

**ON SYMBOLIC ANTISEMITISM:
MOTIVES FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE *PROTOCOLS* IN JAPAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

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Had Japanese forces not been involved in the opportunist Siberian intervention in 1918 and thereby come into contact with White Russian elements, the early translation of the *Protocols* into Japanese would not have materialized. Japan's initial encounter with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was therefore rather accidental but at the same time almost inevitable. Japanese fascination with virtually any intellectual trend in the West, together with the existence of highly vibrant publishing industry in Tokyo, made the translation and publication of such a notorious book as the *Protocols* only a question of time.¹

This inevitability notwithstanding, there is still much irony that the *Protocols* has had such a long impact in Japan. If we stick to traditional determinants of antisemitism, it is one of the least likely countries to embrace antisemitic views. Japan, it should be emphasized, lacks most of the sources and causes that characterize antisemitic attitudes in other nations. Japanese antisemitism has neither historical roots nor any religious roots, as Judaism has never threatened or come into theological conflict with any of the leading religions practiced in Japan. It has not evolved from an encounter with Jews, since the Jewish community in Japan is negligible, and the Japanese do not, and probably cannot, distinguish them from other Western residents.² Furthermore, antisemitic views have never gained full governmental support, nor did it become a national ideology, and did not develop as a result of any significant conflict between Israel and Japan. In addition, antisemitism has never penetrated the lower classes in Japan, nor has it had any popular support, and more critically, it has appeared almost solely in written form and has never deteriorated to the realm of damage to property or physical attacks on Jews.

Nonetheless, the initial Japanese publication of the *Protocols* heralded the emergence of antisemitic views in the country along with a growing public interest in the role of Jews in world politics and the economy. Until then, except for sporadic negative references to Jews related to the role of Shylock in early translations of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the majority of the Japanese population was oblivious to Jews and regarded them as a neutral entity.³ Since then, the *Protocols* has been not only a catalyst, but also a mirror of negative Japanese attitudes to Jews in general. When antisemitic views were rife, interest in the

¹ Japanese names are written with the family name first, followed by the personal name. The circumflex above certain vowels in the Japanese names indicates a long vowel.

² Jewish émigrés in Japan, Cheryl Silverman found out during a series of interviews in the mid-1980s, commonly regarded antisemitism there as "either non-existent or too abstract, passive and benign to be significant." One of her interviewees, Mischa Berkovich, asserted that most Japanese "don't know what a Jew is. They think that the Jews are some special sect of Christianity...." See Cheryl Silverman, "Jewish Émigrés and Popular Images of Jews in Japan" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1989), 190.

³ At the same time, a very small segment of the Japanese population, mainly a few Christian sects, held positive attitudes to Jews. On early Japanese views of the Jews, see David G. Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 2000); Ben-Ami Shillony, *The Jews and the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1992).

Protocols grew, and when Japanese antisemitism languished, so did interest in the book. While the history of the *Protocols* in Japan is absorbing, the issue at stake, at least from an academic viewpoint, is the reasons underlying the book's success and its various usages, which may serve to illuminate the fluctuations of antisemitic attitudes in Japan specifically, and perhaps in other countries as well.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE *PROTOCOLS*

The onset of international interest in the *Protocols* began more than a decade after its initial publication, and is related to the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as to the fact that many Jews were in leadership positions in the Bolshevik movement at that stage. The strong fear of Communist upheaval outside Russia underscores the initial success of the book: it was not fear of Jews for being religious or ethnic Jews, but as harbingers of a revolution.⁴ At the end of World War I, Japan was burdened by social discontent, and its elite was apprehensive of the spread of Communist ideas into the working masses. The encounter with a foreign book that offered not only a partial account for the world turmoil but also a colorful warning seemed effective and the book was soon embraced. While the translation of *The Merchant of Venice* in the late nineteenth century is often cited as the dawn of negative Japanese attitudes to Jews, it was the *Protocols* which provided Japanese society with its first significant prospect of modern antisemitism. Some of the Japanese who welcomed the book, however, were also admirers of Jews, partly because they exaggerated Jewish power. From their local perspective they had a good reason to view the *Protocols* as confirming their positive preconceptions, and this duality has remained an unmistakable characteristic of Japanese attitudes to Jews to this very day.

Two decades earlier, during the Russo-Japanese War, these early philosemites and antisemites received an unequivocal demonstration of Jewish "power," when a single banker, Jacob H. Schiff of the New York bank Loeb, Kuhn and Company, obtained for Japan about half of its desperately needed foreign loans.⁵ Half a year after the conclusion of the war, when Schiff arrived in Tokyo to receive the Order of the Rising Sun from Emperor Meiji, virtually all the political, military, and business elite of Japan took part in the banquets given in his honor. In the eyes of many of the participants he epitomized the inner circle of Jewish financial control and they admired him for that.⁶ Schiff continued to affect international

⁴ On the spread of *The Protocols* among the White Russians in Siberia, see Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 117-119.

⁵ On Schiff's assistance to Japan, see Gary Dean Best, "Financing a Foreign War: Jacob H. Schiff and Japan, 1904-05," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61 (1972): 313-24; Suzuki Toshio, *Japanese Government Loan Issues on the London Capital Market, 1870-1913* (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 85-104; Dani Gutwein, "Jacob Schiff and his true motives in helping Japan." In R. Kowner (ed.), *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War: Centennial Perspectives* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2006).

⁶ Three years later, the German Jewish industrialist and the future Foreign Minister of Germany, Walter Rathenau, wrote in an article published in the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse* that "three hundred men all acquainted with each other control the economic destiny of the continent." Rathenau did not necessarily mean a Jewish circle, but proponents of the *Protocols* took it as a proof for a Jewish plot. W. Rathenau, "Unser Nachwuchs," *Neue Freie Presse*, 25 Dec. 1909, cited in Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, "Rathenau, Wilhelm II, and the perception of *Wilhelminismus*," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm's Role in Imperial Germany*, ed. by Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist (Cambridge:

politics, at least in Japanese eyes, and even as late as during World War I, he refused to allow his firm to participate in any Russian war financing. Schiff's policy toward Russia changed only with the collapse of the tsarist regime in 1917 and initially he seemed euphoric about the prospects of a Russian revolution. Nonetheless, Jewish financial support did not end then. During the 1920s other Jewish partners of the bank, Felix Moritz Warburg in particular, quickly overcame their disillusionment with the Soviet regime and helped finance various projects, the most famous of them being the resettlement of Jews in the Crimea.⁷

It is important to note that the *Protocols* were not unanimously accepted in Japan at face value. While some were quick to translate it, others were even quicker to refute it. In March 1921, about a year after the first translation of the *Protocols* into English, it was cited for the first time in a Japanese manuscript.⁸ Within two months, Yoshino Sakuzô, a professor of law at the Imperial University of Tokyo and one of the foremost intellectuals of Taishô era, objected to the “unfounded rumors” spreading in Japan regarding a Jewish conspiracy. In two articles published in the widely-read monthly *Chûô Kôron* in May and June 1921, he contended that the emergence of the book in the West was used to divert anti-Bolshevik public opinion via traditional antagonism to Jews.⁹ Yoshino's objection notwithstanding, the interest in the *Protocols* generated in Japan following their publication in Western languages led to their full translation in 1924 by an army officer named Yasue Norihiro [Senkô] (1888-1950), under the pseudonym Hô Kôshi, and prompted the Army General Staff three years later to dispatch Yasue, who was on a study tour in Germany, to Palestine to further examine the Jewish situation there.¹⁰

Although antisemitic ideas began to take root in Japan in the 1920s, only during the following decade there was a substantial increase in antisemitic publications in Japan. They represented a conservative reaction to liberalism and socialism by ultranationalist scholars and military figures, and served as an explanation for the growing conflict with the United States and Great Britain. While reflecting much of the Japanese approach to the external world at that time, as David Goodman and his co-author Miyazawa Masanori so perceptively demonstrated in their seminal book *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, these publications were merely a feeble echo of the identity crisis Japan experienced during its cataclysmic turn against the West. In this epoch, however, antisemitism did not contribute, in my opinion, “to the rise of fascism” in Japan, as Goodman suggests, but rather the opposite occurred. That is, the rise of fascism contributed to the greater interest in antisemitic writings, and this issue of cause-

Cambridge University Press, 2003): 259-80, 277.

