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# **Toward a General Proposal for the Consumption Reduction Policy among the Developed Countries — From a Global Point of View of the Class Analysis**

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**Abstract:** Investigating the cases in the U. S. and Japan, we can find the fact that the materially wealthy lives of ordinary people as well as the activities of huge industrial and financial corporations let the developed countries become to be the actual rulers or the subordinate rulers of human-being on the earth today. Moreover, the pursuance of unsuitable high level of living standard as well as unsuitable high level of productive capacity is harmful not only for the preservation of the natural environment of the earth as a whole but also for the preservation of national identity of each country itself. As a conclusion, this paper suggests a proposal, like the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, we should arrange another agreement for the future generation to cut down the consumption level especially among developed countries, and along this policy the program of economic development with consumption-restrained growth should be introduced among the developing countries.

## **1. Introduction**

The fundamental points of discussion of this paper will be the following three. First of all, the simple sum of class analyses based on one country should not be supposed as to become adequate way on the analysis of global scale. Second, almost all middle citizens as well as upper class in the developed countries should be considered as actual ruling power in the global scale of analysis. Third, the consumption by the middle citizens as well as upper class in the developed countries in fact destroys not only either the nature of the earth or the culture of human beings, but also hearts of the people. Discussing abovementioned points, this paper will show a general proposal for the consumption reduction policy among the developed countries as an urgent subject of human beings today (for the protection of the nature, the culture and human being itself).

The necessity of reduction of discharging global warming gasses (mainly carbonic acid gas) is now discussed in all over the world under thousands of happenings of global warming problems. The problem of reduction of discharging carbonic acid gas can generally be said as that of reduction of fossil fuel consumption. And the necessity of

preventing global warming seems to reach anyhow to the worldwide task of preservation of global environment as a whole. I assume, further more, that the worldwide task will inevitably reach to worldwide reduction of human consumption as a whole as far as we pursue the worldwide task of preservation of global environment.

This paper will show not only the necessity (of preservation of global environment), but additionally, from another point of view, the inevitable worldwide task of reduction in human consumption as a whole both in economic activities as well as daily lives.

This paper will focus rather not on the conspicuous matters like the political and business processes or socially influential instruments like giant media, but on the situations and consciousness of ordinary people in the United States and Japan today. This paper will discuss, too, the class position of the ordinary people in the United States and Japan in the dimension of global scale. Then this paper suggests, as a conclusion, a proposal of consumption reduction policy among the developed nations. Although it is my sincere desire to refer this paper's context to the European welfare states, the task will have to be postponed in the near future due to the limited time and space.

## **2. The Necessity of Rethinking of the Method of Class Analysis in Contemporary World**

Many authors have been arguing that only few people in the ruling class rule almost all people including not only workers, peasants and lower people but also middle people in the capitalist countries.

Such a view might still be largely correct as far as we discuss only in the field of one national capitalist country. Observing globally connected, multi-strata world economy today, however, does the very view remain still correct? Is it still true that even ordinary middle citizens living in the developed capitalist countries that regarded so far in the academic discourse as the ruled population should yet be located in the same position as ruled class, while they seem already to have gotten as if a privileged status under the condition that rather majority of the population, shaping highly developed market economy and/or welfare society, seem to be benefited by affluent cheap commodities from underdeveloped countries? Given the development of market economy and/or welfare society in the latter half of 20th century, is it suitable to define that the state of middle citizens in the developed countries still stay as the ruled status in the world?

This paper will make light of the middle citizens in the developed countries. For we can recognize that not only the middle citizens themselves are rather the actual ruling class in the developed capitalist countries today, but also the upper class are sometimes derived from middle citizens — able to return back into the middle citizens in case of their failure, and farther more the rest of the middle citizens seems often to support the upper class and

thus they shape national economies with upper class.

