

Note

# The Wheelchair As a Civilizational Metaphor

Wallace Gray

## Part 1

### Civilization from a Wheelchair

by Wallace Gray Speaking with and for Fumiki Narita

#### Civilizing Civilization From a Wheelchair

I'm not yet in a wheelchair myself but have learned a lot from persons my age (85) as well as those older and younger than I. In our retirement facility I've learned to see persons more clearly than how they get around. Mentally placing myself in Narita-san's chair (he's a Japanese friend), I would advise....

- Don't pity me, you healthy ones.
- Use sympathy to raise all the dough you wish for long-term research, but...
- Avoid pity because it suggests fatalism.
- Fatalism innervates; hope copes...
- Do the things that can encourage those in the "handicap" boat to keep rowing. Forward we must go, never resting too long, and, above all, not capsizing
- If you're a "civilizationist," try to think holistically. I sit in a subculture—"the handicapped," a culture, a nation, a civilization, a world, and a universe....
- Don't worry too much about me, but for Heaven's sake don't let humaneness or compassion van-

#### "Whole" within Limits

[*"Narita-san" can refer correctly either to Fumiki or his mother, a widow who is a most resourceful friend and caregiver. Son Fumiki has muscular dystrophy, a degenerative disease that usually allows a life expectancy of around 20. As this same Fumiki, for some time a writer, nears 40, the demands on him explain in part why he and his mother have permitted me to quote him using summary and paraphrase, since I am both a friend of the family and a translator of a number of his essays as found in his self-published work 限りなくイマジネーション (Unlimited Imagination).—w.g.]*

1. My "whole" is still mine, just not the same as yours.
2. Wholes and their boundaries are drawn differently, with limitations and assets unique to each person and culture on the planet.
3. So, the "whole" you see should not be overly influenced by the "hole" in my physical health.
4. Have you read and/or kept as many books as I have? I'm not necessarily bragging. I'm such a book addict, I should ask for therapy, but what about you?
5. Have you read and kept books to the extent they have become a physical danger? I have bought, read, and hoarded so many that we had to move our library to another house to avoid catastrophe from

ish from self or civilization. May our little civilization (s) at least not subtract from this glorious Universe.

- You, Reader, are part of Universe. Just remember I'm part of it, too.

*Hi! I'm Wallace Gray. You may wonder how I—one of those healthy civilizationists got so sensitized to the handicapped. Answer: from friend and colleague Fumiki-san.*

See adjacent column.

the floor above us where they were housed!

6. The other extreme is: Your reading may have been limited, and that may represent a real “hole” but it should not prevent you or your culture (perhaps, an almost illiterate one) from becoming a contributing agent to global well-being.
7. A grade school teacher encouraged her students to “dream big.” To illustrate her point, she had each of us to publish our own “newspaper” (actually, a news sheet). After that, I never stopped, eventually going online with a network of “news and views” for self-published writers like me.
8. Two issues loom over the rest: First, how to make a difference and, second,
9. how to unshackle our imaginations for enlightened activity....

## Part 2

### Fumiki Who?

Our family thought we knew the Narita family, at least the mother and son part of it. Here's why.

On a recent teaching and study leave in Japan we made acquaintance with Fumiki and his mother through the small but vibrant Baptist church in our neighborhood in Kitakyushu, Japan. Without going into too much detail here, I shall reiterate some things already mentioned and underline some additional information. Fumiki from an early age was afflicted with muscular dystrophy. Because of the ahead-of-their-times training of their baby, the mother and the father lengthened the life expectancy of Fumiki and immeasurably enhanced the quality of his life. By the time of our 1996–97 school-year sojourn in Japan, the father was deceased, but my spouse, Ina Turner Gray, gained an indelible insight into this mother-child relationship. After unloading Fumiki and the wheelchair from the car for his English lesson with her, we offered to carry him up the steps into our house. Scarcely taking time to explain, the mother swung her 25 or 26 year-old adult child onto her

back and carried him quickly into his lesson, simply commenting, “I am strong woman.”

