A Roadmap to Millennial Japan

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This introductory essay aims to provide an overview of the context that brings together the articles in this issue: the ongoing discursive construction of Japan during the long economic downturn of the 1990s. A huge volume of commentaries on the malaise afflicting Japan, unleashed particularly from the neoliberal and neonationalist camps, has fed into and shaped the impression of overall national doom. Against this backdrop, the present essay points out a significant degree of complicity between the Japanese neoliberals and neonationalists, despite their apparent disagreements on their attitudes toward economic globalization and the role of nation-states today. I examine some of the representative claims made by the two sides, analyzing the politics involved in their discursive manufacturing of the "crisis."

In the latter half of the essay I explore some theoretical frameworks through which to make sense of 1990s Japan that counters the widespread tendency to isolate it both spatially and temporally. Instead of defining the 1990s through the recession and its effects, I suggest examining the decade in relation to the

broader historical trends of globalization and postmodernization that followed the completion of Japan's postwar economic modernization. I argue, furthermore, that this perspective helps us understand the profound sense of not only economic but also sociocultural disturbances in Japan with which the decade has become identified.

The economic turmoil of the 1990s has often been cast as both the cause and the effect of the sudden malfunction of the "Japanese system," which allegedly encompasses not only politics and economics but also the nation's social and cultural organizations that took shape in the process of its modernization. This essay approaches sociocultural trends in the 1990s not as the effects of such an abrupt breakdown but as a culmination of the historical process by which the apparatus for producing and reproducing the national community has undergone a complex course of decline. In the last section of the essay I discuss how we may analyze the 1990s as a paradoxical nexus of the retreating national order, on one hand, and the widespread eruption of nationalistic sentiment, on the other. The section also examines the dominant currents of the intellectual landscape in 1990s Japan and the nature of the crisis that it articulates.

It is the built-in constraint of the introduction that the discussion here barely scratches the surface of an extremely broad range of issues. Furthermore, an attempt to make sense of events so close to the time of writing and still in the process of unfolding cannot help but be tentative and speculative. While recognizing these limitations, however, I believe that taking a stab at mapping this complex terrain into some manner of coherence may contribute to the discussion of what really is at stake in trying to understand the nation's turbulent decade.
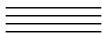
The recession of Japan in the 1990s acquired an epochal status as it became increasingly identified with the breakdown of the nation's unique economic system: the growth machine supported by the iron triangle (industry, bureaucracy, and single-party politics) as well as by the ethos of harmony and formidable work ethics of a homogeneous and highly disciplined population. It is said that while this formation underwrote the nation's "miraculous" high-speed industrialization and growth that made it a poster child of modernization theory and enabled its subsequent rise to the ranks of global economic superpower, it is now strangling the nation with a stagnant econ-

omy. Commonly thought to be at the heart of the so-called Japanese disease is the impasse stemming from the giant export-dependent economy that has left its domestic economy relatively underdeveloped. Conditions such as an extremely high cost of living rigged by an overregulated and inefficient import, distribution, and retail structure; the inadequacies of social security; and a tax system that punishes consumption have consistently squeezed the funding from Japanese households into industries as a cheap source of money, mediated largely by commercial banks. Under heavy protection and regulation by the government, this funding mechanism encouraged the banks to overloan and large corporations to overborrow, helping build the capital-intensive heavy and chemical industries that drove postwar industrialization and growth. The bank-corporation nexus, furthermore, was one of the primary means by which the Japanese bureaucracy, particularly the powerful Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, steered the course of the national economy while avoiding more blunt forms of state intervention.

The system, however, allegedly outlived its efficacy in the 1980s and instead encouraged the formation of the speculative bubble and its subsequent collapse. By then Japan was drawing envy from other industrialized nations by its resilient responses to repeated global economic upheavals since the early 1970s. Japan appeared to have pulled off rapid organizational and technological restructuring in the manufacturing sector (becoming an international model for improved methods and quality of production as well as rigorous cost-cutting), and the broad reorientation of its economy away from resource- and labor-intensive heavy industries to high value-added high/mixed technology lines; and it quickly expanded the nation's international market share in these areas. This resulted in Japan's huge trade surplus, especially against the United States, which, in turn, raised the value of the yen against the dollar—the trend that the Japanese government, under international pressure, formally sanctioned in the Plaza Accord of 1985.

In the face of the skyrocketing yen that severely cut into the profitability of the Japanese export industry, however, the government attempted to curb the appreciation of the currency by easing its monetary policy. This left Japanese banks overflowing with liquidity, while at the same time the nation's banking industry was losing some of the traditional clientele, due to the changes in corporate fund-raising methods. Gradual deregulation of the capital market by the Japanese government that began in the 1970s

opened broader options for profitable and mature large corporations to acquire funds without the help of banks, through the issuance of stocks and bonds, leading the way in the trend of "financial engineering" (*zaiteku*).

Many banks, as a result, began lending to higher-risk borrowers, including stock speculators and real estate developers eager to borrow and invest in the burgeoning speculative boom. It has also been pointed out that banks were left with an oversupply of funds because the Japanese government, characteristically, did not deregulate the capital market for individual investors, so that most Japanese households had little choice but to put their money into bank accounts.[1] The lax evaluation standards for lending practiced by the Japanese banking industry fostered through years of its cozy relations with the government and corporate borrowers, together with increased volume of lending on the basis of highly overvalued real estate as collateral, helped pump more speculative investment into stocks and the real estate market.

It is likely that the speculative bubble was tolerated or perhaps even encouraged by the Japanese government in order to facilitate corporate investments necessary to sustain Japanese companies' competitiveness in the global trade war (made fierce by the volatility of currency exchange rates, the emergence of new competitors in Asia, and the general trend of overcapacity and overproduction in the world economy). By the end of the 1980s, however, the overvaluation of asset prices reached an alarming level, and when the government finally stepped in to cool the economy down by tightening its monetary policy and imposing restrictions on real estate sales, the boom quickly turned into a bust. The banks were left with mountains of nonperforming loans, the volume of which grew rapidly as the industry and the government obstinately refused to admit and confront its magnitude during the early 1990s.

The deterioration of the Japanese banking industry mired in nonperforming loans resulted in a bad credit crunch, but more seriously, the bursting of the bubble economy caused the overall decline of demands and market confidence. Furthermore, many of the standard macroeconomic measures deployed by the Japanese government in the past to stimulate the economy proved ultimately ineffective in the increasingly globalized economic environment. For instance, despite the slowdown of the Japanese economy, a large U.S. deficit kept the value of the yen up during the first part of the 1990s, depressing the profit of Japanese exports. The lowering of interest

rates by the Bank of Japan did help depreciate the yen, but it fell short of achieving the intended results: stimulating domestic demands, reviving the asset price, and thus shrinking bad loans. In the globalized financial market, low interest rates in Japan, rather than increasing domestic investment, led to the flow of money offshore in search of higher returns. The availability of Japanese funds and the artificially low interest rate encouraged an investment boom in East and Southeast Asia, contributing to the bubble there, which would later haunt the Japanese economy.

The meltdown of Asian financial markets, beginning with the Thai currency crisis in July 1997 and the severe recession that followed in many countries in the region, dealt a further blow to the teetering Japanese banks with large investments there, as well as to Japanese exporters that had increasingly become dependent on the demands in Asian markets. Meanwhile, after the collapse of a group of housing loan banks (*jusen*) in 1996, a string of bankruptcies of major Japanese banks and brokerages followed in 1997 and 1998. In the fall of 1998 the crisis in the Russian and Latin American economies aroused an alarm for a genuine worldwide depression, and fingers were pointed to Japan as the trigger of this doomsday scenario. At present, despite monetary and fiscal policies by the state (an extremely low interest rate since 1995 that was lowered to zero in February 1999 and massive stimulus packages sponsored by the government, the Japanese economy has yet to establish a clear prospect for a sustained economic recovery.
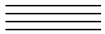
The broad outline provided above is a composite of widespread accounts on how and why Japan suffered a serious economic downturn in the 1990s. What concerns us here more than the accuracy of this narrative is the structural nature of the economic troubles that it constructs. The impact of negative psychology and a pessimistic outlook on the nation's economic future, furthermore, has been compounded by the association between the recession and a diverse set of ominous events and phenomena observed in the nation during the decade. Though they were not directly related to the recession, these occurrences have become closely interwoven with the economic crisis in the popular imagination, underscoring the perception of national peril that encompasses virtually all aspects of Japanese contemporary society.

Before the extent of the banking debacle and its possible effects on the

economy were widely registered by the public, there occurred two events that literally shook the nation: the Hanshin earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyō's sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway, both in 1995. The earthquake that devastated one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country not only exposed the precariousness of life in this highly urbanized nation but also became a striking symbol of the government's bureaucratic rigidity and ineptitude in crisis management. The disproportionate level of hardship that the earthquake brought to the economically, socially, and politically vulnerable segment of the population drew attention to the social fault lines running beneath the surface of the supposedly homogeneous "mass middle stratum society" (*chūkan taishū shakai*).

In the case of Aum Shinrikyō, the degree of threat that a single cult organization managed to pose to the public safety, and the failure of the Japanese police to prevent the elaborate planning and execution of sarinization as well as other violent crimes perpetrated by the group, shocked a population accustomed to a relatively low crime rate. Many of the core members of the cult were young, well-educated men and women from a seemingly unremarkable middle-class background, including engineers and lawyers trained at some of the top universities. The incident raised a number of lasting questions: How did society fail to instill basic ethical and social consciousness in these seemingly intelligent, serious, and ordinary young adults? And why could it not offer them a more compelling and meaningful vision of their lives and their future than to follow the millennialist delirium of a charismatic cult leader?

