

## Keynote Address. Japanese Civilization in the Modern Age : Amusement as a Subject for the Comparative Study of Civilization

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# Keynote Address. Japanese Civilization in the Modern Age: Amusement as a Subject for the Comparative Study of Civiliza- tion

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the eleventh International Symposium in Civilization Studies held under the auspices of the Taniguchi Foundation. In these symposia we have investigated the nature of modern Japanese civilization by attacking the question of what Japanese civilization consists of in the modern age from a number of different aspects. These have included "Life and Society" and "Cities and Urbanization," while we have also looked at "Administrative Organizations" and "Economic Institutions." We have considered the roles that factors such as "Knowledge and Education," "Religion" and "Language, Literacy and Writing" play in the fabric of a civilization, and whether the structures of the world's many civilizations are different because of respective differences in these factors. We have used other themes also, such as "Domestic Organization," "Tourism" and "Technology," to home in on civilization in Japan as it is today. Our theme this year is "Amusement." In plainer words this means "enjoying oneself." How, then, does "Amusement" affect modern Japanese civilization? How does "Amusement" fit in to our civilized society? And what happens when we make comparisons with some of the many other civilizations of the world? These are all questions which this year's symposium aims to address.

Why should amusement be the subject of this symposium? In the modern age there has been a huge change in amusement around the world. There have been huge developments in recreation and amusement facilities and equipment. With technological developments initially having taken place in western Europe, in photography and film and in image and sound reproduction (in audio and video

recorders, for example), a situation has now evolved whereby all around the world and at any time of day one can enjoy the same images and the same sounds.

The changes in amusement which accompany these technological advances have given birth to all sorts of new equipment in Japan over recent years. The bulk of this equipment is closely connected to state of the art technologies, and they include the "Famicon" or family computer, for example, personal computer networks, *karaoke*, *pachinko* (pin-ball) and games machines. Amongst this equipment are some machines developed by Japanese people for Japanese people, and which perhaps one would not enjoy if one were not Japanese. Yet surprisingly they seem to be penetrating into Asia and Europe. *Karaoke* is a good example of this. Recent reports speak of *karaoke* bars opening in places as diverse as London and Lhasa in Tibet.

The amusement equipment that has been developed this century is sweeping through and conquering the world as part of modern civilization, while Japan is at the very forefront of it. How did this come to be?

As a premise for our thoughts on this matter, let us say that Japanese civilization has been gearing itself towards this amusement equipment since quite early on. Japanese people were keen on having fun long ago.

Japanese people have earned the tag "workaholic" from other countries. They are perceived as a people that do nothing but work and who never play at all. Yet this is not the case. Just as Japanese people work hard, they play very hard too. Perhaps, indeed, this is another aim of this symposium—to do away with the misplaced notion that, compared to people from other countries, the Japanese are workaholics.

## 2. VACATION AND RECREATION

Europeans and Americans, especially the French, work, we are told, to earn themselves vacation. Vacation would appear to be the greatest aim in life. Over their month or two of vacation, therefore, one might expect them to be amusing themselves with a variety of things, but in reality this is not necessarily so. Days are spent simply stretched out at the beach and other places. "Vacation," as the etymology implies, denotes blankness. It involves vacancy and emptiness. At vacation time vacation is thus construed as doing nothing. Likewise, "leisure," which means free time too, also signifies doing nothing. Vacation thus means having fun and this includes doing nothing. Japanese people might find this blank time doing nothing unendurable. Even when they are not working, they feel the need to fill their time fully and to be doing something all the time. There is a proverb in the Chinese book *Li-chi* which tells how "the devil finds work for idle hands" (literally, "when small men rest they make mischief") and this reveals how free time is thought to be bad for the average person. One must have no time blank, but be constantly doing something as hard as one can. Farmers in the olden days, for example, allowed themselves no unoccupied time, no blank time, with the con-

stant visits they made to look at their paddy-fields. They thought that if they did, then mischief would befall their idle hands, and so to avoid this mischief they needed to use their time up actively doing something. These active pursuits were packed with fun and games as well as work. There is another expression that illustrates this: "he who plays hard works hard." What is important is to be constantly active.

Perhaps the reason that Europeans and Americans value blank time is this. In Europe and America, in Christian parts in particular, work is punishment imposed by God, and as a result people's concern becomes directed towards somehow escaping from work. One can say that from this process the Labor Standards Act, human rights ideas and so on all came into being. On days like the Sabbath, on the other hand, which was blank time granted one by God, one must not do anything. It is well known that in Puritan times in particular all entertainment and amusement were forbidden.