As I mentioned above, Fumiki has a self-published book of essays from which I hoped to get a chance to improve my reading of the Japanese language. I presumed his writing would contain a smaller vocabulary and a less sophisticated style of writing than I had encountered in the two scholarly books I had cooperated with Eiji Hattori in translating into English. I should have suspected the flaw in my assumption from the fact that the Japanese was so difficult that even with Fumiki by my side a couple of times I couldn’t even read his book. Part of the reason for the difficulty I discovered lay in his thorough education not only in American literature but in Japanese classical literature as well—the latter in his native language! When I think of the gaps in my translation because I could not understand the Japanese, and when I reflect that often my “educated guesses” were way off the mark, it strikes me that many translators have chosen to remain anonymous so that the original authors will never be able to punish us distorters.

Quite recently I needed a rest from my largely unassisted reading of Fumiki’s book. I’ve transformed about half of it into my imperfect translation. To avoid burnout, I decided I needed a change so I skipped to the end of the book and found the following tribute to Fumiki. The author of the tribute is a retired journalist of fine reputation who in retirement taught Fumiki in a class (or perhaps in several classes over a period of years). He became a friend of the family. Here is what he wrote, introduced by Fumiki’s mother:

**To Mr. Fumiki Narita**

A Letter<sup>1)</sup> of Appreciation

By Mr. Shinya Kobayashi

Lecturer for the writing class held at the Asahi Culture Center of  
Kyushu Prefecture

Translated by Wallace Gray and Kimiko Narita

Edited by Wallace Gray

Mother Narita’s Introduction: “I think this is a prose poem or cheery song with many praiseful words from Mr. Shinya Kobayashi who had

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1) While this is Essay #47 in Fumiki’s book, I’m choosing to locate it before his preface because the teacher’s tribute is the sort of thing a commercial publisher might use either as introduction or advertising blurb to induce people to buy the book.

been a capable columnist of the ASAHI Newspaper. He cherished Fumiki like his grandson.”

### The “Letter”<sup>2)</sup>

Fumiki is youngest in our class.

Feel loved by everyone like a mascot.<sup>3)</sup>

Every time Fumiki listened to a lecture and the conversation it aroused, his eyes were bright.

Oh, you made fast progress in reading aloud clearly.

You created many compositions that narrated daily life, all written accurately and with triumphant effect.

Your compositions had both balance and striking titles.

You have the eyes one needs to search out the best topics.

It is wonderful to have a lot of curiosity as well as strong powers of observation.

You modulate your expressions with great skill.

You like to write so much and so well that no one else can be like you.

Fumiki is a true *fumi*<sup>4)</sup> (a fine writer). You’re one of a kind.

Fumiki made his book by gathering results through some years.

His<sup>5)</sup> young tree has many beautiful blossoms.

All members of the class send heartfelt cheers for this young tree bursting out with great words and letters.

### Note on “Mascot”

Perhaps because of Fumiki’s being younger than his peers in the

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2) Because of the style of this prose poem and the way it ends, we can infer that the word “letter” is used somewhat figuratively.

3) One meaning of this word in English is “bringer of good luck.”

4) Mr. Kobayashi is punning on several sounds and meanings of Fumiki’s name. The character Kobayashi uses here can mean letter (as in an alphabet) or a note of correspondence. A letter-like tree might produce literary fruit or a letter such as Kobayashi is writing. Humor and word-play constitute one of the most difficult challenges of translation. I believe Kobayashi is thinking of Fumiki as a young tree able to produce blossoms like essays or letters to friends that are carefully crafted out of a few years of intense experience. All trees grow somewhat slowly, yet some seem literally to burst out with life and beauty. Since Fumiki is about forty years old now and his self-published book has been published in 2006, including some fairly recent compositions, Kobayashi could *not* have seen just how many blossoms the tree would produce after he used the tree metaphor. Isn’t it remarkable that this sensitive journalist Kobayashi could write his tribute without once mentioning Fumiki’s wheelchair?

