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JAPANESE FUTURE ASPECTS

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Although the title “Japanese future aspects” might at first evoke associations with linguistics, this paper primarily intends to focus on assumptions and concepts stressing the dimension of *future* in the social and political context of today’s Japan.

This is not to say, however, that language itself is irrelevant. In fact, Japanese grammar even seems to offer one of the most important clues to understanding “future”. But before discussing that issue, I would like to touch upon the actual circumstances which have made “future” an eminent topic in recent years. In the second part, the Japanese view of the future will be discussed, as it is mirrored in recent publications.

The “common cultural agenda”

The fact that there are just some months left until the first digit of the annual calendar will change to a “2” can obviously be considered a mere arithmetic constellation, a simple coincidence of numbers, so to say. Besides, due to the rather doubtful date ascribed to the beginning of the Christian era, the coming turn of the millenium appears all the more statistical. According to historical research, Christ was born a few years later than the generally stipulated, albeit abstract *Anno Domini 0*. And the respective counting seems to have been fixed *a posteriori* only some centuries later.¹

In spite of this questionable evidence, the coming of the new millenium has been accompanied by manyfold expectations, fears and hopes, which are all supposed to culminate by the eve of December 31st, 1999.²

- 1 The Christian system of counting years was first acknowledged by the Synode of Whitby (664 A.D.) and at first only used within the Anglo-Saxon territories. During the Middle Ages it slowly spread through Continental Europe where it became the official standard only in the 14th century. (SCHWARTZ 1990:28)
- 2 The correct date for the turn would certainly be December 31st, 2000, midnight, since the year 0 has never existed. But, as is to be expected, the numerical change in the digits alone will easily outshine this proof.

Looking back at other *fins de siècle* in the past, however, the phenomenon of focusing on the future turns out to be anything else but new. Medieval European reports speak of ominous celestial signs and of an apocalyptic mood which are said to have prevailed in the Christian world already at the close of the first millenium.³ While regarding various ends of centuries and observing the respective states of minds of contemporaries, the fact strikes us that calendar arithmetics must often have had a considerable impact both on the psyche of the individuals and on the development of human society.⁴

The best known end of a century hitherto is of course the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, which provides several phenomena akin to the present situation. First of all, *future* was extensively discussed. The print media of the 1880s and 1890s, representing the forefront of public opinion during the early stage of industrialization, transmitted numerous impulses by means of concrete visions of the century to come. Most of these articles were of a positivistic nature, starting from optimistic technical scenarios, and formulating a general trend also in literary utopian writing. This trend, starting to emerge as a world-wide process, evaluated the technical and social evolution as such as auspicious signs.⁵

Japan which had, as a non-European country, for the first time joined the industrialized community just a few years before, is a remarkable example of a nation striving to take part in this new *common cultural agenda*. In the second half of the 19th century, Japan was passing through a crucial phase in its *modernization process*. Having realized the needs for loosening its isolation in view of growing outside pressure by 1868, it

- 3 Recent research has doomed these reports mainly to the realm of imagination, but this insight cannot question the fact that man seems to have a special affinity to the magic of round numbers, whatever origin they may be traced back to.
- 4 The task of describing this phenomenon by examining the ends of centuries from 999 A.D. to 1999 has been undertaken by SCHWARTZ (1990). Although the author himself denies any definite influence of calendar arithmetics, the huge amount of data cited suggests more than mere coincidence.
- 5 This tradition dates back to the 16th century when Thomas MORUS published his future classic *Utopia*. Popular writers, such as Jules VERNE in the 19th, and H.G. WELLS in the beginning of the 20th century, stressed the opportunities and chances of a technically highly developed future in which man would be able to lead both a more thrilling and happier life.

definitively switched to the Western “agenda”⁶ by introducing the Christian calendar by law in 1872.⁷ This not only meant that time-tables, school curricula and a large part of the legislation had to be re-written. An even more important consequence for the formerly agrarian society consisted in thus being tied to the emerging global (i.e. Euro-American) scene of events and developments which the Meiji rulers considered the essence of modernization.

Significantly, it was above all the concept of *time* which went through a considerable re-defining in the course of the Japanese modernization process. The original word for time, i.e. *toki* 時, was kept alive, but at the same time enlarged by the hitherto rarely used Sino-Japanese compound *jikan* 時間, a rather mechanic notion coping with the needs of industrialisation.⁸ The word *jikan*, which means both “time” and “hour”, was the ideal tool for denoting the modern idea of calculable units, in short: an objectivated time which enabled the economy, the political and the educational system to catch up with the West.

