

Re-reading Shuichi Kato's *Travelogue from Uzbekistan, Croatia and Kerala. A Three Faces of Socialism*

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1. Background

Travelogue from Uzbekistan, Croatia and Kerala was written back in 1959. Why should a book written fifty years ago, which deals with the (socialist) world “proved” to be a big illusion, disappointment, mistake or failure, be reread now and be reconsidered? Should we read this work as an obsolete record of the vanished world, or there is a space to discuss it in the current circumstances? If yes, what are those circumstances?

The author of these lines was born and grew up in that, today's non-existing world (former Yugoslavia and its socialist regime). It was familiar to me that Kato spent a lot of time in the Western Europe and was writing about the Eastern Europe and the Prague Spring¹. However, while reading *A Sheep's Song*, somewhere close to the end², I was surprised to find out that Kato wrote a travelogue on Yugoslavia as well, since it is not mentioned at all in critiques of Kato, and especially it is not mentioned as any work of importance. Not smaller surprise was that Kato named it as a travelogue “from Croatia” (beside Uzbekistan and Kerala) and not as a travelogue from Yugoslavia. In the context of today's dismembered Yugoslavia by the nationalistic forces, the first association on this title was, at the very least, strange. The second surprise was on the cover page of the chapter on Croatia.³ The map was so strangely turned that I for the moment doubted that it was a correct map of Yugoslavia. I am quite positive that I never saw such a map of the former Yugoslavia before, and I am quite positive that it was not a commonly used map in Japan either. Croatia was clearly positioned in the north of the map and Serbia in the south. This obvious North-South dichotomy, as the further reading would show, was not an accidental thing.

Kato Shuichi passed away two years ago⁴. His death in Japan led to a retrospective and re-evaluation of his

¹ Kato Shuichi: *Kotoba to Sensha*, Chikuma Shobo, 1969.

² Kato Shuichi: The Asian-African Writer's Conference (chapter 38 out of total 40 chapters) in id. *A Sheep's Song*, translated and annotated by Chia-ning Chang, University of California Press, 1999.

³ Kato Shuichi: *Uzubecku, Kuroachia, Kerala Kikou – Shakaishugi no mitsu no kao* (Iwanami Shoten, 1959, 212 pages), p.133, map, see end of the text.

⁴ Shuichi Kato, September 1919-December, 2008.

entire work. In Japan since his death in December 2008, a series of interviews about his work have been published with contemporary intellectuals in commemorative issues of journals, documentaries, re-release of his selected works and old essays or speeches on different occasions, and a number of panels, talks and conferences on his life and work were organized⁵. Nevertheless, same as fifty years ago, this “compact book”⁶, again has received no attention. In Kato's own words in his autobiography - *A Sheep's Song*, this travelogue received much smaller attention from readership although it “contained relatively more information and more leads to his thinking”⁷

2. The Vanished World

Why was it like that and could it be that this book was regarded just like the socialism, as something that has “little to do with the reality”? Probably that can be quoted as one of the reasons. End of the fifties in Japan was a period of disillusionment with socialism – the Korean War, Stalin's death, Hungarian Revolution and the Taiwan Strait Crises contributed to bigger reserve towards the socialist regimes and its legitimacy. Nevertheless, I will argue in this review that “Three faces of socialism” is an important testimony to a lost world, a world that today, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall is being increasingly remembered with nostalgic feelings. It could be read as critical testimony to a lost opportunity for humankind or unfinished critical project of modernity. Growing nostalgia for the times of socialism that appears today in the former socialist republics of the Eastern Europe does not necessarily have to be an utopian idea, although utopian element is a necessary element of any nostalgia. The author of this review, regardless of sometimes disagreeing with Kato's conclusions, felt nostalgia while reading some of Kato's descriptions like part on giri-ninjo where Kato compared hospitality of the people in Croatia⁸, or in the descriptions of Uzbekistan workers' life that got dignity in socialism or equality that socialism brought (in the chapter on national minorities⁹).

