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CLOSE UP ON THE NEWS

1. Social management of risk in Japan.
– *Raphaël Languillon-Aussel, University of Lyon.*

2. Tōhoku and Sanriku: A short geography of a silent region
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“The imminence of a period of strong seismic activity: a national peril hitherto not encountered – from technological measures to prevent disasters to a radical reform of the country’s policies and of the economic and social system” – Speech given by Ishibashi Katsuhiko at a public hearing of the House of Representatives Budget Committee – 162nd session of the Diet, 23rd February 2005. (*French translation by Amélie Corbel*).

Yamazaki Shû, “Politics on the wane: shifts in government and improvements in government policies”, *Sekai*, February 2011, p. 93-100. (*French translation by Yann Favennec*).



FOREWORD

On Wednesday 16 March 2011, Emperor Akihito's solemn and exceptionally rare address to the Japanese people, made through a television appearance of several minutes duration, symbolically reinforced the speech that Kan Naoto had given to the Diet. It confirmed a feeling shared by the international community: that the series of natural and technological disasters arising from the Great Tōhoku Earthquake have caused the archipelago to experience its most serious crisis since the end of the Second World War.

Had it not been for the Fukushima disaster – now classified by the Japanese government itself at the highest level on the international scale (INES) for nuclear incidents – the events related to the earthquake in Tōhoku, a region much less strategically important for the Japanese economy than Kobe, would quickly have been relegated to second position by the foreign media. Furthermore, little comment was made by the world's media about the extraordinary resistance of Tōkyō's buildings to the hundreds of aftershocks of a magnitude greater than 6.5, and more generally about the

effectiveness of the protection and warning systems. However, the Fukushima nuclear disaster has an environmental dimension that goes far beyond the borders of the country of Japan: how can an analysis of the events in Japan be used to develop a global model to confront future disasters, when the features of Japan's natural environment and its political and administrative systems are so particular to that country?

For this reason, the editorial team for Japan Analysis Number 22 have felt it important to focus the analyses on the effects of the 11 March earthquake that take the tack of an overall approach to risk and risk management for the Japanese economy and society. Our special insight repositions the effects of the disaster within the Japanese context, first by an outline of the way the Sanriku coast is organised, then through an analysis of seismic risk management in Japan by Raphaël Languillon. Amélie Corbel's translation of a prophetic speech given in 2005 by Professor Ishibashi Katsu resituates the question of nuclear risk in Japan within

an ecosystem seen in a very long time frame.

The way in which the disaster has been managed by the political powers has become a core issue of public debate in Japan. Yann Favennec concludes with an outline of the news commentator Yamazaki Shû's comments on the "divided Diet" and the internal functioning of the Minshûto, the Democratic Party. His piece illustrates the phenomena of instability and irresponsibility inherent in the "bipolar" political system: he points the finger at the weakness of successive policies in dealing with bureaucratic resistance, as well as the lack of any fundamental political reform by the Party, even with a man as bold as Kan Naoto.

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CLOSE UP ON THE NEWS

1. Social management of risk in Japan. - Raphaël Languillon-Aussel, University of Lyon.

“Risk is the depiction of disaster. Disaster is the materialisation of the risk.”¹

Risk is a category conceptualised recently in the West, and which came to real prominence in the 1990s, first in parallel, and later in symbiosis with the themes of sustainable development. In geography, a risk is the product of a hazard (a phenomenon that can be of natural or anthropogenic origin) and of vulnerability. The vulnerability is always social, and results from spatial organisation, population structure (level of wealth, education, age, sex, etc.) and the mechanisms in place

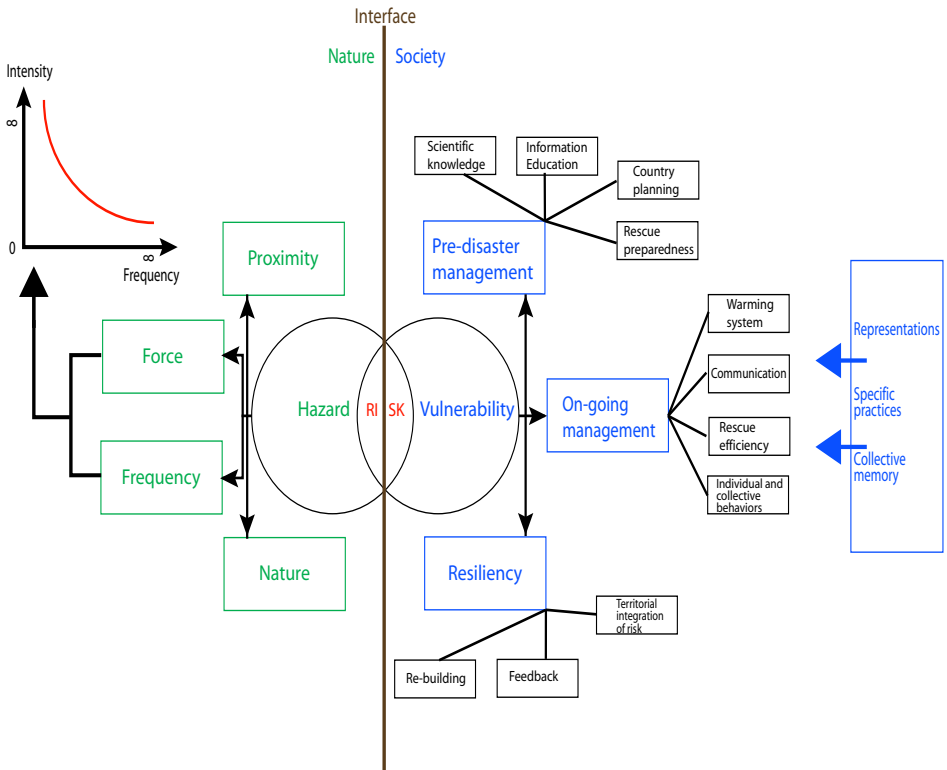
1 Much of what follows in this article draws on the research works of Marie Augendre, *Vivre avec le volcan, une géographie du risque volcanique au Japon* [*Living with the volcano, the geography of volcanic risk in Japan*], a doctoral thesis submitted in November 2008. For greater detail, we recommend the reading of this thesis. This quotation [translated into English] is taken from page 32.

for the monitoring, observation, prediction and anticipation of hazards, as well as the means of protection and the adjustments that are put in place. Such vulnerability derives from all the factors that promote the resulting damage when the hazard materialises. The risk is therefore always social, including when the hazard has natural origins. The most complete definition is undoubtedly that of Coanus: “*The term ‘risk’ refers to a danger that is only potential or virtual, that has no sense other than in relation to the way it is conceived by those who believe themselves to be confronted with it. Risk in itself therefore does not exist; it exists only in relation to a society that fears it (mental perceptions) and deals with it (through specific practices).*”²

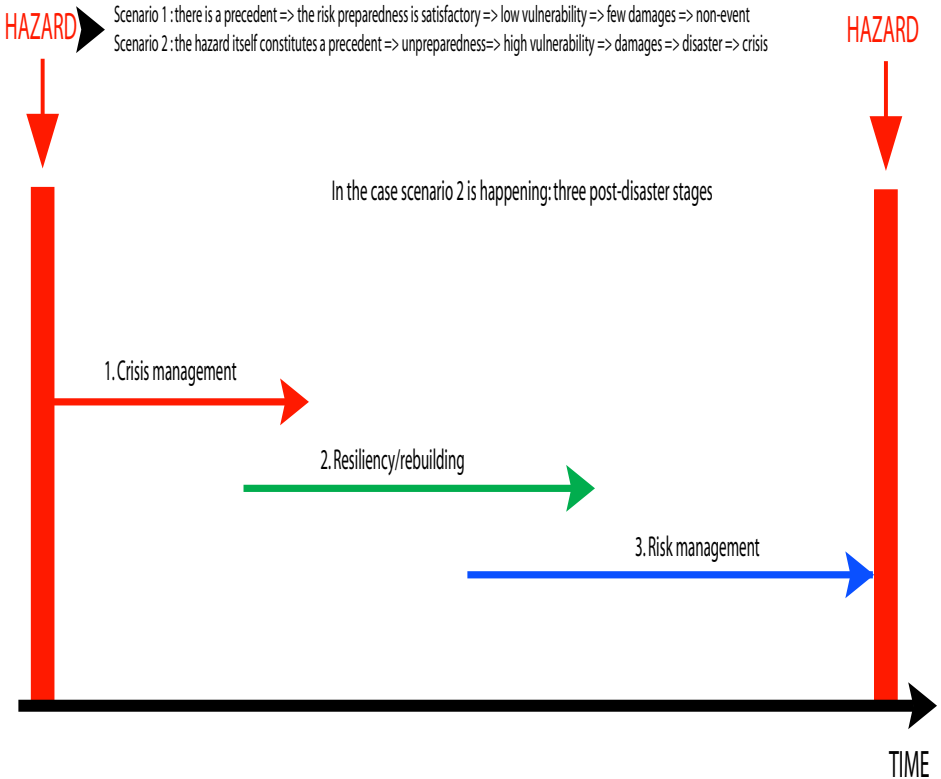
The two diagrams below show the complex structuring of risk in a given area and society, and distinguish the different phases of risk

2 Thierry Coanus (1992) “La thématique contemporaine du risque : entre demande sociale et recherche scientifique” [The contemporary theme of risk: between social demand and scientific research] in *Le risque en montagne. Les réalités et les images*, Éditions du CTHS, Paris, p. 13-19. This quotation [translated into English] is taken from page 15.

awareness, from crisis management following a disaster (a hazard causing considerable damage, as in the current instance of the Sanriku coast), to resilience (reconstruction of the area affected) and risk management (feedback to prepare for and anticipate the next hazard, and to avoid the disaster).



