui and the Tang didn't bring any sheep back to Japan. They didn't bring any pigs back on the boat, either.

Sekihei

Ha! That's good!

Kase

There weren't any pigs in Japan — but we *do* have wild boars. That's why in the original Chinese and Korean twelve-animal zodiac cycle, there is a “year of the pig” — but in Japan it became the “year of the boar.”

Sekihei

Hey, that's right. Japan's “boar” is a “pig” in China.

Kase

Children born in the year of the pig in China and Korea are said to be destined for wealth.

Sekihei

That's true, it's the symbol of prosperity. They still say so today.

Kase

The sexagesimal system was originally created in Babylonia, and made its way to China. And in that vein, in Viet Nam, there are no rabbits, so the “year of the rabbit” is the “year of the *cat*.”

Even now in China and Korea, when a “year of the pig” comes around, people say you should hurry up and have a child.

Sekihei

Right — so they won't have to worry about money.

Kase

And “beautiful” is beautiful because *big sheep* are *beautiful*. But in Japan, the idea of “beautiful” isn't connected to the salivary glands. When you see Japanese food — yeah, it's beautiful, but...

In the case of Japanese food, everything about it — flavor, color, and shape — is its aesthetic object. For the Chinese people, all it has to be is tasty.

Sekihei

I see. So when Japanese go along with China, the rejection of the bad parts is a particular Japanese aesthetic? And the rejection of the tradition of bribery is also the Japanese aesthetic....

Japan has been introducing various Chinese things since before Shōtoku Taishi,¹⁴ but Japan hasn't been stained by China. What is the secret that preserved this civilization from things from China?

Kase

¹⁴ Prince Shōtoku (574–622) was an imperial regent who introduced many critical reforms to Japanese society and government. He was one of the most pivotal people in Japanese history.

Of the countries around China, the only one that didn't fall under the "new Chinese order" and bring tribute to China was Japan.

Sekihei

That's right, that's absolutely right!

• The dragon's talons are one toe short

Kase

About thirty years ago, when I went to South Korea, there was a friend of mine who was a government official — a cabinet minister — who had been a middle-school student during the Japanese rule of Korea and so was fluent in Japanese.

While the two of us were rearranging our drinks and speaking freely, he suddenly scolded me with a loud voice. "What are you saying? You who come from a country where the dragons are short a toe?"

Sekihei

What on earth does *that* mean?

Kase

Well, I was dumbfounded — I didn't understand what he meant. I found out later, though. The Chinese dragon has five-toed talons. Korean dragons have four, and Japanese ones have three. All the statuary and pictures of them in Korea show four toes.

Sekihei

Ah, I get it. [Laughs.]

Kase

When you go to the palace in Beijing's Forbidden City, there are a lot of carvings of different dragons at the big staircase, and all of them have five-toed talons.

Korean and Vietnamese dragons have four toes. Because Japan was at the bottom on China's old classification of "vassal states," China only allowed Japan to have dragons with just three toes.

I saw the dragons on the flags flying on the right-wingers' propaganda trucks running around by the National Diet. They have only three toes.

Sekihei

[Loud laughter.] That's lower than Korea!

Kase

I saw the name of the group, so I called them. I'm a conservative, too, so their chairman got on the phone, and he politely asked what I might be calling about. I said: "Today, I saw your organization's flags and noticed that the dragons only have three toes." Then I explained. He said, "Wha....?"

Sekihei

[Laughs, unable to stop.] A nationalist really should study up more on that sort of thing.

Kase

During the Edo period, Dutch and Chinese trading ships landed at Nagasaki. Since it had been decided that Japanese dragons got three toes, when Chinese ships brought anything with images or carvings of dragons to Japan, all the dragons in the cargo were made with three toes.

Japanese artists, when depicting dragons, generally did three toes. The *Portrait of St. Nichiren* by Hasegawa Tōhaku, a representative artist of the Momoyama period,¹⁵ is famed as a masterpiece. And sure enough, the dragons he painted on it have three toes. Dragons by Katsushika Hokusai are three-toed, too.

Sekihei

That's what I thought it was going to be about when you started. [Laughs.] So Koreans were boasting about having had an extra toe for these 2,000 years, huh?

One digit's difference? For *that*, being all up in Japan's face...? Now it makes sense. The Korean anti-Japanese stance and contempt started with that one toe's difference.

The grounds for the Korean argument that “we're better than you” is that they are closer to China. Korea is like, “still, Japan has become an economic superpower, and they bully us around. They're putting themselves above us.” The root of that hostility toward Japan was a *toe!*

• Korean anti-Japanese sentiment is karmic**Kase**

I don't know — without asking a Korean — whether Korea has been an unfortunate or a fortunate country. [Laughs.] Physically Korea was a continuation of China so Korea ended up becoming a state under China's suzerainty. They were deeply submerged inside the muddy jug that was China's culture.

The kings of Korea, unlike the kings of the West, received letters of rank from the Chinese emperor. They were essentially hereditarily appointed regional Chinese lords. And with that, Koreans boasted that they were “Little China,” and looked down on Japan.

One more big reason for Korea's anti-Japanese stance was that when the Korean ruling dynasty changed, all the actions of the previous dynasty were repudiated.

When Japan annexed Korea, it was during the Joseon dynasty. Some 500 years before, a general of the Goryeo dynasty named Yi Seong-ge received an order to mobilize his troops and cross the Yalu River to regain territory lost to the Manchurians. Instead, before crossing the Yalu, he wheeled his troops around and returned to the capital — Pyongyang — where he overthrew the Goryeo. He then established the Joseon dynasty.

Sekihei

He pulled a *yì xìng gé mìng*, huh.

Kase

In Korean, they pronounce it *yeok seong geukmyeong*. It's a “mandated revolution,” an ancient political concept from China. When the Son of Heaven has lost the

¹⁵ C. 1573–1598. The Momoyama period is considered to have been a “golden age” of Japanese art.

mandate of heaven, a new ruling house with the virtue to rule appears to found a new dynasty and there is a change in power.

There were repeated incidents of mandated revolution in Korea, too. And each time, the new ruler thoroughly repudiated everything that had been done by the previous dynasty.

The predecessors of the Joseon were the Goryeo, and they had made Buddhism the state religion. The Joseon repealed Buddhism, instead making Confucianism the state religion. That's why today in Korea the heads of Buddhist statuary, all having been cut from the torsos, are being sold in curio shops.

No matter where you look, there are no *whole*, old Buddhist statues. The Joseon dynasty suppressed Buddhism so the monks fled into the mountains. That's why there's not a single Buddhist temple on the flatlands.

Under the Joseon dynasty, Buddhist monks were treated as lowly people; but after Japan's annexation of Korea, Japan revitalized Buddhism.

Sekihei

Is that so?

Kase

And now today the Republic of Korea has to repudiate everything done during the Japanese annexation of Korea. It's always the same thing. We Japanese are just like the Buddhists at the start of the Joseon dynasty.

That's why I understand perfectly what everyone in Korea is doing. But you just have to throw up your hands, and it's best for the Japanese to just not pay any attention to it.

Sekihei

I get it. What a sad people they are. What that must mean is that the current anti-Japanese sentiment is just some karmic energy trying to repudiate everything from the Japanese annexation without rhyme or reason.

No, it's that too. The Koreans have to be thinking, "what is it with Japan trying to make out like they're better than we are, even though a long time ago, we got a dragon with more toes than the Japanese ones did?" They must be flying into a rage — "Why is Japan putting on airs?"

Kase

Mr. Sekihei, you don't by chance have *seven fingers*, do you? Two more digits than me?

Sekihei

[Loud laughter.] Sorry. Unfortunately, I only have *five*.

• The Chinese emperor and the Communist Party both make everything of value in the land their own

Kase

In Japan, there is an unbroken line of emperors — so a mandated revolution such as took place on the continent never occurred once. The Japanese emperor doesn't have a dynastic name like those borne by houses that arose due to such revolutions.

The emperor has existed since the misty age of legends, a time before even the long memory of the people. The imperial family is different from royal families in Europe or China who, since they arose from the midst of the people, bore family names.

To expose the trick in the mandated revolution: someone *says* he has received the mandate of heaven — but really all he is is a strongman out to become the supreme ruler through violence.

Both China and Korea were the same. With a change in dynasty, the new emperor or king would wring every drop of blood and sweat possible from the people and, thoroughly exploiting them, give themselves over to every extravagance. In the palace in Beijing where successive generations of emperors lived, the golden roof tiles spread out overlooking everything and are enough to take your breath away.

That's why there was usually a tense antagonism between the common people of China and Korea and their emperors and kings. They were not unified.

Sekihei

Mr. Kase, you've just pointed out a fundamental difference — the emperor from Japan's unbroken imperial line and China's ruler who just happened to be an emperor.

Whether there is or isn't a dynastic name has one more important significance. That there is always a surname for the Chinese emperor clearly shows that he is nothing more than a representative member of a specific family.

During the Tang dynasty, the imperial family's surname was Li. The Han dynastic surname was Liu. What does a surname indicate? First, that the family was central. It was at the heart of the realm, and affairs of state were all the personal property of that family.

It's a famous story from long ago, but the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang, was a hooligan. In his youth, he didn't work seriously, so he was often scolded by his father. "Your older brother works every day as hard as he can. You're the only one who loafs around instead of working to increase the family fortunes. Can't you do *something*?"

So since Liu Bang was a hooligan, how was he able to become emperor? Just as he became emperor, he called his father and answered him back. "Father," he said, "long ago you said I would do nothing to increase our family's fortunes. Well, look at me now. Which is better — the fortunes I have gained, or those of my older brother?"

What Liu Bang was saying was that the fortune he added to the family was nothing less than the state itself. In his view, China itself was his own personal property, his *family's fortune*. This is what a mandated revolution is.

There is no example of a family having an unending dominion over the land. Sure enough, someone always shows up and takes the other's place.

Kase

The idea of mandated revolution is just a façade. Someone has "virtue" so he gets the mandate of heaven from God....

Sekihei

Ultimately, all they are trying to do is justify the privatization of the realm. In reality, they've taken the realm as their own, and made it their own personal treasure. To gain the assent of the people, they make the excuse that they have taken control of the land because they have the requisite virtues.

Kase

That's why I maintain that Confucianism is nothing but a façade.

Sekihei

That's right! Liu Bang certainly had no virtues. In his youth, he was famous for eating and drinking without paying his bills. But as he was taking over China, he was spreading this rumor that he had virtues. [Laughs.]

Kase

Marxism is exactly like that, you know.

Sekihei

It is, yes. It's nothing more than theories to justify the substitution.

Kase

Marxist socialism, too, is a theory on the mandate of heaven.

Sekihei

Yes, yes — a mandate of heaven theory! It's a type of Christian mandate of heaven theory.

A millennial theory that, with the inevitability of history, communism will have the final, certain victory on Earth — the millenarian ideal — either way, it's bogus.

Kase

Marxism, too, can be seen as a Christian sect — given the point that someone absolute and all-powerful runs things from the top.

Sekihei

Communist China is a monster created from a combination of China's traditional despotic government and Marxism. That's today's Communist Party government.

• Japan, where the emperor and the people are one

Kase

That stands in contrast to Japan, where the emperor and the people are one. In 1868, Emperor Meiji issued the Charter Oath. In it, he vowed, "all things shall be decided by open discussion" and "all classes, high and low, shall be united." Everyone, high to low, from the emperor on down to individual common folk, would be bound together.

In 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education was issued. That said, "in common with you, our subjects," both the emperor and the people "attain the same virtue."

Eight years earlier, the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors said, "being one with us in spirit do your utmost for the protection of the state, our people will long enjoy the blessings of peace, and the might and dignity of our empire will shine in the world." The emperor and the people would protect the country *together*.

Such things must surely be unthinkable in China. Unlike Japan, from the get-go the emperor and the people were not united.

Sekihei

That's true. To continue with an earlier line of discussion, even though the Chi-

nese emperors (and the Korean kings) completely inherit their governing traditions, they privatized the realm.

It's their own treasure. And since it's their own treasure, they exploit it without any sense of compunction. For them, the people are nothing more than tools to use in increasing the value of their treasures. There's no way the ruler and the people could be united.

• Chinese language, which didn't borrow from Japanese and isn't practical

Kase

In Japanese, we have the word “*jinmin*” [人民], meaning “the people.”

Sekihei

Right.

Kase

In Chinese, the word used was “live people” — “*shēngmín*” [生民]. When Japan began to modernize at the end of the nineteenth century, *shēngmín* didn't have a the meaning of “people” in the modern sense, so in Japanese the term *jinmin* was newly created to serve that purpose. It was a new Japanese word created with the old *kanji* compound. Now, take the Chinese for the People's Republic of China: *Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó* [中華人民共和國]. That *Rénmín* — “people” — is that same Japanese “*jinmin*.” Likewise, the *Gònghéguó* — “republic” — is Japanese too, where it's pronounced “*kyōwakoku*.”

Sekihei

Right, and take out the “country” and you have *gònghé* — or *kyōwa* — which is also Japanese, meaning “cooperation.”

Kase

“*Gònghé*” — at the start of this dialogue, I brought up the palace kitchens of the Zhou dynasty. King Li of the Zhou was a tyrant and he was forced into exile by the nobility. Since the throne was vacant, two ministers conducted the affairs of government at the same time. They used the word “*Gònghé*” as the era name because of the cooperation of the two officials. It wasn't the “*gònghé*” as in “republic” by any means. In Japanese, though, we use the word “*kyōwa*” as a republican idea.

Japan preceded China in achieving modernization, and because China came in late and learned from Japan, there are some 10,000 words that have entered the Chinese lexicon from Japanese.

Sekihei

If it weren't for such loanwords borrowed from the Japanese, there could be no modern Chinese language. “*Zhèngzhì*” (政治, “government”), “*jīngjì*” (經濟/經濟 “economy”), and “*shèhuì*” (社会 “society”) are all originally from Japanese.

Kase

The Korean language is the same. North Korea — the Democratic People's Re-

public of Korea — is, in Korean, “*Joseon Minju Juui Inmin Gonghwaguk*.” The *minju juui* [民主主義], *inmin* [人民], and *gonghwaguk* [共和国] were all Japanese.

Sekihei

Other than the “*Joseon*” — all of it is!

Kase

The “worker” [労働] in Workers’ Party of Korea — “*Joseol Lodong Dang*” [朝鮮労働党] — is also a word from Japanese.

Sekihei

It’s Japanese. But China and North Korea aren’t paying very much to Japan for all they’ve borrowed. [Laughs.]

• Below the emperor were only servants (the bureaucracy) and slaves (the people)

Sekihei

About that word “people,” or “*rénmín*” — what did those successive dynasties in China call the people? In official documents, the people are not called “people” using today’s conventional terms. Instead, it’s “*shēngmín*” (生民 “live people”) or “*xiǎomín*” (“small people”). Sometimes it’s even “*cǎomín*” (草民 “grass people”). Grass!

Lu Xun said that Chinese history is a history wherein people literally ate other people, but to use the word “grass people” — that really shows the true nature of the Chinese government. What that means is that people are no different or no better than grass. If they’re cut down, they just grow back. However many you kill, or cut off — it just doesn’t matter.

What’s more, this isn’t a secret word. It’s written in official royal documents, bold as you please, the word “grass people” being used to refer to the general population. For over 2,000 years, the Chinese government, while being hailed as virtuous and Confucian, has viewed their people as no better than grass. What a brutal government. In that, it’s fundamentally different from the unified Japanese political culture with the imperial house at the center.

Kase

In Japan, too, though, the populace were referred to as “*sōsei*” (蒼生 “blue life”) “*tamigusa*” (民草 “people grass”) and “*sōmō*” (草莽 “grass field”). Of course, those were extant terms that originally came into Japanese from China, and upon entering the Japanese lexicon, their meanings changed.

Sekihei

They sure did change. The “*mō*” in “*sōmō*” is a grassy field, and while is used to there to refer to people, there’s a sense of an Elysian field about the word. It’s completely different from the Chinese idea of “grass.”

Kase

In Chinese, there’s the word “*jūncáng*” (君臣 “master and servant”), but that referred only to the emperor and officials employed in the service of the dynasty. In the

Japanese understanding of the term, where it is rendered as “*kunshin*,” the second half of that equation is expanded to mean the whole population of Japan.

Sekihei

For the Chinese emperors, they alone are the lords. Everyone else falls into one of two categories. First are the bureaucracy who are servants who act as his hands and feet, and everyone else is the population at large who are slaves.

In the case of the Japanese emperor, though, there is a very Japanese idea where the emperor and the people are united in virtue — as laid out in the Imperial Rescript on Education. As you have often pointed out, in the case of China, only the emperor has virtue.

In China, the person most lacking in virtue is the one who has a monopoly on it. This outrageous policy continued for God only knows how many thousands of years. Its result has been that from the start, virtue is absent from the existing Chinese social structure and national character. Beyond that solitary person at the very top, they have come to exist with virtue as an irrelevance.

In Japan, the emperor does not have the monopoly on virtue. It’s everyone’s, isn’t it?

— Chapter Four —
**The Japan that Has “Public” and
the China that Has Nothing but “Personal”**

• **Japan puts the “public” ahead of the “personal”**

Kase

In Japan, everyone aspires to be moral. This caused looking out for one another to come about, and for everyone to share in the ownership of all things “public.”

This “public” does not refer only to the imperial court; it includes everyone in the country.

I’ve given lectures in America and Europe on Japanese culture. The attendees are almost all of the mistaken belief that Japan falls within the sphere of Chinese or Confucian culture.

I begin my argument stating that Japan’s culture is, rather, an extremely characteristic one. I point out that the differences between Japanese and Chinese cultures are greater than the gulf separating the cultures of European Christendom and Islam.

Then I offer Confucianism as an example of this. In the original Confucianism, the most important thing is filial piety. Filial piety is the foundation of Confucian moral ideology, and all else is subordinate to it.

When Confucianism crossed over to Japan, the placing of filial piety ahead of everything else was something the Japanese didn’t take to. Although filial piety had the greatest value in Chinese Confucianism, when Confucianism made it to Japan, “loyalty” leapt ahead of “filial piety” to create something new: the word *chūkō*, combining loyalty and filial piety.¹⁶

• **Chinese “loyalty” is not “public”; it is for the imperial family**

Kase

In Japan, putting “loyalty” ahead of “filial piety” was because of the importance placed from ancient times on a public spirit that gave preference to benefits to the village community that exceeded any familial connections.

In China, there was no such notion of “the public.” It is still the same today.

Sekihei

As a corollary to that, even though both Japan and China have “loyalty,” the loy-

¹⁶ Discussions of Confucian virtues often cause difficulty in translation. The Japanese word *kō* (孝; in Chinese, *xiào*), is usually translated as “filial piety,” and *chū* (忠; in Chinese, *zhōng*), is “loyalty.” Mr. Kase often prefers to translate them in his talks as “personal” (or “private”) and “public,” based on the directions that they point — filial piety being very internalized and very much involved with the family, while loyalty is more external and directs the point of its value away from the self and towards another. *Chūkō* (忠孝) was a Japanese neologism that did not exist in Chinese.

alty in Japan is different from the loyalty in China. Loyalty in China is something that is owed to the imperial family — it is not a loyalty directed to the public. In Japan, loyalty is the public at large itself. It's a loyalty for the people in common. Perhaps through loyalty to the emperor, the core of the everyday people, it becomes loyalty to all the people in common.

