

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

A series of Op-Ed pieces by Daniel Métraux published in local newspapers in early 2008.

CONVERSATION WITH JAPAN'S SENIOR VICE-MINISTER OF FINANCE PROVIDES A BLEAK PICTURE OF HIS NATION'S FUTURE

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Japan is a nation in deep crisis -- deeply in debt, suffering from a crippling drop in population, and a badly divided government that has brought the national government into a frustrating stalemate. These comments framed a very dismal picture of Japan's present conditions and bleak future that the country's Senior Vice-Minister of Finance, Endo Otohiko, gave this writer and a delegation of 17 students on a study tour of Japan in early May 2008. Endo is a veteran member of Japan's House of Representatives representing the New Komeito Party, Japan's third largest political party and a coalition partner of the ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The Komeito was created in the 1960s by Japan's largest Buddhist organization, the Soka Gakkai.

Endo stressed that Japan's demographic crisis could well paralyze the nation's economy in the near future. "At the current rate of decline, our population today of about 127-128 million could drop to ninety million by the time you students become grandmothers." Indeed, the number of children aged 14 or younger declined in early 2008 for the 27th straight year to 13.5 percent of the population while the percentage of people 65 or older rose to 21.8 percent. "We are becoming a nation of old people with fewer and fewer young people in the workforce.... Young women now don't want to marry before they are 30 and many don't want to marry at all." Women want their freedom and are looking less towards marriage and when they do marry, they find that they must work because any viable household in Japan requires two paychecks. Having and raising children is also very expensive in Japan.

Endo recommends a package of economic incentives to encourage couples to have children, but each of these plans would cost a great deal of money which in turn would mean higher taxes, something which his government wishes to avoid before the next election. Endo also suggested that limited immigration of well-educated Asians from China, Korea and elsewhere might be considered in the future—a surprising phenomenon for a nation that until now has strongly discouraged immigration of any kind.

Endo also commented on the staggering debt that the government has accumulated over recent years—a debt fifty-percent higher than that of the United States when compared to both nations' GNPs. A squabble over a temporary tax of 25 yen

(about US\$.25) on a liter of gas had brought the Diet (parliament) to a standstill. The tax had expired, reducing gas about US\$1 per gallon, from about \$7 to \$6 a gallon. This reduction was very popular with Japanese consumers, but was a bitter financial blow to the government which, Endo said, needs the revenue to further government programs. The opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party) which controls Japan's Upper House strongly opposed re-imposing the tax, but the LDP and Komeito would use their large majority in the Lower House to override the Upper House's veto. "Japan's growing debt," Endo commented, "is a very grave crisis for Japan."

The third crisis facing Japan, Endo noted, is global warming. The world cannot wait much longer to respond to this crisis and some progress, some of it symbolic and some of it real, began with the Kyoto Protocol. Endo noted that while global warming and other environmental problems had increased in the past seven years, the pact indicates that many of the world's industrial powers are ready to deal seriously with these problems. Endo strongly criticized the Bush administration for doing too little to support the Kyoto Protocol and for not taking any meaningful steps to combat global warming.

Endo reaffirmed his party's strong opposition to any attempt by the LDP to rewrite Article 9 of Japan's American-written Constitution which prevents Japan from having any military capacity beyond the defense of Japan. Komeito's opposition has put an end to the LDP's plan to amend the Constitution.

Endo decried the fact that Japan today has split government with the opposition Minshuto strenuously opposing everything the government is trying to do while "offering no coherent program of its own." He would not comment on where Komeito would go after the next election, but an interview this writer had with Soka Gakkai Vice-President Terasaki Hirotsugu brought a strong denunciation of the Minshuto and a sharp note that Komeito would never form a coalition with that opposition party.

THE GHOSTS OF CHINESE CAMP CALIFORNIA

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The concept of ghost towns has always fascinated me. They provide windows with which one can examine the past. As a scholar and teacher of Asian history, the very idea of a Chinese ghost town in California generated even greater excitement. It was thus with great anticipation that I spent the better part of a day in May of 2007 exploring the remains of "Chinese Camp" deep in the heart of Gold Rush country in northern California. This part of California boasts many ghost towns, but in many ways this is one of the most neglected and thus most authentic.

