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ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

1. **Strengthening the political leadership** – Guibourg Delamotte, Asia Centre.

The Hatoyama government is undertaking major institutional reforms in order to increase the influence of politicians in the decision-making process. Among the commitments set out in its manifesto, the Democratic Party Japan (Minshutô) has expressed its aim of bringing about a political structure in which “politicians will shoulder their responsibilities instead of delegating them to the civil service” and “the national interest will be safeguarded by the executive, rather than ministers’ interests being defended by their respective branches of the civil service”. The government has begun to implement this programme; bills have been drafted and should be put to the vote before the end of the parliamentary session.

The desire to strengthen the leading role of politicians goes back to the late 1990s¹.

¹ *Kokkai shingi kasseika oyobi seijishodô shisutemu no kakuritsu ni kansuru hitsu*, law no. 116, July 30th 1999.

(2001-2006) had given the impression that this reform had had an effect. But the periods in office of Abe, Fukuda and Asô showed that the institutions themselves had perhaps not sufficiently changed.

On February 5th, the Lower House passed a bill aimed at strengthening the leading role of politicians (*seifu no seisaku ketteikatei ni okeru seijishudôno kakuritsu no tame no naikakuhô tô no ichibu wo kaiseisuru hôritsuan*) and containing amendments to several laws (affecting the cabinet, its establishment, and the running of its public functions)².

This bill provides for increasing the maximum number of Prime ministerial advisers (*shushô hosakan*) from five to ten; each minister will henceforth have his own adviser (*daijin hosakan*). The system of government auditors

² «Shinseiken tonô masatsu kaihi ka», *Yomiuri*, September 11th 2009. “Hôseikyokuchôkanra kokkai shusseki”, *Yomiuri*, October 27th 2009. “Seijishudô tetteini iyoku”, *Yomiuri*, January 5th 2010. “Kakuryô shudô de seisakukettei”, *Yomiuri*, February 21st 2010, and “Seijishudôhōan wo kakugikettei”, *Yomiuri*, February 6th 2010.

(*seimu sankôjin seido*) is abolished. Two posts for expert advisors to the Chief Cabinet Secretary (CCS), the General Cabinet Secretary (*naikakuseimu sanji* and *naikakuseumu chôsakan*), are to be set up.

The number of political posts in the government is further increased by the creation of a post of Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission (*kokakkôan iinka*) with the rank of political vice-Minister (*seimukan*); also, within each ministry or agency there is a new politically-appointed post (*seimu chôsakan*).

The government depends upon the structures which it has set up and which it is therefore strengthening.

The National Strategic Office (*kokka senryakushitsu*) has been made a Bureau of the CCS. A further General Cabinet vice-Secretary (*kanbô fukuchôkan*) has been added to the three already in place. He is to be in charge of the new strategic bureau. Under him there will be a newly appointed official responsible for national strategic planning (*kokkasenryakukan*) with the rank of political vice-Minister (*seimukan*).

The new Government Revitalization Unit (*gyôsei sasshin kaigi*) is provided with a legislative basis and is legally placed under the Cabinet. This committee is concerned with four issues³: people contributing to the public good while working for the government; the independent administrative bodies; the special budgets; and budget planning. Sengoku Yoshito assumed the Chairmanship when, following the resignation of Mr. Fuji, Kan Naoto took on Fuji's position as Finance Minister. It is assisted by a committee analysing structural reform and regulations (*kisei, seido kaikaku bunkakai*) which draws up plans for reform in four sectors: environment and energy, medical

care, agriculture, employment and training to raise professional abilities.

A committee on the fiscal system (*zeisei chôsakai*) has been set up, replacing Koizumi's political and financial committee (*keizai zaisei chôsakai*).

In addition, a proposed law for the reform of the Diet (*kokkai kaikaku kanren hô an*) would lead to the creation of two governmental vice-ministerial posts (*fukudaijin*), and ten additional posts of parliamentary secretaries.