Document 1: Systemic analysis of risk in geography.
 Raphaël Languillon-Aussel. April 2011



Document 2: Crisis management and risk management, two clearly distinct temporalities.
 Raphaël Languillon-Aussel. April 2011

How do you say “risk” in Japan?

There is no term in the Japanese language equivalent to the word “risk”, which could seem paradoxical given the incredible diversity of natural hazards (to single out only those) that affect Japan: among the more spectacular manifestations are earthquakes (20 % of the world’s earthquakes of a magnitude higher than 6 occur in Japan, due to the convergence of two oceanic and two continental plates), tsunamis, volcanism (10% of the world’s active volcanoes are found in Japan, yet the country

accounts for only 1/400 of the planet’s land area), typhoons, floods, landslides, cold spells, periods of drought, and heatwaves.

The term used most frequently in Japan is *saigai*, which means disaster (*sai*: calamity, and *gai*: damage). More surprisingly, the term *yonaoshi*, “correction of the world”, suggests the idea of a subversive and creative disaster, somewhat in the purificatory vein of the words used by the Governor of Tōkyō, Ishihara Shintarō, speaking of the purifying virtue of

the Sanriku tsunami. The Japanisation of the term *risk* exists in the word *risuku*, and was coined in the years 1990-2000, but relates only to climatic hazards (which cannot include a tsunami of telluric origin caused by an earthquake deep under the sea). This gives rise to the hypothesis not that the risk disappears, but that the idea of risk is “absorbed” in the country, and becomes an integral part of it. Risk thus pervades the country of Japan without being clearly put into words in the Japanese culture, which retains only the notion of disaster.

***Doken kokka* and risk in Japan: the creative danger**

The developments aimed at lessening the damage from a natural phenomenon, and therefore at reducing a country’s vulnerability, link directly back to risk management, without exhausting all its complexity. Amongst such developments are two main types of construction: the dykes and the *sabô* works.

The *sabô* works (-*bô* from *bôσαι*, “disaster prevention” and *sa-*, the Chinese reading of *sun*a, sand/sediment) are aimed at reducing tidal and sediment flows, or at diverting them away from populated areas. For example, the concreted banks of Japan’s rivers are types of *sabô* works, as they enable a faster flow of the sediments carried by the watercourses towards the sea or to the retention basins, while stabilising the banks themselves. There are also many *sabô* works on the sides of volcanoes, to stabilise the slopes and, in particular, to carry away the lahars, the deadly torrents of mud and ash.

The purpose of the dykes is to hold back a flow or to curb its momentum. This is certainly the case with the breakwater barriers built downstream of the ports or coastal facilities, which are designed to break both the swell and the tsunamis. There is a whole series of

them, beginning off the coast and heading further inland, like rows of ramparts, offshore, at the entry to the port, along the beaches, then in the towns, and stretching as far as the first high ground. This massive concretisation has been one of the flagship policies of Japan to combat natural hazards, to the extent that Japan has been nicknamed the Construction State, *Doken kokka*. The Sanriku coastline has also come under this concretisation, with the construction of giant dykes and lock gates alongside some roads, sometimes being as high as 10 or even 15 metres or more. Unfortunately, these expensive constructions have not always been enough to protect the people and property, despite the heights reached in the 1896 and 1933 tsunamis having been taken into account in their construction.

The concretisation of Japan and the areas at risk, through the increasing number of *sabô* constructed by the Construction State, is not just a product of the desire for protection against natural hazards. The *Doken Kokka* and the local authorities were pursuing a further objective, which explains the success of the concrete protection works. On the one hand, with the funding of these works, the central government was guaranteeing a source of employment and support for building and civil engineering projects and construction in remote rural areas. On the other hand, this support for employment was contingent on return support for the party in power, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, or *Jimintô*, founded in 1955 and in power continuously until 2009).

Japan thus has 580 000 building and civil engineering companies, employing more than 6 million workers (10% of the working population of Japan in 2001) and contributing 8% of Japan’s GDP (as against 3.5 % for a country such as Switzerland)³. The building

3 Marie Augendre has shown that in some of the more remote islands (*ritô*), building and civil engineering projects could provide up to 15% of employment, as

and civil engineering projects, boosted by the objective of protection from natural hazards, especially in rural areas, provide a certain level of social assistance and a certain amount of redistribution of the benefits of growth to the more disadvantaged areas, all within the context of the vote-catching practices adopted by the LDP. Here, risk is a source of employment, a creator of wealth, enabling the latent social crisis in the fringe areas where there is an increasing rate of depopulation (*kaso*) to be mitigated, and, to a certain extent, keeping the LDP in power. Risk is thus paradoxically a source of wealth and power in Japan.

Keeping the memory alive: territory, heritage and risk in Japan

One of the components of risk management is prevention, that is, the monitoring and study of hazards. In Japan, the *Kishôchô* carries the responsibility for these tasks. The *Kishôchô* is an organisation under the authority of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT), which originally focused on meteorological phenomena (*kishô*, or phenomena, *-shô*, from *ki*- cosmic energy) but which has extended its mandate to include natural hazards in general.⁴

in Aogashima, an island with two small supermarkets but three building and civil engineering companies, for a population of only 200. See Marie Augendre, *Vivre avec le volcan, une géographie du risque volcanique au Japon [Living with the volcano, a geography of volcanic risk in Japan]*, doctoral thesis submitted in November 2008.

4 It was in 1884 that the *Kishôchô* began seismic and vulcanological monitoring in addition to its initial area of competence in climatology. This extension of its mandate is made possible by the multiple meanings of the term *ki* in Japanese. While its role is primarily scientific, the *kishôchô* can become a crisis headquarters during disasters, by centralising information and the management of rescue operations.

Risk prevention is, in addition, largely based on the repetition and experience of hazards, according to the acknowledged perception that a natural disaster occurs when the previous ones have been forgotten. Whence the concern that disasters be commemorated in order to keep the collective memory alive. In this sense, and in this sense only, it could be noted that the ageing of the population observed in most of the regions of Japan is an asset, in that it enables better transmission of the memory of disasters, and thus plays a role in risk prevention. This is a role, however, that is difficult to quantify.

Within this perspective of commemoration, the damage caused by some disasters has thus been incorporated into the collective heritage of Japan, and engraved on the countryside, for example, in the numerous signs bearing mention of the water levels reached during the 1896 and 1933 tsunamis in the villages of the Sanriku coast. There have also been real attempts to preserve the heritage of these disaster areas, even by constructing tourist developments around them, as Marie Augendre showed with the municipality of Sôbetsu in Hokkaido, which was partially destroyed by a series of eruptions of Mount Usu in 1977 and 1978, but which has now been transformed into a geopark, where the devastation has been put behind glass, like in Pompeii, and can be visited (and so you can see a suburb of houses covered by a lava flow, a hospital leaning sideways as a result of the buckling of the earth's surface after the lava rose in the volcano's chimney, or a road that has risen 70 metres as a result of the same surface deformation).

From vulnerability to coexistence: is there a category of risk in Japan?

The western notion of risk views natural hazards from a negative perspective. The Japanese view is very different. The proximity of risk is experienced not only in terms of the danger or the threat, but also in terms of the benefit. Vulcanism thus means that hot springs (*onsen*), or sulphur, can be exploited. The tsunami coast is also a coast with substantial fish populations and justifies the extent of human settlement there. The typhoons and heavy rains that cause the floods also enable the final ripening of the rice, and equip Japan with an essential resource, water, which makes irrigation and also hydro-electricity possible. With vulnerability (*zejakusei*), resulting from the proximity of risk, Japan therefore associates the notion of benefit (*megumi*), which makes it possible to live despite the risk, or indeed sometimes because of the risk.

Japan calls this ambivalence coexistence (*kyōson*) or symbiosis (*kyōsei*). In Japan, risks are therefore not perceived only in terms of death, but coexistence that draws a link between the potential disaster and its beneficial role. It is this coexistence that makes the proximity to risk socially acceptable, and justifies human settlement in areas that the West would regard as uninhabitable, precisely including the Sanriku coast. This same coexistence will justify the reconstruction of the towns of the Sanriku coast that have been destroyed for the third time since 1896. And coexistence is not just an idle word: since 1996, a year after the Great Kobe Earthquake, it has had its own line in the budget of the Ministry of the Environment (*kankyōshō*).

