

# Popular Culture and the Transformation of Japan–Korea Relations

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## 3 The “Shiba view of history” and Japan–Korea relations

Reading, watching and travelling  
*Clouds Above the Hill*

*Philip Seaton*

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In August 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo issued a statement marking the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War that contained the following interpretation of events during the Meiji period (1868–1912):

More than one hundred years ago, vast colonies possessed mainly by the Western powers stretched out across the world. With their overwhelming supremacy in technology, waves of colonial rule surged towards Asia in the 19th century. There is no doubt that the resultant sense of crisis drove Japan forward to achieve modernisation. Japan built a constitutional government earlier than any other nation in Asia. The country preserved its independence throughout. The Japan–Russia War gave encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa.

(Abe 2015)

Abe’s interpretation of the “encouragement” given to “many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa” by Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) sidelined the war’s role in paving the way for Korea to be placed under Japanese rule as a protectorate (from 1905) and then colony (1910–1945). Furthermore, it constituted a substantially different position from the statement by Kan Naoto in 2010 marking the centenary of the annexation of the Korean peninsula, which stated “the Korean people of that time was deprived of their country and culture, and their ethnic pride was deeply scarred by the colonial rule which was imposed against their will under the political and military circumstances” (Kan 2010).

Negative reaction to Abe’s statement in Korea was widespread. Gil Yu-Hyung of the progressive Korean newspaper *The Hankyoreh* compared Abe’s statement with the historical views of Japanese novelist Shiba Ryōtarō as expressed in perhaps Shiba’s best-known work *Clouds Above the Hill*. The novel, which was serialised in the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper between 1968 and 1972, depicts Japan during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War through the eyes of its three main characters: the Akiyama brothers (Yoshifuru, who served in the cavalry, and Saneyuki, who served in the navy) and poet Masaoka Shiki.

The major theme of the novel is that Japan had to fight – and ultimately defeat – Russia to keep Korea from falling into its clutches. Under this view of history, the wars that Japan waged against China and Russia during the Meiji Period to bring Korea under its dominion are transformed into pleasant memories from a golden era. In contrast, the wars during the Showa Period that began with the Manchurian Incident in 1931 are decried as mistakes that undid everything achieved during the Meiji Period, including the annexation of Korea.

This understanding of history was thoroughly reflected in the statement released by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Aug. 14.

(Gil 2015)

By linking a work of popular culture to official narratives, Gil identified an example of how popular culture may impact deeply upon Korea–Japan relations. As other chapters in this book indicate, popular culture can perform a variety of roles: establish dominant narratives that shape public opinion (Ria Shibata); create fantasies of the “other” that facilitate newfound interest and exchanges (Chris Perkins); stir controversies that whip up anger or xenophobia (Stephen Epstein); and even make reconciliation a central theme (Rumi Sakamoto). However, post-war or postcolonial reconciliation between nations is built upon stable, mutually acceptable official government positions regarding past histories of violence. If, therefore, Shiba Ryōtarō’s writings are “the historical tale behind Abe’s statement” (Gil 2015), the “Shiba view of history” (*Shiba shikan*) assumes a pivotal role within contemporary Korean–Japanese relations as a barrier to reconciliation.

This chapter discusses the origins, nature and implications of the “Shiba view of history” (*Shiba shikan*) with reference to discussion of Korea in the novel considered to present the clearest example of the view: *Clouds Above the Hill* (*Saka no ue no kumo*). Reading the novel in tandem with the NHK Taiga Drama adaptation (broadcast 2009–2011) and associated tourist sites illustrates the interplay between popular culture and official narratives, and their potential impact on Korea–Japan relations.

### **Shiba Ryōtarō and his “view of history”**

Shiba Ryōtarō (1923–1996) was one of Japan’s most popular and prolific novelists. He served in a tank unit during the Asia-Pacific War and later became a journalist for the *Sankei Newspaper*. He is best known for his historical novels, serialised first in newspapers, and then released as books. His protagonists were mainly famous figures from the Warring States (1467–1603), Edo (1603–1867), Bakumatsu (1853–1867), and Meiji (1868–1912) periods. Shiba travelled extensively and wrote non-fiction essays, too. His over 500 books won numerous prizes, are still widely read, and have sold hundreds of millions of copies. Often revered as a “national author” (*kokumin sakka*), Shiba’s legacy is preserved in the Shiba Ryotaro Memorial Museum<sup>1</sup> on the site of his house in Osaka.

