

"Daily Word" Echoes

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(Essays submitted by listeners/readers on themes of "Daily Word" messages between October 31-December 5, 1995. Corrected and edited by Clark Offner.)

October 17/31 Messages (Subject #290)

The theme for the meeting is "Reformation". Political reformation, bureaucratic reformation, educational reformation, economic reformation and religious reformation are all now under consideration.

Today is called Reformation Day. A healthy religious faith encourages reformation in many areas of life—including inner thoughts and outward actions. Recently, as the limitations of political, economic, educational as well as religious traditions in Japan have become evident, reformations are now being considered. What are your thoughts on the attempts at reform and why they are needed?

When I hear the word "reformation", I immediately think of the Protestant Reformation and the Monument of Reformation at the Place Neuve in Geneva, Switzerland.

Reform means to remake, to make better, improve, cure or remedy. There are many aspects of reformation included in these meanings—not only related to religion or government, but in relation to our thoughts, health, home, etc.

Reformation may be a good idea or action at the time, but our hearts do not keep their early passion. I tend to take the easy way. I firmly feel that human

beings are very weak. It is important to persevere and continue to seek a better way than now, putting forth both mental and physical effort, because time does not stop and circumstances change day by day, year by year.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

The term "religious reformation", mentioned by Dr. Offner, reminded me of the bill to amend the Religious Corporation Law, which is now causing a stir in the political world. The Reformation was a remarkable occurrence in Western history, while the "reformation" of the Religious Corporation Law now being discussed is a very mundane problem.

The government has presented the amendment bill to the Diet. The amendment, in a word, aims to strengthen the power of the government to control religious corporations. It makes it the corporations' duty to prepare financial statements and submit them to the competent authorities. It also requires the corporations to disclose their financial statements to believers and interested persons when necessary. Lastly, it provides competent authorities the power to investigate such corporations.

The initial impetus for the amendment was a reaction to Aum Shinrikyô, because a deficiency in the law was thought to be the main reason for Aum's illegal actions. When we examine the bill closely, without bias, we must say it is very reasonable. Religious corporations have nothing to fear from the amendment as long as their activities are ethical.

Then, why do some politicians make such a fuss about the amendment?

There are many different religions in our country. Among them, Buddhism, Shintoism and Christianity are the main and genuine ones, having long histories and a great number of believers. In addition to them, however, there are many newly-arisen religions, some of which are relatively old even though they are labelled "new". Now, the number of religious corporations is more than 180,000 but people are not given enough opportunity to know the substance of these organizations. At the same time, government cannot intrude into the operations of these organizations for fear of being accused of the "suppression of religion". The government parties insist that this defect of the law is the main reason for permitting Aum to have everything its own way and that it is necessary to amend the law in order to avoid a repetition of the same mistake. On the other hand, the Shinshin Party, an opposition party, opposes the amendment insisting that it aims at restricting activities of Sôka Gakkai, which is that party's most powerful supporter.

The relationship between religious organizations and government is a very difficult question. I think it is appropriate for religious organizations to be concerned about political matters, including welfare, human rights, peace, etc., to express their opinions to political parties and to request cooperation. It becomes a problem, however, if they want to manage politics all by themselves, interfering in the political process. Today, people are divided in opinion about whether Sôka Gakkai has already stepped over the limit. Anyway, there is no problem in the proposed amendment itself as long as religious corporations are not engaged in anything shady and if their accounts are in full view of the people.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

The other-day, early in the morning, I was waiting for a special express train on the platform at Nagoya Station. A local train glided into the opposite side of the platform and disgorged many passengers who hurried to the stairs. Among them I noticed a strange pair: a young man in a business suit and an old man in casual clothes. They walked closely together, as if the old man was leading the young one. When they passed in front of me, I was shocked to see the younger man tightly holding the end of a rope that extended to the waist of the old one. They were a policeman and a criminal. The young policeman was tense, but the old man looked shameless and unembarrassed. He appeared to be an habitual offender.

All of us were born innocent, like angels, and welcomed by all family members. But why are some of us forced to go to prison? Minors are sent to a reformatory where they are given training to become law-abiding citizens. But why do some of them have to go back to prison after their release? A few of them have to stay in prison for their whole lives. I wonder what the reason is. Is it due to their weak character? family conditions? unfavorable attitudes of society? faulty training in prison? My thoughts about this problem circulate endlessly. But one thing is clear: to mend one's character is the most difficult problem.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I will write about religious reformation. As you know, believers in Aum Shinrikyô are being put on trial these days. I hate those concerned with the crimes, especially Asahara and his staff.

It is asked why bright Japanese young people followed them and committed such terrible crimes. Someone said, "It's easy for the Japanese to be subject to mind control because their personality and individuality is underdeveloped. Especially in regard to religion, they have

no immunity from false teaching." I think this may be true to some extent.

So, above all, it is necessary for young people to be taught about religion in the compulsory education system or in their homes. If this is not done, even if Aum Shinrikyô disappears, when another false religion emerges, young people will be attracted to it also. The Japanese government should plan to include religious education in the curriculum as soon as possible. (YOKO NAKANO, Kariya)

According to a recent survey, ninety-six percent of junior high school graduates go on to senior high schools. Fifty percent of senior high school graduates go on to universities, junior colleges or professional schools. This is surprising. We can't find a similar situation in any other country in the world. But the majority of university students don't like to study. They are forced to do so by their parents. They are also pushed to study at cram schools. Cramming increases their stress. Recently, we hear of bullying very often. It provides a kind of release of stress for some students. Moreover, we also hear of violent behavior on the part of teachers. Last summer, a certain male teacher struck and kicked a junior high school girl because she strongly opposed him. When I was a child, I never experienced bullying or violent behavior of a teacher.

Education is conducted not only at school but also at home. Today's children are not disciplined. Some of them enter others' houses without voicing a greeting. The number of children who don't say "Thank you" is increasing.

In my view, morality should not be taught only at school but also at home. As we have learned from the incident related to Aum Shinrikyô, too much education without morality spoils a human being. Every person has his or her own ability and interest. Those who don't want to study should not have to go to school.

Teachers and parents should help children develop their individual talents and live more stable lives.

(HIROMI FURUTA, Kita, Nagoya)

Recently, one of the most widely reported topics related to political reform is *kan-kan-settai*, which we can call "wining and dining" in English. I think it will be a key focus of political reform.

The governor has announced that Kôchi Prefecture became the first prefecture to abolish the practice of "wining and dining" central government bureaucrats. He said, "We will budget money to finance meetings that are considered absolutely necessary to collect information that is especially vital to the life of the people of Kôchi Prefecture. He also said that he could not deny the fact that drinking with national government bureaucrats can constantly keep them in touch with what is happening.

But a party for simply wining and dining is hard to distinguish from an information-gathering meeting for the benefit of the Kôchi people. If other governors did the same, it would result in a decrease in wasted taxes. Such a bad, old custom should be abolished to save our precious taxes, but it is very difficult to stop such a custom suddenly, so I hope that method of doing business will be changed little by little.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

The summer before last, I made a trip to Okinawa with my daughters and my elder daughter's family. Before we left, one of my friends told me she didn't feel like travelling to Okinawa only for amusement. Then I noticed I also had had the same feeling for a long time. Needless to say, we felt we shouldn't visit Okinawa only for fun because of the great many civilians, including children, as well as soldiers who died there at the end of the war and because we have forced Okina-

wans to accept 75% of the U. S. military bases in Japan. Nevertheless, feeling kind of guilty, I left for Okinawa for just sightseeing and swimming.