“On Uzbek streets, anyone can be met – Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks. And there is no difference in the occupations they have – some Russians are taxi drivers and some Uzbeks are doctors. This is nothing like the situation in Great Britain where taxi driver's occupation is almost exclusively reserved for Malays or Chinese. In the schools, the main language is Uzbek, and Russian is learnt as second one.”¹⁰

Travelogue itself is a border and hybrid literary genre. On one side it is reportage and on the other side it has lyrical or philosophical confession. Sometimes it can turn into essay or study about less familiar places. The genre became increasingly popular at the end of the nineteenth and especially in the twentieth century. Twentieth century was a century of big and quick changes in socio-historical orders and the time when

⁵ Gendai Shiso, 2009 vol.37-9, Kato Shuichi, 7gatsu rinji-zokan, so-tokushu; La Maison Franco-Japonaise, Conférences Kato Shuichi, 2010/09/17, speaker Prof. Ebisaka Takeshi; Setagaya Bungaku-kan, Kato Shuichi wi-ku 2010/09/18-09/26.

⁶ Kato: *A Sheep's Song*, p.382.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Kato: *A Sheep's Song*, p.163.

⁹ Kato: *Uzubecku*, p.92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.94

encounters with cultural diversities was intensive. Re-reading of those texts (travelogues) can open possibilities of new understandings and lighting of many issues, primarily ideological divisions. People have always divided the world on regions and the most famous such division is the West-East (Occident-Orient) one. Kato, too, was not an exception. From the map of Yugoslavia he put in the book, it can be concluded that by usage of North – South division Kato avoided clear positioning of Japan (to the East or West), or that he took a stance of a Westerner. Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and India are all on the “East”.

3. The marginal

Kato’s position is a marginal, frontier position of the talk about the other. Kato thought that marginal man has no responsibility for the issues around him and that he can afford himself “a view from distance” or “takami-no-kenbutsu” as he explains it in *Zasshu bunka* (Hybrid Culture, 1955). Kato wrote *Zasshu bunka* at almost the very beginning of his writing career and that it stayed an important principle or axis of his thinking throughout his long career of traveling and writing. Traveler is far from his country, in a foreign country he bears no social responsibility and that is an abstract and exceptional existence.¹¹

Kato’s notes on travels in Uzbekistan, Croatia and Kerala represent one more field where Kato’s leading idea and interest in the “peripheral” can be traced. All three countries are situated on the frontiers of ideologically different worlds, between past and present, poverty and progress. And all three countries represent a kind of hybrid of past and present, nature and culture. What interests Kato is in a what way socialism affects a blend of antagonisms met on the borders of different worlds? It is possible to relate this principle to Kato’s famous *Hybrid Culture Theory (Zasshu Bunka)* published in 1955, upon returning to Japan after four years spent mostly in France.

For example, Kato pays quite a lot of attention to the issue of religion in Uzbekistan and in what way socialism can coexist with it. By Kato, there was no special problem in the coexistence of the two. However, some 40 years later we witnessed the rise of the religious factor not only in Uzbekistan and former Soviet Union republics, but in Yugoslavia as well. He is especially interested in Croatia since he sees Croatia (as opposed to “southern” Serbia) as culturally belonging to the Western Europe tradition.

Bearing in mind that it is precisely for the travel depicted in this book that Kato had decided to leave his profession of medical doctor, it can be assumed that this travelogue contains his own principles and experience of the things around him and in himself, more boldly expressed?

4. The Progress and the hope

The First World War spawned the first socialist countries, and the Second one drew many other countries into that “park”, as well as its huge population. In both cases, according to Kato, the socialist revolution did not happen in developed capitalist countries, but in the regions lagging in development, on the “weak-links” of capitalism, and on the periphery. It did not occur in Great Britain but in Tsarist Russia; not in the West but in the East; not in Japan but in China. And now, when reviewed, it is a fact that socialism has faced much more

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

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difficulty in Europe than in Asia. Large number of exiles from Berlin, the Revolt in Hungary; however the observer be fond of communism, did not suggest the success of socialist policies in troubled regions. On the other hand, seeing the construction of for example China and its moral recovery, every opponent of communism who knew the situation before the revolution could not fail to recognize its success.

