

Constitutional Amendment is Out of the Question 憲法をかえる などもってのほか

Miyazaki Hayao

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Abstract by Asato Ikeda¹

This transcription of an interview with famed animated film director Miyazaki Hayao was originally published by Studio Ghibli in their monthly magazine *Neppu*, in a special issue on Constitutional amendment. With a casual, conversational tone, Miyazaki covers a wide range of topics: he recalls his and his father's wartime experience, speaks about his changing relationship with Japan, and gives insight into the Self-Defense Forces and postwar Japan's politics and economy. Throughout, he presents a strong criticism of the current Abe government, especially their proposal of Constitutional Amendment.

This issue of *Neppu* received much media attention, but the booklet was available only at select bookstores: the editors therefore decided to make a part of the publication available online for a limited period. The public interest in Miyazaki's opinions attests to the importance and rarity of this publication, where the globally famous anime director clearly articulated his political positions. Below, the publication is translated with approval from Studio Ghibli.

Constitutional Amendment Is Out Of the Question/ 憲法をかえるなどもってのほか

Miyazaki Hayao 宮崎駿

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I would have become a patriotic young man if I had been born just a bit earlier

I was born in 1941, but I don't remember the Constitution of Japan being drafted.² When I was a child, I felt strongly that Japan fought a stupid war. I heard, if indirectly, some people proudly talking about the terrible things the Japanese military did in China. At the same time, I heard how Japanese people suffered badly in the air raids. After hearing various things from various people, I came to truly hate Japan, thinking I was born in a country that did stupid things.

The war ended when I was four years old, so my experience of the war is slightly different from that of Takahata Isao (co-founder of Ghibli), who is six years older than I, or of my wife, who is three years older. Yet, I do remember an air raid and seeing my town burned. I was humiliated that we lost the war. After the war, many Americans came to Japan, and Japanese people flocked around them, looking at them with curiosity. But I was the kind of child who was too ashamed to ask the Americans for chewing gum or chocolate.

I read a lot of war books. The books published when I was a child were about how people regretted what they did and how the reality of the war was different from what we had thought or been taught. People from various backgrounds, and not just the people who fired guns on the front lines, who were never "heroes" during the war, published stories and revealed things like how Japanese radar was

unreliable and how everything ended in failure despite their efforts and sacrifices.

There was no good news. Hearing stories, including the one about how sailors were set adrift and survived after a battleship sank, I thought it was a pathetic war, even as a child.

Later, I read Robert Atkinson Westall's novel *The Machine Gunners* (1975) and understood what he was saying. The protagonists of the novel are young men in wartime who are outraged at how the adults keep cheering "War! War!" while not taking the fighting seriously. In the novel, that seriousness functions as a way for the protagonist to establish the boundary between himself and the surrounding world. I think Westall is older than me.³ He died when he was only sixty-three years old.

After reading Westall's book, I realized my true nature. I am the kind of person who becomes passionate and ends up thinking there might be something more important than my own life and that I should sacrifice my life for it. If I had been born a bit earlier, I would have become a passionately patriotic military boy. If I had been born a lot earlier, I would have volunteered to fight and died on the battlefield. I think it was a time when you would have realized what war really was only when you were about to die. I don't know whether this would have made me lucky or not, but I had poor eyesight so I could not have been volunteered for a suicide mission and might have been asked to produce propaganda pictures or comics.

My father produced parts for warplanes during the war

Although this is my childhood memory, it was after 1944 that Japanese society and Japan as a country went hysterical. But, my father was a realist and a nihilist, the kind of person who would say something like, "I don't care about the world," so things would have looked a bit different if you had listened only to him.

My father survived the Great Kanto Earthquake near an arsenal in Sumida Ward where a lot of people died. He was proud of his experience of taking his own sister by the hand and fleeing together when he was only nine years old. The day after the Tokyo Air Raid, he visited Tokyo to see how his relatives were. So he saw the aftermath of disaster twice.

My father's student life resembles Ozu Yasujiro's prewar film *Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?* (1932); he enjoyed the moment. During the war, substituting for his uncle, he worked as a chief at a munitions factory. He borrowed money from the bank and invested in the factory even in 1945, when his acquaintances tried to stop him, saying Japan would lose the war. He did not want to acknowledge what was happening in the world. He was probably thinking that he was not the one fighting the war and considered the factory solely in terms of business. So he regretted nothing. He did not have a broad perspective.