The moral panic over the status of the younger Japanese in the latter part of the decade was further reinforced by incidents that were publicized as signs of serious troubles afflicting teenage boys. The discovery of the monstrous murder of children committed by a fourteen-year-old boy who became known as "Youth A" (Shōnen A) in 1997 as well as a string of violent crimes by male teenagers in a fit of loss of control referred to as a state of being "sundered" (*kireru*) were cast as extreme cases of more pervasive problems with Japanese teens. This was only one side of the coin; what was violence in the case of boys was sex in the case of girls. The promiscuity of young Japanese girls and their cashing in on their sexual marketability—young girls selling their companionship and sexual favors to older men in return for money to pay for karaoke bars, luxury designer goods, and mobile phone bills—became widely publicized both inside and outside Japan. Pub-

lic outrage and puzzlement over prostitution by these young middle-class girls were complicated by the culpability of the adult males who constituted their clientele, as well as by the stark way in which the girls' actions seem to mirror the commodity fetishism of contemporary Japan and the "anything goes" zeitgeist (some called it the "moral meltdown") of the decade.

While the nation appeared to need strong and skillful leadership more than ever, the media was in fact saturated with reports of a diverse assortment of "misconducts" (*fushōji*) of elites affiliated with leading institutions in business, politics, and bureaucracy. The exposure of rampant corruption, greed, and ineptitude among political leaders is, of course, old news in Japan. But the barrage of scandals involving elite bureaucrats was characteristic of the decade. The corrupt ties between bureaucracy and business emerged not only from obvious suspects such as the Ministry of Finance but from a wide array of agencies, including the Health Ministry's cover-up of its role in approving the importation of HIV-contaminated blood products that resulted in 1,400 hemophiliacs contracting the virus. More recently the Japanese police force was rocked by scandals involving incompetence, criminal neglect, and criminal acts committed by officers. There were also reports revealing the ties between Japanese blue-chip corporations and *sōkaiya* (racketeers who threaten to cause trouble at the annual shareholders' meetings). The relations between large Japanese corporations and organized crime in general are said to have deepened through the real estate bubble in the 1980s when gangsters were often deployed (presumably through subcontractors) to facilitate large-scale developments in congested cities, providing services such as intimidating reluctant property owners into selling their lands or forcing stubborn renters to evacuate property already sold to developers.
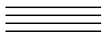
In summary, Japan in the 1990s has come to be widely perceived as the site of an imploding national economic system, a disintegrating social order, and the virtual absence of ethical and competent leadership. Against this background a huge volume of commentaries, finger pointing, and solutions for the national malaise has been churned out by the media. Most notably, a steady stream of critiques from neonational and neoliberal perspectives has substantially informed the public perception of the national crisis.

The Japanese government's massive bailout of failing banks in the 1990s

galvanized a surge of neoliberal criticism of government intervention in the banking debacle in particular and the market economy in general. Reformers argued for the need to foreclose on bad loans and to let insolvent banks and businesses fail, even at the cost of large-scale bankruptcies and unemployment. They insisted that in the end tough measures would hasten the process of recovery and be the right step toward building a competitive free-market economy in Japan. As the decade wore on and the bursting of the speculative bubble catalyzed a much broader and deeper economic downturn, the central target of the neoliberal attack shifted somewhat from the Japanese state and bureaucracy to Japanese corporate governance. Large Japanese corporations themselves were denounced as being steeped in the bureaucratic structure that breeds risk-averse, complacent, and insular culture. They were blamed for weakening the Japanese economy by ignoring the shareholders' rights to high return on equity and focusing instead on institutional growth and stability, acting as the caretakers of the organizations that give out rewards to loyal corporate stewards. According to the critics, therefore, corporate management too had to undergo rationalization—for example, by swiftly abandoning the lifetime employment system, interlocking shareholding among companies, or adherence to the "convoy system," in which strong companies aid and protect weaker companies among their affiliates, typically under bureaucratic guidance.

Already since the escalation of the trade war in the 1980s the Japanese government had been under fire from Washington to open its market and remove laws and regulations that protected the domestic industries. Though economic liberalism did have strong advocates among elite policy makers in Japan prior to the decade, in the 1990s the U.S. call for market-driven reform in Japan was joined by a broad neoliberal chorus from within the nation. For the neoliberals of the decade, the United States became the exemplar of all that is right and what Japan is not—a society that fosters healthy and dynamic competition, transparency, accountability, entrepreneurial spirit, fairness, and the ability to take bold but calculated risks. In the wake of the Japanese government's announcement of plans for the major deregulation of the Japanese financial market (so-called Japanese Big Ban), the neoliberal pundits brandished the term *global standard*—de facto shorthand for U.S. or Wall Street standards and practices—to chastise local deviations from it.

The neoliberal paean to the transparent borderless capital and the United States as its embodiment appeared unconcerned with the politics of free-

market ideology, such as the blatantly political motives behind the U.S. government's demands for the restructuring of the Japanese economic system. The rationalization of the Japanese banking industry reeling from the debt crisis would have provided an ideal feeding ground for Wall Street vultures, helping the United States promote its corporations and reinforcing the increasingly critical function that the alliance between government and high finance has played in U.S. geopolitics since the 1970s.[2] As the malady of the Japanese economy began to spread outside the banking industry, however, the U.S. government itself softened its free-market rhetoric and even supported the Japanese government's massive Keynesian stimulus package. This about-face in the U.S. policy toward Japan is said to reflect Washington's concern that further weakening of the Japanese economy could in turn catalyze the drying up of "Japan money" from the U.S. market.[3] There is, of course, the complex domestic politics of neoliberalism as well—the ideology of economic globalization has given further clout to the Japanese state's conventional tactics of using foreign pressure (*gaiatsu*) as a shield to push reform measures that benefit select economic sectors and businesses while muffling the complaints of interest groups that oppose them.

Neoliberals' celebration of globalization (and the vilification of the supposedly insular, irrational, and backward characteristics of the Japanese economic system), furthermore, is usually framed by the rhetoric of national interest. Their prescription for the Japanese economy and people to swallow the bitter pill of liberalization and rationalization is typically packaged under the familiar call to endure hardship for the sake of building national strength. As Yutaka Nagahara points out in his essay in this issue, globalization and the adoption of a global standard are typically promoted as the means for increasing the *national* economic competitiveness of Japan. Of course, the legitimization of the market through its alignment with national prosperity is an old argument that goes all the way back to Adam Smith. There are, furthermore, more contemporary reasons for pandering to the nationalistic and conservative impetus of the anxious population. Neoliberals need to rally public opinion because the so-called free market requires massive political initiatives, a huge array of reform measures, and new infrastructure in order to operate.

It is worth noting that the contradictory linkage between the national and the global in economic liberalism bears some resonance with the relation between the universal (project of modernity) and particular (nation build-

ing) found in the political liberalism that promoted postwar modernization and democratization in Japan. Through their very call to exorcise the particular and parochial in Japan, neoliberals, like earlier political liberals, occlude the global political and economic forces within which Japan is already situated. With modernization now replaced by globalization as yet another elusive goal projected elsewhere, neoliberal marketism once again simultaneously reifies and marginalizes Japan, reproducing national unity and insularity through this dual gesture. Correlatively, their critique of the "Japanese system" tends to slip and slide from supposedly acultural and apolitical marketism to quasimoralistic exhortation for Japan to repent and reform its inner character, upholding the same old liberal doctrines of individualism, self-help, and entrepreneurial spirit as those that ultimately lead to the national good.

By defining Japan through the lack of properties that characterize the modern individual/national subject, neoliberals reproduce the modernist mapping of the world divided between subject and object, center and margin, and so on. Constituting the Other (the United States) as the embodiment of the global, they faithfully replay what Sakai Naoki refers to as the "postcolonial complicity between the West and the Rest." Thus, though neoliberals speak of globalization as a radical new chapter in human history precipitated by the worldwide expansion of a borderless market and a technological revolution that links the globe under a vast informational network, their rhetoric also relies heavily on the conceptualization of the world and of a subject that hearkens back to the regime of the nation-state, imperialism, and colonialism.

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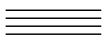
Neonationalists in Japan also gained influence in the 1990s, charading as a new, provocative challenge to the nation's faltering status quo. The neonationalists infiltrated the mainstream media with their boisterous rhetoric and most notably appealed to the young Japanese with their transgressive gestures, defying the postwar state's official tenets of democracy, human rights, and peace. In the 1990s neonationalism gained momentum through its campaign against history education in postwar Japan. Groups such as the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform have claimed that the history textbooks used in Japanese schools (carefully censored by the Ministry of Education) have disseminated the distorted image of wartime Japan

as a cruel aggressor toward Asian countries and peoples. Neonationalists argued, furthermore, that dispelling self-punishing and masochistic representations of the nation's history would be an important step toward fostering a healthy nationalism and national pride, banishing the curse that befell Japan through its defeat in World War II, postwar occupation by the United States, and demilitarization.

The rise of neonationalist historical revisionism was closely associated not so much with the recession but with the end of the Cold War. The dissolution of Cold War polarization, the increased confidence of Asian nations undergoing rapid economic development since the 1970s, and Japan's greater need to strengthen its relations with Asian neighbors in the post–Cold War economic and political environments all drew attention to the unfinished business of the Japanese state's long-deferred official acknowledgment of and apologies for wartime guilt. The retreat of military dictatorship and other forms of explicitly authoritarian regimes in a number of Asian nations also energized local grassroots movements, condemning the Japanese military's war crimes and demanding compensation. Neonationalism grew, in part, as a reactionary and defensive response to these growing pressures on the Japanese state and people to face up to the past from which they were shielded during the Cold War era.