The landscape, the beach and ocean were much more beautiful than I had expected. But on the way to the beach from the airport, even on the national road, through wire fences we couldn't help seeing the bases and even many black military planes. I was shocked to see how big the bases were and I felt that Okinawa is on the bases rather than the bases being on Okinawa. I think it is natural that there will always be many troubles related to the bases for Okinawan people who have to live in such a place.

Now, fifty years have passed since the end of the war. What is the reason these bases continue to exist in Japan? I hope there will be a reformation of the security agreement and a withdrawal of U. S. military bases from all of Japan, as was done in the Philippines in 1991. I hope the Okinawa islands will become peaceful, without military bases and the tragedies they cause as soon as possible.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

Nowadays, I have many thoughts regarding my life and society. In newspaper articles and on television news programs, many problems are mentioned—including those related to cults and sects, so the reform of religions has been discussed.

Many people suffer from nuclear tests and environmental pollution all over the world. Our earth needs a reformation relating to the environment and nature.

Japan's economy is bad now. Many people have lost their jobs. Business is dull everywhere. I wish the economy would improve.

Now, I have a question. What is education? Academic advisors and others have many opinions and ideas. I have been very troubled about whether they are

right or wrong. What is truth? This is a very difficult problem for me. Education should guide students into the right path. But we must be able to choose the truth. I need to truly study now.

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

Reformation. This term immediately reminds me of two words: "initiative" and "co-existence".

As is often pointed out, Japan cannot live without the help of many other countries, especially in relation to the acquisition of natural resources of which she has very few. As a developing country, Japan was very humble and ready to learn from other countries, but she seems to have become too proud of herself to try to get along with others.

Look at its technology. As everyone admits, Japan has highly advanced technologies, but the Great Hanshin Earthquake revealed what was lacking. The foundation which we had believed was firm enough turned out to be not so strong as we had thought. That is, our technologies need much improvement. When big earthquakes happened in Los Angeles and South Korea, Japan did not have the humility to learn something from Americans and Koreans. In fact, some Japanese laughed at the "shaky foundations" of the technologies of both countries. So one thing I think is very important in order to reform ourselves is to be humble once again and be ready to learn something by making friends with many people in other countries.

Yesterday I had an opportunity to listen to Mr. Shintaro Ishihara, a former Dietman, who told us (his audience) how intelligent the Japanese people are. He suggested that we think of Seki Takakazu, a great mathematician of the Edo Era. According to him, Seki was far greater than Newton. He also referred to the statement made by Mr. Etô, head of the Management and Coordination Agency, a good friend of his. Even now he believes Mr.

Etô was right in saying what he did, for he said it on his own. Mr. Ishihara emphasized how important it is to take the initiative in doing anything.

I agree with him as far as the importance of initiative is concerned. How often we are told to conform to the opinions of others! And how seldom we are encouraged to act on our own! So we should learn to think and act on our own. At the end of his talk, however, I had an unpleasant feeling. I don't know why, but it seemed to me that what he wanted to tell us in his talk had come down to this: We Japanese are superior and we can be proud of that. The Japanese Imperial Army did great things in Asia, for it proved that it is possible for a small country to fight against a big country. Mr. Takami Etô, a good friend of Mr. Ishihara's, was right in what he said because he is one of the few people who can express their own opinion.

Since I too think much of initiative, I want to express my opinion by commenting on his talk. First of all, Mr. Ishihara didn't have to tell us how superior the Japanese are for, like any other country, Japan has both intelligent and foolish people. It is no use talking about the superiority of a single nation in an "international" or "global" age.

Secondly, why did Mr. Ishihara try to defend the Imperial Army in that talk? Many of us know the historic fact that many European powers did the same cruel things as the Japanese army when they invaded other countries, but there are not a few who know nothing about what should be done if Japan wants to win the trust of Asians, especially of the common people and not politicians. Mr. Ishihara said in his talk that there are some political leaders who look up to Japan as their "goal".

And lastly, that Mr. Ishihara defended Mr. Etô suggests that they both think the same way. Mr. Ishihara may be knowledgeable about the historical facts in Asia,

but I cannot accept his opinion. Some political leaders in Asia may respect Mr. Ishihara, who often speaks out, but that does not necessarily justify his arguments. There are still many Asians who haven't forgiven the Japanese and I think we should find out what we can do to win their trust. As a first step, I want to know as many Asians as possible and try to see what should be done while talking with them. Now we shouldn't depend on only a few people for a certain kind of information but take the initiative in learning what is necessary for us to do.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

The atmosphere in this country has been dark and gloomy for a long time. We have come to wonder whether we have entered a dark, difficult age of uncertainty. This year, so many unfavorable things happened one after another: the long stagnation of the economy with no sign of recovery; no prospect of political recovery since the collapse of the 55th year system; the Great Kansai Earthquake with its devastating damages; the infamous Aum incident; the remarkable increase in the number of non-voters in prefectural elections. As Dr. Offner pointed out, the limitations of political, economic, educational as well as religious traditions in Japan have become evident. No matter how difficult it may be, we should not be frustrated, but try to make every possible effort to correct the defects and seek to effect a reformation.

We must recognize the changes that have taken place in the world. The cold war political structure has disappeared. We are apt to believe that we attained our high rate of economic growth and raised our standard of living by our own efforts alone, but now we should humble ourselves and not simply take this for granted. Protected by the security treaty with the United States, Japan was able to develop into a great economic power. Now we should make every possible effort for

the benefit of the whole world. From a global standpoint, a country with the right resources should take responsibility for stability and economic growth in the world. We should consider whether Japan has sought only for her own national interests, disregarding the fate of other countries.

Japan is an insular country, basically of the same race. Isolated from the rest of the world for a long time, we are apt to be indifferent to events outside. We esteem teamwork, order and harmony, especially within our own groups. We tend to be exclusive and unwilling to accept nonconformity. We should realize that we can no longer exist as an insular nation for we are living in an inter-related, global age. We should be more sensitive to the needs of others, open our hearts to outsiders and try to have more friendly relations with others, at any level and in any field. We are all human beings, with the same mentality, I believe. Through deepening mutual understanding, effective and fruitful collaboration for reformation will be possible.

To my regret, I must confess that I do not have great hope for an appropriate reformation at the present time. I deplore what I have found through my own experience that Japanese, especially the younger generation, have become so self-satisfied that they are quite indifferent to the needs of others and unwilling to cooperate. I was deeply shocked to discover that when I served as a census taker last fall. The situation was much better five years ago when the last census was carried out. What does the remarkable increase in the number of non-voters during the prefectural election last April indicate? To carry out a desirable reformation for a better future, the role of good leaders is very important. We should be more concerned with politics and raise the percentage of voters.