In Chinese culture, which puts filial piety ahead of everything else, it's making the parent-child relationship — that is, families with the same family name — important. In itself, that's fine; but if you make filial piety the be-all and end-all, what happens then? You lose the public aspect. Filial piety is, ultimately, something directed to the family, or to the parent. If you put filial piety ahead of everything else, the good of the public and the good of the family end up in opposition, and the public gets sacrificed.

• Confucius encouraged lies and disregarded the public

Sekihei

Ultimately, the Chinese didn't have a sense of the public. There's a famous story in *The Analects*. Confucius said this. It's the story of a father stealing sheep. A certain person said, "My friend is an honest person in his home town. When he found out that his father had stolen a neighbor's sheep, he exposed his father."

Kase

And Confucius got mad.

Sekihei

He got mad, saying that wasn't good. Above everything, it's filial piety. No matter how evil the act of your father, you can't talk about it to others.

Kase

It's in *The Analects*.

Sekihei

There are two important points. First, Confucius is encouraging the telling of lies. Second, Confucius shows no regard for the public concerns.

Kase

Also, in *The Analects*, Confucius states that the son must conceal any misdeeds of his father.

Sekihei

That's right. And if the son has done anything wrong, the father has to hide that fact. Confucius advocated just such a warped filial piety and familial relationship. That's why in China you have the family, but you don't have the public.

Kase

In *The Analects*, Confucius taught that even the Son of Heaven could make mistakes, and if he did, they should be concealed.

Sekihei

That's right. It was the same for the emperor's retainers.

Kase

There was the suppression of the poisoned dumplings incident,¹⁷ and the hiding of the truth about the Tiananmen incident. As China is a Confucian state, that's only to be expected.

Sekihei

That's an important point. China has no concept of the public because it is rooted in Confucian ideals.

Kase

In China, if your father was seriously ill back at home, you had to leave the emperor's side and return home even if there was some serious affair of state at hand. That was what was expected of you. It was the same in Korea.

In Japan, however, if your father was ill back home and there was some important affair in your fief, you stayed at the side of your lord and did your duty to the fief. That was what was expected.

Before Japan annexed Korea, several hundred Japanese soldiers were surrounded by several thousand Korean soldiers at the capital of Hanseong, near present-day Seoul. (The "Han" was there as a reference to the capital of China, or "the Han.") Anyway, word was gotten out that the father of the Korean commanding general had died, so the general rushed back to his home town — without arranging anything with his subordinates. As a result, the account goes, the Japanese forces escaped their predicament. It's said this is a true story.

Sekihei

In China, if the father of one of the bureaucracy died, they received a three-year-long leave of absence where they weren't expected to undertake any duties. No matter how critical their job was, no matter if they resigned their job, it didn't matter. If you didn't go back to your father's place, you were criticized.

• If Confucius were reborn in Japan, he would love it

Kase

When I have given lectures in America and Europe, I speak in English, but I translate "filial piety" — *kō* — as "family" and "loyalty" — *chū* — as "public." Throughout history, Japan has put the public ahead of the family.

With the exception of Japan, the other Asian nations have made the family more important than the public. Why was Japan, alone in Asia, able to stave off the threat of Western Imperialism in the last half of the nineteenth century and to carry out successful modernization? It was because the Japanese people, as a body, placed the public over the family. What that means is that Japan's closer to America and Europe than it is to the rest of Asia.

Sekihei

¹⁷ In 2008, several people in Japan developed symptoms similar to food poisoning from eating imported Chinese dumplings (*gyōza*). A banned toxic pesticide was found on the dough wrappers at 400 times the safe level. A major recall was instituted, certain food imports were banned, and an anticipated business merger was abandoned in the fallout. Ultimately, one man in China was arrested and charged with deliberately tampering the wrappers reportedly due to his displeasure over his salary.

There's an important point there. Could we say it's the public Japan and the personal China? There are many places where the cultures of Japan and China resemble one other. They use the same *kanji*. Japan also took up Confucianism. The actual essence is totally different, however. Confucianism for the Japanese and Confucianism for the Chinese are completely different things.

Kase

Thinking they're the same is an incredible error on the part of the Japanese.

Sekihei

That's so right. But you know, though both foreigners and Westerners make that mistake, even the Japanese — who have such a profound association with China — make the mistake. It boggles the mind. [Laughs.]

Kase

If Confucius came back, if he were born again, and if he came to Japan....

Sekihei

It would be so wonderful. He'd love it.

Kase

Yes, but he wouldn't be able to eat human flesh.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] No, but the *sashimi* is delicious over here, so he'd be fine with eating fish.

Kase

If he were reborn in Japan, he'd have to make do with Matsuzaka beef.

Sekihei

"Venerable sir, can you make do with Matsuzaka beef and *sashimi*?"

Do you think Confucius would get mad at whatever country he might go to today? If he went to today's China, he'd get *really* pissed.

If he *were* reincarnated, he'd be ready to die again after only once around the Shanghai Expo. They're doing everything completely contrary to Confucius' teachings. They stole a Japanese song and used it as the theme for the Expo,¹⁸ there was a disagreement over the order of letting people in, there was yelling, there was shoving people about....

• **The 17-Article Constitution was the world's first democratic**

¹⁸ A brief international upset occurred when the theme song for the Shanghai Expo 2010 (1 May – 31 October, 2010) turned out to be the same tune made popular by Japanese singer/songwriter Okamoto Maya in 1997 in her "*Sonomama no kimi de ite*" ("Stay as you are"). The Chinese song, performed by several famous stars including Jackie Chan and Andy Lau, used the same music without attribution or permission. Complaints came in, and the song was quickly scrapped, and actually replaced with Okamoto's original Japanese song. The Expo was the latest in a series of international World's Fairs, so it was a considerable embarrassment.

constitution

Kase

Originally, there was no single absolute ruler in Japan who could enforce despotism. It didn't fit with the society. Everyone had to get along and work together.

Let's go back fourteen centuries to the seventh century, in 645, when the Taika Reforms were instituted under the regnant empress, Kōtoku. This became the first year of the Taika era. The Sui dynasty in the Chinese mainland and Silla¹⁹ on the Korean peninsula were expanding their power. Kōtoku adopted the Chinese system of government to deal with this dangerous threat to Japan's security.

Up to that point, noble families in Japan had divided the country and ruled their own domains, but with the Taika Reforms, the emperor took direct governance of the whole of Japan. Emperor Meiji's dissolution of the feudal domains and turning them into prefectures was the same thing.

With the Taika Reforms, Emperor Kōtoku issued an imperial decree saying, "now for the first time I intend to govern all the provinces," and "the governance of all the people can not be a solitary governance; the assistance of the people is necessary." Forty-one years before, Shōtoku Taishi established the Seventeen-Article Constitution, and commented, "Harmony is to be valued." They're along the same line, aren't they?

The important thing about the seventeenth article was, "everyone please talk things over well and then decide." He had established that everyone talking things through and then reaching a conclusion was the correct way to do things. This was the world's first democratic constitution. For the name of Japan, the word "Yamato"²⁰ appeared in it, and through great harmony, Japanese came to be tied together. I suppose we could also translate that "harmony" as "peace."

Sekihei

Incidentally, the word "*daiwa*" doesn't really translate into English.

Kase

If we were forced to translate it, I suppose we could use "harmony."

Sekihei

In Chinese, too, there's no translation for the meaning of "*daiwa*." Anyway, after the Taika Reforms, Japan also imported the *ritsuryō* system²¹ from China. They were creating a centralized rule as national polity with the emperor at its heart.

With the Korean peninsula sandwiched between them, Japan was advancing a needed national defense given her adversarial relationship with China. What that means is that the Meiji Reformation was virtually the same thing. They had to adopt the *ritsuryō* system to make a strong country.

On the other hand, the *ritsuryō* system, as it was centralized, was at odds with Ja-

¹⁹ Silla was one of the three kingdoms that historically occupied the Korean peninsula. The other two were Baekje and Goguryeo. Silla existed as a state entity from 57 BC to AD 935.

²⁰ "Yamato" is the historical name for Japan, and it is written 大和. These *kanji* would normally be read as "*daiwa*" (meaning, literally, "great harmony"). The actual trouble with the translation is that though *wa* is usually rendered as "harmony," it has nuances of "peace," "cooperation," "understanding," and so on.

²¹ The *ritsuryō* system was the foundation of laws (*ritsu*) and regulations (*ryō*) that were used to organize everything from the central government to the various governmental organs and offices, the criminal codes, religious observations, etc.

pan's traditional spirit. Even though Japan imported the Chinese-like *ritsuryō* system, there was the Seventeen-Article Constitution in place to act as a sort of antidote, so Japan's spirit was preserved.

As the oldest democratic constitution in the world, the Seventeen-Article Constitution transcended the Chinese-style *ritsuryō* system, and the Japanese can rightly boast of it. The Japanese spirit, the Buddhist spirit, and the Confucian spirit — all are in there.

• China is “a large plate with a mountain of sand on it” and Japan is “small pebbles growing to make a great rock”

Kase

Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China, famously lamented that Chinese people are “just like a heap of loose sand” — that is, they are virtually a large plate piled up with a mountain of sand that is soon utterly scattered.

The Japanese national anthem, “*Kimi ga yo*,” was taken from a poem in the *Shin Kokinshū*.²² In English, it says, “May thy reign continue for a thousand, nay, eight thousand generations, and the eternity it takes for small pebbles to grow into a great rock and be covered with moss.” That idea of small pebbles growing together over time into a single great rock demonstrates the diametrically opposite national character to that of China.

Sekihei

Right. Notwithstanding what was said earlier, even though China has a concept of family and clan, it has none of the public. China is nothing more than an assemblage of families. There was no existing national community as an organism. They just don't do it. I was raised in a rural part of Szechuan, and there was no communal solidarity outside of the family.

Conversely, Japan's is a society like that great rock formed by those tiny pebbles coming together because there is the imperial family representing the public as its core.

Kase

So the unbroken imperial line made Japan, and Japan made the unbroken imperial line.

Sekihei

They're the same, body and soul. Which came first, which came later — it doesn't matter what was first.

Kase

Clapping your hands when praying. Japan is the only place where that's done. When meeting, we clasp hands — shaking hands. In China and Korea, they don't have that. While clasping hands, everyone stops thinking and becomes as one. It is a symbiotic culture. This hand-shaking ritual is part of that.

²² The *Shin Kokinshū* (“New *Kokinshū*,” or “New old and modern [poetry] collection”) was the eighth of twenty-one imperial poetry anthologies, and was compiled between 1201 and 1205. It was named after an earlier anthology, the *Kokinshū*, compiled 300 years earlier.

When clasping hands, we savor our good fortune, thinking, “oh, yes, I’m Japanese.” According to Westerners, when people stop thinking, they become useless....

Sekihei

When I came to Japan, I learned. That momentary stoppage of thinking — it’s not becoming useless. If anything, it’s transcending yourself, surpassing yourself, and becoming *one* with the other person. You produce a self that *transcends* the self.

Kase

That’s ceremony.

Sekihei

Right! It’s an important ceremony connecting people together. In the West, however, according to Christian tradition, the moment of transcending the self can only happen in a relationship with God.

Kase

In China, is there a moment where the self is erased?

Sekihei

Hardly at all! In ancestor worship long ago, there was such a moment in fortifying a feeling of solidarity with your ancestors. Recent family worship has deteriorated considerably, though, to the point that energy supplements are being offered up to the ancestors. There is virtually no moment where you view yourself objectively. It’s total individualism.

What we can take from this is that China now is more completely individualistic than America and Europe.

• The fiction that the “Chinese race” doesn’t understand the world’s sensibilities

Kase

What is frightening about the Chinese culture is that it is completely distanced from the sensibilities of the world. First of all, there is that phrase, “Chinese race.”²³

That “Chinese race” encompasses the Han race, Mongols, the Islamic Uyghurs, Tibetans.... all of them are included. There are fifty-six minority nationalities included.

Sekihei

That’s right. Fifty-six minority nationalities are represented by that “Chinese race.”

Kase

²³ This is not as odd as it may sound in English. The term used here in Japanese is *minzoku* (民族; in Chinese, *mínzú*), which refers to people specifically as in a nation or a tribe. Though “Chinese race,” “Japanese race,” or even “American race” may sound odd or perhaps off-putting to English ears, rather than translate it to the more common English usage of “Chinese people” (etc.), it is important to preserve that nuance that *race* or *tribe* has that the general word *people* does not always have in order to keep Mr. Kase’s points clear about the Chinese usage of the term to define themselves.

All of them are called members of the Chinese race. India is also a country with many different peoples, and rupee notes have fifteen different languages printed on them. America is also a country of many different peoples. We don't use the oddball term "American race" or "Indian race" to refer to them. We don't call those of the Aino race members of the "Japanese race."

Sekihei

The term "Chinese race" is, of course, a fabrication. There is no "Chinese race" anywhere. Since the Han race is made up of a variety of other races, the Chinese race is like a hodgepodge stew. Everything gets thrown in.

What is extremely dangerous is that if it's under Chinese rule, whatever race it is, it becomes part of the "Chinese race." If a Japanese person were under Chinese rule, he, too, would become a member of the Chinese race. You'd probably not like it, Mr. Kase.

If Japan's national defense and national polity aren't properly prepared for, it's just possible that that may someday come to be.

Kase

Subjugation by the Chinese race, and the Chinese Empire, was not caused by "aggression." The term they use is to "moralize."²⁴ Thus, to this point, they have not put aggression into play.

Sekihei

That's how they explain it. The truth is, the morality is nothing.... The truth is, with the feigned ideology of morality, they carry out aggression....

Kase

Even though we say Chinese race and Han people, people in Beijing and people in Shanghai are different in their physique and their constitution. Coastal people were originally related to a south-east Asian people called the Baiyue and Minyue, and so are mostly different.

They are all *called* "Han people," but are they really?

Sekihei

That's one political concept. The number one issue in China is that despotism has grown excessively.

Kase

To think that in China there was a "virtuous" emperor —

Sekihei

Virtuous?! No such thing.

Kase

But Chairman Mao Zedong was a traditional Son of Heaven, so the façade was that he was "virtuous."

Sekihei

²⁴ The term in Japanese is *tokka* (徳化; in Chinese, *déhuà*). The idea being expressed is that only China has "morals," and uncivilized nations need to be influenced by China to get morality.

There was no virtue anywhere! Especially with Mao Zedong — a thug as thuggish as he was, was damned rare.

Kase

You say that, but the Confucian order is that a ruler who seizes power is a person imbued with “virtue” acting in the place of Heaven, and he leads the people — so interfering in the people’s lives is to be expected. Those under him have to do everything the guy in authority says.

Sekihei

The problem is the misfortune of those people upon whom the authority was used.

• Americans have never ever understood China

Kase

Many in America who are considered Sinologists argue that it is apparent that the Chinese people will seek more democratic rights to accompany the rise in their per capita income, so China will become more democratized. President Clinton, too, during his term in office, believed that and said so in speeches.

Sekihei

That is an incredible misunderstanding by the Americans. An *incredible* misunderstanding. I think President Obama’s administration is caught up in that same misunderstanding. The dictatorship will only grow stronger the more the Chinese economy develops.

Kase

To be sure, China’s middle class is growing now; but if the middle class loses its present political clout, they won’t be able to continue with that comfortable lifestyle. At present they’re enjoying the favor of the present regime, so it’s to be expected that they would defend it.

There are 1.3 or 1.4 billion people there, and a huge percentage of them are still incredibly poor. The income disparity between those in urban areas and in rural areas is by more than a factor of ten. It’s even been said to be *twenty* times greater.

Those who have become wealthy are but a fraction of the urban residents, and there are required permissions for residency and for employment for residents of cities and agricultural communities, and they are legally differentiated. Beyond that, the gulf between rich and poor is growing all the more deeper and wider.

Sekihei

That’s true. China today has become the number one socially disparate society in the world. The disparity of wealth between the ruling class, making up ten percent of the population, and the bottom ten percent of the impoverished class, is a factor of more than twenty-three times.

Kase

If everyone were given equal rights, and if free elections were held, the wealthy rising rich and middle class would take great pains to buy and enjoy showing off their expensive Shiseido cosmetics, Rolex watches, Chanel products, Roberta Di Camerino

handbags, shiny cars, and so on. Even so, they would get dragged down because of the great many poor people and will become unable to maintain their privileges.

I've said before that democratization would fail, but American Sinologists say, "Not so. If they become wealthy, the merchants would come to seek political freedoms. Britain and France were both like that."

I can only think that China is still a Confucian state, and merchants would earnestly collude with government officials to raise their profits rather than seek political rights and freedom. Chinese merchants have always been that way, and are that way now.

Sekihei

I'm honestly convinced that democracy will never come to China.

America has never once understood China. Mr. Kase, they just need to learn from you.

• The great military power of a Confucian China is more terrifying than that of Nazi Germany

Kase

It's just that China is a Confucian state. What is frightening is that even after 2,500 years, the Confucian order is still continuing. During Mao Zedong's time, it was *said* that Confucius had been overthrown and that Confucius and his teachings were the enemy, but that was just something the Communists put out there for show; their Communism was Confucianism itself.

The Red Guards, far from being the swelling democratic masses working together, were created to operate with orders from above because of power struggles.

The history of the People's Republic of China, ultimately, is nothing more than one of piddly power struggles. After the death of Chairman Mao, as we saw on TV, three parties — the funeral service committee, the Workers' and Farmers' Militia, and the Red Guards — formed the escort for his corpse. The People's Liberation Army wasn't there. I thought this was due to the instigation of Mao's widow, Jiang Qing.

Within on month of Mao's death, the "Gang of Four," including Jiang Qing, were arrested by Hua Guofeng, who seized the public security, and Wang Dongxing, the commandant of the 8341 Special Regiment (Mao's elite bodyguards), who until then had been as much a Leftist as they were. Thereupon, a charge was made that Jiang Qing, who surely had to have been on the extreme Left, was starting to use French cosmetics and Japanese face cleaner, indulging in luxuries every day.

Confucianism is totally chaotic within and has rotted out; it is only clean on the surface. Politicians use beautiful words like "benevolence" and "righteousness," but only to camouflage their own self-interest.

Sekihei

The Japanese also like *The Analects*, and China as a culture is fine. Making Confucianism a state ideology, however, is completely no good.

Kase

The most frightening thing is, the Chinese Empire was a *culture*, not what we usually would call a "state." A culture dressed up as a country.

They thought of themselves as the center of the world. While in Japan we speak of

“inside and outside,” we use the character for “inner” as that “inside” — but in China, they use the character “center” for their “inside.”²⁵

Sekihei

That’s right. The problem is something related to that. It would be really bad if they had nuclear weapons and a gigantic military force. They would be more dreadful than the Nazis.

²⁵ Contrasting the Japanese *naigai* (内外) with the Chinese *zhōngwài* (中外). That *zhōng* (literally “middle” or “center”) is the first character in the name China, *Zhongguo* (中国), which is often translated as “Middle Kingdom.”

