

JAPAN IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

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Fifth Kyushu International Cultural Conference
Fukuoka UNESCO Association
Fukuoka, Japan
29 July 1982

I am most honoured to be invited here today to help inaugurate the Fifth Kyushu International Cultural Conference. It gives me particular pleasure to congratulate and salute the organizers of this conference, the Fukuoka UNESCO Association, on their 35th anniversary, a most remarkable record.

This has to be among the earliest UNESCO associations anywhere in the world, set up only a year after UNESCO itself was established in 1946. You thus began your work in the service of international cultural and scientific collaboration in a countryside devastated by war, with the atomic pyres that had burned in two of your nearby cities still fresh and terrible in memory. That effort has continued apace over the years of Japan's vastly improved fortunes as a compelling bit of eloquent testimony to the lasting importance this nation's people attach to the primacy of peace.

Sadly, we have come to northern Kyushu at a moment when its people are sorrowing at the death and destruction from the recent floods; I want to express my deepest sympathies over your losses.

The meeting here this week is directed to examination of the ways in which Japan, in the 1980s, could lend a more authentic voice to the search for a more just, equitable and peaceful pluralistic global society. Just where Japan should fit into that society -- and what its interactions should be with the rest of the world -- are two essential questions that will concern us.

I must stress at the outset that it would be very presumptuous of me to attempt to lay down any kind of precise course for Japan in the coming decades -- that is chiefly a matter for her people and their elected representatives and leaders. Let me also say that I bring to this examination no particular professional expertise as a Japanologist, as do so many of the other participants here. I have, however, been deeply interested in the Japanese people for some years. This nation has deep cultural ties to the ancient civilizations of Asia, along with the vast network of economic and scientific links that she has forged with the modern industrialized world. Japan is thus rather uniquely positioned to give equal heed in the decades ahead to the problems of the industrial society, of which she is a leading member, as well as to the concerns of the poorer and most populous countries of Asia, home to well over half of all humanity.

We are here to consider what Japan's role should be in a world of rapid, confusing and often very frightening change -- whose peoples and societies are in a constant state of risk from many directions. Vast inequalities still differentiate the lives of the globe's "haves" and "have-nots." Great forces for social change and radical alternations in values are sweeping the globe, upsetting prevailing political equilibria both nationally and internationally. The spreading and deepening pathology of the arms race, both conventional and nuclear, is bringing about the militarization of whole societies and threatening all of humankind with nuclear extinction -- as if arms and armaments were still the answer to today's very complex problems. But the hard fact is that no one is in control and no one nation or group of nations can impose their views on the workings of the international system.

In the quest for a more viable human community, whose members respect and honour each others' differences and live together in some measure of pluralistic harmony, I believe that Japan could be able to bring rare insight and talent -- if these could be properly motivated and effectively mobilized. Perhaps no nation has approached Japan in its capacity for assimilation and appreciation of other cultures -- for respecting and accommodating new ideas and new directions without destroying many of its basic traditions.

There is a great deal that is admirable in the way that Japan has coped with change. It has reached its present economic success and been able to avoid the pockets of severe poverty that are a blight and a burden on industrialized and industrializing nations alike. The sense of obligation to all members of society, even at the expense of localized inefficiencies, seems to be bred deep in the Japanese psyche. The Japanese cultural model may also have important lessons to offer others about how to live with our fellow human beings in conditions of rapid economic growth and great population density without losing a sense of inner beauty and maintaining a high degree of social cohesion under such circumstances.

Yet, for all this nation's ability to receive and adapt foreign ideas and technologies, it is now increasingly recognized that economic success was bought at not inconsiderable longer-term cost in the anomalies that now begin to mar the Japanese social landscape: increasing alienation; spiritually empty consumerism; environmental waste and ugly urban sprawl; and a gnawing fear over loss of cultural moorings. Many have now begun to wonder at what point the limits to her social resilience will be overtaxed.

The Japanese population, in addition, is rapidly aging -- with a resultant widening of the generation gap. Deep strains are beginning to show in the social fabric. Recent surveys have shown frightening proportions of the young harbouring

feelings of violence against their teachers and parents. The impact of rapidly changing technology has led to much questioning and unease.

