

Kokusaika, Revisited: Reinventing “Internationalization” in Late 1960s Japan

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This paper addresses what one anthropologist characterized, a little over a decade ago, as one of the “most compelling and ubiquitous catchwords used in Japan today” (Robertson 1997, p. 97): *kokusaika*, or internationalization. While *kokusaika* appears to be losing its stature as a catchword in recent years as it is being supplanted by terms like “globalization” and “multicultural coexistence” (*tabunka kyôsei*), *kokusaika* was in fact highly prominent in public-sphere discourse for roughly three decades. Drawing largely upon a survey of newspaper articles going back to the 1950s, here I examine how *kokusaika* first emerged as an important catchword in Japan in the late 1960s, and how the meanings that came to be invested in the term were linked to political-economic tensions and transformations that Japan was facing at the time.

Introduction

The term *kokusaika* – internationalization – is one that can hardly have escaped the attention of those of us who have spent significant periods of time in Japan over the past few decades. As Mannari Hiroshi and Harumi Befu commented on the term in the early 1980s, *kokusaika* “is one of the most potent and significant words in the contemporary vocabulary of Japanese intellectuals, academicians, politicians and journalists” (1983, p. 9). Nearly a decade and a half later, Jennifer Robertson could still find it fitting to depict *kokusaika* as perhaps one of the two “most compelling and ubiquitous catchwords used in Japan today” (1997, p. 97). While *kokusaika* is in decline today as a public-sphere catchword in Japan as it is being supplanted by terms such as “globalization” and “multicultural coexistence” (*tabunka kyôsei*), *kokusaika* nonetheless enjoyed a discursive currency in Japan for a period of roughly three decades. As a term that was used frequently to frame everything from economic policy to education reform (Lincicome 1993, Ehara 1992) in ways that shifted over the

years, it affords no simple reading.

In this paper, I attempt to sketch out the manner in which *kokusaika* emerged as such a “potent and significant” word in the first place, focusing especially on the late 1960s. For it was from this time that *kokusaika* – a word that had already had a place in the Japanese lexicon – came to be invested with values and meanings that turned it into an ideologically charged catchword. I draw most of all on a survey of Japanese newspaper articles, going back to the mid-1950s, in order to gauge how the term “*kokusaika*” was utilized in public-sphere discourse. I also examine how the term was used in a 1967 report issued by the Japanese government’s Economic Planning Agency as an index of how the state itself was involved in facilitating adoption of the term and investing it with significance.

Writing from the vantage point of the 1990s, Robertson provides the intriguing claim that *kokusaika*, rather than focusing on “hard” economic and political linkages, was used most often in regard to a “soft,” affective realm (1997, p. 100). There is much evidence to show that *kokusaika* was indeed very much concerned with matters that were “soft” in this sense. A pair of 1987 government reports, for instance, were devoted respectively to “the internationalization of the lifestyle of the nation’s people” and “the internationalization of the consciousness of the nation’s people” (Keizai Kikakuchô Kokumin-seikatsu-kyoku 1987a & 1987b). Yet, what my research suggests is that this was more true of *kokusaika* discourse at a particular stage in its development. When that discourse was first taking shape in the late 1960s, *kokusaika* was in fact tied explicitly to political-economic tensions and transformations that Japan was facing and could scarcely be understood outside of that context.

Internationalization domesticated

Although the word *kokusaika* first appeared in Japanese in the 1920s, it did not really come into its own – following the Second World War – until the late 1960s (see Itô 1990, Kitamura 1990). Newspaper headlines from the 1950s to the mid-1960s suggest that if *kokusaika* had not yet become a full-fledged catchword, it had nonetheless attained a certain consistency or regularity in its usage. In particular, it was used to denote situations elsewhere in the world that were poised at a period of transition – most often involving war, armed conflict, or other turbulence. *Kokusaika* was used in this way to depict the emerging conditions of upheaval or conflict in other regions of the world, such as Cuba, Algeria, the Congo or – somewhat closer to home –

Laos and Vietnam. Here kokusaika was used to convey the sense of a political-military situation in the process of escalation, one that had become or was threatening to become “international” either by spilling beyond the borders of the nation in which it had heretofore been contained, or through the incursion of an outside force. Whether used to denote eruption or intrusion, kokusaika announced forceful impingements of one nation-state upon another, and domestic matters being transformed into turbulent, international contests of power and control. It is perhaps not surprising that in such instances the word kokusaika was often used in conjunction with terms like *osore* (fear), *kenen* (anxiety, fear), or *kiken* (danger) (see, for instance, AS 1954a, 1954b, 1958, 1960a, 1960b).