It may of course be argued whether, or, if yes, in which way the *Japanese language* which lacks the grammatical aspect of future might for its part have influenced concrete social and political developments, e.g. by preventing necessary planning efforts up to the Meiji era.⁹ Insights gained from the first stage of the modernization period would suggest that most values of pre-Meiji Japan were in fact only temporarily relinquished in the

6 *Agenda* is used here both in the sense of a chronology and as a means of structuring political issues and events.

7 SHIMODA (1994:100f.)

8 SHIMODA (1994:73) defines this semantic coining as ‘doubling’ (“‘Verdoppelung’ des Begriffs”).

9 For obvious reasons this question is a very complex one. It is therefore highly speculative to give answers by generalizing philosophical insights, as it can sometimes be found in Western analyses, e.g.: “Das Japanische hat keine eigene Form für die Zukunft; im allgemeinen werden dafür dieselben Formen wie für den Ausdruck von Ungewissheit verwendet und auch solche Formen, mit denen ansonsten vergangene Ereignisse gekennzeichnet werden. [...] Es ist durchaus möglich, dass diese Form von Zeitanschauung etwas mit der Fähigkeit der Japaner zu tun hat, ihre Energien zu mobilisieren, um Fortschrittsaufgaben zu bewältigen, etwa die Modernisierung in der Meiji-Zeit, das hohe Wirtschaftswachstum in den sechziger Jahren, die Energieeinsparungen nach 1973 oder die Vorsorge für das nächste Erdbeben.” BERQUE (1986:34)

face of foreign influence, making themselves clearly felt again at a later date. The concept of time, however, i.e. the process of “adjusting the agenda”, begun in 1872, turned out to be irreversible. This adjustment to the Western agenda was continued after World War II and — more recently — at the end of the Cold War and the events after 1989. It is on these recent events and the respective consequences for the future that this paper intends to focus.

The collapse of communism and the resulting shifts within the global geopolitical sphere forced Japan also to redefine its social identity. Moreover, the perpetual political scandals culminating in the 1989 exposure of the unlawful Recruit-Cosmos transactions paved the way for a radical change in home politics as well.

One of the most spectacular results was of course the unexpected defeat of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party losing its hitherto unchallenged government power in the course of the 1992 Lower House elections. Though the LDP has meanwhile managed to restore its executive power, this was only done at the price of yielding many of its former orthodox positions in favour of political reform.

The upset in politics coincided with the bursting of Japan’s so-called bubble economy — a late consequence of the Plaza accord of 1985 and the following impact on international currency markets by the bolstered value of the Yen. These crucial developments, occurring nearly simultaneously with the 50th anniversary of World War II and the related discussions on guilt and responsibility, had a thorough impact on the Japanese society and its principal patterns of behaviour- commonly referred to as ‘values’.

Value change in Japan

One possible way for measuring attitudes and thinking patterns in a society by trying to evaluate potential changes occurring in it can be done by means of a *survey*.¹⁰ Surveys can be problematic, since they commonly

10 There are, of course, many different approaches and methods for measuring attitudes, such as analyzing government or party programs. Investigations on value change done by the broadcast center NHK suggest a shift of preferences towards *Asia* among young people (クローズアップ現代 *Close-up Gendai*, 4.1.95). As for literature,

tend to include a certain part of their hypotheses already in the structure of their questions. Analyzed with given precaution, though, the results taken from scientific surveys may yield interesting results with respect to value changes among contemporary Japanese. The summary of such a survey by a well-known private think tank reads as follows:

The data collected for Japan under the 1995 "World Values Survey" has been compared with the results of the previous (1990) survey. Evidence was found that the values of Japanese people are undergoing a transformation, reflecting the changes in the environment that have occurred over the past five years. High marks were given to the current situation, "life of peace and abundance."

However, major changes were seen in some of the values which have supported traditional Japanese society and the established "Japanese system." For example, there is a weakened sense of belonging to the nation, and there is an inclination toward a greater emphasis on ability. Also, along with a growing consciousness that we are experiencing an age of change, there is a marked distrust of politics, which are the basis of the social system; there is a growing recognition that citizens need to participate in society; and individuals are also sensing a need for bold changes in their own ways of life.