The doubts and the uncertainties that are now beginning to surface are not necessarily all signs of societal ill-health. Indeed, quite the reverse, these questions could be taken as harbingers of emerging processes of cultural re-evaluation, redefinition and hopefully revitalization -- processes which are also becoming manifest in various forms in many parts of the world.

The capacity for self-reflection is a very necessary one to any nation. There is need for constant self-reinterpretation, redefinition and redirection in a crowded, competitive and rapidly changing world. It is out of such a process that societies forge their resilience and their capacity for autonomous creativity and cultural self-renewal.

This search for national identity goes on in the press and other media, on university campuses, in writings by Japanese scholars and in encounters with the writing and thinking of foreign scholars, and in meetings of international experts such as this one. The search basically comes down to two intimately interlinked questions: What pictures do the Japanese people see of themselves in their own mirrors as shaped by their own scientific pursuits and their own myths? What is the image of Japan contained in the mirrors and stereotypes held up by the rest of the world?

Both mirrors, to be sure, may be flawed in one way or another. Equally important to true understanding of what they show is the issue of who is holding the mirrors and the various angles and biases that may reflect the holder as much as the viewer. Prevailing external perceptions are likely to have a bias of the West, the home of most foreign experts on Japan today. To give Japan a truer sense of the international environment through which she must thread her way in the next

few decades, it would be extremely helpful to have more Third World perceptions or mirrors if you will. A massive increase in training opportunities for Third World Japanologists is an issue well deserving of attention and effort.

It is most important that there be constructive interaction between the interior self-reflection of the Japanese, rooted in the deep structure of Japanese culture, and the exterior views of Japanologists, grounded in their own perception of interest and meaning of their own societies. Meetings such as this can do much to encourage such a process. Often these different mirrors can correct each other and sharpen perceptions of truth, or, more precisely, of the relational objectivity of the perceptions of Japanese reality.

But for these interactions to be truly meaningful, Japan must have the critical capacity to evaluate these exterior views. I am aware, of course, of the debate now raging in various parts of academia over the merits and demerits of Orientalism, with the latter often attributed to a sub-conscious desire for cultural domination. While I recognize very well the roots from which such criticism stems, and understand and sympathize with some of its motivations, I do believe that on balance the external view can serve a potentially creative function. But only provided the culture under study has the capacity for continuous self-reflection and for vigorous but dispassionate and critical assessment of such exterior views in both the national and international contexts. Out of honest and well-grounded interaction between such interior and exterior views, a deeper and much more secure sense of cultural identity and national purpose can develop, as well as a sense of global human solidarity, transcending traditional tribal or ethnic perceptions and loyalties.

I would particularly stress the importance of such interaction to Japan because of the homogeneity of its culture. This homogeneity has provided Japan

with a rich cultural soil that made possible her very rapid and creative adjustment to the challenge of modernity -- it has thus carried Japan a very long way without paying the price of cultural discontinuity and social fragmentation.

At the same time, homogeneity can carry with it the risk of reduced sensitivity to other cultures. Human history suggests that ethnic and culturally pluralistic societies have generally shown a greater capacity for relating to other cultures in terms of mutual respect and essential equality. The natural and essential human affinities, interpenetrations, and interdependencies -- across religious, racial, linguistic and ideological boundaries -- seem somehow to become more quickly recognized in multi-cultural societies. Respect for our fellow members of the global society is particularly important in a world that is no longer ruled by one or two dominant cultures, but increasingly reflects the perceptions, expectations and assertions of many diverse cultures. By virtue of her homogeneity, therefore, Japan needs to make a double effort to understand and empathize with other cultures -- for her very survival could well hinge on her capacity to relate to the many profoundly different but equally valid ways of being of peoples and societies in a comprehensive global vision of mutuality and interdependence that transcends her own unique, culturally rooted hierarchical perception of the outside world.

Once armed with a firmer perception of self, the direction of Japan's role in the future international community will become clearer -- because she can then turn her immense talents and resources to certain fundamental questions in which she and the rest of the world have great mutual interest:

- How can a nation without military power make its way in a pluralistic world and have a real voice in fashioning a viable and humane international system in which no one country or group of countries are in control?