The Gulf War, the first large-scale international armed conflict after the fall of the Berlin Wall, revealed another dimension of the post–Cold War conditions contributing to the neonationalists' campaign to rehabilitate the Japanese military past. The Japanese government's muddled response to the war in the Persian Gulf exposed its deep confusion and internal split over its place in post–Cold War geopolitics and the status of the nation's postwar constitution that renounced the deployment of offensive forces and prohibited the stationing of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) overseas. The awkward spot that the Japanese government found itself in as a multinational military force was mobilized under U.S. orchestration stimulated a national debate over the function of the Japanese Self-Defense Force. While the campaign to overcome postwar Japan's disavowal of its wartime past and restore a "real" military to the nation once again was central to the agenda of the Japanese right throughout the postwar era (including the effort by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in the 1980s), the neonationalist movement of the 1990s led by academics, pundits, and media celebrities popularized it, helped by post–Cold War geopolitical transformations.

In the latter part of the 1990s, furthermore, the perceived menace of recession and the tidal wave of economic globalization developed into a major component of neonationalist rhetoric. As Marilyn Ivy points out, the prolonged recession in a nation so closely identified with its economic success added force to the neonationalists' call to recapture the national identity and national unity through the affirmation of the state as an agent of war and citizens as those who would lay down their lives for their nation. War and death in combat were upheld as the ultimate enactment of public duty, politics at its purest and most heroic—that which stands in direct opposition to the hypocrisy, cowardice, decadence, selfishness, and petty greed that have allegedly infected Japanese society and contributed to its present predicament.

It should also be noted that some of the leading neonationalist ideologues of the 1990s, especially Marxist-turned-nationalist Nishibe Susumu and the critics affiliated with his journal *Hatsugensha*, have sharply criticized the mainstream conservatism (*hoshu honryū*) of postwar Japan. They have denounced the pro-American and probusiness stances that have dominated the ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for giving control of the state to the technocrats and bankrupting nationalism by accepting perpetual political subordination to the United States under the convenient cover of pacifism. Postwar Japan, they say, has been poisoned not only by the Occupation and the subsequent neocolonial control exercised by the United States but also by the unprincipled capitalism and bureaucratic rationality of its own leaders. Now that Japan's path to international political influence through its economic prowess has been derailed by the bursting of the bubble economy and made more elusive by the assault of U.S.-led global capitalism, neonationalists claim that Japan must restore its nationhood through cultural, ethical, and racial as well as territorial integrity, to be asserted by military means if necessary.

Yet the neonationalists themselves are ambiguous when it comes to defining their agendas in positive terms. Just what is authentic "Japan" and its ethicopolitical community, and where would we find a basis for it in Japan today? These are among the questions to which the neonationalist rhetoric does not supply clear answers. Primordial Japan seems to hover in midair as an ill-defined counterpart to the economic nationalism of Japan Inc. (an entity that is in itself apparitional). In other words, the neonationalist campaign to restore nationalism and Japan's political integrity is emphatically a

reactive discourse. It takes for granted the mainstream view that Japanese nationhood is in decline today more than ever in a world increasingly organized under the force of global capital; as such, the neonationalists' agenda is focused on compensating for this eclipsed nationhood.

We may note, furthermore, that the current debate over Japan's rearmament as a whole is driven not so much by nostalgia for wartime militarism but by post–Cold War geopolitics. While neonationalists may speak in the Hegelian language of national subjectivity posited through its war-making agency, the amendment of the peace constitution actually conforms to the demands of the new world order largely dictated by U.S. policies. In the post–Gulf War era of internationally sanctioned "humanitarian war" supposedly against military invasions by ruthless dictators and ethnic cleansings by fanatic nationalists, Japan's inability to send its military force abroad to participate in the global police force has lost the aura of pacifism.[4] It has, rather, degenerated into a source of national embarrassment, a liability to the country's status among the community of wealthiest nations (as well as Japan's ambition to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council). This is why one of the most vocal proponents of rearmament and the revision of the constitution in mainstream politics has been pragmatic, pro-American, neoliberal politician Ozawa Ichiro. Rather than being a move against the currents of globalization, then, turning the SDF into "normal" military forces would in fact align/subordinate Japan to the international consensus among dominant capitalist states led by the United States designed to protect and promote an environment hospitable to their global business operations and investments.[5] The exclusionary rhetoric and anti-U.S. (and anticapitalist) stances of some neonationalists influence public opinion to support the constitutional amendment that would in turn help the state implement policies that reinforce and expand the security alliance between Japan and the United States.

Thus there is more compatibility than might first appear between neoliberals, who affirm the globalizing forces of the free market and exhort Japan to be open to it, and neonationalists, who argue that we must defend the autonomous sphere of the political in the form of the nation-state as the irreducible horizon of identity. For one, underlying their claims is the common assumption of a neat separation (and simple tension) between economic and political, or nation-state and global capital. This shared premise underwrites the symmetry with which neonationalists and neoliberals

define and criticize postwar Japan from opposite ends. For neonationalists, Japan Inc. is perverse because it is completely dictated by economic interests, while for the neoliberals it has failed as an economic system to the extent that it is governed by parochial politics and entrenched culture. The former's hypostatization of an ethicocultural and political nation primordial to modern capitalism and imperialism and the latter's hypostatization of the autonomous flow and logic of capital independent of sociopolitical locations complement rather than oppose each other. That is to say, the contradiction posited between the nation-state and capital, as well as that between Japan and the world, serves the common purpose of displacing the contradiction *within* each pair of terms constituting the binaries.

By the late 1990s the popularity of neoliberal and neonationalist rhetoric in the media inflamed the anxiety that Japanese people must either flee the sinking nation-state by jumping into the sea of borderless market outside it or retrench within the national boundary in defiance of globalization, reasserting their national identity by their own blood. Yet the inconsistencies within neoliberal and neonationalist discourses themselves suggest such choices—between national, political, and communal, on one hand, and global, economic, and market exchange on the other—are untenable even for those who appear to claim them. Moreover, the spectacle of national crisis projected through such binarism helps foreclose the domestic resistance against new economic and political configurations that are taking shape—for example, Japan's integration into the new global military alliance that will further remove security policies from the democratic political processes, or economic deregulation and privatization of public services driven by the state and businesses.

The duality of Japan versus the world, or the nation-state versus the global market, that underlies much of the rhetoric of "Japan in crisis" occludes the mutually parasitic relations between economic and political forces at play. The expanse of the borderless market is, of course, not "out there" somewhere outside Japan but is spreading within it, through the very forces that are transforming the corporate governance and employment practices in Japanese companies or in neoliberal measures that are eroding the public sector and services in the name of reform. Meanwhile, Japanese political order as we know it is imploding from within, as attested to by the chaotic state of party politics since the early 1990s when the uninterrupted control of the LDP over the government ended after thirty-eight years. Since

then, we have seen repeated prospects of the breakup of the LDP; the Social-ist Party (now called the Social Democratic Party, SDP), the leading oppo-sition during postwar LDP hegemony, has also been in a state of disarray; and a host of new opposition parties have appeared and disappeared at a dizzying pace. The ruling elites among the Japanese bureaucracy and poli-tics are divided themselves. On one hand, some are fighting to hold on to the older power base (secured by pork-barrel politics and the dispensation of subsidies). On the other hand, some are seeking to establish a new ground of legitimacy and rationale for the state in its regulatory function vis-à-vis the global economy, its role in the alliance controlled by dominant capitalist countries led by the United States, and its maintenance of the infrastruc-ture, low social spending, and other conditions that promote the growth of its leading corporations. All in all, a critical factor driving the fracture within the Japanese political structure is the totality of forces aimed at re-configuring the state and its function so that its military, legal, and political apparatuses respond better to the needs of the most powerful and competi-tive multinational corporations currently based in Japan. One of the most urgent problems facing Japanese society, then, is not the dilemma between the nation-state and global capital, but the changing relations between the "nation" and the "state" under the new demands of capitalism in its global configuration.

One way to shed light on these forces at work in Japan that neoliberal and neonationalist alarmist discourses obscure rather than reveal may be to con-sider 1990s Japan not in terms of the recent catastrophic rupture (suppos-edly from its previous prosperity and airtight social organization) but in the context of the ongoing transformations of Japan and the world in a larger time frame, with a focus on the last three decades.

Both neoliberals and neonationalists take as their object of criticism an entity referred to by terms such as *Japan Inc.*, wherein economy, politics, culture, and society appear so closely enmeshed that it looks entirely gov-erned by economic or politicocultural forces, depending on the angle from which one sees it. Neoliberals generally perceive Japan Inc. as an endoge-nous product of modernization in Japan, combining native sociocultural characteristics and systems developed under the demands of the "catch-up" economy during the postwar recovery and expansion. Conversely, for the

neonationalists the overwhelming external forces that led to Japan's defeat in World War II and the Cold War military-Keynesian regime of the United States turned Japan into a nation without a proper political backbone despite its phenomenal economic growth. What has often been overlooked, however, is the fact that the image of Japan that is currently denounced as being too national (parochial and particular) by neoliberals, on one hand, and not national enough (politically subordinated to external forces) by neonationalists, on the other, obtained its veneer of self-evidence not so much during Japan's postwar modernization and the Cold War era but after the nation's modernization was said to be over, when the Cold War geopolitical and economic configurations of the world began showing signs of retreat.

Even a cursory look at postwar Japanese history reminds us that the stability and cohesion of Japanese capitalist order was repeatedly challenged during the nation's rapid economic expansion from the 1950s to early 1970s —for example, through the surge of union activism, the public protest against the Japan-U.S. security treaty, and radical student movements. The framework of modernization has been instrumental in smoothing these ruptures and instabilities into a linear narrative of national progress, charting time by the growth of the gross national product (GNP). It was, however *after* postwar modernization and industrialization were said to be completed in Japan that this faux temporality of modernization crystallized into the seamless space of Japan Inc., foreclosing history as a contested and overdetermined field of multiple possibilities.

