

# *The Western World and Japan*

**His Excellency Hiroaki Fujii**

*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan  
to the Court of St James's*



COVENTRY  
UNIVERSITY



International Minds

Ambassadors' Lecture Series : Coventry University  
in association with International Minds Forum



JAGUAR

*International Minds Forum*

**Ambassadors' Lectures**

*Coventry University, Coventry, UK, 26 October 1995*

Japan's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Hiroaki Fujii, delivered the first of a unique series of Ambassadors' Lectures launched at Coventry University on 26 October 1995.

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Coventry University and Coventry City are pleased to welcome the Ambassador to Coventry University and Coventry City as a special guest for the programme for world peace and reconstruction.

The main objective of Coventry and International Minds Forum is to launch a series of lectures which will be given annually in order to provide a succession of high quality speakers from both sides of the Atlantic to help build bridges between nations in the areas of peace and development. The Ambassador's lecture will be a key part in explaining the processes of their respective economies and the current and future development of their respective countries. The series is aimed at establishing a better understanding of why particular nations and people have acted in certain ways and what changes are desirable and feasible in different nations' aims and attitudes.

The anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the Pacific War, made the duties of the Ambassador of Japan to accept the invitation to give the very first Ambassador's Lecture especially significant and timely.

With additional sponsorship by Jaguar Cars, the series is being organised by George Ball, editor of *International Affairs*, and Kamran Mofid of Coventry Business School, who earlier in cooperation with Coventry University designed a conference on 'Progress and War' to be held in Paris.

Ambassadors' Lecture Series : Inaugural Address  
Coventry University, 26 October 1995

For further details of the IAF Forum write to: Susan Ball, 49 Hugh Street, London, W1P 9JF.

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# *International Minds Forum*

## **Ambassadors' Lectures**

*Understanding Other Countries: The Heart and Soul of Japan*

Japan's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Hiroaki Fujii, delivered the first in a unique series of Ambassadors' Lectures launched at Coventry University on Thursday 26 October 1995.

The Japanese Ambassador talked to an invited audience of 100 people on the history of Japan and the character of the Japanese people, and the light that these shed on Japan's recent and current role in the world.

Ambassador Fujii has served the Japanese Government in the United States, Hong Kong, and at the OECD in Paris, and before taking up his present post in 1994 was Japan's Ambassador to Thailand.

The series of Ambassadors' Lectures, also being planned in the United States and Japan, is a joint project in Britain of Coventry University and International Minds Forum, publishers of the quarterly *International Minds*. The Forum's advisers include Yoshio Okawa, former Ambassador of Japan to Canada, Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia, and John Brademas, former US Congressman and President Emeritus of the University of New York. Coventry University and Coventry City are closely associated with programmes for world peace and reconciliation.

The joint initiative of Coventry and International Minds Forum in launching this new series of lectures - which will be given annually in several countries by a succession of serving Ambassadors - springs from their conviction of the urgent need for enhanced understanding between nations in the cause of peace and development, and their belief that diplomats have a key role to play in explaining the policies of their respective countries and the nature and aspirations of their fellow-citizens. The series is aimed at enabling frank exposition of their respective countries' policies to a far wider audience in search of better understanding of why particular nations and peoples have acted in certain ways and what changes are desirable and feasible in different nations' aims and attitudes.

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The Ambassador's Lecture by His Excellency Hiroaki Fujii on 26 October was preceded by a reception by the Lord Mayor in the Guildhall of Coventry and followed by a banquet in the University. Invited guests included members of the diplomatic corps and the British Government, business and academic representatives, as well as students and representatives of local organisations.