2. Tōhoku and Sanriku: A short geography of a silent region.

- **Raphaël Languillon-Aussel, University of Lyon.**

The silence of Tōhoku

It could be said that Tōhoku is a silent region on a number of levels.⁵ It is silent by its discretion, hidden behind Tōkyō's shadow, up in the cold and snowy north of Honshū. It was silent too during the several days following the disaster of 11 March 2011, when people could no longer (or no longer dared to) reach the disaster areas, and Tōkyō's inhabitants and reporters were monopolising, if not to say seizing, the attention and comments of the media, to Tōhoku's detriment. The Tōhoku region is silent also by nature, that Japanese nature of calm dignity in the face of adversity, which is not just a cliché. Silent, finally by obligation, the obligation of contemplation following the ordeals and the funeral processions, which will mark the Tōhoku region for a much longer time than the official minutes of silence during the national commemorations. It is thus for the purpose of lifting the veil on a little known region that this article sets out to give a brief geography of the north of Honshū, with the primary concern of responding to the question that many asked themselves after 11 March: are the Japanese mad to live on a coast chronically devastated by tsunamis and earthquakes? The answer is, evidently not. Yet, we still need to understand their motivations, their history, and of course their relations

5 On this subject, though along different lines, see Pelletier Ph. "Le Japon quatre fois frappé" [Japan struck four times], *EchoGéo*, published on line on 31 March 2011 at <http://co7.univ-lyon2.fr/sw?type=util&ISKey=12f720fd2fb3ca14f2c&nextpage=%2Fnuui%2Fvirtualoffice.jsp#tool=mail&folderoid=119102672>.

with these regions over the long term.

Tōhoku, historically a southern, inland region

Tōhoku is a region located on Honshū, the main island of Japan, and more precisely in the north of the island, between the region of Tōkyō (Kantō) and the island of Hokkaido. While Tōhoku now comprises six prefectures (Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Akita, Yamagata and Fukushima), in the Edo period there were only two provinces: Mutsu in the east, and Dewa in the west. The first kanji of the name of the two provinces gave Tōhoku its former name, Ōu. Historically, there was thus an east-west divide of Tōhoku.

This north-south structure was facilitated by the topography of the Tōhoku region, which comprises chains of mountains alternating with rift basins (graben) from north to south. The Tōhoku region is cut down the middle by the Ōu mountain chain, divided in two again in the east by the Kitakami and Abukuma highlands and in the west by the Dewa mountain chain. These north-south mountain axes are separated by basins (Yokote, Kitakami, Yamagata and Fukushima) where the population and most of the activity are concentrated. Around the edges, along the coast, are a few rare coastal plains. Two are located in the east, including the great Sendai Plain, and three in the west (the Shōnai, Akita and Tsugaru Plains).

Tōhoku is thus a distinctly compartmentalised region, organised along north-south bands, without any particular coherence other than being located to the north of Tōkyō, its main unifying factor. Tōkyō furthermore plays a powerful structuring role. The second particularity of this geography is that the Tōhoku region is focused inwards on its inland areas and basins, much more so

than on its coastline. The Sanriku coast, the eastern coast, which bore the brunt of the 11 March tsunami, is a rocky coast with many rias, wedged between the Pacific Ocean and the Kitakami Mountains. It is a coast that has long lagged behind the rest of the country, with development occurring only relatively recently (since the Meiji period and particularly since the urban explosion of Tôkyô).

The Sanriku region's ambivalence: between risks and benefits

On the 11th of March, many inaccuracies circulated. Tôkyô had not been destroyed. Sendai (one of the most populated of the urban agglomerations in Japan with more than a million people, and the same size as Marseille) had not been affected either... These inaccuracies could have been avoided with some basic knowledge of the region. It was the eastern coast of the Tôhoku region that was destroyed by the wave, in other words the Sanriku coast in the broader sense, the Sendai coast as far as Hachinohe, even though, strictly speaking, the Sanriku coast covers only the coast of the Iwate prefecture, that pimple on Honshû poking out into the Pacific.

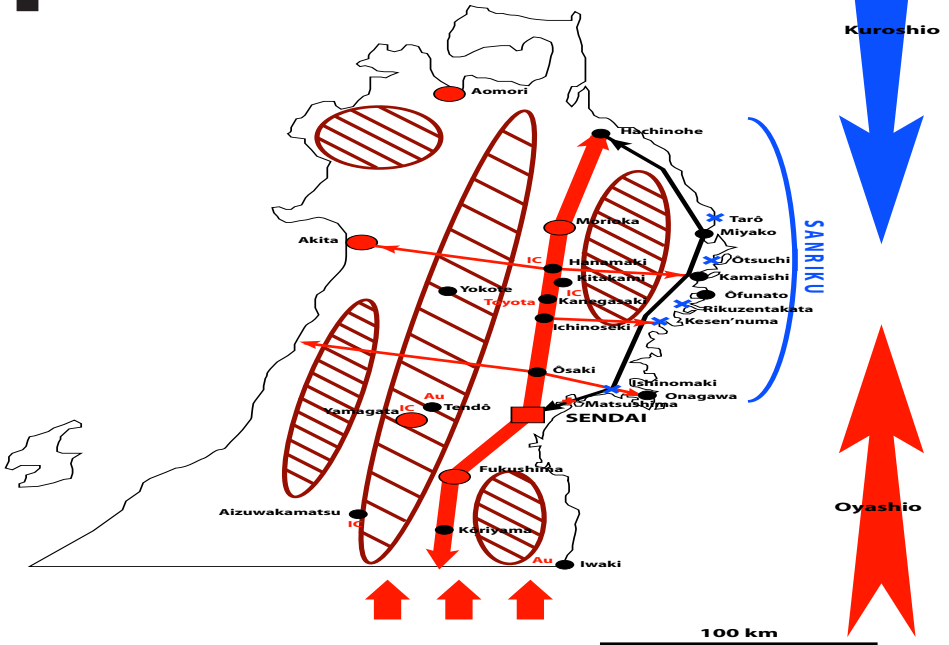
The coast is divided into two parts. The southern part opens onto the Sendai coastal plain, over which the water rushed and penetrated quite far inland. Still, as Sendai is a declining agglomeration, separated from the sea by a strip of agricultural land several kilometres wide, the city itself was not affected, apart from the recent housing estates at Arahama and Arada, which were completely destroyed as they were clearly built in areas at risk where construction should never have been allowed to occur. The same applies to the airport. The northern part of the Sanriku coast is quite

different, however. It is a rocky coast with rias (valleys that were submerged during the last incursion of the sea following the end of the Ice Age), in which the towns were situated at the innermost point of the bay, right up against the relief of the Kitakami Mountains. While the wave penetrated less far, it swept away most of the towns and villages there, before coming to a halt at the foot of the mountains. This is the reason for the extent of the disaster experienced by towns such as Minamisanriku, Kesenuma, Rikuzentakata or Ôtsuchi (going from south to north).

The Sanriku coast is regularly affected by a major tsunami, about once every 60 years.⁶ In the modern era, the 2011 disaster is the region's third major tsunami. An earthquake of magnitude 7.2 resulted in a devastating tsunami of 38 metres on 15 June 1896, with 22 000 people declared dead or missing on the day of the celebrations for the victorious soldiers returning from the first Sino-Japanese War. On 2 March 1933, another earthquake of a magnitude of 8.4, the epicentre of which was located 300 km to the east of the city of Kamaishi, caused a 28 metre wave, with 3 000 people declared dead or missing, particularly in the town of Tarô (Iwate Prefecture, north of Miyako) where 40% of the population perished, and where more than 95% of buildings were destroyed.






The Sanriku, a coast divided in two, difficult to access, and exposed to recurrent tsunamis, is yet tirelessly resettled and rebuilt, while the geographic data make it a region to be avoided. The Sanriku coast lives on this ambivalence: development borrowed against permanent risk.

6 On the subject of the Japanese earthquakes see: Gregory K. Clancey (2006) *Earthquake Nation: the Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity, 1868-1930*, University of California Press, 331 p.







Caption:





A North-South oriented relief

-  Secondary mountain range (Kitakami, Abukuma, Dewa)
-  Central mountain range (Ou)
-  Sanriku coast
-  Cold ocean current (Kuroshio)
-  Hot ocean current (Oyashio)





Tōhoku's central economic axis

-  The agglomeration of Sendai: the economic center
-  The other regional capitals of Tōhoku's prefectures
-  Other important cities and/or cities mentioned in this article
-  The main axis: highway and Shinkansen

Investments from Japan's megalopolitan core

-  Extent of the Japanese Megalopolis' dynamics
-  IC Integrated circuit factories
-  Au Automobile factories
-  Toyota Toyota Lexus assembling factory

Sanriku coast: a well-integrated periphery hit by the tsunami

-  Harbour destroyed (by over one half)
-  Matsushima and the Mutsu Bay
-  The Sanriku coastal axis
-  East-West main crossroads

Structural axes and the organisation of the Tōhoku region and the Sanriku coast: a recent development in the expansion of the Japanese megalopolis.

