

WHAT IS

# JAPAN?

CONTRADICTIONS AND  
TRANSFORMATIONS

TAICHI SAKAIYA

author of *The Knowledge-Value Revolution*

# CONTENTS

- Map of Japan • xii  
Preface to the English Language Edition • xiii  
Preface to the Japanese Language Edition • xix

## 1 JAPAN IN THE NINETIES • 1

### ALMOST PARADISE • 3

*The Face of an Economic Giant . . . 3 Profitable  
Businesses, Solid Family Finances . . . 4 A  
Country Without Beggars, Where Thieves Take Only  
Cash . . . 6 Japanese Education: Approaching Equal-  
ity in Outcome . . . 8 Japan Is Very Safe . . . 9  
Approaching the Ideal Modern State . . . 11*

### THE RICH COUNTRY THAT DOESN'T FEEL RICH • 13

*No Joy in Heaven . . . 13 Finding What Is Miss-  
ing . . . 14 People Unable to Understand Wealth . . .  
16 Slaves to Magazine Trends . . . 18 Frustration at  
Foreign Pressure . . . 20 Japanese Bewilderment as  
the World Changes . . . 22 The Anxiety of Japanese  
Asked to Join the World Order . . . 25*

### THE REALITY OF PARADISE JAPAN: THE INDUSTRIAL MONOCULTURE • 28

*The Inefficient Economic Power . . . 28 The Im-  
mense Waste of the Japanese System . . . 30 The  
Warped Prosperity of the Industrially Optimized Soci-*

*ety . . . 34 Standardization of Education and Information . . . 36 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Japanese-Style Management . . . 39 Core Tendency to Homogenize Everything . . . 41 Bureaucratic Organizations Work for the Ministry, Not the Country . . . 43 Educational System Works for the Administrators and Teachers . . . 45 Japanese Organizations Cannot See the Burdens They Impose on Others . . . 47 Concentric Group Memberships . . . 49 The Faceless Economic Power . . . 50 The Greatest Industrial Monoculture . . . 53 "Wealth" Is Satisfying Desires . . . 55*

## **2 PEACE, COOPERATION, AND THE ENVIRONMENT • 59**

### **JAPANESE CULTURE BEGAN IN THE RICE FIELD • 61**

*Why Japan Absorbed Western Technology So Easily . . . 61 The West's Three Hundred Years of Ideological Confrontation . . . 63 The Environment Mandated Diligent, Cooperative Work . . . 65 A People with Little Contact with Animals . . . 67 Japanese History Has No Slavery and No City States . . . 69*

### **BUFFERED BY A PROTECTING OCEAN, JUST WIDE ENOUGH • 72**

*A Unique Geographical Position . . . 72 Cultural Interchange Without Political Penetration . . . 73 Village Communities Bonded by the Task of Growing Rice . . . 76 A Society That Eschewed Strong Leaders . . . 78 Japanese Had No Conception of State . . . 80*

## A PEACEFUL SOCIETY THAT TRUSTS ITS SUPERIORS • 82

*Europe and America Have No System of Residence or Census Registers . . . 82 The State Was Born of Defense . . . 84 Non-Japanese Don't Want to Be Known to the State . . . 86 The Japanese State Concentrates on Welfare . . . 88 "Six Parts for the State, Four Parts for the People" Was Actually Three for the State and Seven for the People . . . 89 Japanese Methods Leave Ample Room for Discretion . . . 91 Government-Citizen Cooperation the Result of a Commonality of Values . . . 93 Japanese Society Lacks a Military Ideology . . . 95*

## 3 RAISED TO BE GOOD LEARNERS • 99

### SHINTO AND BUDDHISM: TWO RELIGIONS AT ONCE • 101

*The Land of the Samurai and the Industrially Optimized Society . . . 101 120 Million Shintoists, 120 Million Buddhists . . . 103 Shinto: A Creed Without Texts or Doctrines . . . 106 How Buddhism Became a Political Issue . . . 108 Contradicting the Shinto Legends: An Imperial Crisis . . . 110 How Prince Shotoku Reconciled Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto . . . 112 How Japanese Were Freed from Religious Doctrines . . . 114*

### NO SENSE OF AN ABSOLUTE GOOD • 117

*Right and Wrong Are Relative Values . . . 117 For Arinori Mori, Marriage Was a Vow to His Wife and God Merely His Witness . . . 119 Why Japanese Do Not Understand the Legend of Noah's Ark . . . 120 The Duty of Those Who Do Not Provide for Emergen-*

*cies Is to Die . . . 121 Why Japan Can Proclaim the Advantage of the Majority a Virtue . . . 123*

**THE PROS AND CONS OF SELECTIVE ADOPTION • 126**

*The Quick Study That Outstrips the Master in Forty Years . . . 126 Reverse Engineering of Guns, Silk, and Cotton Spinning . . . 128 Japanese Do Not Think of Cultures as Systems . . . 130*