(For further details of the IM Forum write to: Simon Bull, 19 Hugh Street, London, SW1V 1QJ)



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**Hiroaki Fujii**

# *The Western World and Japan*

## **His Excellency Hiroaki Fujii**

I am very happy to be here in Coventry for the inaugural lecture in the Ambassadors' Lecture series, a most innovative joint venture between Coventry University and International Minds Forum, and on this occasion sponsored by Jaguar Cars. Coventry, being an International City of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, provides an ideal setting in which to focus on harmony between nations and the meeting of minds across borders. In this regard, may I pay tribute to the tireless efforts this year of so many people in or representing Coventry aimed at promoting reconciliation between the wartime Allied nations and their erstwhile enemies, including Japan. In March there was the conference on "Forgiveness after War: Preludes to Peace", organised by Mr George Bull, editor of *International Minds*, and Dr Kamran Mofid of Coventry Business School, in cooperation with Coventry Cathedral. In July a delegation of distinguished people representing the University, the Cathedral and the City travelled to Hiroshima in connection with the placing of statues symbolising reconciliation - generously sponsored by Mr Richard Branson - in both cities, and on VJ Day a Reconciliation Mass was held at Coventry Cathedral. I am pleased to note that the momentum generated by these and many other activities is to be maintained by Dr Mofid and Coventry University

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I wonder if I am overstating things if I say that Japan has been one of the few countries in the world which, willingly or unwillingly, rightly or wrongly, has had an bearing on the major historical transformations in the modern world, especially in the 20th century.

From Japan's point of view, the 20th century started with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Buoyed by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance which came into effect in 1902, Japan prevailed in the conflict. The fighting saw the use of machine guns for the first time. It is fair to say that the Russo-Japanese War helped to precipitate the onset of the Bolshevik revolution.

At the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, Japan as a member of the allied powers proposed that racial equality should be one of the guiding principles governing the conduct of nations. This was, in fact, the first time for a sovereign state to make such a proposal. However, Japan itself was unashamedly a colonial power at the time and its excesses in that role actually served to hasten the process of decolonisation in the world.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki presaged the age of the balance of terror. In the context of the Cold War, Japan joined the Western camp to ensure its security. Since then, Japan has had a considerable impact on the rise and modernisation of the rest of East Asia, including China, which in turn has affected such matters as the course of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*.

Today Japan accounts for about 17.5 per cent of the world's GNP. Its contribution to the UN budget stands at nearly 14 per cent and is expected to rise still further in the future. This bears favourable comparison with the combined contributions of France, Russia, the UK and China - all of them permanent members of the Security Council - at nearly 18 per cent. Moreover, for some time now Japan has been the leading donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries.

With all this seeming clout, Japan is far from being at ease with itself. It is in the midst of one of the greatest transformations of its history, comparable in significance to the Meiji Restoration or the end of World War II. How Japan emerges from his transformation - and the process may well take many long years - promises to have considerable effect on the world in the 21st century. Let me try to give you some sense of what this transformation is all about.

I would say that Westerners have traditionally encountered two pitfalls in their attempts to understand Japan. One has been the tendency to search for a single clue that will explain what Japan is. The other has centred on a misreading of its geographical features.

Firstly, since the Portuguese arrived on Japan's southern island of Tanegashima in 1542, Westerners have felt they have many things in common with the Japanese and yet have found it by no means easy to understand Japan. In modern times in particular, Westerners have tended to seek a master key with which to unlock all the secrets of Japan. For some people, the key has taken a dualistic form, such as Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Others have found it in the power of MITI or in the dark machinations of "the system". Most, if not at all, of these theories may apply to a limited extent at particular junctures of Japan's history, but they invite misunderstanding because they generalise too much. After all, one does not apply a single cut-and-dried model with which to explain other complex societies, like the US or Britain.

Secondly, there is the way in which geography can breed myths about Japan. Just look for Japan on a world map. You will see a small island nation at the tip of the Eurasian landmass. One is tempted to conclude that Japan must be a terribly crowded nation and that, lacking natural resources, it has to export or die. This would be both right and wrong at the same time.

