

Portending the 21st Century

By *Kawai Hayao*

1. The IT Revolution and Globalization

Today's climate of extremely radical social change makes it difficult to predict where we will find ourselves in ten years' time – not to mention impossible to survey the 21st century as a whole. In as much as these difficulties allow, I would like to look at this issue in terms of where we find ourselves at the moment. I must point out, however, that my area of expertise, psychothera-



University students using their mobile phones on campus

py, deals entirely with the minds of individuals, and as such, I am merely a layman when it comes to such expansive issues as politics, economics and diplomacy.

We can presume that in the 21st century there will be tremendous scientific and technological progress and in fact acceleration in development in this area. Humankind will likely continue to pour its energy into subjugating and manipulating nature, making our lives considerably more convenient and comfortable

than they are now.

Information technology (IT) will in all likelihood develop at a particularly rapid rate. As the term "IT revolution" indicates, we will witness great strides in this area. The tools we use will become ever more compact, extremely convenient for their portability, and so light that we will hardly feel them. They will also, I imagine, become even easier to operate. These innovations will enable us to know what is happening around the world even when we are away from home and immediately provide us with the particular information that we want and need.

Already students sitting in lecture halls use their mobile phones to send and receive e-mail. In the 21st century, more and more people will try to increase their efficiency by multi-tasking. More of us will exchange electronic messages, for example, as we eat or listen to music at a concert.

As information flits around the world, the gap between those who are constantly "in the know" and those who are not widens. Obviously, those who are able to obtain new information and make decisions faster than others will benefit more than those who work away at creating tangible "products." As information becomes the effective means of gaining the advantage, its value will increase dramatically.

The trend toward globalization will also be reinforced by the point of ensuring that anyone is easily able to

obtain information from around the world. In the past, the Japanese, living in an island nation without a direct connection to other countries, were not compelled to consider their commonly held views from an international point of view. This led to a situation in which only the top echelon of politicians were concerned with Japan's relationships to other countries, and to a Japanese way of life guided by ways of thinking that made sense only in Japan. In today's world, however, these methods are no longer valid. The sea is no barrier to radio waves. In other words, more Japanese will come into direct contact with other countries and other cultures than ever before. This phenomenon is, of course, not limited only to Japan; the same can be said for every other country on the planet.

A set of shared rules is needed to maintain relationships between people from different cultures. Individual cultures have their own sets of rules, which for the most part, whether consciously or subconsciously, are related in some fashion to religion. There is, however, no such thing as a universal religion, and globalization forces us to confront the need to create a set of shared rules that are not rooted in religion. This need has given rise to global standards and other universal regulations. Although the "law" also takes on importance in this respect, laws, being man-made, naturally differ from culture to culture. In addition, there will always be people who create ways to "get around the law," further complicating the issue of global standards.

2. Importance of Identity

Pushed significantly in one direction, the nature of the human being inevitably pulls in the opposite direction. As the move toward globalization has gathered strength, interest in identi-

ty has also increased.

When we hear the word globalization, and particularly the phrase global standard, the fear that the characteristics unique to our culture will be lost, and with it the need to protect our cultures, grows. We see the contention that Japan must not allow its identity to be lost being espoused with increasing fervor.

Rather than encouraging uniformity across the planet, globalization in and of itself brings people around the world into more frequent and varied contact, and, I believe, fear over the loss of cultural identity is premature. In reality, the move toward globalization has instead made us more aware of the issue of identity.

Having addressed the concept of cultural identity, let me say here that identity is in fact a matter of the individual. I expect the issue of individual identity to take on extreme importance in the 21st century, because I believe that human beings will face the fundamental issues concerning their own existence as they gain material wealth and more convenience in their daily lives.

As I have already written, IT, for example, has made it possible for people wherever they may be to learn what is happening in the world. Aren't, though, these the very same people who know almost nothing about how their husbands or wives, those closest to them, feel and do not even make an attempt to find out? They may watch the weather report to know what the weather will bring over the coming week, but they know nothing about the "storm" brewing in their own homes. Even more frightening, these are the same people who know so little about what is going on within themselves.

The IT revolution occurred at the end of the 20th century, but most people seem to have forgotten that the "it" revolution occurred at the beginning of the same century. Following the Age of Enlightenment when people began to believe that anything could be understood completely through the strength of intellect and reason, Sigmund Freud made it clear just how much the human ego is manipulated by the id (it). I use

the term "it" revolution to illustrate the similarity of this revolutionary concept to the IT revolution.

