

"Daily Word" Echoes

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(Essays submitted by listeners on themes of "Daily Word" telephone messages between September 1 and October 6, 1992 and other "echoes" of this telephone service. Corrected and edited by Clark Offner.)

September 1 Message (Subject#224)

In English, "chop" means to cut with a heavy, sharp tool. We may chop wood with an axe or chop meat with a cleaver. When playing tennis, I enjoy using a chop stroke, which is a cutting or slicing motion that puts a spin on the ball, causing it to bounce in an irregular way. In Oriental countries influenced by China, a couple of long, thin sticks are called chopsticks. Their primary function, however, is not to cut, but to pick up articles. In Japan, chopsticks are used to pick up pieces of cold black or burning red charcoal in ahibachi, pieces of food being fried in oil on a stove or the remaining bones of a corpse following its cremation. The more common shorter chopsticks are used to convey food to the mouth from a bowl or dish. Many adults these days are distressed at the lack of ability on the part of children and young people to manipulate chopsticks in the proper fashion. In Japan, there are a number of sayings, superstitions or traditions related to chopsticks. What do you think about chopsticks, their history and uses, sayings about them and proper chopstick etiquette?

I have heard that it was late in the 16th century that forks and spoons were used at a dinner for the first time in the

West. The custom of using chopsticks in our country is much older than that. We find such evidence in a story in the *Kojiki*. When Susanoô, younger brother of Amaterasu, was traveling in Izumo after being banished by his sister, he found a pair of chopsticks floating down a river and firmly believed that people were living up the river. The use of chopsticks will certainly be traceable to remote antiquity along with the habit of eating rice.

Concerning the word "chopsticks", I am rather skeptical about connecting the word to the English word "chop". The verb "chop" signifies a very forceful action. (The word reminds me of a trick *karate-chop* of Rikidôzan, a former famous professional wrestler.) An English dictionary gives its meaning as "cut with or deliver blows of axe or heavy edged tool". Our chopsticks are literally a pair of small sticks to pick up or nip something. Another dictionary I consulted indicates that "chopsticks" is derived from an old Chinese word, *chû*, which means *hashi* in our present-day language. I think this theory is more reasonable.

We Japanese are strictly taught from childhood how to use chopsticks correctly. It is often said that using chopsticks stimulates our brain. The secret of Japanese dexterity may be traced to the use of chopsticks. Recently many foreigners use them very skillfully. On the contrary, Japanese young people today are often very awkward in using them. I think there are two main reasons for this. One is that young people at present tend to be clumsy because, in

their childhood, they were not given a chance to make or process things by themselves--making toys with their own hands or sharpening pencils with a knife, for example. Another reason is the lack of home education. Parents neglect teaching them how to use chopsticks properly when they are small and, to our great regret, this tendency applies to every kind of home discipline today.

There are certain manners and etiquette relating to the use of chopsticks. For example, *utsuri-bashi* (moving chopsticks over various dishes) and *name-bashi* (licking chopsticks) are disapproved. Sticking chopsticks into rice is also considered inauspicious because it may suggest death. Apart from these offensive acts, ways of using chopsticks should not be overemphasized. After all, chopsticks are merely tools. People may use them as they wish. When a foreigner finds it hard to use chopsticks eating Japanese food, naturally he should be allowed to use a knife and fork. Likewise, when we eat Western-style food, I think we may use chopsticks as supplementary utensils. It is nonsensical to eat rice by putting it on the reverse side of a fork. We should always fix our sights on the real nature of things.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

Meaning of chopsticks: a pair of sticks used to pick up and eat food. They are usually made of wood, bamboo, ivory, etc.

Sayings: *Hashi ga korondemo okashii toshigoro* (The age when they giggle even when chopsticks fall). This refers to the age when girls (especially teenagers) giggle even when nothing funny happens.

Hashi nimo bô nimo kakaranai (It cannot be hung using either chopsticks or long sticks). This refers to a very difficult condition when nothing can be done. (from *Dai-jirin*)

(YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

I learned two prohibitions related to chopsticks from my mother when I was a child. One was that one must not pass food from one pair of chopsticks to another. The other is that one must not use chopsticks made of two different kinds of material together, for example, one made of wood and the other of bamboo. The reason for these prohibitions is that that is what is done at the crematory when we pick up the bones of the deceased. I do not know, however, why we do so only at the crematory.

I remember when I went to Greece with my friend. We stayed at the home of an American. I gave chopsticks to her cute son. He was very glad and began trying to use them skillfully. He washed them himself and would not let anyone else touch them. Another memory is an experience at an old town, Furukawa, north of Takayama. This town continues the famous festival called "Furukawa Taiko", when a big drum is beaten. I had lunch at an old-style restaurant there and used chopsticks made of *miscanthus*. The mistress said that she had made them herself, cutting down the wood and bringing it back. It added a primitive charm to our meal.

I remember my grandfather used chopsticks made of ivory. My husband and I use lacquer ones. Yesterday I saw a television program on NHK about Aizu lacquerware. Recently most lacquer products are imported from China, but the quality of Japanese lacquerware is better.

Acts, words, thoughts, lifestyles change, but we must not change our faith which should continue forever.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Chopsticks are used in Oriental countries everyday when we take our meals. In the Legendary Stories of Old Japan we read that Susanoô no Mikoto, the brother of Amaterasu Omikami, saw chopsticks floating

down the Hinokawa River and knew that people must be living along the upper course of the river. I am wondering if there were chopsticks in Japan before it was influenced by China. Anyway, chopsticks are suitable utensils for people who eat rice. I hear that they should not be inserted upright in the boiled rice in a bowl when we leave before the meal is over lest something unfortunate occur. I also hear we should not pass food from our chopsticks to another person's chopsticks because that is the way the remaining bones of a corpse are picked up following its cremation. I think this is table manners rather than superstition.

I heard that Mrs. Schroer, who has been living in Japan for many years, was distressed at the lack of ability on the part of Japanese people to manipulate chopsticks in the proper fashion. I don't remember when I began to use them, but looking at my twin grandnephews, who are six years old, I remember when they were weaned from their mother's breast and began using spoons to convey food to their mouths. A year after that, they began to learn how to manipulate chopsticks. At first, they grabbed the chopsticks and tried to convey food to their mouths in great haste as they were very hungry, but more food was scattered than entered their stomachs. It is difficult for beginners to learn to eat with chopsticks, but now they can do that well and can pick up a small bean with chopsticks. Every mother in Japan must have patiently taught her children to do that.

I know some sayings related to chopsticks. If someone is very particular even about trifles, we say *Ano hito wa hashi no age-oroshi nimo monku o iu*. And if a girl is spoiled by her parents at home, we say, *Kanojo wa hashi yori mo omoi mono o moteta koto ga nai*. And if there is someone who cannot be controlled by others, we say, *Kare*

wa bô nimo hashi nimo kakaranai. These sayings are all negative, so I want to add another one, *Hashi wa inochi o sasaeru mono*, which means "When we can use chopsticks, we are living." I thank God who gave us food which we can convey to our mouths by manipulating chopsticks.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

One of the common Japanese stereotypes of Westerners, especially Americans, is that they cannot use chopsticks well. This idea may be the result of the influence of English conversation textbooks. Such textbooks often include a description of a Japanese host family welcoming their American exchange student with a Japanese dinner and teaching him or her how to use chopsticks.

In reality, however, there are many Chinese restaurants in the United States and Americans often eat there. Consequently, they have many opportunities to use chopsticks. This reminds me of the difference between what is learned from books and the real situation.

(MASAMI NAGATA, Muzuho, Nagoya)

In the "Daily Word" message #4053, I read the following words: "In Japan, chopsticks are used to pick up pieces of cold black or burning red charcoal in a *hibachi*, pieces of food being fried in oil on a stove." These words stimulate pleasant thoughts, but the following words, "remaining bones", "corpse", and "cremation" are very dark, gloomy and cheerless for me. But as we know "man is mortal", isn't he? And "all phenomena are transitory!" This is a great mystery. Don't you think so?

At any rate, we have many memories about using chopsticks. When I was a young child, it was very difficult for me to use chopsticks. Using chopsticks is harder than writing letters with a pencil. Now, I'll men-

tion a few rules of etiquette which were taught me by my mother. In Japan, holding chopsticks between the teeth is very rude, especially while slowly looking from dish to dish. My mother used to give me the following admonition: The boy who holds on to the upper part of the chopsticks will get married late in life. As she predicted, I was married when I was 32 years old. This was one of my mother's jokes.