Because Japan is mountainous, its arable land comprises about 14 per cent of its total area. Therefore, people have to congregate in the crowded plains, such as those around Tokyo and Osaka. However, the share of the total area taken up by forests and lakes was 67 per cent in 1992, which was second only to Finland and about the same as Sweden, among the major countries of the world. Moreover, there is abundant vegetation in the Japanese archipelago, which stretches from a subarctic to a subtropical climate. Thus Japan is richly blessed by the glory of nature and, although the Japanese tend to live in crowded conditions, there should be scope in the future for people to adopt lifestyles that are more tranquil and closer to nature if they so desire. Furthermore, Japan's domestic market is large and the country's dependence on international trade - that is, the ratio of exports and imports to GDP - is lower than that of the US or China and is, in fact, the lowest among the major countries of the world.



Let me move on from geography to geopolitics. I will not deny that some Japanese are starting to worry about the long-term future of China, especially in view of the nuclear tests it has been conducting. However, throughout the entire history of Japan up to modern times, no attempt has been made to invade China except for two attacks by the Mongols in the 13th century, which failed. China has never been an expansionist power vis-à-vis Japan. Furthermore, one must not underestimate the significance of the sea, which separates Japan from Continental Asia. Even at the height of the Cold War, the sea would have posed an insuperable obstacle to any attempt by the powerful Soviet military to mount an invasion of Japan using conventional weapons. Thus, the nation's collective memory helps to preclude in the minds of many Japanese any real sense of a military threat emanating from the Continent, other than that of a nuclear attack.

Against this general background, I would like now to talk about what I feel are the two outstanding characteristics of post-war Japan: pacifism and a primary emphasis on economics.

Japan's pacifism, enshrined in Article 9 of the Constitution and deeply ingrained in the Japanese psyche, comes from the negation of its own militarism. For Japan, the Second World War started with its own attack on Pearl Harbor, preceded by its invasion of China. Given also that Japan is one of the small number of countries that has never experienced an invasion, there is a gut feeling among Japanese that, as long as Japan refrains from arming itself and acting aggressively towards other nations, there will be peace. This gut feeling has been practically reinforced by the existence of the US-Japan Security Treaty, which has kept Japan from involvement in armed conflicts ever since the war.

The post-war emphasis on economics can also be seen largely as a reaction to the war. A notable characteristic of pre-war Japan was the belief that material obstacles could be overcome by a single-minded dedication to a cause. When Japan began to wage war against the US in 1941, its annual steel production was a mere four million tons - one twelfth that of the US, and hardly warranting any hope of winning the war. Any yet, spurred on by devotion to a nebulous ideal, Japan took the plunge. The devastation wrought by the war propelled the Japanese into

rebuilding the economic and industrial bases of the nation.

Pacifism and a primary emphasis on economics have largely confined the international role of the Japanese governments to the non-political, economic sphere. As I stated earlier, Japan has been for some time the leading donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries. In fact, it is the top donor to about 30 countries and the second largest to around 20 more. This level of assistance is significant, particularly when viewed in the context of the ongoing debate on the nature of the contribution Japan should make to international society.

Back in 1988, the then Prime Minister Mr Noboru Takeshita made a landmark speech in London under the title of "Japan contributing to the world", in which he emphasised Japan's contributions not only in the form of ODA but in terms of strengthening cooperation to achieve peace and in the field of culture as well. As the time of the Gulf War, Japan contributed \$13 billion without receiving much gratitude. Since then, the Japanese have become increasingly wary of how their taxes are spent. Meanwhile, Japan's involvement in world politics has steadily risen and the sense has grown that it is only fair for Japan to have a proper say in international affairs if it is to disburse its taxpayers' money for global causes. In this regard I feel that the Japanese will become more assertive, though not nationalistic, in the years to come.