Japanese people are changing slowly but surely from their stereotypical tendency to be vague and indecisive. There seems to be a movement toward reformation of the "Japanese system" through independence and participation in society.¹¹

The most significant results of the survey are related to an alleged weaker role of what is called the "Japanese system". This notion centers around traditional values, such as "hard work", "obedience", or "national pride". The fact that these values were less estimated than they used to be in other surveys before is seen as a sign toward the reformation of the "Japanese system".

It has to be taken into account, however, that the year of the survey, 1995, was a very special one for Japan. Beginning with the earthquake disaster in the Kansai area in January, the social shock deepened during the poison attack by the AUM sect in March, and financial bankruptcies during summer contributed to a mood of general gloom in this *annus horribilis*. To notice "a marked distrust of politics", or "a weakened sense of belonging

recent œuvres by Japanese authors also depict new patterns of orientation; e.g. the novel *Fukai Kawa* 深い川 (Deep River) published in 1993 by ENDŌ Shūsaku 遠藤周作 (1923-1996) which shows a remarkable turn towards Asia of what was formerly known to be a rather "Western" author.

11 cf. DENTSŪ INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN STUDIES AND LEISURE DEVELOPMENT CENTER (1996:2)

to the nation” within this temporal context, can therefore scarcely be considered an astonishing result.

More likely to be counted as an interesting find is the remark that “there is a growing recognition that citizens need to participate in society”. The question to be asked, then, would be what actual shape the new values, like “independence” and “participation”, finally take on within the Japanese society. At present at least, it seems difficult to enumerate concrete examples of this apparently new tendency.

But perhaps the question has to be put in a quite different way, focusing on a more distant future. When browsing through recent Japanese publications with *mirai* 未来 (future) or *nijūisseiki* 21世紀 (21st century) in their titles¹², a huge amount of related books can be found. Intensive discussion on the topic *Japan's future* suggests nothing else than an intensive effort to re-define the scope of psychological and/or social identity. This has, more than ever, become a common preoccupation in contemporary Japan and, therefore, would back the supposition that value change has indeed become a conspicuous phenomenon.

Political visions

Considering the actual state of turbulence in which Japanese politics appears to have slid into at least since the 1992 shake-up, it is hardly surprising that a great number of books dealing with visionary themes are to be found in the field of public affairs. One of the first prominent politicians quick enough to react to the new situation was opposition leader Ozawa Ichirō 小沢一郎. Ozawa, who formerly served three terms as secretary-general of the almighty Liberal Democratic Party LDP, outlined his concept on political reform in the 1993 publication *Nihon kaizō keikaku* 日本改造計画 (Plan for restructuring Japan).¹³

12 Internet provides convenient and up-to-date on-line search options also for new Japanese publications, e.g. by choosing the address “<http://www.trc.co.jp>”.

13 cf. OZAWA 1993. Rather uncommon for Japanese publications, OZAWA's book also appeared in an English version shortly after (OZAWA 1994). The translation, however, does not correspond to the Japanese original in every respect.

The central theme of the book, whose title (but not necessarily contents) slightly reminds one of Tanaka Kakuei's 1972 vision¹⁴, is the notion of a "normal nation" (普通の国). Ozawa uses it to denote Japan's need to adapt to its new global role after the end of the Cold War. Political leadership and the executive power would have to be reinforced, decision-making should become more transparent, and business activities should be further deregulated. Moreover, Japan would have to play an independent and more self-confident role in international politics:

What is a "normal nation"? First, it is a nation that willingly shoulders those responsibilities regarded as natural in the international community. It does not refuse such burdens on account of domestic political difficulties. Nor does it take action unwillingly as a result of "international pressure".¹⁵

The model for most of the proposed changes is seen in Western democracies, above all in the political system and the institutions of the United States of America. Thus it is not surprising that Ozawa's envisaged party configuration for Japanese home politics is based on the traditional American *two party system*.

By emphasizing the problems caused by a lack of executive power, and by urging necessary reforms in order to "normalize" Japan and its political system, Ozawa comes close to the so-called revisionist criticism of van Wolferen.¹⁶ Ozawa does not elaborate on his affinities with the much discussed Dutch journalist, but in pointing to the same problems and formulating comparable remedies, his starting point is also *gai-atsu*, namely the *gai-atsu* from van Wolferen.