I have forgotten to note some Japanese expressions related to chopsticks. *Mayoi-bashi* denotes looking for various kinds of food while holding chopsticks. *Utsuri-bashi* denotes eating from one side dish and then the other. *Ochi-bashi* denotes dropping food from the chopsticks. *Mogi-bashi* means to tear food from the chopsticks with the teeth. (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

A pair of chopsticks is an indispensable tableware for us. In ancient times, from about 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., the Japanese used their fingers to pick up their food. Afterwards, they used a pair of bamboo tweezers instead of their fingers. Since about 1000 years ago, chopsticks have been used for our three daily meals plus other snacks. They are used not only in Japan, but in China, Korea and Vietnam also.

There are long or short, round or square chopsticks made of wood or metal, lacquered or plain, and so on. Especially, splittable, wooden chopsticks in a paper container which are used in restaurants or in a lunch box on the train are very handy, cheap, sanitary and disposable. At one time, it was said that Japanese cut down many trees in Southeast Asia to make splittable chopsticks. Fortunately it has been made clear that they are made from lumber residue. These chopsticks are the best for eating noodles for the noodles do not slip off into the bowl filled with good soup. If lacquered chopsticks are used,

however, the noodles slip off. It is said that willow is so tough that the branches are not broken by a heavy snowfall. Generally, willow chopsticks are used for festival or New Year's dishes.

Here are some sayings related to chopsticks: 1) She has never held anything heavier than chopsticks (used for a rich woman of leisure); 2) He/She complains about how chopsticks are raised or lowered (used for a faultfinder, often between a daughter-in-law and mother-in-law); 3) She laughs even if chopsticks roll over (used of a teen-aged girl); 4) He cannot make use of a chopstick nor a stick (meaning he is useless).

I do not think there is a special etiquette for using chopsticks. But I may say that it is better not to suck, bite or lick them. Food must be carried to the mouth with chopsticks, mouthful by mouthful, not too fast and not too slowly. When using chopsticks, one should not shovel food into the mouth directly from a dish or bowl. When a meal is finished, the pointed end of the chopsticks is quietly dipped into a cup of tea and put in a chopstick box. Unfortunately, such manners are gradually disappearing with the changing times.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

I got a box lunch at a nearby convenience store. When I unwrapped it, I found a small paper sheath containing a brand-new pair of disposable chopsticks, which reminded me of the theme Dr. Offner suggested in his message of September 1st. It is a good opportunity to think about something that is taken for granted in our daily lives.

In Oriental countries under the influence of Chinese civilization, people use chopsticks to lift food to the mouth, but I hear it is only Japanese who use disposable, half-split chopsticks at the table. The disposable chopsticks are made of a slender piece of wood, divided to make it con-

venient to split them apart before using. This handiness or simplicity comes first in enumerating the merits of disposable chopsticks. To explain the source of this merit would require research going back to ancient times. I presume that old Shintoism has something to do with it, but here I will not go into any more detail because of my unfamiliarity with the subject.

Second, the disposable chopsticks are very economical. Years ago, some conservationists took objection to making and using the disposable chopsticks saying that it endangered the conservation of valuable wood resources of the planet earth. But I think that criticism is off the mark and that making disposable chopsticks is nothing else than an effective use of otherwise useless bits of wood. Nothing is more commendable than to make what is otherwise useless useful for people.

Third, disposable chopsticks are always new and are used by only one person. This merit needs little elucidation. Not only is each pair brand new and unused, once they are used, they can be easily disposed of by the user.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

Many years ago, I first learned the word "chopsticks" when I used *waribashi* at a party where a few Americans were present. As I already knew the word "chop", meaning *waru*, I thought that only *waribashi* were called "chopsticks" because we chop (split) them just before using them. Later, I found out that the word "chopsticks" is used for all kinds of *hashi*, though I cannot forget my first impression.

By the way, *waribashi* in Japan are often used as an example of wasting natural resources. I read an article entitled "Let's Stop Using *Waribashi* to Avoid Wasting Natural Resources" in a magazine. The writer said that she takes her own chopsticks

with her whenever she eats in Japanese restaurants. But, on the other hand, I hear that the wood for chopsticks or *waribashi* comes from the trees thinned out or from branches remaining after lumber has been cut. Now, I don't know which is right. So when I split the chopsticks at restaurants I tell myself that sometimes two objective ideas may both be true.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

September 8 Message (Subject #225)

Although it has never been officially designated as such, Kimi ga yo is now considered Japan's national anthem. On September 8, 1870, 122 years ago today, a melody to accompany that poem was first publicly played by a military band in the presence of Emperor Meiji, but the melody was different than the one used today. The original melody was composed by John Fenton, an English military bandmaster. It was over ten years later, that the present melody, nominally composed by court musician Hiromori Hayashi and arranged by German bandmaster Franz Eckert, came to be used. This melody is heard at the close of sumo tournaments, at the end of the NHK television broadcasting day, during Olympic gold medal presentations as well as at national ceremonies. What do you think about that melody? Is it appropriate as the national anthem of modern Japan? Do you like it or would you prefer that it be changed? Years ago, I asked for comments regarding the words of the song. Today I am asking for views on the melody, but comments on the words of the song are also invited.

Not only national anthems but all songs are made up of both melodies and words. Pleasant songs have light melodies. Solemn words and light melodies do not fit together and the same can be said about frivolous words and solemn melodies. There are, however, exceptional cases. "Auld Lang Syne", which we call *Hotaru no Hikari*, is a Scottish song. This song is sung when friends meet after a long time, but it is sung at farewells in Japan. This calm melody seems to suit our feeling at that time.

I do not have a good feeling about the melody of *Kimigayo*. It is not a melody that penetrates my mind. The Japanese national anthem should be brighter because all Japanese hope for peace all over the world.

I will not comment about the words of the anthem because they seem worthless to me. (MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

As Dr. Offner implied, I think our national anthem, *Kimigayo*, is quite unsuitable for the feeling or mind of the Japanese people at present. The melody itself is rather oppressive, heavy and gloomy compared to that of the U. S. A., for example. Moreover, I think most people in modern Japan do not respect the present Tennô as the words express. From my point of view, I would prefer to sing another song, if I sing.

Nevertheless, I am deeply impressed when I see the *hinomaru* flag rising up the pole at the Olympic gold medal presentation ceremony accompanied by this melody. So I think we must be cautious about changing either the words or the melody of our national anthem, *Kimigayo*.

(YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

As I explained in this periodical previously, *Kimigayo*, the Japanese national anthem, expresses the hope for the longevity of the imperial reign. The words of the an-

them mean: "May the reign of the Emperor continue for a thousand, nay, eight thousand generations, for the eternity it takes for small pebbles to grow into a great rock and become covered with moss." The Japanese, since early times, have been very fond of the word *chiyo* or *yachiyo* as an auspicious word. The name of "Chiyonofuji", the retired yokozuna, was derived from this word and there are many women having the name of "Chiyoko". There is a restaurant named "Yachiyo" in Gifu. (By the way, *ya* [*hachi*, eight] generally means "many" and the word itself is thought auspicious because the shape of the Chinese character, *hachi*, widens toward the end [*sue-hirogari*, and therefore suggests increasing prosperity as time goes on.) Some people are very concerned about the words, "the imperial reign", but we need not develop the jitters because it also means "the prosperity of the whole nation". We should follow the boldness of the French who, in preserving their national anthem, are indifferent to the bloody expressions dealing with the war against Germany.

Some people are opposed to *Kimigayo* saying its melody is depressing or gloomy. This is a question of people's preferences. I like the melody which has accompanied the joys and sorrows experienced by our nation since the Meiji era. I consider the weakest point of *Kimigayo* to be that the lyrics are not in harmony with the melody. The lyrics are very short compared to the length of the melody so the anthem may sound dull to our ears. When a person hears the anthem for the first time, he will probably say he cannot grasp the meaning. In particular, the first part, *Kimigayo wa*, and the last part, *kokeno musumade*, are difficult to understand. In my own case, it was after I reached the last stage of my elementary school days that I could understand the meaning. Our teacher often ad-

monished us not to draw a breath halfway through *sazare-ishi* because it is one word without a break. It was very interesting to read an essay of 9 years ago of one who wrote, "I felt as if I was singing a song in a foreign language." I imagine many pupils are having the same experience even today. I think this irrationality comes from the fact that the melody was composed separately from the lyrics without much concern about the sound of the phrase. I recall the story of a famous composer who wrote music examining every note to make it harmonize with the accent of each phrase of the lyrics. (MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

As we were given the theme relating to our national anthem, I sang *Kimi ga yo* loudly, recalling the days when we were forced to sing it before we praised our God at morning chapel in Christian schools. Although the poem was considered very good in those days, it affirms only the continued existence of the Emperor's family for eight thousand generations but not the happiness of the Japanese people. So I think it is not acceptable in modern Japan nor to me.