Even 100 years after the "it" revolution, the id has not lost any of its power. Those who are absorbed in harnessing the power of IT for business gain may in fact themselves be controlled by the id.

Erik Erikson, a psychoanalyst of the Freudian school, called attention to the importance of identity. He pointed out that, no matter how much an individual bolstered his or her ego to accomplish various tasks, the ego must establish a proper relationship with the id to create a consistent subjectivity manifest in the

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Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who made it clear how much the human ego is manipulated by the id

concept "I am me." This led most Americans, who had to that point exclusively valued the strength of an individual's ego and his or her accomplishments, toward a shift in their world view with greater value placed on identity. The id is indeed a powerful force.

In this light, IT is quite powerless when it comes to expressing the id. Those who have jumped on the bandwagon of scientific and technological development, making piles of money and living comfortable, convenient lives, will sense a void when they begin, for whatever reason, to examine their own identity. We may believe that the information technology network connects people around the world. This network, however, represents nothing more than the tree that, its

roots having been destroyed, mingles its branches with those of another tree. Though it may stand now, it will eventually die.

Albeit not clearly conscious of what I have described, young people who have a vague perception of these issues will experience apathy. Despite their superior abilities, these young people will no longer do anything at all. At the risk of exaggeration, even suicide is too much trouble for the apathetic youth.

Human beings will, of course, continue to pursue material wealth and convenience into the 21st century. As human desire knows no bounds, the pursuit of wealth will not end no matter how much property we may accumulate. Ultimately, though, I believe we will look on the quest for identity as extremely important. Once this occurs, we will lose interest in information that comes from others. We will think perhaps, "I've had enough of IT; I want to know more about the 'it' (id)."

3. The "Identity Business"

Any age has its share of clever people. Once people become aware of the importance of identity, there will inevitably be those who come up with identity-related businesses. As always, the identities of these entrepreneurs will be dependent on money.

True identity cannot be purchased. We will, however, see a gradual increase in the number of people who have too much money and who continue to believe that everything is available for a price. Little can be done to stem the tide of people who believe that they can buy identity, as well. When we speak of business, we are in fact talking about a variety of enterprises spanning everything from that which comes relatively close to the essence of identity to the fundamentally deceptive.

Each individual's method for seeking his or her identity differs. The simplest case is searching out the lineage of one's family. There are businesses that do in fact trace family lines. This type of business slips into deception when a family tree is simply slapped together at random. Other examples of "identity

businesses” are those promising to tell clients about their former lives. (This type of business has undoubtedly already cropped up.)

The difficulty of dealing with identity lies in its connection with religion. Human beings attempt to clarify their identities by finding a connection with some transcendent entity. Put another way, we inevitably consider identity in relation to death. An individual may consider his or her occupation, for example, as the ballast of his or her identity, but one’s job disappears when one dies. Every aspect of life in this world is rendered meaningless when one considers death.

Struck by the extreme serenity and ability to put others at ease of a carpenter living in his neighborhood, folklore scholar Yanagida Kunio asked the carpenter to what he attributed his ability. The carpenter replied, “Sooner or later, I will become one with my ancestors.” Yanagida attributed his natural serenity to his acceptance and knowledge of his own life after death. This story offers an excellent example of how an individual’s identity is established with a view towards one’s own death.

The difficulty in the 21st century is our inability to, as the carpenter does, say with composure, “I will become one with my ancestors.” Scientific progress destroys the wealth of images given to us by religion. It is difficult today to believe in the existence of Heaven and Hell. Science teaches us a great deal about “human death,” but it teaches us nothing about our own death. The knowledge gained from the natural sciences is forever concerned with the third person; it tells us nothing about the second or first persons.

Religion that corresponds with scientific progress will therefore be important in the 21st century. A single step in the wrong direction, however, will force us to confront the religious sham of the “identity business.” This type of deception already exists at a significant level, and this type of fraud will most likely continue to increase in the 21st century. We could be witness to the emergence of fraudulent science. Fraudulent business practices marketed

under the catchphrase, “The truth of this religion has been scientifically proven,” will no doubt come to the fore.

Some may say, while admitting that what I say may be true, that psychotherapy is the quintessential “identity business.” This criticism is justified in the sense that psychotherapy is a business that is deeply concerned with identity. As psychotherapists, however, our goal is to help those who come to us of their own volition in their personal search for identity; we do not provide our clients with a ready-made substitute for a true identity. This, at least, is my personal conviction.