Reisengo no bijon o kaku (Drawing a vision of the post-Cold War era) is the goal expressed in the subtitle of a political essay by Funabashi Yōichi 船橋洋一 titled *Nihon no taigai kōsō* 日本の対外構想 (Japan's foreign

14 *Nihon rettō kaizōron* 日本列島改造論 (Restructuring the Japanese archipelago)

15 OZAWA (1994:94). The author is undoubtedly alluding to *gai-atsu* 外圧 (pressure from outside, especially from the USA), commonly referred to for political pressure from abroad, forcing Japanese politicians to react, and thus symbolising Japan's notorious weakness in decision making.

16 cf. VAN WOLFEREN 1989.

policy conception).¹⁷ The author, a known political journalist, discusses the possible attitudes the government, the Japanese citizens, and the leaders of the business world should assume with regard to the so-called *new world order*. Funabashi argues that Japan had historically remained passive towards external problems. Only with the growing economic success in recent years has this traditional attitude begun to shift to a more active role in international politics. The author considers the new international situation as a chance for the country and suggests that Japan must use its economic strength and adopt a more vocal role in the global community in accordance with its own long-term interests as a regional power. As a result, Japan could act as what the author labels a “global civilian power” — a new identity which would simultaneously include economic development, human rights, and environmental issues.

Evaluating Japan’s future possibilities by looking at various 21st century scenarios is a central approach to be found with many different authors. Thus Ozaki Mamoru 尾崎護, a leading official of the *Ōkura-shō* 大蔵省 (Ministry of Finance), has edited a two-volume pocket book named “Japan’s *quo vadis* in the 21st century” 21世紀日本のクォヴァディス.¹⁸ This publication represents a *brain storming* by various contemporary intellectuals on social, economic, technical, scientific, and ecological problems concerning Japan and its role in the future. Passages of particular interest in this book concern the effects of modernization in countries with different cultural and geographical backgrounds. By applying the civilization theses made by Huntington¹⁹, Saeki Keishi 佐伯啓思, a sociologist at Kyōto University, characterizes the Japanese economy as becoming closer to the *European* model, represented by Germany and Switzerland, than to the United States, since Japan would be forced to further develop its social security system and to stress community life as the principal conditions for an acceptable way of life in the 21st century society.

17 FUNABASHI 1993

18 OZAKI 1995

19 cf. HUNTINGTON 1993

The European and the American types of economy differ considerably, and the European type of economy, as found typically in Germany or Switzerland (ドイツ・スイスを中心とするヨーロッパ型の経済), may be said to be closer to that of Japan. In Europe, stress is primarily laid on maintaining social security and on keeping the community life as the basis.²⁰

As for the political status of future Japan, prophecies vary enormously. It is interesting, however, that some concrete visions not only relate to specific hemispheres or continents as points of reference for the future (such as the Pacific area, Asia, or Europe), but also include comparisons with countries with completely different cultural backgrounds:

Then, what will [Japan] look like? My vision is that it will be like Hong Kong in Asia (アジアの香港), or like Switzerland in Europe (ヨーロッパのスイス).²¹

Such a vision — suggested by the head of the economic department of Kyōto University, Sawa Takamitsu 佐和隆光, — could be characterized by clandestine modesty, because it assumes that Japan will not play any hegemonic role in the foreseeable future. Stipulating that it will be a fairly well-off, secure country attracting foreign tourists (like Hong Kong and Switzerland do today), but without any significant influence in the political or economic sphere, may sound rather astonishing. The statement has to be interpreted keeping in mind the strong fears among many Japanese concerning the economic and political development of *China*. As the author points out, China is supposed to dominate East Asia by the year 2010, and Japan would therefore have to adapt to the new order in the region.

