

**The Japanese people's adoption of Western culture
and perceptions concerning Korea and China:
An analysis of self-image as depicted in popular entertainment
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This article studies the perceptions of Korea and China among the people in Japan during the latter part of the 19th century. The antecedent research has explained that the people had become to transfer their own sense of inferiority to their East Asian neighbors, whose Westernization had been stagnant, and disdained them because the people's opposition to Westernization had been crushed by means of the suppression of the revolt.

This interpretation ignores the contradictory situation of a nation of people unable to internally resolve their own opposition to Western culture, while looking down on other nations based on those same Western standards. In order to show the way such a contradiction was dealt with in the Japanese mass consciousness, this article takes up the popular entertainment, especially *kodan* (講談), the Japanese traditional storytelling, to extract the Japanese people's understanding of Western culture and their hopes represented by the images of Korea and China on a deeper level than what was expressed in rebellion. In presenting the evidence, the author attempts to clarify the features of narrative of the popular entertainment in order to interpret its depiction of Korea and China in terms of popular understanding by focusing on the mentality of popular entertainment, as well as the changes of national entertainment policy, trends and social contexts.

In concrete terms, the author identifies two conflicting types of narration in popular entertainment at the time: the satirical style that originated on the urban scene during the late Edo period and the oratorical style, which first appeared during the 1880s, against a backdrop of increasing migration from the countryside into the cities. In the performances taking up such events of the early 1880s as the Imo Incident (July 1882) in Seoul, Korea and the

Sino-French War (1884-85), we find satirical narrative showed its twisted sympathies with “obstinateness” of the forces of resistance in both countries and ridiculing the shallow Westernized behavior of the Japanese people. On the other hand, when dealing with the 1st Sino-Japanese War, the oratorical style pours invective and abuse upon the Chinese, while the satirical performances objectified them and counteract with words of sympathy for the Koreans and Chinese. In the presence of such conflicting narrative styles, the Japanese people became aware of Korea and China not only as scapegoats for its own oppression, but also as a means of escaping from the constant anxiety of being confined within the limits of the Western code of civilized behavior. However, the difficulty in confronting the fallacy of its civilized self-image became expressed in the Japanese people’s hesitation to empathize with its Korean and Chinese counterparts. Such a way of adopting Western civilization, which skillfully grants dispensation from self-denial, can be called, in the opinion of the author, one of the “privileges” accorded the masses living under imperial rule.