All in all, these laws aim at the creation of three additional vice-ministerial posts and a further ten of parliamentary secretaries, giving a total of 94 political posts within the cabinet instead of the current 70 (the Prime Minister, 17 ministers, 24 persons with the rank of vice-minister, including the CCS, 25 parliamentary secretaries, and 4 prime-ministerial councillors).

The director of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau will no longer be listed among the government's "special collaborators" (*seifu tokubetsu hosa nin*) - these include the Chairman of the National Personnel Authority (*jinjin sôsai*), the Chairman of the Japan Fair Trade Commission (*kôsei torihiki iinka*), and the Chairman of the Environmental Dispute Coordination Commission (*kôgai tô chôsei iinka*) whose position remains unchanged. The Director of the Legislation Bureau will no longer be able to address the Diet at the request of a minister, as has been the case until now.

Finally, on February 19th a bill to reform the law on public administration (*kokka kômuinhô tô kaiseian*) was passed by the Lower House. It provides for a personnel bureau under the Cabinet, in charge of civil service promotions (until now this task has been carried out by the office of human resources in each ministry). From now on, either the Prime Minister or the CCS will have to approve recommendations

3 «Sengoku shi kakunaide omomi», *Yomiuri*, January 13th 2010.

from the administrative heads. These reforms will put the final touch to the prohibition, announced in September, of the practice of *amakudari* in public bodies formerly intended for that purpose. In exchange, the right to strike (formerly forbidden in the public administration) will be established along the same lines as in the private sector.

If these bills are passed, they will become law in April 2010.

The party is also being reorganised⁴. Under the Secretary General, Ozawa Ichirō, there are fourteen assistant secretaries, corresponding to the number of ministries. These provide the points of contact between the elected local representatives, the central administrative offices, the local organisations - as well as the local enterprises or professional bodies. This arrangement closely resembles that of the LDP's political affairs research committee which was reformed, as it happens, by Mr. Tanigaki.

The implementation of the reforms is taking a long time: the budget bill was passed after a long delay. The party has tried to make savings by doing away with some of the "major projects" voted through by the previous administrations, and by reducing the compensation and retirement packages for civil servants (through these measures, and by pursuing decentralising goals, the government is counting on a 20% reduction in public expenditure). It has put a limit on some of its original ambitions (use of motorways will only be partially free), but it has not abandoned its main goal, which is unconditional reimbursement for every family with a child to support (amounting to a little under 200 euros per month).

Some reforms are under consideration - particularly the reform of Family law, aimed at enabling married women to retain their surnames or at allowing couples to choose which surname to give to their children - as well as a bill to give permanent residents the right to vote. Mr. Ozawa strongly supports these two measures, but they, and the second one in particular, are meeting a certain resistance from Kamei Shizuka whose organisation, the New People's Party (Kokumin Shintō) belongs to the ruling coalition.

The government will have greater freedom for manoeuvre if it wins the elections to the Upper House in July 2010: the coalition agreement could carry on, but the partners would lose their ability to interfere. The relationship between the LDP and the Kōmeitō, who have been allies in government for ten years, is being closely watched. Mr. Ozawa has recently held talks with Akiya Einosuke, the leader of the Buddhist sect which gives unofficial support to the Kōmeitō. There is also close attention to departures from the LDP: four of its elected members to the Upper House have in fact left the party⁵: Tamura Kōtarō, Hasegawa Tamon, Yamauchi Toshio, and Yoshimura Kōtarō. Some of them might rejoin the Democratic Party. Ozawa has proposed that the party should support them in the coming elections.

4 *Yomiuri*, November 3rd 2010.

5 «Jimin 4nin no ritō hyōmei», *Yomiuri*, December 31st 2010.

2. The proposed reform to the Japanese civil code: should the age of majority be 18? – Isabelle Konuma, Lecturer at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations.

On May 18th 2007, the law on constitutional amendment - commonly known as the law for the constitutional referendum (*Kokumin tōhyōhō*) - was adopted; it is due to come into force on May 18th 2010. Article 3 of this law, which lays down the provisions for a referendum aimed at approving a constitutional revision, states that the age for participating in the constitutional referendum is 18 years, whereas the current voting age⁶, like the age for full civil participation⁷, is 20 years.

