

The Economic and Social Backgrounds of  
The Japanese Government's Cooperation  
with the United States

- Why Does Japan dispatch the Self Defense Force into Iraq? -

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1. Introduction

The Japanese(1) Government decided to dispatch the Self Defense Force (SDF/Jieitai) to Iraq in 2003, and moreover to prolong the action for another year, while several countries switched their policy and withdrew their armies from Iraq. Such decisions by the Japanese Government seems to be completely against public opinion: approximately 90 percent of the citizens in Japan do not feel supportive of it.

The question here is why Japanese people could not annul Prime Minister Koizumi's decision to send SDF to Iraq and why Japanese voters could not alter such US-declined policy as Koizumi's for the more commonly acceptable one? Or, given these eccentric decisions as of the Koizumi Administration, were there no longer democratic or normal political functions in contemporary Japan?

Answers to these questions certainly exist. I dare say, Koizumi's decision is one of the results of the democratic process in Japan. I guess the decision-making of Japan's government is closely connected with the normal life of the Japanese people, and it is no less than the case in the above mentioned incident. To illustrate this point of view, a clear reasoning should be shown, i. e. why and how economically fortunate conditions as well as political democracy in

contemporary Japan require cooperation with the United States.

This paper will discuss not only the political process of such governmental decisions, but the economic and social backgrounds affecting it. The paper will focus especially on the materially affluent standards of living of the ordinary Japanese people as well as the extensive volume of corporate-based production, using resources from all over the world. In this context, this paper will disclose why the Japanese government has to act, at a glance, against domestic public opinion but in compliance with the American request.

(1) As for the name of this country, I use the English name, "Japan" in this paper according to habitual practice. But properly speaking, it does not reflect my general intention. Nobody in this country actually has called and is now saying "Japan". The correct name of this country must be "Nippon" and the name of the people should be spelled in English "Nipponese". The relation of Nippon/Nipponese and Japan/Japanese should be compared with Inuit and Eskimo.

## 2. The historical backgrounds of the restrictive conditions for Japanese foreign policy

Japan is a blessed island for agriculture and fishery floating on the offshore of the easternmost spot of Eurasian continent. Japanese ground is covered all over with good soil for agriculture. The climate is mild, neither too cold nor too hot, and the temperature is proper with four seasons changing from one to another gradually. Besides Japan is located in a fortunate position for fishing. A warm current and a cold current come across at the offshore of the Japanese Islands and its neighboring waters shape one of the four great fishing zones in the world.

Therefore many people gathered in these islands since immemorial time from Siberia, Sundaland (now Southeast Asia), the Polynesian islands, etc. These people are presumed to have fought each other and ultimately formed the Proto-Japanese and Japanese language. (2) When the historical era started, other horseriding tribes came to Japan, too, from the East Asian Continent introducing new technologies like iron instruments, etc., and new thoughts like Buddhism and so on. The Proto-Japanese and the new comers are supposed to have fought to one another, too, and finally made up a unique and delicate Japanese culture.

The hard experiences of continued battle taught people the importance of peace and harmony. The reason why the first Constitution codified by Shotoku Taishi in 604 prescribed the necessity of harmony (Article 1) is presumed to have been a result of such experiences in Japanese history. Since that time, the spirit of peace and harmony became the core philosophy which penetrate through all the Japanese cultures, although sometimes abused as an ideological means of suppression by the ruling class. (3)

Anyways, due to the resulting comparatively stable society, the Japanese economy developed rather rapidly compared with other countries. It means necessarily that the population grew up more rapidly compared with other places in the world. When the Meiji Restoration took hold (1868), the population of these small islands was already in excess of over 30 millions. So one of the biggest subject of modern Japan's tasks has been to secure necessary economic ability to support and develop

the living standards of the relatively big population. For this purpose, the Meiji Restoration Government undertook a grand policy to obtain an economic sphere for resources for capitalistic production and market. This policy was high-handedly carried out fundamentally for the nation itself at that time, i.e. forming and eventhough using strong military forces to supplement insufficient economic and political powers ("Fukoku-Kyohei" Policy: "National Enrichment and Security" Policy).