Many of the critical ingredients of social order in contemporary Japan centered on its system of capitalist production germinated during the economic high growth period usually dated between the mid-1950s and late 1960s. Yet it was in the process of the nation's economic recovery from the worldwide recession (that began with the breakdown of Bretton Woods international monetary regime and the energy crisis) that Japan's capitalist regime consolidated its appearance of being at once timeless and all encompassing. The heightened international competition and volatility of the global economy of the early 1970s hit Japan hard, coming at a time when it had depleted the resource of cheap labor extracted from rural areas and agricultural sectors through the process of industrialization. The Japanese economy, then, launched a ferocious struggle for survival through the reorientation of its focus from heavy industries to high-tech lines, gradual expansion

of offshore production, and the implementation of technological and organizational innovations in order to raise efficiency and quality and contain the cost of domestic operations. Labor union and other major forces contesting the capitalist order, meanwhile, kept weakening as the alarm over the nation's economic crisis and intense international competition helped corporations push through unprecedented levels of rationalization of the labor process.

These developments culminated by the late 1970s in what some critics describe as the establishment of Japan as an enterprise society (*kigyō shakai*) organized around the vast corporate network headed by big companies (especially the large export-oriented corporations), which exert a powerful influence over the pyramid of increasingly smaller companies (suppliers and subcontractors) beneath them. Big business in Japan was, of course, the central institution of postwar modernization, carefully nurtured by a state. Yet the concept of an enterprise society points to the ascendance and increased independence of forces wielded by large corporations in Japan as the era centered on national economic development mediated by the state came to an end, replaced by increased global economic interactions and competition. Meanwhile the political system in Japan took on a supporting role as guardian of social and political stability by redistributing resources not so much through the welfare system but through subsidies and protection of economic sectors at the margin of the enterprise society, such as agriculture, construction, and small-scale retail concerns. Since the late 1970s, furthermore, more aggressive and explicit advocates of corporate hegemony have appeared among policy makers, calling for the privatization of state-owned companies, economic deregulation, and cutbacks in the state budget (smaller government), especially in social services.

The concept of an enterprise society also suggests the changing function of large corporations in Japanese civil society. Many of the organizational structures and managerial systems that developed in large manufacturing companies during the economic high-growth period appear to have become both intensified and generalized throughout the Japanese workplace in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, as Watanabe Osamu and others have argued, the methods and principles of labor management deployed in corporate Japan, such as ability-based competition, permeated the society, strengthening the image of Japan as a singular corporate entity.

The discursive construction of Japan Inc, furthermore, was closely linked

to the roles assigned to Japan in the broader narrative on the global economy. Against the background of mounting trade friction, the relative strength of the Japanese economy in the 1970s and 1980s caught international attention, contrasted with the stagnant conditions weighing down much of North American and European economies saddled with large numbers of business failures, high unemployment rates, and labor disputes. Japan was touted as a nation that made highly focused investments of its social resources toward building the international competitiveness of its economy (instead of spending a large amount on social welfare); was guided by highly trained career bureaucrats who looked out for the long-term interest of corporate Japan; and was equipped with extraordinarily cooperative unions and workers that rally behind management. This image of Japan as Number One—a lean and mean organic capitalist machine threatening to overtake "white capitalism"—served as a propaganda tool in the United States and elsewhere as states and businesses sought to dislodge the burden of the welfare state and the systems of wage and labor management established under the Fordist-Taylorist regime of production.

In the 1980s and into the early 1990s, moreover, the Japanese economy played a significant role in transforming East Asia into a new center of capital accumulation. The rise of the East Asian economy with Japan leading the way, disrupting the privileged association between capitalism and Western civilization, further stimulated culturalist and exceptionalist (that is, difference vis-à-vis the West) views on the Japanese economy. The denigration of Japanese capitalism or an Asian model of development widely heard in the late 1990s merely inverted earlier hyped-up claims for new political purposes while continuing to displace the ongoing and interrelated transformation of global capitalism by ahistoric schema of cultural difference. As Peter Gowan argues, the demise of Asian/Japanese capitalism has been exploited by the neoliberal propaganda that casts the national economy organized under the state's macroeconomic regulation (in particular, exercising control over the capital market) as a local and cultural deviance from the fundamental principles of capitalism, displacing the history of Keynesian economics that shaped much of the post–World War II capitalism.[6]

Thus Japan Inc., as the timeless and seamless enterprise-centered society shrouded in the aura of miraculous growth and cultural uniqueness, was installed retroactively as the subject of postwar Japanese modernization from the perspectives that coalesced around the late 1970s. Japan Inc.

was a construct that emerged in tandem with the increased breadth and depth of corporate control over the society under the first phase of the nation's postmodernization and domestic as well international responses to the transformation of the capitalist economy since the mid-1970s that we now increasingly refer to by the term *globalization*. The legacies of postwar modernization and industrialization of the Cold War era undoubtedly remained in post-1970s Japan, but they were often selectively retained, filtered, and modified by the new configuration of power organized around corporate networks and the global competition they engaged in. What came under severe criticism and scrutiny in the 1990s, then, may be better understood not so much as postwar Japan or Japanese modernity as a whole (as neoliberals or neonationalists suggest) but as dominant currents in Japanese political and economic strategies since 1970s together with the often exaggerated and distorted claims built around them. Approaching Japan in the 1990s in relation to the postmodernization and globalization since the 1970s means assessing it in both its continuity as well as its break from the past, while also eschewing the exceptionalist schema of the Japanese system versus a global standard, commonly found in the discussion of Japan in crisis.
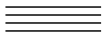
The need to avoid approaching 1990s Japan as a discrete national subject that stands in opposition to the global order applies to the examination of not only its political economy but also its culture and society. As I have suggested earlier, the sense that the economic downturn is somehow responsible for the perceived unraveling of the nation's social and cultural structure has amplified the national anxiety over the recession. The notion that the dysfunction of the Japanese system has had repercussions in all aspects of contemporary Japanese life, in turn, has reinforced the culturalist construction of the Japanese economy. In the following discussion I will once again pay attention to the historical developments since the 1970s in order to analyze the millennial doom over the sociocultural conditions of Japan in the 1990s. The alleged signs of social and cultural decay in Japan today need to be understood, at least in part, as local expressions of postmodern and global transformations of late capitalist society that have developed over decades. This perspective will also help us better understand the complicated nature of relations between the 1980s and 1990s beyond the standard juxta-

position between bubble and recession as the contrasting themes of the two decades.

The image of Japan as Number One, emerging out of major economic gyrations since the early 1970s, helped affirm the ongoing permutation of the capitalist regime in the country, realigning the national identity accordingly. For one, it was widely seen as a sign of the dramatic metamorphosis of the nation's world-historical status and thus the narrative of world history itself. For over a century the ruling elites of Japan, the nation reputed to be the most successful latecomer to modernity, had been intensely self-conscious about their relation to the West, measuring themselves against the time lag to the dominant Other. Japan's establishment as an economic superpower, superseding the majority of Western nations in the contest of capital accumulation, therefore, unleashed a powerful sense that Japan had finally reached its ultimate national aspiration by not only completing but also going beyond modernization, becoming freed from the historical scenario of modernity that had consistently precluded it from a full-fledged subject position and historical agency. The challenge that Japanese economic advances posed on Eurocentric history and the mapping of the world, in other words, was perceived as the nation's triumph over modernity and over history itself.

Many imagined that Japan, liberated from the telos of modernization that for long functioned as its structural and structuring lack, had become a posthistorical nation. In the 1980s, bureaucrats and pundits busily refashioned the national image as a phantasmic collage of the past and the future under pat labels such as the Age of Culture (*bunk no jidai*) and Information Society (*jōhōka shakai*).[7] Cultural critics armed with French poststructuralism and its critique of Western modernity dreamed up their own version of posthistoric Japan: the never fully modern vanguard of postmodernity, unfettered by the dead weight of Western metaphysics or the Enlightenment project of modernity. In the works of these critics hailed by the media as "new academics," postmodernity was linked to the intensification and coming into its own of a peculiar brand of modernity that developed in Japan. They mused that Japan as a centerless and depthless space had emerged as the cutting edge of postmodern capitalist production and consumer culture. Postmodernism was made into an industry by the media that swallowed up and spouted out the metacritique of postmodern consumer society itself as a commodity, promoting its stable of cultural celebri-

ties composed of new academics and other trendsetters in media and marketing.[8] Empty Japan was celebrated against the background of a speculative bubble in the late 1980s as the space of the intoxicating lightness of endless present replete with infinitely varied commodities circulating as increasingly immaterial signifiers (of lifestyle, ambience, status, and so forth).

The self-congratulatory exuberance that accompanied the bubble economy and the boom of postmodernism in Japan had fizzled by the mid-1990s, replaced by the debilitating air of anxiety (*fuan*). The structure of the feeling of posthistory has remained, but in the 1990s it became associated with unbearable fragmentation, opacity, and paralysis. Japan in the recessionary decade seemed arrested in the seemingly paradoxical state of unending and entrenched present coexisting with momentous instability. What accounts for the difference between the two decades, of course, is the recession that undermined the economic stability of Japanese society and had profound impacts on the national psyche.