Of course he could not continue relying on orders for weapons, so he produced things like spoons out of leftover duralumin, which, although not of good quality, sold like hotcakes because there were no goods after the war. He dismantled his company by convincing a labor union to come in, and then shared the profits with his employees. He then opened a dance hall at the now-empty factory space. Some came to the dance hall in the first year, but it was located in Kanuma, a train ride from Utsunomiya, so after a while it lost customers and was shut down. That's when he came out to Tokyo. So I have seen my mother and father dancing to the Blues. He was even surprised when he found out that I couldn't dance when I was a high school student.

People now say the economy was bad before the war, around 1935, because of the Great Depression, but it happened to be the Golden Age of Film. In other words, if you had a job and money, you could enjoy yourself because of

deflation. My father said it was a great time, though that might have been only for a small portion of people in Tokyo.

What do you think he said about the war? He said that Stalin said Japanese people were not guilty. That was it. I often fought with him saying he must have been responsible for the war as well, but he had no intention at all to think about this issue. He also became friends with Americans right after the war, inviting them to our place. He said he would prefer the United States to the Soviet Union. I don't know why he hated the Soviet Union, but I think he didn't like the lack of freedom. He was a free person (laughter).

It was only in my 30s when I took a second look at Japan.

Right now, I'm reading Hando Kazutoshi's *History of Showa* (*Showa shi*, 2004), but it is hard. The more you read it, the more you learn about the horrible things Japan did. I don't understand why Japan went to other countries and waged the war. Wasn't there an alternative path? It would have been different if Japan had not caused the Manchurian Incident. After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan should have returned the Liaodong Peninsula, saying it belonged to China. Japan did not even consider this possibility. It was a time of imperialism, so probably other countries would not have considered it either.

The Soviet Union, England, France, Holland and the United States were interested in China back then. We cannot ignore that history and say only Japan was wrong. But, it is strange to question why Japan gets blamed when Japan was the last one to join these forces. In any case, Japan was a robber. I heard from my mother how her acquaintances went to Manchuria and how arrogantly they behaved there. Every time I heard this kind of story, I truly thought the Japanese people were no good.

Because of all this, even after I grew up, I did not want to sing Japanese songs. Singing Russian folk songs instead, I wished I could have had a homeland that I could love.⁴ It is not that I liked Russia better, but because I didn't have any firm beliefs back then, I thought there might be something more important than myself to believe in.

It was when I came back from travelling in Europe in my thirties that I re-examined Japan. Though I say "Europe," I only wandered around a small part of Sweden. But after coming back to Japan, I realized how much I love the plants and natural environment of these islands. I thought Japan would be a truly beautiful country, if it was without people. It is not that I came to like the nation or the Japanese flag, but I came to recognize that Japanese soil – the land of Japan – was wonderful. Regardless of whether we are wealthy or poor, we live in a fertile, rich environment. I also came to learn that Meiji Shrine, the awesome forest there, was man-made. I came to gradually realize that I live in an island where the soil has tremendous power.

This is according to Hando, but Japan's modern history can be divided up by along a forty-year framework. Japan won the Russo-Japanese War forty years after the opening of the country in 1865, though it took on immense debts. After that, the imperial, military government destroyed the country over the course of forty years. Between 1945 and 1985, it seemed as if Japan was managing well with economic development. After the collapse of the bubble economy, Japan lost its sense of purpose and started to decline. If Hando is right, it is more than "two lost decades": it will last for twenty more years (laughter).

In terms of history, Hotta Yoshie says that history is in front of us and the future is behind us. So what we can see is the past that is in front of us. I understand that people do not want to see our military past. But, if you were

to become a politician in this country, you should be educated about it and should try to learn about it yourself. Otherwise, you will not be accepted by global society.

Since we have lied until now, we should continue lying

Regarding amendment of the Constitution, I am obviously against it. It is out of the question that this government, with low voting rates, can take advantage of the confusion and makes changes to the Constitution on impulse. I truly think so.