In his novels, Shiba attempts to adhere to the historical record. Donald Keene wrote about his writing process:

[Shiba] first amassed a large collection of source materials that he carefully read over until he was thoroughly familiar with the facts behind the story he was about to relate; but once he actually began writing, he did not hesitate when necessary to intuit what the characters in his stories had thought or said on a particular occasion.

(Keene 2003: 95)

Isoda Michifumi also notes Shiba's historical accuracy, particularly in *Clouds Above the Hill*. Isoda distinguishes three literary genres in descending order of proximity to academic history – historical biography (*shiden bungaku*), historical novels (*rekishi shōsetsu*), and period novels (*jidai shōsetsu*). While many of Shiba's works set in earlier periods are historical novels in this schema, Isoda categorises *Clouds Above the Hill* as historical biography given its adherence to documentary evidence (Isoda 2017: 18). As we will see, however, Shiba also has critics on points of accuracy, as well as interpretation.

The Shiba view of history is particularly associated with *Clouds Above the Hill* and gives a positive evaluation of the Meiji period (Gil 2015; see also Hirano *et al.* 2008: 258). The implications for Korea–Japan relations are stark. The Meiji period was when Japan began in earnest its empire-building, wrestled control of the Korean peninsula from China, and warded off Russian ambitions to do the same. Shiba's evaluation of Meiji as Japan's brightest moment before taking a wrong turn cannot sit well with Korean views of the period. As Guy Podoler and Michael Robinson conclude:

During the Russo-Japanese War Japan succeeded in furthering its hold over Korea. The victory over the last contender for influence in Korea cleared the way to the annexation of 1910. For Koreans this period signifies the dark dawn of colonial rule [...].

(Podoler and Robinson 2007: 196)

To understand the origins of Shiba's view of the Meiji period, one must look at his broader writings on Japan and Japaneseness. As Naoko Shimazu notes, “Fundamentally, his undying interest was the question of Japanese identity”, and Shiba's writings had great influence on debates over *nihonjinron*, theories of Japaneseness (Shimazu 2009: 278). Exegesis of Shiba's work often reflects this impact. For example, in a two-part NHK Special documentary titled “Shiba Ryōtarō shisaku kikō” (Shiba Ryōtarō's journey of meditation) broadcast in February 2016 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Shiba's death, presenter Kagawa Teruyuki, who played Masaoka Shiki in *Clouds Above the Hill*, selected four main themes from Shiba's writings, particularly *Kono kuni no katachi* (*The Shape of This Nation*). Part I focused on Japan's status as an island nation and identified the curiosity of Japanese people and their *mushisō no shisō*

(literally “thinking of non-thinking”, i.e. an aversion to ideology) as explaining the absorption of new ideas and technology in the Meiji period that facilitated rapid modernisation. Part II focused on characteristics stemming from Japan’s samurai heritage: a desire not to do things that cause shame, and public spirit. Shiba thought these tendencies that had sustained the “Meiji miracle” started to break down during the Hibiya riots of 1905 when protesters grew violent over the lack of war reparations following victory over Russia. In his view, the mistaken direction of the Shōwa period until Japan’s defeat in 1945 stemmed from the military’s subsequent usurpation of “supreme command” (*tōsuiken*), and their unchecked actions and provocation of incidents that Japan’s leaders had to respond to post facto. NHK cited Shiba’s comment, “There has not been a more stupid period [*bakana jidai*] in Japan’s long history”.