Nevertheless, we should not be too pessimistic. Japanese are intelligent and

are hard workers. As Dr. Offner indicated, when we are sensitive to social changes and make an effort to correct our defects, we will be able to carry out a reformation successfully for the benefit of ourselves as well as of other countries.

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

As times change, there is rapid progress in advanced nations in the world and everything is being reformed. That is not to say that all reformations are good. Recently, the newspapers are full of stories of graft-related scandals and of many kinds of suspected criminals every day. Such people need to be reformed in their thinking.

Our God knows everything that we do, say or think. So we need to experience a reformation in our own hearts. The most important reformation for Japanese now is a spiritual reformation.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

The word "reformation" reminds me of a man under whom I worked at a textbook publishing house for no less than twenty years. When we, the editorial staff of social studies textbooks, were engaged in some assigned work, he used to tell us to always question whether the present way of doing the work was the best. He used to urge us to do the job more smartly, more easily and efficiently, asking us, "Is there any better way of doing this work?" This question of his was derived from his "reform-oriented" way of life. He really made it a rule to urge us to question the way we did any piece of work, whether it was all right or not. Asking questions presupposes an analysis of and reflection on the way we are doing things. "Are you content with what you are doing?" "Why?" he used to ask us. We had to be prepared to answer. In the process, we did reform our way of doing things. If we gained some principles of doing the work better than expected by following his advice, we were

able to apply those principles to a new work with better results. Indeed, under the banner of "reformation", we became able to work so that "each tomorrow finds us farther than today."

When we cast our eyes around the globe, we cannot help but pay attention to the most crucial matter of the nuclear age. Leaders of most countries are ready to resort to military power, including nuclear arsenals, to defend their country in case of an attack by a fearful enemy. Japan is no exception at all. Japan has taken it for granted that the American nuclear umbrella made the country safe in case of an emergency. Remember the sword of Damocles! "All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword" is an ancient adage. How to settle conflicts among nations peacefully instead of at the point of the sword is nothing but the greatest challenge to humankind. Here lies the gravest problem concerning "reformation."

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

November 7 Message (Subject #291)

Themes [for essays] are meant to stimulate people to think as well as to write. Though you may consider today's theme a bit frivolous, it is also meant to make you think. The question is: why is a piece of green plastic with jagged edges placed in trays of sushi? Is it necessary? Does it serve a useful purpose or is it simply an example of an old Japanese custom that has lost its original, natural significance and is maintained in a fabricated form just to keep a tradition? Should the practice be continued or abolished? What do you think and why?

Though there are various Chinese characters used to express the Japanese word *sushi*, they are all simply phonetic equivalent characters. The noun is derived from the adjective *sushi* (now pronounced *suppai*), meaning sour or acid. *Sushi* is vinegar-seasoned rice combined with sliced raw fish, an eggroll, seaweed, etc. There are various kinds of *sushi*, such as *nigiri* (palm-packed)-*sushi*, *maki* (rolled)-*sushi*, *oshi* (pressed)-*sushi* and so on. Needless to say, vinegar is used to prevent rice from spoiling.

The special character of Japanese dishes accentuates outward appearance (color) and fragrance. Japanese cooks try to make their dishes look attractive in shape and color (and often in fragrance). (In the West, cakes are often decorated for the same purpose, but I have little knowledge of dishes for which appearance is considered important.)

Some kinds of leaves or blades of grass are widely used with *sushi* dishes. Leaves of persimmon or magnolia trees (*hoba*), orchid blades, bamboo grass and *myoga* (Japanese ginger) are examples of leaves or blades used with *sushi* dishes. The purpose of these leaves is related to their appearance (color) and fragrance. They also have a preservative function.

Leaves or blades are also used for wrapping or separating kinds of *sushi*. In former days, people did not have chemical materials such as plastic. (Paper was not suitable for the purpose.) *Sushi* is often wrapped with leaves or seaweed to make it easier to pick up with the fingers. Leaves are removed when we eat *sushi*, while seaweed is eaten together with the rice. *Hoba-zushi* in the Hida district is a simple food rich in local color. The color and fragrance of the leaves stimulate our appetite. Pieces of green plastic with jagged edges are often placed in a *sushi* tray to separate the portions of *sushi*. Originally natural leaves or blades of the same shape were used for that purpose, but today people

have difficulty finding these materials so substitute articles are being used.

When traditional Japanese dishes are prepared, decorations such as a twig of a pine or plum tree, rape blossoms, etc. are garnished to fit the color scheme of the season. Natural materials are used in high-class restaurants even today, but the substitute articles are also widely used. (In the case of parsley, the real thing is usually used because it is readily available and cheap.) People are divided in opinion whether to continue the tradition even using the substitute articles or to abolish the tradition which is already stripped of all its original content. Anyway, I do not think we need to make a fuss about this trivial matter.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I have often seen real green leaves used by master chefs at *sushi* restaurants. *Haran* leaves are used. An expert *sushi* chef is also an expert at arranging the green leaves in the tray. They were a part of the atmosphere of *sushi* restaurants in the old days, but recently I do not see them. I cannot say when the change occurred for green plastic to be substituted for a *haran* leaf. I suppose the reason is that it is easier in our busy lives when everything becomes more convenient at the expense of old traditions.

Next I will explain why a green leaf or plastic is used in a tray of *sushi*. As I myself understand the meaning, it is both to remove some smell, such as fish or ginger, for example, and to give a good feeling to those who see it. It is related to the Japanese delicate feeling about cooking, but I do not think that a plastic substitute is better than a real *haran* leaf.

(MICHICO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

A piece of green plastic with jagged edges placed in trays of *sushi* is used as a *tate-kaishiki* or a *tsuitate*. Trays of *sushi* were divided into partitions by *tate-kaishiki* in the old Edo era. *Tate-kai-*

shiki were made from leaves. Now, they are only used in high-class Japanese-style restaurants or *sushi* bars. In the Kansai area, the leaf used is *haran*. In the Kantô area, the leaf is bamboo.

Tate-kaishiki is the result of fine workmanship using leaves by a *sushi* artisan. The leaves serve as a preservative. Long ago, there were no refrigerators in Japan, so *sushi* needed horseradish and *tate-kaishiki*. Now, in most cases, there are refrigerators in Japanese houses and shops. *Sushi* requires horseradish as a preservative, but I think that green plastic is unnecessary. If it is used, it is used as a divider, for leaves have a purifying quality but plastic does not.

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

There is nothing green in a tray of *sushi* so a green leaf makes it look more attractive. Until a few years ago, the green leaf of a plant called *haran*, which grew in the shade, was used instead of green plastic. *Haran* is an evergreen plant and is said to be able to counteract the poison of fish. The plastic green leaf is only a decoration for the *sushi* in the tray.

It is much better to use *haran* in a *sushi* tray than the plastic green leaf, but *haran* leaves will be in short supply before long. Everything is changing in modern life to fit the change of times. We live in a country in the world where progress is very rapid.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Frivolous as it may seem, it is not insignificant. There must be some reasons for placing that piece of green plastic on trays of *sushi*. The plastic is superfluous in that it is not edible. Why is its edge jagged? I remember in former days the little thing was not made of plastic. It was a green leaf. I think a small piece cut off of a garden plant, perhaps called *haran* was originally put on *sushi* as a decoration. It may be quite suitable for the aesthetic sense of the

-- Japanese to have a decoration on a tray of *sushi*. The color green contrasts well with the prevalent colors of *sushi* pieces which consist mainly of fish and other seafood.