Legally speaking, a Constitutional amendment might be possible if the government changes Article 96.⁵ However, that's simply fraud. That is something the government should never do. Because it determines the future of the country, this issue should reflect the opinions of as many people as possible. I do not believe at all that majority opinion is always right, but if we were to change the Constitution, we would need to have a proper discussion.

Right now, when their statements turn out to be controversial, politicians evade them, saying that they did not mean it. I am appalled to see high-ranking government officials and politicians who do not have historical consciousness and firm opinions. Those who are short of thought should not change the Constitution. They determine policies without any real study of the issues, but rather with spontaneous ideas or by listening to people who say superficial things. After talking on the global stage and being completely dismissed, [Prime Minister Abe] suddenly changed his opinion and said he would basically respect the 1995 Murayama Statement.⁶ What does he mean by "basically"? I would like to say, weren't you completely opposed to it? I am sure Abenomics will be over soon.

Of course, considering the Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution, having Self-Defense Forces is a truly strange thing.⁷ It's strange,

but it works well that way. We should not make it a national army. Professional soldiers are in reality a group of bureaucratic workers who could go wrong. I am impressed when the Self-Defense Forces go to sites of disasters and help people. They work very hard, and they are polite. When they were given no choice but go to Iraq, they never fired a shot and they killed nobody. I think they are magnificent. After the Gulf War, they had to send minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, but they returned home quietly after clearing an area that didn't seem to have mines. I did not say anything, but I was moved. If a war starts, we might have to think about whether we change the Constitution, but for now we should just focus on self-defense. We might fall behind at first, but we should not start the war or defend ourselves to an unnecessary degree. Since people in this country are not used to world politics, they can easily be twisted around.

A long time ago I admired neutral countries like Switzerland and Sweden. I only had the idea of Heidi running around in those countries. But in reality it is different. Those countries are not unarmed and unarmed neutrality is just not possible in reality. So realistically speaking, we might need a certain degree of armament. But I think it is right not to do that. It might sound stupid, but Japan can have a small number of up-to-date, high tech tanks. I actually think they should just have Mobile Suit Gundam marching around (laughter). We can say the ability of these machines is top-secret. I am just kidding.

Anyway, because we have lied until now, we should continue lying. Those people who desire a sense of continuity might want to say that prewar Japan was not wrong, but Japan was wrong. We need to acknowledge that. The comfort woman issue is one of ethnic pride, so Japan should apologize and provide compensation. As for territorial disputes, either we should divide the territory in half or we should collaboratively manage the land. These

issues cannot be resolved by continuing to argue or by resorting to the International Court of Justice. Just as Japan expanded in the past, there will be countries that expand. But we cannot have a war each time. More important is that Japan works seriously to change its economic structure. We cannot have a war in a country like Japan where there are so many nuclear plants. China's expansion is due to their domestic situation. China's contradictions are the world's contradictions so we cannot solve that problem by just strengthening our army and making the self-defense forces into a national army.

What is most important is how we change the structure of our economy

As a constitutional state, it is important to protect human rights; this is a pillar of the Constitution of Japan. However, some people, like historian Horigome Yozo, have said that Japan did not have an idea of fundamental human rights to begin with. The world talks about human rights, but that idea doesn't exist among the Japanese. Before he died, Horigome said we could instead apply the idea of "Buddha nature" (*issaishujoshitsubussho*), the idea that anybody can become a Buddha. Shiba Ryotaro suggests we can apply the idea of honor (*na wo oshimu*), the ideal of Kamakura warriors, but I do not think it would work. Hotta Yoshie has a completely different idea. I myself think that even when the Japanese do not have the same idea in our culture, there is no better idea than human rights. As a country isolated in the Far East, we might have been able to do without it until now, but we need to have a common language with the world as we globalize. We then have to find that language in our tradition and culture.

As I mentioned earlier, what we really have to think about is the structure of our economy. We cannot just create a country where people consume and all people engage in the service industry, with no spirit of making what we eat,

wear, and dwell in. We lose feelings of reality when we work for the numbers (money), what can be used and spent. There are some people who try to experience real feelings, but they are a small portion, so in actuality they are overwhelmed by work and go home to watch TV and read email, which does not make sense.