American standards as so-called “global standards” are gradually expanding into developed countries in spite they are sometimes worried by not a small resistance, and penetrating into whole the planet through the assistance and cooperation of minor developed countries. Therefore this paper will focus, too, just in the cases of the United States and Japan, *i.e.* the very core country of the globalization and a typical sub-core country.

### 3. The Case in the United States

When we watch the actual ruling class in the global scale, we should focus not only in the upper class but also in the middle citizens constituted mainly white people in the United States today. The middle citizens are found easily everywhere in the United States. They are usually in a situation even at any type of the work, get suitable incomes, have their own cars, live in a house in which they can lead happy days and nights whether they possess it or rent, keep not a few credit cards, consume ordinarily or more as a resident of developed country, sometimes hold stocks and believe the rise of stock prices would benefit their lives.

The majority of white middle citizens have been classified as non-proprietary class in the academic discourse. It is why the many of them are hired and leading their lives by salaries and wages from their employer. But the different feature would be disclosed up if one would observe them from different point of view. They exist in the developed market economy and share each other the effective market, not only commodity market or financial market but also labor market. They are able to get almost any goods and services everywhere at any time they want through well-developed market. Moreover they are able to get even money relatively easily, which needed to get goods and services, by acquiring profitable job through well developed labor market, if they feel necessity. Therefore they are able to behave as if they are the people in the middle class like landowners or managers of small firms. Their consciousnesses are, therefore, getting to be similar to that of the people in the middle class. This paper defines such people in the United States as “the Citizens like Middle Class” or simply “the Middle Citizens”.

Among the Middle Citizens, not only the overwhelming majority of white people are included, a few non-white winners in the competitive society, too, should be contained. Meanwhile the rest of the people such as the overwhelming majority of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics (Latinos) and ruined white people seems to be regarded actually the outsiders of the civil society in this country even though they are called by any beautiful rhetorical words. The population of the Middle Citizens would be more or less than 200 million, *i.e.* approximately 70 percent of all population of the United

States. Although the ratio seems very high, it is the least percentage compared with other developed countries such as the European countries and Japan.

The Middle Citizens stand in a contradictory position in the sense that they are occasionally stock holders, *i.e.* petit capitalists, on the one hand, and the greater part of them are also employees on the other. If we look at them focusing on the latter feature, we can see their agonies from the unstable employment, the low wages, the long labor hours and the greater labor intensity, and the deepening of stress, either mental or physical. Much attention on these conditions is worthy to be paid. However, another position as beneficiaries of market economy (sometimes as stock holders, even though very few value) should not be overlooked, which is in fact the more important position to be emphasized. Speaking more widely, not a few American Middle Citizens are, first of all, investors for big corporations either direct or indirect way (*e.g.* through pension fund etc.), secondly, voters whom the President of the United States and his brains primarily rely upon, and thirdly, the important readers and listeners for mass-media. Here is the reason why the United States has been and is now more or less a republic of the Middle Citizens. Those who decide the basic stance of the U. S. politics, economy, society and culture are exactly the Middle Citizens themselves as well as upper class.

#### **4. The whole U. S. Middle Citizens now stand at Actual Ruling Class Position in the Contemporary Global Economy**

The daily lives of the U. S. Middle Citizens, that consume one-fourth of oil in the world, discharge a considerable carbonic acid gas, not make remarkable protest against the President Bush who has kicked away the Kyoto Protocol, throw away the foods worthy of 60 million people's nutrition as the leftover, be eager for excessive diet while expense 14 percent of the GDP into the medical treatment..., are maintained by abundant low-cost products flow from all over the world through well arranged market economy. Under contemporary global economy, abundant low-cost materials produced by abundant low-cost labors support everyday lives of the U. S. Middle Citizens. Therefore, we can say, if we watch from worldwide view, that the country of the United States herself turned into a fortress of the Middle Citizens who stand on the ruling class of the world today (see Appendix A).