The annex to the law in fact lays down that it would be necessary to “take measures in the areas of the electoral law and in the Civil Code, in order to lower the existing ages of majority to 18 years”. For as long as such measures have not been taken, article 3 could not be applied, and the age for voting in the referendum would remain at 20 years old⁸.

In order to act in accordance with this new measure, a group has been set up within the Legislative Consultation Committee (*Hōsei shingikai*) specifically to deal with this issue of the civil majority (*Minpō seinen nenrei bukai*). This group consists of professors of law as well as lawyers, judges, and representatives from education, social services, unions, and consumer associations. It has been meeting regularly since March 2008, with the aim of determining whether, from a legal point of view, the lowering of the age of majority is

⁶ The electoral law of April 15th 1950 (*Kōshoku senkyō hō*) specifies the age of 20 for voting for the chambers of representatives and councillors.

⁷ Article 4 of the civil code. This provision goes back to the 1898 civil code.

⁸ The suspension of Article 3 of the law on the constitutional referendum now seems inevitable (*Tōkyō shimbun*, February 4th 2010).

feasible and, if necessary, of laying down the measures necessary to implement the reform successfully.

This readjustment of the age of majority needs to be seen in the international context created by the implementation of the international Convention on children's rights (1989). Japan signed this convention in 1990 and ratified it in 1994, and it is believed to have had a big influence on domestic legislation, since the Japanese government is committed to making a report on the legal situation to the UN, which will in turn make recommendations. The 1989 Convention states that “the term ‘child’ means any human being under the age of 18, except in those cases where majority is reached earlier in accordance with the relevant legislation”.

So, influenced by the 1989 Convention, and confronted by the obligations established by the law passed in 2007, the group in charge of drawing up the statute on the civil age of majority reported to the Legislative Consultative Committee on July 29th 2009.

Their reported deliberations begin with the issue of defining a child and reaching the age of majority: should the child acquire adult status step by step or should it cross a single common threshold defining the age of majority? In effect there are currently several thresholds: the right to drive a motorcycle is set at 16, the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes is forbidden before the age of 20, the age of eligibility for election to the House of Representatives is set at 25, and to the House of Councillors at 30. Lowering the electoral and civil age of majority might set up an even wider range of thresholds, which led the Committee members to consider the justifications for such diversity. The unification of some of these thresholds would end up by redefining childhood as such⁹. Moreover

⁹ For example, within the same group considerations on the civil majority there are different positions

the present variation is complicated by the overlapping of different terms used to define a child¹⁰, so that there is a need for clarification, if not for uniformity in the terminology.

With these problems as its starting point, the report moves on to different views on lowering the age of civil majority. It then outlines and considers the arguments against the reforms, beginning with the lack of enthusiasm among the population. About 80% are said to be against lowering the age of majority¹¹, but this is not a categorical refusal since 60% said that they were in favour of the reform, provided that it was accompanied by adequate supporting measures. The main reason for this was the feeling that young people of 18 or 19 are not mature enough or sufficiently discerning to be considered adult, while only 23.7% took the opposite view. Whatever the case may be, these replies suggest that the reforms currently under way do not reflect the feelings of Japanese society.

In parallel with this public anxiety, the report of the Japanese Bar Association (*Nihon bengoshi rengôkai*) is also critical¹². In their view, if these “young adults” are to be independent of parental control, that could have terrible consequences for some groups of young people. The majority of youth under 18 attend university¹³ and are financially

(see Mizuno Noriko, «Lowering the age of majority, from the standpoint of civil law» [Minpô no kanten kara mita seinen nenrei hikisage], *Jurisuto*, no. 1392, January 2010, p. 164.

10 As is the case in French, so also in Japanese a child is designated by different terms, such as *jidô* (a child as defined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child), *miseinen* (a minor, in the Civil Code), or *shônen* (boy/girl in the penal system).