And yet, I believe that Japan's devotion to pacifism and its primary emphasis on economics are basically here to stay, for not only is the negation of the nation's military past deeply ingrained on the Japanese psyche but there exists a prominent convergence between the undercurrent of the global transformations and the Japanese historical inclination. This is true especially as regards the changing nature of statecraft. The globalisation of industries and deepening interdependence between countries undermine the power of nation states and make it increasingly difficult for them to pursue their goals through the exercise of military power. In fact, the strong central government with a concentration of power which characterised Japan from the Meiji era up to the end of the Second World War comprised an anomaly rather than the rule in Japanese history. Alvin Toffler in his book *Power Shift* refers

to three ingredients of power, namely muscle, money and mind. Traditionally, the Japanese state used to be run in such a way that these elements were kept from combining in the centre. For example, it is said that in the Edo period military and political power rested with the Shogun in Edo (now Tokyo), spiritual power resided in the Emperor in Kyoto, and financial power was held by the merchants in Osaka. Moreover, since Japan was a feudal society, the political power of Edo was never absolute. It was only in the face of the attentions of the overwhelmingly strong Western powers that Japan adopted in 1890 a Prussian-style constitution, which later led to Japanese-style totalitarianism.

A major question for Japan in the post-Cold War era, and one which preoccupied it before the Second World War, is that of identifying Japan's place in the world. Self-discovery can breed self-confidence, which will make it possible for Japan to play a more proactive role in international politics. However, the basic factors underpinning Japan's overall posture will not change in the years to come.

To illustrate what may lie ahead, I would like to refer to money - and you may well wonder what I mean! In Europe today the subject of European Monetary Union never fails to provoke lively discussion. Currencies have great significance for the nations concerned and the bank notes which represent them, portraying personages esteemed by the people at large, function as symbols of nationhood. The Japanese yen is no exception. The ten thousand yen note bears the picture of Yukichi Fukuzawa. The five thousand yen note carries a portrait of Inazo Nitobe. The one thousand yen note bears the likeness of the novelist Soseki Natsume. None of these men was a statesman or held high office in the nation's affairs, and this is not a coincidence. The choice of these three people reflects the values which have come to be deeply held by the Japanese since the end of the war.

Yukichi Fukuzawa, who founded Keio University, had the deepest understanding of Britain among any Japanese at that time, in the early Meiji period. He was convinced that Japan has much to learn from the West, as he made clear in his book published in 1875, in which he advocated the policy of *Datsu-A-nyu-O* ("Out of Asia, into Europe"). He played an invaluable role in Japan's

modernisation process, particularly in carving out the role of business and commerce.

Soseki Natsume, the novelist, studied in London from 1900 to 1902. His life in London was never easy and both British people and his fellow Japanese tended to regard him as somewhat neurotic. This impression was probably a reflection of Natsume's struggle to reconcile Western intellectual thought with traditional Japanese learning. Inazo Nitobe was a scholar who served as Under Secretary General of the League of Nations during the early interwar years. On the basis of deeply-held moral convictions straddling the Japanese and Western cultures, he dedicated himself to the non-military pursuit of peace.

Up to the mid-19th century, Japan had developed its own civilisation through self-imposed seclusion for more than 200 years. It is estimated that Edo - now Tokyo - in the 18th century and early 19th centuries was one of the most populous metropolises in the world of its day and was also known for its cleanliness and beauty. Educational and financial facilities were well developed and culture flourished. However, suddenly faced with foreign demands to open up the country, the Japanese, until then content in their isolation, were overwhelmed by the towering presence of the Western world and opened their country's doors in 1858. From that time onwards, Japan started to emulate the West in building a modern nation. During this process, Japan was split over whether it should try to do so on the basis of its traditional values or whether it should seek to model its development on that of the West. Until the end of the First World War, Japan tried to emulate the West. By the 1930's, Japan's orientation had completely reversed. Thus, soul-searching over its place in the world has been a major characteristic of modern Japan.

Defeat in the Second World War seems to have put an end to the agonised soul-searching about whether to opt for Asia or the West which has characterised modern Japan. The bipolar confrontation between the two superpowers caused Japan to be firmly installed in the Western Camp, or the grouping of industrial democracies sustaining the Free World. However, with the end of the Cold War Japan's "Western identity" largely lost its operational meaning. There have been calls, therefore, for Japan to redefine its identity

so as to find itself a place in the world. Some people have been advocating the “re-Asianisation” of Japan.

