

# Beginning at the End

By Yuji Masuda

**M**ost observers see history in a time of transition in the 1990s. Is the decade to mark the end of an era as well a century? Or is it a time of new beginnings? Whatever you see it as, it is clear that this is a time of major upheaval, reform and global restructuring.

In 1989, the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe crumbled and fell with a resounding crash heard round the world, the reverberations of which are still being felt. Socialism is shedding its historical image. As is capitalism. Indeed, there are increasing numbers of phenomena in both East and West that the old structures are not equipped to deal with. This is a time of change worldwide, and it is not surprising that many people should have a feeling of history in the making—or even a sense of history in the ending.

For some, this is the end of a hot war. For others it is the end of the cold war. And for yet others, it is the end of history itself. Yet however they characterize the present, people are drawing on the lessons of the past to shed light on the future. The end-of-history characterization captures the sense of drama in this time of tumult, but different observers starting from different premises have seen it differently.

An article entitled "The End of History" by (U.S. Department of State Policy Planning Staff Deputy Director) Francis Fukuyama has had a major impact on discussion not only in the United States but also in Japan and worldwide, being vigorously defended by some and just as vigorously attacked by others. Although posed in an inquiring tone, the article's thesis is unabashedly sweeping and has been a stunning shock to the world consciousness at the end of the century. It was also a very timely paper, coinciding as it did with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe.

It should be noted, however, that Fukuyama uses the term "end of history"

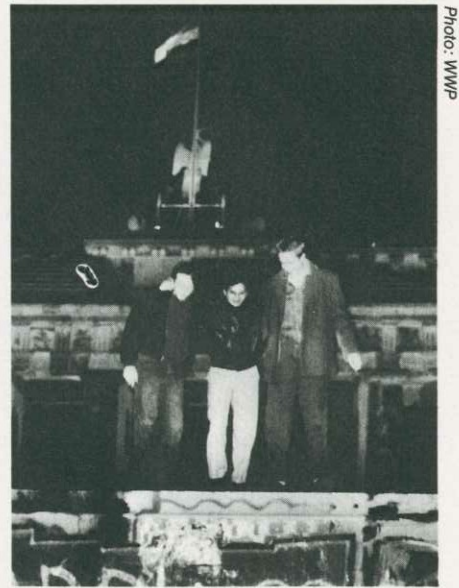
in the narrow Hegelian sense. According to Fukuyama, Western liberal democracy born of the American and French revolutions has vanquished both fascism and communism to become the ultimate philosophy for humankind. In that sense, the events of the present do not simply mark the end of the cold war or the end to a short postwar period but signify the final stage of mankind's ideological evolution.

Thus, Fukuyama contends, there is an emerging global consensus that liberal democracy represents the highest possible stage in mankind's political development; and he backs this contention by pointing to the crumbling of communism in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China and citing this as positive proof that history has indeed entered its final stage and that there is no higher ideological evolution possible.

## 20th-century systems

Energized by the Fukuyama paper, a University of Tokyo professor, Takeshi Sasaki, contributed "The Meltdown of 20th-century Political Systems" to the January *Sekai*. According to Sasaki, we are now seeing a reassessment of the fundamental framework that has underlain 20th-century politics, by which fundamental framework he means democracy, nationalism and socialism—principles that were established and consolidated after World War I. All of these principles are up for grabs and change. In this context, the "end of history" thesis is a ringing declaration of the universalism of Western liberalism and a declaration of victory in the cold war.

Sasaki says that the 20th century saw its political models in the three-ply structure of democracy, nationalism and state sovereignty. The cold war made absolute sovereignty impossible militarily, however, and the growing globalization of national economies resulted in heightening economic interdependence, while at the same time the socialist countries



Berliners stand arm in arm in front of the Brandenburg Gate as they celebrate the announcement by the East German government opening its borders to the West.

abandoned their former economic isolation and moved to more outwardly open economic systems, starting the metamorphosis of the sovereign state. Spurred by the cross-border flows of goods and capital, people have also gained a new international mobility, and it is this that epitomizes the meltdown of 20th-century political systems.

The previously clear delineations among sovereign states have been blurred and become difficult to ascertain. It is not at all clear what kinds of political and economic systems will be created in the future. Although Sasaki limits himself to saying, "The cold war created a simplistic framework, but the times today call for a complex network of many and diverse structures," the fact is that the international world economic system needs to be conceptualized and created as quickly as possible. There is no time to waste.