11 According to a poll conducted by the Cabinet Office (*Nakikakufu*) in July 2008.

12 Views published on October 21st 2008.

13 In the Spring of 2009, 56.2% of the population under 18 attended university (according to basic statistics provided by the schools), out of the 97.7%

dependent. If the reforms were to be passed, these young people could enter into financial agreements such as purchasing on credit without the necessary discernment, and this deficiency could also affect their voting.

While taking account of this dissent, the report still comes out in favour of changing article 4 of the Civil Code, but in a highly nuanced way. According to its view, it would be better to lower the age of civil majority to 18 provided that the age of political maturity is also lowered to 18. There are three arguments in support of this reasoning: young people of 18 to 19 years of age ought to be considered to be socially and economically independent subjects; their political opinions should also be respected since they represent the future generation; and lastly, this measure would contribute towards developing their interest in politics.

In response to the opposing opinions, the same report emphasises the importance of supporting the reform with measures for the provision of training and protection for these “young adults”. This latter point is a reflection of one of the main tenets to be followed by Japan within its neo-liberal policies, which is to “rebuild a new social politics”, in the expression of Kodama Kazuo, a Professor of Education at Tôkyô University¹⁴.

So the ongoing reforms are a vehicle for the felt need to change the current regime, but in accordance with concerns which do not conform to most people’s attitudes¹⁵.

who attended secondary school in 1997.

14«Seinen nenrei no hikisage o meguru shomondai [the various problems surrounding the lowering of the age of majority]» (round table discussion), *Jusisuto*, no. 1392, January 2010, p. 148.

15 This highlights an essential difference with the lowering of the age of majority from 21 to 18 in France in 1974, which was a response to the strong demand from young people, following the events of

Moreover, this aspect of the matter is fully acknowledged by the chairman of the Legislative Consultative Committee, Ômura Atsushi, Professor of Civil Law at Tôkyô University: “*The question is whether institutions should be ahead of consciousness or vice versa. With regard to the debate which concerns us today, we would like to propose a significant modification of this ‘institution’ [the age of majority] to take account of the developing consciousness in that area*”¹⁶.

May 1968.

16 «Seinen nenrei no hikisage o meguru shomondai [the various problems surrounding the lowering of the age of majority]» (round table discussion), *Jusisuto*, no. 1392, January 2010, p. 161.

POINTS OF NEWS

Yamaguchi Jirô,

«The democratisation of the Japanese Democratic Party» [Minshutô no minshuka wo], *Sekai*, March 2010, pp. 47-53 (translated from the Japanese by Pierre Fauquet, Asia Centre).

Yamaguchi Jirô is a Professor of Public Administration and Political Science at Hokkaido University. Here he discusses the critical situation confronting the Japanese Democratic Party. He analyses the role of its General Secretary Ozawa Ichirô and offers some advice to the party.

Just before the opening of the regular Diet session, several people linked to the General Secretary of the DPJ, Ichirô Ozawa, were arrested. These included a member of the House of Representatives, Tomohiro Ishikawa. This event inevitably refocused the political debate onto the struggle between Ozawa, beset with financial problems, and the law.

This is an awkward situation for those who were relying on a shift in power to bring about changes in both the policy and the inner

workings of the Japanese government.

Yet the most embarrassing aspect of this affair is not the light which it has thrown onto Mr. Ozawa's corruption. Last Spring the matter of the irregular contributions from Nishimatsu Construction had already led to the resignation of the party chairman. But that had not prevented the electorate from handing power to the DPJ.

The problem for the DPJ is that it finds itself caught between Ozawa and the law enforcement agencies. The image of the director of public prosecutions, the arm of the law¹⁷, prosecuting corrupt government officials, detracts from the commonplace image of their purity.... The struggle between Ozawa and the

¹⁷ In the English Common Law sense of the term, as the one who lays a charge, unlike the French *juge d'instruction*, who may charge or exonerate.

public prosecutor is not really a legal tussle but a political one. It is a struggle for influence. Under normal circumstances, Ozawa would be presumed innocent, for as long as there were insufficient grounds for charges to be laid. But in a political fight, the situation is quite different. With the aid of the media spotlight, the very fact that the public prosecutor is opening a file on him on the basis of suspicions alone, doubts about Ozawa are being cast even before the facts can be proven.

