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A View of the U.S. from Across the Pacific

Takeshi Kawasaki

Journalist, Foreign News Department at the *Asahi Shimbun* Newspaper in Tokyo

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UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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Alumni Lounge, Gerlinger Hall

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A View of the U.S. From across the Pacific
May 2nd. 2005, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon
Takeshi Kawasaki

Professor Steve Kohl:

Good Afternoon. I would like to welcome all of you to this afternoon presentation. It's been sponsored joint by the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies and the Yoko McClain Faculty Endowment Fund in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Our speaker today is Mr. Takeshi Kawasaki, a staff writer for Foreign News Department for the Asahi Shimbun Newspaper in Tokyo. Mr. Kawasaki has spent more than a quarter of the century covering international news from various perspectives around the world. In early 1990s he was stationed in Washington D.C. just in time for the outbreak of the 1st. Persian Gulf War and spent his time in Saudi Arabia and also in Washington D.C.

Later he was a bureau chief at the bureau in Nairobi in Kenya for his office was responsible for reporting of events throughout all sub-Saharan Africa. In 1999 he was in Stanford University for Knight Fellow to bring together American and International journalists to talk about journalistic things. And currently he is stationed at home office in Tokyo and supervises gathering international news from all over the world. Those of us in Asian Studies spend our time looking at Japan and China and Korea studying, analyzing at, and talking about it. Today we are going to get the opposite perspective. Mr. Kawasaki talks about what the United States looks at the other side of the Pacific. Surely he has many insightful comments for us.

So, Mr. Go Kawasaki.

Kawasaki: Thank you very much, Arigatou. Thank you very much for a kind introduction.

I think I was totally wrong. I have to confess that before landing America this time I had an image of National Guards holding machineguns at every corner of the streets, looking for terrorists. Something like that. I have to be honest.

This is a image of America for I think for the rest of the world at this moment. But I was totally wrong in such peace.

At least my image of National Guards holding machineguns was wrong here in Eugene, I don't know what is going on in the East Coast. To come to the place and to see by your own eyes is always important.

Nothing has changed as far as I see in my own eyes which means what is visible for me at this moment so far since I was living in America in 2000 one year before September 11. Probably I am wrong. But I somehow have an image this country is at war physically. Probably this country is at war mentally but not physically in my understanding of war. I have seen many physical wars in the Persian Gulf, Haiti, Rwanda, Congo, Sudan, Angola and East Timor everywhere in the world.

In a sense, I think I was a traveling Odysseus. Allow me please of this kind of exaggerated adjectives. I was traveling all around of the world and I had been a war correspondent.

I was born 9 years after Japan lost the war to the United States and was brought up under the strong influences of American culture. I have traveled around the world, as I told you; I lived America and Africa, traveled through most of Europe and many Arab and Asian countries. I have never been to South America.

I have visited 56 countries and 3 regions, namely Hong Kong under British rules, Taiwan, and Palestine. I have been a reporter in charge of international affairs as well coincidentally with the end of the cold war. I lost my way many times and sometimes, like Odysseus, heard siren songs to complicate my reaching my destination. Now I am back to hear sirens song to complicate my destination.

Now I am back to Japan, reporting what I saw in the world. Of course still I don't have a clear bird's eye view of international affairs because the world is not so clear and beautiful like $E = MC^2$.

Thank you everyone for giving me an opportunity to see America again. America is always so big, so powerful so complex to grasp that it sometimes triggers ill-feelings from the rest of the world for its arrogance as a state.

But since I have many American friends, by personal experiences and memories with John's and Mary's, Mickey's and Donald's, I would not conclude that the United States is a terrible country. While I admit I would demonize North Korea since I don't know any North Koreans personally. I have once

visited North Korea in 2001 and spent 8 days there. Even though I had some conversations with North Koreans, I am hesitant to say that I understand the country and people. I think intercultural thinking through direct dialogue and communication is indeed important.

Today, May the 2nd, the review conference of Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty started in the United Nations in New York. There was a anti-nuke demonstration yesterday near the UN building. We sent several reporters from Tokyo to New York adding to our staff correspondents in New York and Washington bureaus. But probably this kind of event will not be reported in this country.