A key feature of the Shiba view, therefore, is the turning point of 1905. As Isoda notes, Shiba saw the early Shōwa years as a rogue period (*kitai no jidai*) when “Japan was not itself” (*betsu no kuni datta*) (Isoda 2016: 74–75). Alexander Bukh (2008: 104) argues that by making this contrast Shiba “saves the national history from criticism by shifting the responsibility for these years from ‘Japan’ as a nation to the *military*, considered to be *outside* of the normal ‘Japan’”. As such, while Shiba’s writings eulogise Japanese history and culture, they defy simple characterisation as nationalism. First, although the Shiba view could be categorised as affirmative nationalism in justifying colonial expansion before 1905, he does not justify Japan’s war aims and war conduct after 1905.<sup>2</sup> Second, the Shiba view is also ambiguous or even contradictory regarding Korean colonial rule. For Shiba, “Japan was not itself” from 1910–1945, and he does not actively present a “revisionist” defence of Japan’s colonial rule in Korea.<sup>3</sup> But at the same time, as we shall see below, in *Clouds Above the Hill* he clearly asserts Japan’s need, even right, to colonise the peninsula. Shiba also appears to lament the recklessness that resulted in the loss of Japan’s Meiji period imperial gains, and not colonial rule itself. In short, the appropriateness of terming the Shiba view “nationalist” differs markedly for the pre- and post-1905 periods.

As already noted, the influence of Shiba’s writings is enormous. Shimazu (2009: 273) credits Shiba with establishing “the orthodoxy for the post-1945 reconstruction of the 1904–05 war in popular cultural memory”, and the *Hankyoreh* article by Gil Yu-Hyung cited above implies that it underpins the contemporary official narrative (as given in the 2015 Abe statement), too. However, it might be argued that Shiba did not so much create the “bright Meiji, reckless Showa” interpretation of history, but craft its most eloquent and powerful popular culture rendition. As Nakatsuka Akira notes, serialisation of *Clouds Above the Hill* in the *Sankei Shimbun* began in 1968, the centenary of the Meiji Restoration. At that time, Japan was in the midst of its post-war economic miracle, which evoked parallels with the Meiji miracle. This bright Meiji narrative infused the speeches of then Prime Minister Satō Eisaku and the views of the conservative elites that planned and carried out the centenary celebrations (Nakatsuka 2009: 14–17). Abe’s 2015 statement, therefore, may not reflect the Shiba view so much as the conservative establishment view passed down by

political and business leaders, including Abe's great uncle Satō Eisaku. From this perspective, Shiba's contribution in *Clouds Above the Hill* was to novelise and popularise the patriotic values of Japan's political establishment regarding the Meiji period.

### Consuming Shiba and his view of history

Like many of Shiba's novels, *Clouds Above the Hill* was adapted for television. During his lifetime Shiba refused to allow the text to be dramatised because he feared its viewpoint would be mistaken for militarism (Nakatsuka 2009: 21). But, with the permission of his estate, Japan's public broadcaster NHK eventually made and broadcast the drama in three parts: five episodes in November/December 2009, four in December 2010, and four in December 2011. Furthermore, from 1999 a process of *machizukuri* (community building) based around *Clouds Above the Hill* began in Matsuyama city, the home of the Akiyama brothers and Masaoka Shiki, involving the touristification of sites related to the novel (Hirano *et al.* 2008: 259).

The roles and impacts of Shiba's novel, the NHK drama adaptation, and related tourist sites are linked. The Shiba view of history finds its purest expression in the novel, where long sections of narration, heavily abridged in the drama, provide context. The drama also cuts dozens of figures who play a small part on the grand stage of history and concentrates on the relationships between the three protagonists. While NHK's adaptation of Shiba feels quite different from the novel in emphasising character study over grand historical tableau, the drama assumed significance in creating shared national culture. Each episode captured between 10 and 20 per cent of the viewing audience when first broadcast in 2009–2011, thus reaching several million citizens. The shared experience was enhanced by the media discussion, publication of related books and magazines, and tourism campaigns that routinely accompany the broadcast of major Japanese historical dramas.

The importance of the *Clouds Above the Hill* tourist sites is in connecting the novelisations and dramatisations of history, which lie in the realms of commercial activity and entertainment, with the realms of professional history, heritage, and official narratives. Monuments, museums, memorials, and other heritage sites are overseen by a range of professional custodians of the past, including historians, curators, researchers, tour guides, and local government officials. A major novel/drama like *Clouds Above the Hill* forces professional custodians of the past to address semi-fictionalised renditions. Although these professional custodians might view novels and dramas as a hindrance to "accurate history", they might equally view them as an opportunity to raise interest and thereby disseminate serious historical research to a wider audience. However, whenever works of popular culture feature in, shape the message of, or even make economically viable a publicly funded heritage site, the messages of popular culture have entered the official narrative. Popular texts often first infuse official narratives in this way, as tourism resources managed by or with the involvement of local

government that generate contents tourism, namely, people visiting sites related to the narratives, characters and locations of such works (Seaton *et al.* 2017).

