

Yanaihara Tadao and the question of nationalism and colonialism in the Japanese Empire (1926-45)

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Yanaihara Tadao occupied the Chair of Colonial Policy at Tokyo Imperial University from 1924 until 1937. Born in 1893, a Christian and pacifist, he developed a liberal critique of Japanese colonialism and imperialism in Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, China and the South Sea Islands based on personal observations during his study tours. He also drew analogies between Japanese colonialism in Taiwan and Korea and British colonialism in India and Ireland.

Yanaihara consistently revealed the gap between the "idea" of colonial development and the "reality". In the increasingly authoritarian and repressive atmosphere of 1930s Japan he voiced concern about Japanese expansionist adventures on the Asian continent. In 1937, after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, he called for the Japanese people to lay down their arms, on the grounds that the war against China was unjust and threatened the very existence of the Japanese nation.¹ This action precipitated his forced resignation in December 1937. He was reinstated in the university in 1946, becoming its president in 1951. He died ten years later.

This paper is concerned with his writings on the question of nationalism within the Japanese Empire and it explores some of the strategies Yanaihara adopted in order to communicate his opinions within ever-tightening constraints as Japan moved towards a military-bureaucratic regime.

In 1923, on return to Japan via the US from a year's study tour of Britain and Germany, Yanaihara began work on a series of theoretical essays on imperialism and colonialism which were published in two volumes in 1926 and 1928. Some of these essays contained outspoken attacks on the government-general of Korea. Yanaihara carried out his first study tours of Korea and Manchuria in 1924, and in a short essay entitled "The Direction

of Korean Rule" he condemned the central administration in Korea for exercising almost unparalleled "arbitrary and despotic" rule.² What, he asked, was the Japanese government's excuse for not granting Korea a parliament? It surely could not be that the Koreans had no desire for the right to engage in politics. "Go to Korea and look!" he wrote:

Every pebble by the roadside cries out for freedom. Because no matter how loudly a pebble may cry out, it will not be noticed by the police. In short, there is no positive reason for not granting the people of Korea political rights, other than that the government simply does not want to.³

Yanaihara also launched a bitter attack on the policy of assimilation (*dōkashugi*) which had been implemented in Korea partly in response to the 1919 March 1 Movement. He warned that destructive intervention in the indigenous society's legal system, language, customs and religion would only succeed in provoking rebellion and consequently necessitate the use of military force to suppress an understandably belligerent population. Thus, he claimed, assimilation policy and military suppression were two sides of the same coin. He pointed out that Korea was an ancient society historically separate from Japan and that assimilation forced by government policy was unworkable and fallacious.⁴

In an essay written after the achievement of Irish independence, "The History of the Irish Question", Yanaihara drew an analogy between Ireland and Korea. "In the eyes of the world," he wrote, "Korea is... our Ireland." Historically, he explained, the relationship between Korea and Japan echoed the relationship between Britain and Ireland, geographically, culturally, politically and economically.⁵ He implied that assimilation had been part of British policy in Ireland and yet even after hundreds of years that policy had patently failed. Did these similar histories, he speculated, mean that the direction of Japanese colonial policies in Korea would lead to the same result - the birth of nationalism and the violent separation of the colony from the metropolis? The Irish question, he argued, was of interest to the Japanese because of their involvement not only in Korea but also in Manchuria and Taiwan.⁶

In April 1927 Yanaihara visited Taiwan, entering by what he called the "back door", under the auspices of a friend working for the Taiwan government-general.⁷ He gave a series of lectures round the island at the request of Ts'ai Pei-huo and Chang Wei-shui, who were the moderate leaders of the Taiwanese Cultural Association at the time. However, Yanaihara arrived in Taiwan in the middle of an ideological battle between hard-line Left-wingers and moderates which eventually split the Taiwanese national movement. In several places he met with considerable opposition from Left-wingers and at one meeting pamphlets were distributed, saying that those who did not attack capitalist exploitation favoured compromise. Yanaihara was heckled and the meeting ended in commotion.⁸ Yanaihara was not sympathetic to hard-line Left-wing nationalists. He believed that the

most important factor for the development of an independent nation-state was national consciousness rather than class consciousness.⁹

This would seem to have been the opinion of the colonial authorities in Taiwan, as they showed far more concern about speakers who supported the nationalist cause than those who supported the Marxist cause. Thus while the lectures of Fuse Tatsuji, who was closely associated with the Japanese labour movement, went unobserved, Yanaihara's lectures were carefully monitored by the police.¹⁰ Yanaihara supported the Taiwanese quest for autonomy, although he was naturally cautious about advocating immediate self-determination. In his book *Taiwan under Imperialism* published in 1928, Yanaihara was severely critical of the Japanese-owned sugar industry. He called for a colonial assembly where the Taiwanese people would have a voice in their own government, thereby empowering them to protect their interests against monopoly capital. The granting of assemblies for Korea and Taiwan, he maintained, was a "requirement of justice", as a first step to their autonomous development.