— Chapter Five —
**The Chinese Illusion that
They Can Make Every Country in the World Theirs**

• **China had no name until the Treaty of Nanking**

Kase

In 1839, the First Opium War began. The British were the bad guys in this one. In 1844, the Qing court capitulated and signed the Treaty of Nanking.

I've said this before, but the very premise for China's Son of Heaven is to control every nook and cranny of the world — so China was not just one country among many. The high Qing officials, with their queues, reluctantly used the name of their dynasty on the Treaty of Nanking. But until that point, you see, there had been no country on Earth their equal, so the Chinese empire didn't have a name.

Sekihei

Before that, China didn't have a flag, either. So someone hurried up and painted that dragon and they had a flag. It was the simple image of a dragon. Of course, it had five toes. [Laughs.]

Kase

Since it was an international treaty, in the interest of expedience they used the dynastic name — Qing — at first for the name of the country. To this day there is still no sense in China, however, that they are a *state*.

Sekihei

The concept of statehood encompasses different kinds of states, and your own country is one of them, but in the concept of China before the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, there was no idea of statehood. Following the argument that “all the countries in the world are mine,” there *was* the idea of the Chinese race.

Kase

We may *say* “China,” but during the so-called Sixteen Kingdoms period²⁶ the Han actually created nineteen states.

Sekihei

The Han were pulling the strings, but in actuality it was an age of chaos.

Kase

²⁶ So-called from the number of short-lived sovereign states in what is now considered China proper and its environs during 304–439. It was one of the most devastating periods in all of Chinese history. It commenced with the retreat of the Jin state, and ended with the consolidation of rule into the so-called Southern and Northern Dynasties (the Northern Wei and the Southern Song).

It lasted from 304 to 439.

Sekihei

Wow, you even remember *those* dates?

Kase

The five “barbarian” states were the Xiongnu, the Jie, the Xianbe, the Di, and the Qiang. That “*xiong*” in the Xiongnu name is said to mean someone who is boisterous and dirty, and the “*nu*” is “slave.” “*Jie*” is a castrated sheep. The “*xian*” in Xianbe is a wild animal. “*Di*” is a bowing, servile person. “*Qiang*” means a slovenly barbarian. Those were the five barbarian states in that period.

The Chinese idea is that they alone are correct and proper. Even Queen Himiko of Wa²⁷ — that “*wa*” indicated a person of small stature, a dwarf, and someone dirty. Calling Japan “*Wakoku*” — “the dwarf country” — was just plain rude. And given that Himiko was a real person, do you really think she would use a character meaning “humble” or “lowborn” as the first character of her name?

Sekihei

That *is* strange.

Kase

The *Waren dian* appears in the “encounters with western barbarians” section of the *Wei zhi*. It gives the names of Himiko’s great officials, such as Yakuyako, whose name means “repulsive dog near the gate”.

Sekihei

That’s horrid.

Kase

Many bronze mirrors with inscribed *kanji* from the time of the *Waren dian* have been unearthed in Japan, so surely *those* characters must have been readable here at the time. There is a country called Kuna — “dog-like slaves” — that was recorded to have been fighting with Himiko’s Yamataikoku. Who on Earth would bear such a name themselves?

It was around that time that the Chinese began to embrace the ideology that if you weren’t Chinese, you were a barbarian. Long ago, they called people living along the coast of Fujian province “edge beasts” or “edge worms.”

Sekihei

The Chinese race considers people in their surrounding environs as something they can gobble up. Ultimately, that’s what it is.

Kase

That whole thing about Chinese and barbarians — only China had the proper culture, and they called other people in the four cardinal directions from China “eastern

²⁷ Himiko (fl. 248) was a queen of a confederation of states in early Japan called Yamataikoku. “Wa” was the name by which Japan was known in the early Chinese chronicles. She doesn’t appear in any Japanese histories, but is referenced several times in the “*Waren dian*” (Account of the people of Wa), a part in the *Wei zhi* (Records of the Wei), in the *Sanguo zhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms), written c. 297, and it is quoted in part in several other texts.

barbarians,” “western barbarians,” “northern barbarians,” and “southern barbarians.”²⁸

Sekihei

In *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of the five classics of Confucian teaching, Confucius defined “barbarism” as “*hú*” — not being in subjugation to China.” That *hú* is actually another word meaning “barbarian.”

• Shōtoku Taishi’s brilliant achievement rejected China’s “you’re either Chinese or you’re a barbarian” system

Sekihei

Japan’s history of being at-odds with China has to begin with Shōtoku Taishi.

“The Son of Heaven of the place where the sun rises sends word to the Son of Heaven of the place where the sun sets. I hope you are well....”

Kase

[Applauds.] According to the Chinese chronicles, Emperor Yang of the Sui was livid when he saw that, decrying it as “a barbaric letter, such insolence!”

Sekihei

Insolence, insolence! Oh, he was mad, wasn’t he? Still, this one state document totally turned the Sui dynasty’s central international order on its ear. It was a brilliant, historical achievement.

The letter said, essentially, “yeah, you’re an emperor, but we have a Son of Heaven here, too, so we’re on the same level. What’s more, *this* is where the sun comes up, so we’re *better*.”

I believe that with that one letter, Japanese history changed completely. It didn’t become like Korea — it was able to become Japan. That’s what that moment was.

Kase

The Japanese really should know better about this fact.

Sekihei

At the moment Emperor Yang of the Sui read the letter from Japan, Japan established itself as an independent state. It was an amazing thing. What’s more, about that same time, the Sui were unifying China, and they were a great power that everyone feared. And despite that, Shōtoku Taishi sent them a such a letter. Incredible.

The administration of today’s Democratic Party of Japan and others should take a lesson from that.

Kase

What the Japanese were really racking their brains about at the time was the word “*tennō*.” It wasn’t exactly the same thing as “emperor” but it was on a level with it.

²⁸ Each of these uses a different word in Chinese after the direction-word, all of which translate, essentially, into the English word “barbarian.” These four groups are, in order, *dōngyí*, *xīróng*, *běidí*, and *nánmán*.

The title “*tennō*” was a Japanese idea.²⁹

If Japan were to have used the same word for the Japanese emperor as for the Chinese emperor, it’s just possible that the Chinese emperor might have gotten all worked up and launched an attack on Japan with an army of 100 or 200 thousand men.

Sekihei

There’s no other moment so thrilling in Japanese history. I learned about this since coming to Japan, you see.

That’s why leftist teachers repudiate everything up to the existence of Shōtoku Taishi. For them, Shōtoku Taishi is someone they would rather have not existed. He was incredible, though. The basis for the relationship between Japan and China was established because of him.

• China’s “fight and kill” is man’s logic; Japan’s “enfold them gently” is woman’s logic

Kase

From time to time I’ve been invited to go to China, and I’ve noticed that China’s is a man’s logic. Japan is a country with a woman’s logic.

Sekihei

Really?

Kase

In a nutshell, Japan is a feminine, gentle country. Zhong Kui in Chinese Daoism is a vengeful spirit. Once he entered the Japanese milieu, where he is known as Shōki, he became this kind old uncle figure.

On my first visit of the year to a shrine at New Year’s, I go to Toyokawa Inari Shrine in Akasaka Mitsuke near my home. Because it’s an Inari shrine, they venerate the foxes.

The god worshipped at Toyokawa Inari Shrine is Dakini. Originally, she was a female demon in India who served the great mother goddess Kali. In Tibet, Dakini is a *yaksha*, a terrifying deity who eats the flesh of men. But when they get to Japan, they all become gentle gods.

Sekihei

Yeah.... That’s the magic of Japanese culture — embracing everyone and everything gently.

Kase

There are a lot of aspects where you can say Christianity is a religion of hatred. It’s written right down: from the Jews are “the Devil’s children” and cursed for all time. But when Christianity came to Japan, it became a gentle religion, too. That’s

²⁹ The English word emperor has several equivalents in Japanese. The ones being discussed here are the generic term *kōtei* (皇帝; in Chinese *huángdì*), and the word *tennō* (天皇), which is reserved for the emperor of Japan and did not exist in Chinese. *Tennō* is made up of the *kanji* for “heaven” and “majesty.” When speaking of a Chinese emperor, the word used here is *kōtei/huángdì*. The other generally equivalent term that comes up in the dialogues is “Son of Heaven” (天子; *tenshi* in Japanese, *tiānzǐ* in Chinese).

good, isn't it?

Japan is not a country with a man's logic. Amaterasu Ōmikami is a goddess. When Amitabha Buddha, the bodhisattva Maitreya, the bodhisattva Guanyin, and so on, came to Japan, they were female, and *that* is why they became the objects of such strong faith. It is probably because the Japanese islands were peaceful that we worshipped gentle females.

Sekihei

I see. Female or maternal logic is the foundation of the logic of the Japanese society.

Kase

According to the Old Testament, which is observed by both Judaism and Christianity, God created man in His own image. But the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is a wrathful and absolute God who interferes in men's lives and gives detailed orders. You get the feeling God was created in *man's* own image.

Japanese gods, in contrast, live quietly and peacefully in their natural shrines. They don't interfere with men. Clapping your hands in prayer at shrines to attract their attention is sometimes called "*tamafuri*."³⁰ When a worshipper claps his hands together those three times, he is drawing the attention of the gods. He has to invoke them.

When I talk with Westerners, something I find to be difficult is that they don't understand when I say "the gods are resting calmly." There is no word they have for the idea that a god can rest calmly, or that a god patiently "calmly rests."³¹ I have to spend a great deal of time explaining the concept.

In Japan, we have to live proper lives so as not to cause worry to the gods who are resting calmly. We're not doing it because the gods compel us to.

Sekihei

That's right.

Kase

The *kanji* "*matsuri*"³² is made up of elements representing "meat," "hands," and "god." This is because at the *matsuri*, people ate their fill of meat. But if you eat a lot of meat, you will reek of blood.

In Chinese history, a cycle came about from the struggle where if they weren't killing each other, they weren't able to eat their fill.

Sekihei

And that's why there was a warring man's logic.

Given that, that "gentle" term you keep using — *yasashii* — is something that's

³⁰ This is one of those hard-to-translate terms. The *tama* is *tamashii*, or soul, and the *furi* is comparable to a sort of "pitch" (as in, writers "pitching" an idea to a movie producer to make into a movie, or a salesman making a "pitch" to a potential customer).

³¹ The verb used here is "*shizumaru*," which is an active verb indicating an inaction. It describes a certain attitude of being settled down, or of performing calm, laid back, patient non-activity.

³² *Matsuri* is commonly translated today as "festival" (originally, technically, a religious one), but it also relates to spiritual observances, governance, and so on. In its verbal form, *matsuru*, it indicates worshipping a deity or deification. In Chinese, the character is pronounced *jì*.

only in Japanese, too.³³ When you are discussing these things in English I imagine it takes a lot of effort. Is there a term for expressing that in English?

Kase

There's not a single word that encompasses everything that "*yasashii*" does in Japanese, no.

Sekihei

There's not one in Chinese, either. I suppose there's none in Korean, as well.

Kase

That's because Korea is a male country, too. Japan, and women, are different. Japanese pursue the affection and kindness of women.

Sekihei

What's important is the Japanese aesthetic. This holds true even in Buddhism. Beauty has nothing to do with Buddhist imagery in Chinese and Indian Buddhism.

After it came to Japan, Zen produced gardens that are beautiful to look at from whatever vantage point you take. The beauty of the gardens in the temples of Tenryūji and Daisen'in in Kyoto are characteristic of Japan.

Kase

They say Chinese gardens reproduce the Buddhist paradise, but eroded limestone and Taihu Lake stones are all piled up and they're just grotesque. When we Japanese look at them, they seem strange, and it chills our hearts.

Sekihei

That's it. That's it exactly. The gentleness of the heart itself, and beauty of the heart itself, are to be found in Japan.

• In Japan, it's not "right and wrong" — evaluation is based on beauty and gentleness

Kase

We Japanese, when considering the things people do, don't use a logical measure of whether something is right or wrong. We base things on the sentiment of what is beautiful or what is not beautiful.

Sekihei

There's no ending the theological debate of what is right and wrong. No matter how much you argue the issue, it never ends. As to what is beautiful, however — anyone would quickly understand that.

Kase

Regardless of right or wrong, the French killed over 50,000 of their own country-

³³ *Yasashii* is, in fact, one of those words that requires a full sentence or more to properly translate. For simplicity, we have used "gentle" in the text. In its full meaning, it implies gentleness and gentility, a calmness, a sense of kindness, and a sense of looking out for the other person.

men in the French Revolution. With the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong killed tens of millions. In Japan, we judge these things based on whether they are beautiful and kind, or not.

Logic is like a dangerous sword. It's because Japan is a compassionate country....

Sekihei

Both Christian theology and Confucianism stress only the importance of logic.

Kase

That's very continental. Japan is an island nation, peaceful — and thanks to the blessings of the good fortunes of her seas and mountains, there has seldom been much hunger. Because of that, fortunately, there have been no wars with people killing each other brandishing such logic and fundamentals.

Sekihei

Is it pure or not, clean or not, beautiful or not? That's all there is.

• The Beijing Cuisine People's Republic and the Peking duck flag

Sekihei

I firmly believe that the rise of Qin Shi Huangdi was a watershed in Chinese history. Wouldn't it be good, I wonder, for China to return to the way it was before him?

Kase

I love China, too, so I think it's kind of lonely that there's just the one country.

Sekihei

[Explosive laugh.] I get it, it would be better for China to be broken up, right?

Kase

I think it would be better with six or seven Chinas. Even eight or ten would be fine. Right now, there are three countries with Chinese people, right? China, Taiwan, and Singapore.

I'm thinking we should divide China up by the different cuisines. The different dialects of Chinese spoken — Beijing Chinese, Shanghai Chinese, Guangdong Chinese, and Fujian Chinese — could become a set with the various cuisines.

Sekihei

Huh. Well, that's clear and simple. 'Cause we're unifying cultural spheres and cuisine spheres.

Kase

The Beijing Cuisine People's Republic, the Shanghai Cuisine People's Republic, the Guangdong Cuisine People's Republic.... The cuisines would be better for peace than the present People's Republic of China, don't you think? [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Well, then, Mr. Kase, on the issue of national flags, Sichuan could have a chili pepper on it.... [Laughs.]

Kase

The flag of the Beijing Cuisine People’s Republic would be a Peking duck. For the flag of the Sichuan Cuisine People’s Republic, how does *mapo-tofu* sound?

Second only to Japanese food, the Japanese love Chinese food best. The Japanese flag is already a “*Hinomaru bentō* [‘Rising Sun’ boxed lunch]” with a single red pickled plum placed on a bed of white rice, so we don’t have to change it. [Laughs.]

• Countries with the word “People’s” in their names are no good

Kase

As I think about it, countries that have the word “People’s” in their names are just no good. The perfect example would be the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Sekihei

Damned straight. And the People’s Republic of China is no different. They have to make a point of calling on the *spirit* of morality because there *is* no morality given their Confucian traditions. There is no “People’s” anything there, so they stick on that “People’s.”

Kase

This was a little before my father’s time, but once Matsumura Kenzō from the Diet and Inayama Yoshihiro, chairman of Nippon Steel Corp., met and were discussing China and the topic turned to classical Chinese literature. Japanese back then were like that.

My father’s generation had an admiration for Chinese culture. A firm grounding in the Chinese classics was considered central to a good education. They felt that it was as if Chinese culture was the source of Japanese culture.

Sekihei

That was the tradition in middle schools and high schools under the old order, right? Those high schools in the old days were something else. Those old school songs... The song of the First Higher School³⁴....

Kase

[Singing:] A-ah, with flowers in a jade cup....

Sekihei

That’s it, yes. I’ve heard it, too.

Kase

³⁴ The “First Higher School,” officially the Kyūsei Dai-ichi Kōtō Gakkō (or just the Kyūsei Ichikō), fed into the Tokyo Imperial University (now Tokyo University). Their school dormitory song, written in 1902, was famous all over Japan. Ichikō is now the Tokyo University Faculty of Liberal Education.

There was a man named Mikami Taku who was one of the ringleaders of the May 15 Incident.³⁵ That no-good naval lieutenant carried out the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai in broad daylight. The young officers of the February 26 Incident later on loved to sing a song written by Mikami: [singing] “The clouds of Witch Mountain fly wildly about...”

Sekihei

Oh, wait. That’s Wushan, a mountain in China, on the Yangtze River.

Kase

It was called “The Song of the Shōwa Restoration,” but it was full of Chinese references. Phooey.

Sekihei

Yeah.

Kase

Saying that Japanese morality and Chinese morality are the same — it’s a mistake.

Sekihei

I feel the same way.

Kase

[Singing.] “The clouds of Witch Mountain fly wildly about, and if I rise in this world of chaos...”

Sekihei

[Laughs.] Those young officers back then certainly had high aspirations.

• Skill at wining and dining: tactics or art?

Kase

When I started going to go to China, what I came to admire was that they had cultivated a history of 4,000 years, and there is no country more skilled wining and dining people. When I’m invited to China, I’m exceptionally warmly received. It’s the art of thoroughly wining people over.

Sekihei

It would be fair to call that a tactic. [Laughs.]

Kase

The Chinese are almost neurotic about the care they take in observing the proper hierarchy. The first time I was invited China, I was the chairman of the Defense Research Institute. I was invited along with my number two at the time. When we were getting ready to fly back to Japan, *just* before they closed the doors on the plane, a

³⁵ The May 15 Incident was an attempted *coup d'état* in 1932 led by right-wing radicals from the Japanese navy assisted by army cadets and civilian elements resulting in the assassination of the prime minister, Inukai Tsuyoshi, and accomplishing little else.

number of the top brass of the Liberation Army came aboard to give us going-away gifts. They gave them to us *on the plane*.

Sekihei

Surprise! What a production!

Kase

It was impressive.

Sekihei

Oh, yeah.

Kase

They gave me a big present, and to my number two they gave one that was slightly smaller. [Laughs.] All are not exactly equal in the People's Republic of China.

Sekihei

They chose their timing well! Moments before the plane closes its doors, they give things to their very important visitor....

Kase

In China, wining and dining people is an art form. My wife and I were invited to dinner at the Chinese embassy in Azabu. At the time, it was something the other embassies just did not do. They asked me to provide the names and addresses of four or five other couples, and the embassy sent invitations out to everyone. Because everyone would be thrilled to be invited to the Chinese embassy. And the dinner at the embassy — of course it would be delicious.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] And? Was it? I've never been invited.

• The ridiculous efforts of Mao suits, commander-in-chief uniforms, stand-up collars, and jumpers

Kase

Since Jiang Zemin became China's head of state, he's been standing up there with the others at the top of the Tienanmen wall at the anniversary celebrations of the founding of the People's Republic. It's really critical in the ranking of who is next to whom. If you make a single mistake in your order, that's it for you. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

It sounds tough. Who walks one step ahead, who comes second, who comes third.... It can get really tough.

Kase

That's the democracy of the People's Republic. If you make a mistake, you get liquidated.

Sekihei

If there's a mistake, it can be a big political problem.

