The Chrysanthemum and the Eagle

Sato, Ryuzo

Published by NYU Press

Sato, Ryuzo.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/15723.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15723

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=493551
Several years ago when reporters asked Crown Prince Naruhito to describe the qualities he was looking for in a future wife, he replied, “I want to marry someone who has the same sense of values that I have.”

Although the concept of values is taken very seriously in both the United States and Europe, it has attracted little public attention in Japan until recently. Even the expression that means “values” in Japanese is not very old. If we think about it, however, frictions are bound to arise in any relationship—be it a marriage or a relationship between two countries—if the two partners have major differences in priorities, in the things that each side considers important in their lives. If partners don’t share similar values, they will have to spend enormous amounts of energy reaching an agreement.

When my book *The Chrysanthemum and the Eagle* first came out in Japanese, George Bush was president of the United States. In 1994, Bill Clinton resides in the White House, and Morihisa Hosokawa is Japan’s prime minister. Much has been made of the fact that this is the first Democratic administration in twelve years and
that Clinton is the youngest president since John Kennedy. But more important than these superficial changes is the change in values they represent. An understanding of these values is likely to be crucial for understanding the personality of the Clinton administration and may also offer insights that will help us predict the future direction of U.S.–Japanese relations.

President Clinton has been described as a rare individual who was elected despite public misgivings about his avoidance of the draft, use of marijuana, and marital infidelity. Considering that twenty or thirty years ago the presidential hopes of men like Adlai Stevenson and Nelson Rockefeller were blighted merely because they were divorced, the criteria for judging the qualities American voters are looking for in their political leaders have clearly undergone a major change. American values have changed with the times.

If the key words of the Clinton administration are “values for a new generation,” how will this be reflected in U.S.–Japanese relations? First, this administration will not be bound by ideology or labels, but will be results-oriented. This will mean a tougher policy toward process-oriented Japan—Japan will be told to show results and not try to get by with explanations or excuses. Furthermore, the participation of women in public affairs will be greater than ever. Barbara Bush was famous for being a good wife in the traditional sense of the word, devoted to playing a supportive but clearly subordinate role to her husband. Hillary Rodham Clinton projects the image of the modern career woman with abilities and values of her own, who is capable of carving out a position for herself independent of her husband’s status or occupation. In that
sense, the fact that career woman Masako Owada will one day become empress may provide the rest of the world with a new insight into Japan—the Japanese sense of values may not be quite so different as some people have tended to believe.

Apart from the much ballyhooed appointments of women and minorities to the cabinet, the new administration has no notable star players. Such a lineup is perhaps suited to the multifaceted operations it will have to undertake. Now that the world has plunged headlong into the post-cold war era, the United States urgently needs to make the shift from a military to a peacetime economy. Yet ethnic conflicts, no longer held in check by the two superpowers, are multiplying. As the flames of ethnic hatreds flare up all over the globe, a number of problems must be dealt with simultaneously. The situation calls for team work rather than for the grandstand plays of such famous former secretaries of state as John Foster Dulles, Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, or James Baker.

Although I have used the expression “a change in values” to describe the new administration, that does not mean that everything has changed overnight. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the fundamental concepts on which the United States was founded, remain a constant source of American values despite the transfer of power. Still, as I discuss in this book, the weight given to each of these rights changes to reflect the political philosophy—conservative or liberal—of the president in power.

If, for example, the Bush administration could be defined in terms of Hamiltonian elitism, President Clinton’s political shading might be called a Jeffersonian
populism. This liberal spirit reveals itself in policies that show greater tolerance toward people of color, women, the socially disadvantaged, and homosexuals. Clinton’s economic policies, however, have a conservative tinge to them. They are centered on domestic economic concerns and give priority to American companies. A Clinton administration is emerging that is liberal on social issues but conservative as far as economic policy is concerned.

One other aspect of U.S. policy that will continue to affect U.S.–Japanese relations is the view of economic strength as a national security issue, a view that began emerging in the late 1980s and is a central issue in this book. The fact that President Clinton has set up a new cabinet-level National Economic Council on the model of the already-existing National Security Council is a clear sign that he intends to treat economic policy on the same footing as military strategy. Because Clinton believes that America’s future depends on a revitalization of the U.S. economy, his administration will approach the issue of strengthening and raising America’s international competitiveness as the economic equivalent of war.

In 1990, when the Japanese version of *The Chrysanthemum and the Eagle* first appeared, the Japan-is-different controversy had erupted in the United States, and in Japan voices were shrilly calling for a “Japan That Can Say No.” Undoubtedly, one of the underlying causes of this confrontational atmosphere was the sense of superiority that the Japanese had about their economic prosperity. As Japan’s technological nationalism was gathering strength, Japanese banks appeared destined to rule the world, and Japanese bro-
kerages were flush with success from a booming stock market.

From my more than thirty years' experience of living in both the United States and Japan, I instinctively felt there was something abnormal about this situation. In the Japanese version of this book I made light of Japanese pride in their country's economic power. I also made the point that Japanese pacifism is not shared by the rest of the world and urged Japan to discuss the role of the Japanese Self-Defense Force instead of treating it as a taboo topic. These problems have subsequently become mainstream issues, and today even the Japanese Socialist party is expounding the need for Japan to make a greater contribution to international society.

I am not a social critic nor am I in the business of predicting the future, yet many of the points I made in my book about U.S.–Japan relations have since come true. This is not because I am an expert on these matters; I have merely written what is obvious to anyone who looks at Japan from the outside. Furthermore, the essence of what I had to say then remains unchanged even now after so many enormous changes have occurred.