We also need to note, however, that the crisis of the national economy has brought to light the ongoing crisis of the national itself. What I mean by *national* is not so much the sociocultural formation that defines a given national community but a historically specific form of social order in the capitalist modernity that has been imagined above all in reference to the nation-state system. The national has operated through a broad configuration of disciplinary institutions, hegemonic rule through the creation of social consensus and normativity, and the forging of individual and collective identities in complex relation to one another.[9] While much has been said about the near-annihilation of distinct national culture and social organizations in the current phase of globalization, we also need to pay attention to the ongoing *structural* breakdown of national mechanisms in late capitalist societies. That is to say, the very apparatuses by which the appearance of sociocultural integrity had been maintained in modernity—the discursive and symbolic mediation through which the "imagined community" has produced and reproduced itself—now appears to be in the process of decline.

During the initial stage of postmodernization in Japan, the conflation of the postmodern with Japan's self-realization and the fulfillment of its destiny helped obscure the disintegration of the national that was under way. The imaginary national topos of Postmodern Japan, in turn, provided a pseudonational and spatial contour to the empty, endless present. In the 1990s, however, under the rapid erosion of the mythos of perpetual eco-

nomic growth that had displaced history (the belief that Japanese society developed a magical formula that sustains the dynamism of capitalism forever) the effects of postmodernization on the society began spilling out of the national frame, contributing to the sense of opacity and the disintegration of existing social institutions and practices. Although some Japanese critics in the 1990s pronounced the death of postmodernism as a consumerist intellectual fad of the effervescent era, what really came under question during the decade was the contradictory link between the status of the national and the process of postmodernization that was at times passed off as the theory of the postmodern in Japan.
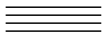
Despite the widespread dismissal of postmodernism, the dissolution of modern Japanese sociocultural order (allegedly composed of its premodern tradition mixed with the mass culture of modernity) has been a hot topic among Japanese cultural critics. In the 1970s some had already predicted that the end of the era of mass production, mass consumption, and a nation tightly united under the hunger for economic advances would lead to the decline of this sociocultural structure that underwrote the nation's rapid economic development.[10] Indeed, Japan's transformation into one of the most affluent societies in the world was accompanied by the palpable weakening of its postwar values and norms, particularly on matters such as work ethics, respect for hierarchy and authority, sexual mores expected of women and youths, and the strong sense of collective identification, while the pursuit of individual identity and individuated lifestyles has become a powerful trend. Many of the social calamities of the 1990s (including Aum Shinrikyō, teenage prostitution, and teenage violence) have been linked to this transformation going out of control, especially among the young Japanese.

Miyadai Shinji and Ōtsuka Eiji, two of the most representative cultural critics of the 1990s, have helped shape the debates on these issues in the media. Their primary field of interest lies in what some refer to as the development of subculture (or neosubculture) in Japan after the postwar economic high-growth period. It should be clarified from the start that the term *subculture* as used by these critics does not necessarily have countercultural or underground connotations. Furthermore, while the term seems to overlap with *popular (consumer/media) culture* in general, it is usually more narrowly associated with *advanced* consumer society (*kōdo shōhi shakai*), defined

by the shift from mass consumption to individuated consumption, or *advanced* information society, defined by the shift from the centralized mass media to various forms of less centralized communicational networks that began taking shape in the 1970s.

In a printed interview, Ōtsuka characterizes the concept of subculture and its distinction from more established terms such as *mass culture* (*taishū bunka*) and *folklore* (*minzoku*) through its fragmentary and acontextual characteristics. Subculture, he says, is a collection of disjointed ideas, phenomena, and artifacts that have become disembedded from their historical origins.[11] Subculture or subculturalization, therefore, is not defined via the binary between high versus low, center versus periphery, or mainstream versus counterculture. The prefix *sub-* suggests that these subcultural forms no longer participate in the hegemonic contest that both presupposes and feeds into the shared symbolic horizon of a society, not even as an antonym or an alternative to the mainstream and dominant culture.

As Ueno Toshiya points out, subculture as defined by Otsuka appears to be what others, especially outside Japan, refer to as postmodern culture.[12] It has been frequently commented, moreover, that the theoretical framework used by the 1990s critics of subculture echoes that of 1980s postmodernist new academics. Miyadai and Otsuka, however, rarely refer to the standard canon of postmodern theory, and they distinguish themselves from the new academics of the prior decade. Miyadai argues that the codes of "difference" and "individuation" that dominated the 1980s marketing strategy have themselves become banal in the 1990s.[13] The desire to stay one step ahead of the crowd that drove faddish consumer culture of the 1980s is no longer viable in the much more fractional cultural scene of the 1990s. Even the sophisticated "play of difference" that energized the elite strata of postmodern culture—that is, the continual escape from the banality and rigidity of established cultural forms by the unending gesture of undermining, destabilizing, and parodying their underlying rules and suppositions—retained residual ties to the common assumptions, strict binaries, and cultural norms that were being deconstructed or spoofed. It should be noted, however, that some, like Azuma Hiroki, insist that the withering of 1980s postmodernism in fact indicates the *saturation* of postmodern in 1990s Japan.[14] In other words, in the 1990s even the pronouncement of the impossibility of a transcendent point of view has lost its critical edge in the face of a world where the absence of a master narrative appears to have be-

come a banal fact of life. No particular point of view, no matter how anti-essentialist, can claim for itself a privileged position from which to speak about the present.

The cultural landscape of the 1990s, according to Miyadai, is no longer divided between leaders and followers of trends but consists of coexisting microcosmic groups that do not communicate with one another. It has been widely commented that the agents of subculture in the 1990s were characteristically numb to the gaze of others outside their specific "tribes," indifferent to the collective imagination beyond highly segmented and immediate social relations in which they resided. *Otaku* is a name given to one type of subcultural subject, typically young males who are obsessed with particular elements of popular culture but indifferent to their broader social and historical contexts. Miyadai observes that the primary criterion of thoughts and actions in Japanese youth culture has moved from the distinction between trendy versus passé to a more visceral, gut-level divide between pleasant and unpleasant (*kai fukai*).[15] He reads this shift as a symptom of the "desocialization" of youths that can at times lead to the explosive violence and icy inability to empathize with others.

Miyadai claims that although the weakening of shared values and moral codes is a phenomenon common to all mature modern societies, this trend has been particularly salient and problematic in Japan, because unlike in the West, Japan does not have a transcendent system of values (and subjectivity based on it) underwritten by the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. What glued Japanese society together instead has been the codes of collective moral beliefs and customs rooted in premodern Japanese communalism that have survived all the way through the postwar economic high-growth period. By then the role of traditional collectivity had been substituted by the national community (united under the singular goal of economic development), and collective morality became aligned with many of the key institutions and values that propelled the nation's modernization. Japan's success in overcoming its material needs and the concurrent maturation of consumer culture, however, have finally broken down the unity of national community and thus the residual structure of collective morality, leaving behind nothing to counterbalance the fragmenting energies of capitalist modernity.[16]

Miyadai views social anomie in Japan today as an irreversible historical development. What is needed, then, is not the revival of the lost commu-

nity or collective morality but a system that complements the society in its very complexity and diversity. He advocates the development of rational, pragmatic, and morally neutral means for ensuring mutual respect for individual dignity, freedom, and accountability.[17] It is the "invisible hand" of such a system that he envisions working behind the scene to regulate and hold together the society of narcissistic, present-oriented, and atomized subjects. Meanwhile he lashes out at the Japanese adult establishment for holding on to the dogmas and useless institutions of modernization that have exhausted their historical roles, attempting to impose their obsolete values on youths who are already living postnational and postmodern realities. He exhorts the Japanese to develop the ability to make autonomous judgments and decisions, honing their communication skills to navigate the world without a haven of stable collectivity.

The writer Murakami Ryū (considered one of the leading Japanese novelists today) has also made a similar appeal. He claims that Japan can no longer postpone the final departure from the collectivism underwritten by the national community and must turn into a truly modern, liberal, and individualistic society. In an essay published in 1997 he argues that Japanese society has not fully confronted the fact that its modernization and thus the era of national unity and purpose has ended.[18] Thus Japanese youths are still being force-fed the anachronistic ideologies of modernization—taught to compete for the monolithic postwar Japanese middle-class goals of good diploma, good job at a big company, and good marriages (for girls)—centered on institutions such as homes, schools, and corporations that used to socialize individuals into national subjects. Yet the validity of this message is constantly undermined by images in the media and everyday experiences surrounding the youths. They cannot help but notice the deterioration of these once-unquestioned institutions and their creeds, and they see the unhappiness and self-destructive conducts of adults still tethered to them. The violence and moral paralysis of youths today, according to Murakami, is symptomatic of the profound and widespread confusion they suffer as the result of this contradiction. The adult Japanese, on the other hand, are wallowing in an acute sense of desolation; middle-aged Japanese men, for example, continue to cling to the corporate collective even though it no longer offers them a sense of larger purpose and meaning, as it did during the era of national modernization.

Both Miyadai and Murakami are prescribing the means to resolve the

paradox that seems to have complicated the narrative of Japan's transformation into "mature" modernity. Namely, despite the development of a full-blown consumer culture that rivals any late capitalist societies and the progressive relaxation of traditional moral codes and social values, some of the central institutions of the national order appear to have survived if not strengthened since the 1970s, including the heterosexual nuclear family, a highly standardized and competitive education system, and extreme discipline at the workplace for the core workers in Japanese companies. Miyadai and Murakami blame this inconsistency on the reactionary segment of the population (such as middle-aged, salaried men or education-crazed suburban mothers) that is incapable of living and thinking outside the shelter of collective identity and clings to the sociocultural structure of the past.