Kase

When I watched the first anniversary celebrations of the PRC's founding after Jiang Zemin became the head of state, of all those lined up on the wall of Tiananmen, Jiang — and *only* Jiang— wore a Mao suit. He had to distinguish himself from the other men. All the others were in suits.

That made me think of Hitler. Hitler had designed a special “commander-in-chief” uniform for himself that he alone wore. Goering and the other army generals followed Hitler with their chests festooned with medals.

Only Hitler wore a simple uniform as commander-in-chief, and he wore on his breast only the Iron Cross that he'd earned when he distinguished himself as a corporal on the western front in the First World War. He was being a representative of the masses.

Stalin was the same. Only *he* seemed like a Russian peasant, wearing a coat with a standing collar. Dictators all make ridiculous efforts.

North Korea's Kim Jung-Il, likewise, is the only one there who wears a jumper. The generals of the Korean People's Army are conspicuous with their chests covered in medals that look like the cheap prizes you get in boxes of candy.

Sekihei

That jumper — it's really dowdy.

Kase

Of course, the Son of Heaven, who has morality, has to distinguish himself from those who follow him — so people will know right away who he is. [Laughs.]

Speaking of great people, a particular distinction of Chinese cuisine is the round table, and the host sits in the best place.

Sekihei

That's how all the banquets in China are.

Kase

Like the conductor of an orchestra.

Sekihei

Right. The person sitting in the head seat takes control. He's in charge of everything.

Kase

It shows just how important the meal is. In Japan, the host humbles himself and sits at the lowest seat. From a Chinese cultural perspective, that's careless and even irresponsible.

Sekihei

To Chinese, dining is a sacred thing. Since the meal is like a religious observance, the officiant sits in the middle. Cultural differences crop up in such traditions. It's the difference in the way people think about eating.

Kase

It would have been better if we'd started this conversation talking about food.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] Like the old Chinese saying, “food is the paramount necessity of the people.”

• China doesn't have a single museum of Western art**Kase**

There's a Chinese saying: “After long unity is division; after long division is unity.”

Sekihei

Yes, there is. There's that cycle.

Kase

It's the cycle of unification and separation. Even so, a great majority of the Chinese people believe that China has a single, perfect culture. It's like it's imprinted in their DNA. You can only see something like this in China.

That's why even though there were many incredibly wealthy people in China before the Second World War, and we can start with those in Shanghai, there isn't a single museum of Western art anywhere in that vast country. That's astounding.

Sekihei

What you've just said — that's an incredible fact.

Kase

In pre-war Shanghai, there was a billionaire named Soong — Charlie Soong. Charlie Soong was Sun Yat-sen's greatest sponsor. His father had been the son of a poor peasant in Hainan during the Qing dynasty, but became a member of the underground Chaozhou Gang, smuggling opium and other things. The surname “Soong” wasn't his original name, either.

Sekihei

That's right. He was originally a gangster overlord.

Kase

Charlie Soong had three daughters: Ai-ling, Ch'ing-ling, and May-ling. His second daughter, Ch'ing-ling, married Sun Yat-sen and ended up becoming the honorary president of the People's Republic of China. Ai-ling, his oldest daughter, became the wife of H. H. Kung, the finance minister of the Republic of China. His third daughter, May-ling, became Madame Chiang Kai-shek.

Think of it. Ch'ing-ling, the grand-daughter of an unsavory opium-smuggler, became the honorary president of the People's Republic of China.

Though they amassed great riches, not a single Chinese billionaire created a museum for Western art. Rich Chinese merchants in Indonesia and Malaysia feverishly collected Chinese art objects, but they had no interest in local or Western art objects.

Recently, rich Chinese, like people in the party leadership, have been coming to Japan. What are they coming to Japan for? To buy Chinese antiques that are in Japan.

Sekihei

Is that so?

Kase

That's the impression I get. The present casinos and bubble economy in China are all but hopeless, they're taking the money overseas. As long as they have Chinese art objects, even if the bubble economy bursts, they're probably going to be alright with it.

When asked, "Are you also buying Japanese art objects?", they respond with a stunned, "Wha...?"

Sekihei

[Laughs.] It's like, "what are you talking about?"

Kase

Their way of thinking is that there is nothing of any value outside of Chinese art. They don't recognize the value of Van Gogh, Cézanne, Renoir, Hiroshige, Utamaro, Yokoyama Taikan, Shinkō Munakata.... They think of the Japanese arts as nothing but insignificant and unsophisticated.

They like Western music, though. At the Chopin Concours, Chinese and Korean pianists placed highly alongside Japanese pianists. Chopin's hands were small, so he's popular with Asians, you see. We also hear stories of rich Chinese buying violins made by master luthiers for their daughters. Music is the only exception.

Sekihei

That's not so. Those buying those things, originally, were viewed as abnormal Chinese, and they had a so-called Western infection. That is, those who did so were considered Chinese infected by the West. Those who played the violin or piano were originally considered *peculiar* by other Chinese.

In China, such people were criticized as Westernizers who worshipped the West.

Kase

It's really strange, though, isn't it, that in all of China — in all that great land mass — there's not a single museum of Western art?

Sekihei

Mr. Kase, you have impressive insight! You get right to the meat of the matter. In Japan, there are many Western art museums just in Tokyo alone. There's one in Ueno, one in Roppongi — you'd run out of fingers if you try to count the ones in the city alone. There are many even out in the countryside and at tourist resorts. But in Beijing? Nope. Nor any in Shanghai.

• The artistic sensibilities of a samurai who traded a castle for a single tea bowl

Kase

They totally fail to acknowledge the value of Japanese works of art. They see them as unsophisticated.

In Chinese, Beijing's Forbidden City is also called the Former Palace. That was the place from which Chiang Kai-shek carried off ivory, gold, and silver art objects to Taiwan to create the National Palace Museum. Even though some of them were melted or broken, there are many things made of valuable materials. In the West, too, there are many art objects made of gold and silver.

We Japanese — and perhaps this is from a frugal spirit — don't like to use things made of valuable materials.

Sekihei

[Laughs.]

Kase

If you go to Beijing's Forbidden City or to Western palaces, you'll see that they're radiant with gold, silver, chandeliers, treasures on display, this, and that. There's not a single thing like that in the palace of Japan's emperor, however. Instead, there is a calm and dignified atmosphere like at a shrine. It's cleansing. When Japanese things get broken, they are, of course, of no value.

Sekihei

And if a tea bowl breaks, it's just no longer any good.

Kase

It wouldn't be worth a *sou*. During the period of civil wars in the last part of the sixteenth century, Western Christian missionaries in Japan sent home enthusiastic reports. In one of them, a missionary wrote of a conversation with a samurai who told him of someone in Japan who had traded a castle for a single tea bowl.

Sekihei

Oh, yes, yes! A tea bowl a dog wouldn't even want somehow got traded for a castle.

Kase

This missionary — he asked, how could something of no value become something so important. A cheap chamber pot had been brought over from the Philippines — then a colony of Spain and called "Nueva Espania" — and it came to be used as a tea utensil. And it was prized. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

That makes me think of Oh Seon-hwa. She said that if Japanese tea utensils and tea bowls classed as National Treasures were taken to Korea, they could be used as bowls for dog food.

Kase

Oh Seon-hwa is my Japanology teacher. To get back to that samurai — he responded to the missionary's question with a question of his own: "Why on earth do you people pay incredible sums of gold for such small rocks?" He was talking about

diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

In the time of Oda Nobunaga,³⁶ a single black tea bowl was traded for a castle.

Kase

What's even more out there is aromatic wood.

Sekihei

What's that?

Kase

In Japan, the incense ceremony, where you sample fragrances, was very popular. We don't say you "smell" the aroma — we say you "hear" it. That's because it's a very faint aroma. It's like straining your ears at a subtle sound — do you hear it, do you not — so that's why. That's different than the strong odor of perfume used by Western women. [Laughs.]

A single small piece of aromatic wood brought from the tropics of the South Seas had the same value as an entire castle.

Sekihei

So in other words, in everyone's minds that piece of aromatic wood had a high worth.

³⁶ Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) was the first of the three great unifiers to try to bring all of Japan under a single ruler.

— Chapter Six — While the People Starved to Death, Mao Held Nightly Jazz Parties

• The Chinese and Korean ruling classes hated manual labor

Kase

Both the Chinese ruling class and the Korean *yangban*³⁷ hated manual labor. They both would summon an attendant to fetch them things they could easily have reached out for and picked up themselves. When they rode horses, they were lifted into the saddle by grunting servants.

Sekihei

That's right, they did absolutely no work. They scorned physical labor, and they took pride in doing none.

Kase

In Japan, however, samurai would till the fields and do manual work. They didn't scorn getting out there and sweating.

Sekihei

The *yangban* society was ridiculous.

Kase

At the time of Japan's annexation of Korea, they made up almost half of the population. In the Edo period, the ruling samurai class made up just under eight percent of Japan's population. In Korea, only the underclass, the *samnomu*, did physical labor. The *yangban* totally exploited the *samnomu*.

Sekihei

Joseon-dynasty Korea was a complete mess. Bribery of officials was a common thing, and *yangban* status was something that could be bought.

Kase

In Korea, they have generational family registries called *jokppo*. In Korea, because nothing is more important than family lineage, these things are huge, multi-volume books — not like those in Japan that are just like simple scrolls. Even today they always have a “main line” for their families. They'd receive money from the *sangmin* who wanted to become a *yangban*, and then enter their names into the family

³⁷ *Yangban* were hereditary nobility in the kingdom of Korea until the end of the Joseon dynasty in 1894. They were the Confucian ideal of scholarly officials, and may or may not have been landed as well. Their status as *yangban* could be repealed if they failed to produce any government officials in three generations, so their status was based on civil service examinations rather than actual landedness as with European nobility.

register.

Sekihei

That's preposterous. Buying and selling *yangban* status like that — it's an absurd society. If Japan hadn't entered Korea, the place would still be hell.

Kase

Now that you mention that, when you look at the differences between Japanese and Chinese cultures, you see that Japanese and Korean cultures share some of the same features.

Sekihei

Such as?

Kase

When you're drinking alcohol in China, you need to be dining, too.

Sekihei

Oh, right!

Kase

Even starters work, as starters are a part of the meal. It's because the meal has begun. In Korea and Japan, we enjoy drinking *before* dining. That's because we have small snacks to munch on.

Sekihei

It's not dinner per se: it's snacks, *tsumami*.

Kase

In Japan and Korea, we put out snacks to bring out the best in the drinks. In Korean, they call snacks "*anju*." It's the same thing as the snacks we put out in Japan.

Sekihei

In China, whatever it is, ultimately it's all about the food. What that means is, it's completely different on whether we put the emphasis on drinking or put the emphasis on eating.

That's why, when you take Chinese people to a bar in Ginza, it's just not enough for them. They eat some seedy-looking snacks, have something to drink, and then get all surprised at how high the bill is.

Sekihei

In China, the substance of the food really varies depending on your social standing. It's like that in the People's Republic of China today, too. It's a kingdom where Chairman Mao was the first generation Son of Heaven. In Japan, there is not so much difference.

• **“Chairman Mao” is Hong Xiuquan reborn**

Kase

After Chairman Mao's death, his personal physician, one of those who had been by his side, moved to America. He wrote in his memoirs that though several tens of millions of people starved to death during the Long March, Mao enjoyed extravagant meals in Zhongnanhai.³⁸ He wrote about the pain in his heart as he ate.

Though Mao had forbidden decadent Western dance and jazz and so forth in the People's Republic of China, he had the People's Liberation Army Band play jazz standards, and enjoyed dancing with groups of beautiful young women. If a woman struck his fancy, he escorted her to his bedroom. It was as if Hong Xiuquan had been reborn. Though Mao forbade the people from playing mahjong, he himself indulged in the game.

Sekihei

Right, right!

Kase

Although everyone is supposed to be equal in the People's Republic of China, the people who are fat have always been — and are even now — the ruling class, and you can tell that with one look.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] That's right.

Kase

All the other people are slender.

Sekihei

Well, then, if you and I went to China, we'd become members of the ruling class!
[Laughs.]

Kase

The first time I was invited to China, the People's Liberation Army didn't have any ranks. Generals, colonels, insignia of rank — they'd junked all of that. Instead, they'd say "division commander" or "leader," and they'd distinguish high and low by their duties, like "regimental commander" or "company commander."

When I asked what would happen if the front line on the battlefield was in disorder, I was told they'd be able to tell who mattered by the number of pockets. The lowest soldiers only had two pockets, and above that, the number of pockets gradually increased.

In addition to that, the cloth and tailoring of the uniforms of the top brass are also different.

Sekihei

In creating a façade of equality, they gave rise to something farcical.

Kase

³⁸ Zhongnanhai is an area adjacent to the Forbidden City in Beijing, where the *crème de la crème* of the Chinese government lives.

Even though Zhou Enlai wore a Mao suit, too, he wore one made of the finest cloth that was well tailored.

Zhou Enlai was like France's Joseph Fouché, that incredible schemer from the French Revolution on through to the reign of Louis XVIII. Fouché was a cruel man who held the power of life and death over people.

Zhou was worse than Mao. In Mao's waning years, he hated Zhou; and when Zhou contracted cancer, Mao wouldn't let them take Zhou to a hospital.

Sekihei

Yeah, well, it was mutual. All of them were gangsters. [Laughs.]

• **The *Asahi Shinbun* headline as Mao died: "A Great Star Falls"**

Kase

The newspaper that could be called foremost in all of Japan is the *Asahi Shinbun*.

Sekihei

Yes.

Kase

When Chairman Mao died in 1972, the *Asahi Shinbun* plastered a huge headline on the front page with white letters outlined in black: "A Great Star Falls."

Sekihei

Really? A great star falls?!

Kase

I brought with me a copy of the evening edition of the *Asashi Shinbun* from the day the late Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei first set foot at Beijing Airport to try to normalize relations between Japan and China. Look. Here they've got a big photo of the two heads of state shaking hands on the tarmac next to a special JAL plane, next to a headline with inch-tall letters saying "Japan and China Now Shake Hands." This is what it says:

Dateline Beijing on the 25th, special correspondent Nishimura.

How can I express the ponderous, sharp silence of that moment? A silence that didn't miss a single sound descended over the whole expansive Beijing Airport. November 25, 1972, at 11:40 AM, a red carpet waited, laid at the airplane's gangway. Prime Minister Tanaka, in a black suit, descended the steps turning slightly to the left and right. He looked to the dazzling sky and with his mouth set firmly in a straight line, he made his way to Prime Minister Zhou.

.... Is this a dream? No, it is no dream. No, it is unmistakable that the hands of the premiers of Japan and China are firmly clasped together.

In truth, it couldn't have lasted more than a minute. It's possible the American and European reporters in the journalist pool must have raised their audacious voices. It felt longer than it was. It feels like there is nothing making a sound. The bitterness that has continued for forty years came to an end at that moment. I got the feeling in a seeming moment of sudden giddiness of all the blood and tears shed by both the Japanese and Chinese people over that long time rising up to the shimmering bright sunlight....

Reading this now, I'm ashamed for this reporter. The low level of Japanese jour-

nalism!

At the time, the journalist Mizaki Masaharu was working for the publisher Rōmansha, and right after this he asked me to write a book for them. This is what I wrote: “A newspaper reporter, regardless of the situation, must never write of giddiness. We want him to be level-headed. In addition, whether it is Japan or overseas, reporters are *always* raising their ‘audacious voices,’ aren’t they?”

Sekihei

What’s more, he’s missing a fundamental point. Even today, the Japanese mass media largely ignore serious financial and social problems that can be tied to China, and they’re putting out “China worship.”

Kase

I’ve said it before, but the first time I was invited to China, I didn’t think I was dreaming that I was coming face to face with the Empire of Heavenly Peace.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] Oh, Mr. Kase. You’re the only one who’s seen through it to see it as the Empire of Heavenly Peace. Even all those people who’ve seen it don’t understand that that’s what it is. For me, that’s the point. That’s why I’m really fortunate to be able to talk to you like this.

Kase

After arriving at Beijing Airport, I rode off in the car they’d sent for me, and I looked out the car’s windows. All I saw were poorly complexioned people dressed in shabby, dark blue Mao suits.

Sekihei

It’s all in the traditions. That’s why Qin Shi Huangdi, the Empire of Heavenly Peace, and Mao Zedong were all the same thing.

• Belief in the UN began with a Ministry of Foreign Affairs mistranslation

Kase

Mr. Sekihei, you’ve said that Japan calling the UN the “*Kokusai Rengō*” — in English the “International Alliance” — is wrong, and that China and Taiwan are correct in calling it, as we would say, the “*Rengō Koku*,” or “Allied Nations.”

Sekihei

Yes, right.

Kase

“Allied Nations” is correct. North and South Korea both call it that as well. Though they say it “*Yeonhap kkuk*.”

On January first, a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt gathered all the nations fighting Japan in Washington and proposed, “We shall be called the United Nations.” That’s how it was decided. At that time, the government translated this as *Rengō Koku*, or “Allied Nations.”

The international body that is the United Nations, or as it is now called in Japan, “the International Alliance,” or *Kokusai Rengō*, was born in San Francisco with America taking the lead while the battle for Okinawa was being desperately fought. The requirement to join those United Nations was to be a “peace-loving country” — but they had all issued declarations of war against Japan. [Laughs.]

Until October of 1945, Japanese newspapers correctly translated “United Nations” as “*Rengō Koku*.” That grated on the nerves of the Foreign Ministry, though, so they took a page from the prewar League of Nations — the “*Kokusai Renmei*” — and they deliberately mistranslated “United Nations” as “*Kokusai Rengō*.”

Japan’s faith in the UN was born by that mistranslation. If they had left it as *Rengō Koku*, probably no one would be worshipping it these days. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Postwar Japanese polishing up things and renaming them — like “defeat in war” as “ending a war,” an “occupation army” as a “stationing of troops,” and “forced Constitution” as a “peace Constitution” — has become a sort of special skill. [Laughs.]

Kase

I personally think that all the members of the UN should have to come together wearing the national dress of their people. Of course the Japanese would be kimono, the Chinese would wear pigtails — no, wait. The uniform of a Confucian scholar. On their heads they should wear those round caps that represent heaven, and on their feet those square shoes that represent earth. North and South Korea should wear Korean costume.... The national character has remained unchanged for 100, 400, or 500 years.

If they did that, everyone would understand the reality of the world.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] That would certainly be easier to understand than everyone wearing suits.

Kase

[While eating.] Mr. Sekihei, I shouldn’t let you overeat. You don’t want to get like me.

Sekihei

What’s that?

Kase

You shouldn’t get fat like I am. Ladies’ men are all fat. We’re troubled when rivals put on weight. [Laughs.]

Sekihei

Oh, is that so! Well, then, I’m going to do my best to out-fat you!

Kase

In the PRC, those who get fat are the leadership.

• Beautiful confections were born out of the freedom of Japanese women

Kase

The confections have come out now. You know, only Japan and European cultures are the ones who make the world's most beautiful and sublime confections.

China has moon cakes and so on, but it's an unfavorable comparison when we look at them. It's a shame, too, since they're that fanatical about cooking.

There are no decent confections in Korea, either. India doesn't have any, and there are none in the Middle East. All the way from China to the Middle East, it's just the same.