Reading, watching and travelling the “Shiba view of history”, therefore, reveals how literary texts, screen adaptations, and tourist sites create a mutually reinforcing network built around Shiba’s writing that is further energised by discussion in documentaries, academic discourse, news and social media. When sufficient cultural power is generated, local government becomes involved in managing heritage. Such local practices are then only a short step away from reaching national policy.

### ***Clouds Above the Hill and its critics***

*Clouds Above the Hill* was originally published in 1,296 instalments, many of which depict a self-contained event or conversation in the manner of a film scene; others resemble short history lectures. This latter type contains examples of the Shiba view.

The following section from early in Volume I sets the narrative tone:

Small. There was perhaps no other country as small as Japan at the start of the new Meiji period. [...] This small nation, a rural backwater by world standards, had its first bloody struggle with a European civilisation in the Russo-Japanese War.

It managed somehow to win that struggle. The fruits of that victory were to be devoured and wasted by a later generation of Japanese, but the Japanese of that time used their utmost wisdom and courage, and took firm hold of their resultant good fortune.

(Shiba 2013a: 40)

Japan is presented as vulnerable, wise and courageous. Its adversary, meanwhile, is presented as large and aggressive: “Russia’s ambition to invade the Far East became obvious around the middle of the Tokugawa period” (Shiba 2013a: 358). Shiba is critical of Russian conduct. “To see how bald-faced they were”, he writes, “let us look at what happened between Russia and Japan [...]”. He then recounts the Tsushima Incident of 1861:

On 12 April, a landing force went ashore near the guard station at Ōfunakoshi, shooting and killing the guard, a petty officer named Yasugorō, and taking captive his two fellow countrymen stationed there. After confiscating all the provisions and ammunition on hand, the Russians pushed on into the village and stole seven cows as well as gold and treasure before returning to the ship. Such bandit aggression was the Russian way.

(Shiba 2013a: 359)

This incident is notable for the parallels with the *Unyō* incident of 1875, when soldiers from a Japanese ship landed in a restricted area, were fired upon by the



Korean shore battery, and then that was used as a pretext to kill over 30 Korean soldiers and loot the garrison (Kim 1999: 38). This incident was one of the pretexts for forcing the Kanghwa Treaty on Korea in 1876. The *Unyō* incident is not mentioned in *Clouds Above the Hill*. The combination of emotive criticism of Russian “bandit aggression” and omission of comparable actions by Japan is emblematic of Shiba’s selective narration of history.

In many ways, the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War were two stages of the same conflict. In the first war Japan wrestled control of Korea from China, and in the second Japan ended Russian ambitions there. Shiba says the following about Korea’s geopolitical predicament:

Now we must touch on the cause of the [Sino-Japanese] war, which lay in Korea. This is not to say that Korea or the Koreans were in any way at fault. The only “fault” lay in a quirk of geography. For a peninsular nation to maintain its independence is never easy [...]

(Shiba 2013a: 205)

Korea’s fate in this reading depends upon geography rather than the aggressive ambitions of surrounding powers. This theme is developed further in Volume II:

From the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, the world’s countries and regions had only two paths open to them: to be colonised by another nation, or, if that was unacceptable, to create industries, gain the necessary military strength, and join the ranks of the imperialist powers. Now in a later age, we fantasise that the nations of that time should have adopted a policy of “neither invade nor be invaded” and should have focused only on the peace of mankind. We attempt to impose this fictive standard followed by these fantasy countries on the actual nations and international society of an earlier age, and then we use this fictive standard to judge the rights or wrongs of a nation’s policy. This kind of thinking turns history into nothing more than clay to be used for making clay figurines in whatever shape one likes.

