



## **Phantom of Cynicism** by Yoichi Funabashi

It rained that evening. I had expected him, soaked with rain, to proceed to the plenary session hall with his fellow faction members. The entire hall would rise up to greet him and he would be in the limelight of once in a lifetime. However, the drama ended up instead to be an anticlimax.

The lead player of the drama boasted, "I will rebel to change Japan." However, he chickened out even before the curtain was drawn up and retired backstage. This is out of the question.

To begin with, people had not set a high value on Kochi Kato's capabilities. Their response to Kato's proposal for fiscal reconstruction might have been something like let's play a game and see how competent he is. However, they had pinned hopes on his moving to break down the barrier against the current political situation.

### **Alternative Proposal Card Now Lost**

Kato failed to meet people's expectations. Transparency and trust in politics and the legitimacy of the Mori administration above all had been questioned. Yoshiro Mori was picked for the post of prime minister through closed-door negotiations of Nagata-cho's Kremlin-like politics. The public had wanted to play a "Kato" card, expecting that the anger and deep-seated grudge of Kato, who was excluded from the conspiratorial negotiations, might collapse the ancient regime.

"Japan's politics is hopeless. Nobody places confidence in it any longer. I have been reminded that governance has ceased to function in this country."

This is a comment made by a lawmaker who acted in concert with Kato. He insisted to the wire on voting in favor of a no-confidence motion against the cabinet of Prime Minister Mori, but he made a policy turnabout at the eleventh hour.

A *Financial Times* editorial noted, "After all, Japan does not want full-fledged reform." The impression is gaining ground that in Japan not only the economy/financial services but also governance is non-performing. It can be said indeed that the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) mainstream factions have won. However, they lost the "Kato card" or an "alternative" card that could have been played toward the ruling coalition as well as toward the people. The incident may accelerate the LDP's self-destroying process.

American politics is also in turmoil. The Democratic Party and the Republican Party are engaging in a mud-flinging contest over the way votes are being counted in the presidential election. The results have yet to be announced. Larry King, host of a CNN news program, lamented, "The U.S. has become an ungovernable country."

System fatigue, such as money-dominated politics, excessive litigation, and political party-oriented public opinion, are wearing away democracy. A friend of mine, who is a presidential assistant, remarked, "What is most dangerous is that the incident this time may turn off the public if they think that even trials are after all a partisan strife. If that happens, a sense of justice will decay and cynicism will permeate." He was referring to the partisan stance that judges of each level in the state of Florida are taking over the recounting of votes.

However, a major difference between Japan and the U.S. is that in the U.S., politics is "shamefully transparent," as Americans themselves admit in view of the incident this time. In the case of Japan, the recent political feud is a mere tempest in a teacup.

In addition, whereas in the U.S., economic and social movements vigorously promote politics, in Japan politicians' resistance to such a move is growing.

Both in Japan and the U.S. politicians are being buffeted by long-term and major changes, such as globalization. In Japan, the LDP continues to expand public works despite huge deficits that are strapping the government. Its economy is in an exhausted situation. The government tends to increasingly rely on public construction works as vote-collecting machine as its support rates drop. Such a stance will not create politics that prepares for the 21st century. Kato's sense of crisis that "our country is breaking down" was not wrong. This is a statement by a person who has long been in the artery of administration. The curtain was drawn by his self-destruction, which came after the fact that every reform attempt made in the 1990s has failed.

### **Fear of Cynicism Bringing About Xenophobia**

It appears that both in Japan and the U.S. hazardous politics is emerging. People are now tending to see politics as a show and to use it as an outlet for their pent-up grievances that stem from helplessness and a feeling of constriction. Clinton politics is guilty of having spread cynicism among American people. The LDP and the Mori administration are also guilty of having committed the same crime. A phantom of cynicism is hanging about here and there.

Cynicism should be feared, for it tends to bring about an inward-looking one-nation principle and xenophobia. It is worrisome that both in Japan and the U.S. people's interest in foreign relations and international order and efforts to promote such are declining.

*Dr. Yoichi Funabashi is a Special Correspondent with the Asahi Shimbun in Japan. This is a translation of an article that appeared in the November 24, 2000 issue of the Asahi and is reprinted with permission.*

Professor Wu is a noted specialist of American affairs. His article is a good summary of the policy the PRC wants the U.S. to implement, but were American policy-makers to follow his suggestions they would be acting contrary to the interests of the U.S., and its allies, and, in the long-term, China.

First, China is not a rising power. It is not the 21st century’s Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan. China has achieved an impressive economic performance in the past two decades because it started from zero after Mao’s “cultural revolution.” But in the coming years China will face numerous obstacles that will not only slow its growth but probably lead to major political upheaval and an economic crisis. The ruling party is ideologically bankrupt and is losing control of society. The absence of solid property rights prevents the emergence of a true market economy because, unlike Meiji Japan, China did not import western legal institutions and practices. Thus, as the CCP decays, China will revert to a weak state (i.e. low capacity to tax, endemic corruption, ineffective bureaucracy). Demographic trends, namely an enormously rapid rise in senior citizens due to the one-child policy, and ethnic conflict, especially in Xinjiang, will further undermine Chinese economic performance and political stability.

Second, Japan, not China, is at the core of American interests in Asia. Japan is by far Asia’s largest economy, and will remain so. Only with a political-military alliance with Japan, sustained by strong economic ties, can the United States remain an Asian power and therefore a world power.

Third, Mao may have told Nixon that Taiwan is a “small thing” but it is not a minor matter for the U.S. Though Japanese officials prefer to avoid mentioning this issue for fear of antagonizing China, the U.S.-Japan alliance would not survive an American failure to prevent the *Anschluss* of

Taiwan by China. One would also expect a scholar raised in what was a Marxist-Leninist polity to realize that the United States is an ideological nation. The U.S. can only be conceived of as a liberal democracy. This affects its foreign policy. Though the U.S. has had alliances with non-liberal states and has strong ties with autocracies such as Saudi Arabia, one of the pillars of American policy is to support liberal democratic states; its relations with fellow liberal democratic polities are generally far stronger than with other nations. For the U.S. to force one of the very few successful new liberal democracies to enter into an “unequal treaty” with a dictatorship that jails peaceful practitioners of Falun Dafa and Roman Catholicism would be highly detrimental to the ideological integrity of the United States as a nation.

For the U.S., the “solution” to the Taiwan issue is simple. It needs to have overwhelming military superiority in the region to deter China’s rulers from even thinking about military action. China’s “face” can easily be saved because Taiwanese politicians have been careful to avoid proclaiming formal independence. The alternative, of letting the US abandon Taiwan, which Professor Wu proposes, would actually have far more unpleasant consequences for China. It would lead to the inevitable break up of the US-Japan alliance. This would force Japan to engage on a major arms build up to replace American protection. Japan would win the arms race with China thanks to its vastly greater wealth, its technological prowess, and the advantage of its ties to American industry. Anti-Chinese sentiment would rise, especially if Japanese feared that China was trying to expand its influence to the Korean peninsula. Thus instead of a rather benign confrontation with America, China would face a malign rivalry with Japan.

*Robert Dujarric, Hudson Institute, Washington D.C.*