As you know, it's been a study of mine to see why that's so. [Laughs.] It's because in Japan and Europe, women are free to go out and about.

Sekihei

They had the high status.

Kase

Women were able to go out and meet up with each other. Since women had foot-binding in China, they couldn't readily go out freely. And in Korea, with the exception of visiting the family graves, the wives and daughters of the *yangban* were hardly ever allowed out.

In China, bound feet were seen as like little gold lotuses, so they were called *jīnlín* ("golden lotus"), and they were as pretty as bamboo shoots in the springtime, and were called *chūnsūn* ("spring bamboo shoots"). They thought of a woman's artificially small foot as beautiful.

Sekihei

That's atrocious.

Kase

It *is* atrocious. And they castrated men to make them eunuchs. A lot of people died trying for that. Only about five in ten survived the process.

As for the bound feet, many women died from inflammation or suppuration.

Korea copied their Song Chinese overlords, so until the Japanese annexation of Korea, there were eunuchs at the Joseon court. Every year, the Korean court presented many eunuchs and *gisaeng*³⁹ to China.

There are some historians who maintain that a [Korean] horse-rider tribe subjugated Japan. There was nothing of the sort, though. As evidence, there is absolutely no horse furniture to be found in Japanese tombs of the period. That there was not a single eunuch is also a piece of evidence. There was no introduction to Japan of a eunuch system as there was no cattle-raising culture, either.

There was no castration of horses or cattle in Japan. Pure things are important in Japan, and there was no harm made to nature.

Sekihei

Taking eunuchs to be impure shows the purity of the Japanese heart.

• Confucius ate human flesh in a paste every day

Kase

³⁹ Simply defined, *gisaeng* were female entertainers trained in the fine arts, poetry, singing, etc.

I first thought that Confucianism was bogus when I saw that, according to Chinese historical records, Confucius ate human flesh every day. It was called *jiàng*; that is, it was a made into a paste.

Sekihei

That must be fairly tasty. Not that I've ever had any. [Laughs.]

Kase

For Confucius, the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, and so on, were things for those of the ruling classes.

Sekihei

There was a sense that the people who were eaten just *weren't* considered people.

Kase

Confucius' favorite disciple was Zi Lu. According to Chinese records, Zi Lu lost a dispute and was eaten by his disputant.

Sekihei

Ah! He was made into human *miso*.

Kase

At one time, I was writing about Confucianism, and there's a place in Saitama prefecture, the Yasuoka Masahiro Memorial Hall....

Sekihei

Oh, yes. I've been there.

Kase

I was asked to go there to give a talk. I emphasized to them that I was going to speak ill of Confucianism there at their center, and that the original Confucianism was totally bogus.

Sekihei

[Laughs.]

Kase

At the end of my talk, sure enough, Yasuoka's disciples made a proper bow, and thanked me. "We appreciated your very nice talk."

Sekihei

[Laughs.]

Kase

In Japan, we have the tea ceremony, and in a proper tearoom there is a very small, half-height entrance door for guests which forces them to bend over upon entering.

It is unthinkable that someone like Mao Zedong, Jiang Zemin, or Hu Jintao would enter through such a door. In Japan, those who stand tall will make themselves small.

Sekihei

Even great warlords like Oda Nobunaga, or the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu — or even the current prime minister — would do exactly as you’ve described. I rather doubt Mao would have. If Mao were told, “Please enter via the guest door,” the first thing Mao would have done would have been to *break down* the guest door. [Laughs.]

• A father’s gift of an English dictionary and a massive *kanji* dictionary

Kase

If I may speak of my personal experience, during my middle-school years, I would often go on walks with my father.

One summer, we were walking by a place with blooming flowers. “These are poppies,” he said. He usually taught me things that way. The poppy blooms in early summer with white and red blossoms.

During the last days of the Qin, there was a great military leader named Xiang Yu. He had a lover named Yu Ji. He fought a battle against Liu Bang, who was to become the first emperor of the Han, and lost. You mentioned Liu Bang earlier.

When Xiang Yu told Yu Ji, “From now, you shall serve the Han,” Yu Ji replied, “It is said that one cannot serve two rulers, and a faithful woman must not serve two lords.” And drawing Xiang Yu’s sword, she cut her own throat and died.

When grass began to grow over the place Yu Ji was buried, these beautiful flowers blossomed there amidst the grass. My father told me this story, and said, “That’s why the formal name of these flowers is *gubijinsō*”— or in English, “Yu the beauty.”

Sekihei

And so the beauty Yu was reborn.

Kase

In my third year of middle school, my father told me that I could improve my English ability by using an actual English dictionary rather than a dictionary where you look up the word in English and get a Japanese translation. So he gave me an English dictionary and a massive *kanji* dictionary. I flipped through the *kanji* dictionary, and it was jam-packed with difficult characters. Was I blown away.

It explained the way *kanji* were made, though, and it had explanations of the characters....

Sekihei

Yup, they have those.

Kase

As I looked over the explanations for the characters, I thought they were completely fascinating. I spent all my energy reading those explanations. I can still remember them well. For example, it explained that the *kanji* for “sheep” has two horns on its head, four legs, and a tail.⁴⁰ In the *kanji* for hand,⁴¹ the central vertical line is the palm, and there are one, two three, four, five fingers. That makes up the hand.

⁴⁰ The *kanji* is 羊. One can see the head at the top with its horns, the four legs, and the tail pointing down.

⁴¹ The *kanji* is 手.

I became the pride of my classmates, and the knowledge spread. The *kanji* for “speak”⁴² has a mouth at the bottom, and the four horizontal lines above it represent the sound coming from the mouth. The noise coming from the mouth is the voice. It’s just like a speech bubble in a comic book.

Sekihei

I get what you’re saying.

Kase

At that time, I didn’t know it, but the Chinese — and Westerners, too — were absolute chatterboxes. Compared to them, the Japanese people are the most reticent in the world.

If *kanji* had been invented in Japan, there would only have been a single horizontal stroke above the mouth. And it would have been a short stroke, too. We’re just not that talkative. [Laughs.]

Next is “neck.” At the top are three strands of hair, and right below that, goggling, is an eye. So it really means “head.” In China, they use a different character for the neck, that thing between and connecting the head to the torso.⁴³ For some reason, in Japan we use the first *kanji* for “madly in love” (*kubittake*) and “necklace” (*kubi kazari*). We also use it for words meaning “boss” or “chief” (*shuSekihei* and *shuchō*).

Sekihei

Right. That’s interesting. The *kanji* for “neck” in *shuryō*, meaning “chief, or leader,” means “head.” In Chinese, the *kanji* the Japanese use for neck is not used for this thing. [Pointing to his neck.] When *kanji* came to Japan, some of their meanings changed in various ways.

Kase

My father was a product of his time. He liked the Chinese classics.

Sekihei

Before the war, all the intellectuals in Japan were like that.

Kase

Oh, and Chinese poetry — Li Bai, Bai Juyi, and so on. He had many anthologies of Chinese poetry. I read most of them during my high school and college years.

• Laozi’s “small country, small population” and his diametrical opposite: the Chinese Communist Party

Kase

Laozi is a Chinese philosopher who I have an interest in. And Zhuangzi. There

⁴² The *kanji* is 言.

⁴³ The *kanji* for “neck” as used in Japan being talked about is 首 and is pronounced *kubi* in Japanese and *qiú* in Chinese. The other character in use in China for neck (also pronounced *kubi* in Japanese, but *jīng* in Chinese) is 頸. “Head” is 頭. The *kanji* 首 is also mentioned in several compound words, where it is pronounced with the Sino-Japanese reading *shu* (e.g., *shuSekihei* 首席 and *shuchō* 首長).

was Laozi's famous "small country, small population." It was his ideal state. Since there would be no want, there would be no using of any machines. Even if there were chariots and boats, no one would ride them.

Sekihei

Yes, right. There would be no use for "conveniences of civilization."

Kase

And therefore, military armaments...

Sekihei

Wouldn't be needed.

Kase

And there would be no coming and going between neighboring countries.

Sekihei

That's right.

Kase

The neighboring country...

Sekihei

The sound of birds.

Kase

Right, they're so close you can hear their chickens clucking and their dogs barking.

Sekihei

And they never get together.

Kase

I dislike international exchange and internationalization. I think it undermines people's spirit.... [Laughs.] I think it's also better not to be able to understand a foreign language. In today's world, Japan has to go out so it can eat, but that's a necessary evil.

One should avoid international travel as much as possible. And then we have Laozi's teachings — we shouldn't fiddle with his ideology.

Sekihei

But Mr. Kase, Laozi's posterity, the Chinese Communist Party, are doing the exact *opposite* of everything he said. [Laughs.]

Kase

After him came Zhuangzi, and their ideas were combined, and came to be called the Lao-Zhuang ideology. Laozi, you know, was a man who lived in the time of Confucius.

Sekihei

Right, and there's a legend that says that Confucius asked Laozi to instruct him on some things.

Kase

It's written in *Records of the Grand Historian*, the *Shiji*, yes. That legend of Laozi appears in *Shiji*. I've read it, and it said Confucius was younger than Laozi. I don't know whether it was actually based on any historical truth.

Sekihei

Right, we don't know. But for what it's worth, there is such a story.

Kase

I like what Laozi said. From time to time, I admonish myself. [Laughs.]

"Life and death are two faces of the same coin" and "keep to your poverty and you will reach fifty." That last one preaches that it's better to be poor.

"To attain comfort, do not be comfortable; to attain renown, do not be renowned" — this tells us riches and fame are fortuitous things, they are nothing but relative things. It's like, the desire for a worldly life is really something vulgar, so your heart should be made one of poverty.

Sekihei

Yes, but of course it would be impossible to adapt such a social view and such a view of the state as advocated by Laozi to present-day society. But you know, I really wish Hu Jintao and those others would study even a little bit of that ideology of Laozi's that you mentioned.

A small state with a small population and no military armaments. If they were to take it from Laozi, I think both people and society would be happier.

If the Communist Party leadership of the People's Republic of China were to seriously attempt to realize even just a bit of Laozi's philosophy, the Chinese people would all be happy. Unfortunately, though, they've taken a diametrically opposite position.

• A Lao-Zhuang parable: "the fat boar"

Sekihei

You've already mentioned the Lao-Zhuang ideology. Its most attractive points are its idleness and its frankness.

Kase

Laozi valued disinterest and quiet. He said there is no artificiality in nature.

Sekihei

I have to wonder if Japan's samurai didn't inherit that frankness long ago.

Kase

Laozi's ideology was very close to Japan's concepts of *wabi* and *sabi*,⁴⁴ you know.

Sekihei

Oh, I see, I see! Right! With randomness, the result is we get the birth of *wabi* and *sabi*! It's all done without the input of human hands.

You know, there's a parable that Zhuangzi often used. In this forest, there lived a boar. Every day he was covered in dirt and was filthy. There were days he ate, and days he didn't eat. But Zhuangzi said that this boar was happy. He was in the forest, in nature, living an idle life. Doing whatever he wanted.

One day, the boar was captured by someone. In captivity, at first, the owner gave him delicious feed every day. The boar was happy. "How fortunate that I was caught," he thought.

One day, out of nowhere, the owner showed up and he put the boar in a bathtub and cleaned him up nicely. The boar was beyond thrilled. He had never been so clean in his entire life. [Laughs.]

Then the owner came again! This time, he put a beautiful robe on the boar. The boar was beside himself. "I've never been this happy!"

You know what happened the next day? That boar was sacrificed!

It was for the sacrifice that he was given good things to eat, got washed, and was dressed in fine clothing. At the end, the boar thought, "Oh, I've been such a fool!"

What did Zhuangzi mean in telling this tale? He used it to show that people were full of desires. They want to eat good things. They want to wear fine clothing. If you go on that way, in the end, you'll live a life where you can only end up being someone's sacrifice. The wisdom is deep in Zhuangzi's stories, isn't it?

Kase

It's like that with today's consumer economy. *We are* that boar.

Sekihei

Right. With our present capitalism and consumer economy, it's exactly like that.

Kase

Lao-Zhuang ideology is completely incompatible with Confucianism, isn't it?

Sekihei

Yes. It's the total antithesis of Confucianism.

There's something interesting, though. Long ago, Chinese intellectuals were Confucian in outward appearance. Confucianism was their façade. Their real nature, though, was Lao-Zhuang.

That's why the intellectuals long ago, when they came to power or entered government service, all spoke of Confucianism. When they were out of office, when they couldn't do anything, when they'd retired or whatever, they played in Laozi's garden. They enjoyed themselves.

And there's one more interesting thing. When those old Chinese intellectuals were reading Confucius' *Analects* from childhood, they were setting up that Confucian façade. But when they were making hanging scrolls or decorating their rooms, no one was writing down sayings from the *Analects*. It was all Lao-Zhuang.

⁴⁴ *Wabi* and *sabi* are two paired aesthetic concepts that emphasize simplicity, naturalness, austerity, rusticity, and so on. It may be considered as "natural simplicity" or "flawed beauty."

Confucius and the Lao-Zhuang ideology were in confrontation. Among the intellectuals, when they were writing hanging scrolls and giving them as gifts and so forth, they were all Lao-Zhuang sayings. In their heart-of-hearts, they really liked Lao-Zhuang best.

Kase

Be that as it may, it totally failed to become the ideology to regulate conduct.

Sekihei

Right, there's that, too.

Kase

For example, there is a proverb of Laozi's: "who places himself in the background will find himself in the foreground." There's also "good fortune brings calamity, and in calamity lies good fortune."

Sekihei

That's right.

— Chapter Seven —
**A Spiritual Culture Cannot Grow under
an Overly Brutal Government**

• **“Wisdom and self-preservation” camouflages self-interest**

Kase

My dad had a copy of the *Dao De Jing* by Laozi. It was a very short book.

Sekihei

It’s short, too — only 5,000 characters long.

Kase

Yeah, it’s only about 5,300 characters. There was a translation of it that I read when I was in high school. I admired the *Dao De Jing* and thought of it as a set of precepts for living. There’s that aphorism: “wisdom and self-preservation.”

Sekihei

Oh, yes — “*míng zhé bǎo shēn.*” It’s a behavioral principal of the Chinese intellectual.

Kase

If your senses become clear, you can protect your body. The current Communist Chinese leadership also say such a thing, but it is not something achieved through morality. Rather, it’s just ultimately used as conventional wisdom on how to get by in life.

Sekihei

That’s right.

Kase

What that means, though, is that their real intention is using Confucianism.

Sekihei

Really? That’s interesting. There are two sides to what Laozi is saying there. There’s the plain intent, and then there’s the other one: the art of living well in society without taking any risks.

The thing is, the samurai of Japan inherited the... the integrity, that is that “plain intent” part of it, but they did *not* adopt Laozi’s other side: the crafty, cunning side. The self-preservation side — that saving yourself at all costs — was what the Lao-Zuang school emphasized, and that was the aspect that the Chinese followed. No surprise, though. China is a political society.

Why did the Chinese intellectuals gratefully buy into the art of self-preservation? Because their politics have always been excessively cruel. It was a world where you

might get killed right away for just making the slightest mistake.

Speaking with you now, it just now occurred to me that there are two different parts — the Laozi of Japan and the Laozi of China.

Kase

The Lao–Zuang ideology has had a strong influence on the Japanese.

Sekihei

I believe so. It's tied in with the ideals of *bushidō*.

Kase

Confucianism had great power during the Western and Eastern Han dynasties.⁴⁵ In subsequent dynasties, Confucianism was in decline for a bit, and the Lao-Zhuang ideology was popular.

Sekihei

That would be during the time of the Northern Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties.⁴⁶

For a time, Confucianism was extolled and became the dominant doctrine during the Western and Eastern Han. As China fell into civil war, however, people became disenchanted with Confucianism. Literati and poets of the Wei and Jin felt that such a thing was just a façade meant to deceive people.

Kase

Buddhism also came into China from India during this period and spread out far and wide along with the Lao–Zuang ideology. Though they called Confucianism a moral ideology, they used its beautiful surface dressing to camouflage their self-interest.

Sekihei

That's right. The people of the Wei and Jin saw right through that. That's why there were so many people like the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove⁴⁷ and many other different people who were brimming with stubborn individuality during the Northern Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties.

Every day these people would do the same seemingly pointless things over and over. For example, there was this one fellow, one of the Seven Sages, Ruan Ji. He traveled for 300 kilometers to pay a visit on a friend. Then, just as he reached the

⁴⁵ The Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) was created on the ashes of the Qin by the rebel leader Liu Bang. The four-century regime is considered a golden age in Chinese history. It is divided generally into two parts: the Western Han and the Eastern Han. The Western Han (206 BC–AD 9) was a period of consolidation and expansion of power. After a usurpation of power by a court official created the short-lived Xin dynasty (9 BC–AD 23), the Han dynasty regained power and moved their court east, earning them the name Eastern Han (25 BC–AD 220).

⁴⁶ The Northern and Southern States Dynasties period (420–589) was an age of civil war, where rival dynasties quickly rose and fell, with some even ruling parts of China at the same time. The Northern Wei dynasty (386–535) existed concurrently with the Jin, which is broken into a Western Jin (265–316) and an Eastern Jin (317–420). The Wei itself would break into an Eastern Wei (534–550) and a Western Wei (535–556).

⁴⁷ The “Seven Sages” were a group of Daoist Qingtan scholars, writers, and musicians who got together in the third century. They were linked to the Daoist state of the Cao Wei, and feared the avowedly Confucian Jin state. Their works celebrated personal freedom and criticized the court.

gates of his friend's house, he thought, "Meh. I'll just go home." So, without seeing his friend, he turned around and *went home*. [Laughs.]

Ruan Ji said, "I had already more than expressed my desire to visit; after that, whether we met or not was of no concern."

Kase

Ruan Ji and the other six gamboled in the bamboo grove, rejected conventional manners, and indulged themselves in heavy drinking. Confucianism has continued to this day in China, forcing everyone into a rigid mold and crushing their individuality.

China is still like that today. That's why China is still an unchanging Confucian society.

• Japanese leaders who were deceived by "In spring nights I sleep past daybreak"

Kase

We were made to dutifully study *kanbun*⁴⁸ in school. If you're Japanese, you have to know the poem "Spring Dawn" by Meng Haoran,⁴⁹ which begins "In spring nights I sleep past daybreak."⁵⁰ Even well before the start of the Meiji period, *kanbun* was seen as a part of one's fundamental accomplishments.

Then, getting back to our compulsory education, Li Bai's⁵¹ "Thoughts on a Still Night" was also one of those we had to learn.

Sekihei

Yes, yes!

Kase

Even now I still remember it. "I raise my head and look at the bright moon / I lower my head and think of home."

Then there are the words of Tao Yuanming:⁵² "Returning home — the fields are nigh to ruin. Somehow, I must return home."

Tao Yuanming is called a pastoral poet. Seeking nothing but things that were good, he took up a hoe and spade and tilled the ground and he became a mere farmer with no connection to Society.

Sekihei

That's a very beautiful poem.

Kase

⁴⁸ *Kanbun*, literally "Han text," is Classical Chinese literature as read in Japanese.

⁴⁹ Meng Haoran (691–740) was one of the major Tang-era poets. As a bureaucrat he was a failure, but as a poet he earned great fame in writing of his birthplace.

⁵⁰ The poem that Kase quotes begins 春眠不覺曉 (*chūn mián bù jué xiǎo*). The *kanbun* rendering in Japanese is 春眠曉を覺えず (*shunmin akatsuki o oboezu*). It is variously translated into English as "Oversleeping in spring I missed the dawn," "I can barely wake up in spring slumber," "I slept in the spring night so well I didn't know it was dawn," "Sleeping, not knowing it's morning," etc.

⁵¹ Li Bai (701–762) is also known as Li Po. He is possibly the most famous of the Tang-era poets, and about a thousand of his poems survive. He is particularly famous for his poetry extolling the pleasures of drinking.

⁵² Tao Yuanming (365–427) is also known as Tao Qian. He idolized the pastoral life, and this is reflected in his *oeuvre*.

I can still remember the beginning. In a different poem — one also loved by the Japanese — Tao Yuanming said, “In courtyard before my door is no rubbish nor mess; in the open I take my leisure.”

Sekihei

This is interesting, too. You know, those Chinese poets whose work is also widely made to be read in Japan.... By and large they’re folks who follow the Lao–Zuang ideology.

Kase

Japanese admire the Tang dynasty. That’s because the Tang poets liked peaceful nature without wars.

The Daoists’ ideology of “calmness and self-control” and “when the great is even the small are hale” — meaning “when governance is fair and even, the populace will be cultured” — fit in with Japanese tastes.

Sekihei

That’s right. During the Tang and Song dynasties, poets who had been forced out of the political makeup or estranged from power popped up in great numbers. Li Bai was one of them.

Kase

Tang and Song poets, in particular, praised wine.

Sekihei

The thing is, while drinking, you could break out of the world of the bureaucrat a little bit. It was an escape. That’s why wine and poetry are closely connected in China.

• 3,000 years a “paradise for government officials”

Kase

Since my father had a large collection of Chinese poetry anthologies, I would read them. When I did, I thought, what a splendid thing wine must be. So when I grew up, wine became my friend. [Laughs.]

Tao Yuanming had been a government official, too. Something interesting about China that they don’t let other countries see is that, when you speak about China, you’re talking about government officials. There is no other country where the officials so much had their own way — no matter what period you’re talking about — than China.

Sekihei

There was no path available to intellectuals but that of becoming government officials.

Kase

That’s right. Even today, the most exalted people are government officials.

Sekihei

They try the hardest.

Kase

Good grief. For over 3,000 years, not a thing has changed.

Sekihei

True. You've just pointed out something incredibly important. During the Edo period, there were scads of cultured people in Japan who were free and who weren't samurai, right?

Bashō,⁵³ Chikamatsu Monzaemon,⁵⁴ Ōta Nanpo,⁵⁵ all kinds of Confucian scholars — all of them were like that. You'd get money from this domain to teach here, and after that you'd move to that domain there. There were also many free people who were, so to speak, standing out as "the opposition."

In China, it was like that until the fall of the Qing — no, wait, strike that — even until the People's Republic of China now, but free speech and people standing out as the opposition were not tolerated.

The period of Mao Zedong, in particular, was that way. All the intellectuals were absorbed into the political force. The only thing for them was to become the hands and feet of the emperor.

Kase

In the whole world, the only place where virtually all the poets were government officials....

Sekihei

Was China.

Kase

A paradise for government officials. [Laughs.] *That* is the distinctive peculiarity of China. Tao Yuanming, for example, worked as the director of the educational administration.

Sekihei

What today we might consider the minister of culture.

Kase

He also served as a staff officer in the town militia. Finally, he worked as chief of his locality.

Ultimately, he said that a simple life in the country was best, so he returned to the fields of his youth. That was where his words about "returning home" came in.

Sekihei

Right. For him, becoming an intellectual meant he first had to leave his positions of government service. The significance of this is that historically there was no free literary world independent of governmental authority in China. There was virtually

⁵³ Bashō (1644–1694) is possibly Japan's best known poet internationally. He is considered a master of the haiku form.

⁵⁴ Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725) was a playwright first of the puppet theater (*jōruri* and *bunraku*) and later *kabuki*. He is considered one of the greatest of Japan's dramatists, and has been called "the Shakespeare of Japan."

⁵⁵ Ōta Nanpō (1749–1823) was a poet and writer of fiction.

none.

• China gave birth to no *Tale of Genjis* or Shakespeares

Kase

In Japan, there were many samurai who were also poets. To give a famous example, there was Ōta Dōkan,⁵⁶ who founded the city of Edo....

Sekihei

And he also built Edo Castle.

Kase

It was right after the end of the Ōnin War, with Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado. I believe he was the 103rd emperor. Anyway, Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado asked Dōkan, “What kind of house do you live in?” He composed a *waka* poem and presented it to the emperor. Taking up his brush, Dōkan fluently wrote:

My humble abode
Adjoins a pine field
Near the sea.
From its eaves
I see Fuji’s peak.

And then there’s the poem Date Masamune⁵⁷ composed when he looked up at Mt. Fuji:

Each time I see it,
Mt. Fuji,
With its ever-changing scenery,
It is as if I am seeing it
For the very first time.

All the samurai were poets. Poetry was the education of the samurai.

Sekihei

In the case of Japan, in addition to the samurai poets, there were many, many cultured men and Confucian scholars who were not members of the ruling class. In Europe, there were great numbers of such writers who were apart from political power.

In both Europe and Japan there were many free men of talent, but historically in China, there was traditionally no such society. That’s why there were no *independent* poets, men of culture, or masters of calligraphy.

China is a nation of calligraphy, but all the great calligraphers (of whom Wang Xizhi⁵⁸ was considered the best) have been government officials up until recently.

⁵⁶ Ōta Dōkan (1432–1486) ruled the Musashi province from his seat in Edo. He was a warrior, a great strategist, and a good poet.

⁵⁷ Date Masamune (1567–1636), also known as “the one-eyed dragon” due to the loss of one eye, was one of the most powerful daimyō in the north east. He was a great patron of art and culture.

⁵⁸ Wang Xizhi (303–361) was famous even in his lifetime as a calligrapher (and a master of all forms of script). His work even influences Japanese calligraphy today.

That, too, is a peculiarity of China.

Kase

Bai Juyi⁵⁹ was the same. He was a near genius, and started writing poetry at the age of five or six. And then there's the civil service examinations. The first test he passed was the local-stage examination.

Sekihei

That's right.

Kase

Then he passed the next test above that, the one at the provincial stage. Then he passed the civil service test for officials overseeing government appointments and discipline. The fourth test was an elite version of the conventional higher civil service examinations. He took his examinations one after the other without a single stumble.

Sekihei

Yes, that's right. He was a heck of a bureaucrat.

I like Chinese poetry, too; but in the literary world, there has been no literature born in China capable of moving people all over the world.

For example, you have Shakespeare. Or take Japan's *Tale of Genji*. China has nothing like that.

What I mean is, there is no spirit of freedom without independent literature. For men of letters, or for bureaucrats, poetry was entertainment. They did the work of a bureaucrat and in their spare time, well... they drank and wrote poetry. There was no scope for a literary world that could plumb the depths of the human soul.

• Romance of the Three Kingdoms is only interesting, but Tale of the Heike describes the Buddhist idea of the evanescence of life

Sekihei

When you read *Tale of the Heike*, you get a sense of the deep world of the evanescence of life. There's really not much like this in Chinese literature. For example, there's the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It's interesting when you read it, and there are all these characters who appear in it, but as for deep characters... well...

Kase

Absolutely none.

Sekihei

None. It doesn't delve into the deep, inner psychological world. But it *is* interesting.

Kase

It's the "interesting" like a Hollywood movie spectacular.

⁵⁹ Bai Juyi (772–846) was a poet whose works often reflected his duties as a provincial governor.

Sekihei

That's it exactly! No matter how many times you read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, it doesn't make you think of your own soul or the depths of humanity.

When you read Shakespeare, though, or when you read the *Tale of Genji*, there are things that touch you. If there's no independent literary spirit, you just can't have real literature.

Kase

It's because it was a government officials' paradise.

Sekihei

There's no helping it. In short, government officials were not of the common people. They existed only to serve the Son of Heaven. In other words, they were nothing more than knights and rooks and pawns on the political game board. Under the Chinese civil service examination system, "intellectual" equals "bureaucrat." The only path for an intellectual was to take and pass the civil service exam and become a bureaucrat. All of them were underlings of the emperor. Poetry and literature were nothing more than mere pastimes of the bureaucrats.

That tradition has continued to this day. For example, there is a government-established organization called the Chinese Writers' Association. Writers, that is, men of letters, all join this organization and are paid wages by the government. It is a "writer officialdom."

It's the invocation of an independent human spirit, though, that creates real literature. As you said a bit ago, they're all bureaucrats, so from the get-go there's been no molding of any independent spirit, or human spirit.

There are exceptions. Li Bai and any number of people worked and tried to extricate themselves from that world.

• Why the Forbidden City's handicrafts are like acrobatic displays

Kase

Chinese artworks, too, were the property of the emperor.

Sekihei

That's so.

Kase

I visited Beijing's Forbidden City and Taiwan's National Palace Museum many times, and these little, delicate things....

The ridiculous thing was, there were magnifying glasses placed in front of them to look through.

Sekihei

It's because they were obsessed with the details.

Kase

Of course it was something presented to the court.

Sekihei

Right, it was tribute to the powers-that-be.

Kase

They're competing with the skill of their fingers like some performance of an acrobatic troupe just to elicit the reaction, "Wow, you can even do *that*?" But there's absolutely no sense of it as a work of art.

Sekihei

That's so. It's a world with no passion for beauty.

It's the same with Chinese pottery. Let's consider the world of Japanese ceramics and tea bowls. The craftsmen express their own colors and shapes. They are expressing the world of their own spirit. For Chinese ceramics, though, historically all the good pieces were made for the emperor. They weren't expressing their own human spirits; they were making things for the emperor. Ultimately, everything in China resolves to the government. It's a frightening country.

On this point, you said you were going to praise China, but there's absolutely nothing to praise about it. [Laughs.]

Kase

No, I'll praise them. Am I not praising the Lao-Zhuang ideology? The Lao-Zhuang ideology is good.

Sekihei

Really? It's a great ideology, but the Chinese people have unfortunately not personally inherited it.

That, too, is the fault of the Son of Heaven. The Son of Heaven is not just any person. He's a person qualified to eat other people. The solitary protagonist. Everything is embodied in that one person, and he has the monopoly on morality. He completely violates the antitrust laws. [Laughs.] That's why the healthy spirit has been snatched from Chinese society.

• Japanese think "I've wronged someone"; Chinese think "someone's wronged me"

Kase

The Japanese "Japanized" Confucianism. We idealized it and tried to implement it. To do that, we came to view China, the font of Confucianism, as a more beautiful country than Japan.

Mistakenly, we believed that China had a better culture. This continued from the Edo period right up to the Shōwa period. Looking through the lens of Japanese-made Confucianism, however, we just were dreaming on it.

Sekihei

True. Let me try to put in my own words what you're saying. The Japanese of that time had taken in all of the good things about Confucianism from China since way back. They adopted the spiritual parts that had long ago been forgotten by the Chinese and they remodeled it through the Japanese spirit, making it into something wonderful.

Until the Meiji period, all the Japanese people followed it. But they never thought that the part that they alone came to hold — the best part — was only Japan's; they

always believed that the source was in China.

Alternatively, they were convinced that China had more of that wonderful part than Japan did.

Kase

Even today, there are many in Japan who are under that impression.

Sekihei

There are. What the Meiji Japanese thought was wonderful was something that, even though it originally had nothing to do with China and had been created in Japan, and they were convinced that the Chinese still had something even better.

Chinese Confucianism and Japanese Confucianism are now totally different things.

Whenever something happens, a Japanese will think “I have done wrong to someone”; a Chinese will think “someone has done wrong to me.” [Explosive laughter.]

Kase

If, for argument’s sake, like Japan at the end of the shogunate and the start of the Meiji period, Qing China adopted a “self-strengthening movement,” undertook a revision of their laws, adopted Western technologies and organization, and if there had been someone like Deng Xiaopeng, and if — as with today’s China — the Qing economy had developed and they had had a strong military power, they would have crushed such dreams as Japan’s.

Sekihei

I see! That’s how it would have been.

Kase

China was called “the sick man of Asia.” It was very weak, so we were unaware of China’s disappointing side.

Sekihei

On the other hand, I feel sorry for China. They thought that they were the greatest country in the world.

Kase

We didn’t know anything of China but what we could get from writing with the same characters.

In high school and college, I read George Orwell’s *1984* and *Animal Farm*, André Gide’s *Retour de l’U.R.S.S.*, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, and other books to get an understanding of socialism. After reading this and that, I came to realize very clearly that communism and socialism were nothing more than a con.

I also burned through the complete works of Marx and Engels. It was tedious going and... well, it was boring.

As I read them, the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace popped up. Marx and Engels praised the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, saying that it was the leader in socialism born in Asia.

Sekihei

Right.

• **Mao Zedong, Marx, and Engels all highly praised the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace**

Kase

Of course, to the Qing court, Hong Xiuquan was a traitor, but Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and Mao Zedong all valued the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace.

Sekihei

They all thought they were successors to it.

Kase

Marx and Engels wrote that the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace was the first to implement socialism.

Sekihei

That was a complete mistake, too.

Kase

Because of all that, I have an interest in the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace. It strongly resembles the Chinese Communist Party. Both championed the cause rescuing the masses from corrupt government officials.

The People's Liberation Army is also a reincarnation of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, and as such, military regulations are strict. They absolutely forbid looting and making personal collections. They were also strict concerning sexuality.

Sekihei

Right, they were incredibly strict.

Kase

In the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, they totally disapproved of personal possessions. The Land System of the Heavenly Kingdom made China into a commune.

Sekihei

It did, indeed.

Kase

As I said before, when I was first invited to China, I thought I'd landed in Hong Xiuquan's Kingdom of Heavenly Peace.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] The Kingdom of Heavenly Peace and Mao Zedong were the same — no doubt about it. Military discipline was strict in the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, and there were restrictions on sexual relations. Even if you were married, you weren't allowed to live together.

Kase

Yes, but after establishing their capital in Nanjing, Hong Xiuquan and the top leadership were the only ones who gave into dissolute sexuality and indulged in every luxury to their heart's content.

Sekihei

The PRC's Mao Zedong and the Kingdom of Heavenly' Peace's Hong Xiuquan — two peas from the same pod.

Kase

China has much in common with the West. They're pushy with their ideas, and are clear about who's friend and who's foe. And they don't mind committing mass murder.

Europe, too, has a history of rivers of blood. And their kings — they were absolute rulers. And their cities were encompassed by tall, deep castellated walls, like China.

• The Germanic custom of cannibalism is the Catholic Eucharist

Kase

The origin of Christianity is in Judaism. Some scholars still debate whether Jesus even lived at all, though. Christianity crossed the Mediterranean and with its spread throughout Europe became a world religion.

Sekihei

Right.

Kase

Even now in the Catholic Church, they have something called "the Eucharist." During the Mass, the priest says, "Jesus said, 'This is my blood,'" and drinks some red wine. This red wine is symbolic of Christ's blood.

Sekihei

Right.

Kase

In the Eucharist, saying, "the body of Christ," the priest places a bread wafer, symbolizing Christ's flesh, on the tongue of the faithful.

Sekihei

I see.

Kase

In Judaism, however, blood is an absolute religious taboo. In Judaism, the blood of animals must not be consumed, and so of course the blood of people must not be drunk. In kosher cooking, the blood is completely drained from the meat.

Sekihei

Really?

Kase

Whether sheep or cattle, after slaughtering and after completely draining off the

blood, they can be eaten. We would think that wouldn't be too tasty, though.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] I probably wouldn't like it, either.

Kase

When Christianity crossed into Europe, the Germanic tribes were practicing cannibalism. There were many cases where Christian holy days were the continuation of European polytheistic holy days. It was syncretism with the polytheism that had lasted to that point.

Celebrating Christmas by putting up an evergreen tree, too, comes from a Germanic custom. In Israel, they didn't get snow or have evergreens. There are scholars who argue that the European practice of cannibalism merged with the Eucharist where "body and blood" are eaten.

Sekihei

Really.

Kase

It's atrocious that there were still castrati at the Vatican until the nineteenth century.

Sekihei

And the implication is that there is an omnipotent God, and there is an omnipotent emperor. It's the same.

Kase

Europe and China are really close, aren't they?

Sekihei

They sure are. As to the monopoly on morality, in Europe, it's Christ.

Kase

And Christ's representative on Earth is the pope.

Sekihei

The pope! In China, it would be the Emperor. The idea is terrifying. The thought that any one person could have a monopoly on morality is truly terrifying.

Kase

For a long time in Europe, kings and emperors ruled by what was called "divine right." They claimed to rule as God's representative. In China, the Son of Heaven receive the mandate of heaven from Tiandi, the god of heaven.

Sekihei

That's right.

• Japan's emperor practices Laozi's "heaven is unavaricious"

Sekihei

You know, what I think that means is that Japan is the most moderate of all. Japan never had a supreme being.

The emperor has never issued an absolute order to his people. And the Japanese people don't serve the emperor like the people of Europe or China serve the pope or emperor. Rather, Japan's emperor works as hard as he can to serve the people.

Kase

The present emperor is the 125th in his line. For ages it's been said that, "there is no 'self' for the emperor." A selfish spirit would just not do.

Sekihei

That's right. He has no holidays or assets. This is a phenomenon unique to Japan. And that's why there's an unbroken line of emperors.

And with that, I return to Laozi. Until Japan was defeated in the Second World War, the emperor's birthday was called "*tenchō setsu*." The word *tenchō* comes from Laozi.

Its meaning, so to speak, is that heaven (*ten*) is eternal (*chō*). Why did Laozi say that heaven was eternal? Because heaven has no avariciousness. Because it has no selfish spirit. Heaven is eternal. Laozi is appealing to unavariciousness. If you have wants, you cannot live long. It whittles down the lifespan, making it a brief existence.

Therefore, what that means is that the Japanese emperor practices Laozi's teachings on this. What a wonderful, interesting concept!

Kase

The Japanese imperial house, too, has been strongly influenced by China. Era names and names of the houses of imperial princes are all taken from the Chinese classics.

Until the Meiji period, the emperor wore Chinese-styled robes replete with embroidered dragons at his enthronement.

• Zen, too, was perfected and shined in Japan

Kase

After Buddhism entered China, Zen was "perfected" during the time of the Tang.

Sekihei

True.

Kase

There was a famous Zen monk named Baizhang Dazhi.⁶⁰ When I was young, I embraced an interest in Zen, and I read up on Chinese Zen.

Sekihei

Mazu,⁶¹ and Linji Yixuan,⁶² founder of the Linji sect of Zen, were both people of Tang, too.

Kase

The Tang dynasty was really magnificent.

Sekihei

It was magnificent. All sorts of culture and civilization are included in it.

To get back to something we talked about earlier, an interesting phenomenon about the relationship between Japan and China is that the Chinese people did not put into practice ideals that were born in China. The Japanese picked them up and *did*.

It's like that with everything. Zen is the same, isn't it? The ones who are seriously doing Zen now are the Japanese.

Kase

Yes, but surely, there *is* no Zen in China any more.

Sekihei

There is no Zen! The people who are leading figures in expositing Zen are Japanese, like D.T. Suzuki.⁶³ The ones who brought forth the Zen philosophy were Japanese. Now, the only ones doing Zen in Kamakura and at Gozan and Jussatsu in Kyoto are Japanese. It's an interesting phenomenon.

You could say this is one of the rules of history. It is said that the culture still remains in the frontiers, but the highest spiritual ideas born in China are not practiced by the Chinese. Who is doing it? The Japanese, off to their east. That's who.

Kase

There is a saying in China: "In Buddhism there's the void; in the Dao there's the nothing." The only place where there are both of these, though, is Japan.

Sekihei

Only Japan.

⁶⁰ Baizhang Huahihai (720–814). In Japanese, he is called Hyakujo Ekai. He was awarded the name Dazhi Juezheng ("great learning enlightenment witness") after death.

⁶¹ Mazu Daoyi (709–788). In Japanese, he is called Baso Dōitsu.

⁶² Linji Yixuan is known as Rinzi in Japanese, as is the sect of Zen that bears his name.

⁶³ Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki (1870–1966) was a Japanese author of works on Buddhism, Zen, and Far Eastern philosophy. He was born Teitarō Suzuki and given the name Daisetsu by his Zen master.

• An episode of Liu Bei and of the brute Cao Cao in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

Sekihei

Taking the example of the *Heike Monogatari* that you brought up a bit ago, the Chinese equivalent is, of course, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

The thing is, no matter how I read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, I get no sense of the evanescence of life. It tells that, in a world of greed, of course the strongest greedy guy is going to win.

Kase

The first time I read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was in my first or second year of high school. Something that really surprised me was when the protagonist, Liu Bei, loses a battle in the area, wonders around a bit, and then a young hunter lets him stay the night at his home.

Sekihei

Yes, that's in there.

Kase

And then after receiving great hospitality, he plans to depart the next morning, but when he peeks into the next room, he sees the young wife of his host dead — butchered. He presses the hunter for an explanation, and the latter replies through his tears, “to offer proper hospitality to you, I killed my wife and fed you with her meat.”

The book then says that Liu Bei was moved. So what does he tell the hunter? “This is an admirable thing. When I have won and rule the land, come to me and I will raise you up.”

I read Yoshikawa Eiji's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and right after this there's a long footnote. Yoshikawa debated with himself whether he should include this passage, but he said, since it was in the original, there was nothing he could do but include it. Then he wrote, “it's a reference to understand the Han people.”

Sekihei

[Laughs.] Oh, it's a reference.

There's another interesting story, one about Cao Cao. One time, defeated in a political strife, he fled alone and went to the home of the family of an old friend where he was welcomed. The brothers of the family go to the kitchen to discuss preparing a banquet for Cao Cao. They bind a pig, and discuss how to prepare it: whether they should behead it, disembowel it, and where would it be best to cut it, and so on.

Perking his ears up, Cao Cao hears this. Cao Cao is a man of deep distrust, and is certain that it is *he* they are talking about killing.

Kase

[Loud laugh.]

Sekihei

He thinks, “they're going to cut off my head? Well, then, I'll have to do them in first.” Cao Cao takes his sword and barges into the kitchen and kills all three brothers right off. After killing them, he notices the pig tied up there. “Ah, that's what that was all about,” and for the first time he realizes his mistake.

Up to that point, it was fine. The problem was that the head of the house had gone off to buy wine to welcome Cao Cao. On his way back, carrying the wine, he runs into Cao Cao, who has fled the house.

He asks, “Cao Cao, what has happened? My sons are cooking some pork right now, and I’m bringing back the wine so we can welcome you properly. Why are you leaving so soon?”

What did Cao Cao do next? Without a word, he cut the man in half.

Then he says, “I’ve just completed the evil thing I started. If I let the father live, and he returned home, when he saw that his sons had been killed he would certainly have become angry. He would go get the government forces and then come after me. So I had to kill him.”

That’s the Chinese ethic. If you’re going to do something evil, do something *thoroughly* evil.

• Chinese history is the ideal of thorough evil

Sekihei

In short, “whatever bad that I do to the realm doesn’t matter; however, the realm had better not do anything bad to me.” Chinese history is this ideal of thorough evil.

Kase

That’s how the People’s Republic of China is today, too.

Sekihei

Yes, exactly! “We don’t care how bad a thing we do all around the world, but the world had better not do anything bad to us.” That the thorough logic of Cao Cao. What’s interesting, though, is that neither the Chinese nor Japanese can bring themselves to hate Cao Cao.

Kase

It’s like a story in a comic book. You’re right.

Sekihei

That’s right. [Laughs.] No one can hate such a great villain. They just can’t hate him. In other words, the guy just cheerfully does these horrible things. I guess it’s because no matter how evil a thing he does, he does it as if it’s perfectly normal, so he can’t make you hate him.

Mao Zedong is the same. If he did some extremely evil thing, contrarily, he became a good guy or a hero. It becomes that monopoly on morality. [Laughs.] This is a frightening world.

In Japan, isn’t what Oda Nobunaga⁶⁴ was criticized for that he didn’t *thoroughly* do evil things? [Laughs.]

It was half-assed, so he was made a villain.

⁶⁴ Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) was a provincial warlord who managed to bring much of Japan under his control. He was considered particularly brutal and vicious in his conquests. Historical depictions of him waver between a pragmatist willing to go to whatever extreme was necessary to a cold-blooded psychopath. He was killed in a rebellion led by one of his own generals. The vagaries of his personality make him today one of the most popular characters of his era.

Kase

Japanese can't thoroughly do evil things. They don't want to, and they can't.

Sekihei

They can't. But people who can't do bad things can be made into the bad guy in the end. Those who do thoroughly bad things are made into great men. What kind of world is this?

Although the prewar Japanese empire and the Japan of today really didn't do anything bad, Japan was made into the world's number one bad guy. This logic really works.

Kase

About Japan and China, they say "separated by a narrow strait," and "same script and same race," but the way Japan and China came about and their national characters are totally different.

• ***Kabuki*, where the lead parts are commoners, vs. Chinese opera, where they're the emperor and the court officials**

Sekihei

It's completely different! I want to tell people that they shouldn't think that the Japanese and Chinese understand each other because we use the same writing system.

Classical Chinese opera and *kabuki* absolutely and completely do *not* resemble one another. The characters that appear in Chinese opera are all emperors or high-ranking court officials.

Kase

In the West, it's the same as Chinese opera. The main characters of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's works are all commoners, though. Store clerks. Things like that.

Chikamatsu came along a bit more than a hundred years after Shakespeare and there are those who call him "the Shakespeare of Japan," but that is just wrong. Most of the characters in Shakespeare's plays are royalty and nobility.

In Japan, the commoners had power. That was particularly true in the Edo period. What this means is that here, too, the West and China closely resembled each other.

Sekihei

They do, indeed. Only Japan has a really individual culture. If you see Chinese opera, you'd be aghast. From beginning to end, it's nothing but the emperor and his officials. There is not one instance where the common folks were treated as people in China.

The bureaucrats are called "great people" and the commoners are all called "little people." Are we really great people or little people? [Laughs.]

— Chapter Eight —
Anti-Japanese Activities of the Calculating Chinese

• The Yellow race is the most admirable, followed in turn by the Whites and then the Blacks

Kase

If you don't mind changing the subject a bit, the anti-Japanese activities of the Chinese people are a bit calculating, don't you think?

Sekihei

They sure are.

Kase

In Japan, we feel uncomfortable when we're called "the yellow race" — but in China, the yellow race is the most admirable race in the world. Then come the whites. The blacks are at the bottom. They're specifically slighted.

Sekihei

True. Despite that, if you were to ask why they were anti-Japanese, it's because they were frightened of white people, and took a step back. Why are they anti-Japanese? "In the first place, it's because you guys are in Asia and are beneath us, and without our permission you went off on your own and joined forces with those white guys and left Asia and moved into Europe." That lack of permission is crucial. [Laughs.]

Without permission we went off on our own and modernized, and without permission we went off on our own and became a major economic power. All that going off and doing things on our own volition! [Laughs.]

Kase

China's anti-Japanese activities began with the May 4th Incident of 1919. In 1919, the First World War was over, and the Chinese thought Qingdao, a territory leased and controlled by the losing Germans, would be returned to them; but the Treaty of Paris turned the region over to the Japanese instead. Students were displeased with that and began to agitate, and that turned into a large-scale anti-Japanese action and it spread.

The one who tormented the Chinese the most, though, was Britain; and then came France, Russia, and the United States. Japan was only riding on their coat-tails. The Japanese weren't the main players — they were only acting in a supporting role, so to speak.

The thing is, they looked upon Japan, the non-white nation among the great powers, as an extremely weak country. Though they couldn't get away with it against the strong "white" countries, they *could* against Japan. Even their recent anti-Japanese activities stem from their viewing of Japan as weak.

Sekihei

Right. Ever since the Opium War China has been put upon by the West. Even when they were defeated by the West, though, it wasn't *that* much of a shock. What shocked them more was the First Sino–Japanese War. Losing to *Japan!* But Japan... Japan used to be a barbarian state!

Losing to that was just unbearable. [Laughs.]

No one really knew where these Westerners came from, and they were like devils from some strange land. Losing to those foreigners — well, there was just nothing that could be done. But to *Japan!* The shock of losing to Japan — How the hell?! — was huge beyond description. [Laughs.]

• The sour Sino–Japanese relationship is like the antagonism between Christianity and Islam

Kase

Looking at the relationship between Japan and China, it seems to be exactly the same as today's sour, antagonistic relationship between Christianity and Islam.

Sekihei

Right.

Kase

And why is that so? For a long time, the civilization of the Islamic world was more advanced than that of the Christian West.

Sekihei

That is so.

Kase

Islam had a golden age. Navigation, health, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, law, literature, philosophy — everything was more advanced in the Islamic world.

Sekihei

The Islamic world inherited and preserved Greek civilization.

Kase

In Western history, there's a period that is known as "the Dark Ages." The authorities are enforcing strict censorship in China today, so I suppose we could call that a Dark Age, too.

During the Dark Ages of medieval Europe, the Pope was the most powerful person, and the Church imposed its principal doctrines everywhere and put a halt to all progress in European learning. Heretics to that doctrine were censured or killed. Galileo knew someone in the Vatican, so he was fortunate in that some money was spread about and he wasn't killed.

Sekihei

True.

Kase

Islam's advanced learning, though, spread via the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, gradually entering Europe and the Renaissance occurred.

One incident that must be considered a critical link in the Renaissance was in 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral, challenging the Pope.

This was the starting point of Protestant Christianity. It was a door that opened in Europe and changed the Dark Ages into an Age of Enlightenment.

History is an interesting thing. The very year before, 1516 was also important in Islam, as that year the Ottoman Turkish army defeated the Mamluk army near Aleppo, some hundred kilometers north of Damascus. After that, the Ottoman Sultanate expanded across northern Africa, gaining lordship and control over the broad Islamic world.

Sekihei

I see.

Kase

With the Turks in control of the whole Islamic world, the growth of Islamic culture came to a complete halt. The age of Islamic glory was over. Contrary to Europe, Islam went from an age of light to an age of darkness. In Europe, rotating on an axis, they went from darkness to light.

When you go to the Middle East, there's a superiority complex that's hard to get past as Muslims remember the days when the Christian West was behind them and they in the Islamic world taught them everything from science to literature.

Sekihei

I see...

Kase

Conversely, however, they also have an inferiority complex that's also hard to get past. Since the Ottoman Empire was allied with Germany during the First World War, upon their loss the empire was dismantled. It was only a short time when compared to the long Turkish hegemony, but afterwards Britain, France, Italy, and Spain divided up the Middle East amongst themselves.

The Muslims living in the Islamic world realized for the first time that they had been defeated by the Christian West, whom they had long looked down on as being behind them, and this was a wide gulf they could not deal with.

Added to that, there's this Islamic edition of Sinocentrism that says Islam surpasses everything in the world, and the whole world needs to be brought under Islam.

Sekihei

It's certain that there are several examples of Sinocentrism all over the world. But that belief that you alone are the only one who is right — it's an awful narrow view.

- **Fruitless criticism and discrimination born from an**

inferiority complex without reflection

Kase

Islam holds a co-existing difficult-to-eliminate superiority complex and a difficult-to-cure inferiority complex toward Christian Europe and America.

Muslims wonder how the Christian West was able to make such rapid developments. They refuse to see the good aspects and advantages of the West, and they can only explain how we outstripped them by saying that we are brutal and crafty.

Sekihei

So they're avoiding looking at reality.

Kase

It's the same for China, too. They're just determined not to see Japan's good points. They just don't notice that Japan values harmony, has an ordered society, and has put forth straightforward efforts.

They just can't think of reflecting on things. Koreans, being included in the Chinese cultural sphere, are the same.

The sour antagonism of the Christian and Islamic worlds applies exactly to the relationship of China and Japan. It's so sour that it just chokes them up. But the relationship with China and Japan has only been like that since around the middle of the nineteenth century, only with Japan...

Sekihei

And without any permission!

Kase

Right. In the middle of the nineteenth century, by the time they realized it, Japan had shot past them and they weren't able to catch up. That was when the difficult-to-eliminate superiority complex and the difficult-to-cure inferiority complex began to co-exist.

Sekihei

But that's not all. It gave rise to one more interesting construct.

Chinese don't know that the good aspects of their real culture and traditions live on in Japan and they don't know that they've lost the good things themselves. Holding their noses in the air, they think they will always be the best and that they are heirs to the excellent Chinese civilization, the greatest culture in the world. But it's an illusion. An illusion that the Japanese have always been taught, from ancient times.

Japan, too, has "committed" its own Japanese illusion. No matter how good Japan becomes, no matter how splendid, no matter how developed — of course we learned it all from China long ago!

We just can't seem to sweep that inferiority complex away.

And that's despite the fact that Japan has left China in the dust. Yet Japanese think that China somehow, somewhere, is splendid. This two-layered illusion exists between Japan and China.

Like you said, it's a construct like that inferiority/superiority complex the Arab world has concerning the Christian West.

It's impossible to discover a common language within this two-layered illusion. [Laughs.] I believe this is the conclusion when it comes to Sino-Japanese relations.

[Laughs.] It took me twenty years to realize that.

• How do the Chinese — who dislike black people — view President Obama?

Kase

Why is it that black people are so disliked in China?

Sekihei

They think that blacks have absolutely no civilization.

Kase

Several thousand students demonstrated in Nanjing in 1988. They demanded that black exchange students be deported. It went on for several days, spreading to Shanghai and other major cities in China. Some African exchange students were killed, lynched, and it was a huge thing. Although African exchange students were steadily attacked by students and other people, the Chinese security officials just stood by and watched.

An African friend of mine who lived in Beijing and Shanghai told me that when he would get on a nearly empty bus and sit down, the Chinese person sitting next to him would make an uncertain face and quickly stand up and move to another seat.

The Chinese internet was horrible toward Condoleezza Rice, the secretary of state under President Bush. It would have been unthinkable in Japan, but there was no moderation with them calling her things like “black dog,” “black pig,” “bitch,” “chimpanzee,” “devil,” and “dog shit.”

Sekihei

Oh, no. That’s their frank impressions being exposed. What it is is, they think black people, white people, Japanese people — *everyone* — are all beneath them.

The thing is, white people are strong and they all have to study English, so they can’t make such frank, hateful expressions about white people.

Next come the Japanese. Well, their abilities are surprising. Seen from a Chinese viewpoint, Japanese are more or less better than whites.

Where are Japanese better? Japanese can also understand *kanji*. But if a black person can more or less read *kanji*, isn’t that some redeeming point there? No, they’re still less than monkeys in Chinese eyes.

Kase

They must really have problems with Obama having been elected president.

Sekihei

They sure do. They can’t forgive an uncultured monkey coming to their country and bringing up the Taiwan question and the problem of Tibet.

Koreans are somehow impertinent. Seen from the Chinese point of view, it’s like they feel, “a long time ago they studied a lot of things under us, and now they’ve become really cheeky.”

But seen from the Chinese perspective, Koreans are still a bit above the Japanese. They valued the Chinese civilization more than the Japanese and adopted it more closely. Up to the Joseon dynasty, Korea was a satellite state of China, so the Koreans

still understand courtesy as the Chinese see it. [Laughs.]

• What the Chinese cannot abide above all: the Japanese

Kase

At the beginning, I mentioned the old man at the Chinese restaurant in Akasaka. One time, he said that the one thing the Chinese cannot abide above all other things is the Japanese. In the old system of “either Chinese or barbarian,” the Chinese are the most important, and then comes...

Sekihei

Koreans.

Kase

This is what the old guy said. During the time of Emperor Yang of the Sui,⁶⁵ the Japanese embassy of Ono no Imoko came to China bearing that letter with the line, “the place where the sun rises...”

Sekihei

“The Son of Heaven of the place where the sun rises sends greetings to the Son of Heaven of the place where the sun sets.”

Kase

Yang was an emperor of the Sui, but after that letter from Shōtoku Taishi, Japan never again entered into that international system that was so central to China.

The old man at the Chinese restaurant said that Japan had been an eyesore to China ever since. That's what he said the Chinese thought of Japan then.

Sekihei

For the Chinese, there's this sense of “when will we be able to completely do away with the Japanese?” They want to avenge themselves. Just once they want to beat Japan until she can't stand back up.

Such subconscious ideas are reproduced through education. The problem is the patriotic education that was started by the Japanese during the Edo period. It led to sentiments of nationalism and also a cool-headed national strategy.

Kase

The fearfulness of China was unchanged from the time of Qin Shi Huangdi.

Sekihei

I think so, too.

Kase

⁶⁵ Emperor Yang (569–618, ruled 604–618) was a great builder of roads and canals and rebuilt the Great Wall, but his expansion into Korea, Vietnam and other neighboring states, along with his ambitious projects, cost millions of Chinese lives. He was killed by one of his own generals. He is thought of as one of the greatest tyrants in Chinese history. His grandson held the throne for less than one year, and then the Sui fell to the Tang.

That's because the Chinese Son of Heaven wants to rule every nook and cranny of the world. After China was bankrupted by communist ideology, the administration's dependency on orthodoxy brought about a move from Marxism to nationalism.

Sekihei

Exactly, they moved toward nationalism.

• China's patriotic actions are based on bringing other countries under their control

Kase

Chinese patriotism is not the same as that of other countries. China is not a "country" per se.

Sekihei

And that is the most profound basis and the most frightening thing.

Kase

It's not what we usually think of as patriotism. It's Sinocentrism. If China can't control the whole world, they just won't be satisfied.

Sekihei

Chinese nationalism is different than the usual definition of the term. It's not nationalism; it's what could be called "*tianxia*-ism."⁶⁶ In the Chinese view, "the *tianxia* is all mine! — everything under the sky is mine!" That's *tianxia*-ism.

Kase

To repeat, China isn't a country. It's a culture that *has* a country.

Even today, the Chinese believe that the Chinese culture and civilization are the only true culture and civilization in the world, and that China is the center of everything. They think there is no culture outside of China. This way of thinking is still thick in the Chinese DNA. Nothing is nearer or dearer to the hearts of the Chinese than Chinese culture.

Sekihei

That's right.

Kase

Even if Chinese move to another country, they don't assimilate. One-fourth of Malaysia is made up of people of Chinese descent. There are also many Chinese overseas merchants in Indonesia and other southeast Asian countries.

No matter where they go, though, they form an insular society of Chinese people and look down on the local populations.

Before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, as the Olympic torch relay went from Canberra, Australia to Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hong Kong,

⁶⁶ *Tianxia* (天下, in Japanese *tenka*) is a Chinese term literally meaning "[all] under heaven." It is usually translated as the whole land or realm (based on political reality), but the real all-inclusive nature of the word clearly indicates that in a larger sense it means *the whole world*, not just one part of it.

Chinese overseas merchants beyond count lined the route waving flags, cheering, and welcoming the torchbearers with wild enthusiasm.

It was the same at Nagano. The only difference was that Japan didn't have to give permission to foreigners.

China's economic development since 1980 was greatly helped by the contributions made by Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and southeast Asian.

Taking India and Russia as examples, however, it is contrastive that we can't say the same for Indians or Russians who have moved overseas.

Sekihei

There is nothing more frightening than this *tianxia*-ism. That's because they really believe "everything is ours." And that means that they think every country in the world should be a vassal state of China. Today they have Mongolians, Uyghurs, and the Tibet Autonomous Region. They honestly believe it is only natural that all the people in their environs should become autonomous regions in the Chinese empire.

Kase

They calmly use the term "Chinese people" though there is absolutely no concept of that term in the world. Uyghurs, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchurians, Korean people — they're all "Chinese."

Sekihei

If it were just nationalism, it would be fine. Patriotism is usually just loving your own country. What is loved in *tianxia*-ism, however, is everything being yours. What that means is, they just can't "allow" Japan to be.

It's like they think, "You don't have our permission. How do you get off doing things the way you want to?" [Laughs.]

• The wonderful sight of a Supreme People's Assembly without a single white head

Kase

I think Chinese politicians today are no different from the powerful men of imperial China. It's a very Confucian state, after all.

Sekihei

That's true.

Kase

It's a Confucian state. I've discovered something funny, though. I was watching the Supreme People's Assembly — what could be called the Chinese parliament — on television. All of the highest leadership was there and there wasn't a single white-haired man in the bunch.

Mencius said that the very old should not be given heavy duties, and that they should be cared for. [Laughs.] White-haired men should not be burdened with important posts.

Sekihei

That's why they all dye their hair!

Kase

It stems from the teachings of Mencius. [Laughs.] Oh, my.

Chinese culture came to rule via *kanji* and Confucianism. Even though the People's Republic of China that Chairman Mao led repudiated Confucius and Confucianism, the communist system was supported by Confucianism. That's why even though the ideas of Mao Zedong and communism are bankrupt as ideologies, the dictatorial system didn't falter in the slightest.

Two or three thousand students and other civilians must have been massacred in the Tiananmen Gate Incident. That was in 1989. Despite that, a scant ten years later there was absolutely no deep emotional scar in the Chinese people.

Such a thing would be completely unthinkable in a normal country, and if a politician had caused such a thing he would not have a job and would not be forgiven.

In Confucian politics, the most powerful people have the virtue and the people just shut up and follow. Chairman Mao was made the avatar of virtue, but it was nothing more than Confucianism clad in the robes of Marxism. In Confucianism, the people were only to be made to obey, and whatever lies were necessary were fine.

Sekihei

Exactly. Getting back to something we were talking about earlier — if a country that follows such *tianxia*-ism has a huge army and nuclear weapons, it could become a serious thing. For ages, even though it had a different ideology, China lacked the capability to rule the world — and that was good. Now, however, China is gradually accumulating that strength. This fact is going to be the cause of great unease in the world.

Moreover, as each year passes, their military strength is intensifying. The Chinese navy has begun deliberately advancing into the South China Sea and threatening Japan's security.

Kase

The little over one century since the Qing empire was defeated by the British has seen China pass through an "age of humiliation." Since Deng Xiaoping made the plunge into an open economy in 1978, the "return to the Chinese empire" has begun.

China is now increasing its strength, and it's like "all roads go through China." But I don't think we will see the realization of a world ruled by China.

Sekihei

Well, that's good, then.

• China's destiny after the Qing state fell the year after the Nanjing exhibition, and the Shanghai exposition

Kase

To speak briefly of Expo 2010 Shanghai, three days before its May first opening,

when I was watching an NHK TV broadcast, I heard the announcer say something about “China’s first international exposition.” But that was a lie.

Sekihei

What? Really? It wasn’t the first?

Kase

It wasn’t. I wrote about it three months before in a magazine article. The first international exposition was held starting in June of 1910 in Nanjing.

Sekihei

That was during the Qing dynasty, wasn’t it?

Kase

Right. Fourteen countries — European ones, Japan, America, and so on — took part. That’s because there weren’t that many independent countries back then. It was a big spread near the Yangzi River. I made copies of the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* and other newspapers of the time that I found at the National Diet Library. Many large articles about the Nanjing Exposition appeared over several days.

The next year, however — 1911 — Sun Yat-sen’s Xinhai Revolution took place. The Qing empire collapsed and was defeated.

The Chinese people didn’t change for 3,000 years, but they were superstitious.

Sekihei

That’s true.

Kase

The Beijing Olympics loaded up on the lucky number eight. They started at 8:08PM on the eighth day of the eighth month of 2008. It’s strange that communists would be superstitious like that.

Sekihei

[Laughs.] No, that’s because there isn’t anyone who really believes in communism.

Kase

The Chinese government closed their mouths tightly and didn’t speak a word about the exposition actually being China’s *second* international exposition.

Sekihei

I see. Because the year after the first one, the Qing dynasty fell.

Kase

Maybe if they believed that, the Chinese people were also superstitious.

Sekihei

So next year, perhaps, the People’s Republic of China might.... [Laughs.]

Kase

Maybe they think it might collapse.

Sekihei

Well, whether it falls next year is neither here nor there. The time Expo 2010 Shanghai is being held is about the same time as was the first exposition, and a lot of changes have happened in China economically and socially. First, there's the exposition itself. When it had been going on for two weeks, the number of attendees at the Shanghai exposition was less than half of what had been expected.

There's another phenomenon. In the Shanghai index, the price of Chinese stocks experienced a sharp drop of eighteen percent since the opening of the exposition. It became a market celebrating the fall.

And there's one more. During about the same time the Shanghai expo was held, the real estate bubble began to burst. There have been many opinions about the average value of Beijing real estate over these two weeks, and there are some who say it fell ten percent, but there are others who say it was thirty percent.

And there was yet one more serious thing to happen in China about the same time as the Shanghai exposition. Inflation. It was a drastic rise in prices. Taking vegetables as an example, it is said prices tripled in the space of one month.

There are now 200 million out of work in China. Inflation has really hit the large strata of the poor, and it's possible that the increased prices were due to orders by the authorities.

Perhaps it's by divine arrangement. At the same time the Shanghai exposition was starting, many changes were coming about in China.

• NHK's false report of "China's first international exposition"

Kase

Most extreme was right after the Tiananmen Gate Incident. Many American, Japanese, and European Sinologists predicted the imminent fall of the People's Republic of China. Train robberies became a frequent occurrence in the provinces about then. It's said that at present there are some 100,000 incidents of uprisings in the provinces each year.

It was like that then, too. There are frequent incidents where people stop the trains and rob all of the passengers of their valuables and then take off — just like in an American western.

Sekihei

How has China been able to hold on till now since the Tiananmen Gate Incident? Because the economy is growing. After this year, though, it's possible the economy is going to go into decline.

The Chinese economy hasn't been making a real recovery since the outbreak of the American financial crisis. Thanks to the bubble, on the surface it looks like it's recovering, but there will be a serious crisis for China when the bubble finally bursts.

When China is hit with a real economic crisis, all their problems will probably come gushing out all at once. Somehow or another they've been doing something to keep the economy growing while still having all these problems. Moreover, even though the economy in China is growing, right in the midst of all this prosperity, tens of thousands of uprisings are still occurring all over the country.

Kase

Nearly 100,000, and those are only the ones that are reported.

Sekihei

After this year, the economy will wane. When the bubble goes away, social unrest will increase. Like you said, that first international exposition was a hundred years ago. Chinese history may make another big change in hundred year increments.

Kase

We can't have any faith in NHK since they said this was "the first international exposition held in China" while they knew that it was the *second*. I recently met some NHK nabobs at a party, and raised an objection: "I'd like to speak frankly about something..." When they told me, "we meant the first one for *this* China," I questioned them again. "What? The Qing dynasty isn't included with 'this' China?" They calmly replied, "No, it's not."

Sekihei

Sophistry.

At least seventy million people should have visited Expo 2010 Shanghai, but this estimate is probably way off.

The historical truth that China held the first international exposition in Nanking 100 years ago and the next year the Qing dynasty fell is giving China premonitions that China may fall a second time.

You know, I think it's a really important thing for future relations between China and Japan that I've been able to engage you in this dialogue about China's true nature at this important moment.

Kase

People came from all over China to visit the Shanghai exposition, but you know, folks in China hate the people who live in Shanghai.

Sekihei

That's true. They say they're all uppity and rich.

Kase

Jiang Zemin is also from Shanghai.

Sekihei

I think the reason the number of attendees at the Shanghai expo is not what had been expected may be connected to political struggles with the Shanghai faction.

Why was the number of attendees down? Because everyone expected complementary tickets would be strewn about to all the regional bureaucrats so they could all go and see the exposition on the country's dime. The authorities put a brake on that and orders came down that they weren't going to be allowed to do it, so the bureaucrats were unable to go.

This is good. It was an omen for the political struggles. It's a portent that a great turning point in history is coming with the increasing strain brought about by internal political struggles in China. [Laughs.]

It's the importance of that hundred-year cycle. What is the second exposition in Shanghai foretelling? That's what I think is important.

• America's high birth rate wins over the ageing China

Kase

Looking ahead ten or twenty years, if China's system continues, I think they'll be all the more dangerous. Japan has to become a strong country. China won't throw down against a powerful opponent. They always sacrifice weak countries. They're shrewd that way.

Sekihei

Japan is meeting a "second invasion of Perry's fleet" now.

Kase

Let's look forty years ahead, to 2050. In 2009, the American population was 307 million. By 2050, it will have increased to 400 million. America has a pretty high birth rate. On top of that, immigrants are moving in steadily.

Sekihei

I see.

Kase

The immigrants to America, Europe, and Japan are all good people with ambitions to better themselves.

Sekihei

With that, it's always going to be a young country.

Kase

What is strange about America is its ability to assimilate its immigrants. America doesn't discriminate against immigrants as Europe does.

At any rate, in 2050, only a quarter of America's population will be over sixty-five. China's aged population is already rapidly increasing. Those over sixty-five make up forty-one or forty-two percent of China's population. In Japan in 2050, they will make up about thirty-one percent of the population.

America is a country overflowing with energy. In the coming forty years, they won't tolerate being beholden to anyone in the world when it comes to scientific and technological strength. In military might, too, they are outdistancing all the other countries.

I don't know whether the People's Republic of China has another ten, twenty, or thirty years. Nevertheless, Japan has completely lost the will for national self defense under an administration that introduced a public election with the slogan "life right now is number one."

I'm worried that Japan has traded places with where China once was, and now *we* have become "the sick man of Asia."

Sekihei

If things don't change, there is high danger that Japan may be gobbled up.

Kase

In China, the ageing of the population is a serious problem.

Sekihei

Ageing and resources. Pollution and environmental problems are serious. There is no other country where water is in such short supply and so polluted, and they have a problem with the disparity in their increasing population. The Chinese economy will have to fail at some point.

Kase

That's because it's a casino economy.

Sekihei

It's entirely due to the bubble. Put simply, the Chinese economy actually has no substance.

Does the country have any industry with an international competitive ability? No, it does not. Are Chinese cars being sold all over the world? No, they're not. Are Chinese computers being sold all over the world? No, they're not. Whatever else we can say, in the end, what's there is there because of the feeling of expectation that is the bubble, and that bubble is going to burst at some point.

• Hey, China — drop the illusions of empire and embrace “small countries, small populations”

Sekihei

This is all why, in the end, I go back to our earlier talk of Laozi. China itself should abandon those ideas of grand empire from the time of Qin Shi Huangdi and get back to Laozi's admonitions for “small countries, small populations.”

Kase

I'm all for that!

Sekihei

And I'm all for that, too!

Kase

Looking at history from the viewpoint of the twentieth century, the history of the twentieth century is a history of the dismantling of empires. In the First World War, the German Empire and their allies the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire lost. The Ottoman Empire controlled a huge amount of territory all through North Africa.

Then, after the Second World War, the British Empire, and the colonial holdings of France, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and the Japanese Empire, all were dismantled. In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, and the giant Soviet empire crumbled.

The last remaining empire in the world is the People's Republic of China, which keeps all manner of people under their control by dint of force. It is an empire that is out of date.

In Japan, though, there are loopy people who mistake the People's Republic of China for the People's Friendly Republic of China. In the *Washington Post*, there was

a column that criticized a certain head of state as “increasingly loopy.”⁶⁷ [Laughs.]

Sekihei

[Explosive laugh.] Ah, well. I don’t think there’s a bright future for the world as long as the Chinese Empire remains intact. Conversely, though, I can’t imagine any way that empire will be able to continue forever.

Sooner or later the Chinese Empire will be dismantled, and the system in place since the days of Qin Shi Huangdi will collapse. The people would be happiest if a Chinese commonwealth, with small countries and small populations, comes about. It would also be best for the world, too, and China’s nearby countries.

Kase

In my heart I pray that China will cease to be a Confucian state and become a Lao–Zhuang state.

Sekihei

When that happens we’ll have to share a celebratory drink!

⁶⁷ Al Kamen, who writes Beltway gossip for the *Washington Post*, said this in April, 2010: “By far the biggest loser of the extravaganza was the hapless and (in the opinion of some Obama administration officials) increasingly loopy Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama.”

— Afterword —

I first met Mr. Sekihei Hei right after leaving the Kyoto Institute.

Mr. Sekihei's discernment profoundly impressed me. Since then, we have become close.

In March I was asked to give a talk about Chinese history and culture in the Ginza. The site was a Chinese restaurant.

Mr. Sekihei was seated in the front row.

I was a bit flustered and babbled, "I've come here today to talk about China. I'm a bit discombobulated today since Mr. Sekihei, for whom I've long had respect and affection, is seated there, but still — fools rush in and all..." Then I added, "Not meaning Mr. Sekihei, of course..."

From my last year of middle school, I was something of a "China junkie."

There were dozens of volumes of Chinese poetry and publications in my home. Seized by curiosity and yearning to know about a country I'd never seen, I started reading them.

After that, I came to be invited to visit China from time to time. I went to learn about Chinese history and culture in my own way, and I was able to really experience China. I visited everything from Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, to Tibet.

Here, Mr. Sekihei and I are publishing this book of dialogues about China. I was fortunate in having the opportunity to have Mr. Sekihei as an examiner asking me questions.

This is the fourth book of mine to take the form of a dialogue. The first was with biblical scholar Yamamoto Shichihei in the book *Isuramu no hassō* ("The Islamic way of thinking") (Tokuma Shoten, 1979), which has been variously republished in 1985 published by Gakushū Kenkyūsha in *Yamamoto Shichihei zentaiwa: kami no iru kuni* ("Collected conversations with Yamamoto Shichihei: The country where God is") and in 2005 by Shōdensha in *Isuramu no yomikata* ("How to read Islam"). The second was *Nande Nihon wa kō natta* ("How did Japan get like this?") with Hatano Akira, the former minister of justice and former superintendant general of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, released in 1997 by Kōsaidō Publishing. Third was *Okite! Nihon!* ("Japan, rise up!") with leading conservative pundit Watanabe Shōichi, published in 1999 by Takagi Shobō.

I am not a specialist in China. China is a major power and a neighbor, however, so one has little choice but to be interested in it. Moreover, until my father's time, a study of Chinese classics was required, so topics and publications celebrated in China have been near to me since my tender years.

When thinking of China lately for these dialogues, I came at Mr. Sekihei hard. In our discussions, Mr. Sekihei was in agreement with my way of seeing things, so the tensions we held just before the conversations were easily relieved afterward.

When Mr. Sekihei and I decided to have these conversations, we thought to begin them with the culture of food. Food expresses the character of a nation's people. The sixteenth-century Portuguese missionary Gaspar da Cruz, who sojourned in China, wrote, "when one speaks of what in all the world makes a Chinese person happy, it always comes back to food." I wanted to see what Mr. Sekihei's thinking was.

Whatever it was that Mr. Sekihei said, it was full of intellectual stimulus. I learned a great deal about Japan and China. It was a great result.

From my student days, I was of the faction that championed Taiwan, so I frequently went there. Even though it was through friends in Taiwan, I was still able to learn about China's culture.

I have been able to learn about Chinese culture through the kindness of my many friends in Taiwan and China. I would like to thank those friends from the bottom of my heart.

— Kase Hideaki

Sekihei Hei (Shi Ping)

Born in Szechuan province, China, in 1962. Graduated Beijing University in 1984 with a degree in philosophy. While in college, he was awakened from Mao Zedong's brainwashing and began vigorously pushing for democratization in China. After working as a professor at Szechuan University's department of philosophy, he went to Japan in 1988. Taking advantage of the Tiananmen Gate Incident in 1989, he emotionally bid his native China farewell. In 1995, he completed his doctoral studies in culture at the graduate school of Kobe University. As a commentator, he began writing and giving lectures. His many principal publications include *Naze Chûgokujin wa Nihonjin wo nukumu no ka?* ("Why do the Chinese hate the Japanese?", PHP), *Watakushi wa Mao ShuSekihei no kosenshi datta* ("I was a little soldier for Mao", Asuka Shinsha), *Kore ga hontô no Chûgoku 33 no tsubo* (These are 33 pressure points of the real China", Kairyûsha), *Chûgoku daigyakusatsu shi: Naze Chûgokujin wa hitogoroshi ga suki na no ka* ("A history of massacres in China: What makes the Chinese such lovers of murder?", Business-sha), and others.

Kase Hideaki

Born in Tokyo in 1936. He studied at Keiô University, Yale University, and Columbia University. He was the first editor of the *Britannica Encyclopædia International*. From 1977, as special advisor for the cabinets of prime ministers Fukuda and Nakasone, he contributed to negotiations with the United States. He has also written extensively on the imperial household. Among other positions, he has served as director of the Japan P.E.N. Club and as an advisor to the Matsushita Institute of Government and Finance. He is also a great-great-grandson of Inô Tadataka. His many publications include *Kosei no jidai* ("The age of individuality", Kodansha), *Igirisu: Suibô shinai dentô kokka* ("Great Britain: The traditional nation that will not fall", Kodansha), *Tennô-ke no*

tataikai (“The battle over the imperial house”, Shinkôsha), and *Toku no kokufuron* (“Morality: the wealth of nations”, Jiyûsha).