After the defeat of the Asian-Pacific Fifteen-Year War (1931-45, a part of WW ), the Japanese government was urged, too, to secure resources, a basis of production and a global market for the purpose of maintaining and developing the Japanese economy and the people's standard of living. After the defeat of WW , however, it was difficult to realize these purposes alone. Giving up national pride, therefore, and obeying an emerged world empire, the United States, seemed to be the only way for the Prime Minister at the time, Yoshida Shigeru, whom the Japanese political leaders and the government parties followed.

(2) Japanese is a quite unique language among 6000 tongues in the world. There is no language on this earth similar to Japanese. Nobody can understand it similarly to the neighboring languages like Korean, Chinese, etc. without hard learnings. Japanese grammar is considered to have originated from Altaic tribes (Mongolian Plateaus), while a large part of its vocabulary is from Sundaland (now partly in Tamil in South India), and its pronunciation exceedingly resembles Polynesian languages such as Hawaiian, Tahitian, etc.

(3) The reason why Japanese culture is comparatively delicate will not be understood, in my view, without considering such a basis as the long-time atmosphere of peace and harmony in this country.

### 3. The Economic background of the Japanese reliance upon the US economy

The Japanese economy after WW have searched widely for almost all raw materials and fuels as well as a considerably wide market abroad for getting money to import such raw materials and fuels. Besides, Japan developed a very favorable industrial plant after the war. We can find some of the remarkable features of Japanese manufacturing after WW on "The Coastal Heavy and Chemical Industrial Region (Rinkai Ju-kagaku Kogyo Chitai)".

The coastal industrial regions were constructed after the defeat of WW . The purpose was to create new industrial zones for rebuilding giant corporations that had been destroyed during the war, and through such growth of industrial areas, finally to create employment, increase individual incomes, and improve the national standard of living, which fallen to the lowest level of the world during the war, to the level of developed countries.

Almost all conventional industrial regions were not only small but also destroyed by US air raid during wartime. Fortunately Japan has complicated but comparatively long seacoasts and broad mountainsides close to the seacoast. The construction began after the end of the war and continued during well over thirty years by local autonomies (prefectural governments), and as a result all the natural seacoasts near big city areas disappeared (Tokyo Bay Area, Osaka Bay Area,

Ise Bay Area of Nagoya, Kitakyushu Seacoast, etc.).

The coastal industrial regions brought extraordinary effects to Japanese industries. Reformed Japanese industries came to be able to import any raw materials easily (sometimes directly on each company's own wharf) at remarkably low cost. For example, the ship transportation cost for iron-ore or steel between Tokyo and Los Angeles was much cheaper than railway transportation cost between the two giant cities of Tokyo and Yokohama (only 20km). While there is only one industrial raw material, i. e. lime, which this country can supply for itself, Japan has been importing almost all necessary raw materials from other part of world. In the same way, each corporation could easily export everything that they produced all over the world with very low transportation cost. This way of industrialization has been far more advantageous compared with inland industrial regions like Rhein in Germany and the Great Lakes in the United States. The coastal industrial regions made Japan into the strongest export-oriented industrialized country. Low ship transportation cost is, needless to say, favorable especially for heavy industry, so that Japan could become one of the most developed heavy industrial countries.