Asian countries were occupied with struggling poverty for which was not known when to be overcome. However, Kato emphasizes the difference in meaning of communism in developed countries of the thirties and in current-day Asia. He develops it with the following argument – in the West, the main issue is distribution of wealth, while in Asia it is on methods of increasing the absolute amount of wealth. In industrially developed countries, communism was a means for workers to demand fair distribution of wealth. This request has been present for a long time already, and because in the West the tradition of socialist thought already exists, in this sense communism was an expression of this tradition. If we take the idea of equality as a precondition, economic equality should come after the political one. In this sense, this is an extension of original democratic thought, Kato writes. If we understand communism in this way, many intellectuals of different worldviews could stand in the front lines of popular struggle. However, this is just one aspect of the problem. As for communism, in western democratic thought opinions are heterogeneous. In Europe, communism definitely carries an important meaning. Theoretically it is historical thought and practically it is a form of collectivism. On one side in Europe deep individualism is prevailing, based on the perennial quest of humanity for overcoming history. Before Marx, with the exception of Hegel, essentially no-one took historical thinking as a starting point, writes Kato. For example, French Communism, which has been long accepted as the center of revolutionary political thought, has been little influenced by historical materialism. In this short introduction to the topic of socialism, it is very obvious that Kato distinguishes East and West, primarily based on the level of economic development, and accordingly defines socialism in different ways in different socio-economic contexts. The main problem on which he focuses here is the periphery and late stages of industrialization.

As Kato will try to prove, communism has actually got its modern meaning on the margins and in the undeveloped countries. First, he will give common characteristics, and then differences in the achievements found partly within global context and partly within the structure of society. Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Burma, Indonesia, in 1953, had a GDP per capita that amounted to one twentieth of GDP of the United States, one fifth of the GDP of the West Germany and less than one half of the Japanese GDP per capita. It can be clearly deduced that the distribution by simple average cannot solve the problem, he writes. From this it follows that it is necessary to increase the nominal GDP, and that is not possible without industrialization. However, in most Asian countries after the Second World War, the priority goal was political independence. When this has been achieved, comes the second stage of industrialization as the main strategy to fight poverty. In January 1959, Nehru stressed the necessity of industrialization. But, exactly low GDP is the biggest obstacle to industrialization. If there is no domestic capital to invest, and without foreign investments, it is difficult to break the vicious circle. Private capital in general does not go to Asian countries, but for example to West Germany since the business there is safe. Of course, these are not the only problems – if we evoke recent events in Suez, and conflict of Egypt and the World Bank, the Cold War context and conditioning of the assistance, it is easy to

come to a conclusion on the role of global politics on development of specific regions. There are many other problems, Kato emphasizes, like necessity of agricultural reform in India, problems in structure of society which is often a result of the postcolonial legacy, insufficient development of the middle class, lack of managers, engineers, doctors, clerks, elementary and secondary schools etc. In this respect, Kato draws attention to the achievements of the Soviet Union and China. In China, there is no lack of discipline and individual decay as can be found in India, although before the revolution there was a lot of it. This should be a very impressive thing for other Asian countries, Kato writes. To summarize, the process of industrialization in the Soviet Union, China or other Asian countries was not uniform. Kato emphasizes the importance of understanding that he does not say that Asian countries will eventually adopt communism, but that in the case that communism is attractive for the Asian countries, - that attractiveness significantly differs from the experience of the working class in Europe.

From September 1958 to January 1959, almost six full months, Kato travelled and visited Central Asia, one part of India and Yugoslavia – all socialist societies. It was not that Kato chose Uzbekistan, Croatia and Kerala in advance. There was official reason for this trip, but private ones, too. There were some inevitabilities and many accidental things happened inside of those inevitabilities. He traveled to Uzbekistan as a member of committee for the organization of the Asian-African Writers' Conference. To Yugoslavia and Kerala he was invited.

