



LTCB International Library Trust/International House of Japan

# MATSUMOTO SHIGEHARU BEARING WITNESS



*Through the eyes of a self-styled “liberalist” . . .*

- Events that led to Japan’s war in China
- Efforts to avoid the worst
- Postwar reflection and renewed global exchange

**Kaimai Jun**

*English adaptation by Waku Miller*



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*English adaptation by* **Waku Miller**

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*Matsumoto Shigeharu (1899–1989) around 1940,  
when he was the managing editor at the Domei  
news agency*

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH ADAPTATION

**M**atsumoto Shigeharu was a man of multifaceted attainment who left a broad-ranging legacy. He served in the 1930s as the Shanghai bureau chief for Japan's Domei news agency. While working in China, he achieved a historic scoop in breaking the news of the Xi'an Incident. That incident, described on the following pages, occasioned the formation of a united front by China's Nationalists and Communists against the Japanese.

By the end of the war, Matsumoto had become the managing editor at Domei. He left that post when the agency disbanded in advance of its inevitable liquidation by the Allies. Matsumoto then took part in launching and running a newspaper devoted to political commentary. That work came to an end when the occupation authorities purged him on account of his wartime work at Domei. The indefatigable Matsumoto moved on, participating in establishing what is now the Japanese Association for American Studies and the International House of Japan.

Matsumoto's lifetime of accomplishments fairly glows with a worldview that he characterized as "liberalist" and with an international perspective of transcendent sweep. Sixty years after the end of World War II, we in Japan tend to take internationalism and globalism for granted. Tokyo, reduced to rubble by air raids, has risen anew as a glittering metropolis. (The destruction wrought north of Tokyo by the March 2011 earthquake and

tsunami was a poignant reminder of the capital's not-so-distant history.)

Emerging from the trauma of war and defeat, Japanese pursued internationalization assiduously, identifying it with peace. Japan underlined its identity as a nation at peace with itself and with the world by welcoming residents of all nationalities. Thousands of people from abroad happily go about their lives in Tokyo's cosmopolitan clime and elsewhere in Japan. Countless Japanese, meanwhile, have mastered English and other foreign languages and conduct themselves with aplomb in multicultural settings.

Japanese learned a bitter lesson from their prewar isolation, from the tragic results of being cut off from information about the world at large. That lesson inspired a headlong plunge into internationalization. And just as internationalization for 19th-century Japan had meant Westernization, internationalization for postwar Japan meant learning anew from the West. Japanese devoted themselves to attaining affluence on North American and European models.

## **The challenge of diversity**

Having finally attained the internationalization that they sought, Japanese now find themselves awash in the tsunami of globalization. Globalism and its dizzying multilateralism differ vastly from Japan's simplistic Westernization of the late 19th century and the postwar era. Japanese are at a loss as to how to proceed, and a mute sense of helplessness pervades the nation.

“Diversity” is the mantra for our era. All sing paeans to the multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual values presumably inherent to the world. The prevailing assumption is that societies are sounder to the extent that they accommodate diversity. That assumption crumbles, however, under historical analysis.

Nations at the upper end of the global pecking order have mouthed the sophistry of diversity to reinforce their dominance. But their position is ultimately untenable. People and nations will come to terms with diversity not as something to be absorbed unquestioningly but, rather, as an environmental factor, as something to be studied objectively. The challenge for Japanese and for Japan is to assert a viable identity in a world of diversity.

As we Japanese ponder how we would be perceived in the global community, we have much to learn from Matsumoto Shigeharu. He embodied the globally international perspective that we need more than ever. Decades ago, Matsumoto agonized over the question of Japanese identity. The conclusions that he reached and the course of action that he chose remain hugely instructive. A solid grounding in Matsumoto-ism would go a long way toward preparing Japanese to cope with the challenge of diversity.

Kaimai Jun

Tokyo  
February 2012

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Matsumoto Shigeharu (1899–1989) characterized his worldview as “liberalist.” This English adaptation of Kaimai Jun’s original work traces the encounters and events that shaped the evolution of that worldview. The book is not, strictly speaking, a biography. It offers little information about Matsumoto’s personal life, for example, or about his immediate family. Kaimai has focused rigorously and narrowly on Matsumoto’s philosophical development as a self-styled liberalist.

As an English expression, “liberalist” falls awkwardly between the more familiar “liberal” and “libertarian.” The task of conveying Matsumoto’s intended meaning calls to mind an episode early in my career as a translator.

I worked at a translation agency in the early 1980s alongside a brilliantly sarcastic fellow American. A vexing Japanese term that confronted translators in the corporate materials of the day was *kokusaijin*. The term turned up frequently in speech drafts and in other PR materials from corporate clients. “We need to devote top priority at our company,” a CEO would intone, “to cultivating *kokusaijin*.” The word literally means “internationalist.” But the meaning intended by corporate clients in still-insular Japan differed profoundly from, for example, the (Woodrow) Wilsonian connotations of “internationalism.”