It is, however, also possible that by depicting negative scenarios of Japan in the 21st century, strong reactions among the contemporary readers are to be evoked. Making predictions about coming situations and events always looks at the possibilities of both *welcome* and *unwelcome* results. As pointed out by sociological research, “self-fulfilling prophecies”, which will lead to the hypothetic scenario finally coming true, are as common as their negative counterpart, the so-called “self-destroying prophecies”.²²

20 OZAKI (1995:165)

21 OZAKI (1995:176)

22 These central mechanisms within the realm of future studies were first described in FLECHTHEIM 1987.

Connected with the phenomenon of “self-fulfilling” vs. “self-destroying” prophecies is the question whether a prediction carries a *descriptive* or a predominantly *normative* claim. According to this distinction, even seemingly neutral descriptions can often result in outspoken recommendations on what shall be done in the future. A particularly illustrating example of this kind of political visions is the *Book that will improve Japan*, 日本をよくする本, by Funada Hajime 船田元.²³ The author is a young politician of Ozawa’s newly formed opposition party *Shin-shin-tō* 新進党 (New Frontier Party). As may be expected from the title, Funada embarks on a listing of the problems and the alleged deficiencies of contemporary Japan which, in his opinion, need thorough remedy:

Why do we have to endure such horrible rush-hours? Why are our housing conditions so bad? Why are there hardly any beautiful row of houses and why is hardly any beautiful nature left? Why are female university graduates at a loss to find employment, and why do they run against a wall of male dominance when they enter a firm? Why do they run against the next wall when thinking about marriage and birth?²⁴

According to the author, the cause for these grievances is related to the fact that Japanese citizens have no say in terms of political rights which, as he points out, are withheld by the almighty bureaucracy. Therefore, the citizens would have to fight to gain the main role in politics (国民を主人公とする政治, p. 31). On the other hand, the bureaucratic system should be completely abolished (官僚制度を完全撤廃, p. 83). A first step in the right direction would be to engage in *volunteer activities*, such as many citizens did during the aftermath of the 1995 Kansai earthquake. Although this disaster sent shock waves through the whole country, the actions of the volunteers should be valued as signs of self-responsibility and civil courage which, according to Funaba, represent the ideal values to take shape in a future Japanese society.

23 FUNADA 1995

24 FUNADA (1995:30)

The dawning of New Middle Ages?

Interestingly, visions about the future often swing back to experiences made in the historical past. A striking example hereof is the scenario with the ominous title *The New Middle Ages* 新しい中世, drawn by Tanaka Akihiko 田中明彦.²⁵ The author, an assistant professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the University of Tōkyō, depicts an utopian civilization which is supposed to evolve from the global situation after the end of the Cold War. His assertions center around the prophecy that the industrialized world will tend towards a saturated state, both politically and socially, marked by the absence of any large ideological conflicts. In analogy to the European Middle Ages, which the author sees as a period with mainly pacifistic features, the emerging new global community would be characterized by a growing sense of interdependence and a common “faith” in the existence of market economy and its mechanisms. For this process, often described as *globalization*, the author uses the concept of *internationalization* 国際化, another key notion within the recent Japanese value discussion:

Also the activities of the companies will become *internationalized* (italics by U.L.) to a high degree within this sphere. With no regard to their origins, the big enterprises will establish important centers in all different regions and make efforts to assimilate there. Japanese companies will establish production and sales bases in North America and in Europe, whereas North American and European companies will develop similar strategies. Furthermore, the “strategic cooperation” (戦略的提携) among different companies in these regions will become a matter of daily experience (日常茶飯事).²⁶

Rome and the Vatican, as the centers of political and religious life during the European Middle Ages, would now be superseded by New York and the United Nations Security Council which will both act as a governing instance and an arbitrating organ in case of belligerencies. Instead of wars and fighting, *science* is expected to flourish within this realm. In everyday life, therefore, a common preoccupation called the *game of knowledge* (知のゲーム, p. 200) will be played as an intellectual and peaceful means of human communication.

25 TANAKA A. 1996

26 TANAKA A. (1996:197)

Not everybody, however, would be able to take part in this idyllic New Middle Ages civilization. According to Tanaka, for the time being only the industrialized Western countries (including Japan) are supposed to belong to it, since the world has to be subdivided into three different spheres. Besides the *New Middle Ages* (*shin chūsei-ken*) 新中世圈, there exists a *sphere of modernity* (*kindai-ken*) 近代圈 formed by the many newly industrialized and/or developing, and, finally a *sphere of chaos* (*konton-ken*) 混沌圈, to which the least developed countries, mainly in Africa, would have to be counted.²⁷

As the only non-Western member within this exclusive club, Japan's role would be that of a mediator between the rich nations and the ambitious newcomers in the modernity sphere, among the latter especially the *Tiger nations* of South East Asia. That way the club of the rich countries would be in a state of expansion. In order to fulfill its intermediary role, Japan, according to the author, would have to strengthen democratic structures in domestic politics and retain its security links with the USA.