Each of those three countries is far from Moscow and Beijing and is located on the border of the so-called socialist countries and liberal countries. Further, historically speaking, in these countries before the revolution there was absolutely no industry. It means that in terms of underdevelopment and socialism, these countries should be typical examples. Furthermore, these countries possess three strong individual faces – Kato writes. The ways in which communism came to power were different : Uzbekistan with the October Revolution in 1917, Croatia with Yugoslavia and resistance movement from the Second World War, Kerala with general elections after the war in which the Communist Party won a majority. It is the world's single example of peaceful socialist revolution. If we count years of socialism, in Uzbekistan it is forty, in Croatia fifteen, in Kerala less than two – so, three generations of socialism can be seen here. As for the situation before the revolution, Uzbekistan was the most underdeveloped, Croatia relatively the most advanced, Kerala somewhere between. What Kato wanted to see was in what ways life of the masses had changed in these forty, fifteen and two years? Has socialism succeeded to solve the problem of poverty? Kato as the first issue sets the economy. But, the interest is not only on economic aspects. As the second important aspect Kato analyzes the human aspect – hygiene of the body and spirit. Underdeveloped regions still have short life expectancy due to many acute infectious diseases almost eradicated in developed countries (cholera, typhus etc). Further, combating illiteracy is a big task for underdeveloped countries. This leads to a problem of media or mass-communication. Kato explains it with the example of India. In India, due to the large number of languages, widely circulated newspapers as in Japan, are not possible. Radio is almost non-existent. Furthermore, it is important to see how socialism met with a traditional value system, and in what way they changed each other. In India, it is Hinduism, in Yugoslavia the European Christian tradition is not lost, and in central Asia there is Islam. According mostly to the Western observers, the reason for resistance to communism in the Middle East and North Africa is

increasingly seen in the religion. Kato considered it extremely important to see how forty years of socialism affected the sphere of religion. If we consider these three issues (hygiene, education, ethnic culture) in relation to three cases (Uzbekistan, Croatia and Kerala), many other important issues will open, Kato writes. Of course, beside these issues, there are a number of others – for example, Uzbekistan not only as a socialist country, but as a part of the Soviet Union. Or Yugoslavian socialistic “revisionism”, workers’ conferences and organization, or Kerala as a part of Nehru’s India.

5. Uzbekistan – a four hundred years’ jump

Part on Uzbekistan is the longest part of Kato’s travelogue and its length is in the accordance with time period he spent in each of those places – travels to Croatia and Kerala did not last longer than a week while in Uzbekistan Kato spent three months. Kato describes his flight over central Asia as a journey through the history four hundreds years old. Rocky mountains with no greenery, blue sky without a single cloud, nature harsh as a knife blade symbolized an unchanged central Asia of four hundreds or even four thousands years ago. Kato wondered how in such a wasteland population can grow and culture flourish. As the plane was approaching the border with Uzbekistan, a drastic contrast could be seen. Here begins the work of human hands, Kato thought, touched and in excitement. Kato was overwhelmed by curiosity – what lies behind the secret of closed Soviet Union – “the slavery without freedom”, “scary communism” or “workers’ welfare state that works because and for the benefit of working class”¹² Kato feels the need to repeat again his main impressions – surprising modernization in the city, shops not different than European, clothes on women less splendid than western, but not shabby. If we judge modernity by neon lights in the night, yes, Tashkent was a modern city, Kato concludes his first chapter on Uzbekistan.

Here, at the outskirts of socialism, Kato again applies his principle of peripheral or marginal and goes out of the city to the peripheral in order to understand peculiar circumstances of Central Asia. It could be useful, Kato writes, to go out of the city to the steppes, and to have a look not at human relationship with other human, but at the relationship of human and nature. This raises the question of freedom in nature i.e. is it possible for freedom at all to exist in cruel nature? His “norigokochi” (feeling while traveling) took him into thinking that East and West are approaching each other in the human aspirations for progress. Former Wild West of America is today’s East of the Soviet Union. Spirit of the cowboy is the spirit of pioneer. When arriving in socialist country, he was expecting something different, Kato writes, and he found more similarities than differences between East and West. Here we can see Kato’s pursuit of the universality of human experience in similar circumstances (natural conditions), but perhaps more interesting in these Kato’s thoughts is to follow Marx’s idea of the possibility of understanding the science of history as twofold - as the history of nature and the history of people. Those two histories, according to Marx cannot be separated, they mutually condition each other and history of nature is nothing more than historic relationship of man against nature. In the United States or Japan, the road would be probably flooded with tourists. Although light branches of industry such as tourism were not developed and

¹² Kato: *Uzbekku*, p.23.

there was no pioneer plan to develop it, other fields' development such as production (notably cotton), agriculture (and development of irrigation systems), factories of chemical products, agricultural machines, etc. were impressive. New cities are being formed around those small centers of human progress, and the impression of those cities is not so beautiful as of the cities in Western Europe, Kato writes. However, every such small city had a lot of cafes, cinemas, schools, hospital. The concept of city is, Kato concludes, quite different from the concept of city in Europe or Japan, where cities are linked to their past and history, not the future as is the case in Uzbekistan's steppe. However, the atmosphere of those cities is bright, the entertainment sphere of human life is not ignored.