Whatever one calls this non-working time received in return for one's labors, be it "vacation" or "leisure" or "spare time" or whatever, it is time with which one can do as one pleases. The individual is absolutely free to use it for recreational purposes or for any other purpose. Presumably as a result, people in Europe do not care for criticism from other people about the way they use their own personal time. Despite a Disneyland having been built in France, there are no thronging crowds like one finds in America and Japan. One reason for this may lie in the resistance that a Frenchman feels to using his precious free time for recreation provided for him by someone else. It would appear that the feeling of not wanting to do the same thing as someone else is doing is also strong. I once heard an amusing story of a Frenchman who was planning to go to Bali one summer but who cancelled his plans the moment his friend told him he wanted to go too. Filling one's blank time is a strictly personal matter. Basically it is important to distinguish clearly between one's own time and the time one uses for other people, in other words work time, and to have absolute control of the disposable time that one can use for oneself. It is thus nobody's business how one uses that time, be it doing nothing or be it at play, and there is no need to justify oneself socially to other people should one, for instance, fritter that time away.

Japanese people on the other hand, while they like to amuse themselves, feel a sort of guilt about doing so. Recreation, play—I need hardly mention the "play" in a car steering wheel in this connection—is superfluous activity which is not connected with an objective. There is no link between this recreation and production. It is wasted time. These attitudes arouse a sense of guilt towards play and amusement in Japanese people. They have therefore prepared a number of defenses to justify recreation.

There are arguments for its usefulness, that recreation is a necessary educational process for dealing with people and that it is useful in a child's upbringing. The argument has even been made that, in the same way that "you can make a living by art, if you know how to enjoy yourself" (as the proverb has it), recreational

pursuits can become one's work and provide one's income. Another stance towards recreation finds that it contains precepts for life. There is the notion too that if one carries recreation to an extreme, it becomes a "way" (like the "way" of tea and the "way" of flowers) and it allows human beings to explore the depths of their psyche. These "ways," however, were established long ago and there is another word incorporating the character for "way," *dōraku* (hobby or fun). New so-called "ways" are closer to this second word, and so the practice of treating them as real "ways" in the old sense can be treated lightly as nothing more than simply playing with words. It has even been thought that recreation is linked to Buddhist training. The literary worlds of ancient and medieval times were connected with Buddhist training, and thus there is a history of tolerance towards the idea of immersing oneself in something. With their various vindications of recreation as education, as a "way" or as religious discipline, therefore, Japanese people look on work and play in the same way as they fill their daily timetables.

### 3. WORK AND PLAY

Our discussion has perhaps erred too far towards cultural theory. Our concern here is to discuss amusement in the context of comparative civilization studies. Let us therefore correct our course more towards civilization studies.

I would like at this point to give a simple explanation of my views on civilization theory. I understand a civilization as a series of systems which have resulted from its institutions and material structures. Cultural theories, by contrast, while they give detailed explanations of individual phenomena, ultimately deal with ideals and values and do not afford explanations for the concrete examples of a civilised society. Of course, it goes without saying, however, that detailed cultural theories provide the basic materials for the development of civilization theory.

It is often pointed out that the distinction between work and play with Japanese people is not as clear as it is in Europe. Typical examples of this fact are the amusements laid on for clients and guests—parties, games of golf, *mahjong* and so on. I gather that one of the participants in this symposium, Anne Allison, has some information about this matter, but it is at any rate clear that one often encounters situations in Japan where one cannot tell how much of what is going on is work and how much is play. A company invites its clients and puts on a party where everyone drinks *sake*, sings songs, perhaps, and watches a performance provided for them. At first glance it would seem that everyone is having fun, yet important information is being exchanged here and business transactions are being set up. It is hard for one to avoid being present since it is the company, of course, that is footing the bill, while the staff members who are turned out as waiters and hostesses might as well be acting under company orders. Perhaps these parties are indeed work. This sort of entertaining was apparent during the eighteenth century at the latest. The feudal lords (*daimyō*) from every clan needed to talk to one another on a variety of issues and when they met, relations were conducted very

much through entertaining. This lies behind the way in which the reception venue (the Japanese restaurant) as a structure in society was set up and maintained so well. *Samurai*, who bore the responsibility for the feudal domain, went to restaurants and tea-houses for such amusement purposes.