Thus, Japanese industry has largely developed from the coastal industrial regions. The important point here is the scale of the productive capacity of Japanese industry. The capacity has grown rapidly to a level far too big for the domestic demand of such a small country, and become as big as to satisfy world's demand. Actually Japan has made almost all newly built ships in the world at the height of the Japanese shipbuilding industry. Japanese ironworks made one third of the world's demand of steel around 1970. Just after then the Japanese automobile industry came to make one third of world's new cars, and exceeded the total production in the United States in the middle of 1980s. In the same manner, Japan made more than 90% of video decks in the world in the early days when such electric appliance appeared in the late 1980s. The Japanese coastal industrial regions were indeed the factory of the world. (4)

In consequence of this country's big industrial establishments, Japan cannot cease to export all manufactured products, and needs a worldwide market. The largest market was the United States as the biggest importer of automobile and electric goods(5), with Asian newly industrializing countries following the United States. Those countries which intend industrialization inevitably import not only machinery and electric equipment but also an overwhelming amount of consumption goods. The reason why we can easily find Japan-made commodities like cars, electric goods, precision machines and optical instruments everywhere in the world today might already be clear. (6)

In order to function the coastal industrial regions, Japan needs a world-wide supply of resources, fuel and market. In order to maintain the nation's security, Japan was obliged to conclude an alliance with the United States, which has the biggest economic power, the largest domestic market and the strongest military power. For Japan as a developed capitalist country without considerable domestic resources and market, the construction of coastal industrial regions and the conclusion of an alliance with the United States have seemed the most essential way to survive on this planet.

(4) Such industrialization became soon a model of industrialization in A-NIEs (Asian Newly Industrializing Economies) and recently in China. See also footnotes (9) and (10).

(5) Each Japanese individual income is none other than the result of redistribution of national income which is earned mainly through export. The biggest part of the income through export is derived from automobiles, accounting for nearly three fourths of total income. The second biggest part is from electric and electrical products, i. e. nearly all of the last fourth.

(6) The biggest importer is the United States. Today well over thirty percent of automobiles running in the US are Japanese cars (including local products). As for electric and electrical products, almost all high-class goods and equipment in every company and family in the United States are Japan-made goods. All these products have brought all necessary funds for the Japanese economy and ultimately support people's individual consumption.

#### 4. The Social background of the Japanese reliance upon the US economy

Today, the Japanese standard of living never looks to disadvantage compared with that of European and US citizens is built up on the abundant imported materials. For example, Japan is the greatest grain importer in the world. While Japan can supply herself with 92.7% of her rice, it imports 100% of corn, 94.9% of soybean, 86.9% of wheat, and imports 76% of her total grain (2002). Tofu, natto, miso (soy-bean paste) and shoyu (soy, soy-sauce) are known as typical Japanese foods and seasonings, but most of their materials are imported, especially from the United States.

Japan is one of the greatest consuming countries of marine products. In 2002, Japan imported 13.9 billion dollars of sea products from more than 70 countries including such Atlantic countries as Norway, Iceland, Morocco, South Africa, Argentine, etc. Tuna is the mostly essential material for sushi (one of the most typical and traditional Japanese foods), but 56.7% of tuna is imported. Particularly 90% of lobster consumed in Japan is imported mainly from Asian developing countries. Lobster is the most expensive sea food among all marine products that Japan imports.

Japan cannot supply herself with the fuel necessary for normal life as well as for industry. In particular, 99.7% of crude oil, 98.4% of coal and 96.6% of natural gas are imported.

There are many other facts that indicates how Japan maintains a high level of the nation's consumption by materials and resources from abroad, but I lack space to itemize them here. In any case the Japanese people and their belongings became beautiful and polished in these decades after WW and they became one of the most zealous nations for clean and beautiful things. Generally speaking, those who have got once a fortunate condition, become unable to go back to the unfortunate days as before, and the Japanese case seems to be exactly so. And once the Japanese stand in such happy position, they can hardly cease to continue to import everything they need both to maintain a favorable business cycle and to lead an abundant life. Japan seems to have only one option: to cooperate with the largest economic power as well as to obey the strongest military power, and Japan seems to be unable to break off the relation.