The emergence of a so-called revisionist view of Japan in the United States has made some Japanese feel as if they are compelled to choose between Asia and America. The revisionists tend to assert that Japan is “different” and should be treated “differently”. Furthermore, some scholars suggest the possibility that a clash of civilisations might become a major feature of the coming century. However, I sharply disagree with the prophets of doom. The Japanese are certainly different from the Americans and are not necessarily going to transform themselves on the basis of the American model. Nonetheless, when one views the two countries in terms of their adherence to the values of democracy and a market economy, they can be seen to be amazingly alike.

Japan has been the only country outside the West to belong to the club of “industrial democracies”. One of the features of present-day Japan is that it is one country with a non-Western cultural and racial background that firmly believes in and practises the universal values of freedom, equality and the dignity of man, and which accepts the primacy of market forces in the economy. There can be many varieties of industrial democracy. Michel Albert, in his book *Capitalisme contre capitalisme*, classifies capitalism into two types: Anglo-Saxon and Rhine-Alpine, with the Japanese model being of the latter type. Francis Fukuyama, for his part, draws a distinction between “high-trust” and “low-trust” societies, placing Germany, Japan and the US in the former category. Speaking for myself, when I was Ambassador to the OECD, I often felt that, when one compared just the American and Japanese systems, there were many dissimilarities, but that when one introduced elements from the European countries, Japan ceased to stand out to any extraordinary degree.

Michel Albert’s analysis of industrial democracy is most thought-provoking. However, in spite of the two distinct types of industrial democracy he identifies and the significant differences between them, one should not lose sight of the host of features which most of the advanced nations have in common. Moreover, flourishing partnerships are certainly possible between countries with markedly differing approaches and preoccupations provided they are based on mutual understanding and respect. In this sense I am very glad

to note a number of trends which suggest that Japan will enjoy increasingly positive interaction with the rest of the world in the years ahead.

First, the globalisation of business and the information revolution will broaden the common ground between Japan and other countries, particularly those in the West. Second, the rapid development of the Asian region as a whole which is now under way should contribute to the emergence of a genuine and deeply-rooted friendship between Japan and its neighbours, based on a sense of equality and shared values. Moreover, the transformation upon which Japan is already embarking will be conducive to the development of closer ties of communication with other countries.

Today Japan is undergoing a process of political reform which aims at greater transparency and responsiveness. In the economic field it faces the short-term question of how to bring about speedy recovery, the medium-term challenge of overcoming such problems as the burden of bad debts which is weighing down a number of financial institutions, and the long-term need for structural reforms.

There are three basic issues which require action geared to the long term. One of the process of globalisation under way and the advent of the information society. The second is the increasing level of competition facing Japan, especially that emanating from the rest of East Asia. The third concerns the rapid ageing of the population.

These long-term challenges dictate that Japan should nurture new industries with a strong high-tech slant. First of all, of course, the demand for such new industries must be there. This means that, in terms of both supply and demand, the Japanese people need to be innovative and to open up new horizons. For this purpose, people need to give freer rein to individual ideas and initiatives and become more cosmopolitan in outlook, and the economy requires a strong dose of deregulation. Profound changes are taking place in our political and educational systems, in our lifestyles, and in the relationships between companies and employees.

There are two characteristics of this transformation in which Japan is engaged. One is Japan's determination to retain those aspects of its post-war society which have stood it in such good stead, such as its social cohesion and relatively equal income distribution, as it undergoes this process of change. Secondly, in contrast to previous

transformations, there exists no model which Japan can emulate. Furthermore, the coming century will be characterised by a number of features which will be quite compatible with Japanese lifestyles. One is that people the world over will increasingly find themselves living in crowded circumstances - something which will have far-reaching ramifications in the development and application of science and technology, and in other ways as well. At the same time, cultural and religious tolerance will have to spread. Another factor which Japan will find amenable concerns the environment. This is a question of the utmost significance to humanity. As far as Japan is concerned, it raises the prospect of the people's traditional love of nature prevailing over economic efficiency. Thus, the transformation under way at present has an aspect of a return to normal for Japan. In terms of the effect on the national psyche, the experience will tend to resemble the Renaissance rather more than the French Revolution.