Today any casual motorist driving along California Route 49 through Tuolumne County would hardly recognize the clump of abandoned buildings adorned by a sign "Chinese Camp" as being one of the biggest and most significant early settlements of Chinese in the United States. It was a placer-mining center settled by Chinese miners in 1849. Much work was done in the 1850s, and the piles of soil and gravel turned over in

the search for gold can still be seen in nearly every gulch. The placer mines of this area are credited with producing \$2.5 million in gold. Today the town consists of numerous Gold-Rush era buildings, most of them abandoned. A few ramshackle dwellings on the outskirts of town house a few remaining residents, but there are no Chinese left here and one can't even buy a dish of chow mein. The last of the Chinese left in the 1920s leaving behind one of the most significant Chinese ghost towns in the United States.

The late 1840s were a period of growing desperation for many Chinese. Wide spread starvation accompanied domestic rebellions and further incursions by the West in the wake of the Opium War (1839-42). At the beginning of the year 1849 there were in the state only fifty-four Chinese. At the news of the gold discovery a steady immigration commenced which continued until 1876, at which time the Chinese in the United States numbered 151,000 of whom 116,000 were in California. This increase in their numbers, rapid even in comparison with the general increase in population, was largely due to the fact that previous to the year 1869 China was nearer to the shores of California than was the eastern portion of the United States. Another circumstance which contributed to the heavy influx of Chinese was the fact that news of the gold discovery found southeastern China in poverty and ruin caused by the Taiping rebellion.

When news of the California Gold Rush reached Canton in 1848, many thousands of Chinese boarded boats to "Gum Shan," or "Gold Mountain" Many of the Chinese made their way to Tuolumne County to such towns as Sonora, Columbia, Jamestown and Chinese Camp where they staked their claims and built significant Chinese communities. The vast majority of Chinese were young men looking for a quick strike so that they could return to China, buy a plot of land and start their own families. The few women who came were mainly prostitutes, virtual "slaves," although a few Chinese merchants brought their wives. This was a man's world, lonely, and very isolated surrounded by a hostile white population, but the dream of wealth and memories of the misery of life in China gave them incentives to stay.

The first settlement here was known as Camp Salvado after a group of Savadorians who worked as miners, but a group of Cantonese miners arrived by 1849. Who they were and why they came remains a bit of a mystery. In 1849, a group of three dozen Cantonese miners arrived at the Camp and began prospecting. Where they came from remains a mystery. Some accounts imply that a ship's captain abandoned his ship in San Francisco bringing his entire crew with him. Another version has it that the Chinese were employed by a group of English speculators. What is known is that the mining brought large amounts of gold which in turn brought thousands of additional miners, including first hundreds and later thousands of Chinese. Miners including many Chinese developed a number of towns, but most Chinese settled in what became known as "Chinese Camp." Facing virulent discrimination in other areas, and after being driven away from other diggings, or having just arrived in the country, the Chinese miners gravitated here, feeling safe and comfortable among others of their nationality. There were some white miners there, but by the mid-1850s the 5,000 residents of the settlement vastly outnumbered the whites.

At first the streets of Chinese camp were solidly settled with store tents, built mostly of pine boughs with canvas stretched over the top and dirt floors. Others were of pine boughs topped with brush. The first substantial building was an adobe structure completed in 1851 which served as a store. A Catholic church, St. Xavier, first constructed in 1854, still stands today – in good shape, but clearly abandoned sitting forlornly on a hill outside the town. The Chinese later built several distinctively Chinese buildings including three Joss houses, traditional places for worshipping a variety of indigenous Chinese deities. By 1859 Chinese Camp had settled into what contemporary accounts say was a “law-abiding and respectable community.” . At its peak, perhaps 5,000 Chinese resided here. Even as late as the 1880s, patient Chinese miners were still eking out a living here mining gold.

The camp continued to grow, and due to the large number of Chinese inhabitants, became known by such names as Chinee, Chinese Diggins, and Chinese Camp. When the post office was established on April 18 of 1854, the town became officially known as Chinese Camp. The only reminder of its earlier cognomen, Camp Washington, lies in the road Washington Street. The town’s location made Chinese Camp the center of transportation for a large area, several stage and freight lines made regular daily stops here on their way to other points.