The Manchurian Incident in September 1931, however, marked a watershed in the treatment of dissidents and Yanaihara was obliged to alter the tone of his criticism quite radically as the attitude of the authorities hardened.¹¹ The colonies of Taiwan and Korea, which constituted the major part of the formal empire, provided important food crops for Japan, but it was China which supplied the vital raw materials for industry and it was in the treaty ports and concessions in China that the large Japanese corporations had really taken off. Thus the Japanese were worried about their lack of political control in China and perceived a *Manshū mondai* and a *Shina mondai* - a Manchuria question and a China question.¹² In the 1920s, moreover, there was the added threat to Japan's perceived "special interests" in China posed by the development of Chinese nationalism and the possibility that China's resistance to foreign interference and intervention would be enhanced by its increasing unity.

There were few in Japan who were prepared to speak out against the militarists in China. Even the self-professed adherents of internationalism and pacifism in the Japanese Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR)¹³, who were perhaps most likely to oppose the militarists, supported Japanese expansion in Manchuria by the end of 1931.¹⁴ Yanaihara, who joined the IPR at the request of his former teacher, Nitobe Inazō, was the exception. In his autobiography published in 1958, Yanaihara stated that at the time of the Manchurian Incident he had strong doubts about the official story. After the puppet Manchukuo state was created he and several colleagues at the Imperial University received telegrams in early 1932 from the Kwantung Army, requesting their presence in Manchuria to act as advisers on economic matters. Yanaihara and a Marxist colleague, Ouchi Hyōe, rejected the invitation.

Yanaihara did go to Manchuria six months later, but at the request of the university. Yanaihara's articles about Manchuria and China written between 1931 and 1937 reflected his awareness of the need for restraint if he wanted them published. In an article on the Manchurian economy in the July 1932 edition of *Chūō Kōrōn*, for example, he said that colonialism was only domination by force whereby the acquisition of economic benefits and monopolies was secured politically through the power of the state.¹⁵ Without his article and the edition of *Chūō Kōrōn* being banned, this was probably as close as he could get to saying that Japan invaded China. In 1934 he published a book entitled *The Manchurian Question* which again cautiously and indirectly refuted much of the government's defence of expansion on the continent. He saw the incident, fundamentally, as a collision between Chinese nationalism and Japanese imperialism, but he maintained that:

The nationalist movement in Manchuria is the historically inevitable product of the economic and social development of China and Manchuria... If we add unjustified obstruction to its development we shall only succeed in perverting its course and making its form illegal... Japan may for a while succeed in obstructing nationalism, but in time nationalism will continue to develop and eventually Japan will be forced to acknowledge the historical relations which formed its basis and will have to forge new policies to accommodate it.¹⁶

In 1935 there was a further hardening of the authorities' attitude to dissent when the legal scholar Minobe Tatsukichi was hounded by militarists and eventually prosecuted for espousing the theory that the Emperor was an organ of the state and therefore a constitutional monarch. The Minobe affair had a profound effect on subsequent expression in the mass media and the case signalled the end of legal critical commentary in public.¹⁷

Meanwhile Yanaihara was becoming increasingly alarmed by new policies being implemented in the colonies in the mid-1930s. After the Manchurian Incident Japan attempted to integrate the economies of the colonies with that of the mother country. Culturally, this meant that any inclination towards moderation or liberalism in cultural assimilation policy disappeared under a wave of regimentation and militarism. Any pretence at gradualism was lost as simple assimilation (*dōkashugi*) gave way to the "imperialization" of subject peoples (*kōminka*).

After the Minobe affair, however, room for manoeuvre in making critical commentary was fast shrinking as the country moved closer to military-bureaucratic rule. Yanaihara responded to this state of affairs by the use of analogy. In 1936 he published a series of essays under the title *India under Imperialism* and the aforementioned essay on Ireland, "The History of the Irish Question". Many of the essays contained in this volume had appeared as articles in various magazines in the late 1920s but the timing of their release as a book was significant. In the preface to *India under Imperialism* he commented that this was the sister publication of *Taiwan*

under Imperialism and he recommended that they be read in conjunction with one another. In *India under Imperialism* Yanaihara attacked the economic relationship between Britain and India and demonstrated that in all its manifestations that relationship was conducted entirely for the benefit of Britain and at India's expense. He charted the rise of Indian nationalism in response to British policies and pointed out that although Britain had dominated India for hundreds of years, albeit with considerable skill and perseverance, eventually British dominion would be unable to resist the tide of nationalism. Unless Britain were prepared to make concessions to the Indian people and grant some form of autonomy, that domination would end¹⁸:

It is not a question of results but a question of principle. It is not a question of benefits but of justice. It is not a question of good government but a question of autonomy.¹⁹

Here he echoed his earlier argument for Taiwanese and Korean autonomy as a "requirement of justice".

