

Who's More International?

By Daizo Kusayanagi

Japanese intellectuals have proposed four goals for Japanese society in the 1990s: caring for its elderly, taking full advantage of the information revolution, accommodating greater social participation by women, and becoming more international-minded. This last has been particularly emphasized as an absolute imperative, and anyone who disputes it runs the risk of being branded a nationalist or a semibarbarian.

In economic terms, "internationalization" means facilitating market access for foreign capital, technology, and goods and services. This is an easily understandable goal. But the internationalization advocated for Japan goes well beyond economic restructuring and requires a restructuring of the Japanese mindset and a reworking of human nature.

There have been many efforts made over the last 10 years or so to define "the international person," but there are still no clear guidelines. The most frequently cited qualification is the ability to read, write and converse in English, and the second most-cited is that the person has an "international mindset." But then opinion is sharply divided on just what constitutes an international mindset.

Still frustrated

For all of these reasons, Japanese remain frustrated in their quest for the elusive Holy Grail of internationalization. Even though close to 10 million Japanese annually brave the trials of traveling overseas, using their new-found disposable income to satisfy their natural curiosity, I would be hard pressed to say they returned with an international mindset. Instead, they have drawn heavy criticism, especially from Westerners, for taking their Japanese mindsets with them.

I recently spent about two months in Europe, and was somewhat flustered when a long-time friend, a former countess from Italy, asked me if I knew of any Japanese-free boutiques she could go to.

She went on to say that Japanese tour groups are noisy and rude, disrupt the boutique atmosphere, and never fail to ruin her day.

According to a European social historian, Britain produced one-third of the world's merchandise, ran one-fourth of world trade, and controlled almost all of the world's business and finance in the middle of the 19th century. As a consequence, there were many British traveling on the Continent, and the rude and free-spending British were evidently looked down on by the natives of Rome, Paris and other European cities. Although this in no way excuses the poor manners exhibited by today's Japanese travelers, a certain amount of emotional friction is almost unavoidable in the clash of different peoples and different customs.

Studying manners

When this goes beyond unpleasantness and turns into a phobia, however, the problem enters a whole new dimension. In other words, if it is only Japanese ill manners that are to blame, then Japanese can forget about developing an international mindset and just read a few books on etiquette and Western restaurant manners. Even in the United States, Tiffany's used to have Tuesday morning classes on table manners for New York bookdealers. When the friction has reached the phobia stage, though, a course on table manners is not going to solve the problem. Indeed, it may be that there is no cure for this phobia.

On May 29, while in a mountain villa on the outskirts of Rome, I watched CNN television news after having lunch. After several news reports, they announced the results of a CNN-Times opinion survey. Asked if they thought Japan's economic success posed a threat to America, 76% answered yes, 16% answered no, and 8% answered they didn't know. To the next question, if they

thought that Japan has succeeded economically by being unfair, 65% answered yes, 15% no, and 20% don't know. These results were strikingly similar to the findings of a survey done by the Roosevelt Center, a U.S. think tank. When the Center asked people to indicate some of the threats they saw to American security, 86% cited nuclear proliferation, 77% the drug problem, 67% economic war with the EC and Japan, and 39% war with the Soviet Union. Here too, Japan is seen as a threat.

Why is it that Japan is considered a threat? Although American readers may have their own ideas on this, the explanation that has been advanced by at least one Japanese student of international relations is that the Japanese concept of security is very weak. As a result, it does not occur to them that Japanese technology can threaten another country's security.

For example, NEC recently developed the world's fastest supercomputer. The





first supercomputer was developed by Control Data Corp. for the U.S. Navy to analyze weather data, and its subsequent development has been supported by defense demand in areas such as ballistic course computation and weapons development. It is thus only natural that the U.S. military would be very uneasy and unhappy about NEC's developing a computer that outperformed U.S. models.

FSX development became an issue for much the same reason. And because Japanese companies have a virtual monopoly on high-definition television—a market that is forecast to be \$400 billion by the turn of the century—America had no choice but to compete by developing its own standards.

This explanation is very sympathetic to the U.S. position, and it is fairly persuasive. I can see how Japan's technological development capabilities could generate considerable fear in someone in the computer or high-definition television busi-

ness. But the CNN-Times and Roosevelt Center pollsters surveyed not only engineers but the whole range of occupations, ages and social statuses, covering both sexes. There is no reason why an engineering bias should be so strongly represented in these results.

Feeling threatened

Both Japan and America now have advanced industrial societies characterized by three features: the nation is supported by strength in science and technology, there is a high degree of investment, and there is increasing specialization taking place in industry. Japanese society has adhered faithfully to these tenets. It has neither sold defective products nor engaged in old-fashioned dumping. So why is it that Americans feel threatened by the Japanese economy? I wish I knew.

One clue, however, is provided by the prelude to Daniel Burstein's book *Yen!*

Here, the author presents a scenario for the year 2004 in which the United States has exhausted its creditworthiness and Japan makes putting America into a de facto receivership the price of further financing. In effect, Burstein has not looked at Japanese thinking and Japanese options but has projected a Japanese policy based on the paradigm of the American mindset. He has, if you will, created a Japanese bogeyman out of his own nightmares.

There have been many thoughtful works written about the Japanese by American scholars over the years. I wonder if anybody is reading them.

(This is the fifth of six essays by Daizo Kusayanagi.)

Daizo Kusayanagi is a free-lance writer and has authored numerous books on economic and social problems. He frequently appears on TV as a commentator.