We can define this in another way. There are more than 20 thousand Gated Communities in the United States, *i.e.* fortresses of large-income earners, with more than eight million citizens living in them. If we watch this from worldwide view, we can find the United States herself turned into a fortress of the Middle Citizens (a fortress of large-income earners, if watched outside of the United States). Although the Middle Citizen's ratio amount to 70 percent of the U. S. total population, they are only less than

three percent of the whole population of the earth. While the very center of contemporary world is the United States, those who have now decisive power upon contemporary world political, economic and cultural affairs and have gained actual ruling class position and even more are actually governing the whole world are exactly the U. S. Middle Citizens as well as big corporations and financial institutions.

This is the source of American chauvinism against strangers, too, and is the social/economic background of the U. S. unilateralism. As the U. S. Middle Citizens could acquire the ruling status thanks to the realization of global market economy, and they can get daily benefit out of it, they tend to be conservative as the result. If someone outside the United States directly attacks the life of the Middle Citizens, then they would exercise a drastic punishment against those who attack America. The military crashes concerning the United States after the Nine-Eleventh Attack, such as Afghan War, Iraqi War, Lebanon trouble, etc. show us the clear evidences.

## **5. The Economic and Social Backgrounds of the Japanese Reliance upon the U. S.**

Searching widely for almost all raw materials and fuels as well as a considerably wide foreign market for getting money to import raw materials, fuels and foods, Japan developed a very unique industrial plant after the war. We can find some of the remarkable features of Japanese manufacturing after WWII on “The Coastal Heavy and Chemical Industrial Regions (Rinkai Ju-kagaku Kogyo Chitai)” (see Appendix B).

Thanks to the construction of the coastal industrial regions, Japanese industry has rapidly and largely developed to a level far too big for the domestic demand of such a small country, and become as big as to satisfy world’s demand. Actually Japan has made almost all newly built ships in the world at the height of the Japanese shipbuilding industry by around mid-1950s. Japanese ironworks made one third of the world’s demand of steel around 1970. Just after then the Japanese automobile industry reached to make one third of world’s new cars, and exceeded the total production in the United States in the middle of 1980s. In the same manner, Japan made more than 90% of video decks in the world in the early days when such electric appliance appeared in the late 1980s. The Japanese coastal industrial regions were indeed the factory of the world.

In consequence of this country’s big industrial establishments, Japan became a country that cannot cease to export a plenty of manufactured products, and that needs a worldwide market. The largest market was the United States as the biggest importer of automobile and electric products, as well as Asian newly industrializing countries/areas which inevitably import not only machinery and electric equipment but also an overwhelming amount of consumption goods. In order to function the coastal industrial regions, Japan

needs a world-wide supply of resources, fuels and market. In order to maintain the nation's security, Japan has been obliged to conclude an alliance with the United States, which has the biggest economic power, the largest domestic market and the strongest military power. For Japan as a developed capitalist country without considerable domestic resources and market, the construction of coastal industrial regions and the conclusion of an alliance with the United States have seemed, in a meaning, the most essential way to survive on this planet.

The Japanese story does not end at this point. Today, the Japanese standard of living which shows up never disadvantageously in comparison with that of European and U. S. citizens is built up on the abundant imported materials. There are many facts that indicate how Japan maintains a high level of the nation's consumption by materials and resources from abroad, but I lack space to itemize them here (see Appendix C and D). In any case the Japanese people and their belongings became beautiful and polished in these decades after WWII and they became one of the most zealous nations for clean and beautiful things. Generally speaking, those who have got once a fortunate condition, become unable to go back to the unfortunate days as before, and the Japanese case seems to be exactly so. And once the Japanese stand in such happy position, they can hardly cease to continue to import everything they need both to maintain a favorable business cycle and to lead an abundant life. Japan seems to have, in a meaning, only one option: to cooperate with the largest economic power as well as to obey the strongest military power, and Japan seems to be unable to break off the relation).