The world was at a different stage then. Having once chosen the path of autonomy through the Restoration, Japan had to preserve that autonomy, even if it was to the detriment of another country (Korea). At that historical stage, Japan had to fixate on Korea. If it had not done so, then not only Korea but Japan itself might have been swallowed up by imperial Russia. Such was the nature of national autonomy during this period.

(Shiba 2013b: 92)

This section’s vigorous defence of Japanese actions regarding Korea is where Shiba sounds most like a nationalist apologist for Japan’s empire.

These lengthy passages convey Shiba’s view of history in *Clouds Above the Hill*. To summarise, the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War are portrayed as righteous, victorious wars in which Japan adhered to the behavioural



norms of the time. Through victory, Japan secured vital interests and enjoyed its finest military moments in the modern era.

But Shiba has many critics. Some, like Kanno Naoki writing in *The National Institute for Defense Studies News*, have censured Shiba from the perspective of military history and a more nationalistic position. Kanno objects to Shiba’s assessment of the reasons for the outbreak of war and his negative depiction of General Nogi Maresuke. Most tellingly, he attacks Shiba’s criticisms of 1930s nationalism as “too simplistic” (Kanno 2009: 34). Nevertheless, Kanno states: “Though one has repeatedly criticised Shiba thus far, one wouldn’t like to assert that the novel should be brushed aside as a means of conveying history to future generations” (Kanno 2009: 35). Kanno’s argument that novels bring to life history via realistic depictions of conversations and acts seems weak given his criticism of Shiba’s historical accuracy. More likely, Kanno found Shiba’s interpretation of the Meiji period more palatable than many other interpretations.

Such interpretations include those of Shiba’s more progressive critics. Around the time that the drama was released, several books targeted not only Shiba but also NHK and often note omissions of incidents that portray Japan in a negative light. Nakatsuka *et al.* (2010: 172), for example, note that the Port Arthur Massacre of November 1894, in which Chinese sources claim 10,000 people died, is ignored in the novels and that NHK only addressed it in a guidebook accompanying the series.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, much of their criticism targets NHK. Even though the drama focuses less on military history and omits much of Shiba’s more strident narration, Nakatsuka *et al.* criticise Japan’s public broadcaster for historical inaccuracy, for making the drama at a sensitive time in Korea–Japan relations (centenary of the annexation), and for going against Shiba’s own wishes in producing the drama (*ibid.*: 180–181).

The Ehime Society Supporting Textbook Trials and the Society to Consider the Problem of the Clouds Above the Hill Museum also sent an open letter of protest to NHK. Both organisations raised similar criticisms but are significant as groups opposed to the touristification of local *Clouds Above the Hill* sites. They noted how NHK’s drama in effect supported the views of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, a nationalist group that has produced a controversial textbook available for use in Japanese middle schools since 2002 (Takai 2010: 189). NHK responded that Shiba’s work did not glorify war and that they wanted to convey the energy of the period on a grand scale (*ibid.*: 202).

However, the Shiba view of history certainly had an impact upon Fujioka Nobukatsu, the ideological father of the “liberalist view of history” (*jiyūshugi shikan*) and a key member of the Society. In *What is the Liberalist View of History?*, Fujioka states that reading *Clouds Above the Hill* showed him a middle way between what he called the “Asian liberation theory” (i.e. nationalism) and the “Tokyo trials views” (i.e. progressivism) of the Asia-Pacific War. He presents his “liberalist view of history” as effectively identical to Shiba’s views and summarises them as a combination of “healthy” (*kenzenna*) nationalism, realism, a rejection of ideology, and anti-bureaucratism (Fujioka 1997: 138–41).

This admission by Fujioka indicates that the textbook controversies of the late 1990s and 2000s were heavily inspired by Shiba, although he had died just before the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was launched. The approval of their textbook in 2001 had major diplomatic repercussions in East Asia for the next decade, particularly in Korea and China. While this textbook did not present the official narrative of national government (and was subject to many revisions before approval), as a government-approved textbook influenced by Shiba's views, it nonetheless poisoned Korea–Japan relations in 2001.

Despite his professed rejection of the Asian liberation theory, within a few years of his tribute to Shiba's influence on his thinking, Fujioka had slipped to the nationalistic extremes of Japanese war debates and was engaging in Nanjing Massacre denial. Ultimately, the views of Fujioka and Shiba on the Asia-Pacific War differed substantially. However, the question remains whether Shiba's views of the 1930s and 1940s were determined by regret for the damage the war caused Japan or genuine belief that the war and imperialism were wrong.