⁷ On Schiff's attitude to Russia after the Russo-Japanese War, see Priscilla Roberts, “Jewish Bankers, Russia, and the Soviet Union, 1900-1940, the Case of Kuhn, Loeb and Company,” *American Jewish Archives* 49 (1997): 9-37.

⁸ The *Protocols* was cited in a report titled *Yudayajin ni kan suru kenkyû* [Research concerning the Jews], written by Mori Kenkichi, a member of the Information Bureau of the Foreign Ministry. See Gerhard Krebs, “The ‘Jewish problem’ in Japanese-German relations, 1933-1945,” in *Japan in the Fascist Era*, ed. by E. Bruce Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 107-32, 108-109.

⁹ Yoshino Sakuzô, “Yudayajin no sekai tenpuku no inbô no setsu ni tsuite” (On the theory of a Jewish conspiracy for global subversion), *Chûô Kôron* (May 1921): 65-72; Yoshino Sakuzô, “Iwayuru sekaiteki himitsu kessha no shôtai” (the truth about the so-called global secret societies), *Chûô Kôron* (June 1921): 2-42.

¹⁰ On Yasue's visit to Palestine, see David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community in Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976), 207.

and-effect is also relevant to Japanese attitudes to Jews in the 1990s. All the more, even in that epoch of turbulent ultranationalism Japanese maintained their ambivalent attitude regarding the Jews. Similar to Yasue before him, the writings of Navy Captain Inuzuka Koreshige, who was in charge of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai from 1939 to 1942, are a vivid example not only for this duality but for the likelihood it may very well exist within the same person.¹¹

While heavily relying on the *Protocols*, Inuzuka held Jews in awe and offered to create for them an Asian homeland, and expected to benefit from their influence and power. Believing that Jews controlled the finance, politics, and media in the United States and Great Britain, Inuzuka and Yasue, by then colonel and the liaison with the Jewish Far East Council from 1938 to 1940, formulated the Japanese policy permitting the entry of Jewish refugees from Germany into Shanghai.¹² While it is true that German influence on Japan was weakened by the racial friction and limited military cooperation between the two nations, there is a place to argue that the *Protocols* had a certain positive effect on Japanese decision makers in China and Manchuria, since it made them believe that Jewish power might be instrumental for their empire.¹³ In this sense, Japanese promulgators of the *Protocols* markedly differed from European antisemites who never interpreted the book in any positive, or at least constructive, light.¹⁴

Ironically, by 1940 both Inuzuka and Yasue were regarded by German officials as “friends of the Jews.”¹⁵ More important, however, is the fact that Japan, despite signing the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany in 1936 and the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in 1940, never joined the two in deporting Jews, using them as a labor force, or facilitating their extermination. German pressure notwithstanding, Japan’s overall benevolent policy toward Jews (although marred occasionally by harsh treatment) during World War II,

¹¹ On Yasue’s ambivalence to Judaism and his appreciation of the Zionist enterprise, side by side with fears of Jewish power, see Yasue Norihiro, *Kakumei undō o abaku—yudaya no chi o fumite* (Unmasking a revolutionary movement: Setting foot on Jewish land) (Tokyo: Shōkasha, 1931), 1.

¹² Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 173-74; Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 27-28.

¹³ On German pressure on Japan to worsen its rather tolerant attitude to the Jews in its territories, see Kreissler, *Japans Judenpolitik*; Krebs, *The “Jewish problem,”* 110-13. On German-Japanese relations during the war, see Johanna Menzel Meskill, *Hitler & Japan: The Hollow Alliance* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966); Hugo Dobson, “The Failure of the Tripartite Pact: Familiarity Breeding Contempt between Japan and Germany, 1940-45,” *Japan Forum* 11 (1999): 179-90; Hans-Joachim Krug, Axel Niestle, and Berthold J. Sander-Nagashima, *Reluctant Allies: German-Japanese Naval Relations in World War II* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001). On Japanese policies to Jews during World War II, see Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*; Pamela Shatzkes, “Kobe: A Japanese haven for Jewish refugees, 1940-1941,” *Japan Forum* 3 (1991): 257-73; Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*; Bandō Hiroshi. *Nihon no yudayajin seisaku 1931-1945: Gaikō shiryōkan bunsō “yudaya mondai” kara* (Japan’s Jewish policy 1931-1945: Documents from the Foreign Ministry Diplomatic Record Office) (Tokyo: Miraisha, 2002); Heinz Eberhard Maul, *Why Has Japan Not Persecuted the Jews?* (Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo Shuppan, 2004); Maruyama Naoki, *Taiheiyō sensō to shanbai no yudaya nanmin* (The Pacific war and Jewish refugees in Shanghai) (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppanyoku, 2005).

¹⁴ On Inuzuka’s plans, see Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz. *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews During World War II* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979).

¹⁵ It is unclear whether the motive was his age or views, but within a short time, the Army released Yasue from active service. See Krebs, *The “Jewish problem,”* 117; Françoise Kreissler, “Japans Judenpolitik (1931-1945),” in *Formierung und Fall der Achse Berlin-Tōkyō*, ed. by Gerhard Krebs and Bernd Martin (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1984): 187-210, 203-204.

demonstrates the limited detrimental, if not ambivalent, effect the *Protocols* exerted in Japan in the first two decades after its publication.¹⁶

The decline of Japanese interest in the *Protocols* after 1945 is by no means less revealing. Except for one minor reference to it throughout the twenty-six years that followed Japan's surrender, no author dealt with the book, nor it was republished.¹⁷ Japanese society was occupied by primary needs, such as rebuilding its cities and industrial infrastructure and restoring its economy, and was less troubled by identity issues. For this reason the interest in Jews—always a marginal topic in the Japanese society—totally subsided. In 1970, however, a book authored by Yamamoto Shichihei (using the seemingly more authoritative pseudonym Isaiah Ben-Dasan) and entitled *Nihonjin to yudayajin* (“The Japanese and the Jews”), heralded a new era of growing international aspirations and a return to global competition.¹⁸ Two years earlier, the Japanese economy had surpassed that of Germany, becoming the second largest economy in the capitalist world. Hereafter, the Japanese quest for recognition following the success of the Tokyo Olympic games of 1964 and the World Exposition in Osaka in 1970 was accompanied by a renewed search for self-definition.

Nihonjin to yudayajin offered just that, although it was basically about Japan rather than Jews. For this reason, but also for the writing style and the timing, it became a sensational success and sold more than three million copies. Jews became a box-office hit in Japan. Less than a year passed before Nagafuchi Ichirô authored his own version of the *Protocols*.¹⁹ In the mid-1980s Japan witnessed a second surge of antisemitic writings, which included many references to the *Protocols*, or at least notions of a Jewish ambition to gain control of the world. It is not surprising that this reemergence of the *Protocols* occurred when it was predicted that the Japanese economy would supersede that of the United States, and the Japanese were facing a second identity crisis. Like the situation half a century earlier, this time, too, there was increasing friction with the United States, reinforced by rising nationalism.²⁰

THE CONTINUING SUCCESS OF THE *PROTOCOLS*

The chronicle of the *Protocols* in Japan seems indeed erratic but not necessarily unpredictable. In the eight decades since it was initially translated there has been an interplay between various factors that promoted interest in this book or alternatively, worked to suppress it.

¹⁶ On German pressure on Japan to segregate the Jews in Shanghai, see Bandô, *Nihon no yudayajin seisaku*, 299.

¹⁷ In 1958 Matsumoto Fumi reprinted Kubota Eikichi's translation of the *Protocols* from 1938; see Matsumoto Fumi, *Fuji kaidan'in konryû* (Building the altar at Mount Fuji) (Tokyo: Fujisan Myôkôin, 1958).

¹⁸ Isaiah Ben-Dasan [Yamamoto Shichihei], *Nihonjin to yudayajin* (The Japanese and the Jews) (Tokyo: Yamamoto Shoten, 1970).