5) Japanese tends to be vague as to pronouns, so Kobayashi may mean either “His” or “Yours.” In this essay or “letter” the author seems to waver between his and yours throughout, but perhaps he intends both meanings, since he is writing both to and about Fumiki.

class and/or being smaller in stature due to his disease, he can be thought of as “mascot” without any disparagement at all. Both as a person and as a writer he is loved and respected by those who best know him and his work. This can be more fully appreciated if we now turn directly to the civilizational significance of both chairs and wheelchairs.

### Part 3

#### The Chair/Wheelchair Metaphor

##### Some Astonishing Implications for Civilizational Studies

The implications fall into two broad categories, technological and humanistic.

To begin with, I’m thinking of a “primitive” type of human being who was happy to sit on the ground or on the rocky bottom of a cave or wherever some natural warmth or shelter was to be found. Next, when the species learned to create shelter *with a floor* however crudely crafted, the builder probably felt superior to the human clods who went before....

When weaving was discovered, we imagine a talking weaver saying, “Wow! We’re getting civilized at last. We can talk and we can weave useful things that are also pretty!”

By the time chairs and beds were discovered, cultural relativism and ethnocentricity arose almost simultaneously. If you are used to sleeping on a nice mat, you may be tempted to say, “Chairs and beds are so stupid and dust-accumulating! Why not just roll a futon up or hang it out to air and enjoy all that space you gain?”

Or, depending on where you grew up, you may say, “I’ll certainly never *lower* myself to sitting or sleeping that way!”

Ah, sweet progress. To rise with civilizational technology has only led to a fall into pride of place and people. Each side thinking of the other, “We’re more civilized than you are!” Not too much later, I can imagine a wheelchair-bound person saying, “Don’t look so smug. What good is that oh-so-stationary chair after your bad fall or your increasing difficulty in walking? I can at least move around,” to which a person in a *motorized* wheelchair will respond, “But I can move around *faster*.”

Is this a parable? If it is, it uses ironic surprises to expose how technological ascents may bring about humanistic descents. Were it not for cultural diffusion we might end up simply despising each other’s ways and inventions instead of learning to borrow appreciatively from each other. There is a pride of *time* that can also blind us as to what

some of our most distant ancestors discovered long before more advanced societies did.

Some countries today, because of their legislated policies and technological capacity to construct wheelchair accessible buildings and sidewalks, may be in danger of thinking they stand on a high historical peak of progress in the humane treatment of the handicapped. It is true that for centuries if not millennia those with disabilities have been neglected or even abused.

What came as a tremendous shock to me was the well-founded discovery that our very ancient cousins (not direct ancestors), the Neanderthals, have been much maligned. What should set the record straight is recent cooperative exchanges between archaeologists and palynologists. (The latter are specialists in the science of pollen and spores, whether living or fossil.) This cooperative research has established that the Neanderthals were not ape-like creatures. One set of remains long misled scientists to treat these remains as those of a typical “Neanderthal Man”, that is, a person so malformed and unlike us as to be incapable of human speech or culture. It is now known that these malformed skeletal remains are the result either of a flexed, fetal style of burial or else the Neanderthal custom of paying honor and respect to persons seriously deformed. This buried individual lacked a hand and part of his lower arm. The pollen samples found with his remains reveal that many of the flower species used in Paleolithic burials are the same ones still used in 21<sup>st</sup> century funeral practice—and for some of the same reasons! My principal source for the previous statement is the Great Courses DVD and booklet by Professor John R. Hale (*Exploring the Roots of Religion*, especially Lecture Two, “Neanderthal burials at Shanidar,” The Teaching Company, Copyright 2009.) Hale convinces me that the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was wrong in his claim that the human condition, left to itself, has always been “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” The deformed Neanderthal man was 40-years-old, scarcely a short life under primitive conditions. Hale thinks the reason he lived this long was the care and respect of his contemporaries. The emerging facts point to his being treated with compassion during his life. Also, the use of flowers in a way similar to modern burial custom suggests an expectation of resurrection or some kind of continued life after death.