The melody of the Japanese anthem, however, is very good, wonderful and excellent. It is regrettable that Hiromori Hayashi is considered the composer, but I presume that he must have given helpful suggestions to Franz Eckert who arranged this noble melody. I have peace of mind when I hear the melody. Especially if I happen to hear it in a foreign country, I will be choked with tears. So I hope it will be kept as Japan's national anthem as long as Japan exists on the earth.

It was very sinful that we sang it before singing hymns and bowed toward the Emperor's residence before praising God. However, I am happy to hear the melody on radio or television. I enjoy making parodies

of songs, so I composed a poem to accompany that melody.

*Asahi noborite Yomo o teraseba
Kigi wa odori Kotori wa utai
Hito wa mi-kami o Hometatou
Koko mo mi-kami no Osame-tamaeru
Mi-kuni, Iyo-iyō Mi-megumi afure
Towa no yasuki Are ya*

The sun is rising High in the morning
Shining around

All the trees dance on the ground

The birds merrily sing there

We hear the voice of God everywhere

This is the land which God reigns over

His amazing grace and mercy cover

All the people of this land forever

I hope the day will come when this poem in Japanese is accepted throughout Japan. (KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

Reading your questions about *Kimi ga yo*, such as "What do you think about that melody? Is it appropriate as the national anthem of modern Japan? Do you like to sing it?" etc., made me think that maybe you do not like our national anthem. Of course, *sazare ishi* will never become *iwao*, but I have never criticized it since I was a child. Even though I could not grasp the reasoning in it, but I have respected it as the most precious song in Japan.

If you were to ask me "Do you like to sing it?", I'll surely answer, "Yes, I do!" And if you ask me "What do you think about that melody?", I'll certainly answer, "It's very sacred!" because I am a Japanese. About 70 years ago, when I was a student at a normal school, I naturally liked *La Marseillaise* in spite of not knowing the meaning of that song. I was especially charmed by its melody. But I will say that I have come to grasp the meaning of *Kimi ga yo* positively.

At any rate, yesterday I tried to make

my own national anthem as you suggested. Pardon me if this makes my essay too long.

*Umashi Kuni, waga Hinomoto yo!
Tokotowa ni yurugazaru kuni, ôinaru
Koke musu Iwao sanagara ni
Oh! Umashi Kuni Yurugazaru Kuni
Waga Hinomoto yo!*

Now, to put it into English for me, not for you, who has mastered our Japanese language perfectly through and through:

"Our Land of the Rising Sun, Fine Country,
Everlasting, Firm Country. /ens.
Like a very great rock covered with lich-
Oh! Our Land of the Rising Sun is a Fine,
Firm Country."

(HYOWAY OHWAY [87], Kami, Hyôgo)

Frankly speaking, the melody for *Kimi ga yo* is too short and too solemn for an anthem. It is neither a vibrant nor a cheerful tune. It is not appropriate as the national anthem of modern Japan. I do not like to sing it. I hear that mission schools in Japan do not sing *Kimi ga yo*. Rather, they sing hymns on ceremonial occasions. The national anthems of European, American and other foreign countries have a swinging rhythm and depth. I like such melodies better than that of *Kimi ga yo*.

Regarding the words of *Kimi ga yo* I will make a brief comment. The new Constitution, which was established in 1946, states that imperial sovereignty has been changed to sovereignty of the people. The Emperor is only a symbol of the state now. The sovereignty of the people is more significant than a symbol. I think the words are strange and not in keeping with the viewpoint of the new Constitution. Even though the Ministry of Education encourages the singing of *Kimi ga yo* at ceremonies, schoolmasters and principals in the compulsory education system have been perplexed about whether or not to sing it for the past several years. I wonder if there is

any other country in the world like Japan.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

In terms of melody, the song is so somber and solemn that it merely suits some solemn occasions like pompous ceremonies. It even makes one sleepy. The source of the solemnity comes from its birth and subsequent growth as referred to in the message of September 8. Indeed, the song reflected the surge of the Meiji Era Imperialist Japan aiming at building a modern nation to catch up with the leading European and American nations as soon as possible. In this sense, the song does not suit present-day Japan seeking international peace among nations of the world. Rather, I would prefer that a new national anthem be composed some day.

In regard to the words, the song was meant for the Emperor. Again, it does not suit present-day Japan under the 1946 Constitution. After all, general neglect and inertia alone allows the song to continue its pretense to be the national anthem.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

September 15 Message (Subject#226)

Today is "Respect for the Aged Day", a Japanese holiday. The general subject of "old age" was suggested some years ago, but I will suggest a related theme today. Legally speaking, a person becomes an adult at a certain age, even though the maturing process is different with each individual. The same can be said regarding "old age". One doesn't become "old" all of a sudden, when a certain age is reached. Whatever our age we should seek to keep our minds active and seek greater knowledge, wisdom

or truth. Whether you yourself are "old" or "young", what suggestions do you have for people to keep growing mentally or spiritually? What do you think of civic education (shimin kyôiku) or about learning some new art or craft? How do you aim to keep mentally alert? What do you think about the influence of a religious faith: does it encourage people to broaden and deepen their knowledge or to become narrower and more confined in their thinking? "Keeping mentally active" is the suggested theme

To keep mentally alert, I'd like to suggest the following things (at least for me):

- 1) Read newspapers as much as possible.
- 2) Listen to the radio, even for a short time, including music and English conversation programs (using earphones).
- 3) Make my own clothes, if possible.
- 4) I recently read in the *Chûnichi* newspaper that using make-up is very effective in helping women to keep mentally or spiritually active.
- 5) Have contact with other persons, including talking about religious subjects.
- 6) Gardening
- 7) Going outdoors for a certain purpose as often as possible.

Now that our children do not need so much care, I'd like to do the above-mentioned things as often as possible after finishing my household chores.

(YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

We will certainly become old whether we want to or not, so we must not avoid thinking about growing old. My age is considered old by statisticians, but I do not think of myself as old, except for my age. I have hope for the future and try my best to gain knowledge and truth, even though my

efforts may be in vain. I have nothing if I lose my will.

Older people provide an example for younger people, so we need to always manifest our earnestness. I sometimes ask and seek divine help to do what is right. I know well it is difficult, but when I go astray, I ask for God's help.

We say *demo* and *shika* in Japanese. I hope to have faith *shika* only until the end.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

In this periodical about 6 years ago, I wrote as follows about what we should do as we advance in age after retirement: "we must develop an interest in something. It is desirable that this interest be something requiring the use of both our bodies and brains. It is better if it is something useful for society, because to be useful to other people is something to live for." After the lapse of 6 years, recently I saw my *kanreki* arrive before I was aware of it.

Today (September 15th) is "Respect for the Aged Day". According to the stated reason for the holiday, it is a day for showing respect and affection to the elderly who have devoted themselves to society for many years and for celebrating their long lives. In many cities, towns and villages, the elderly are invited to some kind of entertainment and are given gifts to mark the occasion. It is a good thing for the aged to be respected and honored, but we shall be in error if we consider them simply as beings to be protected.

In the long history of human beings, traditional customs of killing or abandoning the old have been observed here and there. The story of *Narayama* shows evidence of the same folk custom here in Japan. When people are absorbed in economic growth, they are apt to think that only competition, efficiency or output is important. Something incongruent with that purpose

seems useless. When we affirm such a scale of values, we tend to ignore, at least in mind, the old who have little to do with competition and efficiency. At the present time, we are not allowed to actually abandon them. Therefore, we pretend to "respect" them instead of "abandoning" them. However, I think this way of thinking is not right. We should not only respect them; we should also utilize their high degree of maturity and experience which can only be attained with the advancement of age.

Recently, many remarkable, highly motivated activities of older people have been publicized. We have read many articles concerning their volunteer activities, such as teaching children how to make bamboo stilts and beanbags, presenting hand-sewn dustcloths to primary schools, planting flowers in empty lots in apartment building complexes, alongside the street, etc. But these kinds of activities are not enough. The aged should endeavor to acquire new knowledge and skills themselves, not only preserving and handing down old ones. Today, many old people desire to learn what they wished but failed to learn in their youth. To meet this unprecedented eager and varied demand for study, many local communities have established "Universities for the Third Age". It is often said that the most important things for the aged are three *kaku*, that is: *ji o kaku* (to write letters), *ase o kaku* (to work up a sweat) and *haji o kaku* (to disgrace oneself in public). The aged should not avoid disgracing themselves in public because that provides an impetus to their brain, preventing them from becoming senile.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

How do we define an old person? In most cases, we decide on the basis of his or her age, features and movements, but my feeling is a little different. I put more

weight on one's responsibility in business or social activities. The person whose decisions are still very influential and who is feared by others, who may be admired but at the same time criticized by others, I would never call an old person.