¹⁹ Nagafuchi Ichirô, *Yudayajin to sekai kakumei: shion no giteisbo* (The Jews and the world revolution: the Protocols of the Elders of Zion) (Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Oraisha, 1971).

²⁰ On Japan's recurrent conflict with the West and the United States, see W. Burger, “Rise of the America-Bashers,” *Newsweek* (13 Apr. 1987), 18; James W. White, Michio Umegaki, and Thomas R. H. Havens, eds., *The Ambivalence of Nationalism: Modern Japan between East and West* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1990); Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (London: Routledge, 1992); Bruce Stronach, *Beyond the Rising Sun: Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).

Several associated “mini-theories” may also account for the occasional surge of literal antisemitism in Japan as a whole.

Emulation and Imitation of a Leading Culture

The rise of antisemitism in Japan, and the emergence of the *Protocols* can be viewed as a mere emulation of foreign trends and fads. The attraction for the *Protocols* was an imitation of European and North American anti-Communism, or at least fascination with White Russian ideas. The first wave of antisemitic writing in the 1930s and 1940s was an emulation of German writings, and even the recent wave of antisemitic writings in 1987 was an echo of a global surge in antisemitism elsewhere. Simon Epstein shows in his study of cyclical patterns in antisemitism the recurrence of Jewish-hatred that a new surge has started, not surprisingly, exactly in the same year.²¹

Reflection of Preoccupation with the Other

Throughout human history, and notably in modern times, various nations have displayed fear of elitist or secluded groups whom they perceived as assuming anti-national or cross-national attitudes and seeking to control the world. This was often the case with the Christian Church, and the Jesuit Order in particular, as well as with Freemasonry. Although originating in medieval days, accusations that Jews were attempting to control world affairs grew substantially as their economic importance increased in the eighteenth century, and thereafter they were often mentioned synonymously with Freemasonry. In Japan too, Jews have represented or displaced preoccupation with external groups with whom the Japanese have been in conflict but which are less “legitimate” for criticism. The most evident group is the monolithic “West,” which the Japanese tended to admire since the onset of their modernization, but are also in competition with, and often feel threatened by.²²

The two waves of antisemitic writings in Japan coincided with moves against the West, or at least during a heightened sense of competition with it. The *Protocols* were introduced in a time of perceived Communist threat from the West, reemerged in the mid-1930s, and popped up again in the mid-1980s. In its latter emergence, Japanese antisemitism was, as a matter of fact, a strand of anti-Americanism rather than anti-Westernism in general. Jews were used, particularly since the mid-1980s, to explain Japan’s increasing trade frictions with the United States and were portrayed as controlling American politics and plotting against Japan.²³ They became scapegoats, goes the argument, since it is not possible or desirable for

²¹ See Simon Epstein, *Cyclical Patterns in Antisemitism: The Dynamics of Anti-Jewish Violence in Western Countries since the 1950s*. ACTA no. 2, (Jerusalem: SICSA, 1993).

²² On the multifaceted Japanese attitude to the West in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see, for example, Hirakawa Sukehiro. “Japan’s Turn to the West,” in *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, ed. by Marius B. Jansen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 432-98; Tetsuo Najita and Harry D. Harootunian, “Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century,” in *Cambridge History of Japan: The Twentieth Century*, vol. 6, ed. by Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 711-74.

²³ See, for example, an editorial written by the chief of the Washington bureau of the daily *Nibon Keizai*, Yoshida Toshio, “Yudayajin no amerika” (America of the Jews), *Nibon Keizai Shimbun* (9 July 1984), 13.

the Japanese to openly criticize the United States.²⁴ Finally, the antisemitic surge of the late 1980s proved a convenient vehicle for left-wing anti-Zionist writers who associated earlier notions of Jewish hegemony with Israel's conduct and supposed conspiracies to harm Japan.²⁵

Interpreting Japan

Some Japanese have used the Jews as a beacon of Japan's quest for self-definition, as an explanation for Japan current problems, and as a warning for future developments. Jews have been used also to reinforce of the Japanese sense of uniqueness as a part of national discourse on Japanese identity known as *nihonjinron*.²⁶ Since their early history as a nation, the Japanese have invoked and manipulated images of foreigners, often far from any reality but in accordance with certain social or political agendas, in order to define their own identity.²⁷ Jews, in this sense, serve as the quintessential Other, which contrasts with the Japanese in any of their traits.²⁸ Yamamoto's *Nihonjin to yudayajin*, for example, facilitated a comfortable course for other *nihonjinron* theorists to keep comparing the Japanese with Jews.²⁹ The new

²⁴ See an interview with Neil Sandberg, director of the American Jewish Committee's Pacific Rim Institute: C. S. Lee, Bill Powell, and Kai Itoi, "Anne Frank to Einstein," *Newsweek* (16 May 1994), 46. Uno's aim in attacking the Jews, David Goodman also contended, was to discredit the U.S.-Japanese relationship. Uno insisted that Japan's postwar constitution, which was promulgated during the Occupation and which mandates Japan's democratic institutions, "is a Jewish plot to destroy Japan as an independent culture." David Goodman, "Japanese anti-Semitism." *The World & I* (Nov. 1987): 401-409, 406-407.

²⁵ For writings on Israeli conspiracies and the equation of Zionism with Jewish attempts for world domination, see Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 216-19, 248-51.

²⁶ On the *nihonjinron* discourse, see Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001); Rotem Kowner, "Deconstructing the Japanese national discourse: Laymen's beliefs and ideology," in *Exploring Japaneseness: Japanese Enactments of Culture and Consciousness*, ed. by Ray T. Donahue (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002): 169-82.

²⁷ On the manipulation of the Chinese image in Japan throughout history, see David Polack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

²⁸ For the concept of the "Other" in the Japanese society, see T. Yoshida, "The Stranger as God: The place of the outsider in Japanese folk religion," *Ethnology* 20 (1981): 87-99; Jacob Raz, *Aspects of Otherness in Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1992): 19-33; Michael Weiner, "The invention of identity: 'Self' and 'Other' in Pre-war Japan," in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. by M. Weiner (London: Routledge, 1997): 1-16; Rotem Kowner, "Homogeneous nation with exceptions: Prejudice and its ideology in Japanese society," in *Political Psychology in Japan*, ed. by O. Feldman (New York: Nova Science, 1999): 233-55; John Clammer, *Japan and Its Others: Globalization, Difference and the Critique of Modernity* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001).

²⁹ A popular Japanese book discussing *haragei*, a "unique" way of communication, used the image of the Wandering Jews as an antithesis of the Japanese ability to communicate laconically and in a manner that "defies Western logic": "The only way fish can define themselves as animals living in the water," argued the author Matsumoto Michihiro, "is for them to get out of the water. By the same token, the shortest route to giving *haragei* clarity is to shed light on a culture whose self-understanding and representation seems to be so different from the Japanese. The Jewish people's struggle with the definition of identity, still such an ambiguous notion, is untranslatable into Japanese. The Jewish people, devoid of the historical parallel of the divine wind (*kamikaze*) keeping a people from wandering, being scattered, has never had the mutual indulgence (*Amae*) the idealistic Japanese race has enjoyed. The awareness that brings the Jews together seems to be based on some reality principle, in Freudian terms, by no means the sort of pleasure principle that 'laughs at' debates about survival." In Michihiro Matsumoto, *The Unspoken Way. Haragei: Silence in Japanese Business and Society* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1988), 9-10.

wave of antisemitic writings, epitomized by Uno Masami, appealed to many Japanese also because they offered a palatable account for Japan's trade frictions and subsequent economic woes. The collapse of the "economic bubble" at the end of the 1980s, and the beginning of an unprecedented recession have intensified the anxiety about Japan's economic future. Finally, Jews have provided Japanese society with a warning and negative model. The avaricious Jew, some argued, is used a negative model, to warn Japan of the danger to its image if it continues to behave like an "economic animal."³⁰

Interest in the Occult

Japanese display exceptional interest in the occult, supernatural phenomena, doomsday prophecies, and a wide range of conspiracies.³¹ Within this milieu, some interest in the Jews appears to result from their image as a small and secluded group which manipulates, if not controls, world affairs. The Jews, an unfamiliar but legendary people, occupy an important place, and the *Protocols* can be viewed as an archetype of inexhaustible occult literature on evil attempts to control the world.³² Since the early 1980s, members of a new and growing subculture known as *otaku* have been especially susceptible to this idea. The term *otaku* refers to young introverted males obsessed with computer games and perverse animation, who are often sexually frustrated. They tend to shun human contact and to live in a claustrophobic, "virtual world." Significantly, many of them are preoccupied with evil forces.³³

³⁰ See, for example, Shillony, *Jews and the Japanese*, 222.