By the end of the 1960s, however, kokusaika seems to have undergone a dramatic change in referential usage. Unlike the above examples, where kokusaika referred to processes, states of affairs, and events unfolding elsewhere in the world, it came to be used almost exclusively with regard to Japan itself. Quite suddenly, in the late 1960s, internationalization emerged as a process that Japan itself was enmeshed in and preoccupied with; instances of internationalization that might be occurring elsewhere in the world essentially ceased to be considered under the heading of kokusaika. Instead, phrases like “the internationalization of Japan” (*nihon no kokusaika*) and “the internationalization of the Japanese economy” (*nihon keizai no kokusaika*) became commonplace, and remained so through the 1970s and 80s and on into the 90s. This is not to say that countries other than Japan were not involved in their own processes of internationalization, but that, insofar as kokusaika discourse in Japan was concerned, explicit attention to internationalization as it might have pertained to any country but Japan virtually evaporated. By the early 1970s, at the latest, “kokusaika” as such had become a thoroughly domesticated thing.

Economic liberalization

What brought this about, it seems, was the rising discourse in government, economic, and business circles about changes underway that would significantly affect Japan’s national-economic interests: the liberalization of trade and capital. The Japanese state of course played no small part in bringing about these changes, and to an extent also in attaching the name “internationalization” to them. In one relatively early use of the term, the Economic Planning Agency (EPA) made internationalization a key focal point of its Economic and Social Development Plan

of 1967. In this Plan, the EPA refers to “complete internationalization” (*zenmenteki kokusaika*) as having two aspects: trade liberalization and capital liberalization. It presents trade liberalization as something that has, to a significant degree, already been accomplished; what Japan must now confront to bring about complete internationalization is the liberalization of capital (see Keizai Kikakuchô Sôgô Keikakukyoku 1967, pp. 13-17). This EPA Plan, like others, was more a compilation of projections for economic growth and a vision of how this growth ought be channeled rather than a master blueprint for managing the economy. It nonetheless did promote its own vision of internationalization in terms of liberalization, and in so doing it helped grant currency to kokusaika as an explicitly national-economic concern. Other deployments of the term in this period reflected a similarly economic focus. A 1968 article in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, for instance, characterized the government’s intention of liberalizing the import of cars and car parts as making way for “the age of full-fledged internationalization” (*honkakuteki na kokusaika jidai*) (AS 1968).

The EPA certainly did not single-handedly put this new discursive spin on the term kokusaika, but such usages by the EPA are nonetheless significant because of the agency’s position as an organ of the state. This is not to say that there was a singularly unified view of liberalization and kokusaika from the Japanese government. The Ministry of Agriculture, for instance, was strongly opposed to liberalization on the grounds that it would be harmful to Japan’s farming populations and agricultural interests. The EPA, for its part, was a consultative body attached to the Prime Minister’s Office, and given that Japan’s post-war “developmentalism” emphasized the growth of the economy above all else (Gao 1997), the EPA and other economically-minded parts of the Japanese state in the end had more influence in defining the terms of Japan’s national interests. Through its regular economic reports and assessments, its “plans” for the short-term growth of the country, and its surveys and prescriptive reports, the EPA helped define the national interest in decidedly pro-liberalization terms, and its pronouncements on kokusaika thus carried the added weight of this authority.