And also today we have a bilateral foreign ministerial meeting between the United States and Japan in Washington D.C. Japan's Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura is having a bilateral meeting with Ms. Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State at this moment. The United States is angry that Japan still refuses to reopen its market to American beef because of possible contamination of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, mad cow disease). Another issue facing the two countries is about American military bases in Japan. Japan is worried about U.S. reshaping its military formation. Why? If Japan accepts the American request to grant them a Command control function moving from Germany to Camp Zama in the south of Tokyo, it could largely change the character of US-Japan military capacity. There is a possibility to deploy military presence beyond North East Asia, which experts say could contradict the Japanese Constitution and overrule the meaning of Japan-Us Security Treaty.

Japanese Animation films and pop-culture are everywhere in the world. We are proud that "Spirited Away" by Hayao Miyazaki is a little, a little, a little more sophisticated than Disney. I read "Kafka on the Seashore" by Haruki Murakami recently. It was a good novel.

(Pause)

I would tell my gratitude to America later, but now let me remember some example that I felt I was a minority in several places in the world.

In November 1991 I was working for the Asahi Shimbun Washington Bureau, I was sitting in a high school auditorium in Monroe, a small town with a population of 56 thousands, in the state of Louisiana. Am I pronouncing the name of the state correct? Louisiana. Thank you. We Japanese call it Lu-i-ji-a-na. Former Ku Klux Klan Leader, then state law maker Mr. David

Duke was running for gubernatorial race against the incumbent governor. He got a local Republican ticket but then federal President George Bush Daddy opposed to him.

Mr. Duke's message was simple. He mobilized angry poor white people. He did not like affirmative actions like forced busing for white and black children, advantage for procurement for black contractors and state social welfare system for poor people etc. Louisiana at that time was suffering from slow economy because oil industry was not successful after the Persian Gulf War.

The auditorium was packed roughly with 900 people. The meeting in the auditorium was orderly. Speakers attacked the incumbent because they thought he failed to deliver. It was not so different from what we see in many other political rallies all over the United States. Mr. David Duke was not so eccentric and neither was his audience. I supposed that angry whites are not so furious.

But what I felt uneasy was that I was the only colored person in the crowd. People in the auditorium including media people from Washington are all white. Audiences were not necessarily angry but I felt the feeling of being a minority member for the first time in my life.

After 911 and eventual War in Iraq, American media often say that America is divided. I always remember my experience chasing David Duke and those silent but apparently angry white people in the Deep South at a small town in Louisiana. After David Duke lost in the gubernatorial race in 1991 you may remember he attempted to be a candidate in a federal Presidential election in 1992. I think his and his supporter's remorse is still very powerful. What kind of remorse? This is remorse against social welfare system, affirmative action, namely all politically-correct affairs like genders and minorities. I say politically correct, I am afraid this is a wrong perception but this kind of political correctness has established accumulatively since Roosevelt's New Deal era.

Japan after the defeat of the war was actually built by this kind of concept. Japan was in a sense a good loser on the war, then the United States was a good winner teaching us democracy and, well this is not a very good word, political correctness.

Later I interviewed Mr. David Duke. He wisely commented. He looked and sounded a very intelligent person. He wisely commented that he liked Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima. Mishima was a wonderful author whom

Japan was proud, but in 1970 he advocated self-defense forces to urge coup d'etat to defend the emperor and he committed suicide?

In this auditorium, this is not so large like an auditorium, but in this room of the University of Oregon, here in Eugene, I see the diversity of people of many ethnicities. This makes me very comfortable. Through my many experiences I have come to know that any group which establishes a special identity by defining themselves as unique or superior will attack other groups by many different means, through words, economic measures and eventually by violence. Why cannot human beings acknowledge the differences they have with each other before insisting on one's strong identity?

(Pause)

In our world and throughout history, the engine which has caused such tragedies as endless terrorism or bloody ethnic and religious conflicts is, I am afraid, an orientation toward a homogeneous and closed group by avoiding others and desiring to purify blood ties.

Japan has had such an experience.

In such groups people demand elimination, differentiation, discontinuity and inner circle languages.

