

'Americanism in Postwar Japan: Political Consciousness on Pro/Anti- American Sentiment'

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Vanue : Setagaya Campus, Library, AV hall

Today, I will lecture on the presence of America in modern Japan and East Asia based on a book that I have recently written entitled, *American-Friendly and Anti-American Sentiments: Political Unconsciousness in Postwar Japan* (Iwanami Shoten Publisher).

In the past, I have had my students read a book called, *Reading Donald Duck*, but have received a very negative reaction. It is a notable book that criticizes cultural imperialism. However, the students reacted strongly against it, arguing that they did not want to hear their favorite Disney character blamed. Their thinking is that they although they dislike the United States for attacking Iraq they like Disneyland. But how can we consider these two aspects of America—America as a militaristic country and America as a cultural exporter? In my view, postwar Japan has been an exceedingly American-friendly society compared with the rest of the world. All kinds of data show that this Japanese attitude toward America has been steadily maintained since the end of World War II. I have been approaching the proposition “How can we consider this stable Japanese attitude toward America?” from a popular cultural level.

In one of his books, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, John W. Dower, who is a professor of Japanese history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, clearly explains how postwar Japan's emperor system was established in the midst of a cozy bilateral relationship with American occupation and social movements. However, although I believe that his study offers sharp insights into the collusive ties between Emperor Hirohito and General Douglas MacArthur, it does not provide a properly critical view of ordinary people's awareness in daily life. It seems that the professor approaches the relationship between the establishment and ordinary people from a somewhat dualistic perspective. I speculate that the Japanese public also has a kind of collusive view or emotional attachment to the United States. In addition, Dower only considers Japan-US relations. In fact, it is important to look at America in postwar Japan in terms of the Cold War structure, the American military paradigm in that structure, and the Asian systems that emerged in response to that situation. Roughly speaking, I am of the opinion that approaching postwar Japan in Asia from the viewpoint of its ties with the United States leads us to consider the transition from imperial Japan's colonial rule in pre-war East Asia to the US hegemony in postwar Asia as a continuous development.

In response to the question “Why did Japan continue to take a US-friendly attitude?” I hypothesize that that was because it was “a comfortable approach” for Japan. In establishing the postwar structure, America deprived Japan of its political and economic power, which imperial Japan had exerted over Korea and China during the war. Our country accepted that structure in a positive manner. Japan gained a secondary hegemony in East Asia by putting itself under the American umbrella. From the 1950s to the 1970s, when Korea, Okinawa and Taiwan were established as military citadels, the mainland of Japan enjoyed democracy and a consumption culture and proceeded with demilitarization. This enabled the country to achieve high-speed economic growth, attain the number one economic status in the whole Asian region, and achieve rich lives far ahead of other countries, which was very comfortable for Japanese people. This outlines the situation in postwar Japan.

My definition of the words *Americanism* and *Americanization* is quite different from those of people who conduct regional studies. My thinking is that these terms can be defined in two ways that suggest the dual aspect of America. The United States has a dual structure in that the country is both a nation-state and a global entity. In other words, it is a world, as well as a nation. The whole world began to Americanize around World War I. America itself started to gain the awareness that it was not only a country but also had a large economic and military presence throughout the entire world. America also established a global presence in individual countries. The word *Americanization* means not only that immigrants to America assimilate her cultural values but also that the cultural structures of countries other than America change along with the arrival of American cultural elements.

In my view, Americanism means that other countries learn America as America from outside eyes. The concept of *Americanism* not only constitutes a value system embedded in a nation called America but also offers critical insights into America from outside eyes as described in *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said (1935–2003). In my book, I approach Americanism in East Asia in terms of three aspects: The first aspect is Emperor Hirohito and General MacArthur; the second is US military bases and the consumption culture in urban areas; and the third is America in Japanese household environments with a particular focus on electric appliances. Now, I will explain these points.

First, I want to mention a famous picture depicting Emperor Hirohito and General MacArthur. The picture was taken when the emperor visited MacArthur on September 27, 1945. Two days later, it appeared prominently in newspapers. There was a dispute over the publication of the picture between the then Ministry of Home Affairs and the General Headquarters (GHQ), and it is well known that this confrontation ultimately caused the ministry to be abolished. It is also said that this picture epitomizes the Japan-US. relationship in the postwar era. More specifically, it captures a relaxed, dignified MacArthur and a nervous-looking, diminished Hirohito. This picture gave many Japanese the impression that their country, which had been dealt a heavy blow by its defeat in the

war, would be placed under the control of a strong America in the postwar phase.

However, this interpretation leaves some room for doubt because it only became common only many years later. There are few records describing what ordinary people thought of the picture at the time. Therefore, it is unfair to declare that most people looked at the picture solely from the perspective of the superiority or inferiority of the two countries. Many official stories have it that the emperor began to be regarded as a human being around this period, but it also leaves some room for skepticism. Indeed, some local newspaper articles on the emperor's visits to their areas after 1946 show that people continued to worship him as a living god just as they had worshiped him before and during the war. Many "fake emperors" also appeared and won some sympathizers.