“What in the world,” we translators of the era agonized, “would serve as a workable English equivalent for *kokusaijin*?”



The answer crystallized by my sarcastic colleague deserves a prominent place in the translators' hall of fame: "normal people."

"Perfect!" exclaimed the other translators at the agency in unison. "Exactly!": Japanese who didn't laugh when no one was telling a joke. Japanese who could express their views as individuals. Japanese who could interact with foreigners without tensing up.

In the 1980s, Japanese industry was expanding rapidly into global markets. Its companies desperately needed employees and managers who could interact effortlessly with people of different nationalities. Thus were executives harping on the need to foster *kokusaijin*. They needed personnel cut in the mold of Matsumoto Shigeharu.

Matsumoto had been a pioneering *kokusaijin* for his nation, a trailblazing "normal person" on the world stage. As Japanese strive to remain globally relevant, they would do well to rediscover the cosmopolitan outlook that Matsumoto exemplified.

## Old liberalist

A caveat: Matsumoto customarily preceded the appellation "liberalist" with the modifier "old." He knew that Japan had long since abandoned the liberalism that he and some of his contemporaries had embodied. Thus did the author, Kaimai, subtitle his original work *The Last Liberalist*.

The reader will discover in Matsumoto's worldview a broad-minded receptivity tinged by a sometimes touching, sometimes troubling naïveté. Matsumoto came to prominence in 1936 as the journalist who broke the news of Chiang Kai-shek's

detention in the Xi'an Incident. And he subsequently played a central role in initiatives aimed at ending the conflict that had broken out between China and Japan. Those initiatives were, of course, ultimately unsuccessful. Perhaps worse, they gave rise to a tragic farce that took shape as a Japanese puppet state based in Nanjing.

Another struggle to steer Japan away from disaster is winding down as I write. That is the struggle by the former president and CEO of a well-known Japanese manufacturer of medical equipment and cameras. It began when the then CEO discovered massive fraud at his company. He called attention to the malfeasance, launched an investigation to elucidate the full extent of the wrongdoing, and was rewarded for his heroism with dismissal by a unanimous vote of the board of directors.

The former CEO happens to be British—one of the few foreigners to have headed a large Japanese corporation and the first foreign CEO to have attained that position after coming up through the ranks. Concerned about his former company and about its employees, he continued to call for changes essential to the company's survival as an independent enterprise. He recognized, meanwhile, that anything less than full disclosure and sweeping reform would have repercussions beyond the fate of a single company, that it would compromise Japan's capital market in the eyes of the world. Alas, his calls fell on deaf ears in the Japanese establishment, and he has reluctantly decided to abandon the struggle.

I am a close friend of the former CEO, and I stood beside him in what proved a quixotic quest, coordinating media relations and interpreting for interviews with journalists, prosecutors,

police, and securities regulators. Like Matsumoto in China, my friend perceived an impending disaster that he regarded as preventable. Also like Matsumoto, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to a doomed effort to avert the worst.

The liberalist stance championed by Matsumoto was an efflorescence of the democratic ideals that flowered in Japan's Taisho period (1912–1926). It was a positive, hopeful stance fated to fall victim to the authoritarian opacity of militarism. The reforms imposed on postwar Japan by the occupation authorities replaced authoritarian rule with ostensibly democratic governance. But I suspect that Matsumoto would take issue with the opacity that persists in Japanese corporate management and public administration, that his liberalist values would demand higher standards of transparency and accountability. Japanese would do well to benchmark their democratic attainment against the standards set by the old liberalist.

Waku Miller

Tokyo  
February 2012

**MATSUMOTO SHIGEHARU**  
**BEARING WITNESS**

## The LTCB International Library Trust

The LTCB (Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan) International Library Trust, established in July 2000, is the successor to the LTCB International Library Foundation. It carries on the mission that the foundation's founders articulated as follows:

The world is moving steadily toward a borderless economy and deepening international interdependence. Amid economic globalization, Japan is developing ever-closer ties with nations worldwide through trade, through investment, and through manufacturing and other localized business operations.

Japan's global activity is drawing attention to its political, economic, and social systems and to the concepts and values that underlie those systems. But the supply of translations of Japanese books about those and other Japan-related subjects has not kept pace with demand.

The shortage of foreign-language translations of Japanese books about Japanese subjects is attributable largely to the high cost of translating and publishing. To address that issue, the LTCB International Library Foundation funds the translation and the distribution of selected Japanese works about Japan's politics, economy, society, and culture.

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