A good example is the Japanese political world. There, political careers are begun in the latter half of one's fifties or sixties, when most ordinary persons are ready to retire from their businesses. Even a politician who is over seventy has a chance to become prime minister. We can't call such a person an old person. I think that whether or not one becomes an old person depends on one's social and mental attitudes.

(MASAMI NAGATA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

Keeping mental active is important for us, especially for me. The other day, I composed a Japanese poem, *tanka*, for example. *87 sai ware wa muyô no chôbutsu to kuchi niwa suredo izen mujikaku*. Now, I'll put it into English. (But wait a moment. I hear that you have mastered our Japanese language and are able to write and speak it perfectly. But, for me, translating Japanese into English is one of my ways of studying English, so pardon me, please.) "Now, I'm 87 years old and I said to myself, I'm a good-for-nothing and as blind as ever."

Yesterday, I suddenly composed another Japanese poem as follows: *Asana sana aiken Popo to sanpo suru ware wa sukoyaka 87 sai*. May I put it into English also, although I presume it is unnecessary for you. "Early every morning, I take a constitutional walk with my pet dog, Popo, and, fortunately, I'm now a very healthy 87-year old."

This morning, I read that there are two kinds of old age: chronological age and so-called mental age. I'm afraid there is nothing that can be done about chronological age because if we live another year we'll surely grow one year older, but the other,

mental, age is more enigmatic, isn't it? Even if I'm 87 years old, by trying to be younger, I'm able to become younger. To always keep smiling, to be slow to get angry, to talk with younger people every day, etc. are very important to me. Finally, I'll take a meal and keep my bowels functioning without the use of medicine. To do that, I must keep healthy.

Now, I'll conclude with this poem. *Donataka ga dokoka de kono a no ikiiru wo yorokobi kururu ware toshi naran.* "As I grow older, someone somewhere rejoices that I am alive." (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

It is very good for people who are old or young to participate in civic education to upgrade their level of education. It encourages them to broaden and deepen their knowledge. Unfortunately, as I am not interested in civic education, I have never participated in such courses, but I have enjoyed trying to learn some arts and crafts through self-education in past years.

I was very fortunate to read an article about the "Daily Word" telephone service in the *Asahi* newspaper in 1988. Since then, I began listening to the messages. It is very difficult for me due to my poor ability in English. I am slow to remember, quick to forget and slow to make progress. The messages of "Daily Word" and *Kyô no messej.* have been of no little help in broadening and deepening my knowledge. I hope I will not suffer from Alzheimer's disease in the future. (TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Curiosity is the name of the game. We are mentally active as long as we are interested in something unknown. "What is the matter?" "What makes it be or do so?" "How did it happen?" One question after another comes to our minds. Then our minds cannot be idle, but become active in order to answer such questions.

One of the easiest ways to stimulate our curiosity is to read books. Books are full of subjects, from natural to human, exciting enough to arouse our curiosity. So reading books can be an answer. Needless to say, reading includes thinking and even writing. For reading is a dialogue with the author. Without thinking about what the author means, the reading in the true sense of the word does not proceed at all. To write down what the reader thinks is to deepen what he reads. It goes without saying that "Daily Word" messages give me precious food for thought.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

September 22 Message (Subject#227)

In ancient China, a person's name was sometimes carved into bamboo or wood, which is the reason why the Japanese word meishi, is made of characters meaning "name" and "stab". In English, meishi may be translated as "calling card" or "business card". I never possessed such a card until I came to Japan and in my limited experience as an adult in the United States, such cards are used in a very limited fashion, primarily for strictly business purposes. People who own or carry such cards with them are comparatively few. In Japan, however, a person on a trip or in a social gathering where new people are met would feel quite lost without a supply of meishi. Why do you think meishi are so important in this country? What is their function? Do you have your own meishi? When and for what purpose do you use them? Meishi, calling cards or business cards is the suggested theme.

I have *meishi* in my handbag whenever I go out. *Meishi* are very convenient for indicating my address and telephone number. I use two kinds: one in Japanese and the other in English. When I go abroad and meet new friends, I exchange cards with them. If I take a snapshot, I can send it to the address on the card. In a short time, we can have much communication.

I am careful, however, how I use *meishi*. I do not give them to people I don't know in Japan because I will be troubled if they are misused. But I think I will be more blameworthy for giving them to people who will misuse them.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Reading your message of September 22nd, I tried to consider many of your questions about *meishi*. For example, "Why do you think *meishi* are so important in this country? What is their function?" etc.

Anyway, I'll relate an experience of mine when *meishi* were necessary. About 50 years ago, when I became a schoolmaster, I had to make a visit to the P.T.A. leaders' homes and hand my *meishi* to all of them. Of course, if I couldn't meet one of them, I had to leave my *meishi* in that home, because my *meishi* was the evidence that I had visited that person's home.

I think *meishi* were necessary in that case, but they are not so necessary ordinarily. (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyōgo)

Are name cards so popular among Japanese people? In regard to the Japanese business world, this is true, but I wonder how many ordinary people have name cards. Usually we don't print our home address and telephone number on them, so they are only used for business purposes. Of course, some persons who participate in social activities have name cards which indicate those activities.

Name cards are almost always made of paper, but sometimes we use other materials, like wood or steel. Especially recycled paper has become popular.

One of the most surprising things to me about name cards is that most foreigners have them in Japan though they don't have that custom in their own countries. Maybe they realize that having a name card in Japan is very effective in promoting their business.

(MASAMI NAGATA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

One very important function of *meishi* is to identify the person we meet for the first time. It is very convenient for a businessman like me to know relevant facts about a person. I have exchanged business cards with many foreign businessmen. I think that they have realized the value of business cards. When I receive a business card, I write such things as the date, some characteristics of the person, etc. on it. Then I insert it in a business card file and my area of business relationships expands.

(TSUGUO TABATA, Midori, Yokohama)

It is a strange sight to see adult men exchanging their *meishi* on the road or at a social gathering. First, they take out their *meishi* from their pockets or wallets and exchange them, saying *Dōzo yoroshiku*, which means "Let's be friends" or "Do me a favor". This has become a men's custom in Japan. I'm surprised that it is only a Japanese custom. Now that there are more and more businesswomen, they do the same, I suppose.

For me, I don't do so. I don't have my own *meishi*. Once, for a while, I was the only woman teacher at a co-ed school. The head teacher ordered my *meishi* at the school's expense. When we visited other schools, I used my *meishi* unwillingly. Now I have some left over, which are in the corner of my desk drawer.

What is the merit of *meishi*? If I were a man, I'd have collected many of them, so I'd use them to check and correct my address book for the New Year's cards. As for my left-over *meishi*, I will put one in my purse. If I lose my purse, the finder will see my address and telephone number. Then my purse will be sent back to me safely.

(KIMI KONDO, Miura)

Thank you ever so much for informing us why the Japanese word *meishi* is made up of *kanji* meaning "name" and "stab". It seems to be more reasonable for "paper" to take the place of "stab", but the customs in ancient China, upon which Chinese characters are based, are more meaningful. In Japan, people like to have calling cards, especially when they get titles or degrees.

Calling cards of ladies are a little smaller than those of men and they exchange their cards when they meet for the first time. I have received several kinds of such cards and have sometimes been amazed at the high-sounding titles on them. I confess that I have never had my own *meishi* because calling cards or business cards were not so indispensable as seals in my business life. On the other hand, salesmen or saleswomen have to use their names as well as their products in their commercial dealings. In some respects, this is the best use of business cards--to inform others of not only their names but also the addresses and telephone numbers of their homes and offices. I feel regretful that I will never have my own *meishi* throughout my life, but I will keep the calling cards of others out of respect for those who kindly gave me their precious cards.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

It is no wonder that not only Japanese businessmen and businesswomen in or out

of Japan but foreign business persons in Japan also take business cards with them wherever they go because Japanese people have made it an important custom to have such cards. They are embarrassed at social gatherings at their inability to remember the names of the people there.