By stressing the ideas of Western democracy, Tanaka's ideas fit smoothly into the ideological framework set by Francis Fukuyama with his much debated *End of history*.²⁸ After all, the stances of the former US State Department member of Japanese descent and the advocacy of American liberalism seem to be regaining their impact among contemporary Japanese intellectuals after a phase of vigorous contestation lead by Ishihara's and Morita's *Japan that can say 'no'*.²⁹

The political analyses and social predictions of authors like Ozawa, Funada, and Tanaka, can be traced back to intellectual efforts such as found in the *Meirokeisha* 明六社, the group of thinkers who advocated the

27 TANAKA A. (1996:195)

28 Although Japan did not perform as a central actor in FUKUYAMA's concept of advocating Western liberalism, he touched upon it as a key notion in the global ideological process: "The beginnings of a systematic rejection of liberal democracy can be heard in Lee Kuan Yew's theoretical pronouncements and in the writings of certain Japanese like Shintaro Ishihara. Japan will play a crucial role if such an alternative emerges in the future, since that country has already replaced the United States as the model for modernization in much of Asia." FUKUYAMA (1992:243)

29 ISHIHARA & MORITA 1989

adoption of Western concepts during the early Meiji period.³⁰ And there remains little doubt that the discussion about the appropriate degree to which Japan should still *westernize* its society will continue far into the new millenium.

Back to the future?

Potential models for shaping the 21st century society do not necessarily have to be sought outside the Japanese archipelago. A genuinely Japanese approach, searching for traditional *ethnic roots* within the country, has been undertaken by free lance writer Hanazaki Kōhei 花崎皋平 in his book titled *The individual and the overcoming of the individual*.³¹

Hanazaki starts by discussing *individuality* as one of the clues to understanding traditional Western thought. After elaborating on the concept of the individual and its constituent factors, the author foresees a dissolving of individual experience (個人的経験の解体, p. 18f.) in the near future. He attributes this global process to the gigantic development of new information media (such as the *internet*) which would render individualistic knowledge less determinant, since it will be embedded in a constant stream of collective interaction provided by modern communication technology. This trend will finally overcome individuality as a Western value, as the title suggests (個人を超えるもの). Therefore, the occidental concept of individuality is supposed to lose its impact on Japan.

A possible alternative value for individuality, which is neither of European, nor of Asian origin, would be the adoption of what the author defines as *peopleness*:

“Peopleness” (ピープルネッス) stands as a universal position in the constitution of a global society for the “relationship between people and people”.

30 The group, founded in 1874 by the statesman MORI Arinori 森有礼, pursued the goal of “promoting civilization and enlightenment”. It counted 33 members, among them many leading intellectuals, such as the reformer and educator FUKUZAWA Yukichi 福沢諭吉.

31 HANAZAKI 1996

It may encompass the ideas of freedom, equality, and peacefully living together, but it is no moral teaching with fixed contents. It should not be bound to any objectification, but evolve as a form of non-objectified quality (非対象的な質) for human activities in life.³²

The concrete manifestation of what Hanazaki understands as a viable option for social life in the future would have to be sought within the practices of the indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago, the *Ainu*. According to him, the mechanisms of the Ainu society will provide solutions for some of the urgent problems of modern Japan. On this behalf, a new consciousness of *solidarity* and *welfare* for the weak and old would be as important as the respect for the *natural environment*:

When I first read about it I was deeply impressed, and, by gradually enriching my knowledge about the Ainu people, their feelings and their behaviour, through those who taught me about them, I learned that this culture of “care” (世話=ケア) must have been very efficient formerly in the Ainu society. I am not able to prove its distinctness, but it seems to me that it has slightly different features to those of the concept of the common *ie* and family moral or to Confucian ethics of the pre-modern era, and I feel that it could stand for a culture of solidarity (共感の文化) by being able to deal with the care problems of today.³³

The author tries to localize possible solutions for some of the most urgent contemporary social problems by looking in the opposite time axis at an ethnicity which was for a long time suppressed by the *Wa-jin* 和人 majority. Yet, even if it holds true that the welfare system practised by the Ainu was in fact outstanding, it is difficult to interpret Hanazaki's enthusiasm otherwise than a nostalgic reflex.