Of Jean Auel’s novel *Clan of the Cave Bear*, Hale concludes that she has skillfully and accurately represented the findings of science. He says her work is backed up by such careful research that it could have earned her several PhDs.

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As you probably realize by now, I personally believe that every beneficial human invention has potential for both good and bad uses. The graph line for the ascent of human cultures is, in my view, wavy. I'm rather sure that some trends have the capacity to cause the line to dive toward the destruction of human beings and this planet's viability.

A contrasting vision is found in Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Near when humans transcend biology* (Viking, 2005). Some of the evidence Kurzweil adduces is both impressive and startling. In general, his overall thesis is that technological, scientific and computer developments should be graphed by a line continually approaching perfection but in a calculus-like way never touching it. The problem with his thesis, among several, is that side effects of the progress he envisions will always bring new problems, some escalating toward bad outcomes as fast as his singularity curve approaches good ones. I am not giving an entirely fair summary of Kurzweil's position, since the dialogues scattered throughout his book allow the reader to make necessary corrections or qualifications.

With this said, I sense the value of exploring further the wheelchair metaphor to note how human progress can give birth to inappropriate pride and prejudice.

What about wheels and wheelchairs? These are great inventions but each has its problems. What frees me also limits me. The invention of the horseless carriage revolutionized transportation, but its evolution continues to require further revolutionary improvements. For example, the "tired" auto wheel has always had the irritating habit of going flat. This kind of wheel may soon become obsolete if progress makes it "tireless". (Pun intended.) The anticipated leap involves a form requiring no tires. It is even expected to stop looking like a wheel because, when in motion, it magically disappears revealing only empty space. The prototype consists of only specially shaped plastics suited to tolerate hard surfaces better than any tire ever invented. Whether this innovation or another proves practical, the question will always lurk, when is a wheel no longer a wheel?

What about somehow fitting a wheel to a chair? The chair, any fool should have known, holds a person in a *stationary* erectness, while the wheel epitomizes *mobility*.

#### **Part 4**

### **The Paradoxical World of Fumiki Narita**

The same chair that “concentrates” Fumiki into a reader and assembler of whole libraries, as well as a writer of praiseworthy prose, also prevents him from the things “normal” people enjoy, such as long walks alone in the woods. The thing about normal folks “like us” is that we, too, suffer from serious but unnoticed limitations. Most limitations that restrict our “normal” bodies might also free our imaginative powers and even our brains if we were only aware that Fumiki’s paradox is also ours.

I wish to suggest that civilizations, cultures, corporations, ethnic groups, families, even religions all suffer from the “normal” paradox. They also fail to benefit from it.

This relevance of the paradox is a little harder to defend because a corporation is clearly not a person. My retort to this valid objection is: “But corporate society is the soporific or narcotic that allows individuals to avoid applying their ethical codes to the institutions of which they are members.”

The deep social problem most of us seem unaware of is that we are all members of circles within circles of social institutions regardless of our efforts to escape such encirclement or even to rebel destructively against one or more of these institutions.

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Fumiki shows willingness in his essays to talk about his disability, his treatments for the disease, and how the wheelchair mitigates some of the worst symptoms. Why, then, did Mr. Kobayashi ignore the matter in his tribute? Everyone in the same classroom had to be well aware of Fumiki’s struggles. A number of fellow students confronted similar incapacitation.