In order to avoid this situation, Ozawa ought to have done everything possible to take a lead in the information war with the agencies of the law ... But he is a politician from the older generation. To seek media support by presenting a profile aimed at gaining the understanding of the public, is for him a totally alien idea.

This situation is paralysing the debates in the Diet. If it were to continue, Hatoyama and the DPJ would be in a critical situation.

When the DPJ was in opposition, whenever such a scandal was uncovered, it attacked the LDP which then tried to cover the matter up. But the change in government would be meaningless if, after taking power, the DPJ were to adopt the same practices as the LDP.

It is therefore necessary to set up the possibility of a dialogue, as the opposition wishes. But Ozawa must certainly find such fixing in the Diet detestable. Nevertheless, in order to preserve the legitimacy of the new power structure, the DPJ must show that when there are enquiries which directly affect it, its practices differ from those of the LDP, and it must get the latter to accept that.

Moreover, if the DPJ wishes to see its position in power continue over a longer period, it must sooner or later distance itself from Ozawa. To continue, as it does at the moment and as

it did in opposition, to turn to Ozawa for every decision and political co-ordination of complex issues, is no longer justified. Ozawa has fulfilled his main role, in ending the power of the LDP.

It has often been said that by appointing Ozawa as General Secretary, the DPJ had shown that it was a strong organisation. It was a necessary development to allow it to gain power. But, on the other hand, that change also entailed the jettisoning of qualities which the DPJ needed to retain, if it was to be a reforming standard bearer for Japanese politics.

Consequently, if the party is to get through to a "post-Ozawa" phase, it needs to clearly identify the positive and negative aspects of his legacy. That will enable it to choose what it wishes to inherit from him, and what it must change.

When the DPJ was set up, through the slogan "Citizens come first" it aimed at abandoning the paternalistic authoritarianism which favoured hierarchical relations, in order to replace them with a horizontal network established by individuals. But as Ozawa gave increasing precedence to his own leadership qualities, the principle of a vertically structured organisation grew up. This was not simply limited to his immediate contacts but extended to the party as a whole.

The Japanese have put up with this mode of government for a long time, so unfortunate experiences are unavoidable when power is achieved for the first time. However, the electorate's indulgence has now reached its limit. The Japanese citizenry has had sufficient time to reflect on this unprecedented experience of a changeover. And if there is no sign of changes to come in the measures adopted and in the government's overall conduct, the DPJ administration will be unable to control its drift away from its aims.



Wada Haruki¹, Fujiwara Kiichi², and Kan San-jung³,

“The reality of Japan’s colonisation of Korea” [Chôsen chokuminchi sihai towa nandattonoka?], *Sekai*, January 2010, pp. 144-158 (translated from the Japanese by Guibourg Delamotte, Asia Centre).

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3 Professor in IT and Communications at Tokyo University.

Wada: The centenary [in 2010] of Japan’s annexation of Korea is loaded with significance. At the end of the 19th century, the United States annexed Hawaii and in 1993, a hundred years later, the US Congress passed a resolution signed by President Clinton. Along the lines of these “Clinton apologies”, such anniversaries ought to be occasions for reflection on the past, a retracing of history, and revisiting one’s relations with other countries. Japan ought to follow that example, examine its historical connections with Korea and try to resolve the outstanding issues of contention between the two countries. It so happens that this coincides with the end of the long “reign” of the LDP and that we are experiencing a change in direction. We would like to be able to proclaim that, under the Hatoyama government, a new Japan has achieved full cognisance of the historical record, to mark the occasion of the anniversary of the annexation of Korea. Murayama’s declaration in 1995 has already expressed apologies and remorse over the pain and the damage caused by Japan’s colonisation. A “Hatoyama declaration” expressing the views of the Japanese government over the manner

of the annexation and the real content of the annexation treaty, would carry a great deal of weight.