³¹ Interest in the occult and supernatural phenomena can be observed in the rituals of many "new religion" groups, including the widely accepted belief in blood groups, superstitions concerning numbers, the content of comics, etc. Cf. Winston Davis, *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1980); and Cullen Tadao Hayashida, "Identity, Race and the Blood Ideology of Japan" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1976); Robert Kisala, "1999 and beyond: The use of Nostradamus' prophecies by Japanese religions." *Japanese Religions* 23 (1997): 143-57; Thomas Crump, *The Japanese Number Game: The Use and Understanding of Number in Modern Japan* (London: Routledge, 1992). . See also Kiyomi Morioka, "Escape into the occult." *Japan Interpreter*, 9 (1974): 60-62; Noriko T. Rieder, "The appeal of kaidan, tales of the strange [frightening ghost stories]." *Asian Folklore Studies* 59 (2000): 265-83 Anonymous, "15% of Nagasaki students believe the dead can be resurrected." *Japan Today* (25 Jan. 2005).

³² One such example is the very successful TV series *Evangelion* [known also as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*] which was aired during the early 1990s; the plot appeared in print as *Shinseiki Evangelion* (The Evangelion of the New Century) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1997). On the links between Japanese animation, computer games, and Aum ideology, see Yumiko Iida, "Between the 'Technique of Living an Endless Routine' and the 'Madness of Absolute Degree Zero': Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," *Positions* 8, no. 2 (2000): 423-64, 438-39. On the association between the concept of Armageddon and the television series *The Voyage of the Space Battleship Yamato*, see Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999), 46.

³³ This term carries a negative connotation in Japanese and is used also in English. It was probably coined in 1983 by writer Nakamori Akio in his series *Otaku no kenkyū* (Studies of otaku). See Sharon Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24 (1998): 289-316; and idem, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000). See also *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku>; Volker Grassmuck, "I'm alone, but not lonely: Japanese Otaku-Kids colonize the Realm of Information and Media. A Tale of Sex and Crime from a Faraway Place" at <http://www.cjas.org/~leng/otaku-e.htm>; I find an apparent association between the otaku of the 1980s and the 1990s and the recent and more extreme phenomenon of *hikikomori*, that is young people who live a fragmented life and lock themselves in their rooms for months and even years. Both display a withdrawal reaction to the extreme social and psychological pressures they perceive in school and at home and prefer living in a secure but isolated

Supply and Demand

The reemergence of the *Protocols* seems to involve more mundane and personal motives as well, which are related neither to antisemitism nor even to Japan's political and social contemporary circumstances. The most apparent motive is the commercial success that follows the publication of books about Jews. The outlandish success of Yamamoto's book in 1970 led to a wave of publications partly because the topic appeared to be a goldmine for shrewd publishers and supple writers. In turn, the greater supply of antisemitic books have lured a new readership that previously may not have harbored any interest in this domain. Not all writers were antisemitic, but by the late 1980s several new and unscrupulous publishers were taking part in the soaring business.³⁴ Some of them seemed to have very limited knowledge of Jews, and in the name of freedom of speech they were concerned solely with the high sales of their books.

"It's simply supply and demand," rationalized Takahiro Shimizu, one of the most prolific publishers of antisemitic books in Japan in the early 1990s. "I understand that there is a market for these books," he confessed. "They offer a different perspective on history." Shimizu's company was only one example of a publishing house that specialized in Jews: five of the six books brought out in 1994 by this company dealt with Jews in one way or another.³⁵ In 1987 this trend was further reinforced by large bookshops that devoted a special section to books on Jews ("Jewish corner"). Leading the pack was Kinokuniya, probably the largest bookstore in Tokyo. Starting in February 1987, it presented a one-month display, with the sign "Do Jews control the world? Now is the time to think about Jews."³⁶ With such a general support, the success of any "Jewish" book (not all were necessarily antisemitic) was for the time being almost certain.

RECENT USAGE OF THE *PROTOCOLS* IN JAPAN: RECONSIDERING FOUR CASE STUDIES

In a recent paper in this series, David Goodman, a professor of comparative literature and leading scholar of the Jewish chronicles in Japan, elaborated on the usage of the *Protocols* and its current implications.³⁷ The gist of Goodman's paper is four intriguing case studies of recently active Japanese proponents of the *Protocols*—Uno Masami (1942-), Yajima Kinji

world, where one's enemies and fears are filtered and controlled via comics (*manga*), animation movies, and computer games.

³⁴ In an interview conducted in May 2002, Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center referred to the ethics behind the Japanese publishing industry. Cooper, who led the international protest against the monthly *Marvo Polo's* Holocaust denial article in 1995 met with the editor Hanada Kazuyoshi. After several meetings Hanada suddenly disclosed he had visited Auschwitz and was very moved by the place. "So I asked him," Cooper recalled, "why would you run an article like this that denies the Holocaust? And do you know what he said? He said, basically, that it sells magazines. That's it." In Adam Gamble and Takesato Watanabe, *A Public Betrayed: An inside Look at Japanese Media Atrocities and Their Warnings to the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 2004), 184.

³⁵ Cited in David Lazarus, "Anti-Semitism Still a Blind Spot in Japan," *Japan Times* (6 Nov. 1994), 14.

³⁶ Silverman, "Jewish Émigrés," 284n.

³⁷ David G. Goodman, "The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Aum and Antisemitism in Japan." *Posen Papers in Contemporary Antisemitism*, no. 2 (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2005).

(1919-1994), Asahara Shôkô (1955-), and Ohta Ryû (1930-). Having examined some motives for the Japanese interest in this book, we may now turn to reconsider these case studies.