On the same subject, Yasusuke Murakami of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies contributed an ambitious and noteworthy article to the January *Chuo Koron* on "Conservatism and Progressivism at the End of the Century." Murakami argues that the end of socialism does not signify any winding down of ideological conflict and that, in fact, there are legions of new issues coming to the fore. The most conspicuous manifestation of this is in the effort being

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made to discard the old progressivism (socialism) and at the same time to reform the old conservatism. This paper is part of an ambitious effort to rewrite economics, and it is sharply critical of the Fukuyama thesis, the neoclassical economists, and the analysis put forward by Peter Drucker.

Fukuyama's brief that the history of ideological conflict is drawing to an end with the final victory of Western liberal democracy as the ultimate ideology, says Murakami, falls prey to the same fallacy that invalidated Daniel Bell's 1960 *The End of Ideology*. Although this wave of new problems is threatening to sweep socialism away, and although there is no doubt that liberalism is the central motif of the new era, Murakami says, the ideological conflict will continue and the conflict between conservative and progressive will live on in new guises. Looking ahead, he postulates a new multidimensional international system tolerant of a multitude of cultures and explores both the potential for and limitations of such a system.

Fukuyama's paper ignited a flurry of debate in Japan on what new systems would emerge out of the tremors and crumbling of the 20th-century political system. Even though this paper was an important spark for the discussion, however, it has yet to be fully understood or adequately discussed in Japan.

## The new cold war

Aoyama Gakuin Professor of International Political Science Yonosuke Nagai and Tokyo Institute of Technology Professor of Literature Jun Eto have an interesting discussion entitled "What 'The End of History' Means" in the January *Bungei Shunju*. Looking at the changes taking place in the United States as well as the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and considering the Fukuyama thesis, Eto argues that there will be a change in our modes of delineation. After World War II, and especially during the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union to a large extent ran world affairs, provided the value nexuses for their respective camps and divided the world

into blocs. However, with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, physically as well as psychologically the old divisions are giving way to new delineations.

Both Nagai and Eto contend that the end of historical ideology as argued in the Fukuyama thesis is taking place within a broader context of crumbling walls, and that it is taking place not only in the Soviet Union but also in the United States, where there is a parallel crumbling of the historical ideology. The withdrawal from Vietnam was prelude to a delineational change for the United States and was a harbinger of change in the postwar world paradigm. Likewise, the events in Germany can be seen as either the crumbling of East Germany or as a prelude to German unification, depending on how one delineates history, and the different perspectives lead to radically different conclusions.

Referring to the changes in our pattern of delineation, Nagai notes that there is a subtle change under way in how the Western world sees the "East-West" conflict. Until recently, the term East-West was used to refer to the ideological conflict between liberalism and communism, yet the axis is today shifting and increasingly taking on overtones of confrontation between the Occident and the Orient. In essence, it is coming to be seen as a conflict of widely divergent cultures. With economic liberalism and democracy poised to cross the Urals, Eastern Europe is increasingly becoming part of the Western camp. By contrast, China, Japan and the newly industrializing economies of Asia are increasingly seen as somehow "different" and apart.

Going into the 1990s, the postwar cold war is becoming a thing of the past and the international political and economic system is undergoing radical changes. While this is arguably "the end of history" in one sense, there is not yet any clear consensus on what kinds of social and political systems will characterize the post-history era. Indeed, the very fact that the Fukuyama thesis has provoked such an outpouring of debate across the entire spectrum is itself indicative of the changes taking place. The end of the East-West cold war is bound to have an impact

on Japan—and the whole world is watching to see what choices Japan will make and how Japan will behave at this critical juncture.

If the basic reference points for defining East and West move from the capitalist/communist nexus to a geographical Occident/Orient nexus, this will in turn define the way the two regions perceive each other. If this happens, it is likely that we will have more and more people claiming that Eastern culture, and particularly the Japanese industrial culture, are uniquely different from and incompatible with Western values. While this will be the focus of a later installment, it should be noted here that the creation of such a conceptual framework would run counter to the best interests of both Occident and Orient. In its classic extreme, this would signal a reversion to a Kiplingesque "East is East and West is West" and would imply not only that the twain shall never meet but that they cannot even carry out a meaningful dialogue, with the end result likely being a drift to isolation and distrust on both sides.

The crumbling of the postwar structures, the end of the cold war, and the changes in East-West relations in the 1990s will do much to define the political and economic systems that characterize the 1990s and the century ahead. Not surprisingly, this is also a time of testing for Japan. What social and political systems will Japan opt for, and how will Japan seek to define and to achieve its ends?

I have tried in this first essay to introduce some of the main currents of contemporary Japanese thought as seen in the articles that have drawn the most attention here. While there are a number of other crucial issues for the 1990s, including the claims of Japanese uniqueness and the problem of alien workers in Japan, these issues—not simply questions affecting the Japanese economic and political systems but international issues as well—will be taken up later. ■

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