With the growth of modern technology, not a few artificial things made of plastic have become substituted for natural things. The piece of green plastic with *sushi* is an example. It may seem to be a waste of material to use such a piece of green plastic, however small it may be, but people enjoy the beauty that appeals to their aesthetic sense.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO Suginami, Tokyo)

The green leaves of *yôran* were traditionally used in our country for Japanese food because of their fragrance and their color, which harmonizes well with Japanese food, but now we seldom see them.

Recently, I made a trip to the Hida District. At dinner, our plate of *sashimi* was partitioned by a small oval leaf with jagged edges. The Japanese restaurant owner was next to me. I asked him about the leaf. He said, "It is an *ôba* leaf. It costs five to seven yen apiece. We usually use them and should use them within two days." "Can we eat it?" I asked. "Yes, you can," he replied. Then I continued, "What is your opinion about the green pieces of plastic used in *sushi* trays which have become popular recently?" At first, he seemed not to understand my question, but after he grasped the meaning, he blurted out his answer: "Nonsense!"

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

As a souvenir of my South Kii Peninsula trip last month, I bought some *Kakinoha-zushi*, for which Wakayama Prefecture is famous. This *sushi* with mackerel on the top is wrapped in a persimmon leaf. While eating it, I thought about the theme of a piece of green plastic with jagged edges. A piece of paper in the *sushi* box informed me that the persimmon

leaf contains vitamin C and is useful as a preservative.

In the old days, I know that, instead of a lunch box, bamboo or *haran* leaves were used. According to my small encyclopedia, in the Edo era, *sushi* chefs used to compete with one another in cutting the bamboo or *haran* leaf in beautiful ways to decorate *sushi* trays. Even today, if we can get real leaves cheap and easily, we of course prefer them to the plastic ones in *sushi* trays. Even though the leaf is plastic, however, it is useful for preventing a mixture of tastes and the green color is appropriate—not red or pink.

Nevertheless, it is clear that this is one example of an old Japanese custom that has lost its original significance. I feel like saying, "There's something wrong with it, isn't there?" I love living flowers, but I don't reject all artificial ones or fabricated forms.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

November 14 Message (Subject #292)

The suggested theme for an essay this week is: credit cards. What do you think of credit cards? Do you have any? Do you use one often? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using such cards?

I have a Visa card to use on trips to foreign countries, but I have never used it because I cannot remember when, where and for how much I use it. I like to do everything correctly, but sometimes I make mistakes or spend more money than I desire. I do use my husband's depart-

ment store card. I make it a point to use it when I want to buy something expensive and do not have enough money.

A credit card is convenient from one point of view, but on the other hand it is not so good for us if we do not use it wisely. We may not notice how much we have spent if we do not pay attention. I think we must recognize the dangerous aspect of using a credit card. A credit card is money.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Since I wrote about credit cards for subject #213 three years ago, here I will write about the value of money as a sequel to that essay.

As for the harmful effects of credit cards, I gave two examples. One was young people's foolish outlook on life. Today many young people are heavily in debt due to buying on credit. It is deplorable that they cannot accurately foresee the result of their own acts. These days, people's income level is remarkably high compared to former days. Even young people can easily earn enough money to satisfy their desire to obtain many expensive things. *Arbeit* in my student days was for getting money for tuition and living expenses. If our income was sufficient for such things, we stopped working and used our spare time for studying. The affluent lifestyle of young people today erodes their sense of the value of money. This is the reason why they cannot discern such an easy principle that a credit card cannot be used for more than the limit of their deposit.

Another harmful effect of credit cards is related to their effect on children. If we adults use credit cards in front of small children, they may get the false impression that they can get whatever they want with a single, small card. They cannot understand the theory that there must be a deposit behind the credit card being used. We can find this kind of baleful practice also in the attitudes of

some wives. In former days, a salaried worker brought home his salary with him and handed it to his wife. The wife received it with words of gratitude. (A devout wife offered it on the altar before she used it.) Today, a salary may be withdrawn from a bank account and used by a wife without her husband knowing it. Lack of respect for their husbands at present, to some extent, comes from this fashion of bank-transfer system of salaries. (This is not a joke.)

The value of Japanese currency, the yen, is very high in foreign countries now especially in Asian countries. We realize this fact when we travel in those countries. We can obtain commodities or services very economically there. This fact may induce us to regard such things with contempt before we realize it. The value of people's labor in any place is never any different from ours no matter how cheap their wages may be. Therefore, I do not think it is desirable for many Japanese companies to advance into Asian countries to get cheap labor. We should not forget the days when our income was low and we made desperate efforts for economic progress. I often hear that the NHK drama, *Oshin*, is very popular in Asian countries. I think it is because they are moved by the sincere attitude of us Japanese who, at that time, struggled against poverty and intently aimed at progress as one united body.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

The birthplace of credit cards was the U. S. A. about the middle of the 20th century. The word cannot be found in a Japanese dictionary, but we call it a *ku-redito-kaado* in Japanese. Credit cards are very handy and I have one. I often use it at the Takashimaya Department Store in Tsuyama. I can buy things which cost less than the amount of my deposit in the bank, but I must be careful not to exceed that amount. Moderate shopping is best.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

I have a credit card for a supermarket I often go to. I use it several times a month. Each time I use it, I find it very convenient. I do not have to take any cash out of my pocket. All I have to do to pay my bill is to produce my card. Its convenience is the greatest advantage of using the card. Moreover, card bearers can take advantage of the limited discounts occasionally given them.

I find no disadvantage whatever in using the credit card. Nobody else should find any disadvantage either so long as they keep their spending within limits. But I am greatly surprised to learn that there are not a few people who have gotten up to their necks in debt by using their credit cards beyond their resources. The world is quite large enough to allow those addicted to limitless shopping to live in it. They are helpless victims of a money-oriented society.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

My parents always taught us children as follows. When purchasing something it is most efficient and advantageous to use cash. You will get a special discount by paying cash. You should save money first, then buy what you want. Never buy first; earn first! So I was not interested in credit cards for a long time.

One day after I got married, a representative of a department store came to our house and recommended that my husband obtain a credit card which would give a 5% to 10% discount when it was used. He obtained a card of that department store and my husband and I enjoyed buying goods with the discount service. Then, we made plans to travel abroad and obtained other cards for use overseas. They were really convenient to carry and safe. Thus I got accustomed to using credit cards.

I know that if I rent a car in America, I will have to show an I. D. card and a credit card will be accepted. Nowadays, paying cash is no longer advantageous.

Some stores and airline ticket agents welcome payment by credit card, especially by a so-called gold card which has gold on its surface, indicating a high social position and high income of its bearer.

It seems to me that credit cards are becoming a kind of I. D. card even in Japan these days.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shôwa, Nagoya)

Credit cards are very useful. Today, "cashless" is a very popular concept. Mastercard, especially, is very good for it can be used throughout the world.

