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Bringing the World to the Rising Sun

By Hans Schattle



Japan's Open Future: An Agenda for Global Citizenship

By John Haffner, Tomas Casas I Klett, and Jean-Pierre Lehmann

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THE CONCEPT OF “global citizenship” has gained momentum in recent years as a metaphor to describe both communities of individuals and professional and advocacy networks that operate across national boundaries. While global citizenship often comes across as an idea that transcends the limits of nationalism, much of the contemporary public discourse on global citizenship also uses the concept as a way to evaluate the policies and practices of national governments. It is this view of global citizenship, as a series of enlightened and responsive policy choices carried out by nation-states, that drives the authors of a sweeping new volume, *Japan's Open Future: An Agenda for Global Citizenship*. John Haffner, Tomas Casas I Klett, and Jean-Pierre Lehmann have channeled their experiences in academic and business circles in Japan into a tour de force of the country's recent history and the imperative for Japan to establish a new foreign policy “rooted in an enlarged conception of humanity that identifies Japan's interests integrally with the fate of people everywhere.”

True to the book's title, the authors cast global citizenship as an aspiration for Japan's future, not as a description of the current state of affairs. The authors are highly candid, even blunt at times, in assessing the extent that Japan has not only closed much of its economy and society to the rest of Asia and the world but also has constrained democracy at home and maintained deeply entrenched customs of social and cultural exclusion. Political sociologist Rogers Brubaker once framed the institution of national citizenship as a means of social and political closure, a sorting mechanism separating insiders from outsiders. Much of *Japan's Open Future* illustrates how numerous policies and traditions linked with political, economic, social and cultural closure have prevented Japan from attaining a robust vision of global citizenship. Not only do the authors believe that the political establishment's penchant toward closure leaves Japan mired in “global autism” at present; they also believe that a closed and nationalistic Japan runs counter to its own self-interest.

In contrast, global citizenship for Japan, in the eyes of the authors, would entail a new strategy of opening the economy to greater import competition, entrepreneurship and international mergers and acquisitions; opening the political system to stronger judicial oversight and democratic participation at all levels; and opening the culture and society to women, “foreign” residents, immigrants and marginalized native Japanese, such as the Ainu population. The authors also envision a global citizenship agenda that would involve Japan taking greater leadership in East Asia by facilitating regional economic cooperation and possible integration, curtailing nuclear weapons and advancing alternative “green energy” sources to help China, in particular, shift away from its ever-increasing reliance on fossil fuels.

Such an ambitious and wide-ranging agenda, the authors rightly emphasize, requires a dramatic transformation in Japan's current foreign policy, the abandonment of mercantilism in its economic policy and a change in the prevailing mindset among Japanese government and business elites. As illustrated in my own research, which examines how global citizenship is now interpreted and communicated in everyday political and social life, global citizenship often begins with a heightened sense of self-awareness in relation to the outside world. In the case of Japan, global citizenship as self-awareness will require Japan to recognize multidimensional accounts of Japanese identity and history. Japan faces the challenge of moving beyond the myth of “pure” ethnic Japanese ancestry. The authors are eager to point out Japan's richly multicultural heritage and argue that if we really take seriously claims of pure ancestry, most Japanese are, in fact, “non-Japanese Japanese.”

Also essential for Japan, in terms of historical awareness, is some genuine soul searching over the country's descent into imperial fascism and the atrocities perpetrated in China, Korea and beyond during the colonial period that culminated with Japan's defeat in World War II. Just as Germany had to confront its own past before taking on a more constructive and conciliatory role in European integration, the same holds true for Japan. The educational system has been the target of much controversy in recent years for its inaccurate and shallow treatment of the Imperial era. The book underscores the need for change in both Japanese educational policy and the wider political culture in Asia — beyond Japan — that tolerates the absence of comprehensive historical inquiry and leaves generation upon generation of schoolchildren trapped inside rival and often resentful accounts of their respective national legacies. In fairness, the book recognizes that United States' postwar policy toward Japan, motivated by a sense of urgency to rebuild the Japanese economy in order to counter China after its Communist revolution, enabled Japan to “escape fundamental questioning” and rapidly develop in a “state of amnesia and political quietism.” This was hardly the condition in which the qualities of a global citizen would flourish. The authors suggest that Japan should launch a truth and reconciliation commission similar to the South African commission put in place after apartheid, and build a new national monument as an antidote of sorts to the Yasukuni Shrine, thereby sending a message to the world that Japan is serious about seeking world peace and will no longer insist on dealing with other countries exclusively on its own terms.

A global citizenship agenda would require Japan to make a concerted effort to cultivate trust and respect across East Asia and the wider world, and the affirmative steps advocated in the book cut across several themes, ranging from geopolitical and economic considerations to the need for the Japanese to become “open international communicators.” The authors insist, for example, that the Japanese not only need to speak much more readily in other languages, particularly English, but they also should incorporate some of the cultural attributes and values inherent in other languages, particularly from the West, such as honesty and directness in communication. “If honesty is not upheld as a strong public virtue, various democratic goods that are linked to forthright communication — goods like dissent, debate, advocacy — may not get their day in the sun,” the authors write. By encouraging more honesty in communication and more opportunities for individuals to assert themselves, the authors hope Japan can move away from “intellectual insularity” — which would seem far removed from global citizenship — in favor of “cultivating spontaneity and the unfettered exchange of ideas.” This might be a rather tall order in a society that often values loyalty above honesty and where maintaining face is a supreme virtue.