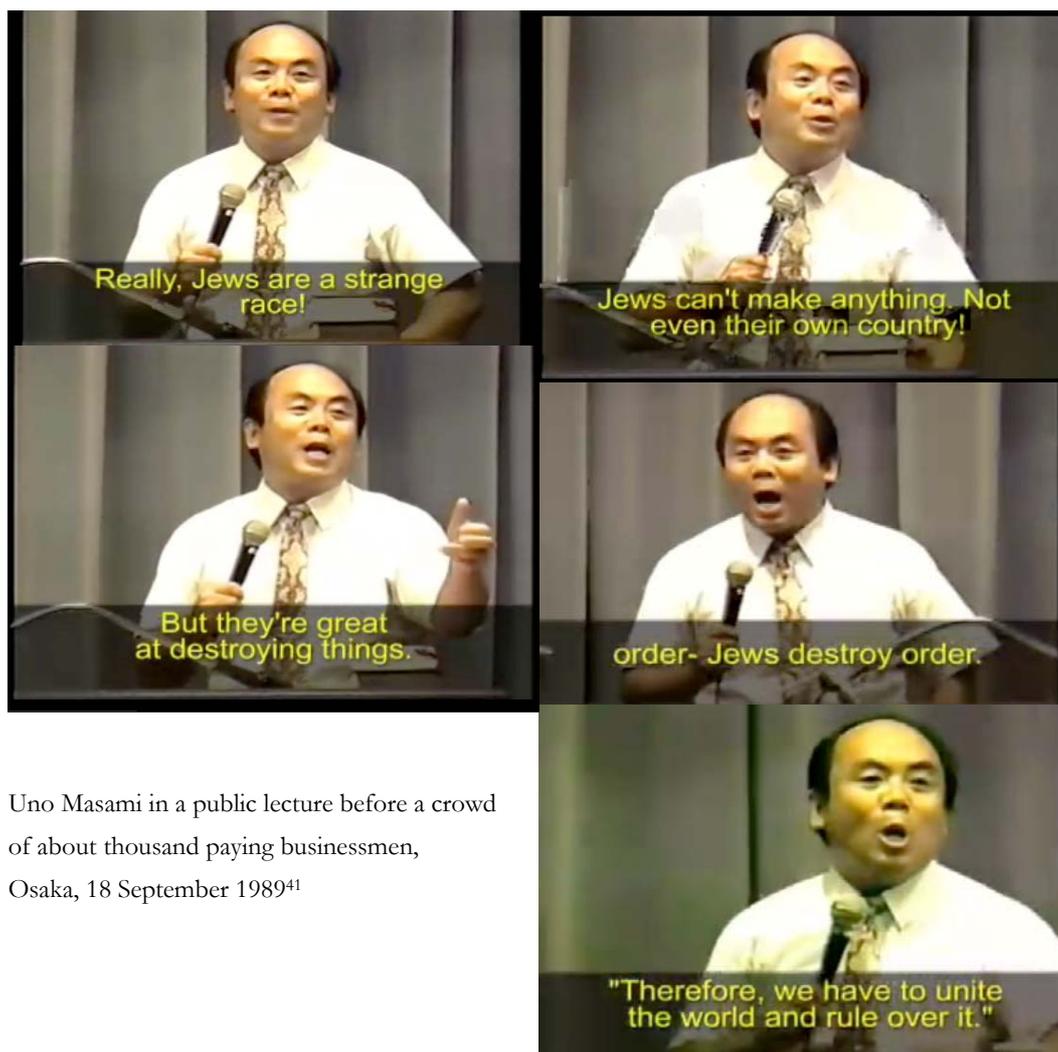
At first glance, the four appear to represent a mixed bag of motives, but in fact they have much more in common. The most evident denominator these figures share is the period of their activity. They all referred to the *Protocols* within a nine-year period starting in 1986 and ending in 1995. During this short time span their antisemitic writings reached their peak and then dwindled or even completely stopped.³⁸ This time span coincides with a period of head-on economic competition with the United States and rising aspirations for world hegemony. Symbolically perhaps, during 1986 Uno Masami and Yajima Kinji came into the public limelight with extremely successful antisemitic books; Asahara Shôkô officially founded the Aum Shinrikyô as a religious movement and left for a momentous visit to India; and Japan's Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro made racist statements in which he touted the superiority of monoracial Japan over the United States.³⁹ It all ended nine years later with the Great Hanshin earthquake in January 1995, the Sarin-gas attack in Tokyo in March, and the gloomy realization that Japan was in a deep economic recession, outclassed again by its mentor and rival, the United States. By that year, Yajima was already dead, Asahara arrested, and Uno and Ohta quit writing on Jewish issues.⁴⁰

Another denominator is an economic motive disguised by ideological rhetoric. The majority of the figures presented—Uno, Yajima, and Ohta—apparently had strong commercial incentives for their interest in Jews since all the three made their livings, partly or fully, from writing and publishing books, and thus maximized their revenues by publishing best sellers on trendy topics. Vulnerable Japan and the Jewish conspiracy against it, unfortunately, were among the more popular topics in that period. The shift of these authors to the realm of Jewish conspiracy theories was, by and large, opportunistic not only because it occurred in an era of growing interest in the topic, but also because it did not reflect any long-standing personal interest in Jews. The gamble proved profitable from the start and encouraged them to publish more. There is nothing wrong with economic motives for writing books, as long they do not become the sole reason for the writing, with that end justifying the means, and the actual economic motivation remaining obscure behind a veil of pretentious conviction.

³⁸ The antisemitic activities of two of them stopped completely in the mid-1990s: Yajima died in 1994, whereas Asahara was arrested for murder in early 1995.

³⁹ Praising the achievements of the Japanese education system, Nakasone told members of his Liberal Democratic Party that “our average [intelligence] score is much higher than those of countries like the U.S. There are many blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in America. In consequence the average score over there is exceedingly low.” See Ezra Bowen, “Nakasone’s World-Class Blunder,” *Time* (6 Oct. 1986): 40-41, 40. Uno’s publication that year included *Yudaya ga wakaru to nihan ga mietekuru* (If you comprehend the Jews, you will understand Japan) (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1986); *Yudaya ga wakaru to seikai ga mietekuru—1990 nen 'Shumatsu keizai sensô beno shinario* (If you comprehend the Jews, you will understand the world—a scenario concerning the final economic war of 1990) (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1986). Yajima’s most successful publication in 1986 was *Yudaya purotokôru chô-urayomijutsu* (The expert way to read the Jewish Protocols) (Tokyo: Seishun Shuppansha, 1986).

⁴⁰ In 2003, Ohta reappeared in a somewhat related topic, this time as a translator of Michael Hoffman and Moshe Lieberman’s book, *The Israeli Holocaust Against the Palestinians*.



Uno Masami in a public lecture before a crowd of about thousand paying businessmen, Osaka, 18 September 1989⁴¹

Uno's literary career exemplifies this notion to the extreme. He began with co-editing a lexicon of computer and electronics terms and five years later, in 1982, he wrote his first two books on Jewish-related subjects, still mixed with occultism rather than sheer antisemitism.⁴² The books had only limited success and Uno abandoned the topic. He returned to it only in 1986, and only at this stage, following the publication of his two bestsellers on Jews, he soared at last to a momentary literary stardom. His success was so instantaneous and beyond any expectation that it channeled his energy and aspirations for the whole next decade. Along with sales of over one million copies of these two books within a year, Uno became the core of a profitable industry. Within that first year, he delivered lectures to large audiences, provided consultations through several branches of his "Middle East Research Center," and sold an assortment of about seventy tapes of lectures, all devoted to the

⁴¹ I thank David Goodman for referring me to this visual source. The full 12-minute clip can be viewed at <http://netfiles.uiuc.edu/dgodman/shared/unovideo.htm>

⁴² See Matsumoto Kinji, Uno Masami, and Nakamura Isao, *Konpyuta erekutoronikusu yogô jiten* (Lexicon of computers and electronics vocabulary) (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1977); Uno Masami, *Kyûyaku seisbo no daiyogen—seikai saishû sensô to yudayajin* [Great prophecies of the Old Testament: The Jews and Armageddon] (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1982); Uno Masami, *Zoku kyûyaku seisbo no daiyogen—seikai saishû sensô to shidôsha no jôken* (Great prophecies of the Old Testament, continued: Armageddon and the qualifications of the leader) (Tokyo: Tokuma books, 1982).

insidious role of Jews in world affairs. In the next seven years Uno strove to repeat his early success but in vain.⁴³

The literary record of Yajima and Ohta is also devoid of interest in Jews until the eruption of the Jewish “boom” in 1986. Earlier, Yajima had focused on economics textbooks, but also wrote on other academic topics, while Ohta wrote about ecological issues, as well as on the origins of the Japanese. Yajima abandoned his earlier themes in 1986 when his antisemitic tract sold several hundred thousand copies; Ohta did likewise in 1991. Somewhat late and hesitant, Ohta’s departure from ecological topics was not as abrupt, however; in the same year he wrote on Jews for the first time, he also experimented with a book on UFOs. For many Japanese, the two topics were not dissimilar at all, but apparently, the blind shot at the realm of antisemitism proved more profitable, and he immediately followed up with additional titles on the Jews. While the initial motive was by and large economic, all the three writers soon sought ideological support, perhaps to justify their initial opportunism and minimize their cognitive dissonance.⁴⁴ Uno and Yajima turned into antisemitic ideologues and movements abroad, in the United States in particular, for theory and expertise, and the affirmation they received intensified their ardor and reinforced their conviction that the Jews posed a threat.⁴⁵

All three were extremely prolific writers. Even Uno was able to compose no less than a dozen books within seven years (1986-1992). Despite the pretense of expertise on Jewish issues, such a rate of production obviously does not allow for any profound research or even enough time for a true acquaintance with one’s supposed specialty. None of these writers was a serious scholar or “academic” writer, and their books on Jews, at least, were without references, with hardly any bibliography, and were written in a highly polemic style. Customarily sold in soft cover at a relatively low price, the books were all aimed at *sarariman* (white collar workers) and occult fans.