Using credit cards sometimes results in a 5-10% discount. A few years ago, I had a credit card. Its advantage is the that no cash is required, only a signature. It's nice and smart! But it has the disadvantage of requiring definite planning. Lack of plans is the cause of bankruptcy. So, one must plan within one's income.

I'm a student. The reason I don't have a card now is that I don't have a steady income, but I want to have one in the future.

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

I have had few experiences related to credit cards other than at department stores, but I will relate one. One day I used a credit card at a hotel which was related to the Meitetsu Media service. I felt that everybody was kind and polite when I showed them the card. I do not remember how much of a discount I received at the hotel because of the card. It is a matter of course that related organizations help each other in Japan.

Recently, the economic situation is becoming more and more complicated. Under these difficult conditions, planners related to credit card companies have special ideas about service because providing many services can attract many people who want special favors. In my thinking, it is like an *omake* or *furoku* in Japanese. When I once viewed a shopping

guide on television, I was astonished because not one or two, but three, *omake* were added. I thought at the time that the product itself must not be very good or practical. I think that a reduction of the price is better than an *omake*. and it is better to add an explanation why it is available at that price. If many Japanese like *omake*, however, businesses will cater to them. There is no other choice in Japan now, but I hope Meitetsu Media does not have the thought of *omake* and provides good service everywhere.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

November21 Message (Subject#293)

A secondary business of Meitetsu Media the sponsor of this "Daily Word" message on the NTT CAPTAIN System, is their "bridal service", called Début. I am not sure whether or not this kind of matchmaking business is peculiar to Japan, but I have never heard of such a business in the United States. I am sure there are social and cultural factors, rooted in Japanese tradition, which gave rise to such businesses in this country. Matchmaking businesses is the theme suggested for an essay. What do you think of them? Are they really necessary? Why or why not? Have you or your relatives had personal experience in making use of their services?

I went to school before the war. In those days, Japan did not have a co-educational system. In an elementary school, boys were in a boys class and girls were in a girls class. Then, boys went to a five year middle school and girls went to a four or five year middle school. Beyond

that, there was a three year higher school for boys only. Girls went to a girls college. Universities allowed girls to enter, but the Tokyo Imperial University and the Kyoto Imperial University excluded girls until the end of the war.

Under such circumstances, boys and girls had little chance to make friends with each other throughout their school life. In those days, when a girl was born, her parents expected her to grow up to be a good bride. They did not want her to be self-asserting, but to be gentle, obedient and amiable. Compared with today, human relations were much closer and friendlier. Her relatives, neighbors watched over her growth with affectionate eyes. When she became of age, if they were pleased with her, they were willing to take the trouble of matchmaking for her. I remember that this was very common in those days. The merit of those matchmakings was that matchmakers knew both sides rather well—their background, family, reputation and character. I don't think this type of matchmaking can be called a business. They did it for her happiness, not for making money. On the other hand, I realize that matchmaking businesses existed even then, since love matches were quite uncommon in those days.

It is said that in Japan in the old days, it was common for marriages to be determined by family needs, not the result of any attraction between the young couple who had seldom seen each other before their marriage. Consequently, under such conditions, the divorce rate in this country was very high and there were many tragedies. As education advanced, such disagreeable ways were reformed and those types of marriages cannot be seen anymore.

In arranged marriages, even though the opportunity is arranged by a matchmaker, those involved would not want to marry against their wishes. Only when they are pleased with each other, would they like to go steady. Generally speak-

ing, Japanese are not so outspoken as Westerners. It is very difficult for such people to have a good chance to meet an appropriate mate, but such a system enables them to get married.

Those are the merits, I think, that this system has, but we should not overlook its weaknesses and demerits. Through this system, it is very difficult to engender mutual love, which is the most important element in married life, before marriage. They must be very careful about that and make every possible effort to lead a happy married life.

After the end of the war, everything changed. Now we have a co-educational system. Boys and girls have become able to make friends during their school life. They are not so shy as older folk. Even in this country, love matches are more common than arranged marriages. The younger generation cannot expect their elders to take the trouble to serve as matchmakers as they used to. The many changes have made it difficult for older people to understand what younger ones like and the relationship between them is not so close as before. As the economy grew, we came to live apart for business or other reasons. Relationships are not so close and friendly as before even though much effort is being made to improve the situation. I cannot say whether matchmaking businesses are good or bad, but I think that where a need exists in this country, a business will arise to fill it.

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

I knew that Meitetsu Media managed a variety of enterprises, but I had not been informed of its matchmaking business. It is natural for a company to try its hand at whatever undertaking seems to be profitable. The wedding industry (usually called the "bridal industry") is no exception. Today, increasing numbers of young people want to have lavish receptions at big hotels for their wedding and to honeymoon in Hawaii, Guam or

some other overseas resort. As a result, enterprises which provide wedding halls, clothes rental agencies, travel agents and assorted other purveyors catering to newlyweds have flourished. Some enterprises deal with all of these elements together. When the situation comes to this point, it is but a matter of time until matchmaking businesses appear on stage. These companies sign up young singles and then try to match them with the perfect partner using computers.

Miai-kekkon, or arranged marriages, are peculiar to Japan or to Eastern countries at large. Until the end of the war, most marriages were arranged. Today, they say, this custom accounts for approximately 30 percent of marriages. One reason for the high rate of arranged marriages is that these arrangements generally provide people with opportunities for finding a compatible spouse. Such arrangements provide an effective way of bringing together men and women who have little opportunity to meet persons of the opposite sex and is also an effective way of finding marriage partners for those whose social circles are rather limited.

A matchmaker, or go-between, is called a *nakôdo* in Japanese. The *nakôdo*, with his experience and familiarity with the situation on both sides, can bring together people who, in his judgment, would make suitable marriage partners and even after the marriage, the *nakôdo* continues to offer advice and discuss problems with the married couple. So the number of arranged marriages which fail and end in divorce is extremely small.

Nakôdo are usually not professional matchmakers, but persons who like to help purely out of goodwill. Most of them are obliging and find pleasure in helping young couples. They make a list of many prospective brides or bridegrooms and devote themselves intensely to finding the right combinations. But no matter how many they may have on their lists,

their abilities are no match for computers, which, with their superior efficiency, find the most suitable combinations in a moment. In addition to the efficiency of these computers, young people need not feel any constraint related to a computer because it is just a machine having no will. I hear that many young people today are rather shy and retiring in their ways and have not as much chance to meet with the opposite sex as we imagine. I think these are the social and cultural factors which have given rise to the prosperity of the matchmaking business.

(MIKHIKO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

In Japan, matchmaking (*miai-kekkon*) was very popular until the Edo era. Then Japan was a feudalistic land. Fathers decided on their children's partners. This was called *kafu-chōsei*. But Western culture and *romansu* was introduced into Japan in the Meiji period. Today, more than 55 percent of the young people want to marry for love. In 1985, 75.3 percent of the marriages were love marriages (*ren-ai-kekkon*) and 22.6 percent were arranged marriages (*miai-kekkon*).