Such groups lack the orientation to try to engage in dialogue with alien elements, to try to establish a certain level of public relationship with such elements and to attempt to communicate with those elements.

Civilization, I think, is to accept others who are different with us as members of the same community. Civilization, I think, is constructed in the basis of communication capability which enables us and them to live together. That is something which makes us possible to live together with others. It may not be the ability of individual level such as love, compassion, imagination or receptiveness.

It is not so. It is not the virtue of individual level. We need to acknowledge legal fiction in the level of public through communication.

Many places I have traveled from Arab countries and small villages in Africa I detected some kind of animosity to others. For them others don't bring goodness but others bring fighting and hate.

There are people who advocate patriotism everywhere in the world. To love their own community is natural feeling and behavior. I love my community. I think I have patriotism. But why someone can say that you are not patriotic. Why can someone say that I am more patriotic than you are? What is your reason that you can say you are more patriotic than me? How can you evaluate my patriotism?

Well Japan has an argument, you should sing National anthem, Kimigayo, and it has several problems with history as well as a national flag. So we always have debates about them. But if you don't like national anthem you are blamed as unpatriotic.

In Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor and many other places in the world after the end of the Cold War, I saw people who gave up trying to communicate with others, but became more determined to eliminate others.

(Pause)

I think America used to be a great communicator. I remember a President who had such nickname. But I mean when world was at war, American used to be very cool to analyze where we were standing. I mean at the World War two. Do you remember "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword?" I think students of East Asian Studies might know this masterpiece. I hesitate to pick up for my example as cliché, but it can not be helped.

Ruth Benedict, anthropologist was requested by the military in 1944 to study about the patterns of Japanese culture. She opened communication circuits with many different windows like Japanese Americans, movies and books et cetera.

She wrote as following.

Quote;

My assignment was difficult. America and Japan were at war and it is easy in wartime to condemn wholesale, but far harder to try to see how your enemy looks at life through his own eyes. Yet it had to be done. The question was how the Japanese would behave, not how we would behave if we were in their place. I had to try to use Japanese behavior in war as an asset in understanding them, not as a liability. I had to look at the way they conducted the war itself and see it not for the moment as a military problem but as a cultural problem. In warfare as well as in peace, the Japanese acted

in character. What special indications of their way of life and thinking did they give in the way they handled warfare? Their leaders' ways of whipping up war spirit, of reassuring the bewildered, of utilizing their soldiers in the field—all these things showed what they themselves regarded as the strengths on which they could capitalize. I had to follow the details of the war to see how the Japanese revealed themselves in it step by step.

Unquote:

Even at war, the great America was trying to communicate with others. Japanese were not able to do such things. The authority, the government of Japan, prohibited people studying English and American culture. American movies and books were banned. Leadership of Japan tried to purify one homogeneous group and in order to do so they are afraid of communicate others.

(Pause)

Well when I was young, that is not so long ago....., I was greatly influenced by American journalism. Needless to say about American culture, Miles Davis and Jazz, Bob Dylan and folk music, pop songs like Simon & Gerfunkel, Carol King, Rock and Rolls movies like Easy Rider, Graduation, The Strawberry Statement, Puff the magic dragon..... I need days to talk about them. Professors in my generation are laughing at me.

It's funny that in the same way we were addicted to American pop culture, now some Americans like Quentin Tarantino are fascinated with Japanese yakuza movies.

I have to be honest. I was influenced by American journalism before I became a reporter. Or something I believe that American journalism has mighty power. They are at random.....Russell Baker, Studs Terkel, what was his name of managing editor of the Washington Post?....I don't remember his name, I'm sorry.....Pentagon Papers, Roger Simon, Bob Woodward and "All the President's men," David Halberstam and his historical analysis on the decision making system of the Vietnamese War "The Best and the Brightest," "The Power that be" describes the interrelations between the media and the power, Harrison Salisbury and his essay on North Vietnam and China or Civil Rights movements in the 60s. Then Art Buchwald, Bob Green. In my younger days all of them were translated into Japanese. I was definitely influenced by these journalists.