Mr. Kobayashi wondered how Fumiki put letters together to make literary gems superior to his classmates’ efforts. Perhaps this led him to think of Fumiki as a “blossoming tree.” What Mr. Kobayashi may have overlooked is that the wheelchair was an important component in the fertilizer that enabled the “tree” to blossom so beautifully in so many essays.

Now pause to consider this comparative conundrum. If the wheelchair itself can tie a handicapped person down, doesn’t writer’s block similarly frustrate the aspiring writer? Yes, but there is an important difference, as noted above. While most writers can take a walk in a thick wooded area and come back refreshed for the writing task, the

person sitting in a wheelchair is not free to take a literal walk for his change of pace or activity.

Even God, we are told, took a rest from being creative. “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work” (Genesis 2). If this sounds a bit anthropomorphic to fit an Infinite Deity, is it not exactly apt for Edison-like inventors or astonishing achievers in the arts, sciences, and humanities? Don’t all creative persons profit from a rest or change of pace that creates moments of integration and insight? Sleep can provide this change, as can recreation, meditation, or prayer. The turning away from blockage may unleash refreshing forces from within or from beyond. They are antidotes for the continuous grind that leads to burnout.

Writer’s block may be a bit like the prospect of being hanged when the hanging doesn’t actually transpire. Wasn’t it Samuel Johnson who said, “Nothing concentrates the mind like the prospect of being hanged”? The ominous prospect of surrendering to emotional collapse that terminates literary or artistic output can activate the unconscious to speak to us, “Just relax until your inner you comes up with something.” Then sheer relief can reduce pressure and allow the creative juices (or ink) to flow again.

At this point I thought I should list the many topics our “disabled” Fumiki has written about. The magnitude of this challenge is too intimidating, so I shall mention only some broad categories of topics he has treated: museums he has visited, the family and medical events in his life, and last but not least, the schools he has attended.

The twists and turns his mind goes through in dealing even with mundane topics become almost limitless; my vocabulary lacks words for some of the themes that greet the reader. When you read for yourself the introduction to Fumiki’s collection of essays as well as his first chapter, you may not agree with me that either piece defies precise naming or classification. In that case I encourage you to *look again*.

## **Part 5**

### **Fumiki’s Preface in My Translation of His Work**

**To begin with,**

**First off....**

I’m remembering 20 years ago in Kitakyushu where I spent five whole years in an international program for the handicapped. The plan was that, as children with disabilities, we would place in a time capsule our drawings and little compositions about what we dreamed

for the future. The dedication ceremony for the capsule's burying was held in the Hall for the Welfare of the Handicapped in the Kokura Ward of Kitakyushu City, and sensei Hoda, the teacher in charge of the performance, led in the opening welcome ceremony. As one of three children who mounted the platform, I even got to read aloud my version of the assigned theme, "My Dream". The large number of people gathered on that day in that place quieted to a hush. Right up to the time I had to quit speaking in public [due to my disability], Mr. Hoda was kind enough to praise me and to give this advice, "With the exception of long speech manuscripts, it is, we think, best to practice reading your piece aloud as many times as possible." The day before the program I typed "My Dream" on the word processor, and, then, during the process of reading it aloud any number of times, I learned it by heart. Mr. Hoda has by now been called to Heaven, but I have unforgettable memories of him.

In the Hall Entrance of the Kitakyushu Municipal Center, stood the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dream Capsule in which our "dream" essays had been placed. We were now awaiting the ceremony for the breaking of the capsule's seal and a celebration of the opening in the present year (2006) at the time of the Fall Equinox.

The mini-essay "My Dream" that was placed in the Dream Capsule continues as my favorite among my childhood writings in that it occupies a special nook in my heart and mind. As one of the top things determining the course of my life as a human being right up until now, it functioned as a brightly beaming star or, again, as a gentle pressure urging me to return from a long darkness. About the time I finished my four years as an elementary school student, I began to book-bind the copies of a daily family newspaper, "Pond". Then, several years ago, I started a news release with the English title *HARD COPY*. Also, during that time I continued to write pieces, as well as little items (hardly essays) in which I became perhaps a little fussy about some detail. Yet I'm the one who thought, "I would like to try my hand at writing essays or novels"! Toward that end, perhaps, I enrolled at the Asahi Culture Center for literary composition.