Economic liberalization, rather than bursting rapidly onto the scene in the late 1960s, was a piecemeal process of change that – for Japan – unfolded throughout the 1960s. Prompted by the postwar movement to build a unified European market, economic liberalization had become an “irresistible trend” in the world’s major industrialized countries by the end of the 1950s (Gao 1997, pp. 263-4), and in connection with this, Japan faced increasing pressure to adopt a similarly open stance

toward liberalization. As Bai Gao notes: “When Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke visited the United States [in 1959] to renew the U.S.-Japan security treaty, the U.S. government demanded that Japan proceed with the liberalization of trade. At the annual meetings of the IMF and GATT, U.S. representatives strongly criticized Japan for its restrictions on imports” (1997, p. 264). The following year, despite domestic opposition and anxiety, Japan adopted its outline Plan for the Liberalization of Trade and Currency Exchange, which sought to liberalize trade to 80% over three years (Gao 1997, p. 266; Kô sai 1988, p. 522). Under continuing criticism and pressure from foreign countries, particularly the United States, Japan adopted additional liberalization measures throughout the remainder of the 1960s. In 1963, Japan became an IMF “Article 8” country, which required that it not place restrictions on foreign trade; in 1964 it joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an entity devoted to the liberalization of trade and capital and to whose principles Japan was expected to adhere; in 1967, Japan took yet another liberalization step in adopting its Fundamental Plan for Capital Liberalization (Kô sai 1988, p. 522).

Fear

To be sure, there was a great deal of concern in Japan about the effects that liberalization would have on Japan’s national-economic interests. Prior to the liberalization measures taken in the 1960s, Japan’s foreign trade, foreign exchange, and capital movements had all been under the control of the state; Japan had been enjoying a period of high economic growth since about 1955, and many felt that the loosening of state controls on imports and the movement of capital would have a detrimental effect on the country’s industries and enterprises (Kô sai 1988, pp. 522-3). In Chalmers Johnson’s view, the liberalization of capital was of special concern: the very thought of it, he writes, “struck terror in the hearts of MITI [Ministry of International Trade and Industry] officials and Japanese industry leaders” (1982, p. 276). According to Johnson, the fear was that “the United States had for all intents and purposes ‘bought’ Europe – and was about to buy Japan as well” (Johnson 1982, p. 276).

In this context, the term *kokusaika* served to help galvanize attention and mobilize responses to the apparent threats posed to the nation’s economic interests. A newspaper article on the auto industry thus referred to *kokusaika* in terms of the

elimination of two “moats” – trade (import) liberalization and capital liberalization – that had heretofore surrounded and protected Japanese automakers (AS 1968). Another article addressing *kokusaika* depicted the Japanese economy as becoming “naked” (*hadaka ni naru nihon keizai*) (AS 1967a). Also covered in the press was a 1969 report by the Economic Planning Agency which, playing upon the sense of fear for the nation’s economic interests, urged that “‘internationalization’ should not be dealt with passively, but should be actively put to use... for the building of long-term prosperity” (AS 1969). Later the same year, a memorandum issued for public consumption by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry proclaimed that in the “age of internationalization,” Japanese businesses could not be complacent simply to export, but should also expand their production activities overseas (AS 1969). Moreover, because liberalization was widely seen as being forced upon Japan by outside powers, especially the United States, it was often likened to the forced opening of Japan to commerce in 1853 at the hands of Commodore Perry and the steam ships under his command (Komiya & Itoh 1990, p. 13). As the EPA’s 1967 Plan bluntly put it: “...capital liberalization is indeed a coming-again of the black ships” (1967, p. 17).

Concluding thoughts

From the above, it thus becomes apparent that *kokusaika* did not simply describe processes of economic transformation. It instead pointed to a highly charged political-economic terrain in which Japan was seen as pitted against impinging foreign forces, with the future economic well-being of the nation at stake. It is thus no surprise that before *kokusaika* became a catchword anywhere else in Japanese society, it became one in governmental, economic, and business circles. Imaginatively linked to another coming of the “black ships,” *kokusaika* was – in these early years – still envisioned as something to be dealt with by government ministries, economic forecasters and planners, and corporate strategists. It did not yet involve the nation’s people in any substantial way; the Japanese people were, for all intents and purposes, not seen as having a direct role to play as subjective actors vis-à-vis *kokusaika*.

This would eventually change, particularly over the course of the much talked-about trade friction with the United States during the 1980s, which gave rise to no small degree of anxiety in Japan about how Japan was being seen in the eyes of its primary trading partner. This in turn stimulated interest in working toward better

understanding and communication between Japan and the United States, and in regard to this the nation’s people certainly were considered to have a key part to play. That change would entail an important and unmistakable shift in kokusaika discourse toward “culture” (Oliver 2007) and thus toward the “soft” realm of human subjectivity.

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Note: “AS” in citations above denotes *Asahi Shimbun*.

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