I understand now those journalists whom I admired were liberal and probably do not represent different sides of American journalism. But in those days so many American books were translated into Japanese. Even we had "Readers Digest" in Japanese. In 1980's Readers Digest in Japan bankrupted.

Last week I went a bookstore and I found there were mountains of books about America still. Almost all of them, some of them were translation from English and others were written in Japanese, were actually accusing or denouncing America like warmongers. Some titles were "Why Bush made misunderstandings" "America and globalization destroy the world," "Stupid White Men or Fahrenheit 911 by Michael Moore." "After the Empire" by Emanuel Todd" OK, it is enough. Almost all of them are criticizing America or very cool to America.

I think I have to be cautious of this kind of tendency. When America looks holding a rope in a small ring Japanese people favored to read that Americans are failing. Those who are expertise America would tend to say America has problems. There is a desire for not only Japanese but probably also for Chinese and Europeans (needless to add, Arabs) would like to look at such America and would like to hear about bad rumor about America.

I think I need to look at brighter side of America now. I don't think America is blameless but just condemnation is not a good way to open communication with others.

Libertarianism, oh this is another difficult pronunciation, libertarianism is one of the big factors to understand American cultures. Even I have known the jargon for more than ten years; I confess that I did not know what libertarianism was. But I am surprised it's important works like Ayn Rand have never translated into Japanese until very recently.

In July last year, 'Fountainhead' by Ayn Rand was first ever translated into Japanese. Then in September 2004, 'Atlas Shrugged' by her was also translated. (「水源」と「肩をすくめるアトラス」)

I don't know whether this is the new movement of libertarianism is budding in Japan or this might be serious desire for some Japanese to understand the United States of America from the grass-roots rather deeply and rather profoundly.

Let me introduce a poem by Takamura Kotaro.

I tried to translate it from Japanese into English.

Takamura Kotaro is a poet in modern Japanese literature. And the 8th of December is the day when the Japanese common people were notified by radio or newspaper that the war in the Pacific had begun in 1941, namely the attack on Pearl Harbor. As you know, this war between Japan and, mainly, America, was fought over 4 years, and had very nasty and barbaric consequences on the Japanese community, especially. In other words, it is often said America became, in a true sense, a Pacific power as a result of this war.

Once a community in danger or in crisis, I mean community in Japan, people have own unique expression in the form of literature whether they are novels or poems.

(Reading the 8th of December)

The 8th of December
by Takamura Kotaro

Remember the 8th of December.
When world history changed.
When Anglo-Saxon supremacy
Was refused by the land and the sea of East Asia.
It was Japan that refused white supremacy,
a little country in the Eastern sea,
country of the gods
reigned over by Emperor Showa.
The power of America and Britain,
monopolists of the world's wealth,
Was refused here in our country.
To refuse is our justice.
We demand that East Asia be returned to the East Asians,
Our neighbors have all been sapped of strength by their exploitation.
It is we who will break the grip of their nails and fangs
We who will rise up, gathering our strength
Old and young, men and women
Every one a soldier
We'll fight till our mighty opponents admit they were wrong
Remember December 8,
The day world history was broken into two.

(Translated by Takeshi Kawasaki)

*Takamura Kotaro (1883-1956); poet & sculptor, Japanese

十二月八日
高村 光太郎

記憶せよ、十二月八日。
この日世界の歴史あらたまる。
アングロ・サクソンの主権、
この日東亜の陸と海とに否定さる。
否定するものは彼等のジャパン、
眇たる東海の国にして
また神の国たる日本なり。
そを治しめたまふ明津御神なり。
世界の富を壟断するもの、
強豪米英一族の力、
われらの国に於て否定さる。
われらの否定は義による。
東亜を東亜にかへせといふのみ、
彼等の搾取に隣邦ことごとく瘦せたり。
われらまさに其の爪牙を摧かんとす。
われら自ら力を養ひてひとたび起つ、
老若男女みな兵なり。
大敵非をさとるに至るまでわれらは戦ふ。
世界の歴史を両断する
十二月八日を記憶せよ。

The 8th of December is not one of his best poems at all. I don't think it was good. His anthology does not usually take this one. But when I saw many crises in various parts of the world, I noticed intellectuals in the society and community and ordinary people as well have to set their minds in the crisis mode. I may be very arrogant to say that I think I understand what American people feel kind of crisis of identity, crisis of safety, crisis of daily life, I remember this the 8th of December.

