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Is Today's Japan a Multicultural Nation? Some Observations around the New Year's Day

Kimitada Miwa, MUA President and Professor Emeritus of Sophia University

A well-established novelist born in Tokyo talks of his boyhood experiences around the New Year's Day in the 1930s, saying that his house was cleaned throughout, leaving all the sliding doors and windows kept open so that fresh but insufferably cold air would cleanse all the rooms and corners of the house. Then a fresh hair-cut and a visit to a sento public bath house used to be the routine to usher in the new year. One statement he included in his year-end essay was peculiarly interesting to me. It was that the Jews believed that the new day begins as the sun sets. It jarred with my boyhood memories about welcoming the New Year's Day in my birthplace city of Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture.

When the sun sets on the last day of December, the New Year has already begun to break. It was marked by a special buri yellowtail steak dinner in place of soba supper as was the tradition in many other regions of Japan. The point is that ours in Matsumoto was already the beginning of the New Year's Day celebration.

Whether it meant the closing of the year or the beginning, or regardless of regional differences, the cleaning of the houses and the streets in front of them was a shared tradition of the Japanese people, so I believed. External cleanliness was an outward manifestation of the minds and sentiments of the residents of the houses to meet the New Year's Day.

But things had undergone apparent changes. The allies which had been cleaned spick-and-span were quickly dirtied with pet dogs' droppings, cigarette-stubs and other miscellaneous goods like empty soft drink cans from vending machines. The typical New Year's decorative symbol of kadomatsu, essentially made up of evergreen pine trees and rice-straws and placed on both sides of the entrance to a house, were treated by a pet dog as a regular object for its need of marking. It does that under the benign and undisturbed look of its master.

Earlier, the 14th of December marks a historic day of the 47 loyal master-less samurai ronin's act of vengeance against Kira Kozukenosuke. There is a fenced-in spot which sits on an edge of the high-rise apartment complex owned and managed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Housing Supply Public Corporation. This is where actually 17 of the 47 ronin put themselves to death by hara-kiri following the Shogunate order. These and the rest of the 47 ronin who met the same fate are entombed in a special corner within the compound of the nearby Sengakuji Buddhist temple.

As the historic day was approaching, I was concerned about the unkemptness of the aforementioned fenced-in spot. Outside the fence there hangs a bronze slab prepared by the Tokyo Metropolitan School Board, explaining what this place was. The memorial day came and passed with no sign of tidying up. I was ashamed as a concerned observer to see many people streaming to the spot to learn about the history and apparently paying their due respect to those loyal samurai of the past.

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The Second Cross-cultural Awareness Workshop in 2008
**United States of America: its Universality and Particularity
in the Age of Globalization**

Date: Thursday, December 11, 2008

Place: Minato City Life-long Learning Center

This time our committee asked Dr. Kimitada Miwa, President of MUA and Professor Emeritus of Sophia University, to speak extensively about the United States of America, which has been the most influential country to Japan, and which just saw the outcome of its presidential election. Dr. Miwa has authored many books and papers on the U. S. The following is a summary of his presentation.

What is Globalization? An Arabic View

An Arabic journalist Traci Ali authored a book in 2003 entitled "Bush in Babylon." The New York Times for one gave an enthusiastic review.

The sharpest thrust of the book is that what has been known as "globalization" was in effect nothing but a form of neo-colonialism.

The post-World War II world order was to build peace and promote prosperity by further pushing the post-World War I order which had been built around the principles of national self-determination and free trade. But in reality Anglo-American need and greed for keeping their special interests in the petroleum in that part of the world led to the Gulf and the Iraqi wars in the name of globalization.

In the Old Testament of the Bible you find many values and local people's value orientation that are still pretty much the same and kicking in this region. Theirs is a pronouncedly masculine civilization.



Japanese-American Relations

In explaining why Japan had to help the United States war in Iraq, Prime Minister Koizumi did not say a word about Japan's dependence on the oil coming from there. The only rationalization he gave was the alliance that bound Japan with the United States. Professor Bruce Russett once clarified that in economic terms Japan was a part of the Middle East, while culturally, Japan belonged to Western Europe and North America, with two more countries joining the region from outside of this geographic demarcation, namely Israel and Argentina.

Postwar Japanese Academic Pursuit that Excluded Geopolitics

Geopolitics was a policy science for security and war for the major powers before World War II, especially for Hitler's Germany. Japan too developed its own to map out and justify Japan's notion of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

With the defeat of Japan came the end of that science to be openly studied and taught.