There are several reasons why the Sanriku coast is an attractive region despite the risks. The main one is that it lies close to an area with high fish stocks, just to the east of the Sanriku coast, which has made possible the development of a fishing industry. This well-stocked zone is a result of the meeting of a warm current from the south (the Kuroshio Current) and a cold current from the north (the Oyashio Current). The meeting of the two currents, in an area rich in nutrients, promotes the growth of fish such as sardines and a local species, the *hatahata*.

The fisheries resource has enabled the development of important fishing ports on the Sanriku coast, in particular Ishinomaki (160 000 tonnes in 2005, the 3rd largest Japanese port), Hachinohe (150 000 tonnes, the 4th largest port), Kesenuma (120 000 tonnes, the 5th largest port), and Miyako, Ôfunato and Onagawa (each with 50 000 tonnes), making the Sanriku coast the second largest fishing region in Japan after Hokkaido, with almost 20% of Japan's catch. It was these ports that were the hardest hit by the giant wave. In addition to fishing, there is also aquaculture and shellfish culture, with the oysters of Kesenuma and Matsushima, the scallops of Mutsu Bay (near Sendai), and seaweed as well.

So, the development of the Sanriku coast has been derived from the sea and from the fisheries resource resulting from the meeting of a warm and a cold current. First with Tôkyô's, then Sendai's urban explosion, and their food needs, the Sanriku fishery experienced a boom, curbed recently by overfishing and the exhaustion of resources. Thanks to this boom, Sanriku was linked to the Tôhoku region's central transport routes, benefiting from the construction of lateral links from the main cities along the central highway to the main coastal ports. In 1984, a rail line was also constructed along the Sanriku coast. This new link runs

from Sendai to Hachinohe, thus creating a limited alternative to the central route that passes through the Kitakami basin. Given this transport configuration, care should be taken not to overestimate the problems of accessibility related to the tsunami, because the Sanriku coastal route is not the critical route for the Tôhoku region, and because all the towns along the Sanriku coast can be reached from the main central route via the west-east lateral links that have recently been constructed. Access to the destroyed areas thus constitutes more of a local problem. In any event, it is not a regional problem. Tôhoku is therefore not a region paralysed by the damage to its transport links.

Since the Meiji period, the Sanriku coast has reconciled a benefit (fishing) with a danger (tsunamis). As the benefit outweighed the danger, the Sanriku coast has always been rebuilt each time it has been destroyed. For several decades now, in addition to fishing, an additional new activity has been cultivated: tourism, which has spread along the Sanriku coast for two reasons. The Sanriku coast boasts very beautiful landscapes, including one of the three most famous views in Japan (*nihon sankei*): the Matsushima archipelago, near Sendai. The Sanriku coast also has the easternmost lookout over the sea in Honshû (*Todo-ga-saki*), attracting flocks of admirers of the rising sun.

Tôhoku and Sanriku: a diverse dynamism

So we see that the Sanriku coast is on the fringes of the Tôhoku region, which itself is on the fringes of Honshû. Indeed, the Tôhoku region contains only 8% of Japan's population on about 18% of its soil (half that of another region of similar size in Honshû, Chûbu, the region of Nagoya). The Sanriku coast is thus doubly a periphery, the fringe of a fringe.

Tōhoku's main structural transport route runs though the inland. It begins at Tōkyō, heads north to Kōriyama and Fukushima, heads on to Sendai, then dives headlong into the Kitakami basin, passing through the main cities of Ōsaki, Ichinoseki, Hanamaki and Morioka, ultimately reaching the north coast at Hachinohe. Each of these cities along the route is located at a crossroads between the south-north route and a west-east lateral link running to the Sanriku coast, the southern part of which is particularly well served.

The central road and rail route experienced a period of significant growth in the 1970s with the construction of the Shinkansen line (the high speed Japanese train), the freeway (Tōhoku Expressway) and many domestic airports in addition to the Sendai airport. This opening up of the north of Honshū led to the development of Kōriyama, Sendai and Morioka. The cities along the central transport route then experienced the arrival of industrial investment from Tōkyō and the Kantō region during the 1980s and 1990s. This investment was the product of a triple initiative. The first initiative is attributable to the local authorities who were attempting to curb the agricultural problems of the 1970s by stimulating industrial development in order to promote the economic diversification of the region. The second initiative is attributable to the central government, who undertook the opening up the north of the island. Finally, the third initiative is attributable to the economic players in the Tōkyō region taking advantage of new infrastructure, local policies and the increase in land prices in Tōkyō, caused by the speculative bubble, to establish factories in the Tōhoku region. Two sectors were involved: integrated circuits (Kitakami, Hanamaki, Yamagata, Yonezawa, Aizuwakamatsu) and the motor vehicle industry (Iwaki, Tendō, and particularly Kanegasaki with Toyota's establishment of the Lexus assembly plant in 1993).

Therein lie the origins of the difficulties that the industrial groups in these two sectors are currently experiencing, as a result of energy restrictions (and not problems of accessibility).

The two prefectures that benefited in particular from this resurgence in the dynamism of Tōkyō and the northern megalopolis were the two southernmost prefectures: Fukushima and Miyagi (the prefecture where Sendai is located). The seasonal labour force of the Tōhoku region, who in winter went to work on the Tōkyō construction sites, remained, as of the 1980s, in the dynamic Tōhoku region, which also managed to stop the exodus of its young people. This development explains the dynamism of the Sendai Plain as far as Fukushima.

In parallel with the industrial development, the State, in the same gesture, also propelled the energy development of the Tōhoku region, in response to an internal need, but also, and especially, to supply Tōkyō. Thus, from the 1970s onwards, in addition to many thermal and hydro-electric power stations, the State developed nuclear power stations, located by the sea for the purposes of cooling the reactors. Each power station has several reactors. These include Fukushima Daiichi and Daini, operated by the Tōkyō Electric Power Company (Tepco), and the power stations of Onagawa and Higashidori, operated by the Tōhoku Electric Power Company.

What damage to what regions?

In conclusion, the coasts affected by the tsunami are very diverse. First there is the northern Sanriku coast, very isolated, not very developed, sparsely populated, in demographic decline and ageing. It is a region where districts with an excessively

decreasing population (*kasō*) are in the majority. This area is located between Hachinohe and Miyako. Then there is the southern Sanriku coast, between Miyako and Sendai, with many fishing ports amongst the most active in Japan, where the losses were considerable. It is a region on the fringes of the Tōhoku region, but one integrated into regional development and linked to the central transport routes by the perpendicular routes and a recent coastal rail line. This region is warding off demographic degrowth and will most likely be rebuilt given the strategic interest of the adjacent fishing zone. Finally, at the southern end of the Sanriku region, the Sendai Plain, essentially agricultural and, to a lesser extent, industrial, has not suffered major human losses due to the fact that the populated areas were set back several kilometres from the coast. Only some recent housing estates and infrastructure have been affected, including the port, the airport and, much more seriously, the nuclear power stations established there, away from Tōkyō, for the development of the Kantō region. It was these dynamic areas on the coast that were made more vulnerable to the tsunami by the very fact of their dynamism and development, which can, however, be explained by interests that are set above the risk factor.

POINTS OF NEWS

“ The imminence of a period of strong seismic activity: a national peril hitherto not experienced – from technological measures to prevent disasters to a radical reform of the country’s policies and of the economic and social system” [Semarikuru daijishin katsudô ki ha mizô no kokunan – gijutsuteki bôσαι kara kokudo seisaku / shakai keizai shisutemu no konhonteki henkaku he] – Speech given by Ishibashi Katsuhiko at a public hearing of the House of Representatives Budget Committee – 162nd session of the Diet, 23rd February 2005. (French translation by Amélie Corbel).

Ishibashi Katsuhiko is a renowned seismologist, a Professor at the University of Kobe, who, since 1997, has been warning of the danger presented by the construction of nuclear power stations in a country subject to earthquakes such as Japan. In 2006, he resigned from Japan’s Nuclear Safety Commission (Genshiryoku anzen iinkai) as a sign of protest. In the speech translated in part here, Professor Ishibashi outlines the three types of serious damage that a major earthquake in the Tōkai region would cause: first, complex seismic damage occurring over a vast area, both in the cities and in the mountain areas, followed by the arrival of a tsunami; next, damage related to the strong

seismic aftershocks that would continue over a long period of time; and finally, the damage arising from the destabilisation of the nuclear power stations close to the epicentre with, ultimately, the risk of a nuclear accident. The extract that has been translated deals with this third point. The predictions made by this scientist turn out to be particularly relevant now in the wake of 11 March, with one small exception in that he predicted the arrival of a “big one” in the Tōkai region, and it was in fact the Tōhoku region that was affected. This seismologist’s view of the future of Japan and, more specifically, of the relations humans should have with nature, is particularly interesting. He gives us some

very valuable food for thought at this difficult time.