A more important matter is that mass consumption is supposed to be both a cause and an effect to shape the so-called "Japan Corporation" system (a systematically controlled nation-wide economy under governmental orientation) during the latter half of the twentieth century. Each big company under the "Japan Corporation" established life-time employment, a pay-for-age salary structure (or promotion-by-age structure), a union-management cooperation system with enterprise unions, etc. and such a company system has come to be called "Companyism (Kaishashugi)". (7) Under "Companyism", the salary of each employee has rapidly increased and his/her standard of living has highly improved. "Companyism" has been sustained inasmuch as salary and living standard are expected to increase. "Companyism" under the "Japan Corporation" system has enabled this small country to be one of the most distinguished industrially developed countries after the WW in the world. (8) Thus, "Companyism" has been an essential part of Japanese life especially for those working at relatively big corporations. (9)

"Companyism" is now rapidly getting out of shape. Notwithstanding, as far as "Companyism" has been established and brought immeasurable benefit for the Japanese people in recent years, it will not disappear thoroughly in the near future. The Japanese people seem to be unable to find another available way to maintain such developed and abundant economic conditions as under "Companyism" and the "Japan Corporation" system. (10)

(7) "Companyism is very strong, because it is pure capitalism in the dimension of macro economics and is socialism in the dimension of micro economics." Refer Baba Hiroji [1986].

(8) With this consideration, we can lead a reason that the "Japan Corporation" system has been one of the styles of developed countries in the contemporary world, if we consider the well developed market system in the US as the first style, and well developed welfare system in European countries as the second style, the Japanese style will be considered to be the third style. In the United States, a rather well-developed domestic market assures a normal middle class life compared with other developed countries. Everything needed for everyday life can be easily obtained through the supermarket, drugstores, discount stores, shopping malls, etc. Even if some one needs money, it also can be received without very much difficulty by getting a job through a well-functioning labor market. Thus the middle class in the United States is able to enjoy their lives when markets are effectively functioning. On the other hand, in not a few developed Western European countries, the same effect has been realized through constructing a welfare society. Instead citizens pay high rate of tax, and get everything needed for their normal life from the welfare society. Now in Japan, the "Japan Corporation" system has been acting both for a well developed market system and a well developed welfare system. This is one of the most typical features of Japanese economy in the latter half of the twentieth century.

(9) As mentioned above, Japan created another type of developed country in the latter half of the twentieth century through export-oriented industrialization with the "Japan Corporation" system. This is a quite different way of industrializing to become a developed country. This has become one of the most effective models of industrialization for other Asian countries. These countries have sometimes repulsed Japan and sometimes adopted the Japanese way, and have constructed "special economic zones" at coastal districts and similar such company systems as "Companyism". Japanese experience has become a model of the Asian Way

of Capitalistic development.

(10) These facts mean that many Asian countries have become and will become flatterers of the United States, including China. Particularly China will cause a not small impact and/or anxiety on the world economy and international relations, if the Chinese economy successfully grows up in cooperation with the United States to become a giant power.

#### 5. Japanese as peace-loving nation

Since the defeat of WW , considerably many Japanese people have gotten used to a world under the Constitution of 1947, and antiwar policies have been welcomed by overwhelming majority of the Japanese. Indeed, long experiences of series of invasions into Taiwan, Korea, wars with China, Russia, still more WW and WW as well as in its final defeat gave almost all citizens the sense of necessity of peaceful coexistence with the other nations in the world. As far as common consciousness is concerned, there exists very little consensus that Japan should share in military activities on this earth.

Moreover, a peaceful world has been convenient not only for the successful recovery and development of the Japanese economy but also for the growth of national income and the Japanese standard of living. This fact means that political leaders, top managements and the people in general want a peaceful world. This is completely consonant with the spirit of the Constitution of 1947, especially the article prescribing abandonment of war itself and war potential as the means of war (Article 9).

#### 6. Conspicuous disparity between the decision of the Prime Minister and the opinion of the majority on dispatching the SDF to Iraq

There is no doubt that approximately 90 percent of the Japanese people are skeptical about the dispatch of Japan's Self Defense Force and its activities at Samawah in Iraq. (11) Rather the fact itself seems to be incredible that Prime Minister, Koizumi Jun'ichiro decided to send the SDF into Iraq, accepting US requests to cooperate with not only in the financial field but also in concrete military activity. It also seems also to be incredible that the Koizumi Administration decided, in November 2004, to prolong the activity of the SDF at Samawah for more one year, while there was extreme public opinion against Koizumi's decision. It was just when international opinions against US military activity in Iraq had gradually intensified and not a few countries including Spain and the Netherlands decided to withdraw their Armies from Iraq.