The most intriguing case study, however, is that of the sect known as Aum Shinrikyô and its leader Asahara, currently on death row for his role in the Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995.⁴⁶ Asahara’s motives, at first glance, seem very different from the three other writers. At the heyday of Aum’s activity, the use of Jews in the group’s rhetoric was certainly not aimed at economic benefits for its leader. About a decade earlier, however, Asahara ventured to establish a sect of his own partly because of economic distress that followed his arrest for illegal sales of herbal medicine. Nonetheless, in striking contrast to the other cases, Asahara was from the start genuinely driven by a sense of destiny, and the economic motive

⁴³ On Uno’s exploitation of his momentary success, see Silverman, *Jewish Émigrés*, 285n.

⁴⁴ The best psychological account of such a behavior is the theory of cognitive dissonance formulated by Leon Festinger. This is a state of contradiction between two cognitions, in our case the desire for greater success on the one hand and the disbelief in the validity of the writings on the other hand. The theory suggests that the contradiction between these cognitions compels the individual to generate a new belief or thought, that minimizes the discomfort felt due to the discrepancy. The greater the dissonance, the greater the tendency of individuals to reinterpret reality in a way that shows they are right. See Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (New York: Row, Peterson, 1957).

⁴⁵ On the contacts that Uno and Yajima had with antisemitic groups and Holocaust deniers in the United States, see Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 229-32.

⁴⁶ On February 27, 2004, Asahara was found guilty on 13 charges and sentenced to death by hanging.

became increasingly less important.

The most important difference is the marginality of Jews in the agenda of Aum. During the decade of its activity up to the Sarin gas attack, the group witnessed extreme changes in its ideology. Throughout its erratic evolution from a benign New Age-like religious sect to a destructive doomsday cult, Aum borrowed numerous ideas and practices from various religions and traditions, but until almost the very end, Jews in general and antisemitism in particular were absent from Aum's agenda. It is important therefore to examine the winding road of Aum and the sources for Asahara's ideological flexibility to understand the sudden use of Jewish images later on.

In 1985, one year after leaving the "new" Buddhist sect Agonshû, Asahara adopted the prophecies of the 16th-century French physician and astrologer Nostradamus—an extremely popular topic among Japan's new religions and in other sectors during the 1980s—and began to articulate for the first time his fears of the possibility of a nuclear war.⁴⁷ Asahara's early prophecies of such a doomsday conflict were closely related to the growing tension with the United States, and being aware of it, he warned that Japan's consequent rearmament would lead to war. Between 1988 and 1990 Aum moved from salvation to world destruction. Some scholars suggest that this slide to violence begun with Asahara's beating of his own followers for disciplinary reasons, in an attempt to sustain his leadership in the sect and his consequent emphasis on obedience.⁴⁸

At the same time, Aum's conflict with its surroundings worsened as the media intensified its scrutiny of the sect following disturbing reports from former members. In 1989 Asahara published a book entitled *Metsubô no Hi* (with the subtitle *Doomsday*) in which he incorporated Christian visions of apocalyptic war and used the word Armageddon for the first time. That year, the path of the sect to its ultimate catastrophe began to take shape when several members, under Asahara's instructions, killed a dissident member and shortly afterward murdered the entire family of a lawyer who had investigated the sect's activities. In May 1990, almost five years before their murderous subway attack, and still without any reference to the Jews, Aum members released lethal poison (botulinum) in Tokyo, but fortunately with no effect.⁴⁹

Asahara's rhetoric tended to follow his actions, if not specifically to justify them, rather than to precede them. In 1989, for example, the sect established a laboratory for manufacturing biological weapons, but Asahara's fully fledged apocalyptic visions appeared only two years later. When his two-volume *Kirisuto Sengen* (The declaration of Christ) was published in 1991, it was evident that Asahara had undergone another intellectual transformation and had moved further into the realm of Christian imagery.⁵⁰ He invoked the

⁴⁷ Japanese "New Age" sects have made significant use of apocalyptic themes since the 1970s along with particular fascination with the prophecies of Nostradamus. On the prevalence of these prophecies and their appeal to Aum, see Kisala, *1999 and Beyond*, 144-45; Daniel Alfred Metraux, *Aum Shinrikyo's Impact on Japanese Society* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 134, 141.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyô* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 160-61.

⁴⁹ On Aum's first years see Reader, *Religious Violence*, 95-161; Metraux, *Aum Shinrikyo's Impact*, 138-42.

⁵⁰ Asahara Shôkô, *Kirisuto sengen: kirisuto no oshie no subete o okasu* (The declaration of Christ) (Tokyo: Aumu, 1991) and *kirisuto sengen 2: sairin, sabaki, shûmatsu* (The declaration of Christ 2) (Tokyo: Aumu,



Asahara, founder of the Aum sect

image of himself as Jesus, a messiah who seeks to bring salvation to a select few, while the masses reject his deliverance. Asahara's attraction to Christianity brought him in proximity to the Protestant Reverend Uno Masami. This somewhat unexplored commonality is not accidental. Japanese Christian leaders have been a major source of antisemitic rhetoric since the early twentieth century. Although Christians were not alone in this practice, they used the image of Jews more than any other Japanese sect to emphasize the chosen-ness of the Japanese people and their ultimate role in world salvation.⁵¹

Part of the problem in accounting for Christian antisemitism in Japan is the curious coexistence of fervent philosemitism among certain non-mainstream denominational Churches.⁵² Both antisemites and philosemites in Japan exploited the Jews to affirm their Japanese-ness within a specific cultural discourse and thereby to strengthen their social position within the Japanese society.⁵³ John Clammer argues convincingly that the two trends share similar attitudes:

*Paradoxically the very alleged characteristics of the Jews that fuel Japanese anti-Semitism—closeness, genius, world domination, economic prowess and the source of an absolutist ethical system—become through this mechanism of identification attached to the Japanese, but trans-modified of course from negative to positive as they appear in their Japanese incarnation.*⁵⁴

Asahara's turn to Christianity in 1991 unbolted the door for the use of the image of evil Jews, but while the new faith was a major source for his future references to them, it was not the only one. Another source lay in his attempt to extend Aum's activities abroad, similar to many other Japanese sects following the path of *kokusaika* [internationalization]. The sect was successful only in Russia, where it recruited more than 30,000 followers starting in 1992, but also clandestinely purchased weapons. At that specific time, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian society was particularly susceptible to apocalyptic visions and therefore it served perhaps as a catalyst, or even a motive, for Asahara's growing reliance on

1991). The book was translated into English under the revealing title *Declaring Myself the Christ*.

⁵¹ For example, the Mahikari, a non-Christian sect, also adopted apocalyptic images from the Bible and treated Jews favorably in its writings. On the Mahikari and the Jews, see Winston Bradley Davis, *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1980), 68-71; Winston Bradley Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 69-70; Brian J. McVeigh, *Spirits, Selves, and Subjectivity in a Japanese New Religion: The Cultural Psychology of Belief in Shūkyō Mahikari* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 72-75.

⁵² The most prominent of them are the *Genshi fukuin undō* ("Original Gospel Movement" popularly known as *Maknyū*) and the *Sei Iesukai* ("The Holy Ecclesia of Jesus Church" known also as the *Beit Shalom* Church).

⁵³ Shillony, for example, argued that identification with the early Jews enable Japanese philosemites to be Christian while still rejecting the West. Shillony, *Jews and the Japanese*, 142.

⁵⁴ Clammer, *Japan and Its Others*, 193.