The worst of situations: seismic disasters and their impact on nuclear power stations

“The third type of seismic disaster that I have highlighted since 1997 involves the consequences an earthquake would have for the security of the nuclear power stations. Predictions lead us to believe that an earthquake of considerable magnitude could hit the Tōkai region within the next few years [a region located to the south-west of Tōkyō and to the east of the Ōsaka-Kobe region, indicated on the map below]. The epicentre of this earthquake, according to the seismologists’ predictions, would be located just under the Hamaoka nuclear power station, which is currently operated by the Chūbu Denryoku Company.⁷ As of this year (2005), a fifth reactor has been commissioned. The four other reactors still continue to function, although they have already been in operation for a considerable number of years.

Japan currently has 53 nuclear reactors. All are absolutely secure in terms of a seismic threat. Chūbu Denryoku also assures us that the Hamaoka power station could withstand an earthquake in the Tōkai region. However, from a seismological perspective, such a claim gives rise to a not inconsiderable number of doubts and questions. Indeed,

⁷ The Chūbu Electric Power Company (*Chūbu Denryoku Kabushiki Kaisha*, sometimes shortened to *Chuden*), supplies electricity to the Chūbu region, located in the central part of the island of Honshū, between the Kantō region (where Tōkyō is located) and the Kansai region (Osaka-Kyōto-Kobe). Chūbu includes the prefectures of Aichi (Nagoya), Fukui, Gifu, Nagano, Ishikawa, Nagano, Niigata, Toyama, Yamanashi and Shizuoka. Tepco is the equivalent company for the Tōkyō region.

the fear is that the anticipated earthquake, and the intensity of the shocks the nuclear power station could withstand, has been under-estimated.



In the United States, earthquakes are considered to be the most dangerous external factor affecting nuclear power stations. Nuclear accidents are generally due to a “unique” breakdown. If a particular element of the power station is ever affected, various security or “back-up” systems are set in motion in order to avoid loss of control of the situation. In the event of an earthquake, the causes of the breakdown are multiple and the situation becomes more complex: the control systems and other safety systems are unable to be activated and, in the worst case scenario, one can be looking at an accident of rare seriousness,

with the fear of a meltdown of the reactor or an unprecedented nuclear explosion.

According to Chûbu Denryoku, the electricity company that operates the Hamaoka nuclear power station, the power station should be able to withstand a powerful earthquake in the order of 600 Gal (or 600 cm/s²) with no difficulties. However, at a press conference on 28 January this year (2005), its Chairman announced that the company was intending to undertake anti-seismic strengthening work to enable the power station to withstand an earthquake of 1 000 Gal. This is why one is justified in asking how far we need to go to ensure that the power station can really withstand all the dangers it may have to confront. For the time being, this is far from clear.

Here is a possible scenario of a nuclear accident at the Hamaoka power station following an earthquake in the Tōkai region. First, it is highly likely that a large quantity of radioactive elements generated by fission will be emitted outside the reactor core. As Hamaoka's third reactor has the capacity to produce around 1.1 million kilowatts of electricity, over a year the core builds up 700 to 1 000 times the quantity of radioactive particles thrown out by the Hiroshima atomic bomb. We cannot know what quantity of radioactive particles would escape during a nuclear accident, as this is closely related to the type and seriousness of the accident, but, in a nutshell, a scenario along the lines of Chernobyl is probable. Following such an accident, the inhabitants of the areas close to the power station will die rapidly as a result of acute exposure to the radioactive rays. The people living a little further away from the power station will also be in mortal danger, even if the percentage decreases the further one goes.

As south-west winds are common, the radioactive cloud, having crossed the

regions of Shizuoka, Shimizu, Numazu and Mishima (and then the Hakone Mountains), will reach the Kanagawa prefecture and the metropolitan region of the capital. While the meteorological conditions and the wind speed are parameters to be taken into account, one can nevertheless say that Tōkyō would, in any event, be affected within twelve hours. If it were to rain, the radioactive particles would fall to the ground with the rain.

In addition, what I term "seismic disasters and their impact on nuclear power stations" does not just mean the straightforward consequences of an earthquake in the form of a possible nuclear accident. It includes problems of greater proportions. The derailments of the Shinkansen, the collapse of buildings, fires, etc. linked to an earthquake cause around 10 000 deaths. In a nuclear accident – not of seismic origin – at the Hamaoka power station, we accept that the human toll could reach 1 000. Imagine now what human losses could arise from the two disasters occurring simultaneously. There is no doubt that there would be a much higher number of victims than the number of deaths caused by the two catastrophes separately, indeed about 11 000 people.

People seeking to flee the radiation would in fact simply be unable to do so, as the damage caused by the earthquakes and tsunamis would make the roads and bridges unusable. Similarly, we would face considerable difficulty dealing with the nuclear accident at the power station. How would we rescue the people blocked by the Shinkansen derailments, or those who are alive but are prisoners in the rubble of their own houses? Usually, as was the case in the 1995 Kobe earthquake, the military and volunteers rush to the disaster areas to save the survivors. However, in an area badly affected by the fallout of radioactive particles, no such help could probably be

offered. I do not know what steps would be taken in such an instance; perhaps death squads would go to the rescue of the people in danger... One can wonder if the people affected by the damage caused directly by the earthquake, as well as those rescuing them, might not just be left to their fate. The human toll would then rise to tens of thousands. Such a scenario could occur following an earthquake in the Tōkai region.

Towards a society that does not stand up to Mother Nature

If the events mentioned earlier occur simultaneously, how will we confront them? The preventive measures put in place against seismic disasters will not be able to deal with the extreme nature of the disaster. In May 2003, the central Council for the prevention of natural disasters and catastrophes (Chūō Bōsai Kaigi) drew up an outline of the steps to be taken in the event of an earthquake in the Tōkai region. For example, prior action plans for the deployment of the Japanese protection forces were developed to determine what units would be deployed, in what area, etc. At least through this step, the capacity to react to an earthquake can only be improved. However, such plans will be of no use in the event of a nuclear accident related to an earthquake of sizeable magnitude.

Finally, I think that, currently, the country of Japan and its people are extremely exposed to earthquakes. In the cities as well as in the mountain villages, whenever we are affected by an earthquake, we try to learn lessons from it to make us more able to withstand possible new disasters. Nevertheless, I think we have reached a point of no return: we can no longer continue to try always to find new preventive measures only to discover subsequently that they were defective in one

way or another. We must undertake radical reform of our way of life. That does not mean that we have to be inevitably passive in the face of natural disasters and earthquakes, but we need to realise that our responses to disasters, both natural and human, must be accompanied by reflection on a broader number of subjects.

These include the problems that are of particular concern to Japan and to the world in the 21st century, such as energy, food, waste and the environment. It also comes back to the question of decentralisation.

First, as long as we live in the Japanese archipelago, we will have to achieve a culture of coexistence with earthquakes. Until now, we have lived in a culture of confrontation with nature, where we have tried to overcome the challenges imposed by it and to compensate for our weaknesses by way of more and more innovative and efficient technologies. I think that from now on we must build a culture that does position itself in conflict with Mother Nature.

The rationale for development, for productivity, for centralisation to the extreme, around Tōkyō and more generally around the larger cities, are all things we will have to re-examine. With regard to the seismic disasters that Japan regularly has to confront, I think that a radical change of thought is required. Here are the key words that we must include in our thinking: conservation, local scale, decentralisation and polycentrism in the planning of urban spaces, tranquillity and security, decentralisation and local autonomy and, finally, revitalisation of the villages and their agriculture and fisheries.

With regard to the nuclear power stations, although the question depends on many different parameters, we must recognise that they are genuinely dangerous, whether it is Hamaoka or any of the others. For

example, in Wakasa Bay, there is a nuclear power station, used for commercial purposes, that comprises thirteen reactors, when the probability that the area will be affected by an earthquake is high. After careful evaluation of the risks of a nuclear accident linked to earthquakes in respect of all the power stations in the country, we would need progressively to reduce their number, beginning systematically with the oldest ones.

As long as we do not commit to such consideration of the matter, the toll from the human and natural disasters will continue to be very high. Admittedly, it is likely that all the countries of the world will of one voice contribute their assistance and sympathise with our lot, but it is possible also that many strong criticisms will be levelled at us. This is why Japan has a duty to act fast. Thank you for your attention.”



“Yamazaki Shû”,

“Politics on the wane: shifts in government and improvements in government policies”. [Seiji no damesa ha naze umareru noka: seiken kôtai to seiji no shitsu no kôjô], Sekai, February 2011, p. 93-100.

Yamazaki Shû, a news commentator, sets out the various reasons that have led to the political instability characteristic of contemporary Japan. Whilst the writer freely acknowledges that every government since 2006 has had its share of responsibility in this political entanglement, he also points the finger at the “structural” weaknesses that have contributed to making this situation even more inextricable.

The year went by without the Kan government being able to overcome the split between the majorities in the Diet (commonly referred to as the “divided Diet”), which stemmed from the Upper House elections in July 2010. The upshot is that the government is about to open an ordinary session which will determine whether the draft bills on the proposed budget for the 2011 year are adopted or rejected.

