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Love Your State, Love Your Boss: Whither Japan?

By Nagata Minoru

Talk of love, beauty, and hope filled the air in Tokyo as 2007 dawned. It is not that Japanese people were suddenly smitten with such romantic sentiments, but that their leaders were demanding it of them. The country's political and economic leadership was insisting that the Japanese love their country and their corporations. It is the phenomenon described by Japanese critic Sataka Makoto as that of a "stalker state," to which now, in light of the document introduced below, may be added "stalker corporation." Nowhere else in the industrial world is there anything quite like this. Those in Japan itself with long memories recall the time in the first half of the 20th century when citizens were compelled to love their state and told that its deeds were incomparably beautiful. It did not end well. Hence the general foreboding in the wake of new state and corporate demands.

On 15 December 2006, the centerpiece of the Abe Shinzo regime, the revised Fundamental Law of Education, was adopted. Article 1 of the 1947 law, on "respecting the value of the individual" was struck out and the new law is replete with reference to the "public" realm. It prescribes a set of moral virtues, including love of country, that the schools are now required to instill in children. Morality, as Miyake Shoko recently wrote in Japan Focus, will henceforth function "within the parameters set by the state." Educational "reform" to this end is a cause that Prime Minister Abe has pursued throughout his political career. As 2007 began, he declared his determination to press on to revise the constitution too, with the goal of setting public, state goals (loyalty preeminent among them) above "selfish" considerations of individual rights.

The romantic and sentimental quality of Abe's thinking, and his belief in the organic unity of state and people, the beauty of their past and untrammeled nature of their essence, is evident in the book he published in 2006, Utsukushii kuni e *(Towards a beautiful country). During the year ahead, he now promises to unfold a national campaign to determine precisely the parameters of Japan's unique beauty. Now (as Nagata's article below details) the country's major business federation, Keidanren, joins him in insisting on love of country as the prerequisite to turn Japan into a "Country of Hope."*

Ironically, the term "Country of Hope" was recently (in 2000) the title of a best-selling novel by the novelist Murakami Ryu (Kibo no kuni no exusodasu or "Flight to a Land of Hope"). Murakami's "Country of Hope," however, was a refuge to which people fled, escaping the "fascism of love and illusion" (the title of an earlier Murakami novel) in Japan proper. His was a hope diametrically at odds with that of Abe and Keidanren's Mitarai Fujio, and it was only to be realized by flight.

The Keidanren report may be found (so far in Japanese only) here:

As the earth inches towards catastrophe, the thoughts of Abe and Keidanren's Mitarai on Japanese power, leadership, unique "beauty" and unsullied essence are profoundly narcissistic. Their concept of state power is rooted in the 19th century and their ideal looks distinctly Prussian. Their highest goals are not freedom and equality, but discipline, order, authority embodied in rituals of flag and anthem, and unquestioning service to state and corporation. Their efforts to gain a seat at the "top" table of the United Nations and assure an ever-rising GDP are pathetic ambitions when set against the crisis of our era. The idea that economic growth will continue through a decline in population projected to fall below 90 million around mid-century and 45 million by century's end, while the state retains the tightest of barriers against immigration and refugees, seems far-fetched.

At a time when political leadership and corporate responsibility call for nothing so much as a profound reassessment of our way of life so that we shall bequeath a livable world to our children, they are peddling fantasies of pure national essences and a population drilled to love their state and corporations. (GMcC).

Keidanren report pushes patriotism

By Nagata Minoru

Promoting patriotism and constitutional revisions have been hallmarks of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo 's administration. But those measures to create what Abe calls "a beautiful country" are now being pushed by the leader of the nation's largest business group.

In fact, Mitarai Fujio, chairman of Nippon Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), feels that the controversial nationalistic measures forced on schools should also be extended to companies and elsewhere in society.

Mitarai Fujio

Nippon Keidanren's report on its long-term proposals focuses more on the importance on patriotism than on business-related policies.

The report, officially released on New Year's Day, is dubbed the "Mitarai vision" since it reflects the ideas of the Canon Inc. chairman, who took over as head of the federation in May 2006.

Much like Abe, the Nippon Keidanren report calls for a revision of pacifist Article 9 of the Constitution, which bans Japan from

maintaining any war potential.

The report also suggests that government entities and private-sector companies fly the Hinomaru national flag on a daily basis and have employees sing "Kimigayo," the national anthem.

It is the first time Keidanren has made such a suggestion.

The Mitarai vision says that these and other measures are required in the next decade to create a "country of hope," the title of the report.

Although the report has no legal binding power, Mitarai's opinions could influence the government's decision-making process and other areas. He is not only the Keidanren chairman, but is also a member representing the private sector in the government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy.

Some critics say the Keidanren report is Mitarai's way of trying to contain public criticism against the Abe administration as well as corporate management, and that the ultimate goal is to mold the public and employees into subservient minions for the nation's leaders.

The 140-page report did, in fact, mention financial issues that should be tackled, including the promotion of innovation, economic agreements and corporate tax breaks.

But the report continued to return to patriotism.

The report suggested that "education on Japan's traditions, culture and history should be promoted, and that it is important to nurture people's love of country and respect for the national flag and anthem."

It said that the flag should be flown and anthem sung not only at schools but also at government entities, companies, sports events and other public places so that a sense of valuing the flag and anthem can be nurtured.

It also said the current education system lacks efforts to nurture a "sense of public morality," adding that such feelings can only be cultivated if people identify themselves as members of a community with common basic values.

Mitarai's vision reflects the generational change under way in business circles.

He was born in 1935 and was a child at the end of World War II. He does not have the wartime experiences of his predecessors, such as Gaishi Hiraiwa, who fought on the bloody battlefields of the South Pacific during the war.

Mitarai is also said to have been influenced by his 23 years of living in the United States, during which he saw firsthand the "strong America" under Ronald Reagan and the importance placed on the Stars and Stripes there.

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