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Japan, the United States, and China in the Twenty-First Century: A Historian's Perspective
Summary Response

The author of this article, Iriye Akira, argues that the twenty-first century actually began in the 1970s with the emergence of numerous international trends. This is in contrast to a different idea that the twenty-first century is an age of terrorism which began in 2001 with the terrorist attacks in the United States.

The first trend that Iriye highlights is the globalization of the international economy. He says that previous to the 1970s, the international economy was largely comprised of only the United States and Western Europe. True globalization began in the seventies and eighties when Japan, China, India and some other countries began to gain economic power and entered the international economy.

The second trend is that energy issues, environmental problems, and human rights issues became more noticeable in the 1970s, which is seen in events such as the First World Conference on Women and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The outcome of noticing these problems was the recognition of human rights as an international ideal and the need for multilateral cooperation in order to deal with international challenges.

This leads to the third trend, the development of "transnational" or cross-border relations. Transnational relations differ from international relations in that international relations refer to established agreements between countries, such as laws and treaties, whereas transnational relations refers to the cultural and educational exchanges on a more civil-level. Evidence of these transnational relations is seen in influx of exchange students from China to American universities in the 1970-80s.

Iriye also explains that these cross-border relationships are likely to prevent World War III from occurring. While the hundred years between 1870 and 1970 could be seen as a century of international confrontation, in the twenty-first century, people in China, Japan and the United States are currently closely connected to one another and transnational connections are growing stronger in the areas of economics, culture and education. This makes it unlikely that war will break out.

In the latter half of the article, Iriye introduces the fading of narrow-minded patriotism as another trend that began in the 1970s. He says that national identity is a fallacy because it is always changing and no race or nation has ever been totally unique or alone. Instead, Iriye explains that academics use the words "encounter" to conceptualize the interactions between nations, and "admixture" or "hybridity" to replace "identity" and "cultural uniqueness" when referring to the mixture and fusion of many different peoples and cultures.

Through this perspective, the twenty-first century is comprised of numerous cross-border encounters and an admixture of lifestyles and academia. However, although diversity has become a key factor in this age, it is also taken for granted in many situations.

Iriye closes the article with a musing about the relationships between Japan, China, and the United States in the future. He believes that, although there will always be nations, people now think of their country more in terms of international status rather than domestic politics, meaning

that international factors will become more important than domestic factors. Iriye also says that if China, Japan, and the United States can develop closer relations, they could become models for the rest of the global community in the twenty-first century.