The situation is such that even if the opposition, with a majority in the Upper House, refused to proceed with a reading of the text or to vote on it, the proposed budget would still be adopted during 2010 by virtue of the principle of the supremacy of the House of Representatives. The

problem would then be probably in terms of the correlate bills, along the lines of the exceptional draft bill on State borrowing, which releases details of public funds that are in deficit. Without the adoption of these subsidiary bills ensuring “supply”, the proposed budget with the government’s “expenses” cannot be implemented.

An examination of the correlate bills would only begin after completion of the process of adopting the proposed budget. This means that if the opposition in the Upper House refused to deliberate or vote on the matter, the adoption of these bills in 2010 would be complicated. It would then become possible for the opposition to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Kan Naoto or even the dissolution of the House of Representatives, to be followed by general elections, in exchange for its cooperation on adopting these draft bills during the course of 2010. This could develop into what one might call a “hostage taking” situation.

Early in its term of office, the Kan government held a majority of seats in both Chambers of the Diet thanks to a coalition of the ruling parties. However, the government suffered

a crushing defeat at the mid-term Upper House elections, where it lost its majority, especially as a result of the Prime Minister's announcement of a rise in the consumption tax and a series of contradictory statements.

The government made matters worse through an array of gaffes in its reaction to a chain of problems caused by the collision between a Chinese trawler and a Japanese coastguard vessel off the Senkaku Islands, followed by the unauthorised spread of video images of the incident. In addition, after some intemperate statements made in question time in the Diet, including the infamous remarks on the "violent nature of the Self-Defense system", a censure motion was moved in the Upper House against some government members: Mabuchi Sumio (the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, as well as Minister of State for Okinawa and Territory Affairs), Yanagida Minoru (Minister of Justice) and Sengoku Yoshito (Cabinet Secretary). The upshot was that Minister Yanagida was forced into resigning.

Furthermore, the government recently showed itself to be powerless in the face of the scandal involving Ichirō Ozawa (the former president of the Democratic Party). After he was the subject of legal proceedings for being in breach of the regulations concerning the financing of political parties, the opposition insisted on his being called to appear before the Diet. At the end of the year, the Diet suddenly required that he appear before a committee of inquiry into political ethics made up of members of Parliament, which plunged the Democratic Party into a deep crisis with internal divisions and conflicts. The government then suffered a major reversal at the local government elections in the prefecture of Ibaraki, a prelude to the battle in the regional elections in April.

The first seven months of the Kan government were thus marked by real uncertainty, which was the result of an immature management of power, quite apart from the question of whether the policies it was implementing were well founded or not. Moreover, it does not seem as if the Kan government has decided to turn the situation around to extricate itself from the mess. One may therefore anticipate an unprecedented state of confusion at the ordinary session of the Diet that will be held in the Upper House, during which there is very likely to be a personal attack on Kan Naoto himself, and no longer only on the bureaucracy.

Normalising confusion

One may ask, however, whether the responsibility for this confusion, which was produced by a childish exercise of power, can be attributed to the Kan government alone, or whether it is rather a recurring pattern of behaviour of every government since 2006 (Abe, Fukuda, Asō, et Hatoyama).

This is borne out by the fact that Prime Minister Abe Shinzō had had a promising start to his new government by working on improving both China-Japan relations and Japan-Korea relations which were at their lowest ebb since the visits that his predecessor, Koizumi Junichirō, had made to the Yasukuni shrine. However, by reinstating the former officials of the LDP who had left the party in protest at the draft bill on the privatisation of the Post Office, he attracted the wrath of the supporters of Koizumi's policy. Moreover, he committed errors of judgment in a series of scandals (the expenditure by the office of the Minister for Deregulation Policy, Sada Genichirō, the suicide of the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Matsuoka Toshikatsu, and above all the scandal of the "vanishing retirement pensions"), which earned him

a crushing defeat in the July 2007 Upper House elections. I am probably not alone in having mentioned the example of the Abe government, at the time of the Kan Naoto government's rout in the Upper House elections. Like Kan, Abe kept his job, but after making a speech about general policy in an extraordinary session of the Diet, he tendered his resignation shortly before question time for party heads, referring to health problems.

His successor, Fukuda Yasuo, who was thought to be a sure value by dint of his three-year experience as a state secretary, suffered from the "twisting" of the Diet, which refused to approve administrative staff appointments (something that had not happened in fifty-six years), and he had to accept a suspension of the special law on anti-terrorist measures which had legitimised supplies to the naval Self-Defense Forces in the Indian Ocean. To overcome this situation, Fukuda, aided by Ozawa Ichirō, the leader of the Democratic Party, attempted in November 2007 to set up a new structure involving a grand coalition of political parties. However, at a meeting of Democratic Party officials held shortly after a conference of all the party leaders, there was very vocal and general opposition, and the idea of a grand coalition was jettisoned. In 2008, Fukuda found himself unable to secure an extension of the law on fiscal reform, due to expire in March, which included a provision to maintain the rates of the provisional tax on the consumption of benzene. This led to a drop in the retail price of petrol. Fukuda, who was very keen to shore up the future of his government, staunchly went ahead with a ministerial reshuffle in August. This failed to improve the situation, however, and he ended up tendering his resignation a month later.

The reason prompting Fukuda's resignation was that in spite of the term of office of members of parliament expiring in September 2009, he had no possibility of dissolving the House of Representatives himself, given the government's very low level of support. His successor as Prime Minister, Asō Tarō, who was said to enjoy strong popular support, found himself having to face the test of a general election, convinced that his role had the blessing of providence. He rejected the idea of dissolving the Lower House, however, arguing the need to confront the global financial crisis which occurred immediately after he took office. In the wake of that, Asō Tarō ended up losing public support, due to the confusion over the amount of the grant from the two thousand billion yen made available to improve the economic situation, but also on account of a misreading of a Chinese character in the written version of a speech that he had to make. In the end, he did dissolve the House of Representatives, just before the end of its members' term of office, but he suffered a complete rout at the elections resulting in his loss of power to the Democratic Party.

Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, who then became chief of the executive, also enjoyed strong public support. His influence gradually waned, however, following the revelation of under-the-table scandals implicating him, together with the secretary general of the Democratic Party, Ichirō Ozawa. Moreover, government members could not reach an agreement on the question of the relocation of the American air base in Futenma. Hatoyama, unable to hold out against the demands of the Social-Democratic Party that threatened to withdraw from the ruling coalition, put forward the idea of moving the base away from Okinawa, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Defence advocated a relocation of the base to another part of the same prefecture.

The deadline for a final decision was initially pushed back to May 2010, but in the event a back flip saw a decision to move the base to another part of the prefecture, as a result of which the Social-Democratic Party left the ruling coalition ranks. On account, in particular, of the Upper House elections that had been called for July, Hatoyama tended his resignation in June, after pressuring Ozawa into quitting his job as party secretary general.

“Sifting through” the causes of confusion

Through these examples, we can understand why political confusion gradually set in over these five years. This is perfectly normal, since it was the result of a combination of the difficulties encountered by each of these governments (and which are particular to each of them) and the structural problems which have affected the political world in general in recent times.

In this case, and in order to find a way out of such confusion, what is needed is to sift through these difficulties and separate the specific problems encountered by each government from the structural problems affecting the world of politics. To criticise the Kan government, thinking that these problems, which are structural in nature, are specific to it alone, would merely constitute an unproductive condemnation not leading to any real solution. On the other hand, to consider a difficulty that was specific to the Kan government as a problem of a structural kind would run the risk of turning the feeling of mistrust with regard to the world of politics into real despair.

This sifting is necessary, just as it is necessary, for a doctor to determine the medical causes of an illness affecting a

patient, at the same time as analysing the personal circumstances that led to their falling ill. The illness that the doctor must eliminate with the aid of medicine or surgery, and the behaviour that the patient has to adopt to prevent a relapse, are two different problems. In distinguishing each problem, one should better understand what one must expect from the Kan government, as well as the parties of the majority and the opposition, but also the difficulties which the entire nation (including the voters) will have to face.

What, then, are the difficulties that are specifically encountered by the Kan government? First of all, we can mention its juvenile behaviour, as indicated above. We should remember that it suffered a serious defeat at the Upper House elections, by reason of its spinelessness at the time of the upward review of the consumption tax, which was made public by Kan in person. This put him on the road to ruin. On 17 June, shortly after taking office, the Prime Minister revealed his plan for an upward revision of the consumption tax, going as far as to put forward the very precise rate of 10%. This was his own idea, as he had been fighting for a streamlining of public finances ever since his time as Finance Minister. In order to avoid discussions going sour, his strategy consisted in doing a deal with the main opposition party (Liberal Democratic Party) which had already proposed the idea of a 10% rate. A desire not to implement the legal measures increasing the consumption tax before 2011, which had been provided for by the 2009 law on fiscal reform (adopted under the Asō government), was already very much at the back of Kan’s mind.

Some Cabinet members at first thought highly of this strategy of seduction, which they regarded as the expression of a formidable “political flair” on Kan’s part.

