

Can we see the US of the Year 2230 in the Japan of 1992?

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Creating a Foundation for the Future of Japan-USA Relations"
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I want to begin my remarks today in a way very uncharacteristic of me: I want to look backward before I look forward; something I usually criticize when others do it, and so I can expect justified criticism from many of you. But, it can't be helped.

According to a report by Hayashi Yujiro, contained in Vol. IV of the Proceedings of the International Future Research Conference (pp. 41-47) held in Kyoto in April 1970, the Japan Society for Future Research was born on July 6, 1968. Its first meeting was, auspiciously enough, on December 7, 1968 and its second meeting was on March 26, 1969, at which time the Society was addressed for the first time by a non-Japanese, none other than Johan Galtung, who is also with us today.

Dr. Hayashi said that it was the intention of the Japan Society to create a "new field of academic pursuit" which shall

"1. inherit the academic achievements and heritage of the established disciplines,

"2. promote free and creative thinking and spirits unfettered by conventional concepts,

"3. ensure cooperation among different disciplines and fields of learning for this purpose, and

"4. actively engage in a wide range of international contacts and exchanges." (p. 42)

We have had the opportunity over the last few days to see how, or whether, the Society has fulfilled those intentions over the last twenty-five years.

There is no doubt that, by hosting the Kyoto Conference, the Society played a major role in creating the World Futures Studies Federation, for which I am eternally grateful. Johan Galtung might well be also since he was the first President of the WFSF.

Elsewhere in the same report I quoted above, Dr. Hayashi said:

"In transition from an old to a new society, Japan has not marked any clear-cut stages of change, but has undergone stages of overlap in which old and new elements co-exist and intermingle with each other. In a word, Japanese is a multiplex society." "The pace of change in the Japanese society, therefore, may be found to be either slow or fast, depending on what is illuminated. Having these traits the Japanese society does not well fit Rostow's categorization of developmental states, nor can it be easily measured by the standards of western scholars. And this should be born in mind when we think of the future too." (p. 44)

In the same Volume IV, Dr. Hayashi also summarized a special session of the 1970 Kyoto conference devoted to reports by a nine member interdisciplinary group sponsored by the Japan Techno-economic Society. I remember very distinctly their reports on Japan and the world as a Multi-channel Society. "The general theme of our research," Dr. Hayashi said, "deals with the question of values in the future society. In particular along with technological innovation, we felt that society will have a variety of global values in co-existence...." "In such a future society, social functions should be more flexible." (p. 113)

I will return to these ideas in just a minute, but I need to look even further back than 1967 and the founding of the Japan Society for Future Research to an experience that I had when I was in Japan which completely changed my life. Well, virtually everything I experienced in my six years in Japan in the 1960s can be said to have changed my life, but one thing was exceptionally powerful.

From 1950 until 1963, John Randolph was the chief correspondent of the Associated Press in Japan. One day, in 1963 he called me and asked me to review a manuscript he had written, titled, "The Senior Partner." It was published in the Japan Quarterly of January-March 1964.

In it, Randolph displayed the history of Japanese civilization along side the history of West civilization, in accordance with the theory of civilizational periods described by Oswald Spengler in his monumental book, The Decline of the West.

Randolph concluded that Japanese civilization fell into exactly the same historical periods that Spengler used to analyze Western and many other civilizations; that those periods were in the same chronological sequence for both Japan and the West; and that the intervals for each period were virtually the same for both civilizations. However, and it was this which blew me away, Japan was for each and every period, including that of the present, about 235 years ahead the West. Thus Randolph concluded that "Japan is inwardly today (ie. in 1963) where the West will be in the year 2200" (p. 95). Or, we can say that Japan is inwardly today, in 1992, where the West will be in about the year 2230.

I know that Hayashi said that Rostowian and other Western historical categories do not fit Japan satisfactorily. But I don't believe he knew about Randolph's idea--and I doubt that anyone else knows about it either. I have never seen it referred to anywhere in talking about Japan-US relations.

Which is why I thought I'd bring it up this afternoon.