This was one consequence of the Press Code the General Headquarters for the Allied Occupation of Japan had issued soon after its establishment in Tokyo. Specifically, it proscribed the use of such words and ideas which had fanned militarism and aggressive wars as "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," "Greater East Asia War," "Eight Corners of the World under Japan's Imperial Benevolence" and "*Eirei* or spirits of brave and honorable war dead Japanese soldiers enshrined at Yasukuni."

As redirected in peace time, geopolitics as a policy science could have helped keep the Japanese being aware of problems of poverty and inequality between the developed and underdeveloped countries. But from this wholesale eradication of wartime ideas and spirits there emerged in the post war mentality of the Japanese a perception that as long as the Japanese did not initiate war, there would prevail peace all around them.

The making of the new Constitution

After winning war against Spain in 1898, the United States legislation created a democratic constitution for the "liberated" Cuba as an independent state. The model for the postwar Japan's constitution that renounced war was American-made 1936 constitution for the Philippines: No armed forces but the defense of the country was to be taken care of by the U.S. forces stationed in the Philippines. A special care was taken to impress the Japanese constitution drafting committee that its ideas were prominently incorporated rather than American ideals and practices were forced upon them.

Hirohito, the Emperor of Japan, should never be put on the war crimes trial

If ever he were tried, the Japanese public would not forgive the Americans. The Japanese people would erect a more magnificent shrine for him than that of the Meiji Emperor. And it would become the rallying spot for a war of revenge against the United States.

Mutual images of the Japanese and the Americans

John Manjiro admired American democracy and humanitarianism. Fukuzawa Yukichi's Japanese version of Thomas Jefferson's phrases in the American Declaration of Independence, "All men are created equal," set the stage for Japan's modernization.

American discovery of Japan

There were several occasions before Perry for Americans to admire beautiful Japan. One sailor when his ship was cruising off outer Boso peninsula observed that he wished he could one day live in the serene and picturesque fishing village he saw right before his own eyes.

An American naval officer, whose writing about naval strategy had a universal appeal worldwide, so much fell in love with the beautiful landscape of the valley in what is today's Kobe that he declared that if in his next visit he found the valley had been despoiled by human hands, he would never forgive the Japanese.

On one hand Americans of Perry's mission were impressed very favorably by the gentleman-like behaviors and dignified dresses of the samurai officials of the Shogunate, but on the other, they thought that common people they had encountered on land in Shimoda, both men and women, were wretchedly barbarous walking totally naked in the village roads to and from the public bathhouse.

Americans have a general pattern of passing a dichotomic judgment when faced with an alien civilization or cultures, calling them either "civilized" or "barbaric," according to

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MUA Visit to the Swedish Embassy in Tokyo

Date: Monday, October 24, 2008

A total of 33 MUA members visited the Embassy of Sweden in Roppongi on Monday, October 24th, a substitute national holiday for Labor Thanksgiving Day. In the entrance hall, large-sized photos of the Arctic caught our eyes. Ms. Hayami, an embassy staff, welcomed us as the day's hostess. After we were led into the auditorium, Ms. Akiyama, Chairperson of the Membership Committee, thanked Ms. Hayami for receiving us even on a holiday. After a brief self-introduction, Ms. Hayami started a presentation about Sweden using slides on the screen.



The capital of Sweden is Stockholm. Sweden is 1.2 times as large as Japan in territory. Because half of its land area is covered by forests, forestry has been a mainstay industry well known internationally. Swedes have a tradition of making furniture for themselves when necessary. They even build houses on their own. There are hundreds of thousands of small lakes throughout the country. Its population density is fairly thin with 9 million people.

Swedish people seem to be very much concerned about politics as shown by the average voting rate of 80% in elections. This is surprising to us Japanese. The child welfare is well established, as is the system to support elderly people on self-help. The child benefit system covers up to 19 years of age. Schools are all public and education fee is covered by government budget up to the university level. Income tax rate is 60% at the highest. Consumption tax is 6% for printed matters, 12% for food, and 25% for other items.

I realized that Sweden has been well balanced between people's duty and social welfare for a long time. I also found that in Sweden it is always the first child of the king who becomes his successor regardless of gender. This sounds to me like an advanced way of thinking. In sports, soccer has been most popular in the country. Sweden seems very competitive in ice hockey internationally, perhaps because of the relatively long winter season.

The Nobel Prize awarding ceremony is held on the 10th of December in Stockholm every year. In 2008 three Japanese scientists attended the ceremony as recipient of the prize. They received an exceptional treatment to be announced about them in Japanese during the ceremony.

Finally, on behalf of all MUA members who visited the embassy, I would like to express our deep appreciation to Ms. Hayami for her hospitality and elaborate answers to each of our questions.