The Gion area in Kyoto is a typical example of organizational, institutional and material provision of a system which allows artistic amusement against the background of these requirements. Here *geisha* houses, tea houses where *geisha* and patrons could amuse themselves and so on, were set up as one single system. This is like the world of today's expense-account aristocrats, of which we are told that not all is after-hours fun, that company entertainment is also going on—that half of it is an extension of work. Company trips provide another system. Let us take another example too. Many white-collar workers stop off on their way home to drink at cheap drinking spots. This would quite categorically appear to be recreational time. If, however, you listen to what they are talking about as they drink, they are engrossed in conversation about ideas for reforming the way their company is run or about technical innovations and so on, wrapped up in and devoted to the prosperity of their firm. Someone has called attention to this phenomenon and developed an argument which says that all salaried employees are in effect managing directors.

These sorts of Japanese are not content simply to do the job they have been given textbook-style and are instead absorbed in adding new plans and dimensions and trying to make it into something better. This they do not do reluctantly; rather they feel an ecstatic delight in their work. In Europe the blank time outside the work one is made to do as punishment by God is treated as time for one's own personal fulfilment, but in Japan we can say that one's work itself is that time for personal fulfilment. This system where work and play seamlessly connect is guaranteed institutionally. It would be hard to find this in European society.

#### 4. THE INSTITUTIONS AND MATERIAL FACILITIES OF THE ENTERTAINING ARTS

The Japanese word *goraku* (amusement or recreation) covers a very broad spectrum, and there is a concept of the "entertaining arts" in Japan which sees a fusion of recreational fun and public entertainment. It is an amusement system which developed as mass urban society established itself during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Let us reserve detailed remarks for another report which is being prepared; suffice it to say, meanwhile, that the recreational study of various artistic pursuits was popular amongst the townspeople of the day, even though they were amateurs, and teaching systems to teach these arts evolved along with systems for meetings to allow people to enjoy them.

One of the features of the way they were enjoyed was the lack of delineation between performer and audience, as people took it in turns to perform their piece and then to enjoy spectating. While spectator and performer alternated, they were

in fact one and the same. Everyone, in other words, was a star in the show. That was the system—I wonder whether Europe has ever had this.

It would certainly appear to be the case that in Europe the performer and the audience are clearly separate. If we look at the troubadours of medieval Europe, or professional performers in the theater or the music world, we find the audience in the position of patron, one step above the performers. People who were meant to be spectators, or who were usually spectators, would have been ashamed to perform in public themselves. This sort of environment could never give birth to *karaoke*. A European made the following remark over the question of whether *karaoke* would catch on in Europe. "A song is something we enjoy by having it sung for us by a professional. Why should I entertain other people? That is not the position I am in." This opinion, no doubt, is prevalent. Singer and spectator thus fall into different classes. There is tremendous resistance towards reversing this class differentiation. By contrast in Japan *shamisen*- and *geisha*-accompanied *karaoke* were already in existence in the Edo period; *karaoke* continued, reborn in modern equipment, and the practice of participating was already established as a system with the tradition of "entertaining arts."

What is interesting is that *karaoke* should now be expanding into Europe. Perhaps the *karaoke* phenomenon is showing a trend in which the phenomenon of a sort of borderlessness in amusement and recreation, where the barrier between professional and amateur is vague, is breaking out of its Japanese framework and spreading through the world.

We can see the "entertaining arts" becoming institutionalised by looking at individual recreational pursuits. Among the pursuits favored by Japanese people are Japanese chequers (*go*) and Japanese chess. The European equivalents of these would be chess and so-called board games. In the Edo period there were players who made playing *go* and chess their speciality, with some of the very best of them even being retained by the shogunate and receiving stipends. Although this was recreation and amusement, it was established institutionally. When board games met mass society, however, the retained chess players disappeared and professional players emerged, supported by the new masses. A system of facilities for board games in mass society developed as large numbers of *go* parlors, charging an admission fee for playing, were built in cities; these were widely used by the people. *Go* parlors can still be found dotted around and they seem to be fairly prosperous. Board game publications came out—records of games giving the details of matches between masters were published on a wide scale and explanatory articles appeared in newspapers. A vast array of specialist board game magazines was published and more recently there have been coaching programs on television.

Some of the "entertaining arts" themselves have also created extremely elaborate equipment and facilities systems. One of these is the tea ceremony. While the tea ceremony is a form of recreational amusement involving the enjoyment of tea, very skilled procedures and etiquette have been created, and it has unique equipment in the tea hut, garden and ceremony utensils. It has a vast organiza-

tional structure under the *iemoto* school system, which comprises several million people. The tea ceremony can be called a typical example of the recreational pursuits which have become institutions and which have acquired their own facilities and equipment.

## 5. THE GROWTH OF A RECREATION SOCIETY

The fact that amusement underwent industrialization, so that the institutions and material facilities would be maintained and recreation society would grow, is very significant.

One in two Japanese households has a piano. This is because the musical instrument industry in Japan grew remarkably and became able to offer the people large numbers of high quality, cheap pianos. Likewise, Japanese people listen to and enjoy western classical music and other music from all round the world, and this is due to the striking growth of the record and CD industries. Every household seems to have video games, also, and this is a result first of the spread of televisions and then of the way that everything from software manufacture to games machines has been industrialised.

Since the eighteenth century Japan has become a great recreation society. This period also witnessed the large-scale development of an information industry in publishing, of "amusement journalism." Perhaps this amusement journalism actually made the recreation society's development all the stronger. Be that as it may, the subject matter treated in amusement journalism was information on the *geisha* quarters and the theatre world. Articles reported on prostitutes (*yūjo*) and actors: Who's Whos were published on a vast number of prostitutes and, in the theater, on actors.

After the Meiji Restoration many tourist guides, called *Hanjōki* (literally: "record of lively prosperity"), appeared and these were published all around the country—*New Lively Tokyo*, *Lively Hakodate*, for instance, and *Lively Ōsaka Today*. These mainly covered information on red-light districts. Gossip on theater actors and red-light district prostitutes was also well received. The reason it was well received was because this amusement information was the ultrafashionable information of the time. In England, by the way, gossip about the royal family invariably features in almost all newspapers and magazines. This is because fashion in England spreads downwards from above. In this connection we can indicate that Japanese fashion in former days found its origins in the red-light districts and the theater. Nowadays this amusement and recreation information industry has been taken over by weekly magazines and sports newspapers, which continue to maintain a wide readership.

Various types of recreational amusements, therefore, have become huge industries and continue to be provided for the Japanese people.



## 6. THE DIVISION OF TIME

It is well known that the Industrial Revolution in England was premised on the Agricultural Revolution which had taken place earlier. In Japan's case, however, judging from Hayami Akira's research [HAYAMI 1979], in the agricultural communities of the Tokugawa period which could have been the basis for an industrial revolution, agriculture developed in exactly the opposite way from England. Whereas in England domestic animals, the capital, increased and the farming population decreased, in Japan domestic animals decreased while the farming population rose. What is happening here? Despite farmers working the animals' share as well as their own, they raised productivity. The workload thus became extremely heavy. However, the farmers realised through this the value of working diligently and established this way of life. This was the "Industrious Revolution"—the diligent revolution. They entered the Industrial Revolution without losing this diligence and it continues to the present day. I am impressed by how extremely well this term expresses the attitude to life held by Japanese people and believe one can say that this spirit of diligence constructed the civilization we see in Japan today.

This spirit of diligence was promoted during the feudal Edo period by the family-centered way in which time was used cooperatively. Every area of life—work, education, recreation and so on—was managed with regard to when and for how long and where each was pursued. In the apportioned time and place it was right to give one's all to each allotted activity—if it was work then to work, if education to education, and so on. This was perhaps slightly different from what happened in European factory towns in the Industrial Revolution, where people all around town woke up together at the sound of the factory bell, then all began work at the next bell before all stopping work when the bell signalled the end of the day and time to go home. In the Japanese case one's time was divided extremely thoroughly within the family unit; when the country entered the modern age, the principle of time division was probably well established in the heart of every individual. Consequently recreation time was provided for too, and in it people amused themselves as hard as they could.

The Japanese Industrious Revolution was fairly well in force in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a period which saw the gradual maturation of evening recreation in city life. Night houses and red light areas spread, allowing people to enjoy themselves just in the evening or at night, after they had finished work, rather than having to visit the *geisha* quarter tea houses during the daytime. Then in the nineteenth century variety halls evolved where comic dialogue and storytelling shows were put on as evening entertainment. Play and amusement were incorporated into the way time was divided up in a day.

If one looks at what happens over the course of a year, for example at the ways in which at work Japanese people organise time and places for recreational activities or take their immediate group along to see plays and so on, the Japanese practice of "allocation" is pronounced when compared to other countries.

At elementary school children are often told by their teachers to write down what they did on the previous day if it was a holiday. They write down roughly how long they spent, for example, getting up, washing their faces, having breakfast, helping with the housework, having lunch, running errands, playing with friends, having supper, watching television, doing homework and going to bed, but never is there time spent doing nothing. Japanese people cannot have time that is not labelled. This is a deeply rooted custom amongst Japanese which is a direct result of the Industrious Revolution. It is thus difficult, as we stated earlier, for Japanese people to contemplate lying around on the beach and so on, doing nothing with their free time. The division of time does not apply only to the twenty-four hours in a day; it also applies to dividing up one's whole life. Planning out one's life from early on is another distinctive characteristic.