It is 45 years since the Japanese-Korean treaty was signed but its article 2, stating that the annexation treaty was “out of date”, has given rise to different interpretations in Korea and Japan. This should be remedied by a new declaration. We have reached a stage where at least a minimal rapprochement between the two countries’ collective memories (*rekishi ninshiki*) can be considered. That could provide the opportunity for establishing relations with North Korea, with whom we have had no relations in a hundred years and with whom the question has not been cathartically “purged” (*seisan*) despite the 65 years that have passed since the end of the Japanese presence there.

We are also confronted with the Takeshima problem. That has been a major source of tensions since 2005 when, to mark the centenary of the protectorate treaty, a “Takeshima day” was proclaimed [by the Shimane prefecture]. [The effects of that decision by the Shimane

prefecture are regrettable], but in my view it was wrong to draw a connection between that decision and the annexation of Korea. It is not at all necessary to take that view of events.

As for Japan's willingness to express regrets, that raises the issue of reparations. These have been discussed for some time. Some talk of overall global reparations, and others of "partial" compensation [which would supplement those paid out by the South Korean government, for example]; both should be listened to carefully. But, in concrete terms, the Korean government is beginning to pay compensation and to provide medical support to the forced labourers: the Japanese government, firms, and population at large should begin to ask whether they can go on keeping silent.

Finally, I believe that President Lee Myung-bak has requested a visit to Korea by the Emperor for this centenary. It seems to me absolutely necessary that a suitable symbolic gesture on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the annexation would be that the Emperor or the Prince Imperial should make a visit to the tombs of King Gojong and Queen Minbi [who reigned before the colonisation].

Fujiwara: It cannot be said that it is abnormal for us not to have relations with North Korea: diplomatic relations are giving considerable impetus to an international presence there. If you mean that it is our fault that we do not have relations with North Korea, I disagree. As for responsibility for the colonisation, there can be no doubt about that, but it raises the question of the words used to admit it. For example, in the case of China, Japan was certainly the aggressor, but to have refrained from saying that China does not respect human rights has given rise to a behaviour which prevents an objective approach to history: that too is part of the truth.

After being freed from military rule by the defeat of Japan, the countries of Asia experienced authoritarian governments. Following the painful experience of Japanese subjugation, those countries underwent further oppression by dictatorships. This is not a matter of justifying ourselves by sheltering behind the authoritarian nature of China or North Korea, but we should not let one version prevent another from being expressed. History can be approached as an attempt to set out our objective assessment of relations as historians, or else as a repetition of prefabricated versions. Just as the Korean War can be considered as the founding moment for North Korea, so too, the annexation of Korea can be seen as the occasion for its modernisation.

This is a convenient view for Japan, which allows it to avoid taking responsibility for its colonisation of Korea. But why did that colonisation happen? The Meiji restoration was a nationalist revolution, as Satô Seizaburô has written, and it had a significant outcome, the creation of the Japanese nation-state. Carol Gluck has shown how it was necessary to create and disseminate the symbols of a people, just as happened in Italy or Germany at the same time.

While constructing this fiction of the Nation-State, Japan also became an Empire. The difference between State and Empire is that the latter is made up of different peoples. By re-forging itself as a Nation-State, Japan re-connected with its ethnic identity. This meant that the Koreans, who had been made subjects of the second zone of the Empire, became foreigners again. We must follow this process through: we committed a twofold "violation" of the Koreans.

Wada: The Japanese saw the end of the war as the end of militarism and tyranny; and the colonial issue simply disappeared from their reflections on the war. The proof of this is that

the only work published in *Sekai* dealing with that matter was an article by Suzuki Takeo entitled "Reflections on the policy for the assimilation of Korea" (in May 1946).