(Written by F. Iguchi, a member of the Membership Committee, and translated by T. Mizuno, Vice Chairperson, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

Diplomats Lecture 2008

"The U. S. Presidential Election and the U. S.-Japan Relations"

Date: Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Place: International House of Japan

Our speaker this time was Mr. Ryoza Kato, who was the latest Ambassador to the U. S., and who is currently Commissioner of Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB). A total of 27 diplomats, including six ambassadors from different countries, attended the MUA's annual event. The timing was quite right because we had just seen the outcome of the U. S. presidential election, a topic of great concern for Japan, and were sharing the aftermath excitement over the big international event. All of us appreciated receiving Mr. Kato's insightful viewpoints on the subject, based on his years of ambassadorial tenure in the U. S. During the Q & A session, we could also see how well versed Mr. Kato is about professional baseball.



(Written by Y. Miyashita, Standing Director, the Science & Culture Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, Standing Director, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

Hearty Congratulations, Mr. Shimizu!

We would like to share with you a very happy news about Mr. Gunji Shimizu, Vice President of MUA, who has been an active member ever since its foundation. He recently received a merit award from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, for his distinguished contributions in regional cultural activities.

Mr. Shimizu has had a long-time leadership position with music-related organizations in his community, including the Minato Federation of Music Organizations (23 years), Minato City Chorus (8 years) and Minato Children's Songs Association (8 years). He has always been at the forefront of these organizations to promote amateur music in Minato City.



Mr. & Mrs. Shimizu attended the award presentation ceremony held at Josui Kaikan on November 28, 2008 (photo). Mr. Shimizu has received similar recognitions from Minato City and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in the past. Taking this opportunity, we would like to extend our whole-hearted congratulations to Mr. Shimizu and wish that he will further contribute his talent and leadership to promote amateur music and also enrich MUA activities.

(Written by T. Mizuno, Vice Chairperson, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, Standing Director, the same committee)

World Cooking Workshop: Swedish Christmas Cuisine

Date: November 29, 2008 (Sat)

Place: Minato City Gender-free Center

We had the pleasure of having Ms. Marianne Wilson Kuroda as our instructor and Ms. Yoko Iwai as her assistant in this workshop. Ms. Kuroda has been an advisor to foreigners in Japan while also organizing an m&y production company. The day's menu included Jansson's Temptation, Meatballs, Open Sandwich, Gloegg, Gingersnaps, and Coffee.



The Kingdom of Sweden, known as a country of forests and lakes, is famous for aurora in winter and the midnight sun in summer. Sweden has a population of some 9 million in the land area which is 1.2 times as large as Japan. It is also known as a country of advanced social welfare based on high taxation as well as a country of advanced gender-free society. The country has become familiar to ordinary Japanese due partly to the four Japanese Nobel Prize winners in 2008 and partly to the Swedish boutique recently opened on the Ginza.

The Swedish culinary tradition is characterized by a culture of preserved food, including farm products which are reaped between May and August and preserved for one year. According to Ms. Kuroda, if you go into a forest you can easily pick within a few hours a bucketful of berries in spring and mushrooms in fall. The cooking workshop started as we were hearing Christmas carols while also seeing a red Dalarna hoest (a small wooden horse originating from Dalarna, an old capital of Sweden) and feeling a smell of gloegg (warmed red wine with spices and dried fruits in it).

Details of the Day's Menu:

Jansson's Temptation: what a wonderful name! This is a classic mainstay on the Swedish Christmas dinner table – sliced potatoes, onions and anchovies layered with rich cream on top and baked in the oven.

Swedish meatballs: they are served with lingonberry sauce together with potato puree and minced dill.

Smoergasbord: this is the world-famous Swedish buffet, prepared with various food materials just like Japanese New Year's dishes.

Open sandwich: Swedes usually use hard rye bread baked slowly for long preservation, but we used German bread instead. Toppings for the sandwich were cheese & olive, boiled egg & shrimp, herring, and sour cream made from yogurt and dill.

Sweden is regarded as top-ranking internationally in terms of per-capita consumption of candles and coffee. The last part of the workshop was a talk by Ms. Kuroda about Sweden in general. We enjoyed her presentation while tasting gingersnaps and organic coffee by the candle light. I wished we had more time today.

(Written by H. Nishinoiri, Chairperson, the World Cooking Committee, and translated by T. Mizuno, Vice Chairperson, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

2009 New Year Party of MUA

Date: Sunday, January 18, 2009

Place: "Neboke" restaurant in Shibuya

This year the annual New Year event of MUA took place in Shibuya, attended by 30 people, including members and their families, who did not mind the cold winter weather.