Turning to economic policy, the authors make it clear that they champion “trade, specialization, and comparative advantage,” and thus their economic version of global citizenship extols “mobility, flexibility, productivity, efficiency” and “the intelligent pursuit of risk.” In contrast, Japan's mercantilist approach is castigated as the antithesis of global citizenship, given its tactic of exporting to open markets abroad while closing the marketplace at home to global competition. In the words of the authors, Japanese mercantilism “hitchhikes on open markets in other countries” — once again, hardly the quality of a good global citizen. Here the authors argue that mercantilism not only boils down to a double standard but also undermines Japan's economic interests by protecting undeserving industries, depriving Japanese consumers of access to better and cheaper products from abroad and prompting growing numbers of multinational corporate executives (“global citizens” in an elitist sense) to set up shop in China rather than in Japan, which now has the lowest percentage of “foreigners” of any OECD country. Moreover, the authors associate mercantilism with fostering the same “intellectual insularity” they decry elsewhere in the volume, saying the relative lack of international competition results in “restricting new ideas, fresh talent and novel management methods.”

As for Japan's political arena, the book illustrates how Japan pursued economic freedom during the second half of the 20th century without the accompanying political and social freedoms. While Japan managed to sustain a nominally democratic constitution earlier than other East Asian countries, civil society in Japan remains comparatively weak (with regulatory barriers in place that make it difficult for voluntary organizations even to secure tax-exempt status). All sorts of democratic activists outside the Liberal Democratic Party and the corporate sector — women, the independent press, migrants and refugees — remain disempowered and discriminated against, letting the LDP establishment off the hook in a system of “democracy without competition.” The need for legal reforms that strengthen basic civil liberties is also paramount, especially with regard to the rights of immigrants and non-Japanese residents — a crucial population for

Japan if the country is to rebuild its declining population and diversify its workforce. Yet another prerequisite of global citizenship in Japan, then, is to invigorate democratic citizenship within *domestic* politics and society, with the hope that stronger citizenship at home, as well as a climate more hospitable for those groups now languishing on the sidelines, will set the tone eventually for global citizenship to become a cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy. As the authors concede, it will take quite a groundswell of domestic political activism for this to happen anytime soon.

Concerning geopolitics, the book frequently compares Germany and Japan not only as countries but also as a way to compare continents. While today's reunited Germany is secured by NATO and embedded within the European Union (and by extension open to the free movement of goods and people), Japan remains largely isolated and exposed to various sources of instability and potential conflict in Asia. The authors do not mention Robert Kagan's characterization of Western Europe as a "postmodern utopia," but it seems on their minds as they lament that "Japan is a post-modern state neither in terms of political power, nor economic structure, nor overall national ethos." While Western Europe was ready after the World War II for a postmodern experiment in the partial delegation of sovereignty to supranational institutions, regional integration in East Asia seems elusive, at least in the near term. The book does not expand upon how the countries of East Asia might work to overcome the absence of regional multilateral institutions — and what kind of institutional architecture might fulfill this objective, especially considering the current climate of "mutual political suspicion" between China and Japan — but they do argue that Japan has a crucial role to play in fostering trust and collaboration. It is far from clear that Japan is poised for such a role, especially since it has been moving away from postwar defense policies that renounced militarism. As the authors note with concern: "Japan has effectively repudiated the Yoshida Doctrine while remaining nationalistic in its fundamental political and economic principles in all other respects, and without having formulated a coherent new foreign policy for the new world that surrounds it."

Japan's Global Future makes an important contribution not only to academic and public debates regarding Japan but also to debates on the feasibility of global citizenship. While much has been written about individuals who think of themselves as global citizens and global advocacy networks, little analysis has been done about applying the notion of global citizenship as a yardstick for measuring the credibility and enlightened self-interest of specific national governments and their respective policies. Interestingly, one of the best contributions in this regard comes from Yoichi Funabashi, a Japanese journalist and author (cited in the book) who has called for Japan to become a "global civilian power" and renounce "inward looking exceptionalism."

While much of the literature on global citizenship looks mainly at political actors in the West, this book illustrates how the concept can be deployed quite effectively in East Asia, with perspectives that inform and challenge Western understandings of global citizenship. The book also reinforces recent interpretations in political and social theory that frame global citizenship as ongoing processes of political engagement and discovery — and as a verb signifying ways of thinking and decision making rather than as a noun signifying fixed legal jurisdictions or institutional relationships between individuals and the state. By illustrating at length how Japan fails to measure up as a global citizen and the choices now before it to move decisively in this direction, we are left with a better sense of what the idea of global citizenship requires of national governments. Japan's potential, then, to develop an agenda for global citizenship promises to enrich public understandings of global citizenship far beyond Japan's borders.

Hans Schattle is Associate Professor of Political Science, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea.