

E member

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Essayist. Born in Tokyo in 1933. In addition to his many books -- among them *Shiroi Kumo wo Kaese* (Why is the sky so dirty?) and *Boku no Mawari niha Jikkan Ningen ga Ippai da* (What a great bunch of people!) -- he has published a translation of Frank Presbrey's *The History and Development of Advertising*. The essay here is from his 2002 *Yoigoshi no Zeni wa Motsu na* (Spend it while you've got it) (I&I Press).

A Lower-profile America

It is a gloriously beautiful mid-October day, and my wife and I are back in California after nine long months away. Back in California in a brand-new house in a mind-boggling brand-new community developed just a few minutes from Monterey.

The house is so new the curtains are not even hung yet, so I wake up jet-lagged at 5:00 in the morning and the room is bathed in light. Walk over to the window and look out over the 7th-hole green. It is, of course, deserted at this hour and I have the scene all to myself -- which seems an almost obscene extravagance.

So I throw on a bathrobe, find some flip-flops, and wander outside. Even though smoking has been banned in my house and throughout the rest of the state, I am out in this no man's land enjoying a wake-up cigarette. Of course, this is not really a no man's land. It is the Pasadera Country Club development. And I am here because I sold my house at Pebble Beach, paid off the mortgage, paid the state and Federal taxes -- 28% when you add everything up -- and then used the rest of the money to buy a piece of the Pasadera dream.

This 18-hole course designed by Jack Nicklaus sprawls over a spacious 900,000 tsubo (approx. 300-hectare) site. Here and there, the landscape is dotted with white-stucco

houses with distinctive red tile roofs. It is breath-takingly expansive -- a very American scene. Although it has just been opened, Pasadera is well on its way to becoming a must-see, must-play California destination. As one of the local papers headlined: "Jack Nicklaus Brought His Vision to Pasadera. Now It's Your Turn."

Your turn? My turn. Maybe. But even if not, it is good to be back and to see the vast changes that are underway here at the turn of the century. Everybody is talking about change, a new day, moving around, improvements and upgrades, discrimination, segmentation, selectivity, and more. I hear the cynics dismissing this as "another in a long run of bubbles," but that utterly fails to understand or describe the situation. There is a tremendous dynamism of change here and everyone -- all 250 million of them -- is caught up in it. Never has it been truer that there is nothing permanent except change. Indeed the constancy of change is a major defining feature of this young society.

Within that, one of the things that stuck me about Pasadera is that there is no imposing gate or even any billboard announcing this new resort. Likewise, there are no yardage signs or even tee-off markers on the course. When I asked about this -- don't you think that's awfully confusing for guests and other first-timers? -- I was told, "We are not catering to one-off players. This is a limited-membership community and a limited-membership club. Our members know what they are doing, and we do not need a lot of signage."

Perhaps it is because of the greater concern with personal safety, but change and segmentation seem to be pushing in the same direction. America has traditionally been a very open, friendly, and welcoming society. But now we have restricted-membership gated communities. We have people wanting to limit their encounters in the interests of security. Indeed, it may well be that this represents a yearning for life in the walled cities of Europe.

Finally, I would be remiss were I not to share a new term that I picked up during my stay: high-profile and low-profile. People now speak about moving from high to low profiles -- moving from the conspicuous consumption that characterized so much of America's consumer society to a more low-profile inconspicuous consumption with greater emphasis on non-material aspects. This too is one of the many changes taking place here. Change is everywhere, and it may well be that the only people in the whole country not eagerly embracing change are these two old and old-fashioned Japanese in Pasadera.

Author's afterword: This essay was written many years before Barack Obama rode change to the White House, yet I hope it is still of some interest.

Translation by Fred Uleman

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