Most of the Chinese who came to California and thus to Chinese Camp were unskilled and uneducated laborers. Many found solace through the “Six Companies,” Chinese benevolent associations who helped Chinese survive in an alien environment. Most of the business transactions of the Chinese were done through the “Six Companies.” The Companies often contracted for large bodies of laborers. These Companies simply acted as clearing-houses for all sorts of transactions among the Chinese, as they had found that they could handle things in a strange land more satisfactorily through such associations than they could individually. Four of these “Companies” were represented in Chinese Camp.

Life could be rough for the Chinese in the early days. In 1856, it was the site of one of the earliest tong wars in the gold fields, when members of the Tan Woo Tong faced off against Sam Yap members. About 1,000 men scuffled; fortunately casualties were light due to the preferred choice of weapons--swords. When American lawmen finally intervened to halt the bloodshed, there were four dead and several more wounded.

When the gold mines in the area petered out after the Gold Rush, many of the Chinese miners moved on, but a few brave Chinese hung on until the last two returned by train to Chinatown in San Francisco. They left behind a remarkably preserved ghost town and, one presumes, the ghosts of many of the lonely Chinese miners who died there, their dreams of returning to China with pockets full of gold permanently thwarted.

Today one can walk the streets of the old town. A few residents live on the outskirts of town, but most of the buildings stand in the blazing sun, empty save for the ghosts of the original miners who gave life to this town. A stone and brick post office

dating from 1854 is still in use; the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church is still maintained. The Wells Fargo Building also still stands.

California has many incredible ghost towns, but Chinese Camp is the only one that reflects the Chinese mining heritage of the 1849 gold rush. It is well worth a visit.

BENAZIR BHUTTO'S ASSASSINATION AND PAKISTAN'S ULTIMATE FAILURE AS A NATION

[Column written for the *Hardwick [Vermont] Gazette*, 3 January 2008.

Benazir Bhutto's death on December 27th is just one of a seemingly endless series of jolts that this country has experienced since it gained its independence from Great Britain in 1947. Newsweek magazine recently headlined Pakistan as the world's most dangerous nation, an opinion supported by the major presence of Al Qaeda in the Northwest Tribal Areas as well as the country's know-how and possession of a significant nuclear arsenal.

A nation-state will have trouble surviving if it is not also a cultural nation. Political scientists define a nation-state as a piece of territory headed by a recognizable government. A cultural nation, on the other hand, is a group of people who readily identify with each other as one large family and who have experienced a period of prolonged suffering together. One might say that while the United States existed as a nation-state from 1776 (or 1783) on, it did not become a truly cultural nation until the end of the Civil War. Today cultural nations without nation-state status exist all over the world including Quebec, Scotland, the Basque region of Spain, and the Kurdish areas of Iraq. The existence of a cultural nation within a larger nation-state can often lead to significant chaos as we see in Iraq today. Iraq is a totally artificial state created by the British after World War I which today remains very tribal in nature. Even the United States almost collapsed in 1860-61 with the secession of a distinct cultural nation in the guise of the Confederate States of America.

The territory now called "Pakistan" was incorporated into British India in the late 19th century. The country was conceived and later founded by Muslim nationalist and activist Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League. Although Jinnah and the League initially worked with India's Congress Party in the 1920s and 1930s against British colonial rule, by the time British India showed signs of collapsing during World War II, Jinnah and his supporters demanded the creation of a separate Muslim state in those areas in India with Muslim majorities. When independence came in 1947, the nation was named Pakistan – a name derived by taking the first letter of national cultural / political units of people living in the new country – Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir, Sindh, and BaluchisTAN. Pakistan lost its founding leader soon after that with the death of Jinnah and the assassination of his successor. Since its independence, the country has been characterized by periods of military and economic growth interspersed with political

instability.

Pakistan is one of only two nations in the world created specifically for religious purposes (the other is Israel). But Islam was not a strong enough force to keep its very diverse population together and by 1971, the eastern portion of Pakistan broke off to become the new country of Bangladesh. An even deeper problem is the very real fact that religion has also failed to unite the people of western Pakistan. In reality, Pakistan is a gross failure as a nation state because it consists of a series of tribal cultural nations who have never lived very comfortably together and who often show greater affinity for their "tribes" than they have for their nation-state. The Pashtun people of Pakistan are very closely linked with the Pashtuns of Afghanistan—the border between them was drawn by the British in the 1800s. The affinity that the Pashtuns of Pakistan show for their cultural countrymen in Afghanistan—and the fact that much of the Afghani Taliban movement is Pashtun-based—is a major reason that many Pakistanis have supported the Taliban while Pakistan's President Musharraf is a strong supporter of the United States. The fact that Pakistan consists of a number of competing cultural nations (including the Pashtun "nation" that was divided by the British) rather than one national unit is a major factor in its inherent instability. Unlike its neighbor India, Pakistan has also failed to evolve into a relatively stable civil society based on the rule of law.