"Romance" is primarily for oneself. It is suitable for a democratic and free society. Matchmaking businesses are replacing the matchmaker. For the man who is not in love, the matchmaking business may be a savior. But is it really so? Marriages are being computerized. Computers contain much information and make for great efficiency. But they are only machines. Are they perfect? No!! Computers do not have hearts. Human beings have hearts and emotions. We need to have love. So I will never make use of a matchmaking business. Sorry!

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

"You must go back to the country where I was born and get a wife for my son Isaac." "Isaac brought Rebecca into the tent and she became his wife. Isaac loved Rebecca." (Genesis 24:4, 67)

November 28 Message (Subject #294)

Bicycles have become popular in recent years and are the suggested subject for an essay this week. Do you ever ride a bicycle these days? Did you ride one when you were younger? What are the advantages or disadvantages of riding a bicycle? Why do you think they are increasingly popular these days?

As I had lived in Nagoya for many years, I could not imagine that I could not get along without a bicycle around here. But in fact, as I mentioned before, I must go shopping and go to the bank, post office and other places by bicycle. Whenever I go by bicycle, I can see beautiful scenery and it does not require gasoline. These are the good points, but it is also dangerous and I cannot be too careful.

(YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

I used to ride a bicycle when I was young. Twenty years later, I thought I would like to ride it again but my friend said to me, "It is dangerous to ride a bicycle. Don't think about it." My idea at that time is the same reason why bicycles have become popular again recently. Bicycles are very convenient. Many people use them to go from their homes to the station and from the station back to their homes. There are not many parking places for cars at our destinations or they are expensive if we park a long time.

I have been driving a car for over thirty years, but I usually think about which way to go, which parking place is good and how long it will take to accomplish my purpose. If I go by bicycle, I need not make such plans. From my experience, I would say that it is natural that bicycles are becoming increasingly popular.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

(I mentioned something about bicycles in relation to the message of August 31, 1982, so here I will write from a different angle to avoid repetition.)

Today is the day of motorcars. Almost all families have at least one car. When I built my own house 16 years ago, I had no car, but the contractor advised me to include a garage in preparation for the future and I followed his advice. It was a few years later that I obtained a drivers license, after a hard struggle, and became a part of the car society. Before that time, a bicycle was the one and only means of transportation under my control.

When I was a boy, a bicycle was a very expensive possession. I remember quite well my joy when I was given my own bicycle by my parents. Those days, society itself was poor on the whole. At that time, I never dreamed of the day when I would possess my own car. This state of affairs was the same throughout the world in prewar and postwar days, which I could imagine through an Italian movie about a bicycle thief. (I do not remember the exact title.)

When we travel in Southeast Asian countries, we are surprised at the sight of so many bicycles which reign supreme even today. In early morning in Beijing, streets are crowded with a great number of bicycles which carry their riders to their places of employment. In Taipei and Bangkok, many fathers carefully carry two or three members of their family on a bicycle all together. (Recently, it seems that bicycles are being replaced by motorcycles in accordance with economic progress.) Rickshaws powered by a bicycle are also found there. I feel envious when I see the mingling of cars, bicycles and people in those areas.

I think we are rich now compared to people in Asian countries and ourselves in the early postwar period. Nevertheless, bicycles placed in shopping quarters or near a station are often stolen. How can we explain this social phenomenon?

Most of the insolent fellows may not intend to steal it, but just want to use it temporarily. The other day I was informed through television news that a new antitheft buzzer to be attached to a bicycle was invented. If a thief moves the bicycle even a meter or rocks it a bit, the buzzer begins to sound furiously and it is necessary to push a secret number to stop the sound.

The other day, I observed an event on a street connected with a bicycle. Several bicycles were parked on a sidewalk in front of a bank. Suddenly a strong wind blew hard and toppled the bicycles one by one. One of them, unfortunately, fell toward the road, struck and damaged an expensive foreign-made car which was illegally parked there. I felt sympathy for the owner of the car, but at the same time, it is true that I thought it served him right. Am I a man of a crooked disposition? (MIKHIKO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I ride a bicycle almost every day. I first rode it when I was an elementary school pupil. Then I had to practice every day in Akatsubo Park which is near my house. Since then, a bicycle has become a necessity for me. I ride it to various places in Minami Ward. I have a drivers license, but I have no car. A car is expensive and requires a parking place. A bicycle is convenient and light, but it is cold to ride in winter and difficult in rainy or snowy weather. In fine weather in spring, summer and autumn it's very good. The ordinary style bicycles first came to Japan from America in 1870. They were first made in Japan by Eisuke Miyata in 1890. In 1965, there were about 24 million bicycles in Japan. In 1975 they totaled about 50 million. In 1982, there was a bicycle for every 2.2 people. Japanese like bicycles very much.

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

I use a bicycle to go shopping for food several times a month. Without a

bicycle I would have a hard time carrying such heavy bags full of food. The bicycle makes it possible for me to avoid having such a hard time.

When I go to a supermarket near the railroad station, I am always at a loss about where to park my bicycle. I find the parking places already overflowing with bicycles. More often than not, I have to wait for sometime before somebody takes away a bicycle to make room for mine. I refuse to park my bicycle in a no parking area. Isn't a mass of bicycles parked in a no parking area a very ugly sight?

Bicycles are very handy vehicles. Unlike cars, they require no gasoline. Also, they are not difficult to maintain. Ordinary ones cost little and are very useful. Many people tend to use them for a reason. So an increasing number of bicycles are filling the parking area near the station. The bicycle parking problem is a serious headache for the city government.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

I have never ridden a bicycle in my life even though bicycles are one of the most convenient vehicles. The advantages of riding a bicycle include the following: they need no fuel, they go from door to door soundlessly and they can easily pass along any alley. Riders are kept in good health through the exercising of their legs. Bicycles do not speed as fast as automobiles so they are not so apt to have traffic accidents.

People travel around the world, up mountains in Africa or across the Australian desert on bicycles. Bicycles provide personal transportation. Bicycling strengthens the heart, lungs and feet. Bicycling is a competitive sport. But riding a bicycle may be very dangerous or impossible on rainy days, during storms or typhoons. (TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

After the war, I came back to Japan from Indonesia and lived in Nagoya for

the first time. I wanted to find a job I could do on my feet. By chance, one of my father-in-law's friends began to sell steel balls in Osaka and enjoyed good sales. He recommended that I sell them in Nagoya and I jumped at his offer.

Usually about four o'clock in the morning I left my home and went to Nagoya Station by bicycle. It took about an hour. I boarded the first local train to Osaka. The train was jammed with many, many black marketeers carrying rice, sweet potatoes, eggs, charcoal and so on on the train to Osaka. After about six hours, I arrived in Osaka, bought steel balls, put them in my knapsack, came back to Nagoya Station and rode my bicycle back home again. From the next day, I rode a bicycle, visited bicycle retailers at random and sold steel balls. Not only in Nagoya. I went to Okazaki, Toyohashi, Gifu, Ogaki and Yokkaichi also. Doing so, I accumulated knowledge and experience about selling steel balls.