Making use of virtually extinct cultures for the sake of gaining new prospects for the future, however, is by no means a Japanese peculiarity. Since Jean-Jacques Rousseau at the latest, the ideal of the “noble savage” has become a stereotype in Western thinking, especially so in periods of domestic uncertainty and trouble.³⁴

32 HANAZAKI (1996:88)

33 HANAZAKI (1996:159f.)

34 cf. CRANSTON 1991

From technology to ecology

Attempts to find alternative models which are free from political, ideological, or historical burdens might be called symptomatic for many modern Japanese writers who feel a need to re-define their own whereabouts. This is a far cry from the euphoric social and technical visions which used to dominate bestseller shelves some thirty years ago. One of those scenarios which predicted blessings for future generations by propagating the sheer development of communication technology and computer innovation was the idea of an *information society* proposed by Masuda Yoneji 増田米二:

One of the most interesting actions has occurred in Japan, where in 1972 a non-profit organization called the Japan Computer Usage Development Institute presented to the government 'The Plan for Information Society — A national goal toward the year 2000'. This plan had been developed for presentation as a model plan for the realization of Japan's information society. It gives a picture of an information society that is desirable and can be realized by 1985.³⁵

Meanwhile, however, 1985 has passed without Masuda's vision³⁶ becoming reality. An even more ambitious plan for the future society based on congenial software innovation, the so-called *Fifth-generation-computer-project* 第五世代コンピューター・プロジェクト, was quietly buried in 1992 after ten years of intensive research (and high investments), when it turned out that it yielded no useful results.

Positivistic utopia are still appearing occasionally in Japan nowadays, mainly in the context of urban planning, albeit less often than in many other modernizing South Asian countries. Generally speaking, in recent years the emphasis on future priorities seems to be shifting away from mere science fiction scenarios and becoming more concerned with *ecology* and environmental preservation.

35 MASUDA (1980:3)

36 MASUDA's ideal was a state of total computerization (*Computopia*) where people living in future cities (*Computopolis*) would have the possibility and the duty to stay connected to the authorities and among each other on a 24 hour basis. (cf. MASUDA 1966). After experiences with several pilot projects in so-called *New Towns*, which were designed as models for the information society (情報化社会), further plans were cancelled because of technical and also social reasons ("Big Brother" phenomenon).

An example of the latter is a digest of ecological visions edited by Ōya Eiko 大宅映子, a known radio and TV journalist.³⁷ Its title *The future of Japan and the future of the earth* 日本の未来と地球の未来 illustrates the cosmopolitan dimension within the common agenda issue of *environment* by linking domestic problems to global aspects. Nevertheless, as yet, ecological approaches mostly still focus on national issues.

Among the articles dealing with the situation of Japan's environment and the necessary measures to preserve the natural surroundings we find a programmatic essay by novelist Komatsu Sakyō 小松左京.³⁸ Komatsu has been a well known writer ever since the seventies on account of his abysmal scenario *The sinking of Japan* 日本沈没, in which he described the fatal consequences of an earthquake in the Tōkyō region which triggered the crash of the Japanese economy and, consequently, brought about a crisis of the international financial system. In his article on ecology, Komatsu analyses the close interrelationship between economy, technological innovation and environmental problems on a global scale. Komatsu pledges for a *new consciousness* among his contemporaries with respect to the preservation of nature.

A similar pledge is made by Tomiyama Kazuko 富山和子, a literary critic, who published Japan's first ecological manifest some twenty years ago.³⁹ But the author's argumentation goes far beyond mere ecological reasoning, touching on economic, cultural, and political aspects.⁴⁰ In this respect, Tomiyama speaks out against the international trend of deregulation, fearing that rice imports to Japan could have a negative impact on the environment. It is the indigenous paddy *rice culture* which she regards both as a prerequisite and as a guarantee for the functioning of the environment. Neglecting this fundamental cultivation method would not only destroy the vital top soil, but also damage the crops and thus lead to famines. In consequence, society would be affected as well:

37 ŌYA 1995

38 生命圏と地球環境・共存文明は可能か *Living sphere and global environment — Is a coexistence of cultures possible?* (ŌYA 1995:10f.)