This perspective, centered on the dichotomy between the collective national order of modernization versus the decentered, diverse, and individuated society *after* modernization, however, underplays the function of capitalism that has persisted even as it transformed in the wake of Japan's postwar economic expansion. The two trends in Japanese society since the 1970s cease to appear contradictory if we see them as interconnected dimensions of an enterprise society mentioned earlier: the subordination of the society under the large corporation and its specific form of labor management centered on the principle of individual competition. Not only the shift from homogeneity to diversity in the personal life revolving around consumer culture but also an increasingly more systematic and intensive extraction of labor power at the workplace (and at school) or the maintenance of heterosexist domesticity and gender roles, it should be noted, conformed to the logic of capital as articulated in the enterprise society. These matters are discussed in more detail in my essay on maternal society, in this issue.

Here it will suffice to note that what appears as a throwback to the traditional social structure or disciplinary regime of modernization has in fact acquired a new rationale and apparatuses under the hegemony of large corporations. For instance, labor management in the enterprise society speaks not only the traditional language of loyalty, harmony, and obligation but also of self-initiative, continued self-improvement, and workers' autonomy in order to promote individual competition and underplay a static and centralized hierarchy of command and authority.

Thus by the time Japanese society appeared to have overcome the lack that drove its population into the project of national economic development, the apparatuses of economic growth had become a self-sustaining mechanism

deeply ingrained in diverse areas of the society, encompassing increasingly longer segments of the human life cycle so that even young children toiled under the regime of "examination hell." What was promoted as the *means* for building a stable, egalitarian, and prosperous society became an end in itself, as a large segment of the society sought the means to survive in the age of mega-competition in the power of large corporations and their global market share.

After the completion of modernization, the principle of capitalist production and the control over labor deployed in big companies went on to exert greater influence on the society than ever, but increasingly without the mediation of centralized state programs or national sociocultural order. Instead the corporate subordination of workers and their families through a highly rationalized system of labor management began serving as the model through which national and social unity was imagined. This was the social integrity, above all, of mass competition, allegedly an inclusive and homogeneous space that sustains a high level of competitive pressure and dynamics within, constituted of differentiating as well as equalizing forces. This paradoxical space of enterprise society supported the illusory national frame of Postmodern Japan mentioned earlier, simultaneously appropriating and eroding the institutional and ideological bases of national sociocultural order.

By reducing the complexity of this hybrid formation to the anachronistic remnants of the national imaginary and collectivism, Miyadai and Murakami misrepresented the late capitalist logic governing it. Implicit in their views is the core tenet of liberalism that regards capitalist modernization as a natural, inevitable, and noncontradictory evolutionary process that effects a coherent form of social organization (rational, individualistic, nonauthoritarian, and so on). Moreover, it is through a simplistic binary of Japan versus the West (collectivism versus individualism) that they posit the allegedly atavistic traces in Japanese modernity as the lack that legitimates the further rationalization of Japanese society. In the end Miyadai's and Murakami's arguments turn out to be very similar to the rhetoric embraced by economic liberalism and its critique of the "irrational" Japanese economy.

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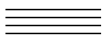
It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the debate over the decline of national community and the disciplinary regime of modernization began to proliferate in 1990s Japan as the nation's capitalist system entered a new

phase of transformation. The economic slump provided the pressure (for some, the opportunity) for Japanese corporations to renounce the tightly interrelated organization of home, schools, and work in the enterprise society. Wages, benefits, and job security for regular male workers started to break down under economic stagnation, while corporate restructuring, depressed demands in the labor market, and changing strategies of corporate recruitment kept diminishing the prospects for youths entering the job market (even those with hard-earned diplomas from decent colleges) to find secure employment at large companies. In the meantime women faced further intensified pressure to work and contribute to the household income while gender discrimination at the workplace remained firmly entrenched, and the demands on unpaid female labor to bear the brunt of inadequate social services have become greater than ever.

The rising number of homeless (many of whom are recently unemployed men and women) in urban areas and the surge of suicides linked to economic woes are salient symptoms of the economic shake-up presently unfolding. More long-term and systemic problems may also be suggested by the conditions of Japanese youths. Many worry that the increase in the unemployment rate among Japanese in their twenties (around 10 percent as of spring 1999) and the increase of "freeters" (*fureetaa*) among them—youths who are reputed to be indifferent to solid career aspirations or good work opportunities and drift from one contingent job to another—are signs of a new economic underclass in the making. (According to the Ministry of Labor, the number of freeters rose from 1 million in 1992 to 1.5 million in 1997.) It is said that a considerable portion of young Japanese today, especially those without a college education, will never enjoy the security and benefits that the past generations had through regular employment (or through a marriage to a regular worker); instead, they will constitute a social strata of surplus labor to be hired and fired according to the fluctuating demands in the labor market. Staggering public debt (now amounting to $6 trillion, 130 percent of the nation's GDP) accumulated by a government that tried to spend itself out of recession is a dark legacy bequeathed to today's youths. Meanwhile, the media is circulating unsympathetic references to the young working Japanese who continue to live in their parental homes as "parasite singles," charging them with being opportunistic, irresponsible, and hedonistic, blowing off their disposable income on luxury consumption while freeloading off the older generation.[19] The conflict of interest creeping in

between younger and older populations in the rapidly aging society is one of the significant social fault lines surfacing in Japan today.

Miyadai made a name for himself by speaking out on behalf of the young Japanese known as the baby-boomer juniors (*dankai junia*), contesting the conservative claims that morally degenerate, antisocial, and underachieving youths today epitomize the nation's social crisis. He has argued for the rights of teenagers to make choices on matters concerning their bodies and sexuality and for the dismantling of monolithic standards of evaluation in Japanese schools; he has also defended the youths' lack of ambition and moral inhibitions not as their failings but as their adaptation to the "endless everyday" (*owari naki nichijō*) of the postmodern world.

While the pressure-cooking Japanese education system and other oppressive disciplines of enterprise society that Miyadai attacks do continue to operate and bear down on the youths, we need to be aware of the new forms of terror surfacing through ongoing social, economic, and political reorganizations. Many leaders of Japanese business, bureaucracy, and politics today fully endorse the dismantling of the costly and beleaguered education system designed to produce an evenly disciplined population. For instance, educational reform plans proposed in the 1990s under the banner of diversity, tolerance, and liberalization aim at depressurizing the force field of mass competition, creating a system that can openly round up and expel its lowest performers while creating a separate accelerated track for the high performers. The youths, especially those without a privileged social and financial background, are one of the first groups of the population to be directly and adversely affected by these transformations.

We also need to consider the complex ways in which not only reactionary moral indignation but also the changing demands of capitalism inform the recent youth-bashing. The denigration of wayward youths by conservatives has translated less into a campaign to reform them into upstanding and productive Japanese citizens but more into an encouragement of public opinion that holds them responsible for their economic and social displacement. What is really at stake is not the threat the youths pose to the Japanese postwar ethos but how to master the disruptive effects of the Japanese capitalist regime's withdrawal from the system of social management that had until recently sustained a relatively even income distribution and the phantasm of a homogeneous mass middle-stratum nation.

The conservative condemnation of youths' moral deficiency invites hard-

ened tolerance toward increasingly more visible socioeconomic unevenness while diverting attention away from its causes. From this perspective we can see how conservative assertion of traditional values and liberal reform complement each other. A similar logic is at work in the demonization of foreigners and immigrants as criminals and threats to public safety by Ishihara Shintarō, the popular nationalist governor of Tokyo. Speaking to the Japanese SDF, Ishihara urged them to prepare for the rioting and looting by *sangokujin* (a derogatory reference used primarily for Chinese and Korean immigrants) and other foreigners in the event of a major earthquake in Tokyo. Ishihara's xenophobic rhetoric could be understood as laying the groundwork not so much for the removal of foreigners and immigrants but for ideological and institutional responses to their expected increase (due to changing Japanese demographics and the acute need for cheap labor by its industries and businesses), setting them up as convenient political scapegoats while justifying aggressive measures to rein them in.[20]

Ishihara's demagoguery reminds us of the fact that some of the most popular elements of conservative and nationalist discourses in Japan today are premised on social heterogeneity. They propose to redraw national identity on a basis other than the passive assumption of homogeneity coupled with the silent repression of difference that underwrote postwar nationalism in Japan. Thus Ishihara comfortably mixes overtly racist and nationalist rhetoric with the neoliberal language of national strength built on individual responsibility and accountability, capitalizing on the popular discontent with the status quo. Although he flaunts his anti-American stance, his political persona—hawkish, patriotic, socioculturally conservative, and often neoliberal in his stance toward the economy and the role of government—appears to have more in common with the U.S. Republican Party since the Reagan presidency than the conservatism of the LDP in Japan (where he began his political career). As such, the critique of national community offered by liberal critics such as Miyadai and Murakami cannot offer a rigorous challenge to the new brand of nontraditional nationalism that feeds off the decline of enterprise society and the imaginary coherence of its enclosed (pseudo-)national order.
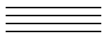
Asada Akira, who is considered the leading postmodern critic of the 1980s, provoked much discussion recently by drawing attention to the broader

manifestation of such a nontraditional nationalism in the cultural and intellectual landscape of 1990s Japan.[21] In Asada's words, the 1990s were the decade of "return to J" (*J kaiki*). The letter *J*, however, stands not so much for Japan but for *J* in terms such as *J-Pop*, an enormously successful brand of Japanese popular music, which features teenage vocal groups with English names such as Speed or Dragon Ash or megastar Utada Hikaru, who sings rhythm and blues songs with Japanese-English mixed lyrics. There is also a J-league, a Japanese professional soccer league that was self-consciously created and marketed as a more pop, hip, and contemporary alternative to professional baseball, the traditional national sport of Japan. The return to J, therefore, is not a simple repetition of the numerous surges of cultural nationalism that have erupted periodically in the country's modern history. Alphabetized and contracted, J is Japan as a site of the trashy pop culture of *otaku*, video games and animations. It is wholly divorced from the hoary tradition and rarefied premodern aesthetics that once anchored Japanese cultural identity in contrast to and resistance against the dominance of modern Western culture.