However, as with any strategy based on instinct, there are hidden traps that can be fatal. The first was that Kan's words, although made in the context of a strategy of seduction, were not perceived as such, but rather as the translation of his government's political thinking. Once the Prime Minister unveiled his plan, the written press took up with a vengeance the key expression, "10% rate of consumption tax", whose meaning was all too plain to see. Soon, public opinion was interested only in Kan himself, who had been the one to mention this figure of 10%. This pushed the LDP into the background, whereas this was in fact the party that had been the instigator of it. This fateful failure was most likely the result of the old habit of a party which, during its long years in opposition, had always determined its strategy in reaction to the moves of the government and its majority.

The second trap lay in the target of the seduction strategy, namely, the main opposition party, the LDP, on which the government focused its whole attention to the point of completely forgetting about implementing strategy vis-a-vis the party from which it came, the Democratic Party. One may recall that, during the year preceding the change of government, Hatoyama, a candidate running for office, had declared in the lead-up to the general elections that he "would not increase taxes for a period of four years", thereby settling the debate on a consumption tax. This resolution of the problem reflected the political direction advocated by secretary general Ichirō Ozawa, which had benefited from a unanimous agreement within the Democratic Party.

In spite of all that, Kan mentioned the "10% upward revision of the tax" only after consulting a handful of collaborators such as the Secretary of State Sengoku Yoshito, the

general secretary of the Democratic Party, Edano Yukio, and the president of the party's political business, Genba Kōichirō. No criticism was voiced by the LDP regarding the planned consumption tax hike, or even of the mention of a specific figure. On the other hand, protests came flooding in from the Democratic Party, targeting Ozawa in person. Even the party's candidates for the Upper House elections felt obliged to scramble to refute Kan's announcement to their supporters who came to think that the Prime Minister had, without notice, forced on his party a proposed tax hike that had been poorly stitched together.

The upshot was that the Democratic Party lost its majority in the Upper House. Owing in part to the voters' hostility towards a law that would only increase their cost burden, they snubbed a political method which consisted in proposing lukewarm measures without attempting to get backing for them through consensus. This juvenile behaviour symbolised by the recklessness of one official (due to the inexperience of his party in being the majority) could be seen at the time of North Korea's armed aggression against its southern neighbour, a situation which required Japan to have nerves of steel.

During the night of 10 December, Kan spoke in particular to Iitsuka Shigeo, then president of the Association of the Families of Victims of abduction perpetrated by North Korea, as a sign of his determination to take decisions that would enable the Self-Defense Forces to intervene directly on the Korean peninsula in cases of emergency or in the event of the collapse of the North Korean regime, in order to come to the rescue of Japanese citizens (including the victims of abduction). He confirmed this position the following day by declaring to a group of journalists that, "as for the victims of abduction who are in North Korea, up to now there has

been no regulation allowing for the rescue of Japanese nationals residing in South Korea with the aid of the JSDF military”, and that he therefore wanted to launch a concerted effort with the South-Korean authorities. According to those involved, no such direction had been decided within the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, or even within the government. It was thus understood that Kan had acted entirely “alone”.

Giving help to Japanese nationals on the Korean peninsula is an issue that requires the government to consult the South Korean authorities and to organise mock exercises. If, despite previous experience, the JSDF were to intervene directly in South Korea, it would obviously produce a violent backlash in that country, and protests could also be expected in Japan. This is not the kind of proposal that can be made publicly without the groundwork being laid and a favourable environment being created for it. Kan no doubt imagined “that he clearly said what he did because it was necessary”, but it also plainly did not occur to him that there had been gridlock ever since he had brought up the question himself. This is a typical example of the “ethics of feelings” about which Max Weber had warned politicians.

Quite clearly, this “ethics of feelings” concerned not only Naoto Kan, but also his ministers. Accordingly, Maehara Seiji, the Minister of Transport and Territory, stepped forward a short while after his appointment to announce that construction works on the Yamba dam would be halted. This statement, which had taken the bureaucrats in the Transport Ministry by surprise, received strong support from public opinion which was still buoyed by the recent change of government.

It was not, however, as if Maehara had outlined any real solution to the problem,

whose historical dimension proved that it could not be settled without complex discussions with the local population. In actual fact, the statement had been made prematurely without the Minister taking the trouble to contact either those around him or the residents of the site who were in favour of the work continuing, or even the groups opposing the construction of the dam. If we look at what was really behind Maehara's action, we can see that his goal was to get the supporters of the works continuing to relinquish their position, under the pressure of the popular support that he was able to enjoy thanks to his anticipated statement, and to get them to accept a halt to the dam's construction. At first sight, this way of doing things makes us think of former Prime Minister Koizumi, who used to set a difficult goal that inevitably ran up against groups with vested interests which he opposed, in order to forge the image of a “revolutionary defying pressure groups”, and thereby take advantage of his considerable popularity in the opinion polls and manage, in the end, to reach his objectives.

However, Maehara's attitude whereby he would create “a media buzz, above all”, got the backs up of the local supporters who wished to see the dam's construction continue, and merely resulted in a breakdown of negotiations. Whilst Maehara may have claimed that his words “were taken from the Democratic Party's own platform”, it also has to be said that there was no opposition force within the ruling party over the dam. Indeed, if one may be so bold as to say, the only real opposition force was none other than that part of the local population which was in favour of the continuation of the works. In the end, it came down to an issue that would have required negotiations at an individual level, for which the Koizumi method was inappropriate. This seems obvious, but the residents who were in favour of the dam

being built could not, in any case, embody the force of protest that Maehara had been looking for.

He had no strategy based on strength, contrary to Koizumi's approach, which would catch the public's attention by setting a strong goal in front of the media and work in the background to reduce to a minimum the number of unruly factions within his majority. All that happened, moreover, while Iijima Isao, Koizumi's principal aid and confidante, and Takenaka Heizō, the ex-Treasurer and Finance Minister, worked doggedly to bring about reforms.

All that Maehara had at his disposal was little more than his emotional ethics, which amounted to saying: "My statements are correct, and they cannot fail to be realised thanks to popular support!". Once again, however, it must be pointed out that we are dealing with an ingrained habit specific to a former opposition member who had never before had to deal with the reality of a situation in which opposing interests were entwined in a very complex way.

A mania stemming from the first phase of the polarised system

However, the situation whereby "a party with little experience as a majority suddenly finds itself in power" could arise thanks to the growing polarisation of the Japanese political world (favoured by the introduction of the system of single-seat electorates for the House of Representatives) and to the resulting change of government. The Democratic Party (at least its old version) was formed in 1996, just before the holding of the first legislative elections based on the principle of single-seat electorates. At the time, it represented the second opposition

party after the New Progressive Party founded by Ozawa Ichirō. Following the dissolution of this party in 1998, it united with various political factions of the now defunct New Progressive Party and became the leading opposition party. In 2003, it merged with the Liberal Party led by Ozawa Ichirō. At the November legislative elections, for the first time it drew up a list of electoral promises and obtained 177 seats in the House of Representatives, thereby ushering in the era of the polarised system. It suffered a serious reversal following the dissolution of the Lower House by Prime Minister Koizumi, who wanted to push through his reform package on the privatisation of the Post Office. In spite of that, as indicated above, it subsequently took advantage of the political splintering of the majority coalition to reach its goal following the 2009 legislative elections, namely, a change of government.

In short, the Democratic Party was born as a party of opposition and, having always developed as such, it seems only natural that its members in the Diet have little or no experience as members of a majority. Hatoyama Yukio, the first head of government to wear the colours of the Democratic Party, had had no Ministerial experience behind him, other than as State Secretary in the Hosokawa government. Even Hirano Hirofumi, who put himself at the service of Hatoyama by taking on the post of State Secretary, was in his first governmental position. As for Kan himself, he had occupied the position of Health Minister in the Hashimoto government before becoming Minister responsible for National Strategies, then Minister of Public Finances in the Hatoyama government, but these were only for very short periods each time. Sengoku, who is currently working for Kan, was a first time minister, in charge of Public Administration Renewal. The same could be said of various general

secretaries of the majority in the Diet. Ozawa had, admittedly, had some experience in administrative posts within the government and as secretary general of the majority at the time when he was a member of the LDP. On the other hand, Edano's only experience was as Minister responsible for Public Administration Renewal, and that for just four-months.

After fifty-three years of the LDP's uninterrupted reign (with the exception of the Hosokawa and Haneda governments), the final three governments (Abe, Fukuda, Asô) of the LDP-Kômeitô's period of supremacy all collapsed in a state of indescribable political confusion, creating grave doubts as to their ability to exercise power. Just before the change of government, the LDP was branded as a decrepit majority party, asked to leave power temporarily and become a party of opposition.

However, the fact that a change of government occurred for the first time meant that an opposition party without any experience as a majority now had to assume power. We can more or less suppose that the electors who were behind this change of government had not foreseen that there would be such a confusion on the part of the Hatoyama and Kan governments, given the sudden collapse in confidence in the previous government and the majority party. In some cases, it even happened that opinion polls on voter intentions for the upcoming elections give the LDP as the winner, at the expense of the Democratic Party.