### ***Clouds Above the Hill as heritage***

Shiba Ryōtarō occupies an important position in Japan's tourism history. He wrote about his extensive travels and conducted fieldwork at heritage sites while researching his novels. In doing so, he crafted uplifting narratives that sustain or even made possible tourist sites today. The impact of his writings makes it appropriate to consider him a father of heritage tourism in contemporary Japan.

Tourism in Matsuyama in Ehime prefecture on Shikoku exemplifies Shiba's influence. *Clouds Above the Hill* established Matsuyama as an important site related to the Russo-Japanese War. Under Mayor Nakamura Tokihiro, who was both a fan of the novel and supporter of the liberalist view of history, the city was divided into zones and designated a field museum.<sup>5</sup> Seven billion yen (supplemented by 2.8 billion yen from national government) was allocated to building the Clouds Above the Hill Museum and improving infrastructure in the nearby Matsuyama Castle Ropeway area and the Dōgo hot spring area.<sup>6</sup> The museum, designed by world-famous architect Ando Tadao (who also drew up the plans for the Shiba Memorial Museum in Osaka), opened in 2007. A few years earlier, the Akiyama Brothers' Birthplace Museum was reconstructed and opened in 2005 (Ehime shimbunsha 2009: 14–17). Fortuitously for Matsuyama (and likely with its active lobbying), NHK decided in 2003 to dramatise *Clouds Above the Hill*. The key sites relating to the novel were ready to welcome visitors inspired by the broadcast of the first part of the drama in 2009.

Tourism statistics indicate that the *machizukuri* programme has had a significant impact on the city. The Clouds Above the Hill Museum attracted around 125,000 visitors a year during its first decade, with over 200,000 visiting annually in the years of the drama's broadcast.<sup>7</sup> These enhancements contributed to a rise in the base level of tourism in Matsuyama by about 600,000 visitors per year from the plateau of around five million in the early 2000s to a new plateau nearer six million in the 2010s. This clear success story for the city vindicates its

decision to utilise Shiba’s novel as a tourism resource. The city was also awarded the third Minister for Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Planning Prize in 2007.

Given that *Clouds Above the Hill* is now central to municipal branding, that the novel depicts Matsuyama as a vibrant centre of Meiji period modernisation, and that hotels, restaurants and retailers today benefit from the Shiba effect, little incentive exists locally to challenge Shiba and his view of history. Discrediting the Shiba view would not only discredit a view of history but undermine a tourism resource that sustains a local brand, business, and employment. A touristification process like the one seen in Matsuyama, therefore, creates diverse stakeholders with a vested interest in promoting a particular narrative. What matters more than the narrative’s accuracy is its usability: cultural producers easily adapt the Shiba view as uplifting and inspiring entertainment; community leaders derive a positive identity from association with such narratives; and tourism operators treat them as a resource from which to make profits. Where all these benefits exist, politicians may gain public support by promoting the heritage. Local politicians in Matsuyama may focus more on local business, but national(istic) politicians like Abe Shinzo can find in the Shiba view an uplifting alternative to progressive intellectual narratives of aggressive Japanese expansionism in the Meiji and early Showa periods.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the Shiba view of history, its articulation in *Clouds Above the Hill*, the interconnected impacts of the novel, drama and tourist sites, and the relationship between a successful work of popular culture and official narratives together suggest the following conclusions.

First, the Shiba view of history (*Shiba shikan*) draws much attention in academic and literary circles within Japan. It has also been credited with influencing or even underpinning the official government narrative. It might be more appropriate to say that the view grew out of existing conservative narratives, such as those expressed during the centenary of the Meiji Restoration. But, the narrative of a bright Meiji period (to 1905), followed by the mistakes of the early Showa period (to 1945), followed by the post-war miracle – in other words, two positive periods sandwiching an aberration – is now firmly associated with Shiba. The view justifies Japanese imperialism in light of the era’s norms but remains critical of war year mistakes. In 2015, something close to this position became the official government stance, overturning two decades of more progressive statements made by prime ministers from Hosokawa Morihiro to Kan Naoto.