I think that most business people in Japan have at least one name card file in which name cards they have accumulated are arranged. Japanese are fond of taking a moment to look back and recollect while looking at these cards. That is why stationers produce newly designed deluxe name card files every year with such added conveniences as spaces to enter dates, comments, etc. Japanese are very fond of collecting many things, ranging from cheap to expensive things, including postage stamps, postcards, coins, prepaid telephone cards, tickets, name cards, diaries, series of novels, comic books, LP record jackets, CDs, kitchen utensils, fishing tackle, golf clubs, wearing apparel and many other things.

A difference between Japanese and foreigners is that the former tend not to remember the names of persons they met during meetings while the latter try to remember them carefully as they deem it a sign of respect if they do so. Japanese do not make an effort to remember so after meeting a person they cannot recall the person's name without a name card. Although I realize it is advisable to call people by name and to cite their situations when they are known, it is difficult to instantly remember all the names of people we meet when there are many new persons.

This reminds me of a situation that occurred when I served as the interpreter for fourteen Australians who visited my city of Owariasahi in September 1992 when they met the mayor during their stay. One of them, who seemed not so young, was embarrassed when he ran out of name cards.

After giving them to many Japanese, he needed still more to give to others. He would not have expected such a situation to occur considering the original function of a name card.

To get to the point, my answer to the question of when and for what purpose I use my name cards is complicated for I have three kinds of name cards: one for official business, one for voluntary activities and the other for general usage. On some of my name cards, I have printed a special telephone number for those who wish to listen to daily information in English and enhance their international understanding, i.e., the "Daily Word" telephone number through which English messages have been transmitted for more than 12 decades since September 1, 1980 by an American missionary who is also the editor of this periodical, Dr. Clark B. Offner. It is quite beneficial for foreigners among residents and/or visitors from various countries to receive my name card with the "Daily Word" telephone number on it. This not only publicizes this service more widely but appeals to the foreigners. On the other hand, I try not to distribute my name cards indiscriminately because some people use other person's name cards for illegal purposes.

What is important is that my name cards are providing foreigners with this English information. The more I give them out, the more foreigners become interested in them. Because I am in an administrative position rather than in the sales department, however, I give out fewer cards than salesmen and because of changes in business circumstances (such as the development of new businesses and new offices), my cards sometimes become out-of-date before they are used up. But for me, nothing is more important than distributing my name cards with the "Daily Word" informa-

tion on them, which is something like volunteer service primarily for the benefit of foreigners, but also for Japanese who learn of the "Daily Word" activities. I may say that the purpose of my name cards is to benefit foreigners.

The situation of foreigners who spend their precious time in Japan reminds me of the time I was wandering from street to street in Germany, alone, without a map and with no one to talk to because of my inability to speak German.

Different languages have been and are a barrier between different nationalities even now. Don't you agree?

(JAMES IWAI, Owariasahi)

A *meishi* is an important document for businessmen or women and social workers in Japan. It serves as an advertisement for themselves and their companies or organizations. *Meishi* received from others are kept for a long time, but introductions by spoken words only or by handshakes may be soon forgotten. The person's name, title, address, telephone number and so on are printed on one side. The many organizations which the bearer is related to are printed in smaller letters on the reverse side.

The popular size for *meishi* is 9 cm. x 5.5 cm. and the smaller size of 6 cm. x 3.5 cm. for women. The cards have four corners and some have gilded edges. I have seen *meishi* made of thick Japanese paper or with the design of little flowers. As I am a housewife, it is unnecessary for me to have my own *meishi*.

A businessman who was transferred to another place after he had ordered 1000 *meishi* used only 100 of them so the remaining 900 were wasted. There are many similar cases among businessmen. I am afraid this may be a waste of resources in Japan. (TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

In my family, only I do not have a *meishi*. Even our young daughter has had her own *meishi* since getting a job last April. My husband is proud of his splendid memory of a person's name and face. There is a reason for this special ability. When he meets someone for the first time on business or socially, he exchanges *meishi*. After returning home, he writes the date and a characteristic of the person on it: fat, big eyes, similar to someone else, and so on. He files them in a box in order, like book cards in a library. Later, when he receives a telephone call and can't remember who the caller is, he continues talking while looking for the person's *meishi*. Then he mentions when and where they met previously, almost all people sound happy and have a good feeling.

One evening when my daughter asked him about exchanging *meishi* at a meeting, he also told her about his method of using *meishi*. I don't know whether or not she will adopt the same method, but *meishi* are very helpful for business and for people like me who have poor memories.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

Meishi provide information, including a person's occupation, company and position as well as his or her name and address. If a man changes his behavior and language after his first glance at another's *meishi*, which played an important role in their meeting, I would be disgusted. Isn't that a kind of discrimination? Yet, I know that we often adjust our way of speaking, depending upon the person with whom we're talking and to know the social position of the person with whom we're dealing is of vital significance.

The other day in a subway, an American lady happened to be seated next to me, so I tried to speak to her. Short as it was, I had a nice conversation with her. As she

got off the train, she handed me her business card that was much appreciated. But I was sorry that I was without a supply of such personal cards!

Now I enjoy working on the *meishi* collection of my husband, putting a pile of cards in order, inserting them in their individual holders. It is a real history of his social life!

(SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

September 29 Message (Subject#228)

As an island nation, Japan does not share its national borders with any other country. Across an expanse of water, its closest neighbors are Korea and Russia with which it has had complex relationships over the years. In the past year, cataclysmic changes have occurred in the former Soviet Union and repercussions of those changes continue to affect not only the Russian people but the whole world. Recently, Russian President Boris Yeltsin suddenly postponed his scheduled visit to Japan because of opposition by conservative compatriots. As a result, important talks on the territorial dispute and financial aid between the two heads of governments did not take place. What is your impression of this huge neighbor of Japan, of her people and of Mr. Yeltsin? What do you think of the past and present relationships between Japan and Russia? What is your thinking about Russia's present condition? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about her future and about Japanese-Russian relationships?

When I was a student, I went to Hokkaido with Yoko and two other classmates, so I have seen Kunashiri Island, though from very far away. At that time, I thought it was one of the problem northern islands. I hear that the water around the four islands is a fishing area for salmon and trout. I hope they will be returned, like Okinawa was, as quickly as possible. But I hear that to resolve this problem, we must reconsider Japanese history up to the Japan-Russian War in the Meiji Era. Besides, President Yeltsin's visit to Japan was postponed indefinitely, so it seems to be very difficult to resolve this problem. It is doubtful, however, if these four islands truly belong to Russia as she did not sign the San Francisco Treaty.

Russia is a country that is still militarily powerful, but because of its cold weather, its agricultural products are said to be not so good. I hear that Japan is superior to Russia in technology. Since Japan, Russia and America have made joint suggestions concerning how to solve the territory problem (*Chūnichi* newspaper), we should begin a campaign and technical aid to attract the hearts of the people on the islands and express an apology for the past invasion. As for Russia, she should officially announce the end of her occupation of these islands and apologize for forcing the Japanese people to leave them. She should also begin a program to make people understand the benefit of normal relations with Japan. As for the U. S. A., she should announce her willingness to play the role of a mediator and to admit that she was part of the cause of this confrontation in the past. (YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

One day I talked with my friends about Russia and President Yeltsin before the news of his postponed visit. I said that I thought there would be some meaning in

his visit but since Russia and America are different, we could not expect the northern territories to be returned like Okinawa. My friends responded, "Yes, yes." I myself am surprised that my anticipation was right.

I can understand the difficult situation of Russian President Yeltsin, but I think the decision to postpone his visit was not good. It is good to rest and refresh our bodies and minds by stopping work, but we must not continue to rest. If we do, it will mean a regression little by little. Not only President Yeltsin but all governments must go forward, even though it is a difficult road that is not liked and brings no benefit to oneself. I hope that the relationship between Russian and Japan will improve and that both of them are able to have happy and peaceful days under God's mercy.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Russian President Boris Yeltsin one-sidedly postponed his planned visit to our country. This decision is quite regrettable and undermines international trust. It is not surprising that some of our leaders called him a "liar" although this kind of expression should be used with care.

Given the yet-unresolved status of the Northern Territories, Japan and Russia have yet to sign a peace treaty. Japan has been pushing tenaciously for the return of the territories even as it has maintained economic and cultural relations with Russia, but Russia has been unrelenting on this issue and there is little likelihood of a peace treaty being signed soon.

There are various opinions about the reason for the sudden change of the President's plans. The clear fact is that President Yeltsin's leadership has been weakened by the failure of economic reforms, the increased strength of conservatives and militarists and the common people's dissatisfaction. So long as Russian poli-

tics and economy are unstable, we cannot expect, to our great regret, action toward solving the territorial problem which may stimulate Russian nationalism. The rapid decline of influence of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the channel of Russo-Japan relations, was one of our government's strategic miscalculations and makes it difficult to say how things will turn out. There is also talk that the pro-Japanese group in the Russian government is in danger of being changed. As a result, we fear that relations between the two countries, which are weak even now, will be further impaired.

