On This Issue’s Feature: “Japanese Image Of America”

Ever since Columbus, Europeans have been formulating images of the “strange New World,” but Japanese people have also been engaged in the pursuit of the essential American. The history of Japan-U.S. relationships, viewed from our side, has been a process of constant remolding of the image of America held by Japanese people.

In recent years scholars of various fields of study have come to recognize the importance of the study of the image of a nation held by another nation. Students of international relations, for example, now find it imperative to study the images of foreign nations held by both decision-makers and ordinary citizens. John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith, editors of Image and Reality in World Politics, remind us of the “role of distorted images and misperceptions in compounding the objective conflicts of interest that are ever present between nations.” It is ironical that we should be aware of the gap between image and reality in this age of mass communication when we are supposed to have every means to build an appropriate image of any foreign country. But the development of mass media apparently works both ways so that we can obtain a vast amount of information about a country which may contribute only to the formation of a distorted image of that country.

Clearly we need a more systematic approach to the process of image-formation. On Japan’s image of America both historical and analytical studies are necessary before we can discuss meaningfully any possible impact of images upon the relationships between the two countries.

The study of Japan’s image of America is a legitimate field for Japanese students of American studies. A number of studies have already been done in this field, but we here publish there articles on Japan’s image of America in the hope that they will stimulate further research and thinking on this important and fascinating, if a little elusive, subject.

There is a paradox that strikes us as soon as we reflect on the process of image-formation: the more we see others, the more we see ourselves. Our image of others is, in a way, our self-image. Alexis de Toqueville’s Democracy in America gives us an image of Jacksonian America, but it also reveals much about the French thinker himself. Hopefully the study of Japan’s image of America will give fresh insights into the Japanese character. (Nagayo Homma)