6. Croatian hybrid

After his stay in Uzbekistan, Kato decided to spend Christmas in Vienna and after that he visited Yugoslavia. Part of the travelogue on Yugoslavia is much shorter than on Uzbekistan, in proportion to the length of his stay. However short, and regardless of the relatively same method Kato used to analyze objective facts (giving firstly a short historical review) on development using statistical data, differently from Uzbekistan, Kato looked at the specificity of Yugoslav socialism through art. Kato was introduced him to Edo Murtic¹³, who later became world-renowned abstract painter. 1958-9 was a period when Yugoslavia already broke apart with the Soviet politics and its domination and discreetly inclined to the West. In the context of visual art this trend is visible in braking apart with the praxis of replacing socio-realism with modern artistic expression. The trend was especially vivid in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb and Kato did not fail to correctly recognize the atmosphere of the time. Unlike his "sightseeing" of the factories in Uzbekistan, in Croatia Kato focused on the art. Main figure of modern artistic expression then in Zagreb was Murtic whose studio Kato visited and from where Kato gives a photo in this travelogue. Croatia as the margin of European cultural space and marginal inside of Yugoslavia (the capital of which was Serbian Belgrade), still was a part of European tradition and from that aspect, Kato writes, he was interested primarily to see how European tradition is responding to socialism. The fifties and sixties in Yugoslavia were a period when Yugoslavia was establishing a new identity as open socialist country and promotion of modern visual expression happened gradually at the same time with process of de-Stalinization of the country.

7. Indian neutrality

Kato gives long and startling description of poverty, suffering and the "silence" of the Indian masses. He contrasts this situation with the main point of Kato's interest in India - a province on the western coast - Kerala, which was the first and the only place in the world where a Communist party won power in a peaceful and democratic way. Kerala's prosperity could be seen everywhere, from factories to schools, Kato writes. India is a country full of antagonisms, but Nehru made it possible peacefully coexist, Kato writes. Nehru could unify internal antagonisms (tradition and the present, the Congress Party and its opposition, different regimes of different provinces) and international antagonisms by being "neutral" between opposite military blocks. Isn't it,

¹³ Edo Murtic (1921-2005), sent to a state-sponsored study-trip to USA and Canada, 1951-1953.

Kato writes, that those Indian antagonisms in a way reflected antagonisms of the contemporary world?¹⁴ And could it be, Kato ends his travelogue, that Indian “neutrality” is a prediction of the trend in the world? That will not be simple realism, nor simple idealism. And not before long, Kato concludes in idealistic manner that this is going to be a reality of human future.

8. Conclusion

The travelogue from three “peripheral” socialist countries was written in 1958-9 which was a period, in Kato's own words, when the first phase of his life ended. It was, also, the end of the post-war epoch in Japan and in the world.¹⁵

Kato's writing tone is optimistic, it is a reflection of era in which it is written, it was a time of hope for a better tomorrow, a time when the future looked bright. Although Kato is continuously critical and skeptical towards the prospect for the socialism, almost every discussion on the progressivity of socialism in this travelogue ends with recognition of socialist revolutionary achievements, especially in the part on Uzbekistan. It touched upon many important issues – on which, actually, socialism in the long-term, did not pass the test – such as economic development and poverty, religion, nationalism and national minorities, limitation of private property, colonial legacy, freedom of speech, mass-media.