Experiments with democracy have failed because there is no tradition of these cultural units working in harmony. Pakistan's well-armed military felt obliged to interfere with the democratic process on many occasions when elected governments, including two under Benazir Bhutto and one by her father, proved incapable of properly governing the country. Ironically Mrs. Bhutto may prove to be a stronger force in favor of democracy and the creation of a civil society in death than in life. She was a flawed politician in life, but may be a stronger martyr in death.

RECENT TURKISH INVASIONS OF NORTHERN IRAQ COULD RUIN THE WHOLE AMERICAN WAR EFFORT

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The recent Turkish invasions of northern Iraq threatens to destabilize the region and ruin the whole war effort of the United States in Iraq.

Four years ago my son David and I took a trip to Turkey, a fascinating country with a deep history and a fascinating mix of the European and Islamic worlds. Its modern history, largely shaped by the Republic's founder, Kemal Attaturk in the 1920s and 1930s, is thoroughly secular, but many of its people and many of its politicians are dedicated Islamists. The political divide is almost equally divided between those with a secular orientation to life and those who favor a more Islamic view. It is also a rapidly modernizing country ready for an explosive period of growth that reminded me very much of Japan in the late 1960s and Korea in the 1980s. It remains an active candidate

for membership in the European Union and would be the first Muslim member if admitted.

When we told travel agents in Istanbul that we wanted to travel to interior parts of the country, we were told that we could not travel to the eastern corners of Turkey bordering Iraq. It was said to be a virtual war zone, the home of many of many of Turkey's twenty million Kurds many of whom have no wish to live under Turkish authority. The tragedy is that there has been considerable fighting between Kurds and Turkish forces and that although Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, has made many moves to try and satisfy Turkish Kurds' aspirations, the whole area is on the verge of an explosion that could severely damage American attempts to bring the Iraq war to a peaceful close.

The Kurds are an ethnic group indigenous to a region often referred to as Kurdistan, an area that includes adjacent parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. According to the CIA World Factbook, Kurds comprise 20% of the population in Turkey, 15-20% in Iraq, perhaps 8% in Syria, 7% in and 1.3% in Armenia. In all of these countries except Iran, Kurds form the second largest ethnic group. Roughly 55% of the world's Kurds live in Turkey, about 20% each in Iran and Iraq, and a bit over 5% in Syria. Kurds are desperate to form their own nation, Kurdistan, but the tragedy is that they are situated in so many different countries, all of which refuse to give up any of their sovereign territory to allow the formation of a Kurdish state. Because many of the Kurds in each of these nations are actively developing plans to decouple these regions to create a Kurdistan, they have been actively suppressed by many of their host governments.

Recently, there have been active skirmishes between The Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK), considered by the US and EU to be a terrorist organization dedicated to creating an independent Kurdish state, along the Iraqi-Turkish border. It is a large ethnic secessionist group using force and threat of force against both civilian and military targets for the purpose of achieving its political goal. Between 1984 and 1999, the PKK and the Turkish military engaged in open war, and much of the countryside in the southeast was depopulated, and in recent months fighting has flared up anew. In recent weeks Turkish troops have launched a full invasion into northern Iraq and there is the real danger that the whole region could soon erupt into war if nothing is done to stop the fighting.

Northern Iraq, an area dominated by Kurds, for the past decade has been a very peaceful and stable region enjoying strong economic growth. Its Kurdish population, which has received strong American protection and has been very pro-American in its sentiments, has formed a virtual mini-state within Iraq. The problem is that the US has interests on both sides. According to the London Times, "The clashes put America in an unenviable position. Turkey is a NATO member, an important military partner and a crucial factor in regional stability. The US has expressed understanding of its determination to root out terrorist sanctuaries across the border. But any invasion could destabilize northern Iraq, stir fierce anti-American anger among Kurds who have been largely supportive of the coalition forces and jeopardize the fragile coalition in Baghdad."

