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I grieve for Go Matsuura and Takuma Ito, gunned down in a Los Angeles carjacking, as I grieved for Yoshi Hattori and for Masakazu Kuriyama, who was shot to death at a BART train station in Concord last August--all victims of the senseless violence and ready availability of guns so prevalent in the United States. Like Ambassador Walter Mondale, I, too, wish to apologize to the Japanese people.

But I would not say, as the ambassador did, that these killings should be viewed as rare occurrences, considering the 3 million Japanese tourists and 50,000 students who come to this country every year. Of course, he is correct in a purely statistical sense. But this is like saying that Americans do not usually assassinate their presidents.

Random violence in America is so widespread and common that even ordinary people take all sorts of precautions, and not only in major urban areas. Yoshi Hattori was shot in a residential neighborhood in Baton Rouge, La., by a man who said that he was afraid of crime--who decided to shoot first and ask questions later.

One of the many ironies surrounding American lawlessness is that Hollywood films glorifying such violence are enormously popular all over the world, including Japan. I am thinking not merely of gangster films or detective stories, but of surrealistic films like "Robocop" and "The Terminator," drenched in mindless mayhem and gore. Matsuura and Ito were film enthusiasts and had come to Southern California to study filmmaking.

The United States has seen a lot of debate about whether violent films lead to violent (perhaps imitative) behavior, but there is great resistance in Hollywood to censoring or eliminating such violence altogether because it is too popular and brings in too much money.

Similarly, despite opinion polls that show a majority of U.S. citizens favoring some form of gun control, there is great resistance to actually passing such laws. Americans fought for their national freedom using guns, and many of them lived at least until the turn of this century (and a few, in areas like Alaska, still do) in places that had no police, where citizens themselves dealt with crime through “rough justice,” much as the Samurai did in Kurosawa’s famous film “Magnificent Seven.”

Ultimately, the modern state disarmed the Samurai. The Japanese wonder why the United States could not imitate Japan in allowing only the police to be armed. But guns may not be the root of the problem. In a carefully reasoned article in the March 1994 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, law professor Daniel Polsby argues that gun ownership in the United States--whether legal or illegal--will decline only when enough criminals cease to find criminal behavior profitable and when ordinary citizens are no longer afraid of criminals. The underlying cause of crime, he argues, is not the prevalence of guns but the fact that “for certain people, predation is a rational occupational choice.”

Japan, of course, has its own criminal underclass, but it tends to be organized by *yakuza* (Mafia-like families). There are even occasional “gang wars” and “shootouts” among such groups, although American police have discovered that *yakuza* killings often occur abroad (say, in Los Angeles or Las Vegas), where the chance of being caught is smaller. A year or so ago, when Angelenos were reproaching themselves for the death of yet another “innocent” Japanese tourist, it turned out to be a *yakuza* -ordered “hit” on a member of a rival gang.

Nonetheless, Japan is unquestionably a much safer society than the United States. And the United States is probably safer than most of sub-Saharan Africa, Somalia, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and perhaps Russia.

In another very important *Atlantic Monthly* article (in the February 1994 issue), Robert Kaplan argues that crime, poverty, overpopulation, tribalism and disease will soon turn much of the underdeveloped world--and perhaps even parts of the semideveloped world--into ungovernable places where Thomas Hobbes’ “war of everyone against everyone” prevails and all live in “continual fear and danger of violent death.” In such a world, rich enclaves can attempt to wall themselves off. Kaplan evokes the image of a stretch limousine in which people like the Japanese may, for a time, navigate the dirty, dangerous and potholed streets of the rest of the world. But sooner or later the limousine will break down, or an envious and angry outsider will throw a rock through the windshield.

That is why ultimately I have to agree with Ambassador Mondale that the Japanese should not pull up the drawbridge and isolate themselves in their own country. It is worth remembering that the great poet John Donne, a contemporary of Hobbes in what was a period of great civil turmoil in England, wrote: “No man is an island, entire of itself. . . And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

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How to Open a Rice Market and Still Keep it Closed by Ulrike Schaede

The Japanese government has a problem: How to stay in control of its rice market? A bad summer destroyed the 1993 harvest, so Japan now needs to import foreign rice. This year, it is hoped, the harvest will be fine again. So how can the government make sure that the imports will not undermine domestic price regulation, and that Japanese consumers will keep buying subsidized, expensive Japanese rice rather than the equally tasty and cheaper Californian variety?

The new rice accord under the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT) rules out reestablishing import quotas or other barriers. So the ingenious Ministry of Agriculture has designed more subtle means to maintain control of the market in the face of a completely confused situation. There are many different kinds of rice, some of which work nicely for steamed rice (such as the short-grained Californian variety) and some of which don't (such as the long-grained Thai rice). For sushi, you need Japanese or Californian rice, while for other dishes, such as Chinese food, Thai or Chinese rice is much better.

Hiding behind a superficial argument of "national equality," the Ministry announced that all Japanese citizens have to bear the same burden of eating foreign rice. On March 7, the Ministry issued a directive that no rice could be sold separately, but all rice--domestic--and imported--had to be mixed, so that the resulting rice does not have a "nationality." The directive prescribed a mix formula of 30% Japanese, 50% Californian, Chinese, and Australian combined, and 20% Thai rice.

Mixing rice has two effects. First, the mixed result is appalling: You simply cannot steam a California/Thai mix, and neither can you prepare it otherwise. Second, based on a rumor campaign alleging dead rodents and the like in the Thai imports, the Japanese clearly dislike Thai rice. Thus, by combining it with the other imports, the Ministry severely diminished the value of the mixed result.

What may have been the idea behind the "mix directive"? Given the intolerable result, every Japanese in her right mind will decide to buy the home-grown, non-mixed produce as soon as it hits the market again. There will be no need for import quotas or other non-tariff activities. Japanese consumers will happily revert to buying Japanese rice and pay up to ten times more for it, if it only sticks.

And indeed, the first reaction to this policy was a national panic that led to large-scale hoarding of domestic (unmixed) rice, as well as to a sharp increase in national concern over self-sufficiency, and a pronounced aversion to imported rice. By the end of April, the mass media had further elevated the national concern. At the same time, there was also a growing public outrage over the Ministry's restricting policies, and the Hata government needed some positive publicity. To stay abreast of the development and in control of the situation, the Ministry of Agriculture did not intervene when rice retailers, who are regulated and licensed under the Rice Control Law (which has its roots in the 1930s), set out to reinterpret the "mix directive." While still literally mixed and sold in one bag, rice also began to be sold in "sets" of four smaller packages with rice from different countries, bundled together according to the same formula. To give the consumer a "choice," the old blend as well as a completely "foreign" blend of U.S. (40%), Chinese (40%), and Thai (20%) rice is also offered.

Retailers, knowing the Ministry was under pressure, then moved on to ignore the mix directive altogether. But make no mistake, the Ministry is still in control of the market. Because it had become clear that the citizens sufficiently disliked Thai rice and had not developed a craze for Chinese rice either, foreign rice can now be sold just by itself-- with one exception. The most popular of all imported produce, the sticky California rice, still does not sell in its pure form. It is mixed with rice from other states (which remains unlabeled, but is most likely long-grained) and sold under the name "American." The official reason for this mixing is that there is not enough Californian rice for everyone. Some retailers openly admit that the rice is mixed in order to lower its quality, so that they can also sell the less popular Chinese and Thai grains.

In addition to this deliberate policy of reducing quality, the "American" mix is subject to a 580% tariff, which makes it exactly as expensive as medium-quality Japanese rice (\$7 per kilo, or \$15.4 per lb.), thereby removing all price advantage. The Japanese government is expected to make a profit of \$2.7 billion out of its rice imports. This revenue is used to subsidize Japanese rice farmers and improve their irrigation systems (the more water, the less the influence of weather on the harvest). The idea is that as the new GATT "minimum access rule" kicks in over a seven-year period beginning in 1995, Japanese farmers will become price competitive.

In the meantime, Californian rice farmers are bending over backwards to ship highest-quality rice to Japan in hopes of gaining market share. The California short grain is by all measures comparable in quality with Japanese rice; and it is better than all other rice imports to Japan. Unfortunately, Japanese consumers are still unable to buy pure Californian rice and appreciate its quality.

There is probably no better example of Japanese managed trade. (Not surprisingly, the minister under whose auspices the mix plan was designed and implemented was the head of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata's cabinet). First, the quality of the foreign product is disguised by a mix directive. Second, as the panic reaches its peak, the mix directive is "diluted" to avoid domestic and foreign criticism, but prohibitive tariffs ensure that high-quality foreign products don't have a price

advantage. Third, subsidies help Japanese farmers increase their output. All of this rests on a strategy of misinformation to the Japanese consumer. And while Japanese papers cover the story, the rest of the world doesn't hear about it.

To be sure, Japanese consumers are currently outraged with the price fixing and quality control schemes of their bureaucrats. The Ministry of Agriculture rests its strategy on the hope that this outrage will fade as soon as the new Japanese harvest of "early rice" reaches the markets in July and August. Given that this scheme is ingeniously orchestrated not by business, but by the Japanese government itself, there is reason and justification for the U.S. government actively to add some pressure to the momentum, rather than allowing the Ministry of Agriculture to stay in control. The U.S. government ought to insist on direct marketing, without rice mixing by the Ministry. It is arguably not the Japanese government's business to mix U.S. rice after shipment to Japan. The mixing scheme will only damage the reputation of the very popular California grain. The U.S. ought to refuse to export rice to Japan under these circumstances--and then see what kind of sticky rice policies Japan will adopt.

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