

# House of Cards?

By Hisanori Isomura

By way of introduction, it should be mentioned that I have been to Europe seven times in the last six months. Each time I flew over the Ural Mountains. As mountains, the Urals are not much. They are not as lofty as the Himalayas, or even the Alps. In a manner of speaking, they are only hills.

But unlike the Himalayas or the Alps, they represent a significant division between Europe and Asia. Although natural barriers, they are just as clear a delineation as the Berlin Wall. My question today is whether or not this largely psychological barrier between Europe and Asia should be torn down like the actual physical barrier between East and West Berlin was.

It is today widely agreed that Europe is entering a new era of optimism. Indeed, it is not too much to call the 1990s an era of "Euro-euphoria." What a contrast this is with the situation just two years ago when South Korea, the rising Asian dragon, hosted the most festive and successful Olympic Games in history while Europe still moped in a morass of Euro-pessimism.

## European attitudes

At the beginning of 1988, I took part in a symposium in which André Fontaine, director and editor of the French newspaper *Le Monde* and a very good friend of mine, bemoaned Europe's absence from the international scene. Not only was Europe becoming a technological and political backwater, he said, it would eventually become a mere super museum with the peoples of Europe having to subsist on tips thrown to them by Japanese and Korean tourists.

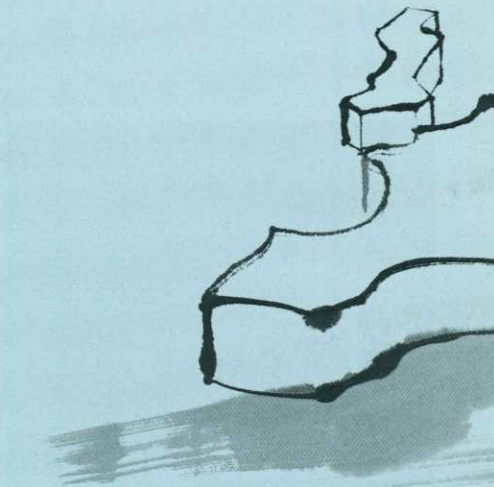
European attitudes have undergone a radical change recently as Euro-pessimism has given way to Euro-euphoria. There are three main factors behind this transformation. First, as explained by the well-known Czech writer Milan Kundera, the "kidnapped" half of

Europe has been restored to its brethren. Second, the Soviet Union has adopted the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, signaling the triumph of reason over ideological prejudice in Moscow. Third is the new momentum created by the push for European market integration by the year 1992.

Perhaps the phrase that best captures the spirit of the 1990s is that of "the common European house"—a phrase given currency by President Mikhail Gorbachev. What an appropriate image this is for the 1990s—a time at which telecommunications technology has turned us into a generation of visualizers—and how easily can we visualize the familial warmth of the common European house. This is indeed a very attractive picture, even if it is never precisely defined. As such, it has earned itself a permanent place in the lexicon of international diplomacy.

For example, in a recent speech, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger suggested that the house would have room for Armenia but not for Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan or Siberia. There is widespread recognition that Europe is geographically the area west of the Urals and east of the Atlantic Ocean. It is significant that this "common European house" was first suggested by French President Charles de Gaulle and that it has been adopted by President Gorbachev. In expanding on the imagery, President Gorbachev has perceptively pointed out that this common house will have at least a guest room for the Americans and Canadians. But no such room exists for Asians or Moslems. So the question for Japan is clearly whether or not we Asians may at least knock at the door.

Some people in Europe think so. For example, Gianni de Michelis, the Italian foreign minister who will become chairman of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Community this July, said in a recent interview that Japan



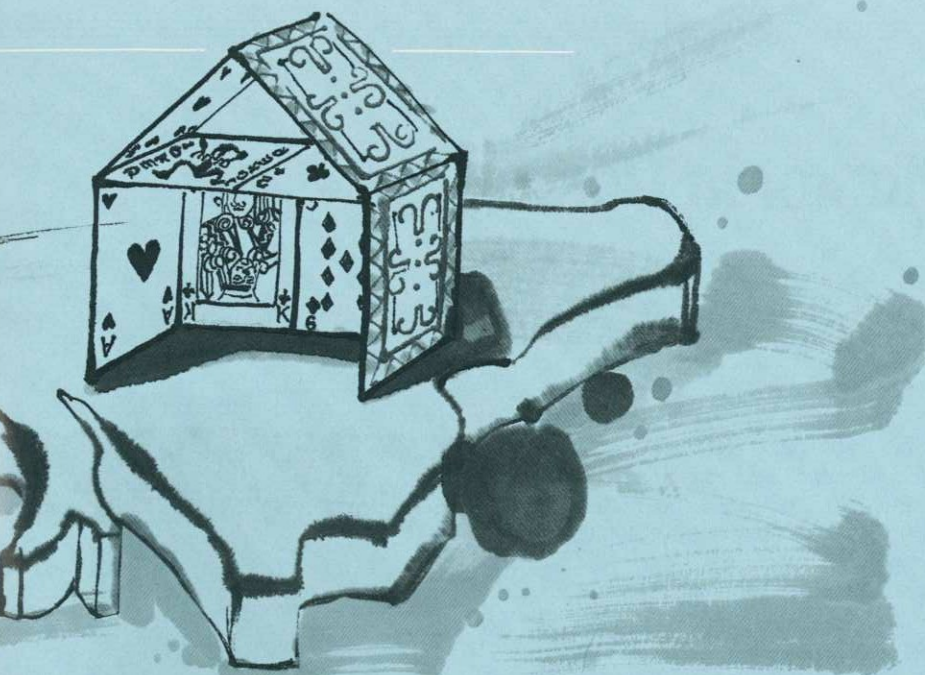
should be brought into the Helsinki Conference—and the Japanese government has made it clear that it hopes for at least observer status at the Helsinki Conference.