I have talked so far about this process of profound change as it affects Japan. I am positive that the Japanese people, both as individuals and as highly-educated members of Japan's political, social and economic structures, have the flexibility to see this transformation through. However, a successful outcome will not be achieved by the Japanese alone, but must surely involve the participation of foreign enterprises and individuals too. As far as Europe is concerned, Britain in particular will have a great role to play.

For one reason, the Japanese have started to discover that Britain, which is at the vanguard of the movement pressing for economic deregulation, is a society from which they can draw inspiration. Moreover, the Japanese are increasingly attracted by the way of life of the British people. In the coming information age, where the importance of software will rise relentlessly, the flexible nature of Britain's society and economy will become a new source of strength. Secondly, the globalisation of economies and information will not be the same as homogeneity. Instead of a single global village, we are likely to see a multiplicity of quite different global villages living in harmony. Yes, harmony - something dear to the hearts of the Japanese. In fact the old name for Japan, "Yamato", literally means "great harmony".

Britain has adopted an admirably pragmatic and positive approach to Japan, based on the broadminded recognition of the fact that

all countries have their own traditions which are worthy of respect. As for Japan, its post-war moorings in the Western world have been predominantly with the United States. However, now that the Cold War is over, Japan senses the need for another mooring - in Europe.

I began my observations today with my remark about being a professional optimist. In fact, with all the earthquakes, the activities of religious extremists, the problems of the banks, and of a slow economic recovery, you could be forgiven for expecting the Japanese people to be pessimistic. However, this is not necessarily the case. For instance, even though much has been made of Japan's rapidly ageing society and the welfare burden this is likely to represent in years to come, the term "silver economy" has gained currency, indicating a preference for viewing the rising numbers of elderly people as assets for the economy.

When Japan came face to face with the perceived might of the Western colonial powers in the Meiji era, it had no option but to contemplate the need for very drastic and traumatic change. The second transformation in 1945 took place in dire circumstances, when little remained of Tokyo but bomb debris. By comparison, the transformation now taking place in Japan is quite benign. True, we may have to adjust our aspirations to the realities of a crowded world in which nature has to be accorded greater respect and where it is simply unthinkable to waste energy and other resources. For many Japanese, however, what we are really heading for is, in a sense, a return to our historical roots.

Besides, there is one big bonus in the offing for Japan. For the first time in its history, Japan has a real chance to form some solid, genuine friendships which will endure. The Japanese will increasingly feel at home in the great global village, where tolerance - both cultural and racial - will prevail. In Japan there is an old saying: "Even a small insect one inch long has a soul of half an inch". Thus people and all other inhabitants of the natural world are thought to have individual souls and therefore to have intrinsic value, no matter how seemingly little.

Finally, I would like to quote a few words from Inazo Nitobe's book *Bushido* ("The Soul of Japan"), which was published in 1899:

"We smile as if we had outgrown it as the boyish desire of the young Britisher, Tom Brown, to leave behind him the name



of a fellow who never bullied a little boy or turned his back on a big one'. And yet, who does not know that this desire is the cornerstone on which moral structure of mighty dimensions can be reared? This desire of Tom's is the basis on which the greatness of Britain is largely built".

What Nitobe wanted to say was that there is a sense of fairness in *Bushido*, Japan's warrior code, which echoes the ideal of fair play that one associates with Britain. However, contrary to Nitobe's fervent wish, the Japanese militarists who later came to power did not observe this lofty ideal in their dealings with the rest of the world. This time around, I am optimistic that Japan will live up to Nitobe's expectations.