

What Role for Japan?

By Takahashi Susumu

Soon after the package of four political reform bills was passed in a last-minute compromise with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership, Prime Minister Hosokawa abruptly announced a National Welfare Tax in February and just as abruptly withdrew the proposal when it ran into a brick-wall. The Hosokawa coalition is changing, and seems to some to be coming apart at the seams.

Things are still in flux, and there is considerable discussion in the media of possible new political realignments. In a panel discussion on "Single-representative Electoral Districts Will Mean the Emergence of a Middle-right Monolith" in the December 7, 1993 issue of the *Ekonomisuto*, Tokyo Institute of Technology political scientist Tanaka Zen'ichiro put forward the position that the Japanese tradition favors a two-party system with one dominant party, and University of Tokyo political scientist Inoguchi Takashi says that politicians will gravitate to where the votes are and that Japan is likely to end up with a massive middle-right party that will go to war with the bureaucracy. Yet *Mainichi Shimbun* Senior Staff Writer Iwami Takao predicts in "Can the LDP Survive" in the January

Bungei Shunju that, rather than moving toward a two-party system, we are more likely to see regroupings among the coalition partners to slash the number of parties until there are only about five or six left, including the LDP and the Japan Communist Party.

Realignment among the parties is also a question of realigning power within the parties, and many people see the current political developments basically as politicians jockeying for power. This view is eloquently expressed by Kunimasa Takeshige and Tachibana Takashi in their "Ozawa Ichiro: The Last Tanaka-ist" in the February *Sekai*. Contending that the furor for political and electoral reform is essentially a struggle for control within the Takeshita faction (heir to the Tanaka faction), Tachibana argues that the political developments since last summer have not meant the destruction of the 1955 system, but have represented a new phase of the struggle for power within the 1955 system, with the coalition government but a temporary phase in this longer drama.

Focus on Ozawa

Ozawa Ichiro is one of the main players in this struggle for power, and there has also been a lot of media attention paid to his new book *Nihon Kaizo Keikaku* (*Reengineering Japan*) and its espousal of Japan as a "futsu no kuni" or "ordinary country."

Kitaoka Shin'ichi, for example, wrote in "Ordinary Countries and Non-ordinary Countries" in the February *This Is Yomiuri* that the changes engineered by President Clinton in his first year in office have been away from military power and toward economic power. And, as U.S. diplomacy has paid greater attention to multilateral adjustments under Clinton, the United States is moving in the direction of becoming an ordinary country. He then goes on to lambaste criticisms of Ozawa's call for Japan to be an "ordinary country," say-

ing that such criticism ignores the fact that the world is a very harsh and competitive place. In closing, he seconds the call for Japan to move to ordinary-country status, including gaining permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council and taking part in U.N. peace-keeping operations if necessary.

On the other side of the argument is Terajima Jitsuro, who in his "The Primacy of Economics" in the February *Chuo Koron* unabashedly argues against the across-the-board systemic changes that are emerging in the political and economic areas. He states that political reform is simply leading to a proliferation and enhancement of the conservative camp and that the coalition marriage between reformists and the conservatives is a recipe for assimilation.

In the economic sphere, he says we are faced with the choice between American-style competition in pursuit of economic efficiency or a Japanese-style mutual-assistance society—that we should not rush to deregulate simply because it is the fashionable thing to do but should first clarify what kind of a society we want, what things need to be reformed, and what things need to be preserved. Turning to the idea of Japan as an ordinary country, he says that it was the postwar concentration on economic growth that created our present prosperity and that we cannot possibly formulate a persuasive vision of how we see Japan developing unless we recognize that Japan is an extraordinary country in having been a late-developing Asian nation, having endured wartime defeat, and having been subject to nuclear attack. Rather than mindlessly embracing the attraction of great-powerism, he says, we should recognize that nobody outside of Japan wants Japan to be a player in the great-power geopolitics shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States and Europe.

Ishikawa Yoshimi takes a somewhat different perspective in his "Ideals Thrust upon Him" in the February



Ozawa's bestseller *Reengineering Japan*



Photo: Kyodo News Service

Ozawa Ichiro (center) has been called the power behind the Hosokawa government. The media has remarked upon his each and every move to the point of hypersensitivity.

Gekkan Asahi. In this, he depicts Ozawa as someone who was unwittingly forced to play the role of silver-bullet cure for the ideal-lessness that afflicts Japanese intellectuals and detoxicant for the inferiority complex that Japan feels toward the rest of the world. Most people, he says, read Ozawa's *Nihon Kaizo Keikaku* as a call for reengineering the Japanese and see its central message as a plea to concentrate political power with the political elite and to let the political elite reshape the Japanese character through political means.

In addition, most people see this cry for reshaping the Japanese character not as something arising from within Ozawa but as something in which Ozawa is acting as the mouthpiece for foreign interests and foreign pressure. Thus the arrogance and loneliness that Ozawa evidences arise from the burden of his being a politician who has undertaken the task of forcing Japan to make the changes he thinks it has to make given these foreign pressures. Yet Ozawa is basically a rural populist type of politician, and he should really be responding not to the ideals implied by foreign pressure but to those ideas that well up from the populace.

China

There has also been active discussion on China. Takano Hajime's "Command Post for the Greater Chinese Economic Sphere" in the February *Chuo Koron* is an analysis including developments in the United States and China (including overseas Chinese). In it he speculates that China has entered upon a new stage in its development since adopting economic openness and that we are on the brink of explosive growth in the Chinese-style borderless economy linking the global Chinese network. Politically, he sees China moving to a more democratic and decentralized system, conceivably breaking up into a number of autonomous regions with considerable sovereignty and perhaps with some kind of federation.

By contrast, pessimist Nakajima Mineo writes in "Facing up to the Reality of Three Chinas" in the January issue of *Foresight* that China is a pressure cooker—the more it is pressed down and contained from above, the greater the explosion when it finally does let loose.

On Sino-American relations, he says he expects the United States to continue

to take a basically hard line, for China to opt for military expansion in an effort to buttress its global strategy, and thus Sino-American relations will enter a new Cold War period, with Japan caught in the cross-fire. Given the precedent set in the APEC and elsewhere, Japan should face up to the reality of the three Chinas (China, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong) and should rethink its diplomatic obsession with maintaining good relations with mainland China alone.

Also on this subject, Funabashi Yoichi writes in "America in Search of Asia," also in the January *Foresight*, that the United States is placing a new foreign

policy emphasis on Asia, as shown in its APEC policy, and is gradually abandoning the Euro-centric attitude of thinking of Asia as the Far East and starting to view Asia as the Far West. Given this change in American perceptions, and the greater moves toward multi-culturalism in Asia, it is likely that, having achieved modernization with governmental leadership, Asian societies will now start to move more for cross-border networking centered on the non-government sector and will forge horizontal links among their civil societies.

There is even the possibility that a megaculture might emerge encompassing the very different patterns of North America and the Asia-Pacific. In closing, Funabashi sees the Asia-Pacific region not as a mesh of threads linking specific points but as something more three-dimensional, and he suggests that the major changes that will create homogeneous space within this construct are already underway.

Takahashi Susumu is a professor at the University of Tokyo's Division of Law and Politics, Graduate School.