From 1936 Yanaihara became increasingly concerned with the *Shina mondai* and in lectures and articles he sought to dispel myths and negative racial stereotypes with regard to China. Writing in 1936 and 1937, he firmly believed that Chiang Kai-shek's national government in Nanjing was capable of unifying China and protecting its interests against foreign aggressors, but he also realized that China's future was very much in the balance. Of course, Yanaihara was mistaken in his views, but then so were other foreign observers of the China question in the 1930s. He was correct, however, when in an essay entitled "Locating the China Question" he claimed that it would be impossible to destroy the recently formed national consciousness of the Chinese people. This nation-state consciousness, he said, was most vigorously stimulated by the need to protect state independence against foreign invasion.²⁰

This, he claimed, was where the China question was located, in recognizing the fact that China was in the process of achieving nation-state unity:

Only policies which meet this perception are scientifically correct... Only those policies which are based on this perception and which approve and aid the unification of the Chinese nation-state will aid China, aid Japan and aid peace and harmony in the Orient. When arbitrary policies which go against scientific perceptions are enforced, a calamity extending across generations to come will torment China, will plague the Japanese people and put a blight on peace and harmony in the Orient. We must base our country's policies towards China on scientific perceptions and put them back on the right road.²¹

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937 Yanaihara was faced with preserving his integrity not only as an academic but also as a Christian. He owed his Christian inheritance to Uchimura Kanzō, founder of the No Church Society (*Mukyōkai*), a Christian group which, rejecting the inter-

demoninational infighting of foreign missionary churches in Japan, established what could be termed an authentic Japanese Christianity.²² Yanaihara was a leading figure in the *Mukyōkai* and he published an article in the September edition of *Chūō Kōron* entitled "The ideals of the state" which was based on "ideals" expressed in the Book of Isaiah.²³ In his article he adroitly developed an anti-war critique while at the same time recognizing the need for restraint. Yanaihara implied that Japan had committed an act of invasion against China's sovereign rights on the pretext that such an act was necessary for its own survival. Such an act was contrary to the ideals of the state, signifying the abandoning of the objective mind which not only regulated the existence of the state but was its very foundation and hence threatening its destruction. It was, he said, a state gone mad. Then on 1 October 1937, in a lecture entitled "God's Country", he finally requested "please bury our country for a while so that its ideals may live".²⁴

Right-wingers in Tokyo Imperial University had already begun a campaign to oust Yanaihara from his post and the publication of "God's Country" gave them the opportunity they were looking for. Yanaihara's magazine *Tsūshin* was banned and he was forced to submit his resignation to the president of the university on 1 December 1937. Unlike some other academics, Yanaihara escaped arrest in the purges which followed, but in March 1938 he was prosecuted under the publication laws together with his publisher, Iwanami Shigeo of the well-known firm of publishers Iwanami Shoten. The editors of *Chūō Kōron* who published his articles were also prosecuted. His works *Nation and State* and *Nation and Peace* were banned and publication of *Taiwan under Imperialism* and *The Manchurian Question* suppressed.²⁵

After his dismissal Yanaihara gave lectures at his house to groups of young people²⁶ and toured Japan and Korea giving public lectures and holding Bible classes. He also concentrated on running his monthly evangelical publication *Kashin* (Auspicious News), successor to the proscribed *Tsūshin*. In *Kashin*, using Biblical concepts and terminology, he continued to voice opposition to the war and despite attempts by the authorities to suppress it Yanaihara, with the help of friends, doggedly continued publication. *Kashin* was finally closed "voluntarily" in 1944, but Yanaihara simply changed its name to *Kashin Kaihō* and continued publishing it as a pamphlet until the end of the war.²⁷