Yet such a scenario for a possible change of government would have an impact different that of the period of the LDP's decline. It would mean a return of the Democratic Party as a party of opposition, even before the latter acquired sufficient experience in the exercise of power. It would also mean a return of the

LDP as a majority while it would still be in the throes of its own reconstruction, beginning with the renewal of its membership. Is that really what we want?

It is said that a change of government does not come about when "the opposition scores points", but when "the majority loses points". And when a "majority party with no previous experience" tries to score points (a typical behaviour of a party in opposition) at the same time as avoiding to lose any (the standard behaviour of the majority party), we are quite simply faced with a paradoxical situation. It therefore seems to us necessary to think once more about this reality, "an opposition party without any experience of power which becomes a majority party", that was offered to us by our first change of government.

A group handicapped by its youth

What I have wanted to put forward is nothing more than the acute "inexperience" of the Democratic Party as an organisation in power. When one talks about a government, one is referring of course to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, then the Ministers, Deputy-Ministers and, finally, the three secretaries in the Diet. In the majority party, there is the leader, the secretary-general and the Party's under-secretary. However, as far as the Democratic Party is concerned, we see the absence of any unofficial structure capable of supporting all these official institutions, in particular, one that would have the function of duplicating the institution's often inadequate way of communicating, which tends unfortunately to get bogged down in rhetoric. By way of comparison, one could refer to the example of "clans" that are formed within companies, where job selection or promotion is made on the

basis of where someone went to university or the very close-knit human relations which were created in the workplace in the past. The bigger an organisation becomes, the more its communication lags behind. For this reason, a shadow structure has an all the more important role to play.

Powerful unofficial structures, called factions, formerly existed within the LDP itself. These dominated the party to such an extent that it was said to be no more than an alliance of factions, and not a proper party at all. The supremacy of these factions was essentially based on two factors:

- the LDP had introduced an internal voting system for the election of the party president, so that the great number of supporters that each of its leaders had within the Diet had become the condition sine qua non for maximising their chances of becoming Party president and hence Prime Minister;

- at the time when these elections were held on the basis of the intermediate system of electorates (then comprising 2 to 6 seats), it was possible for a party to present several candidates within the one electorate. This situation enabled various factions of the LDP to openly support candidates affiliated to them.

The factions, which then exerted a formidable influence on the behaviour of the sitting members of the Diet, played leading roles in the political decision-making process and the running of government business. When the decision to introduce a consumption tax encountered strong opposition within the party, the faction chiefs met to decide on its acceptance. We can say that one of the advantages of this system was the ability of these chiefs to stifle any form of opposition.

The Democratic Party became a majority thanks to the legislative elections based on the system of single-seat electorates (which, it must be emphasised, had been set up especially with the aim of eradicating the factions). In fact, except for the political group led by Ozawa, this party does not have any real shadow structure similar to the LDP factions. Yet, in spite of that, there are within the Democratic Party working groups of the majority (without having the status of the LDP factions) like the State Association for Training Research, created by Kan, or the Ryōun Association (Uplifting), whose main actors are Sengoku, Maehara, and Edano. However, on account of the hostility of a large majority of its officials (except Ozawa) regarding the system of factions that was long used by the LDP, the Democratic Party has practically no other activity that its groups of members in the Diet have in the political decision-making process and in the running of government. That is why the Democratic Party in power has no other choice but to rely solely on the official institutions to pass measures and to ensure the management of government affairs, resulting in its being extremely formalistic. In conducting its business in this way, there is a risk of it running up against even more significant protests and opposition, and of the political choices in the government's decision-making and management of business becoming ever clumsier.

Despite the different context, one could make a similar analysis for the LDP over recent times. Since the change to single-seat electorates and the regulation of the financing of political parties, it no longer has factions as it once did. What is worse, no shadow structure has emerged in its place. This resulted in the childish management of power, from A to Z, by the Abe, Fukuda, and Asō governments. There exists a marked difference between the situation of

the Democratic Party (in which no shadow structure has yet “seen the light of day”) and that of the LDP (in which the structures “did exist but they have disappeared”), but it can nonetheless be asserted that they are both experiencing the same structural problem.

This majority cannot get over its failure in the Upper House elections

The Democratic Party’s loss of majority in the Upper House perfectly encapsulates the structural crisis which the Japanese political world is currently undergoing. The sole reason for the situation of the “divided Diet” that arose in the wake of the Upper House elections in July 2010 was the immaturity of the Kan government, as explained above. However, a similar situation was known before, with the defeat of Abe’s LDP at the 2007 Upper House elections (the Fukuda and Asô governments subsequently paid for this). By delving back further into the past, we can see that in 1989 and 1998 a “divided Diet” was born out of the defeat of the majority in the Upper House elections. Conversely, we can see that, since 1989, the leading party in the majority has won more than half of the seats on only two occasions, in 1992 and 2001. Over the past twenty years, the majority party “can no longer manage to win” the Upper House elections.

How did this come about? In 1989, when the LDP was in power, we saw the end of the Cold War opposing West and East, respectively symbolised by the two superpowers of the day, the United States and the Soviet Union. The LDP had first and foremost been a political party born out of a sense of crisis at the prospect of a worsening of the conflict. With the end of the Cold War, it can be supposed that the LDP finally lost its substance and its very raison

d’être... This theory applies to the LDP, but not to the Democratic Party which was born after the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

The fact that either the LDP or the Democratic Party is the majority means therefore that it is a structural problem preventing it from winning the Upper House elections. What we need to convey, in the first place, is the feeling of concern and frustration in public opinion faced with the problem of the ageing of Japanese society and the consequent deterioration of pension schemes and the health system, and the worsening of the state of public finances due to an increase in costs for the social security system.

In order to overcome all these problems, the LDP government, which was in power in 1989, made the decision to introduce a consumption tax, but this was poorly prepared and badly sold to the population. It became the key issue in the Upper House elections that took place that year, and the LDP suffered a major backlash as a result. Later, the incident of the “disappearing pensions” and the credibility of the public pension scheme were the central issues of the 2007 Upper House elections, which resulted in a significant defeat for the LDP. As mentioned above, it was the rash pronouncements made by Kan about an upward review of the consumption tax that led to the Party’s losing the Upper House elections in July 2010. It can therefore be said that the government is continually, and significantly, running up against the issues of the ageing of the population, the deterioration of the pension scheme and the health system, and the worsening state of public finances, the latter being difficult to turn around without a negative reaction by the electorate.

The change in the mood of the voters has also had the effect of a wavering of the basis of power. An electorate without any fixed

partisan preference has become increasingly apparent, firstly due to the weakening of the centripetal strength of the LDP, but also on account of the reorganisation of the Japanese political landscape and the disappearance of the former Socialist Party. Similarly, there has been a clear development in the social classes which had hitherto given their wholehearted support to such and such a political party. This means that there is an increasing trend towards swing voters.

Since the reorganisation of the opposition in reaction to the introduction of the system of single-seat electorates, the LDP and the Democratic Party have both set themselves up as defenders of conservative values. Accordingly, this polarisation has accelerated changes in voters who had hitherto thought that they had no other choice than the LDP, and who now see themselves as having another option at the ballot box. A good number of these electors, whose behaviour in the polling booth is largely influenced by what they read in the newspapers and see on television, give direct expression during the elections to their perception of the actions of the Prime Minister and his government, as reported and assessed by the media alone.

In the case of the Upper House elections, it can be said that they have the institutional defect of the 29 electorates restricted to "one councillor". The fact that the House of Representatives was the first to introduce the system of single-seat electorates exposed these more to unforeseen mood swings in public opinion. Accordingly, this type of Upper House election, now seen by the majority in power as "an insurmountable hurdle", comes about in a cyclical fashion every three years. Moreover, contrary to the House of Representatives that it can dissolve at any time, the government has

virtually no power over the life cycle of the Upper House. This is why it is impossible to organise Upper House elections even when the government enjoys significant electoral support.

This brings us to the conclusion that the state of confusion in which the Kan government currently finds itself is a problem that is peculiar to the Democratic Party. By reason of its lack of experience in power and its structural inexperience (which it cannot easily be blamed for, given how it has fared since its creation), as well as the deficiency it had shown in the way it had exercised power, the Upper House elections proved to be too great a hurdle. It has suffered an "abrasion" which is none other than the loss of the majority in the Upper House, and it is therefore going through a very painful period.

It is incumbent on the Kan government to get out of this entrenched state of confusion as fast as possible. It must first of all become aware of its own foibles, namely that it has had little experience at the helm of the State and that its party lacks experience as a majority formation. In addition to overcoming these faults, it must find a way to come through the test of the "divided Diet", brought about by the loss of the majority in the House of Councillors. At the same time, we, the electors (whether we have abandoned the Kan government and the Democratic Party or not), have to take stock of the fact that it is our own electoral behaviour that resulted in a change of government, and that the confusion that reigns at present, just like the many problems underlying it, is also connected to this.

Put plainly, before embarking on any consideration of the Kan government's future policies, one should be conscious of the sad reality that political change resulting from

a change of government is no guarantee whatsoever of a “qualitative improvement in politics”. It does no more than ensure a mere change of majority.

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