Afterward, we became the agent in this district for a steel ball manufacturer and our steel balls are now included in many newly-built automobiles. Now, almost all of our bicycle clients have disappeared, but I have a special feeling about bicycles.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I rode a bicycle almost everyday when I was a junior high school student. It took me about 15 minutes to go to school by bicycle. At that time, roads near my house were very narrow and were not paved. A bicycle seemed to be the most convenient way to get to school quickly. And most of the roads in my neighborhood were not used frequently by cars, except for buses or trucks which sometimes passed by. I enjoyed riding my bicycle without touching the handlebar with my hands. It used to give me a little thrill.

However, cars gradually increased in the 1960s along with Japan's economic

development. My husband opposed my riding a bicycle, saying it was too dangerous to ride on such crowded roads and that there were no lanes for bicycles, so I changed from a bicycle to a car.

Although I haven't ridden a bicycle for more than 20 years, I still admit that it is more convenient than a car if the destination is not so far away, as Dr. Offner has mentioned about his experiences in his telephone messages.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shôwa, Nagoya)

An "ancestor" of today's bicycle, a velocipede invented in 1645, had 4 wheels. It would never fall over and it would be a safe vehicle for me, but it would be difficult to ride on narrow alleys. Today's bicycle is light and swift, so it can reach its destination faster than an automobile in the case of a traffic jam.

My brother is now 75 years old. When he was a boy, a bicycle was expensive for a common citizen. Father took his son to the bicycle shop in Aomori to buy him one. Later, my brother told us there was a handy-sized boys' bicycle suspended from the ceiling of the store, but father decided not to buy it upon hearing its price." I also heard that he had learned how to ride using his playmate's bicycle. It was in 1944 that he got his own bicycle when he became an army technical lieutenant in the Nakajima Aircraft Factory in Gumma Prefecture.

As for myself, I had no chance to ride a bicycle in my childhood or my youth. I used to walk, however far my destination was. But after I started working, time became precious. When I went on an errand for Dr. Hansen, my employer, seeing other people riding bicycles easily, I envied them. Dr. Hansen and Miss Lindsey never rode bicycles and never took city street cars. They also walked and walked from their house to school through the Tôhoku University campus with their sunshades or umbrellas, so I gave up my ambition to ride a bicycle.

When I began to serve at the Fukushima School for Handicapped Children, from 1983 to 1986, I found some parents carrying their crippled children on the back of their adult tricycles. Their tricycles never fell over while riding and I wanted to get one but, being timid, I couldn't ask them to lend theirs to me. Going back and forth in front of the shop, I finally got my own tricycle and found that a tricycle for adults is different from that for children. The two wheels on the back are stable, but the front wheel is not, so the tricycle may fall over if I lose my balance. I realized that a person who cannot ride a bicycle cannot ride a tricycle either.

It took two months before I was able to ride my tricycle. I was very happy when I first rode it on the entry way of the 9th floor of our apartment house. Since then, it has been helpful for my daily life, carrying the things I bought at the store far away from my house and going to various places where I had to go by bus before. Now, I don't have to mind the time for going out.

For the past few years, I have been trying to ride a two wheeled vehicle, although I have not gotten one yet. And it seems to me that a person who can ride a tricycle cannot always ride a bicycle.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

Bang!! With a dull sound, my whole body flew about 10 feet through the air from the pedestrian walk and in the next moment was on the ground at the edge of the concrete road. When I came to, I was being held by two passersby. I couldn't see for several minutes, nor could I move at all. My left shin was covered with constantly flowing blood while I awaited treatment at a certain hospital for more than one-and-a-half hours.

Guess what had happened. My daughter's new bicycle on which I was riding was hit by a white passenger car from the car lane on my right. The driver was a 67-year-old woman who had just fin-

18 JANUARY 21, 1996

"DAILY WORD" ECHOES

ished her midnight job at 7 o'clock in the morning. It was an unhappy day, March 27, 1995. She promised unhesitatingly to pay for all my medical treatment. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that she has not kept her word. Only the first payment was paid by her. I had a killing pain days and nights for three weeks and my rehabilitation still continues. What is worse is that my daughter's new bicycle was broken and still does not work. I take off my hat to her daring. You'll see what I mean if you read between the lines of what I have written.

The bicycle is a two-wheeled vehicle powered by a rider who sits astride it. It is the fastest way for us to travel using our own power. Compared with engine-powered vehicles, bicycles do not pollute the fresh air. Riding bicycles has been popular for sport and travel since the 1880s. Not only does a bicycle take us to our destination faster than an engine-powered vehicle on a road jammed with cars, but bicycle riding keeps us healthy.

After all, a bicycle has its advantages and disadvantages. The question is whether the advantages counterbalance or outweigh the disadvantages.

(JAIME IWAI, Owariasahi)

At my house, we have two bicycles. One is rather new and the other, about 40 years old, was used by my sister before her marriage. That bicycle which had lost its rider was given to us by my mother. Since then, we have used it for shopping, going to play pingpong or going to the library. It is very comfortable to ride on and will run at a high speed with little effort. Several times we have changed its tires, saddle or other parts. At such times, the bicycle shop man always advised us to buy a new one, but realizing that we had no intention of doing so, he became willing to repair it and now seems to love it as much as we do.

I hear that in the busy cities, the number of bicycle riders is increasing

because bicycles are convenient. But in the countryside, like where we live, I think the number of bicycle lovers is decreasing. For example, fifteen years ago, almost all the members of our pingpong club came to the gym by bicycle, but now there are very few bicycle riders. We can say the same thing about shopping places.

I hope the roads for bicycles will be improved much more so we can ride bicycles safely and easily.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

December 5 Message (Subject#295)

Japan is a very orderly country. The traditional emphasis on orderliness is seen in the formal greetings or gestures which are observed at home, at school and at work. The Chinese characters for the most common Japanese gesture, a jigi, literally mean a word-ceremony. Many jigi will be performed the first few days of the New Year when formal greetings are offered during visits to relatives, friends, business associates and others. This last month of the year is also a busy time for writing and addressing New Year's cards, or nengajô. Nenga/nengajô is the suggested theme this week. What do you think of this custom? Do you enjoy writing and receiving these New Year's cards and do you also make formal visits over the New Year season? Have these customs changed over the years and do you think they will change in the future?

I mail about 300 nengajô greeting cards at the beginning of every year. It takes much time for me, but I continue to do it because I imagine that my cards may give the same kind of delight to

those who receive them as I feel when I receive theirs.

Regarding *nenga*, I remember when I was young, before the Second World War, that we visited and greeted people in our neighborhood at New Year's along with others to whom we wanted to express our thanks. Customs are changing little by little because we are apt to consider our own enjoyment first. I presume that this tendency is not only seen during the New Year's holidays but during other holidays as well. The recent trend is partly good and partly not good. To enjoy ourselves is good, but to forget to thank others is not good. I hope that we will not emphasize only our own ways.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Nenga and *nengajō* are special, traditional customs in Japan. I think the custom came to Japan from China in ancient times.

I write New Year's cards at the end of every year by the deadline date indicated by the post office. It is rather troublesome for me and takes many hours to complete, but it is one of our important customs.