By this line of reasoning, it would be too simple to speculate that people in those days regarded the picture as depicting the basic postwar structure and they were convinced of their country's defeat in the war. My close research has clarified that, unexpectedly, the picture was an exceptional one. Douglas MacArthur stayed in Japan for over six years, exerting overwhelming political influence on the country, but he kept a surprisingly low profile in the media. I guess that his low-profile attitude toward the mass media was carefully contrived since his portrait was depicted on commemorative stamps in the Philippines. But in Japan, Emperor Hirohito came to be spotlighted as the central national figure with MacArthur remaining in the shadows. The earlier picture was exceptional and MacArthur intentionally kept himself away from the public eye during the whole occupation period. In my opinion, this approach worked in reverse to imprint the presence of the America on the Japanese mind.

Next, regarding US military bases and the consumption culture in urban areas, this aspect also has a dual structure. A vast number of US military bases were constructed throughout the postwar occupation period. The postwar deployment of the US bases in the Kantô region was concentrated in areas stretching from central Tokyo to the south and west, that is, from Hibiya and Kasumigaseki, where GHQ's bases were situated, to Roppongi, Hiroo and Harajuku. Large bases were located in Yokosuka and Atsugi, and the area extending from Tama to Shônan was the central arena of the US military forces and many American facilities were constructed. The area became popular as Tokyo's most fashionable spot for young people after the 1970s and this was largely due to the concentration of US facilities found there. Harajuku, Roppongi and Azabu had been closely connected with military forces even before the war. That was why the US forces occupied this region. As the bases spread widely, US-related residences and stores were built and Japanese female prostitutes called "Miss Only," who were particularly engaged in providing sexual services for the senior echelons of the American forces stationed in Japan, started to live there. Many young people were enthralled with Western culture and gathered around the area in pursuit of the latest trends.

Along with the global reorganization of hegemony, the United States was contemplating making Japan the economic center of East Asia as part of its Asian strategy for the world in the

middle of the Korean War and Cold War in the 1950s. Focusing on Japan's industrial capability, America looked at the country as an essential center providing stability for the East Asian economy. In the meantime, Okinawa, South Korea and Taiwan were military citadels against the Communist bloc. In accordance with this basic US strategy, land used for American facilities in Tokyo was gradually returned to our country. As a result, people living in Tokyo and other urban areas became less aware of the presence of US bases. This helped remove the image of American forces as a violent entity and paved the way for people to accept and consume something American and foreign as a kind of fantasy. As a result, Roppongi and Harajuku, which used to host US forces, were developed to meet the demands of trend-conscious young people, which perfectly symbolized the transition to a new phase.

This was also the case with the Shōnan area. Many US bases were concentrated in the area, which stretched from the Shōnan coast to Yokosuka. This created an image of "Shōnan Boy" and "a Trendy Shōnan." This is also true of Hawaii, Guam, Okinawa and Florida; US bases and holiday resorts are closely linked with each other. The Shōnan area with beaches and bases is the epitome of this relationship. *Crazy Fruit*, a movie starring the famous Japanese actor Yūjirō Ishihara (1934–1987) and highlighting Shōnan, depicted him as a man who fell in love with a woman serving high-ranking American soldiers.

As my last point, I will say something about electric appliances. The fantasized America became more accessible to Japanese in their daily lives. This means that America turned from a military entity to something more familiar that secured our identity. Electric appliances offer significant insights into the process.

The idea of electric appliances being generally used by housewives emerged in the mid 1950s. The term *electric appliances* was coined at about that time. The main target of the products was housewives and a new trend emerged that housewives should play a central role in the electric appliance market. More specifically, in America people depended on electric appliances for various daily activities from the laundry to dishwashing and Japanese people considered whether or not to follow suit. An advertisement for Matsushita Electric Works, Ltd. says: "Article 25 of the Japanese constitution declares, 'All people shall have the right to maintain the standards of wholesome and cultured living.' Electric appliances are among the items to facilitate the ideal. Electric appliances will greatly help Japan achieve its democratization. Look around you and make plans for a more convenient and comfortable life." This advertisement declares that home electric appliances will speed up the process of democratization and housewives are the driving force behind the democratization process.

Needless to say, the democratization postulated in this ad means Americanization. Ordinary housewives played a pivotal role in the formula "Americanization=electric appliances=democratization." Interestingly enough, Article 25 of the Japanese constitution actually

declares, “All people shall have the right to maintain the *minimum* standards of wholesome and cultured living.” However, Matsushita deliberately removed the word *minimum* to construct the image of cultured living that they wanted Japanese citizens to pursue.

This Americanization through electric appliances subsequently led to Japanization. The Americanization process enabled postwar Japanese to reconstruct their national identity. Around the 1960s, many advertisements for Japan-made electric appliances appeared. Almost all of those advertisements included a notice saying “This product has gained credit from American consumers.” This is based on the logic that Japan’s technical standards have been confirmed by American consumers, thus providing a good reason for the Japanese to be confident of the quality of their products. In other words, our country succeeded in gaining credit from the United States in the masculine realm of technical standards, while housewives pursued an American way of life in the feminine realm of convenient electric appliances. This suggests that the Japanese national identity was constructed via America in both the male and female cases. During the 1970s, the image of America as a military entity faded away and the idea of America as a foreign country that secures Japan’s national identity and convenience of living came to the fore.

Japanese US-friendly sentiments are underpinned by the logic that a denial of America will lead to instability as regards their own identity as Japanese. They established their national identity by standing close to the United States and gaining its respect. However, this framework has probably been shaken since the 1990s. But Japanese people have yet to establish a new structure to guarantee their identity. I consider that in the current situation, Japanese people are on the horns of a huge dilemma about being US-friendly in that they feel uncomfortable about it but cannot break away from it.