Even so, as the number of people who feel they can buy anything grows, psychotherapy itself may also develop into a business that offers a variety of “identities” for sale at a marketable price. Indeed, this is a realm fraught with dangers in which it is difficult to discern the sham from the real.

4. Ability to Sustain Conflict

I have discussed the religious sham, which has emerged as anti-social cult groups. Japan has already experienced a sarin attack by the Aum Shinrikyo cult on its subway system. Unless considerable attention is paid to this development, it is possible that anti-social cult groups will emerge throughout the world in the 21st century.

Author Murakami Haruki interviewed several members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult. We spoke about his impressions of the members he interviewed, and he mentioned that he was struck by a type of purity he found in quite a few of the Aum believers. He sensed in their beliefs an innocent pursuit of identity that disregarded the common values of the world at large.

Photo : Mainichi Photo Bank



A sarin attack by the Aum Shinrikyo cult on the Tokyo subway system in 1995

The problem, however, arose from the fact that this pursuit of identity translated to absolute obedience to Asahara (founder of the Aum sect) and led directly to behavior that subverted social order. These members were not strong enough to think for themselves when caught in the conflict between the teachings of a leader they respected and the decision not to break with social norms.

The development of scientific techniques leads at times to the destruction of nature. The immediate rejection of science and calls to suspend all scientific development are simply knee-jerk reactions. Not every scientific technique, however, should be developed. If we wish to, we could actually clone human beings, for example, in the 21st century. The world seems to agree, however, that we should control our ability to do so.

We cannot deny that humankind is a part of nature, but human beings consistently work in opposition to nature. This is what it is to be human. The genetic manipulation made possible by the life sciences is the most extreme example of to nature. Disconnected from nature, human beings will lose their serenity; we will find ourselves nervous and frustrated.

In the 1920s, Carl G. Jung visited the Native Americans and came away impressed by their grace and dignity.

He spoke with the chief of a Pueblo tribe who described the brutality of the white man's face and went on to speak to the effect that the white man is always searching for something. What is he looking for? The white man is constantly in want. He is always nervous. He cannot be still. (C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*) Jung came away from his conversation with

into Japanese, as well. This newfound interest lies in the fact that the Native American ways of life are rooted in man's coexistence with nature. The fountain of wisdom found in their everyday words has struck a chord in modern man.

On a recent visit to a Navajo tribe, I was struck by the magnificence of their culture. Certain Navajo groups do not

nal form. The Navajo shamans whom I met decried the fact that their young people are not interested in carrying on their culture. Above all, an increasing number of young people do not speak the Navajo language. This illustrates just how much power the white culture that surrounds them has over them. The problems of the Navajo nation must be dealt with by the Navajo people, so I would like to conclude by addressing what the 21st century means to us.

In the 21st century, we will have to take a hard look at the extent to which human beings will preserve the conflict between these two opposing philosophies – the “anti-nature” tendency of science and technology we have promulgated and the “pro-nature” tendency maintained so far by the Native Americans – and create something new out of this conflict. It would be so easy to reject one of these philosophies in favor of the other, but this would undoubtedly lead to our downfall. The contrast between these two tendencies is too extreme. Since the science and technology philosophy gives rise to an easily foreseeable conclusion, it tends to be given more attention. But, this is a dangerous stance to take. Nor is it easy to advocate integrating the two. We seem to have no other recourse but to throw ourselves into the conflict created by these two

contrasting philosophies, taking things one step at a time. **JJI**



The conflict between the two opposing philosophies – the “anti-nature” tendency of science and technology we have promulgated and the “pro-nature” tendency maintained by the Native Americans – will have to be carefully observed in the 21st century

the chief with the sense that he had learned about the dark aspects of the white man's way of life. At that point, however, no Westerner was willing to listen to what he had to say.

Recently, we see a growing trend in the U.S. towards learning from Native American ways of life. Browse through any bookstore and you will inevitably come across several books on Native American wisdom. Quite a few of these books have been translated

have a word for “religion” in their native language. Since the religious was such an integral part of their daily lives, they found no need for this word. To them, death and life existed organically within nature.

Herein lies the basic problem, however. It is not possible for modern man to learn the Native American ways of life. More frightening, it is becoming nearly impossible for Native Americans to preserve their cultures in their origi-

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