As for the Netherlands, its army withdrew at the end of 2004 from Samawah, Iraq, where the Japanese SDF was stationed. Given that such a small country as the Netherlands could stop military cooperative activity with the United States, someone might ask why Japan, the world's second largest economic power, could not suspend military cooperation with the United States.

There is only one reason that explains everything. Prime Minister Koizumi absolutely might think without saying it, that the majority of Japanese could not abandon the cooperation with the United States by which the national economy grew

up to be the world's second largest economy on the one hand and by which the national standard of living rose to have one of the world's highest consumption levels on the other hand.

If Japan were to change the usual course, the economic conditions, which are now under deep depression, would rapidly drop down into great disorder and, as a result, the stable, abundant consumption life of the people would largely fail. If such situation occurred, Mr. Koizumi might judge, people sooner or later demand a return to the former situation of economic activity and standard of living, and cling to the US rule even though throwing away righteousness, humanitarian standpoint and national pride. Then, Mr. Koizumi might consider, almost all people except for minor political parties and eccentric persons might bow at the last moment to the Prime Minister and the government party. (12)

Mr. Koizumi clarifies nothing about the political process that I mentioned above in this paper. Nevertheless, nobody can deny that this is the hidden but real reason why Japan sends the SDF and maintains it despite domestic as well as international critical opinions of it. (13)

(11) Along with public opinion polls such as that of NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai : Japan Broadcasting Corporation) and some major newspapers, those who oppose SDF dispatch to Iraq are fewer than the figure which I report here, i. e. only seven tenths of the Japanese people. These results seem to be less than my observation. But these results are far from our normal feelings. For example, we had a video-conference with American university students about the Iraqi War issue. About 95 percent of the students at my university expressed critical views on driving forward the American war in Iraq and Japanese cooperation with the United States. The reason why there is not a slight difference between public opinion polls and our usual actual feelings lies, I suppose, on how to read the result of public opinion polls itself. Actually, there is a large gray zone especially in Japanese public opinions, i. e. Japanese people do not conventionally make clear their own views in public, and have an inclination to obey the general trends or governmental policies.

(12) The same context is found with the "Yasukuni problem". Successive Prime Ministers have taken a firm attitude to the worship at Yasukuni Shrine, where the war dead are enshrined, in spite of the resentment from Asian countries. Every Prime Minister says this is to mourn for the dead soldiers and to express the intention for a peaceful world. But it is an expression of their belief that the Asian-Pacific War was a righteous war to secure the requirements for the Japanese economy and people's lives at that time. Although there exists strong opposition from Asian countries, no Prime Minister from Liberal Democrats ever stopped the worship.

(13) Mr. Koda Shosei was a young Japanese man who was killed in Iraq in November, 2004. The media in Japan reported this case as an incredibly unexpected incident by terrorists in Iraq. But there were two prior incidents to Koda Shosei's case. In April in 2004, three Japanese people including a female volunteer relief activist were captured by someone in Iraq, and just afterwards two journalists were arrested in the same manner. At the same time, someone considered as offenders demanded Japan to withdraw the Self Defense Force from Iraq. The Japanese government only understood these happenings as unjust behaviors by Muslim outlaws and neglected the requirement. After negotiations by Japanese government



with senior Muslim religionists, all five people were emancipated. The media as well as the government continue to insist, after their coming home, that their individual responsibility should be questioned, i.e. Japanese citizens should not have entered such a dangerous area as Iraq against the government's prohibition and besides should pay the rescue costs. Under all these campaigns, everything demanded by the Muslims were forgotten among Japanese people. Just after six months had passed, the Koizumi administration decided to continue SDF activities in Iraq. The new incident, the murder of Koda Shosei happened just after the decision of Japanese government. It might be clear, I believe, that the captures of former five people were warnings to the Japanese government and people, meaning that the captured people in the third case would be actually killed if Japan did not decide on withdrawal in a half year. Namely the Muslims gave Japan half of a year to consider whether to withdraw the SDF or not. Not only government and the media but also the majority of Japanese could not understand the meanings of these incidents six months ago.