I propose we stop thinking of Japan as somehow "catching up" with the US, and instead imagine that the US is eventually going to catch up with where Japan is now, but that Japan will continue to be well ahead of the US. I think this view makes at least as much sense as does the opposite conventional wisdom, and I actually think it makes more sense. So let's give it a try.

If we say that Japan is about 200 years ahead of the US, what does that specifically mean? Well, it might at least mean that Japan is already a fully

postmodern country with essentially all of the characteristics of postmodernity. It seems to me a good case can be made for that.

But first, what do I mean by "postmodern." While there are many definitions, let me take the perspective expressed by Walter Truett Anderson in the opening pages of his book, Reality Isn't What It Used to Be:

"In recent decades we have passed, like Alice slipping through the looking glass, into a new world. This postmodern world looks and feels in many ways like the modern world that preceded it: we still have the belief systems that gave form to the modern world, and indeed we also have remnants of many of the belief systems of premodern societies. If there is anything we have plenty of, it is belief systems. But we also have something else: a growing suspicion that all belief systems--all ideas about human reality--are social constructions.

"The modern era brought us into a world with multiple and conflicting belief systems. Now the postmodern era is revealing a world in which different groups have different beliefs about belief itself. A postmodern culture based on a different sense of social reality is coming into being--and it is a painful birth."In small towns all across America, modern and postmodern culture do battle. (p. 3f)

Indeed they do--in America, but not in Japan because most Japanese have for some time understood that ethical and other belief systems are relativistic, human-made, and situational whereas most thoroughly modern Americans still cling to absolutistic and putatively God-given ethical and moral beliefs.

The Japanese also demonstrated an early awareness that for a nation to be great, economic productivity and marketability is more important than military weaponry, and this is about to be replaced by the early awareness that ecological sustainability is more important than economic productivity; which I believe itself will be replaced by the earliest widespread recognition on the globe that the creation of an artificial world that appears to be natural is more important than trying to preserve a nature that has long ago been rendered unnatural by millenia, and especially recent decades, of human activity.

And there are many other Japanese practices and beliefs which are derived largely from their having lived for centuries in heavily populated urban areas. These include especially the belief that good human relations is more important than individual human ambition. Modern Americans, who still profess to be Christians, tend to glory in and exemplify that which they should, as Christians, most fear and least embody, namely, sin, hubris, pride in themselves as free-standing, self-supporting, over-achieving and domineering individuals. It is the self-effacing non-Christian Japanese who, to the contrary, believe themselves always to be in the wrong, or at least never wholly to be in the right. As the so-called Constitution of Prince Shotoku said in 604:"Cease from wrath and angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary people. How can anyone lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all, one with another, wise and foolish, like a ring that has no end. Therefore, let us on the contrary dread our own faults,

and though we alone may be in the right, let us follow the multitude and act like them."

I can not imagine a more unAmerican sentiment than that!

But it certainly is postmodern.

As a consequence, I would suggest that much of the conflict between the US and Japan is because the US is a country struggling to cope with its transformation from modernity to postmodernity--struggling, that is, with life in a multi-channel society. Too many Americans still believe that their channel is the only channel.

As George Bush said at the Republican Convention, what is wrong about the Democratic Party's platform is that it left out those three little letters spelling G. O. D. Whereas it was clear that Bush, or at least those Republicans most vocally present, were certain that God is on their side, and is otherwise a good modern American.

Japan has no such hangups. Or, at the very least, I would say that Amaterasu and company is not Yaweh and sons.

Do you remember what I said the title of John Randolph's article was? It was "The Senior Partner." It was Randolph's contention that Japan is the Senior Partner and the US the Junior--the very Junior--Partner.

Randolph appears to have gotten it a bit wrong: while Japan may be the older, wiser Senior Partner, the US seems to be more of a spoiled brat, or at best a Prodigal Son.

In conclusion let me say that I offer my comments here not only in the spirit of postmodernity, but also in an attempt to fulfill the second of the intentions which Dr. Hayashi articulated for the Japan Society for Future Research in 1967, namely, as I quoted above, to "promote free and creative thinking and spirits unfettered by conventional concepts," or, I might add, unencumbered by facts.