Can we not say that this division of time means that time for recreation is programmed in too, that it is expertly incorporated into a cultural structure of institutional systems and equipment and facilities systems which cater for it, and that recreation makes Japanese civilization work smoothly? Is Japan perhaps not the first country to incorporate recreation into civilization?

## 7. NEW SIGNS

Modern Japan, with its Industrious Revolution experience, has established a strict sense of time and successfully created a modern civilization. Perhaps now that strict sense of time is starting to crumble. There are several phenomena which show signs of this.

There is the phenomenon of refusing to go to school. At elementary school, junior high school, even high school, there is a growing number of children refusing to go to school. There are various causes for this—lessons are boring, they do not like their teachers, they cannot make friends, they are bullied and so on. But perhaps at the root of it all is an unwillingness to be managed, to be controlled. Perhaps they are unconsciously putting up resistance against the idea that between such-and-such and such-and-such an age you must be in education. On the other hand, it is really gratifying that the lifetime study system (*shōgaigakushū*), which is irrespective of age, has begun to be catered for institutionally and in terms of facilities. In the workplace too, second thoughts were had about the way everyone arrived together and then left together, and the flexitime system became increasingly widely adopted. The boundaries in divided-up time seem somehow to be becoming fuzzy. Perhaps because with the arrival of the twentieth century every individual came to own a watch, previously the preserve of a privileged few, the personal management of time moved forward. Did recreation maybe also become personalised? Was this trend somehow different maybe from the importance attached to one's personal time which one finds in Europe?

In my "Theory of Comparative Entertainment" I have already looked at this sort of individualization phenomenon and stated that perhaps there are two forms

in entertainment: the “party type of entertainment” and the “solo-drinking type of entertainment.” The party type is ordinary stage entertainment.

The performance is offered first to the god and then afterwards to the audience. If you look at it in terms of a way of drinking, the *sake* is drunk for the god and it is drunk in a group. In the modern age, however, with the solo-drinking type of amusement that has evolved, there is no god and no audience. Meaning lies in performing alone. The “solo-drinking type” theory comes, of course, from Yanagita Kunio’s ideas. In *sake* terms this is *sake* drunk purely for one’s own enjoyment. This system, whereby with the modern age *sake* drinking shifted from group-drinking to solo-drinking, is not limited simply to *sake*, however. We can extend it to recreation. This is what I mean by the solo-drinking type of entertainment.

The solo-drinking type of entertainment began fairly early on in Japan with solo poem-recitations and the like. *Renga* and *haiku*, which were linked to writing, were among the artistic entertainments, and thus the so-called literary arts immediately became individualised and personalised. Artistic forms of entertainment which had nothing to do with literature—indoor arts such as the tea ceremony and flower-arranging for example—can be said to have finally become solo-drinking type entertainments as they entered the modern age.

When one looks at the way entertainment is consumed in our modern mass consumer society and at the way entertaining has become nonprofessional, one can conclude that entertainment is rapidly becoming more and more individualised, leaning increasingly towards the solo-drinking type. Artistic entertainment that one does on one’s own is the artistic entertainment of the present age—this is my basic thesis.

One can extend this theory to recreational amusement as a whole. It has resulted in the growth of *karaoke*, of *pachinko* and games. This personalization, however, is most certainly not in the same vein as Europe’s attitudes towards personal vacation, since while the Japanese have the solo-drinking type of recreation as a background, they always seek the presence of companions to surround the individual. The new recreation equipment and facilities are presumably substituting for the companions who were originally there. The *pachinko* player might seem to be wrapped up in an individual world, but this world would not exist without the symbolic companionship of the noise in the parlor. Obsessive fans (*otakuzoku*) also, though one might think of them as ultimately isolated, are linked to the external companionship of PC networks and games machines. With *karaoke* the machine takes the place of the audience to provide the applause. These systems of mechanical gadgetry and facilities have never existed before in either Europe or Japan.

There is every possibility that this new civilization, based on a system of personalised amusement, will move beyond its Japanese framework, like the “entertainment arts,” and spread through the world.

Although I have not been able to discuss amusement systematically, I hope that I have been able to show some of the possible approaches to considering it from the

viewpoint of comparative civilization studies. I hope you will have been able to appreciate my intentions in presenting my argument in this way.

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