Kato used a combination of analyses of statistical data and his personal experience and impressions. However, I cannot escape the impression that Kato, in spite of his strong skepticism, while being there, did succumb to the general atmosphere of faith in a better future through socialist social order, and believe that a heterogeneous world is getting on consistent, mutual character. He believed that with the change over time and the undeniable progress that socialism brought to its countries, regional characteristics are becoming part of the process of “world history”. Narrating and describing are Kato's main methods. Narrating is used for talk about events and adventures of traveler-narrator, and describing for the talk about outness of the traveling world – of people, nature, architecture, art etc). Beside objective analyses of the external world, Kato describes his own feelings and thoughts, expectations and doubts, especially in many dialogues with people.

Kato's distinction of the East and the West is a direct consequence of the time period in which the travelogue was written, and specific cultural discourse in Japan in 1950s. Japan was somewhere between the East and the West, dependent on the U.S., and Kato's cultural hybridity theory had the highly ideological function to confirm status quo.¹⁶ From that point of view, Croatia was of a special interest to Kato, since he considered it culturally a part of Habsburg monarchy and Western European tradition suddenly put in a different context – context of the East (unity with Serbia) and of socialism. Kato on the same occasion traveled to Serbia (Belgrade) as well, and wrote that Belgrade culturally is completely different from Zagreb. From the 90s onwards, differences inside Yugoslavian federation Kato had observed, showed to be accurate. Kato wrote in

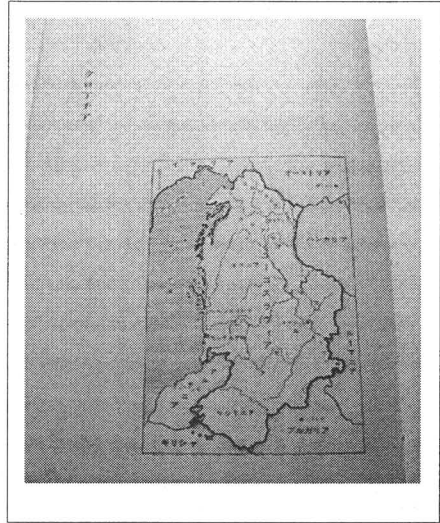
¹⁴ Kato: *Uzbekku*, p.210.

¹⁵ In his own words, 1960 was a threshold in his private life and in Japanese history – see Epilogue of *A Sheep's Song*.

¹⁶ Igarashi Yoshikuni: *Bodies of Memory, Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1979*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p.82.

retrospective about that, in the *Watashi-ni tote-no ni-ju-seiki* (Twentieth century for me)¹⁷. Nevertheless, fifty years ago, Kato had hope for Japan (subtitle of the *Zasshu bunka-Nihonno chiisana kibo*), and he had hope for Yugoslavia (he ends his essay on Croatia with the statement that he cannot help but believe in so strong people's belief). What is the meaning of loss of that belief and hope today? Close people to Kato say that he was never more pessimistic than at the end of his life.¹⁸

The nostalgia author of this review felt while reading Kato's travelogue does not necessarily mean wish to restore what has disappeared, but could make space for the critique of the present state. Recently (April-July 2010), at the Centre Pompidou, there was an exhibition called "The Promises of the Past – 1950-2010, A Discontinuous History of Art in former Eastern Europe"¹⁹. It means that the ideas from socialist period still can be interesting, especially the "historical emotion"²⁰ emerged as "shrinking space of experience that no longer fits the new horizons of expectations", writes Svetlana Boym in the *Future of Nostalgia*. Perhaps this review should be read from a vantage point of a reader as a traveler through the time, who from the distant perspective can see a wholeness of the vanished world with its all unfulfilled promises and hopes.



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<http://www.apexart.org/conference/Devic.htm>, accessed 2010/09/03.

(VODOPIVEC, Maja, Graduate School of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

¹⁷ Kato Shuichi: *Watashi-ni tote-no nijusseiki*, Iwanami Shoten, 2000, p.166.

¹⁸ Narita Ryuichi et al. : *Kato Shuichi-no kokoro wo tsugu tameni*, Iwanami Booklet No.771, 2009.

¹⁹ <http://www.cnac-gp.fr/Pompidou/Manifs.nsf/0/50902C6097E58113C12577070034A5CC?OpenDocument&sessionM=2.2.1&L=2>, accessed 2011/03/03.

²⁰ Svetlana Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, 2001, p.10.