Asada scoffs at the return to J as a backlash against the multiculturalism of borderless global capital, self-withdrawal at the level of culture in a country where the tide of globalization overwhelmed its ailing national economy. Contrasting it with the ideological and philosophical tension that modern Japanese intellectuals struggled against—caught between Japan and the universalizing dogmas that entered from abroad, whether Christianity or Marxism—Asada dismisses the return to J as a superficial reaction to the raw reality of the global economy.

Negative characteristics that Asada identifies in J-culture—populist, infantile, shallow, and parochial—are attributed to the Japanese intellectual scene of the 1990s as well. As already mentioned, this was the decade in which postmodern theorization associated with Asada was increasingly dismissed as an incarnation of the 1980s consumer culture, snobbish cosmopolitanism based on imported theories that remained disengaged from the Japanese context. Asada views the heightened interest in local subculture by a new generation of Japanese critics as well as the prominence of neonational and neoconservative pundits as the manifestation of the intellectual return to J during the 1990s.

Regardless of the validity of Asada's general assessment of the Japanese intellectual or cultural climate, his simple conflation of critical discourses

and popular cultural trends may need some qualification. Consider, for example, the nationalism of Fukuda Kazuya, a scholar of French literature turned neoconservative who calls himself a "punk conservative." According to Asada, Fukuda typifies the return to J to the extent that his conversion to nationalism was mediated by his very acknowledgment of Japan as a de-essentialized simulacrum. Indeed Fukuda, who draws on a broad range of contemporary critical theory, concedes that a nation is a historically contingent, imaginary formation, but he insists on its significance as a necessary fiction for protecting some measure of social order and integrity in a world increasingly dominated by the pure forces of market economy and the new version of U.S. imperialism. Fukuda also suggests that neonationalism today cannot be reduced to naive and regressive communalism insofar as it is an effort to secure the space for publicity (*kōkyōsei*) in a society increasingly infested by disjointed psuedocommunities.[22]

At the core of Fukuda's concern, therefore, is the preservation not of a particular content of the national but its structure, not a national essence but a national form. Fukuda's "formalism" suggests the structural cause for the ghostliness of "Japan" invoked in the nationalist discourses today. He is conservative to the extent that he is attempting to restore the ideological coherence of modern order and the nation's axiomatic status within it. Fukuda's neoconservatism seeks to counter the subculturalization of Japan by the fictitious national validated by the values and principles of modernity. This means, moreover, that he is returning not so much to J but to M—that is, the reaffirmation of the telos of modernity not as a goal to strive for but as the ground for defending the consistency of the world as we know it.

Here we may note that the formal Japan of neoconservatives is empty but not entirely ahistorical. Even though "Japan" itself may be acknowledged to be a simulacrum devoid of essence, it is still anchored in the context of modernity; a nation recognized as an imagined community is a historicized nation. As Ōtsuka's definition of subculture suggests, however, the cultural practices in contemporary Japan that have captured much attention in recent years are characterized by their radical lack of will to history. They are not only severed from tradition but also indifferent to the imperatives of modernity. It is therefore important to consider this difference between subcultural J and neoconservative "Japan."

Rather than assuming that the Japanese popular culture today ultimately refers to some form of a larger national frame, we may understand the prefix

J- as inscribing the subculturation of the national. Put another way, the more appropriate category for discussing the J-culture may be the local rather than the national. As Stuart Hall and others have pointed out, globalization does not translate into a seamless homogeneity of global culture. Local cultural variance, far from being expunged, is actively produced and consumed—as ethnic food, world music, and constantly changing themes in fashion, for example—but the meaning and function of cultural difference is being fundamentally transformed. The local is increasingly disassociated from specific social spaces and relations we inhabit as it is constituted through the process of commodification. Rather than inscribing a sociocultural boundary between the inside and the outside (that takes the national interiority as the ultimate horizon), the local in the global postmodern operates on a more fluid, affective distinction of familiar and exotic or a visceral sense of proximity and distance that need not presuppose a fixed historical or social point of reference.

This fluidity is what enables the infinite reproduction of J that crowns everything from pop music to novels on street life in urban Japan (so-called J-literature). No matter how seemingly insular and local J-culture may appear to be, therefore, it is not parochial in the conventional sense of the term. If Fukuda's nationalism is national in form rather than in content, J is national in content rather than in form.

We can find an illustration of this aspect of J-culture in the animation series *Evangelion*, which was a phenomenal hit in mid-1990s Japan. Many have commented that *Evangelion* is a massive patchwork of citations, drawing from a vast array of foreign and domestic science fiction, comics, and animations as well as religious, pop psychological, and scientific literature to a degree unprecedented in the medium. Yet, unlike earlier generations of *anime* that often looked inadvertently Japanese even when they were supposed to be taking place in some distant galaxy, *Evangelion* self-consciously inserts visual/narrative details unmistakably drawn from the most mundane everyday life in Japan in the late twentieth century. Highly local markings, blended into the animation's sophisticated collage of nonlocalizable elements extracted from disparate contexts, perform a specialized function as signifiers of proximity, a prop that induces in the targeted audience a sense of familiarity with and connection to the story world.

A similar logic appeared to be at work in reverse when *Pokémon: The First Movie* was prepared for distribution in the United States. Overt signs of Japa-

neseness were airbrushed out and replaced with signifiers that appear local to the American audience.[23] Of course, there is nothing new about the procedure for passing cultural products from marginal locations into the larger mainstream market. Increasingly, however, such an operation is becoming the norm rather than the exception, as references even to cultural idioms local to the site of production take on the affectation and artificiality of cultural masquerade.

National culture itself was always an abstraction, forging unity out of heterogeneous customs and narratives, thus patching up radical historical transformations and ruptures into a seamless continuity. While insisting upon its autonomous meaning and identity, it actually relies on the international framework of the modern nation-state system to mark its interiority. J-culture may represent, however, a new level of abstraction from the concrete social context in that the signifier of locality can be immediately—that is, nondialectically—subsumed into the general economy of value underwritten by global capital. The production and marketing of J-culture, therefore, is as native to the postmodern consumer society as the commercialization of multiculturalism. The proliferation of J-markings in 1990s Japan signals not the resurfacing of the national (regressing into it) against the tide of global postmodernity but its continual waning. The poverty of J-culture that Asada blames on Japan's self-withdrawal, therefore, has to be understood in relation to the regime of cultural production under global capital.

Asada's insistence on the conventional opposition between Japanese parochialism and the cosmopolitanism of global postmodernity, together with his nod to the past era (when the binary between Japan and the world stimulated intellectually and artistically productive tension), indicates that he too is not immune to the return to modern I suggested of the neoconservative Fukuda.[24] In fact, the return to modern in various inflections has been one of the most dominant trends of intellectual discourse in Japan during the 1990s across the ideological spectrum.

Not only Asada but many leading figures of the postmodern culture industry of the 1980s appear to have treaded this course.[25] For instance, in the 1990s Karatani Kōjin, a leading intellectual figure of the 1980s and a close associate of Asada, began arguing for ethical intervention against global capital and the nation-state system, through a theoretical program of "(non-historicist) Marxism via Kant." Karatani invokes Kantian ethics as an

imperative to accept the freedom of oneself and others while at the same time recognizing the historical and social contingency of the subject.[26] The ethics, in other words, rest on the transcendental act of choosing to be free, shouldering the consequences of recognizing others as well as oneself as free, individual subjects (thereby rejecting the utilitarian ideology of capitalism that reduces others to means, as well as the parochialism of the state that separates "us" from "them"), even though we can never obtain the objective certainty of our freedom.

Karatani's argument strongly echoes Slavoj Žižek's reading of Kantian ethics in which freedom is equated with the Lacanian Real, a nonhistorical, nonreal entity around which a symbolic network (the sphere of history, language, social relations, etc.) is articulated, an origin that is retroactively presupposed but remains resistant to symbolization. At the most fundamental level, ethical choice, according to Žižek, is not between good and evil but whether or not one establishes one's agency through the reaffirmation of the symbolic order organized around the Real as its empty kernel. To reject this paradoxical predicament of subject, refusing to choose "something" (for example, freedom without an absolute guarantee) is not so much evil but mad, a psychotic withdrawal from the symbolic order. Žižek recasts ethics at this theoretical register in order to challenge what he perceives as the reigning ideology of global capital that strives to dissolve all impediments to the unbridled commodification of everyday life—in other words, postmodern attitudes that "pathologize" the rigidity of a modern autonomous subject while endorsing the psychotic choice of distancing oneself from fixed identity, closed social boundary, or a big Other.[27]

Žižek's formulation helps us detect a common current underlying the return to modern in the intellectual discourses of 1990s Japan: the fear for the degeneration of the symbolic order precipitated by the withering of modern teleology under the logic of global capital. Critics appear to be wary that in contrast to the cliché about postmodern consumer society as a sphere of self-interest and unfettered pursuit of pleasure, the society may be blindly drawn to the death drive—beyond the pleasure principle, self-preservation, and phantasmic coherence of socius. Rather than an ineluctable maturing of modern society, they perceive a profound and unpredictable crisis erupting out of the retreat of the modern national order.

This is the background against which Fukuda Kazuya himself identifies

a parallel between neoconservatives' invocation of a fictitious nation and the cosmopolitan project of Karatani Kōjin based on universal ethics.[28] The most vital tension among diverse strains of cultural criticism in the 1990s surfaced in their relations not against supposed ideological opponents but against the present historical moment and its pervasive indifference to the metalevel theorization.