## 7. Conclusion

The consciousness of the Japanese people changed to a peace-loving one through the experience of defeat in WW , disorganization of the army and navy, democratization of political processes, dissolution of the Zaibatsu, etc. At the same time, Japan became extremely reliant on the world economy in a double (economical and social) sense, i. e., the export-oriented economy on the one hand, and the import-dependent mass consumption on the other hand. The facts signify that coexistence with the United States is necessary to maintain the fortunate economic conditions and high standard of living. (14)

Mut coexistence with the United States does not necessarily always coincide with a policy of peace/anti-war. (15) This is the background of the deep contradiction lying between the anti-war opinion and the Prime Minister's decision to cooperate with the United States in Iraq. It is very interesting that both ideas actually derived from the experience of the defeat of WW and the real feeling of recovery and development of Japanese economy after the defeat.

When the contradiction appears in real political process, the majority of citizens orientate towards anti-war. In the case of sending the SDF to Iraq, citizens are also opposed, while the Prime Minister cannot choose a policy to escape cooperating with the United States. Then we should ask here why the Prime Minister's decision has not suffered definite counterattacks by the people. The reason is that the majority of Japanese people do not seem to abandon the noble ideal of peace even when their accustomed economic and living conditions collapse. In evidence, peace movements, the rate of labor organization and the left party's seats in the Diet are indisputably diminishing, especially in the long-term depression of these fifteen years.

The majority of voters do not seem to act understanding the above mentioned context. There are some tricks and mechanisms for the government party to win the election, and the political speeches and behaviors are not understandable for many voters. (16) But here is not the time to clear up the process. Anyways the Prime Minister and the government party have a certain confidence in their own policy. To maintain the corporate activity of a globalized Japanese economy and to sustain

the fortunate standard of living of the Japanese people are exactly not both retrogressive, as I mentioned in this paper. As the Prime Minister and the government party believe, the outlines of the voter's mind in either case surely expose to the political dimension.

Then where Japan is going? One of the answers lies in the recent phenomenon of increasing the "bakappoi" younger generation. In Japanese "bakappoi" means "looks foolish". The appearance of such people tells us one of the result of corruption that has brought with the very development of Japanese economy and the improvement of living standard itself. I am afraid that the Japanese prosperity will collapse in the future with US haughtiness.

(14) Japan's case seemed to impress US political leaders as one of the most successful examples of US support after WW . And this single one happy experience seemed to lead the United States to a big misunderstanding and to jump to a simple conclusion, i. e. democracy and neo-liberal economic policy will go well anytime and everywhere if the United States were to destroy the Taliban Administration and Sadam Hussein Administration and to rebuild a pro-American political power. The result is already well-known : George Bush after all has only invited waste from innumerable anti-American attacks.

(15) Political debates are now active in Japan about amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution (provision of abandonment of war as well as war potentials). The purpose for the Prime Minister and the government party is to vanish the disunderstandability of the political process discussed in this paper and to adapt the provision to the realities of Japan which already declined deeply to cooperate with the United States.

(16) One of the examples was seen in the special election of the Diet in May, 2005. In this case, Liberal Democrats won. But it was a result of declined rate of voting. Many supporters of non-government parties as well as Liberal Democrats are floating voters, while the Komeito, a party of a buddhist sect, is well organized and recently supporting Liberal Democrats. The majority of supporters of the Komeito is consisted of those who are not so rich. Actually Liberal Democrats relies upon the demand of those people. Without Komeito's support Liberal Democrats could never win in various elections.

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