At each session in the composition classroom, a theme or topic for the next week was assigned by Professor Kobayashi. To illustrate the principles of good literary writing, participants in the course were to present a work of their own. At this Culture Center, my work reached a size of 30 or 40 chapters written during a seven-year period. So, recently, I have gathered these chapters into one book.

The improvements made to these pieces as they evolved under the

direction of the teacher were impressive, and the frequent revisions really piled up. When we reread the transformations that occurred from the time of our first turn-ins, we discovered that our fine-tuning dug down as far as each of our individual sentences. What I have referred to as our written pieces I now realize were creations bubbling up from our inner life; they carried the promise of deep and serious import...

—April 2006, Narita Fumiki

## Part 6

### Gray's translation of the first essay of the collection

#### The Bell in the Heart

By Fumiki Narita in Japanese

At the end of essayist Shōno Fuku's *The Road of the Ringing Bell*, a collection of Japanese poetry and pictures, we find an essay with the same title as the book. While coaching a club activity in middle school, Shōno fell from a horizontal bar and damaged some cervical vertebrae; this resulted in a severe handicap.

One day he procured a small bell to hang on his wheelchair. Now when he went along an uneven path or roadway his bell emitted a beautiful tone, something like *chee-ring*.

Although he cannot shake the bell with his own hand, its sound increases his visibility. The little thing hanging on his electronically motorized wheelchair permeates his heart and mind with its happy *chee-ring*. In fact, he has come to want to hear the sound again and again, to the extent that he'd even roughen the routes his wheelchair travels! From that first day out with his bell, its *chee-ring* was pleasant for him. Even such a small thing as a bell could give him feelings of peaceful harmony. He thinks, and I quote him, "All human beings have something like a bell in their hearts. In human life, whenever you face rough spots in the road, won't that bell ring in the innermost recesses of your heart?"

What kind of bell must exist in my heart? I am living a life constrained by physical disability, this in contrast to persons enjoying better health. However, I am not handicapped by gloominess as much as some people may assume. There is a reason for me to watch TV from morning to night, and it is not because I have to lie down all day. All right, ordinary folks go places together and live lives that do not require much extra effort when they go shopping or on a trip. I think

that since I am still young I should continue to read and study in the prospect of gaining knowledge and education. A year ago I joined An Association for Reading Children's Books. The group held its meetings in a public hall. Since I have enjoyed these books from childhood, they naturally still interest me, but I was astonished when I attended our first meeting.

Lecturers have, at least temporarily disappeared, so these meetings require us enrollees to read aloud for an audience. When several of our group notice this change they simply withdraw, but I, who have been invited by a friend, stick around. And then, just as on other occasions, I find myself ascending the stage with my wheelchair and preparing to recite a poem. This is an unexpected development.

At public performances my chest usually throbs, but in my heart this time I feel something growing there. It is a steadying feeling that will allow words to flow smoothly from my mouth. When I look from the stage into the audience I see elementary students who have planted themselves as a group in the front row section. Farther back in the center of the auditorium, there are cameramen standing by to set up their tripods.

I hadn't had experience speaking in front of many people in an auditorium and so initially felt pretty worried and nervous but received good support from my pals and fellow students. I was able to start reading the poem [assigned by] the Tanigawa department [of my school]; I completed reading it to the end. When I came down from the stage amidst applause, I heaved a long sigh of relief. "Narita-san, you did well!" "A very successful accomplishment." Voices of encouragement came to me from instructors and fellow students, and I was indeed happy.

If we students refuse to get up in front of a larger audience, we will just keep practicing and practicing [in small groups] without the sense of improvement we desire.