It is quite deplorable that the President stated that the Japanese side should be blamed for the postponement of his visit. But we must keep in mind that nothing will be produced by mere exchanges of emotional words. This is the time for the two countries to think coolly about their bilateral relationship. Our government declares that our diplomatic policy toward Russia, based on promoting the territorial issue and the economic issue in parallel, will not be changed. In my opinion, I would be reluctant to give Russia financial aid, bypassing the territorial issue, when I recall her unlawful invasion of that territory just before the end of the war. She is not in a position to say that Japanese financial aid is small and should be expanded. Obviously, Russia is one of our neighbors. There are some neighbors, however, whom we do not want to associate with, which is no different from our individual lives. But, after all, to think like this will not be helpful. Deepening the mutual relationship through aid on humane grounds, in the long-range view, will contribute to the solution of the territorial issue and help stabilize Russo-Japan relations. I sincerely request in this difficult time that the two countries continue constructive and long-sustained dialogue. **(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)**

This week's subject is so large that I don't know how to confront it. Russia was so huge and militarily strong that we Japanese have always been afraid of it. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that country has been suffering economic and political confusion, so the fearful feeling has gradually been declining.

The pending problems between Japan and Russia are the northern territories off of Hokkaidô and a peace treaty. The Japanese government insists that the four islands off of Hokkaidô are historically Japanese territory and asks Russia to return them immediately. Of course, if these islands are returned to Japan, it will be very gratifying. But, on the other hand, only big companies will make a profit from them and their natural beauty will be destroyed. In addition, the Japanese government may have to pay a huge amount of money to Russia. I always ask what kind of benefit ordinary Japanese people will get from the return of these four islands. Our only benefit will be the possibility of visiting them, but I doubt that their return will bring greater prosperity to Japan.

(MASAMI NAGATA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

My first impression of Russia is the large Red Square and the gorgeous Kremlin Castle. Next, I think of Russia as being a cold and dark country but with kind and affable people. I think that Mr. Yeltsin is a great and thoughtful Russian statesman.

Unfortunately, Japan made war on Russia for a year from 1904 to 1905. Fortunately, it was ended due to the mediation of the president of the U. S. A. at that time. Present relationships are much better than those in the past. Children who suffered from the Chernobyl radiation accident are staying in Japan now to receive treatment.

The government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Japan recently attached con-

ditions to its aid to Russia, which is troubled and confused in every area. Economic problems are especially serious following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Japan said, "Return two of the four northern territories and we will give relief money." This was the worst and poorest example of the Japanese government's diplomacy. I deeply sympathize with Russia.

It is disagreeable to me that all Japanese politicians are so selfish and think only of the convenience of their own country. It reminds me of the fairy tale, *Momotarô*. Dogs, monkeys and pheasants found some millet dumplings which were hanging at Momotarô's side. They begged to be given one of them. "Come along with me. If you join me in an expedition against Onigashima, I will give you a dumpling," replied Momotarô. Isn't it similar to the conditions given to Mr. Yeltsin? It is a matter of course that Mr. Yeltsin has hesitated and delayed coming to Japan.

In my opinion, it is better to let the situation relating to the islands be frozen for some years. Japan ought to give relief money to Russia immediately. I sincerely hope that Russia will be prosperous in the future which will be favorable for Japanese-Russian relationships.

I know a little about Russia. For example, two great writers are Tolstoy and Gorki. Davis Oistrackh, father and son, are famous violinists. The Bolshoi Ballet is excellent. Russian cooking is good too. I once enjoyed borsch and piroshki. Two Russian cooks have visited Hiroshima City to learn how to cook *okonomiyaki*. There are also exchange students in both countries.

We Japanese ought to respect and be friends with the huge neighbor of Japan forever. (TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

"Love your neighbour as you love yourself." (Mark 12: 31)

October 6 Message (Subject*229)

When a machine breaks down or fails to function as it should, it needs to be repaired. When a political system has obvious defects and is seen to be unjust and manipulated for the good of a few rather than for the benefit of the many, it needs to be reformed. So-called political reform has been on the agenda of Japanese governments for a long time, but there seems to be little progress made and little genuine incentive for such reform by the party in power. Another financial scandal of illegal political donations continues to unfold and the disparity of the effect of individual votes in various districts has long been recognized. Yet the necessary reforms are not made. What do you think about this problem? Why do the same kind of financial scandals repeatedly arise? Why are not changes made to make the weight of the votes of all voters more equal? Why don't Japanese voters insist upon political reform? Why do the same politicians continue to be elected to public office despite their illegal or unethical activities? I would like to read opinions regarding this matter and any suggestions about how to change the situation for the better.

Mr. Kanemaru, the former vice-president of the Liberal Democratic Party, was fined 200 thousand yen for violating the Political Funds Control Law. Many people say that the amount of the fine was too small compared to 500 million yen, the amount of political funds he received. But the judicial decision itself cannot be faulted because the violation was just formal,

not having the nature of a bribe. The problem here is that he distributed this money to other members of his faction who are also Diet members. It is really regrettable that this financial scandal is not the first one in Japanese politics. The Lockheed affair and the Recruit affair are still fresh in our memories. A valuable insight gained through these scandals is that, under the existing circumstances, Diet members (in common with local assemblymen) need much money for their daily activities.

In a television program I saw the other day, a Diet member gave one example of a necessary expense for his activities saying, "We have to send a great number of postcards to let voters know the details of our daily political activities." He handled this matter with kid gloves, I guess, but the reality is quite another story. If politicians complain that politics cost too much money, they are probably being exploited by the voters who make them spend money for all kinds of things. Voters require contributions for village festivals, for athletic meetings of a town association and so on. Taking members of the supporters' association on a trip may cost a great deal. This kind of expense is a sort of shakedown. For the sake of the "clean vote" movement, it is the voters themselves who should shoulder a great part of the responsibility.

It is said that Yukio Ozaki, who was called the god of constitutional government, said, "From around 1894-95, the power of money replaced physical strength until finally the rise or fall of a political party was decided by the amount of money it attracted." ("*Vox populi, vox dei*", *Asahi Shinbun*) The structure of political corruption we see today already existed one century ago. Needless to say, voters' shakedown is bad. But at the same time, there are many payments made to politicians in

return for favors, which is much worse.

Political funds themselves are not bad, but the important thing is what kind of transactions there are between the companies which make contributions and the politicians. I am not saying that all contributions by companies are wrong. The basic principle of the Political Funds Control Law is that politics should be performed in full view of the public. These days the cabinet reveals cabinet members' assets at the time of inauguration and resignation. Going one step further, I would suggest that all candidates in any election reveal the funds they received (to the smallest amount) in their campaign brochures. (MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

Recently in my home, a rice cooker, a television set and a cordless phone part broke down, though not at the same time. Similarly, I think present Japanese government policies do not seem to reflect the majority opinion. I hear about the "black mist" of politicians who receive questionable financial donations to win elections.

A few months ago, I learned from a television program that even to become a candidate, two million yen is needed, so I discovered that the poor cannot even become candidates. Moreover, today I learned that even a campaign to collect signatures is prohibited. Finally, I realized how difficult political reform is. Therefore, as Charles Dickens wrote in *Oliver Twist*, I think there is no suitable way to change policy except becoming rich oneself. ("Oliver" was raised in a workhouse but in the end became a son-in-law of the wealthy Mr. Brownlow.) (Noted in the conclusion of my graduation thesis.)

(YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

I imagine that you cannot approve of the recent scandalous activities of Japa-

nese politicians. I feel ashamed in the presence of foreigners about such unethical activities. I wish the Japanese Constitution were changed because such scandals were beyond our imagination when the Constitution was drawn up.

I cannot understand the word *misogi* in Japanese. I think that politicians who are known to have participated in illegal activities should not participate in politics again. I hope the changed Constitution will make this clear because the thought of the majority is not able to change the mind of such politicians. This is the great problem confronting us and the reason it is difficult to reform or change the Constitution. I think that we should not keep silent now. If a mass protest occurs, I shall join it.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Helmut Kohl, the chancellor of Germany, has been governing his country for more than ten years. France's Mitterand has the right to be president for 14 years and the American president is guaranteed a four year term. If he wins the next presidential election he can continue for another four years. In most of the developed countries, with the exception of Italy, political leaders retain power for relatively long terms.