The market-oriented system that pervades the world today is not working well. We have to question why we can buy three bananas for a hundred yen. It is strange to wear clothes made in a foreign country and throw them away without hesitation. Nothing good will come of this. In the past, mothers made clothes for their sons and daughters, but now there are many mothers who don't even know how to use needles and thread. They probably wouldn't even know how to light a fire. If their husbands do not smoke, they don't even have lighters or matches. I don't think those people can survive in this world. It's impossible. They can't even tie a knot. But when I say this, there are always stupid people who would say we should start conscription again. Those people tend to be younger than me, so they have never experienced the horrors of conscription themselves. To those people, I would like to say, "you should go first," whether they are fifty or sixty years old. If they don't want to go, they should send their own sons or grandsons. Only after that would they understand what conscription means.

Those people should lose the idea that they are the ones who are living correctly while others are not. Conscription is the worst. We should remember how the conscription system is harming young people in Korea. This isn't simply a matter of putting a certain number of guns together and sending the young people out to march. We cannot fight a war in this kind of crowded place. Japan is not a country where a war can be fought.

Do not do things that are in vogue

The Constitution is an ideal, so even if it gets

improved it would not reduce the number of poor people. But, because the Constitution has protected us and fostered economic development in the postwar era, though we might have exploited others in foreign countries too, we barely see starving people in Japan now. Without national health insurance, we would be in trouble and wouldn't be able to see a doctor. Most people in the animation industry would not be able to see a dentist (laughter). Up until a certain period, I think right wing politicians tried hard to fulfill objectives made in the postwar period and create a society where people would be equal.

When the economy becomes stagnant, people start saying that social welfare systems are bad. There are always people who try to take advantage of those systems, but it would be a mistake to do away with them. I do understand that local administrations and offices are in financial trouble. They especially have a problem in the area of welfare. I feel that way when I see the fiscal budget of Tokorozawa, Saitama, where I live. We will gradually be poorer. There is nothing we can do about it.

Instead of talking about future hope, we need to shift our attention to how interesting our jobs are, how relaxing our time with friends is, how delightful it is when you see your husband, and so on. From now on, people are going to have to use these things to find meaning in their lives. There is no guarantee for the future. This doesn't cheer us up (laughter). But humans originally lived in that way.

I created a daycare nursery at work. This turned out to be wonderful. It was great for me. When I see the little ones walking around, I feel a need to ground myself. When I think about how they grow up, though sometimes I get dismayed, we cannot just say they should not have been born. We should, and actually can, celebrate new lives. So we can't say anything but "we'll get by somehow"...

I think that we should let Japan's population

shrink. I think an adequate population for Japan is around 35,000,000. Considering technological development in the agricultural field, it could be a little bit more, but it cannot be 50,000,000. Despite that, there are more than 100,000,000 now. This is why Japan produced things like animation. The animation industry cannot survive in a small market. As the population declines, there will be no more animation industry. "Forever Giants" is ridiculous. There won't be "Forever Ghibli," either. It will actually be all over when Ghibli producer Suzuki Toshio stops functioning (laughter).

The last word from me is "do not do things that are in vogue." This is true for animation too, but if you follow fashion, you are too late. People now say they are uncertain, but I would like to ask if there was a time when people were not uncertain. The situation hasn't changed so much. It is okay as long as we are healthy. If we do not have a place for work, we should just create it. You get anxious because other people are anxious. So, I don't recommend doing things that people are already doing.

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Notes

¹ Except for the translator (who is primarily active in North America), Japanese names are written in the traditional order: the last name first and then the first name.

² Neppu editor's note: The Constitution was drafted in 1946.

³ Neppu editor's note: Westall was born in 1929.

⁴ Translator's note: Miyazaki specifically talks about a Russian song called "Огонёк" ("Little flame" in Russian and "Sokoku no tomoshibi no tame ni tatakawan" in Japanese).

⁵ Translator's note: Article 96 specifies the process for amending the Constitution. "Amendments to this Constitution shall be initiated by the Diet, through a concurring vote of two-thirds or more of all the members of each House and shall thereupon be submitted to the people for ratification, which shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of all votes cast thereon, at a special referendum or at such election as the Diet shall specify."

⁶ Translator's note: though Miyazaki does not name the person, he is talking about Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. In 1995, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, issued an apology for the suffering and damage caused to Japan's Asian neighbors .

⁷ Translator's note: Article Nine the so-called "peace clause" of the Constitution, states that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."