That day's events gave me courage and self-confidence.

To avoid *pebbles* and *rough spots* will not guarantee an absence of shame, taunting, or humiliation. Though confined to a wheelchair-life, I have nothing to lose and so enjoy the challenge of some rough roads. Also, it happens that the sound of the bell continues to penetrate my heart encouraging me to try to communicate with people concerning my sense of surprise, wonderment, consternation, amazement, fright, and, perhaps, even miracle.

July 2000

### Bibliography

- Besides my own thinking as set out above, the principal inspirations for the article are the writings of Eiji Hattori and Fumiki Narita. Examples:
- Hattori, Eiji, 文明の交差点で考える。(Thinking at the crossroads of civilization, Kodansha, 1995). English version with Wallace Gray: *Letters from the Silk Roads: thinking at the crossroads of civilization*. Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 2000.
- Hattori, Eiji, 出会いの風景.... (Scenes of Encounter: Japanese Culture in a Global Context, Reitaku Publishing Society, 1999). English version with Wallace Gray: *Deep Encounters: Steps toward Dissolving the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mystery and Discovering the Truly Global Learner*, University Press of America, 2009.
- Narita, Fumiki. Self-published collection of essays 限りなくイマジネーション, 2006. 167 pages. Wallace Gray has translated about half of the book as “Unlimited Imagination.” Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

### Bibliographic Addendum

In addition to writing his many articles and books as a civilizationalist, Eiji Hattori has been a major encourager and facilitator of communication across difficult geographical or cultural boundaries. Wherever there are important centers of dialogue about comparative civilizational issues, he stimulates leaders and scholars to maintain worldwide connections with centers not in their home areas. Without intending to criticize leaders or scholars in either area, I would like to illustrate how Hattori helped restore creative interaction between the Japan-based work and work in another hemisphere.

All of us as either individuals or groups tend to lose touch because of the daily demands on our time and energy where we live and work. I need to illustrate this in more personal terms.

After close association during the 1990s with Dr. Hattori on the board of directors of the American-based International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, he invited me to visit Reitaku University where I first learned about the Institute of Moralogy. That visit, in which I lectured to a select group of students and faculty on John C. Plott’s massive project in the global history in philosophy, led to Dr. Hattori’s inviting me to collaborate with him in the translation of the two books listed above. Then, as so often happens, some of us Japanese and American civilizationalists lessened our communication and collaboration with each other.

For example, I did not continue my frequent exchanges with Dr. Hattori, and, in fact, almost forgot about the important role Reitaku University had played during my year of teaching at Kitakyusyu University in 1996–97.

Then several of us Americans lost all effective contact with the Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and Cultures at Reitaku University. We were not even sure its wonderful journal was still being published. An American who had studied Japanese at Reitaku and served as a graduate assistant to Dr. Hattori, was not sure about the journal’s continued existence and suggested I ask Dr. Hattori, who assured me it was alive and well; he immediately mailed me six superb issues of *The Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations*, many of whose articles have pertinence to the present essay.

The moral of this story is: *We all need to work harder at truly global intercommunication.*

### Epilogue

#### “Strong Woman” as the Ultimate Civilizational Paradox

Remember the mother who carried her paralyzed son up steps on her back to his English lesson? Smiling, she simply said, “I am strong woman.”

It would take a whole book to explore the active role played by God, by religion, and, specifically, by the Christian faith, in this woman’s life, as well as in her family, church and world, if we were even to come close to understanding the phrase *what Fumiki made of himself*. Like all profound mysteries and miracles, the full explanations would still have been only hinted at.

Fumiki himself dives into this issue when he studies and writes about the religious dimension of Ernest Hemingway’s *Old Man of the Sea* (1952). I am too old to remember where Fumiki discusses this. And he may just have spoken to me about it sometime. When it comes to God and the human mind there is always unfinished business....

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