Christian sources and his consequent adoption of the *Protocols* in his apocalyptic gospel. Not only was Russia the motherland of this tract, but following the demise of Communism, the country witnessed a massive return to religion, growing fears of the uncertain future, and intensifying antisemitism.⁵⁵

A third source for Asahara's turn against the Jews was related to his anti-Americanism. In 1993, two years after the first Gulf War and at the height of Japanese-American tensions, he started to regard the United States—a nation controlled by Jews according to Uno and others—as the world's main force of evil and incorporated it in his apocalyptic prophecies. In Aum's eyes, the malicious role of that nation culminated during the Great Hanshin Earthquake, when the cult's "science minister" accused the American military of operating a machine that caused the catastrophe.⁵⁶ The United States, however, was merely one actor in an ever growing circle of enemies. In 1994 Asahara began to view the entire world around him as conspiring against Aum and himself personally.⁵⁷ At this stage he was engulfed with paranoia and committed to violence following the gas attack his followers carried out in the city of Matsumoto in June that year, which resulted in the death of seven innocent people. Among the enemies he listed now were several more successful religious sects in Japan, a number of Japanese figures (including the influential politician Ozawa Ichirô, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ôgata Sadako, and the American-educated Princess Masako), the United States, Freemasonry, and the Jews.⁵⁸

Asahara was a product of his time. In retrospect, the fickle evolution of his thought and the backdrop which he was active in made the exploitation of the image of conspiring Jews almost inevitable. It is surprising, in fact, that Asahara did not resort to antisemitism earlier. It is evident, however, that the anti-Jewish rhetoric followed his sect's violent acts rather than preceding and being used to justify it.⁵⁹ The availability of negative stereotypes of Jews in Japan, the attraction to Christian apocalyptic visions, the malicious image of the United States and the forces supposedly standing behind it as the cult's main enemy, along with the recruitment of followers in Russia—all led to the ultimate characterization of the Jews as

⁵⁵ On Aum's activities in Russia, see Yulia Mikhailova, "The Aum Supreme Truth Sect in Russia," *Bulletin of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia* 16, nos. 2-3 (1996): 15-34.

⁵⁶ On the accusations against American military during the Great Hanshin Earthquake, see David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult of the End of the World: The Incredible Story of Aum* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), 224. Some of the now almost forgotten tensions and American suspicion of Japan in the early 1990s can be found in the following two titles (both were translated to Japanese within less than a year of the original English publication): George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), and Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (New York: Alfred S. Knopf, 1992).

⁵⁷ For Asahara's charges that American and Japanese airplanes sprayed poisonous gas on Aum's compound, see D. W. Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 106.

⁵⁸ For details on the names listed in Aum's monthly *Vajrayana Sacca* during 1994, see Fujita Shôichi, *Aum shinrikyô jiken* (The Aum Shinrikyô incident) (Tokyo: Kyôiku Shiryô, 1995), 60-64; Ian Reader, *Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyô's Path to Violence* (Copenhagen: NIAS Books, 1996), 67-68; Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo*, 106-107.

⁵⁹ The late usage of Jews in Asahara's rhetoric suggests that the source of his "fundamental concatenation of Hitler, Nostradamus, and Armageddon," was not the Judeocentric conspiracy theories, as Goodman contended earlier. If these theories were the sole or the major source of his rhetoric, I believe he would have expressed antisemitic views much earlier. See Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 266.

Aum's universal enemy in December 1994.⁶⁰

For Asahara, Jews were never real people. They were problematic neither in a religious nor in an ethnic and national sense. To him they represented an evil force, and he did not make any distinction between them and other "dark forces." Nearly blind and semi-educated, he knew very little of Jewish history and simply picked up the prevalent notion of Jews as conspiring to harm humanity and peaceful Japan.⁶¹ This portrayal may underrate, however, Asahara's sophistication and cold manipulative ability to materialize his goals. The choice of Jews as one of the sect's enemies was not done only because of the circumstances but was also due to his awareness of the effect such image would have on his potential followers in Japan and abroad.⁶² Asahara's usage of the Jews was therefore a byproduct of a decade of antisemitic writings and it illustrates the danger of such demonization.

THE CURRENT REPERCUSSIONS OF THE *PROTOCOLS*

My reexamination of these four case studies casts some doubt on the significance attributed to the Japanese attraction to the *Protocols*, and particularly on the present repercussions of the book. David Goodman contends that the book and its epigones could not circulate as widely as they did during the 1980s and 1890s without ill effects. The *Protocols* are, as he paraphrases Norm Cohn, "a warrant for mass murder," and further, he concludes, the book

*is not only "a justification for killing anyone whom one chooses to define as a "Jew," it is also a catalogue of techniques for how to accomplish this on a large scale.*⁶³

While I share with Goodman his fascination with the *Protocols* and regard the book seriously, I believe it does not function as any sort of warrant for mass murder in present day Japan. It is certain that the attitudes expressed by the four figures I discussed are strongly antisemitic, but they also remain solely within the context of Japanese society. They are so remote from the Jewish reality and the lives of individual Jews that they do not pose a risk to Jewish existence, at least not in the immediate future. Moreover, I argue, the present manifestation of the *Protocols* in Japan is merely a reflection of Japanese xenophobic

⁶⁰ On the reference to the Jews, see "Manual of Fear: The Jewish Ambition—Total World Conquest," *Vajrayāna Sacca*, no. 6 (25 Jan. 1995), 3. For further details on the article, see Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 261-62; Ely Karmon, "The Anti-Semitism of Japan's Aum Shinrikyo: A dangerous revival," *Anti-Semitism Worldwide: 1998/1999* (Tel Aviv: Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, 1999). Karmon's article can be found also at <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw98-9/karmon.html>

⁶¹ Although it is a better indicator for Asahara's motivation than for his knowledge, it is important to note that he failed in all his attempts to gain university admission. It is possible that antisemitic images of Jews were brought to Asahara from the more educated members around him. One of them may have been Murai Hideo, a scientific researcher at Kobe Steel before becoming one of the leaders of the sect. On April 23, 1995, Murai was stabbed by a Korean member of the Yakuza, who was hired, some suspect, by the sect to get rid of the member who knew too much. Dying, Murai attempted to whisper the identity of the assassin. Some bystanders heard him saying "Yuda" (Judas Iscariot), whereas others were certain it was "Yudaya" (the Jews). See "Hanin wa 'Yuda' to Murai shi" (The criminal is "Judas" and Mr. Murai), *Asabi Shimbun*, 13 May 1995.

⁶² Asahara was attuned to manipulate public attention. In 1985 he appeared in *Twilight Zone*, a magazine dealing with New Age issues, claiming to be able to levitate. Asahara provided a photo of himself performing such levitation with great pain on his face. During 1991 and 1992 he appeared in several television talk shows and was able to present a favorable impression. See Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan*, 72-73, 174.

⁶³ Goodman, "The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*," 14.

nationalism in general, and its bizarre antisemitic attitudes in particular, and should be treated as such.

I agree with Goodman's emphasis on the context of the Japanese attitudes to Jews, as well as on the place of antisemitic attitudes as a lingering mirror for the broader Japanese discourse on nationalism, identity, and its place in the world since the outset of Japanese modernization. "Jews," in this sense, have played a much more profound role in the Japanese discourse than the Japanese have had in any Jewish discourse. In this context, therefore, the saga of the *Protocols* in Japan should be perceived not only as a microcosm of the general attitudes Japanese have held toward Jews since the 1920s, but also of the attitudes the Japanese hold toward the West and consequently towards themselves.

There have been various views on the actual significance of Japanese antisemitic writings and their impact on Japanese society. They range from alarmist fears to calm sarcasm over this phenomenon. Some experts argue that Japanese antisemitic writings lead to generalized anti-Jewish hatred and by and large also to anti-Israeli views. Others, by contrast, suggest that they are a marginal phenomenon that may even reinforce positive images of a successful group, thereby providing Jews and the state of Israel with some credit they do not necessarily deserve.

My own reading of the impact of this phenomenon is that exposure to antisemitic literature does not lead to a substantial shift in perceptions of the Jews, but it tends to slightly underscore its positive and negative facets. In some cases and for some individuals it may lead to suspicion and distrust, while for others, as Prof. Shillony pointed out, it may lead to greater respect and admiration.⁶⁴ The majority of Japanese, however, are ignorant of the *Protocols* and unaware of the long legacy of antisemitism in the world and in Japan. A survey, I conducted among university students in 1995-1996, soon after the Aum gas attack and the eruption of a case of Holocaust denial (the "Marco Polo Affair"), confirmed many of these aspects. The Japanese perceive the Jews, I found back then, as a small group, often smaller than it is in reality, of detached and asocial people. Even young Japanese occasionally possess a deep-seated image of the Jews as a group which conspires to harm others. This notion is encouraged by the popular attraction to writings about the occult and an old belief in the threat to Japan posed by foreign powers.⁶⁵

This negative implication notwithstanding, antisemitism has not led to any cases of physical violence against Jews for being Jews. Even for Asahara, who planned attacks on American figures and institutions, and did resort to violence against fellow Japanese, the Jews remained in the realm of his imagination.⁶⁶ Throughout the final stage of Aum violence, Jews were marginal and purely symbolic, and were used to spice up the ideology of the sect. For this reason Aum neither targeted Jews in Japan or elsewhere, nor harbored any intention to do so. Its ultimate choice was not even an American target, but ordinary Japanese citizens. In this sense, the *Protocols* in Japan combines a long-term demonization of Jews (of more than

⁶⁴ Ben-Ami Shillony, "Comments on the Essay of David G. Goodman 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Aum and Antisemitism in Japan?'" *Antisemitism International* (2006). In press.