Second, although the Shiba view does not offer the most nationalistic interpretation of Japan’s modern history, and indeed it has been criticised in nationalist circles, it nevertheless presents a view largely incompatible with Korea–Japan reconciliation. The wars that paved the way for Japan’s annexation of the Korean peninsula are depicted as part of a golden, energetic age. For Koreans, the Meiji period began with Japan opening Korea via gunboat diplomacy, included two

major wars fought in or close to Korean territory, and ended with Korea's annexation. However bright this period was for Japan, virtually no Korean, North or South, would consider it so for Korea. Overall, as long as the Shiba view and more generally conservative Japanese views of this era remain powerful, the work of this man dubbed a "national author" (*kokumin sakka*) will impede reconciliation between Japan and the two Koreas.

Third, the Shiba view exemplifies how popular culture may influence official narratives, and ultimately diplomatic relations. By tracing how the narratives within *Clouds Above the Hill* went from little-known local history, to highly successful work of popular culture, heritage sustained by local government, and historical interpretation affecting national debate (including government-approved textbooks), the discussion in this chapter has indicated how powerful works of popular culture intertwine with politics.

Fourth, when a popular text achieves sufficient power to influence official narratives, it signals that the work is also embedded in popular consciousness. Political positions might change quickly via an about-face in policy, but a cultural artefact can remain embedded much longer. The Japanese official narrative shifted towards a more "cosmopolitan" (Saito 2017) position regarding Japan's colonial rule of Korea from the Murayama statement of 1995 to the Kan statement of 2010. However, that shift has not outlasted the Shiba view of history. When *Clouds Above the Hill* first appeared in 1968, the Shiba view was close to the official narrative, and the 2015 Abe statement returns that official position more closely to the Shiba view than at any point since the 1980s.

Peter Duus (2017: 11) has written:

Historical memory is long, especially if it is aggrieved memory. While studying Meiji expansion on the Korean peninsula, I was surprised to learn that even in the 1890s, Korean peasants were singing songs about the defeat of the Hideyoshi invasion three centuries before.

Korean memories remain long and aggrieved about the colonial period, too, which is why the Shiba view and conservative justifications of Japanese empire remain such a barrier to reconciliation today.

But historical memory may also run deep, especially if it underpins a positive vision of the past that affirms collective identity and sustains economic activity in the present. Herein lie the roots of Shiba's enduring popularity in Japan and his vision of the bright Meiji period, whose primary achievement was not colonising Korea, but modernisation that allowed Japan to avoid being colonised by the West. These were the clouds – namely Western civilisation as an object of both fear and admiration – that Japanese people saw above the large hill of Meiji period modernisation that they had to climb (Hirano *et al.* 2008: 258). With the Shiba view, therefore, as with all cultural practices, understanding the meanings and resonances for others of the same work of popular culture is a prerequisite for that work to aid, or at least not hinder, a reconciliation process.

## Notes

- 1 The museum is run by the Shiba Foundation. Their website ([www.shibazaidan.or.jp](http://www.shibazaidan.or.jp)) contains a complete list of his works.
- 2 “Affirmative nationalism” here is used to refer to arguments such as Japan was fighting for the “liberation of Asia”, or denial of atrocities (particularly Nanjing Massacre denial).
- 3 Regarding colonialism, revisionists typically make the following arguments: Korean nationalism prevents a fair assessment of the achievements of colonial rule, particularly modernisation and advances in education and infrastructure; Korean leaders prior to Japanese colonial rule were corrupt and unpopular; and Japanese colonialism was more benign than Western colonialism. For an example in English, see Akita and Palmer (2015).
- 4 See Shiba (2013a: 238–240) for the section about the fall of Port Arthur with no discussion of any massacres.
- 5 The Field Museum concept is outlined on the city homepage (Matsuyama City n.d.).
- 6 Interview with Ishikawa Jun at Matsuyama City Hall, Clouds Above the Hill Machizukuri Division, 18 May 2017.
- 7 As this chapter went to press, tourism levels in Japan were collapsing because of the coronavirus pandemic. This discussion relates to the period up to 2019.

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