The United States must somehow intervene or its entire war aim of creating a stable and independent Iraq might be in danger. A major war in northern Iraq between Kurds and Turks would be a disastrous event. The Kurds in Iraq must restrain efforts by the PKK to attack Turkey and the Turks must restrain themselves from attacking Iraq. Failure to find a peaceful resolution to this crisis could well lose us the Iraqi war.

WHO PLAYS BETTER BASEBALL: THE UNITED STATES OR JAPAN?

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Tokyo. 23 March 2008. Late March is a beautiful time to visit Tokyo. The skies are generally clear, the temperatures hover around 60, and the cherry blossoms are out. The city's huge parks, including the vast expanse of fields and woods surrounding Meiji Shrine, are filled with young families and earnest lovers enjoying their first taste of spring. A business trip brings me to this glorious city, but I have time off to savor the eternal question-- where does one find better baseball, the United States or Japan? Japan won the World Championship series in 2006, but how would individual teams from the US and Japan do?

As luck would have it, the best that America has to offer, the "World Champion" Boston Red Sox are in town for two exhibition games against two fabled Japanese teams, the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants and the Osaka Hanshin Tigers as well as two games against the Oakland Athletics to open the 2008 season. I am a die-hard Red Sox fan and baseball is my passion! All the games are being played at the beautiful Tokyo Dome. I was lucky to purchase a \$30 grandstand seat with a fabulous view of the playing field.

The first game between the Red Sox and the Tigers was sold out. Half the stadium was jammed with a tight and very noisy Tigers fan club with thousands of young Japanese banging drums and blowing horns as they vociferously cheered on their tough young team. A surprisingly large number of Americans made the trip from Boston and elsewhere in the US to see their team. And a large number of Japanese of all ages wore Red Sox hats and T-Shirts--not surprising since the Sox are the number one favorite team in Japan. Sox star pitchers Matsuzaka and Okajima caused a sensation here last year.

The game itself started with a bang--quite literally! After two obviously jet-lagged Red Sox struck out rather feebly, crowd favorite David Ortiz launched a titanic 514 foot homerun into the left field stand--one of the 2 or 3 longest homeruns hit at the Dome. After star third-baseman Mike Lowell and the sensational Manny Ramirez hit back-to-back singles, left-fielder J.D. Drew hit another long shot to give Boston a 4-0 lead. When Kevin Youkilis singled to drive in another run in the second inning, Boston had a 5-0 lead and it seemed as though the route was on.

But any thought of an easy Boston victory soon disappeared. Boston pitcher Clay Buchholz, who was overpowering in the first two frames, suddenly had difficulty getting hitters out in the bottom of the third. After what seemed an interminable string of singles

and doubles, the inning ended with Boston only ahead by 5-4. Buchholz was relieved in the fourth when the Tigers loaded the bases with two outs, and a string of Boston relievers tamed the Tigers the rest of the way. Both teams exchanged runs in the late innings as Boston finally prevailed 6-5.

One very annoying and rather rude factor was the role that Japanese fans played by flashing their cameras in the late innings whenever a Tigers pitcher threw against a Boston batter. The result was that the batter would be temporarily blinded by hundreds if not thousands of flashing cameras when attempting to see a pitched ball. I am told that this custom is a way of saluting a great player, but it certainly blinded a lot of Red Sox hitters, especially the next day when the Red Sox trailed early, but eventually beat the Yomiuri Giants.

So, what did these games do to answer my eternal question. Two games cannot tell you much, of course, but it was obvious that both teams were easily matched.ⁱ It was a tight, well-played game that was not decided until the final out. Boston displayed much more power, but the Tigers, who out-hit the Red Sox 12-9, showed better hitting. Both teams displayed excellent fielding and generally mediocre pitching. It is clear that Boston would do well in Japan's leagues and that Hanshin would be a contender in the US. Their talents are appreciably equal.

The exodus of so many of Japan's top baseball players to North America, however, has caused a grave crisis for Japanese baseball. The big question is whether Japanese baseball, now suffering declines in attendance, can survive this baseball drain.

ⁱ The Oakland Athletics actually had a much easier time with both Japanese teams and in the end US teams beat Japanese teams 4-0.