Japanese prime minister's terms, on the other hand, are relatively short. They maintain their top governmental position for only two or three years. Of course, there are some exceptions like the late prime ministers Yoshida and Sato. Mr. Nakasone also enjoyed this leading position for several years, but Messrs. Uno and Takeshita were in office for only a few months. We cannot expect many important political decisions from these leaders who have such short terms. Their purpose is to become prime minister not to make important political improvements. Of course, in the depths of their minds, they want to become

a big historical success, but their energy is exhausted in seeking to become prime minister and then they are afraid that they will be forced out of that position. Generally speaking, Japanese prime ministers are not reliable leaders. I think that is a big reason why they can only manage to remain in the top position for only a short time. (MASAMI NAGATA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

Political reform? The high ranking officials of the so-called political world are always announcing a political reform resolution aimed at restoring public trust in the nation's politics. But it seems quite evident that it will turn out to be in vain. A mere announcement of such a resolution will not change the current situation at all. The problem is what to do and how to do it, and yet they avoid even discussing the matter despite their announcement of the resolution.

Generally speaking, before doing something, it is necessary to make a plan. Then comes putting it into effect. And finally comes reviewing what has been done. The same principles apply to the present case. My idea about how to change the situation for the better is as follows: First, another election system should be adopted. The current local constituencies should be replaced with a single nationwide proportional constituency. Second, a kind of negative balloting should be introduced to keep dirty or unethical politicians out of the Diet. Voters would cast no confidence votes against those candidates they do not want to be elected. Third, a strict Political Corruption Prevention Law should be enacted. Any violation of its provisions would mean the end of the political life of the violator. In essence, every politician should be a statesman in the proper sense of that word (SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

At the end of September this year, I was surprised to hear the disclosure that Mr. Kanemaru, the strongman in the Liberal Democratic Party, had illegally received ¥500 million from Tokyo-Sagawa Express Company two years previously. Normally, he should be interrogated, but he refused, saying, "I am the strongest politician in Japan," and was let off with a fine of just ¥200 thousand. Although I am not a judge, I am sure he is not worthy to be a representative of our nation.

Since 1976, several kinds of financial scandals related to illegal political contributions—Lockheed, Recruit, Sagawa—have been reported. For many years, Japanese heard the proverb, "Yield to the powerful", *Nagai mono niwa makarero* and they applied the law leniently against powerful persons. However, we should not submit to evil. Some of those got out of prison, being released on bail after paying much money, and regained their former positions. The politicians in the Liberal Democratic Party may be good at making policies. However, there are very few Japanese politicians who fear the Lord, our God, and conduct government asking God what they should do as David or Solomon did. So they fall easily into the temptation to manipulate for the good of a few rather than for the benefit of the many which is much more important.

I am reminded of the fact that Mr. Tomio Mutô, the president of Meiji Gakuin, organized a "Japanese Christian Party" soon after the disclosure of the Lockheed Scandal and ran for election to the Lower House in the nationwide constituency. Rev. Ashina and our church members also gave him our support, uniting our efforts. To my regret, we could not send him to the National Assembly that year. Since then, the Japanese Christian Party has not been active, but I pray that this Christian Party will be re-established and all Christian churches in

Japan will raise up Christians who will reform society, including the government.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

I think the problem stems from a lack of morality among Japanese politicians. Political leaders need much money to give to their followers to maintain their own political power. The money is obtained secretly from business enterprises as political funds. As such contributions are not made public, some kind of financial scandals repeatedly arise.

Political reform is not yet realized because all politicians pursue only their self-interests and desires. I once heard that if a man becomes a Congressman in America, he moves from the large home in which he had lived to a small apartment and makes every effort for his country. On the contrary, in Japan, if a man becomes a Diet member, he moves from the little apartment in which he lived to a gorgeous house. It seems to me that Dietmen are wanting in sincerity in respect to democratic government. That is the reason that the same politicians continue to be elected to public office despite their illegal or unethical activities. Some voters or hangers-on are indebted to their political leader. They have a regard for relationships more than for government. Such bad customs have been continuing for more than 100 years.

The scandal regarding Mr. Kanemaru is unspeakable and outrageous. Mr. Kanemaru, the public prosecutors and the faction members are all wrong. Japan is a constitutional state. The members of the Diet are law-makers. We must obey the law. Only a few faction members among the Liberal Democratic Party support Mr. Kanemaru, but most of the nation criticize and are angry with him and the Tokyo district prosecutor who handled the scandal.

Despite differences between men and

women, rich and poor, famous and unknown, old and young, the law must be just and fair. Nevertheless, Mr. Kanemaru continues to be a leader in the Liberal Democratic Party. He must deeply reflect on his conduct. He who is shameless has brought shame to Japan in the eyes of the world. Isn't Mr. Kanemaru acquainted with Abraham Lincoln, who was the 16th president of the United States? Mr. Kanemaru! You ought to take a lesson from him. His famous saying, "of the people, by the people, for the people" "under God" is the basic principle of democracy.

I suggest that an age limit be set at 70 years old, that free passes to go abroad be abolished and that secret political discussions and decisions regarding cabinet appointments at high class Japanese-style restaurants be discontinued.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Essays received too late for inclusion in *Echoes* #39 from SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Sugunami, Tokyo:

(Subject #218: Rituals) When one buys a gift for someone at a department store, the clerk usually asks what kind of gift-wrapping is preferred. Generally speaking, Japanese wrap a gift with a piece of white paper specifically designed for gifts. On the upper right-hand corner of the paper is a decorative symbol to signify the respect of the sender. The symbol varies in complexity from an elaborately folded piece of thick paper to a simple mark printed in red. The symbol, called *noshi* in Japanese, was originally a substitute for shavings of dried abalone, a fish used as an offering in ceremonies, elaborately cov-

ered with a small piece of decorative paper. In the ordinary course of events, the dried abalone was gradually simplified and changed its form into the printed red mark. Nowadays the reduced formalities alone remain prevalent in society.

As another example, in the toilets of some restaurants in the Hokuriku District in central Japan one may find a pair of unglazed pottery masks fixed to the wall. I understand they stand for the gods of the toilet. It is the popular belief in that area, which has come down from ancient times, that some gods reside in the toilet. The most popular form of these gods is a couple of clay idols about seven centimeters tall. In a simpler case, they are made of paper. Curiously enough, such idols are found even in restrooms with modern flush toilets. As long as people believe in the gods of the toilet, the ceremonial formalities symbolized by the idols will persist.

(Subject #219: Prayer) I make it a rule to offer a short prayer before the family Buddhist altar in the morning as well as in the evening. In the morning I pray for the peace of the whole world along with the health of all my relatives. I also pray that there will be no disasters or misfortunes. I say to myself, "act in such a way today that you will be better than yesterday." In the evening, I give thanks before the altar for the day's activities. At the same time I pray for a better tomorrow.

During those brief moments of prayer before the altar, I often feel as if I have become identified with a certain Great Being, the Life of the Universe, Law of Nature, or something like that. (I do not know how to express it.) Perhaps I may be under an illusion. At any rate, at that time I forget I am an ephemeral being like dust on the planet earth. Although I do not know whether my prayers are in line with Buddhist

teachings, I consider these tranquil "religious" moments to be most precious.

(Subject #222: Bridges) I was born and raised in a big city in western Japan famous for its many waterways. It has been said the water city has "eight hundred and eight bridges", though I do not know exactly how many bridges there are. I lived about a hundred meters from the foot of one of the most celebrated bridges called "Tenjin bashi" of Osaka City. If memory serves me right, the bridge was rebuilt when I was about ten years old or around 1935. The wooden bridge was reconstructed into a ferroconcrete one with long, magnificent railings built of steel painted in brownish red. Its magnificence seemed to reflect the national strength of Japan in its ascendancy at that time. It was a pity, however, that only a few years later the steel railings were replaced with stone ones during World War II because there was much demand for steel for military purposes. I have never seen the bridge since the end of the war. I often wish some day I could walk on the bridge again. Then I will hear the silent message of the stone railings: "No more wars."

July 20 Message Excerpt:

Because of a legend that crocodiles make weeping sounds to attract their victims and then shed tears while eating them, "crocodile tears" denote an insincere display of grief. They are the sham or empty tears indicated by the Japanese term sora-namida. People who shed crocodile tears may be called hypocrites and in the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus taught his disciples not to follow the bad example of hypocrites.