Recently, we do not have any visitors who bring us New Year's greetings, so it is a good custom to exchange New Year's cards with one other. By them we are able to keep informed of each other's well-being. This custom may change in the future. The advantage of sending a letter or card once a year is that it is enjoyed by the receiver. Its disadvantage is that it takes many hours to write them. However, I do not think this Japanese custom will be changed soon.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

When I was a boy, I used to make formal visits to some of my relatives to wish them a happy new year over the New Year season. Also I attended the school ceremony held on New Year's Day. Toward the end of a year, I used to be busy writ-

ing and addressing New Year's cards to some relatives and friends. I thought that writing these cards were mere substitutes for the annual formal visits.

Manners and customs have changed since the end of World War II. I understand present-day boys and girls do not attend school on New Year's Day. I miss the ceremony which is no longer held. However, the custom of writing New Year's cards remains unchanged. So toward the end of December, I am usually busy writing and addressing the postal cards. In fact, I write and address the cards only on the presupposition that I will still be alive on the coming New Year's Day, more than half a month ahead.

With the end of December approaching, I am going to be busy preparing those greeting cards.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Shinjuku, Tokyo)

It is customary to make a visit, or *nenga*, during the New Year season. Today, we can omit the visit, but we need to send a greeting card, *nengajō*. It is necessary to send them to relatives, friends, colleagues and people in the neighborhood. There are many people to send them to.

When I was a child, I was very bored writing *nengajō*. When I received one, I was interested in it, but I think it is unnecessary to send them to people we see everyday. Especially, we need not send them to our colleagues and boss, for it is not an obligation.

In Japanese traditional events, there are many obligations, but it is only when we feel that something is really needful that we should do it. In December and January, post offices are very busy. For postmen, are *nengajō* good or bad? I wonder about this in the winter season, but, in any case, the New Year season is very happy!! (KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

It is said that New Year's cards express one's personality. These are cards sent as greetings for the new year. They

usually have a picture of the animal corresponding to that year's zodiac sign(*eto*) and are sent so that they will arrive on New Year's Day.

Some people make an original card with a painted picture or a family photograph on the government postcard. Government postcards are popular because prizes are awarded by a lottery related to the number on the card. Most business *nengajô* come with the greeting printed on them while writing one's own cards can tax one's ingenuity.

Nengajô arrive from old friends. It is a pleasure both to write such cards and to receive them. Even on a printed government postcard, if a personal greeting in their own handwriting is included, it makes me happy, remembering past times or imagining their present life and how they are getting along. So I also usually write a few warm-hearted words by my own hand. In this way, I keep in contact with old friends or relatives for a long time. Every year, it is very troublesome but very enjoyable.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

The Japanese language has many homonyms and *jigi* is one of them. The most common meaning of this word is a bow or greeting (when used in this meaning, it usually takes the form of *o-jigi*) and the other is, as Dr. Offner explained, the compliments of the season.

We are now in December and the new year is approaching. Many special events take place during the first week of the new year, especially during the first three days. The two most typical are the first visit to a shrine or temple where people pray for good fortune during the year ahead and the formal New Year's calls paid on relatives, company superiors and anyone else to whom we have become indebted during the past year. (These calls or visits are called *nenga*, which literally means the greeting of the year.) In the feudal age, the heads of

branch families used to go to the house of the main family on the morning of New Year's Day and the main family used to serve sake and food to them. This custom came to be followed also by friends and acquaintances and is observed even today as the practice mentioned above.

The custom of *nenga*, however, has undergone many changes in the last two or three decades. In the case of the Gifu prefectural government, for example, directors of each division used to visit the governor at his official residence on New Year's Day, early in the morning and after returning to their own homes, received visits from their subordinates, the chiefs of each section. The chiefs did the same at their homes. They all became tired of observing this custom and in order to abolish the undesirable practice, a *goreikai* was introduced. On the morning of New Year's Day, all persons holding a managerial position gathered at the prefectural office, together with notables representing various social groups and offered their New Year's greetings to each other. With the passage of time, even this practice came to be felt troublesome and was also abolished under the name of simplification. The practice at present is for the governor to deliver an address to all prefectural personnel at an assembly hall on the first day of work, not on New Year's Day.

The annoying custom of these New Year's calls have to some extent been replaced by *nengajô*, or New Year's cards. Sending greetings by postcards has become popular as the postal service has developed since the Meiji era. We enjoy reading *nengajô* delivered in a batch on New Year's Day and learning how friends and relatives are getting along. It is an indispensable part of the New Year festivities.

My wife and I send some 400 *nengajô* each and every year. We must write addresses and mail them by the latter part of December. In order to lessen this work

load, I am now struggling with a word processor to write the addresses. This will be helpful also to remove my poor handwriting from the eyes of people to whom I send my *nengajo* every year.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

Essay on Subject#289 ("What were you doing fifteen years ago?") received too late to be included in "Echoes" #50

Fifteen years ago, I experienced a big event. It was the building of a home of our own. Until then, we lived in a company house which was located in the countryside. We were allowed to stay in it for seven years at the most. So we had to prepare for a proper place in which our family could live. The following year, our daughter was expected to enter kindergarten so we wanted to move to our new home by then.

Regarding our lot, we had already purchased one that was called "a lot reserved by Kariya City". However, to build a house was very difficult for us, financially and socially. Because we were so young and from the Kansai area, we didn't know a reliable construction company. Unfortunately, there were some cases in those days of unscrupulous contractors being prosecuted. We wondered if we might not be deceived by such disreputable builders. After some hesitation we made a decision for my husband's superior introduced a company to us.

But from that time on, we had difficulty consulting with the builders about building materials, expenses, designs, equipment, and so on. Before starting construction, we had some negotiations till midnight. Finally, we inevitably fell into debt. Even when construction was under way, we went to the building site

at least once a week to check on some matters, carrying snacks and tea. Sometimes I found something mistaken. At the time, my son was a one-year-old baby.

Anyway, when it was completed, we were really relieved and happy. But I said to myself, "I will not build a house again. Never!" (YOKO NAKANO, Kariya)

It is our custom to hold meetings of listeners to or readers of these telephone messages on the 5th Sunday of a month. This means we usually hold four such meetings a year. Usually, a new issue of "Daily Word" Echoes is available at those meetings, but since my wife and I made a trip to the United States last summer, I did not have time to correct essays and print an issue for the 60th meeting, held on October 29, 1995. Also, since the 5th Sunday of December was New Year's Eve, we did not hold a meeting on that day. Thus, this 51st issue of the *Echoes*, dated January 21, 1996, the date of the irregular meeting of "Daily Word" fans held on that day, appears almost six months after the publication of #50. It contains 47 essays by 16 writers, which is about average for the *Echoes* over the past 13 years. Once again, the essays are interesting, informative and stimulating.

I hope the writers have benefitted from noting the changes I have made in their manuscripts. The changes do not always imply that the original wording was mistaken. Sometimes, they are meant to simply improve the flow of words. I am always grateful for the faithful assistance of my wife who proofreads the periodical and always finds mistakes or typographical errors of mine that need to be corrected before it is printed. In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, we read: "The Lord corrects those he loves, as a father corrects a son of whom he is proud" (3:12). (Clark Offner)