⁶⁵ Rotem Kowner, *On Ignorance, Respect, and Suspicion: Current Japanese Attitudes Towards Jews*, ACTA no. 11 (Jerusalem: SICSA, 1997).

⁶⁶ On such plans, see Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo*, 107.

80 years) with an occult image of a sinister group that clandestinely gathers and plans to rule the world. Hence, it is really not important, as Ohta admitted, if the book is genuine. The belief in the power of the Jews is stronger than any rational refutation and serves some goals its authors could dream about.

Since the surge of antisemitic writings in Japan in the late 1980s, Jewish organizations have made several attempts to halt their publication and distribution. Their most fruitful activities took place during the *Marco Polo* Affair, which arguably led to the closure of the journal, and to the publication of scores of articles about Jews and the Holocaust, mostly positive and some even self-reflective.⁶⁷ Goodman rightfully criticized the Japanese failure to engage foreigners in an open debate instead of conducting “an intense, solipsistic monologue” about Jews and antisemitism, and contended that such a reaction “was typical of the way many Japanese have dealt with the outside world for centuries.” Nonetheless, the reactions to the *Marco Polo Affair* certainly marked a breakthrough in the Japanese intellectual treatment of Jews in the last twenty years. Critically, the Jewish reaction and the Japanese response to it provide some insights to plausible dealings with Holocaust denial in the future and to the broader phenomenon of “intellectual” antisemitism in countries such as Japan, with limited acquaintance with Jews.⁶⁸

All in all, the year of 1995 was a turning point in Japan’s postwar attitude toward Jews. Following the *Marco Polo* Affair and the Aum Shinrikyo attack that year, Japanese antisemitic writings received much public attention and mostly criticism. Ever since, there has been a sharp decline in attention to Jews, and notably to Jewish conspiracy theories.⁶⁹ By contrast, the last several years were marked by a relatively high rate of translations of serious works on Jewish history, persecution, and antisemitism. This tendency demonstrates some shift in Japanese interest if not some momentary maturity of some of the readership previously adhering to more sensational materials.⁷⁰ This shift notwithstanding, Jews in the Japanese

⁶⁷ See Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 271-76; Rotem Kowner, “Tokyo Recognizes Auschwitz: The Rise and Fall of Holocaust Denial in Japan, 1989-1999,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3 (2001): 257-72; Herbert Worm, “Holocaust-Leugner in Japan: Der Fall ‘Marco Polo’—Printmedien und Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” in *Japan 1994/95: Politics und Wirtschaft*, ed. by Manfred Pohl, (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1995): 114-61.

⁶⁸ For some suggestions for practical measures, see Kowner, *Tokyo Recognizes Auschwitz*, 269-70.

⁶⁹ Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 270. See also an interview conducted in May 2002 with Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, in which he partly confirmed this observation. “The good news,” he asserted, “is that for the most part we’ve been able to focus more on the proactive good stuff. The bad news is that among certain elements in Japan, the stereotypes still is that Jews control Washington and if you want something from the U.S. you have to go through the Jews. The ratio of insane books about Jews and Judaism to legitimate books about Jews and Judaism has gone way down.” In Gamble and Watanabe, *A Public Betrayed*, 186.

⁷⁰ These books include, among others, translations to Japanese of Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (published in Japan in 1997); Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933-1945* (1999); David G. Goodman and Miyazawa Masanori, *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (1999); Paul Johnson, *History of the Jews* (1999); Hertha Nathorff, *Das Tagebuch der Hertha Nathorff: Berlin-New York, Aufzeichnungen 1933 bis 1945* (1999); Bernt Schille, *Varför ryssarna tog Raoul Wallenberg* (2001); Joseph Bendersky, *The “Jewish Threat”: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (2003); Shalom Rosenberg, *Good and Evil in Jewish Thought* (2004); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Jewish Faith* (2005), and two volumes of the *Mishna* (2003-2005). New books on Jews include also some original titles, such as Osawa Takeo, *Yudayajin to roma teikoku* (Jews and the Roman Empire) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001); Yamamoto Yūsaku, *Yudayabito no kon’in* [Jewish marriage] (Tokyo: Kindai Bungeisha, 2001); as well as a number of lexicons such as *Yudaya daijiten* (The unabridged encyclopedia of Jews) (Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Oraisha,

mind remain symbolic. The Japanese attitude to them still corresponds to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "allo-Semitism": a non-committal and radically ambivalent attitude toward the Other.⁷¹

Obviously, this development should not be a cause for alarm but rather for celebration. It qualifies Goodman's warning and softens its immediacy within a chronological perspective. The reasons for the change are to be found, in my opinion, primarily in Japan's internal affairs and its global or regional position, in the readers' saturation with this material, and to a much lesser extent, in either the Jewish response or the local backlash to earlier writings.⁷² During the recent decade, frictions with the United States over trade issues have diminished, and Japan has found itself increasingly threatened by tangible powers with no Jewish ties, such as North Korea, and more recently, China. Japanese society has also been facing internal problems typical of affluent societies, such as an aging population, low birthrate, and latent unemployment. In this new environment, where the quest for meaning replaces the urge for economic competition, symbolic Jews are not needed anymore and the interest in them has subsided. When all is said and done, however, the seeds for another wave of antisemitism in Japan have not been eradicated, and in the appropriate circumstances, the *Protocols* might reemerge and once again be exploited against Jews.

1997) and a revised edition of it by Takigawa Yoshito, *Yudaya daijiten* (Tokyo: Arechi Shuppansha, 2006); Yoshimi Shuichi, *Yudayakyō shōjiten* (The little dictionary of Judaism) (Tokyo: Riton, 1997); and Takigawa Yoshito, *Yudaya kaidoku no ki-wado* (Key words for deciphering Jews) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1998). Some remnants of the old genre are still published, but they usually treat Jews in general and Jewish business shrewdness in particular, in an admiring manner, such as the following titles: Honda Ken, *Yudayajin daijūgō no oshie: shiawasena kanemochi ni naru jushichi no hiketsu* (The teaching of great Jewish millionaires: 17 secrets for becoming happy affluent people) (Tokyo: Daiwa Shobo, 2003); and Ugaya Masahiro, *Yudayajin kanemoke no chie: Yudayajin no yoni kangaero* (The wisdoms of moneymaking Jews: Let's think like Jews) (Tokyo: Daiyamondosha, 2004).

⁷¹ Allo-Semitism, Bauman expounds, "does not unambiguously determine either hatred or love of the Jews, but contains the seeds of both, and assures that whichever of the two appears is intense and extreme. The original non-commitment (that is, the face that allo-Semitism is, and perhaps must be, already in place for anti- or philo-Semitism to be conceivable) makes allo-Semitism a radically ambivalent attitude. There is therefore a sort of resonance (in semiotic terms, isomorphism) between the intellectual and emotional ambivalence of allo-Semitism and the endemic ambivalence of the Other, the Stranger—and consequently the Jew, as (at least inside the European *oikoumene*) a most radical embodiment, the epitome, of the latter." In Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 207-208. I thank John Clammer for pointing out its relevance to Japan; see Clammer, *Japan and Its Others*, 214.

⁷² While the ups and downs in the publications of antisemitic writings in Japan are unrelated to Jews or Israel, the most efficient way to deal with it on a local level is perhaps to launch fully orchestrated operations that combine the use of Japanese and foreign media, criticism of well-known foreign personalities, political intervention, and even economic sanctions. See Kowner, *Tokyo Recognizes Auschwitz*, 270.

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