## **6. The Contradictory Consciousness of Japanese People and its Economic Background**

The majority of Japanese seems to be difficult to abandon the cooperation with the United States by which the national economy grew up to be the world's second largest economy on the one hand and by which the national standard of living rose up to be one of the world's highest consumption levels on the other. If Japan would change the usual course, the economic conditions would rapidly drop down into great disorder and, as a result, the stable, abundant consumption life of the people would largely fail. If such situation occurred, people sooner or later may demand a return to the former situation of economic activity and standard of living, and cling to the U. S. rule even though throwing away righteousness, humanitarian standpoint and national pride. Accordingly, there is such a probability as almost all people, except for minor political parties and eccentric person, might bow at the last moment to the pro-US political leaders and party.

The majority's consciousness of the Japanese people which was distorted to imperialistic route under the circumstance of imperialist age of the world history during the

end of 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries came back to a “peace and harmony”-oriented one through the experience of defeat in WWII, the disorganization of army and navy, the democratization of political processes, the dissolution of *Zaibatsu*, etc. (“peace and harmony” – Japanese traditional major spirit since 7<sup>th</sup> century). At the same time, Japanese economy and people’s life became extremely reliant on the world economy in a double (economical and social) sense, *i.e.*, the export-oriented economy on the one hand, and the import-dependent mass consumption on the other. The facts signify that coexistence with the United States is necessary as far as keeping the export-oriented economy and import-dependent high standard of living.

But the coexistence with the United States does not necessarily always coincide with the policies of “peace and harmony” or anti-war. This is the background of the deep contradiction lying between the anti-war opinion and the government policy after WWII era. It is very interesting that both ideas actually derived from the experience of the defeat of WWII and the real sensation of recovery and development of Japanese economy after the defeat.

A typical case was seen in the Prime Minister’s decision in November 2004 to cooperate with the United States’ invasion into Iraq. In the case of sending Japanese Self Defense Force to Iraq, the majority of people opposed, while the Prime Minister could not choose a policy to escape cooperating with the United States. Then we should ask here why the Prime Minister’s decision was not suffered definite counterattacks by the people. The reason is that the majority of Japanese people do not seem to continue to support the noble ideal of “peace and harmony” even when their accustomed economic and living conditions collapse. In evidence, peace movements, the rate of labor organization and the Left parties’ seats in the Diet are indisputably diminishing, especially in the long-term depression of these fifteen years.

To maintain the world-wide Japanese corporate activities and to sustain the fortunate standard of living of the Japanese people seem to be exactly not both retrogressive, and therefore Japan comes out as one of the subordinate countries to the United States. The class position of the Japanese people in the global scale is, I dare say, actually a subordinate partner of the U. S. Middle Citizens, whatever they think about their situation.

## **7. A General Proposal for the Consumption Reduction Policy among the Developed Countries**

We have discussed in this paper two cases, *i.e.* about on the United States and on Japan. As for the United States, not only the political readers, business leaders and influential mass media, “the Middle Citizens” in this country, too, are now actually dominating the contemporary world economic and political systems and culture. The

number of Middle Citizens is only less than three percent of world's population, but have been enjoying high and increasing levels of material well-being, under the cooperation with subordinate partners such as Western European and Japanese middle citizens, and they also are increasingly wasting natural resources, disrupting the natural environment and exacerbating poverty among people in underdeveloped countries. They are really getting mountainous benefits from all over the world in double meanings: getting products and resources on the one hand, and getting money flow as the foreign investment into the U. S. (especially into the U. S. Treasury Bonds), etc. on the other. This situation might be exceedingly fortunate. Therefore they tend to be conservative, and father more they tend to be chauvinistic to protect such fortunate situations, when their individual and/or national identities are attacked by unexpected threats.

As for the Japanese case, people as well as business enterprises rely too much upon the imports not only to continue the business activities but also to sustain everyday's high standard of living of the people, and upon exports, too, to get money to buy everything from raw materials for the industry to daily consumption goods for the people. Just exactly this situation forces Japan not to be able to refuse the intolerable U. S. requests.