Kan: Japan and its colonies were not two completely separate entities: when the colonies were transformed in advance of the transformation in Japan, it was not only tyranny which disappeared with the colonies but also the complex web of interdependent connections which had grown up... That was the case with all empires, but especially in the case of Japan, for reasons which go back to the geopolitical and historical context of Northeast Asia in the late 19th century. Whereas Europe created its empires by expanding its territory externally, Japan, as a latecomer to colonisation, could only turn to the region which in geopolitical, historical, or ethnic terms was near to it. Manchuria was intended to protect Korea, which in turn was to protect Japan. As Yanaiharu Tadao has shown, Japan was all the more fiercely imperialist because it became so belatedly. When, in order to establish diplomatic relations with Korea, Japan under the Meiji rule called its sovereign the Emperor, that meant that it was placing itself at the centre of the world order in accordance with the Chinese conception which was predominant in the whole area, although it had until then been peripheral in relation to China. Korea, the "little China" under the Qing Empire, could not accept that view. By becoming an empire, Japan brought the Westphalian order of nation-states into Asia.

Fujivara: Certainly, when Japan embarked upon colonisation, the different territories were practically separate entities. But Japan was not the only latecomer; the United States annexed Hawaii in the late 19th century. So what makes Japanese colonialism different from the others? Every country made colonisation a part of national policy. But in Japan colonisation became increasingly associated with military policy and was considered to be related to

national defence. In the same way, the fact that the Philippines provided a re-provisioning harbour to the United States played a major role in their military strategy. But the United States, which had thrown off the colonial yoke itself, always harboured some doubts over the legitimacy of possessing colonies, while free trade seemed to be just as beneficial to the country. That is where Japan differed from the other countries. While it is true that Ishibashi Tanzan and Miura Tetsutarô said that free trade would benefit the Japanese economy, and that colonialism and military aggression against China would lead to the ruin of Japan, they were in a minority. Pan-nationalism had reared its head. The endlessly repeated argument then was that colonisation would favour both the emancipation of the populations of Asia and the pursuit of Japan's geopolitical interests. The question which this avoided was the following: was the intention to create a "Greater Japan" or a multi-ethnic empire? Actually, some people were quick to ask whether an empire could be created by completely ignoring the rights of the Koreans, but they remained a minority, and the idea of an empire in the service of nationalism and nation-building, was victorious.



Takahashi Tetsuya¹,

“Discussing Japan’s wartime responsibility in 2010” [2010nen no sengo sekininron], *Sekai*, January 2010, pp. 181-192 (translated from the Japanese by Guibourg Delamotte, Asia Centre).

¹ A philosopher and Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies, Tokyo University. His best known book is *Rekishi, shūseishugi* (History, Revisionism), Iwanami shoten, Tōkyō, 2001.

In this interview, the philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya tells of his expectations with regard to the Minshutō’s approach to History.

Starting in the early 1990s, Japan’s colonial aggression in Asia has become a matter of public debate: associations have been formed to press claims, and a large number of hearings have been held. What are his views in 2010 of the events of the last decade?

In the early 1990s, as the Cold War was coming to an end, there was a resurgence of the debate over Japan’s wartime responsibilities. The victims have issued demands for compensation and apologies. With the LDP removed from power, the Hosokawa government clearly stated that the war carried out by Japan was a war of aggression. The socialist Prime Minister Murayama, at the head of a Socialist-LDP coalition when the LDP chairmanship was held by Kōno Yōhei from the liberal wing of the party, worked towards a resolution of the question of compensation. What is the position today? The victims have still not received compensation. At a time when

the political situation is being transformed, this question must become a central issue. Japan has failed to respond to the victims who raised the matter of its responsibility. The anti-Japanese demonstrations in China in 2005 clearly reveal this failure.

Japan should have accepted responsibility for the aggression and colonisation in 1945. Japan’s responsibility was established by the outcome of the war crimes trials, but these left gaping loopholes: the Emperor’s responsibility could not be discussed, nor could the organised sexual violence against women... That was the moment when these issues should have been pursued; but the Cold War quickly put an end to any such possibilities.

The fact that neither South Korea nor the Democratic Republic of Korea were invited to the San Francisco conference, and that since 1965 there have only been relations with one of these two countries, makes it difficult to discuss the annexation, which is already a complicated enough matter.

We can now say that the situation in the early 1990s offered a long-awaited opportunity. Japan, which had dominated a multitude of peoples, was able to avoid its historical responsibility for fifty years, in flagrant contradiction with the spirit of its peaceful constitution. That post-war period had witnessed the confrontation between the supporters of partial reparations and the opponents of any reparations at all, before there was any chance to listen to the voices of the victims. Of course, those voices were very critical of Japan, but they had another discernable message too: those people wanted Japan to be able, during their lifetime, to accept responsibility for its wrongdoing. In the early 1990s, many Japanese wanted the matter of compensations to be taken forward and they took a lot of trouble to make it happen.

But the first mistake occurred in June 1995, which was a significant year because the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war was being celebrated. The setback was in fact caused by the Diet's adoption of the "Resolution to ensure that history should serve as a warning and a reiteration of our peaceful intent" (*Rekisho wo kyōjun ni heiwa he no ketsui wo aratani suru ketsugi*). At the initiative of Prime Minister Murayama and the Chairwoman of the Socialist Party, Doi Takako, a resolution was drawn up, which would establish Japan's responsibility for the colonisation and the war, and would express its regrets and remorse. But, in the face of opposition from the LDP, which had a majority of the seats, the compromise versions were carried. And, when it came to the vote, not only the conservatives who considered the resolution pointless, but also a number of the socialists, refrained from voting. So the passage of the bill to the Upper House was blocked.

At the same time, in June 1995, the government was proposing a fund for the Peace in Asia women, which was launched the following year, intended for the former "comfort women".

On that occasion too, strong opposition from the LDP to both the project and the principal of individual compensation, in the Diet and in the executive, led to compromises being made. The project fell far short of expectations.

Instead of a resolution with hardly any content left, Murayama made a statement which governments have repeated since. That was a meagre outcome. In the end, despite the opportune moment, there was nothing which might leave a positive impression on Asia and the rest of the world.

That is when the revisionist debate appeared. Trends like the research group for a liberal version of History, or the association for writing new school textbooks etc. were born out of a reaction against the demands for war reparations, in order to stifle them. The LDP played a leading role. After Hosakawa's acknowledgement that the war had been a war of aggression, the LDP set up a Committee for Reflecting on History (*rekishi kentō iinkai*), aimed at promoting the idea that the conflict had been a war of legitimate self-defence conducted for the liberation of Asia. The year 1995 saw the publication of *Daitōa sensō no sōkatsu* (An overview of the "great Asian war").

In my opinion a great change in public opinion occurred in the late 1990s: it became radicalised and far less willing to accept the payment of any compensation. Koizumi rode this wave of opinion through his visits to the Yasukuni shrine. His populist policy - in the face of protests from China and South Korea, he posed as an unshakeable statesman and rose in the opinion polls - strengthened the hand of those opposed to raising the issue of Japan's wartime responsibility. Koizumi's visit to North Korea on September 17th 2002, aimed at normalising relations between the two countries, further strengthened this tendency by opening the file on the kidnapped

people, whose outcome was uncertain. Since then, North Korea has been the target of a lot of media bashing aimed at presenting it as an enemy, and this has shifted public opinion to the right. The associations demanding compensation have fallen silent. The number of legal hearings has increased, but the plaintiffs' claims are nearly always turned down.

Is it possible that with the current political change there may be a second chance to say and do the right things, to allow the building of relations based on trust?

When Murayama made his declaration, the LDP was the dominant party in both chambers. Now it is in the minority. But in the Minshutō there is a wing further to the right than the liberals in the LDP. Nonetheless, Hatoyama has told Lee Myung-bak that “this government has the courage to face up to the historical record” and on November 15th 2009, at a conference on Asian politics (at the APEC summit) he affirmed that “sixty years after Japan caused countless losses and suffering (*tadai no songai to kunō*) to many countries, and particularly to the peoples of Asia, we are still not certain that a true reconciliation has taken place”. Reminding his listeners of the Franco-German reconciliation and the beginnings of European unity, Hatoyama called for the creation of an East Asian community: there are grounds for believing that he is aware that there can be no “fraternity” (*yūai*) between the peoples of Asia without Japan's recognition of its historical responsibility for its past colonialism and aggression.

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