It was held at a Japanese restaurant called "Neboke" where they offer authentic local "Tosa" food from Kochi Prefecture. The tatami room was spacious and we felt very comfortable. The lunch course was full of local tastes which went along perfect with Japanese sake. All of us were impressed with the palatable dishes and talked happily about topics of common interest, including Sakamoto Ryoma, a legendary Tosa-born samurai hero during the Meiji Restoration.



After President Miwa's opening address, we had a small ceremony. Mr. Tomogane received words of hearty thanks, with a bouquet of flowers, for his years of dedicated service to MUA as secretary general. We were very happy to see his sincere and emotional response. It was followed by a short self-introduction of every attendee, which was a great opportunity to know everyone's personality and life experiences. At the end of the gathering, we went into excitement playing bingo game. Mr. Shimizu, Vice President, was the first winner with his big "Bingo!" shout. Other winners followed him and it did not take long before all prizes were presented.

As an organizer, I had a great relief to see the gathering go successfully and receive words of thanks from everyone. I hope that as many or more people will join this event next year, and that MUA activities will be strengthened through the face-to-face dialog among its members on such opportunities.

(Written by J. Miyoshi, Vice Chairperson, the Membership Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, Standing Director, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)

(Continued from Page 3) United States of America: its Universality and Particularity
their own value orientation.

The basics of American civilization are masculine

Professor Harvey Mansfield, a Harvard University political scientist, wrote in his 2006 publication from Yale University Press, *Manliness*, citing concrete examples from American history as well as from Ancient Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian history of humanity down to the present, that "manliness consists of self-confidence, assertiveness, strong leadership, and daring behaviors of taking risks, and manifests tendencies which will be best described as imperialistic traits and tendencies."

I should conclude that the fundamental driving force behind the American globalization is this special character of American manliness, or those imperialistic tendencies, and that this is the reason why American actions in the Middle East are hatefully regarded by the locals as neocolonialism.

(Written by K. Okumura, Chairperson, the Cross-cultural Awareness Committee, and translated with some modifications by Dr. Miwa, the speaker)

(Continued from P.1) Is Today's Japan a Multicultural Nation?

You may take it for granted that the Sengakuji Temple would be keeping the approach to the spot nice and clean every day, with a bonze coming out with a bamboo bloom and what not. But the reality was far from it. Then why wouldn't the souvenir shops that line one side of the spacious passage way between the middle gate and the formal gate of the temple do the job? Again the reality was far from it.

Not only do they not bother to beautify the area but they even add messiness by what appears to be intended behavior. How could they do this? Everyday both domestic and foreign tourists come to the temple. After all this is one of the major historic tourist attractions of Tokyo and Japan. Two sign posts solemnly declare "Illegal Dumping is Strictly Prohibited" with signatures by the local police station and the local self-government of Minato City.

In Japan we were brought up in a culture of cleanliness. Interestingly enough, "kirei" in Japanese stands for both "clean" and "beautiful." Even if other places may be left untidy with thrown away goods, we always found solace in clean compounds of temples and shrines. Where had this laudable tradition of everyday life gone?

One day as I was passing through the Temple, I was very much surprised to see about ten lower grades children of some international school sitting on the ground, listening very attentively to the explanation being given by one of the accompanying instructors. In fact almost all of these small tots were sitting squarely on the bare concrete ground. That was the way children were paying respect to the loyal samurai story.

In olden days, it was customary for the members of a house facing a street to clean the area in front of the house. Since when has this custom been given up? It is now done by the paid workers of the condominiums or local administrations.

But the olden customs are not altogether forgotten yet, making a sharp contrast with the Sengakuji Temple and souvenir shops. There is a wide paved space which is actually a portion of the sidewalk across the street from the Seishoko Temple, only a few blocs away from the Sengakuji. It looks always serene and clean. The secret was found as I was one day passing there earlier than usual. An old woman, apparently keeping her long tradition, was sweeping the place with her bloom from corner to corner.

It was not on a New Year's Day but I felt like woken up to a bright new day as I saw beautiful morning sunshine smiling on her dignified posture like a bonze of a Zen temple. This is my concept of good life of Japan.

Minato UNESCO Association is a citizens' voluntary membership organization that promotes Japanese traditional culture, holds cross-cultural workshops and present multicultural events and international symposia for world peace. For any questions or comments about our articles, please contact our secretariat office at: Telephone: (03) 3434-2300, Fax: (03) 3434-2233 Email: minato-unesco@nifty.com URL: http://www.unesco.or.jp/minato/index.html