Now we can learn some lessons which requires for us today from the abovementioned facts. Given the Japanese case, the pursuance of unsuitable high level of living standard (such living style as to consume considerable kind of daily consumption goods from all over the world) as well as unsuitable high level of productive capacity (such productive forces as to be able to supply not a few production goods for all over the world) is harmful not only for the preservation of the natural environment of the earth as a whole but also for the preservation of national identity of each country herself.

We should remember the fundamental reason why the Indus Civilization in ancient India, Maya Civilization in Yucatan, or Rapa Nui (Easter Island) Civilization in Polynesia extinguished. All disappeared by cutting down trees in the forests around the civilized areas, and historical run away beyond the capacity of natural self-recovery. Fortunately, as these civilizations were local, the rest of the earth remained undestroyed. But we should realize that what is now going on is global.

This point of view suggests us at least one instructive proposal. Namely, it is the precious task not only for the government and each business enterprise but also for each individual person in the developed countries to reduce consumption level. It is already well known fact that the consumption level can hardly be lowered once it has been raised up ("ratchet effect" by Duesenberry, J. S.). But Duesenberry's find is to be effective in the condition there are neither inducement of government policy nor individual awakening and endeavor. Each individual behavior such as consumption styles is directly connected with the mode of the society as a whole. Therefore the importance of rethinking of consumption styles should be recognized as essential for the government policy in the developed countries. By the way as for the developing countries, it should be recognized

much more essential, too, what style of consumption should be created for each countries hereafter.

Referable good example here is the Kyoto Protocol that arranged the reduction of discharge for carbonic acid and some other gasses in 1997 at Kyoto, Japan. In this agreement, the reduction of 8 percent of such gasses for EU, 7 percent for the United States, and 6 percent for Japan are arranged. Like that, the reduction of a certain percent of consumption should be arranged among the developed nations in the near future, and along this policy, the project of economic development with consumption-restrained growth should be introduced for the developing nations. By the way, such trading business as emission trading recognized in Kyoto Protocol should never be accepted in the international agreement of the consumption-reduction. As for the detailed investigations into the way how to reduce consumption, the effects of consumption reduction and the counter-effects of the measure, all will be a big tasks for us from now on.

As for the ordinary people in the United States and Japan, they should recognize the mission of developed country. For the mission of the people who lead fortunate life should be considered as to contribute human beings to develop sciences, technologies, arts and culture. Generally speaking, to engage such tasks require considerably much time and fund, *i.e.* those who have relatively free time and those who have relatively surplus fund. If there would be some historical meanings in the age of extension of differentials (not only among the individuals but also among the nations), it would be taken by the ordinary people who enjoy relatively fortunate in the time as well as in the fund. But if the fortunate people only consume too much without developing sciences, technologies, arts and culture, then they should be regarded as those who abandon their proper historical mission.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper, focusing on the ordinary people's affluent usual lives in the developed countries (especially in the Unites States and Japan), draw out some lessons for us today. Investigating the cases in these countries, we can find the fact that the materially wealthy lives of ordinary people as well as the activities of huge industrial and financial corporations let the developed countries become to be the actual rulers or the actual subordinate rulers of human-being on the earth today. Moreover, the pursuance of unsuitable high level of living standard (such living style as to consume considerable kind of daily consumption goods from all over the world) as well as unsuitable high level of productive capacity (such productive forces as to be able to supply not a few production goods for all over the world) is harmful not only for the preservation of the natural environment of the earth as a whole but also for the preservation of national identity of each

country herself. As a conclusion, this paper suggests a proposal, like the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 agreed the reduction of global warming gasses, we should arrange another agreement for the future generation to cut down the consumption level especially among developed countries, and along this policy the program of economic development with consumption-restrained growth should be introduced among the developing countries.

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