I am afraid, however, that this is still a minority opinion in Europe. We in Asia are less confident that European unity will not mean excluding us. The Soviet Union is illustrative here. Since the time of Peter the Great, Russia has constantly looked to the West for enlightenment and civilization. When they looked East, all they could see was "yellow peril," starting with Attila the Hun and continuing with the Tartars, Genghis Khan, the Japanese, and most recently China.

Fear of other nations and fear of other peoples, like other cultural facets, are passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, there is in the Soviet Union, as elsewhere, a growing groundswell of Russian nationalism or even ultranationalism which is always anti-Semitic and occasionally anti-Asian. Noting this, cynics will tell you that today's Euro-euphoria is subconsciously rooted in and reinforces the feeling among Europeans that they are superior to Asians.

## Common house

Pride in one's own accomplishments is all very well and fine, but not if it is used to denigrate or discriminate against others. In this era of growing detente and an emerging interdependent, borderless economic world, such hegemonic rem-



nants must go. I sincerely hope that the common European house will not become a common European fortress or an exclusive club with admission restricted along racial lines.

Rather than encouraging "white Europe" policies, I believe that Asians and Europeans alike should develop a common cultural strategy to dispel such racism and prejudice. With its vast and rich diversity of culture, Europe should join hands with Asia to produce—perhaps for the first time in the history of mankind—a true East-West cultural syncretism.

In this context, I should like to refer to a remark by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, the father of Europe and a man whose mother, incidentally, was Japanese. He said that his concept of a pan-European movement included not only the land from the Urals to the Atlantic but all the land from San Francisco to Vladivostok. This is not only European. It is almost global. In effect, he seems to be saying that, instead of talking about a common European house, we should turn our attention to the building of a common world house.

Although I am a commentator and not an architect, I would nonetheless like to make some specific proposals as to how we might achieve this goal. First, it is imperative that stable relations be maintained between Europe and Asia. The United States has a crucial role to play here. This is because Europe's great fear is that the United States will one day gang up with Asia against Europe. Similarly, Asia's nightmare is that one day the Unit-

ed States might gang up with Europe against Asia. After all, not only are most Americans descended from European stock, they have a guest room in the common European house. We will all benefit if the United States can preserve a delicate balance in its relationships with Asia and Europe.

Second, we must not use divide-and-rule tactics in dealing with each other. Every Othello has his Iago. There at least a dozen for the EC's 12 countries and many more in our relationships. For example, some Russians have been known to take Korean visitors aside and confide that the mule-headed Japanese refuse to conclude a peace treaty and that the Soviet Union thus really wants to do business with Korea. But other Russian Iagos take Japanese businessmen aside and confide that South Korean products are still technologically second-rate, that the Soviet Union really wants to do business with Japan, and that Japan should set its territorial claims aside.

Such ploys to divide the Japanese and Koreans to the Soviet Union's benefit are old tactics—sometimes called playing the Korea card or the Japan card. When France, Italy and Spain recently imposed strict import quotas on Japanese cars, many people in Japan were tempted to revert to similar old tactics and to turn to Britain or West Germany, which are far more liberal in their trade policies.

As a sort of "back to the future," let us cast our minds back to the 1940s when Japan entered its alliance with Germany and concluded a neutrality pact with the

Soviet Union. Such divide-and-rule tactics were obviously not successful, and I need not detail the disaster that resulted. My suggestion is that all parties abandon divide-and-rule methods, lest the mistrust between Europe and Asia develop into a new crisis. We cannot afford to think about playing the China card, the Europe card, the aid card, or any other card. We have to be creating a common world house, and cards are hardly the appropriate building material.

### Seeing realities

The third, and last, proposal concerns the relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan. Unfortunately, this key relationship has been gridlocked for many years. Everything remains frozen, and the only thing that has changed is President Gorbachev's rise to power and his advocacy of "new thinking" to enable the Soviet Union to no longer look at the world purely in military terms but to view other nations as wholes.

Next year, President Gorbachev will be the first Soviet leader in history to visit Japan. It is true that our two countries have yet to solve their territorial dispute, but I am sure these difficult and delicate problems can be taken care of with President Gorbachev's new thinking and the opportunity he will have to see the realities of today's Japan.

The importance of such personal visits cannot be overemphasized. Hu Yaobang, general secretary of Chinese Communist Party, once told me in a private conversation that he would not have believed or understood how much Japan had developed unless he had seen it with his own eyes. When he finally saw it, he said, he felt that China had wasted the 40 years since the war. I hope that Mr. Gorbachev is similarly impressed and has the courage to act accordingly. ■

(This is the third of five essays by Hisanori Isomura.)

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