The message about "crocodile tears" on July 20th reminded me of men or women keepers, employed by a sorrowing family, who shed crocodile tears. Their wailing creates a mournful atmosphere at a funeral ceremony as they shed insincere, crocodile tears. There are three rankings: *isshô-naki*, *nishô-naki* and *sanjô-naki*. *Isshô* is equal to 0.477 U. S. gallon and is a unit of rice or saké. The keepers perform according to these different degrees. *Sanjô naki* is the most expensive and *isshô-naki* is the least expensive. This custom originated in ancient China and Korea and was also employed in Japan. Gradually, however, it disappeared in Japan about 100 years ago.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

August 13 Message Excerpt:

A strange thing happened in the German city of Berlin 32 years ago today, on August 13, 1961. On that day a wall quite suddenly appeared along the demarcation line between East and West Berlin. The wall was erected by the Communist government of East Germany to halt the exodus of its citizens to the West. This physical wall has now been destroyed and Germany has been reunited, but in other areas of the world, walls of a political or nationalistic nature are being erected. Are you acquainted with the poem by Robert Frost, entitled Mending Wall? It is about two New Englanders who own adjacent fields divided by a simple wall of large stones taken from their fields and piled along the boundary line. Every spring the two men meet and go along the wall, each on his own side, to

repair gaps that have naturally occurred during the winter months. One of the farmers questions the need for such a wall between wooded fields where no animals are kept. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That wants it down!" he muses, but his conservative neighbor repeats the traditional observation that "Good fences make good neighbors." In the world today, there are still too many walls between people, and internationally-minded persons should be engaged in tearing down walls instead of erecting new ones.

Last July, my niece Eriko and her family went to America. Her husband was accepted as a student at San Diego State University. I am happy to hear from her that they had arrived safely and were settled in San Diego. Eriko wrote: "The weather here is nice and it is very quiet. There's a church nearby. My two little sons attended a summer school at the church and were delighted with it. They have already made friends even though they can't speak English."

She also wrote that one day her little boys said to her, "We want to play with the American boy next door. What can we do, mommy?" So, on a piece of paper, Eriko wrote some English greeting words, using *katakana*, and handed it to them! They jumped for joy and with this simple manual they called at the American home by themselves. Eriko was a little uneasy about it, but to her surprise they came back home after enjoying their first visit for nearly two hours! From what she wrote, I learned that there is no wall in the world of children, who are so innocent, so open and free.

Speaking of a wall, I enjoyed the "Daily Word" message of August 13th, that men-

tioned a poem by Robert Frost I knew entitled "Mending Wall". It goes, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." On the earth today, we find that there are still too many walls between people, nations and even in our hearts. I was happy to have an opportunity to recall this verse I've loved to recite.

(SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

August 18 Message Excerpt:

Since 1987, pumpkins have been raised in Tonga for export to Japan. Last year Japan consumed 190,000 tons of pumpkins, of which 52 percent were imported. Over 20 percent of the imports came from Tonga. The Tongan government is now concerned about overproduction and has decided to limit exports to 10,000 tons this autumn. It does not want palm trees to be cut down to make way for pumpkin plantations and hopes to avoid a repetition of the unfortunate situation in which local people do not have enough shrimp of their own to eat because almost the entire catch is exported.

The export of shrimp brings Tongans a lot of money and thus helps them. I guess it is very important for them to earn money by catching, selling and exporting shrimp. It is taken for granted that the Tongans are not so foolish as to sell all their shrimp without leaving some for themselves to eat.

Unfortunately, there are a few simpletons in certain religions, which are completely unnecessary in such an advanced

country as Japan, who seek to cheat us normal citizens out of much money by standing in front of banks, railway stations or along the street and discourteously and shamelessly beg us to contribute money to help those they consider to be poor but whom we do not feel any need to help but wish to cooperate in preserving this beautiful planet for future generations. I live in Japan which has never been a poor country in which many people starve. Therefore, I may not have the right to criticize the charitable campaigns to collect money for those considered to be poor in countries which are sometimes shown on television newscasts. However, the money one contributes so easily and unreasonably as throwing away rubbish will certainly encourage those considered to be poor to lose their incentive to earn money by working and to become lazy rascals in their communities.

I can never approve of those wretches, including singers and religious teachers, who cash in on those considered to be unhappy and poor in order to survive in this competitive society by wheedling a lot of money from us while avoiding the kind of work that has been sustaining the economy even though they are less useful in society than Japanese students who are known around the world as intellectual children who do not earn money nor help the economy by taking part-time jobs but simply go to school. Those singers seek to engrave their names on musical history by vainly creating and releasing albums intended to save those considered poor in order that religious leaders may preach to the simpletons who cannot keep up with the rapid changes in competitive society and who sincerely believe in the existence of God, enabling the religious leaders to maintain their religions which can never be helpful in such an advanced country as Japan in which there are many normal people who

calmly and rationally criticize Communist thought which has proven to be useless in the development of the economy and has caused people distress until the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

(KAZUYOSHI UKAI, Ichinomiya)

Miscellaneous "Echoes"

I remember my trip to England with my friend when I was reading *Golden Treasury*. You may know W. Wordsworth's poem "To the Cuckoo". It begins: "O blithe new-comer! I have heard, I hear thee and rejoice: O cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird, or but a wandering Voice?" We went to Lake Windermere. It is a very beautiful lake. Wordsworth's house, which is called Dove Cottage, is at Grasmere, north of Windermere. When we arrived at the cottage, an attendant kindly struck the cuckoo clock so we could hear it go "cuckoo! cuckoo!" I was deeply impressed by this experience. I shall never forget the beautiful landscape there.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

A new week has begun and I would like to write bit by bit each day after listening to the "Daily Word" message. Although many friends and former students who listen to the messages say they find it difficult to follow the Sunday messages, I like them very much. In fact, the Sunday messages get me ready for the Sunday services at my church. The message for today [May 24], included the statement: if people want to be great, "they must become servants." In a secular sense, the greater we are recognized by the world, the more people we are served by, but Jesus taught the opposite. I had read another verse of the Bible before listening to that message, which says,

"Give as freely as you have received!" (Matthew 10:8, *Living Bible*) The latter part of this sentence seems to have answered my question: Why should we serve people after we have done many things for them? Even if we have done much for other people, where has our ability to do it come from? Doesn't it come from our Creator? This is especially true in my case.

Now I am teaching English at a high school and am proud to say that I have motivated many people to study English, but I should stop and reflect on how I came to be able to teach English. My serious study began late in my junior high school days because an American teacher of English came to my *juku* and encouraged me to speak English by praising my English-speaking ability. Who sent this teacher to our *juku*? In high school, I met a very good student of English who became my friend and I made a great effort to catch up with him. But who made this friend appear?

I failed in the entrance examination of the department of my first choice at Nanzan University, but in my sophomore year, when I was a student in the Business Administration department of that university and almost gave up studying there, I visited a former high school teacher who encouraged me so that I continued studying business while devoting my free time to the study of English. Who caused me to go to that teacher? After one year of my private study of English, I was chosen to be one of the scholars in a study tour co-sponsored by the Nagoya Broadcasting Network (NBN) and the University of Utah, which gave me my first direct contact with an English culture in the United States. Who gave me such a golden opportunity?

Many other wonderful experiences have been given to me freely, so now it is my turn to give freely to others. The Matthew verse reminds me of another verse in

Psalm 103:2: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." I'll remember all the good things God has done for me.

Now I have begun telling my students about nouns, and messages for this week have provided some interesting information. For one thing, proper nouns are usually uncountable, but they can be counted if they become common nouns. Napoleon is a proper noun when it means Napoleon Bonaparte who proclaimed himself emperor of France in May 1804, but it becomes a common noun when it refers to a French pastry with a cream filling [May 26 message]. Beer is a materialistic noun, signifying a fermented alcoholic beverage in general, but it becomes a countable noun when it denotes a particular kind of beer as in the sentence: "The Stuffed Sandwich is famous for its selection of beers" [May 27].

The May 28 message concludes with the sentence: "All people, especially those considered special, different or outstanding, should be permitted to live with dignity." I feel those of us Japanese who tend to value conformity to our group should keep it in mind, especially when there is a strange person in the group. This reminds me of an experience I had when I was teaching at Okazaki Nishi High School, one of the so-called newly-established schools. In order to obtain the reputation of a "good" school, the school was making strenuous efforts to increase the number of successful candidates of entrance examinations of prestigious universities. One day one of my colleagues suggested that we should pray to the god of the Iwazu Tenmangu Shrine where Sugawara no Michizane, the god of learning, is said to be enshrined, in order to gain divine help. I was greatly surprised to see our principal approve of the proposal. No one except me objected, but finally we did not have to go to Iwazu.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)