In the case of the Gulf War, for instance, the memory of the U.S.-led coalition force's ferocious land and air attack on the Iraqi army is still relatively fresh in most people's minds, yet right up until the bombing began, almost all the so-called military experts who appeared on Japanese television made the absurd assertion that America was unlikely to embark on the use of force. The idealism and pacifism of these Japanese paceniks were so laughable in international society that—it was
said—the only people who were unaware of what was really going on were Saddam Hussein and the Japanese. The United States acted as I always predicted it would, but because most Japanese tend to view the world from the vantage point of their own physical and spiritual insularity, they completely failed to recognize what the rest of the world took for granted. Unfortunately, that still remains true today. Famine in Africa, ethnic strife in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the perilous process of democratization in Russia—there are storm clouds everywhere one looks. The difference between Japan, which is relatively peaceful and prosperous even in a recession, and the harsh international climate is so enormous that it is hard for most Japanese to comprehend. They would like to close their eyes to the realities of the world outside the Japanese archipelago. Few if any attempts have been made to eliminate what has become the trademark of Japanese behavior in international society—keeping its pocketbook open and its mouth shut.

One of the major differences between Japan and the United States is that America is not allowed the luxury of insularity. As the sole remaining superpower, another topic I deal with in this book, the United States is expected not only to act but also to lead. Although the Clinton administration may have promised to “focus on the economy like a laser,” international demands make that a difficult promise to fulfill. On another level, however, Americans tend to be just as insular as the Japanese. Confident of the rightness of their actions, they are often shockingly ignorant of, or indifferent to, the opinions of others.

Americans suffer from an obvious lack of a real un-
derstanding of Japan, and the media in the United States do little to help the situation. On February 17, 1991, for example, the New York Times’s account of the Japanese government’s baby bonus plan began: “With its crowded roads, overstuffed commuter trains and cramped housing, Japan would hardly seem to be in need of more people. So when the government recently started telling the Japanese to bear more children, many people, especially women, became incensed.” This is not wrong as far as it goes, but I can’t help feeling that the reporter’s strong individualism led him to downplay the elementary economic issues involved: the steady decline in Japan’s population, the over-concentration of people in large cities accompanied by depopulation of rural areas, and the prospect that by the year 2025 one in every four Japanese will be over the age of sixty-five. Keeping the birthrate low may be crucial for India and the People’s Republic of China, but it can do more harm than good in Japan.

Having observed firsthand how little people overseas know about what is going on in Japan, I feel strongly about increasing the channels through which information about Japan is transmitted to the rest of the world. The Japanese must make themselves better understood. Information overflows within Japan, which rightly prides itself as being in the vanguard of the Information Age, yet a great deal of the most important news never even gets translated, let alone disseminated through international media.

On the other hand, despite the prominence the Japanese media give to American affairs, the Japanese people are surprisingly ignorant about the United States. Information about America in the Japanese press or
on Japanese television tends to be very superficial, a repetition of received ideas with no effort to look behind the platitudes. When I started writing the Japanese version of this book back in 1989, criticisms of Japan in the United States were growing more and more shrill. Japan-bashing on one side of the Pacific had given rise to America-bashing on the other. During this period of trans-Pacific bad feeling, I tried to draw on my own experience of life in America to go beyond the stereotypes perpetuated in the Japanese media and look at some of the basic divergences in the two countries’ priorities, in what I referred to earlier as their sense of values. I firmly believe no true solution to the frictions that have exacerbated U.S.—Japanese relations can be achieved without first delving into these problems and tracing them back to their origins.

Much has happened in the world since the Japanese version of this book first appeared. The Japanese economy, which had been held up as an example to the world during the 1980s, was a bubble that eventually burst. Meanwhile, outside Japan, a number of major changes have occurred in quick succession: the collapse of Soviet communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union; the Gulf War; the end to the myth of a never-ending rise in Japanese land prices; a global economic slowdown; the first Japanese soldiers to be sent abroad since World War II; the break-up of the largest faction of the LDP and formation of a coalition government in Japan; the end of twelve years of Republican administrations in the United States—these and other events have profoundly altered the political and economic landscape. Though tensions between the
United States and Japan do not seem quite as acute as they were in 1989 when I was writing the Japanese version of this book, mutual ignorance and misunderstanding still prevail in U.S.–Japanese relationships. Today advances in transportation and communications technology have just about perfected the physical links between the United States and Japan. In rewriting and updating my book for an American audience, I hope to contribute in my own small way to bridging the communications gap between our two countries.

Many people have worked behind the scenes to make this book possible. On the Japanese side, I would like to thank Ms. Sawako Noma, president of Kodansha, which published the original Japanese version of this book, and Kodansha editors Tadashi Ichikawa, Takashi Ogose, and Sueo Muraoka. My deep gratitude also goes to Tsuneo Watanabe, president of the Yomiuri Shimbun Company, which awarded the Japanese version of this book the First Yomiuri Rondansho Prize for writings in the social sciences; to Ichiro Kato, the chairman of the selection committee, whose valuable comments prompted me to write a sequel; and to then Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, who did me the honor of speaking at the award ceremony.

On this side of the Pacific, my special thanks go to translator Jean Hoff for all her efforts. At the Center for Japan–U.S. Business and Economic Studies, Hiroki Nikaido and Laurie Jaeger helped track down stray details, and my associate director Rama Ramachandran and the Center coordinator Myra Engel read over the final version and made many helpful suggestions. I
would also like to express my appreciation to Colin Jones, director of the New York University Press, whose comments were extremely useful in clarifying issues for an American readership. I take this occasion to extend to all of them my sincere thanks.
THE CHRYSANTHEMUM AND THE EAGLE