39 水と緑と土 *The water, the green, and the soil*

40 地球の未来と私たちの課題 *The future of the earth and our tasks* (ŌYA 1995:58f.)

Japan's rice has created the mountains, the water, the rivers, and the soil. If the Japanese would give up rice cultivation, the mountains would become depraved, and by the loss of the paddies, which serve as dams, the ground water and the rivers would dry out. The ground would become hollow, and rain would therefore cause inundations and threaten the private homes bought at great pains. These would be the consequences. That is why the problem of the liberalization of rice imports cannot be separated from the problem of nature and the problem of the soil. — But that is not all. The Japanese people would lose their culture and their identity and become global vagabonds (世界の浮浪者).⁴¹

“Winning” the 21st century

Wishful thinking about the future undeniably exists as a trend with many authors, and Japanese publications make no exception. This tendency becomes evident also when looking at concrete ecological programs published by official boards, such as the MITI scenario *New Earth 21. The Ministerium for International Industry and Trade* 通産省, which for a long time acted as a prime motor for Japan's export industry, has published a research report on limiting the so-called *greenhouse effect* in the next century. This report emphasizes Japan's role in what is considered one of the gravest problems in air pollution in the years to come:

Japan has the finest technology in the world for desulfurization and denitrification, and at the present time does not suffer much damage from acid rain. However, because people anticipate a more serious acid rain problem in the East Asian area in the future due to rapid increases in coal consumption in conjunction with the greater economic activity of China and other countries, it is thought to be important that Japan makes a contribution by technology transfer.⁴²

Japan is seen as a nation which has already solved or, at least, come to grips with most of the ecological problems, e.g. energy saving, thanks to its advanced technology. Therefore, further improvements in the field of environmental policies are mainly expected from other countries, and they should preferably be based on the *Japanese model*:

41 ŌYA (1995:90)

42 OKAMATSU (1992:337)

Countries that have already introduced technologies to increase the efficiency of energy consumption and that have achieved energy conservation through a shift in the industrial structure will find it difficult to diminish fossil fuel consumption still further. Japan ranks among the best energy conserving countries in the world, and one can see that future conservation initiatives would require considerable effort.⁴³

Indisputably, tendencies with the clear aim of characterizing Japan as a model country for 21st century society are recognizable in various statements, though mostly in implicit form. Rarely are they expressed in such an outspoken way as in the following two books: *Who will be the winner of the 21st century?*⁴⁴ by economic journalist Asai Takashi 浅井隆, and: *My will for the 21st century*⁴⁵ by freelance writer Itokawa Hideo 糸川英男.

Asai hopes that what he diagnoses as an actual crisis of Japanese society will harbour the decisive impetus needed for the future. He therefore turns to business leaders and politicians, urging them to reflect upon present deficiencies in order to improve the situation after the turn of the century and finally turn Japan into what it deserves, namely to become the “winner of the 21st century”:

If we do not wage a spirit of challenge now, Japan will fall down without halt. Don't let us miss the chance to make East Asia and Japan the winners of the 21st century!⁴⁶

Itokawa even uses more pathos when promising his readers a “golden millenium to come”:

In all probability we can conclude that the 21st century will be a golden century filled with such brilliance and happiness, as has never been the case since mankind has appeared on earth.⁴⁷

43 OKAMATSU (1992:339)

44 ASAI 1996. The English subtitle of the book looks somewhat blunt, too. It reads: *Who's the next conquerer?*

45 ITOKAWA 1996. The English subtitle of this book reads: *GOLDEN MILLENIUM TO COME — My irreplaceable last wish to the 21 Century People.*

46 ASAI (1996:227)

47 ITOKAWA (1996:5)

This prophecy, however, will not materialize without considerable efforts, which the author defines as "Japan's national projects". One such projects is the construction of an "Asia Bridge" (アジア橋) linking the archipelago to the Asian continent:

If we build the Asia Bridge, the hearts of the Japanese will clear up! The way of thinking of the Japanese who have lived in an island country will be changed, too! It will also create more employment and trade connections!⁴⁸

Thus, it is by means of modern construction technology that one of the most obstinate political problems in East Asia could be solved for good. Even if the proposed projects will perhaps never translate into reality, they nevertheless seem to mirror the wishes and feelings of a large part of the Japanese population in search of a new identity and a closer and more reliable relationship with their Asian neighbours.

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48 ASAI (1996:226)

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