Whether in upholding the national community or universal ethics, then, critics are reaching back to the ideals of modernity to re-create the state of tending toward an unrealized goal. The return to modern, in other words, struggles against the inertia generated by the fait accompli telos of global capitalism—the market and its self-regulating mechanism as the solution to all problems, the ultimate horizon foreclosure of history. It is the terrifying prospect of disappearance, not so much of the master narrative but of the desire (and agency) that used to generate it, that calls for the apparition of the modern today.

The profound sense of rupture and uncertainty in the present tends to stimulate the return to the languages and ideas of the past. A critical question that arises in such a context is whether the existing frames of knowledge are adequate to the task of developing an understanding of, not to speak of a cogent strategy against, the problems arising before us. It may be worth remembering the old lesson of complicity between antimodernist calls to "return to Japan" and the history of modernization. Now we may need to caution against the return to modern (e.g., the host of refurbished modern paradigms wrapped in the garb of *neo*) and their ironic complicity with the new. While they largely miss the genuine source of novelty in the present, in their very blindness they serve as handmaidens to the ongoing transformations that are taking us beyond the familiar terrain of the modern order.

In this essay I have argued against the mainstream neoliberal and neoconservative constructions of 1990s Japan that reaffirm one of the most dominant frameworks through which Japanese modernity has been construed: the duality between Japan and the world (now cast as global capital or the United States as its embodiment). The reference to this schema, whether in urging Japan to adopt the global standard or in exhorting Japan to assert its political autonomy, obscures much more fundamental problems

that Japan and the world are facing today. The issue is not the changing relation of Japan versus global capitalism but the permutation of the global order of capital into an increasingly direct and pervasive force organizing our world, shaping, for instance, political as well as economic forces in ways that blur the boundary between them.

By placing 1990s Japan in the context of postmodernization and globalization since the 1970s, I have tried to suggest the extent to which Japan has been already fully implicated in this development, well before the 1990s economic downturn. The exceptionalist image of "Japan" that is invoked against the global capital today is itself largely an outgrowth of this process. To speak of the impasse of the Japanese system (its tension with the global standard), therefore, is no less ahistorical than the once-popular belief that Japan, through its repression/preservation of precapitalist psychosocial organization, developed a system that yokes the eternal flame of capitalist expansion.

So how may we approach 1990s Japan in its proper historical dimension? One of the responses to this question that we have examined is the return to modern not in the sense of grafting old frameworks onto the new conditions but as a means for understanding the present by reimagining the alterity to the dominant ideological horizon of our time. The approach, however, runs a serious risk of turning nostalgic rather than critical unless it remains well calibrated to the contemporary target of criticism. Many of the most compelling critical thoughts on modern Japan are those that have struggled to maintain a genuine tension with both modernity and tradition, problematizing the reification of Japan as well as of the West. Japan in the 1990s, however, signaled the need to rethink fundamentally the efficacy of this strategy by pointing to the shifting center of contradiction as well as coherence of our world.

Earlier I objected to Asada's analysis of J-culture because of his focus on its parochial content, stopping short of addressing the global relation of cultural production as its structural basis. Asada's own criticism of J-culture as a reaction-formation to the raw reality of the global economy suggests that his hostility is directed not so much against its parochialism but against its *realism*, that is, the dismissal of the exteriority not of Japan but of global capital. Asada's (anticapitalist) cosmopolitanism, however, blunts its critical force by holding on to the old adversary, parochialism (nationalism),

rather than directing its aim against the globality of capitalism today that dissolves the dialectical tension between universal and particular, threatening to cast cosmopolitanism as well as nationalism redundant. The nostalgia most likely to thwart the critical efficacy of the return to modern may be the yearning for the "space of modern" as a familiar site from which to disclaim oppressive and abject Japan. The 1990s have presented us with the prospect that the Japanese cultural and social terrain, without ever overcoming the parochialism, may appear before us in its utter globality.

Notes

1   Takeo Hoshi and Anil Kashyap, "The Japanese Banking Crisis: Where Did It Come From and How Will It End?" (working paper 7250, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 1999), 4.

2   Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London, 1994), 323–24.

3   R. Taggart Murphy, "Japan's Economic Crisis," *New Left Review*, no. 1 (2000): 46–52.

4   On the significance of the Gulf War as the pivotal event in the emergence of a new world order protected by the U.S.-led world police, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 180–82.

5   Watanabe Osamu, *Gendai nihon no teikokushugika, keisei to kōzō* [Imperialism of contemporary Japan: Its development and structure] (Tokyo, 1996), 237–41.

6   Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London, 1999), 14. Also see Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, 328–30.

7   On the discussion of postmodernism in relation to Japan in the 1980s, see Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham, NC, 1989). On the Age of Culture, see Harootunian's essay, "Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies," in Miyoshi and Harootunian, *Postmodernism and Japan*, 78–90.

8   On the commodification of postmodern discourse and new academics in the 1980s, see Marilyn Ivy, "Critical Tests, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan," in Miyoshi and Harootunian, *Postmodernism and Japan*.

9   Although the scope of the word *national*, as I use it here, is broad enough to virtually overlap with that of *social*, its explicit historical and institutional associations (to the nation-state system) also helps us consider its decline in concrete and material terms.

10   Murakami Yasusuke, Kumon Shunpei, and Satō Seizaburō, *Bunmei to shite no ie shakai* [The household society as a civilization] (Tokyo, 1979), 467.

11   Ōtsuka Eiji and Ueno Toshiya, "Sabukaru otaku wa naze hoshu to musubitsuitaka" [Why did subcultural *otaku* became allied with conservatives?], *Impaction* 106 (1998): 10.

12   Ibid.

13   Miyadai Shinji, Ishihara Hideki, and Ōtsuka Akiko, *Sabukaruchā shinwa kaitai: Shōjo, ongaku, manga, sei no sanjūnen to komyunikēshon no genzai* [Disassembling the myth of subculture: Thirty years of girls, music, comics, and sexuality, and the current conditions of communication] (Tokyo, 1997), 9–25.

14 Azuma Hiroki, *Yūbinteki fuantachi* [The postal anxiety] (Tokyo, 1999), 254.

15 Miyadai Shinji, *Seifuku shōjotachi no sentaku* [The choices of the girls in uniform] (Tokyo, 1998), 242–43.

16 Miyadai Shinji, "Baka oyaji wa inkyoseyo" [Stupid geezers should retire], *Sansara* 8.4 (1997): 85–86.

17 Miyadai Shinji, "Jiyū to chitsujo," [Freedom and order] *Shōsetsu Tripper* (Fall 1998): 216–24.

18 Murakami Ryū, "Samishii kuni no satsujin" [A murder in a forlorn nation], *Bungei shunjū* (September 1997): 116.

19 The notion of *parasite single* is based on a work by sociologist Yamada Masahiro; see Yamada Masahiro, *Parasaito shinguru no jidai* [The age of parasite singles] (Tokyo, 2000).

20 With the waning of the disciplinary regime of enterprise society, we may expect to see on one hand the reinforcement of the overtly coercive apparatus for maintaining the social order, and on the other the expansion of informational control of population, as suggested by the recent passage of the wiretapping law, which gave police the power to use wiretap in their criminal investigations.

21 Asada Akira, "J-kaiki no yukue" [The future of the return to J], *Voices* 267 (2000): 58–59.

22 Nishibe Susumu et al., "Dentō, kokka, shihonshugi: hoshushugi no riron o tou" [Tradition, state, and capitalism: An inquiry into the logic of conservatism], *Hihyō kūkan* 16 (1998): 18.

23 Kubo Masakazu, "Why Pokemon Was Successful in America," *Japan Echo* (April 2000): 59–62.

24 In a New Year symposium printed in a popular business magazine, Asada commented, "Given that Japanese-style groupism is no longer functioning properly, we are now at the point where we need to reaffirm some of the fundamental principles of modern individualism" ("Futatabi maruyama masao o omoshirogaru" [Let's have fun with Maruyama Masao again], *Daiamondo* [Diamond] 85.1 [1997]: 163).

25 It is often said that one of the pivotal moments in this transition came during the Gulf War when some of the leading writers and critics linked to 1980s postmodernism issued a joint statement protesting the Japanese government's support of the war, casting off the prior image of political aloofness that had distinguished this generation from the New Left intellectuals and cultural figures of the 1960s and early 1970s. Among the signers of the statement, some, like Asada or Karatani Kōjin, have moved away from the analysis of postmodern consumer culture to take up more explicitly leftist political issues, expressing a renewed focus on Marxism in the 1990s. Others, such as Tanaka Yasuo, who made his media debut in the early 1980s with a best-selling novel, *Nantonaku Kurisutaru* [Somehow crystal] (the work famous for dense footnotes on brand-name luxury goods and references to trendy urban spots throughout the narrative that made it a manual of 1980s consumer culture), has fashioned himself into a celebrity liberal-democrat. Tanaka became involved in a number of citizens' movements (including disaster relief in the aftermath of the Hanshin earthquake) in the 1990s and was elected governor of Nagano prefecture in 2000.

26 Karatani Kōjin, *Rinri 21* [Ethics 21] (Tokyo 2000), 9–10.

27   Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham, NC, 1994), 216.

28   Fukuda Kazuya, "Owarinaki nichijyō to yakkai na bokutachi" [The endless everyday and our intractability], *Takarajima* 30 (1995): 53–54. Fukuda's reflexive comment is notable for the matter-of-fact tone with which he signals the erosion of the conditions that had constituted nationalism as a form of particularism, defined by its opposition to the universalism in postwar Japan. On the historical and political sources of this binarism, see Sakai Naoki, "Modernity and Its Critique," in Miyoshi and Harootunian, *Postmodernism and Japan.*