- How can one translate economic strength into political power capable of illuminating and bringing to reality the vision of a global society functioning with less resort to violence and lower levels of armaments?

- How can a nation convincingly demonstrate that it has legitimate title papers to moral high ground, from which it has no choice but to argue the imperatives of peace?

- What, in short, can the Japanese perspective offer the notion of common survival, common security and common international economic development in a pluralistic world where no nation can survive in isolation?

A nation's claim to moral leadership can only come from its own commitment to a more peaceful and just world and a clarity about its own values. I believe that Japan could aspire to that moral leadership if she sets herself to it. As the "third superpower," she would have a singular advantage in making such a bid.

Japan has a very real, deep-seated and fundamental commitment to peace that took root in the ashes of atomic attack. Uniquely among the great powers, she forswears war and nuclear weapons. From such a vantage point, she could claim an undeniable role in helping to chart a course toward a world more capable of peaceful management, one that recognizes that moral reasoning is the only viable basis for regulating its affairs.

However, countries who choose to rely on moral authority must avoid any appearance of vacillation that is devoid of moral dignity. They need to make it clear that they stand for something -- something that goes beyond their own national interests, i.e. a more morally acceptable, sustainable international order. They dare not risk that their policies, however, grandly stated, are only construed as "looking out for No. 1." Thus the future vision they offer needs to be stated lucidly and persuasively, and it must be backed up by consistent appropriate policies, vigorously pursued, that leave no room for

misinterpretation.

In this connection I believe there are a number of concrete steps Japan could take to demonstrate her commitment to improved international understanding and the cause of peace.

The first would be to build up her infrastructure for listening and relating to the legitimate self-interests of other nations -- in her universities, research centres and other institutions. In this connection also, the appeal for an international centre for Japanese studies in Kyushu should be warmly welcomed. The search for Japan's own national identity should, of course, go on -- but not in isolation. It should be conducted within the context of an effort at clearer perceptions of the legitimate interests of all nations, including Japan, on which to build a more viable and morally persuasive international order.

A second step would be to assist, in whatever ways possible, in building up the world's supply of competent Japanologists -- and especially in the Third World where they are now in very limited numbers. Japan's future is bound to be caught up more and more with her neighbours in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other regions in both North and South. This relationship could only benefit by increasing the number of scholars from those regions who know Japan's culture, history, politics, and economy intimately.

Another very important move would be the general opening up of the Japanese higher education system to the world -- making it much more international in character and much more accessible and attractive. Special attention should be directed to Third World students, who will be the future leaders of that huge segment of the world. Their educational experience in Japan could significantly improve her capacity to work more closely and on a more sustained basis with the developing countries in the future. This has been amply demonstrated in the West

by the educational opportunities provided to many of the present Third World leaders, and their resultant affinities with Western values and perceptions.

These are three steps that could be taken to improve the cultural climate in the international arena for Japan. Two others, of a more political nature, would also help demonstrate Japan's global interests and outlook.

The first would be an increase in the levels of aid to the developing countries, more and more of it untied, at a time of declining interest in international development. This would constitute a distinct contribution to the world's social stability and would signal the conviction that the improvement of the lives of men and women around the globe was in the best interests of Japan -- morally, economically and politically.

Second would be increased support by Japan to the peace-keeping capabilities of the United Nations in various regions of the world. I do not refer here to soldiers, sailors or airmen. What I have in mind rather is that, within its own Constitutional limits, Japan could make a substantial contribution to the UN's peace-keeping forces -- in funding, in non-military hardware and technology, including, perhaps, aerial and space surveillance systems. Japan would thus be investing her great technological expertise and rich scientific resources in convincing fashion in works for peace.

With these steps Japan would be staking a claim, in clear and compelling voice, to a new kind of leadership so very much needed in this modern pluralistic world. This would be a leadership having nothing to do with the flourishing of military might, nor even with the flexing of economic muscle, but rather drawing its strength and inspiration from the vision of the myriad peoples and cultures of this planet Earth living in peaceful co-existence and harmony. Such leadership, I feel sure, could win the gratitude and admiration of people the world over.

Thank you very much.