Yanaihara has been criticized by some Japanese and Korean academics for not advocating immediate self-determination. He advocated instead a policy of autonomy within a colonial framework. Yanaihara's vision for the future was inspired by the British concept of a commonwealth of self-governing nations which ideally were independent yet linked to the metropolis in an equal relationship based on ties of mutual benefit and friendship. To argue that Yanaihara should have gone farther down the road

towards advocating immediate self-determination is perhaps to look at the world of the 1930s through post-colonial coloured spectacles. In 1940, for example, even George Orwell, a vociferous critic of British imperialism, said in his essay "The Lion and the Unicorn" that it was a mistake to imagine that India would cut itself free from Britain at the first opportunity, arguing rather naively as it turned out that:

When a British government offers them unconditional independence they will refuse it. For as soon as they have the power to secede the chief reasons for doing so will have disappeared.²⁸

Yanaihara, like Orwell, may have been naive. He was certainly something of an idealist, but his views on the questions of colonialism and nationalism were by far the most liberal in Japan at the time. They might be summed up in the following quotation from the preface to *Taiwan under Imperialism* :

Should I be asked to express my feelings about the colonial question, I would say that with all my heart I look forward to the liberation of those who are down-trodden, the raising up of those who would sink, and the peaceful union of those who are independent.²⁹

Notes

- 1 Yanaihara, Tadao, "Kami no kuni" (God's country) in *Yanaihara Tadao Zenshū* (Collected Works of Tadao Yanaihara), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1963, Vol. 18, p. 652.
- 2 Yanaihara, "Chōsen tōji no hōshin" (The direction of Korean rule) from *Shokumin Seisaku no Shinkisho* (The New Foundations of Colonial Policy) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 725-744.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 740.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 741.
- 5 Yanaihara, "Airurando mondai no engaku" (History of the Irish Question), appendix to "Teikokushugi-ka no Indo" (India under Imperialism) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 654.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 655.
- 7 Originally published in 1958. Yanaihara, "Watakushi no ayundekita michi" (The road I have walked) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 26, p. 36.
- 8 Koh Se-kai, *Nihon Tōji-ka no Taiwan*, (Taiwan under Japanese Rule), Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1972, p. 284.
- 9 See Yanaihara, "Minzoku to Kokka" (Nation and State) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 18, p. 296.
- 10 Koh Se-kai, p. 285.
- 11 Wilson, Sandra, *Pro-Western Intellectuals and the Manchurian Crisis of 1931-33*, Nissan Occasional Paper Series No. 3, Oxford: Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, 1987, p. 7.

12 The Chinese and Japanese word for China, pronounced in Japanese as *chūgoku*, is represented by two characters meaning "middle kingdom" which evokes China's perception of itself at the centre of world civilization. In 1930s Japanese, however, these characters were replaced by two characters representing the sounds *shi-na* in a corruption of the English "China". The character for *shi* also means "branch" - perhaps a deliberate usage which implied that China was a "branch" or extension of Japan. The use of *Shina* was discontinued after 1945 because of its derogatory connotations.

13 The Institute of Pacific Relations was organized in 1925 following a conference in Honolulu in an effort to promote peace at a time when it was felt that the Pacific nations had entered a critical period in their relations with one another. The Japanese Council of the IPR was organized in 1926. Inazō Nitobe, Yanaihara's mentor, became a director in 1929 and he and his followers became the most active members. See Wilson, pp. 9-12.

14 Wilson, p. 12.

15 Yanaihara, "Manshū keizai-ron" (Essay on the Manchurian economy) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 621.

16 Yanaihara, "Manshū mondai" (The Manchurian question) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 538.

17 Kasza [sic], p. 134-136.

18 Yanaihara, "Teikokushugi-ka no Indo" (India under Imperialism) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 558.

19 *ibid.*, p. 557

20 This article was first printed in the February 1937 edition of *Chūō Kōron*. Yanaihara, Tadao, "Shina mondai no sōzai" (Locating the China question) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 339.

21 *ibid.*, p. 340.

22 For the most authoritative account of the *Mukyōkai* in English see Caldarola, Carlo, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (Monographs and Theoretical Studies in Sociology and Anthropology in Honour of Lels Anderson), Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979.

23 Yanaihara, "Kokka no risō" (The ideals of the state) in *op. cit.*, Vol. 18.

24 Yanaihara, "Kami no kuni", p. 652.

25 The details of his prosecution are printed in *Masu Media Tōsei*, Vol. 2, document 12, pp. 118-123 in *Gendai Shi Shiryō*, Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1973, Vol. 41.

26 Yanaihara, "Watakushi no ayundekita michi", p. 54.

27 *ibid.*, p. 58.

28 Orwell, George, "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius" in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, London: Penguin, 1984, p. 144.

29 Yanaihara, *Teikokushugi-ka no Taiwan* (Taiwan under Imperialism), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988, preface.