You may say it was Japan who started the war. I don't argue that at this moment. But what I want to tell is this feeling of crisis of being attacked, daily life being destroyed. I think this feeling about crisis in a community is familiar and probably common in various crises in the world, and even in the

history.

Takamura Kotaro was one of the best intellectuals in modern Japan. He had been educated in America and in France. He was one of the best and brightest figures in modern literature of Japan. He described this as his feeling about national crisis. In other poems he called his center of his mental peace as emperor and called several times "His Majesty, His Majesty, His Majesty...". My generation does not have same feeling about emperor any more but in every community something like this must exist. Something which is nationalism, chauvinism whatever it is called.

You are from Asian Studies like literature, history, politics, culture, sociology, economy, business and religion whatever. I appreciate you that you are interested in Asia. America is another world, it's a big world. This is self-sufficient globe in a sense. America's strategic location is perfect. You can not imagine some neighboring countries to invade except supposed individual terrorists.

That may be why Hollywood made so many films that involved attacks from outer space.

America is also abundant of resources both natural and human. You are self-sufficient by comparison other developed countries in Europe and Asia. Yesterday I was walking Agate Street from Spring Boulevard. I found there were so many things. Beautiful houses, beautiful promenade with trees and beautiful people and beautiful stadium. America has too many things to protect. America thinks that America would like to protect this abundant life-style.

Some people may say there is poverty in this country. America has both developed world and the third world. Maybe. But I know the different poverty. Absolute poverty is no way to run out. You may have seen victims by big earthquakes and Tsunami off Indonesia. I was surprised when I was watching the television that Asian victims by Tsunami owned so many things to lose rather than their family. They had so many properties.

I remember in a refugee camp in Zaire, now renamed Congo. I was very very surprised to find a rental video shop in 1995. In the camp there is no electricity but rich, comparatively rich, I mean, people have generators to make electricity and watch movies at their blue tent in a refugee camp.

There are haves and have-nots everywhere in the world, but there is absolute

poverty in some areas, areas that look like they have been abandoned by the civilized world. American poverty is not that bad, it is possible to eliminate it if you are determined.

(Pause)

Needless to say, Japan has to live in the neighborhood with China, Korea and over the Pacific with the United States of America and Canada.

Please imagine 3 big economic powers, Japan, China and two Koreas live very close for 3000 years. Now we can add Russia in this power circle. The story is very complex. This is not easy. In addition to history, inside countries people's views are so different. Now there seems even in China democracy is budding.

Even in Japan, a little island country, people's views are so different. You can not reach consensus at once. You cannot order what we should do. You have to persuade people why we need to do so. We have to co-exist with neighbors (sometime they are very noisy) and we have to co-exist with weak enemy inside our community. I mean weak enemy which is not a strong enemy but inside us there are others who do not agree me and oppose my opinion. Well I am not able to eliminate others inside community like immigrant or foreigners; I have to find the way to co-exit.

In North East Asia there is no way to resort to war. These countries have to co-exist.

Nationalism or petit-nationalism rises occasionally. In Japan there are people who advocate nationalism or xenophobic statement; I think many of you heard about them. They were reported. I would say I am a patriot; I love my community and my country, why can you say you are more patriotic than I?

In the same manner I would say I love the world. I would not say I love the world more than you. But I would say please don't tell you love the world more than me. Love or patriotism cannot compare.

Many of you remember the big train accident took place last week in Kansai are at Amagasaki. More than 100 people were killed. We don't know the reason yet but it is reported that driver was late 90 seconds from the schedule. It is supposed that trains in Japan come and leave on time. Now Japanese start thinking that if the Japanese society had been so obsessed with 90 seconds and killed 100 people, system of Japanese society may have been

something wrong. I don't know yet how does the lesson of 90 seconds change the way of thinking of Japanese life. But let us try to change.

I know the status of my poor English with errors both grammatically and in pronunciation. I thank you so much.