**STRUGGLE BETWEEN MODERN CIVILIZATION AND JAPANESE TRADITION • 133**

*Modern Rationalism: Happiness Lies with Material Accumulation . . . 133 The Restoration Leaders Who Opened the Country . . . 135 Papering Over Contradictions with a Group-oriented State . . . 137 How a Penchant for Compromise Created the Industrially Optimized Society . . . 138*

**4 SHADOW GOVERNMENTS AND A CULTURE OF SIMPLICITY • 141**

**JAPANESE COMMUNAL GROUPS • 143**

*A Genius for Being Governed: The Japanese . . . 143 Japanese War Criminals Could Not Flee Abroad . . . 145 Japanese Lose Their National Identity Outside of Japan . . . 146 Governed Obedient to Their Government, Government Obedient to the Governed . . . 149 Wars Require Dictatorial Authority . . . 151 Self-sacrifice More Important than Results . . . 153*

**CITIES WITHOUT WALLS • 154**

*The Great Wall Had Real Uses . . . 154 Ancient Kyoto Had No Defenses . . . 156 An Army Is a*

*Self-sufficient Military Group . . . 157 Tokugawa Period Samurai Were Not Soldiers . . . 160 Tokugawa Period Order Was Maintained by Harmony Between Government and Governed . . . 163*

#### SYSTEMS THAT SEPARATE APPEARANCE AND REALITY • 166

*The Same Logic and Aesthetics Throughout Society . . . 166 Ceremony in Kyoto, Authority in Kamakura . . . 168 The Common Cultural Context Caused a Separation of Outer Appearance and Inner Substance . . . 170 Consultation Decides What Contracts Really Mean . . . 172 Vague Expression Is Cultured . . . 175 Legal System Allowed Room for Discretion . . . 176*

#### A CULTURE OF SIMPLICITY THAT ESCHEWS THE "UNNATURAL" • 179

*The Culture of Simplicity as a System . . . 179 Extremes of Expression Avoided . . . 181 "Nature" Means "As the Human World Goes" . . . 183 Deforming Things to Make Them "the Way They Are" . . . 185*

### 5 RESOURCES AND POPULATION AFFECT CIVILIZATION • 187

#### SOCIETIES OF SHORTAGE AND ABUNDANCE • 189

*The Three Formative Factors of Civilizations . . . 189 Design and Planning Started with Agriculture . . . 191 Ancient Cultures Valued the Spiritual . . . 193 The Agricultural Revolution Gave Birth to Classical Cultures . . . 195 Where Did Hannibal's Elephants Come From? . . . 197 Ancient Populations Began*

*Shrinking . . . 199 Shortages Produced the Middle Ages . . . 202*

**FORMATIVE FACTORS OF JAPANESE CIVILIZATION • 206**

*Selective Adoption from Foreign Cultures . . . 206  
Japan's Classical Period Was Brief . . . 209 Japan's  
Renaissance: The Warring Countries Period . . . 211  
The Toyotomi Organization Was Based on Expansion-  
ism . . . 213 Korea Was Invaded to Defuse Personnel  
Pressure . . . 215 Ieyasu Crushed Expansionist Dai-  
myos . . . 216*

**JAPANESE CULTURE OF DILIGENCE AND SOFTWARE • 219**

*Merchants in the Zero Sum Society . . . 219 The  
Ishida School of Philosophy Reconciled the Contradic-  
tions of Diligence and Frugality . . . 221 The Japa-  
nese Work Ethic Is Based on the Ishida Philoso-  
phy . . . 223 Japanese Even Work at Play . . . 226  
Good at Details, Inept with the Big Picture . . . 227  
Lack of Resources Creates a Software Society . . . 230  
Education Fueled by a Culture of Form . . . 231*

**6 THE LIMITS OF PROSPERITY IN THE  
ULTIMATE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY • 233**

**THE ROAD TO THE ULTIMATE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY • 235**

*The Japanese Way to Wealth . . . 235 Producer  
Heaven, Consumer Hell . . . 236 The Nature of the  
Industrial Revolution . . . 238 The Prime Virtue  
Changes from Stability to Efficiency . . . 241 Social  
Isolation: A Fate Worse than Death . . . 243 How  
"Civilization and Enlightenment" Became Adminis-  
trative Guidance . . . 245 Prewar Manufacturing In-  
dustries Ran on Casual Labor . . . 247*

## THE EARLY DAYS OF ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDANCE • 250

- Industrialization Requires Standardization . . . 250*  
*National School System Standardizes Character . . .*  
*253* *Education Expunges Both Defects and Individu-*  
*ality . . . 255* *Tokyo: The Head of the Japanese*  
*Body . . . 257* *Information Transmission Concen-*  
*trated in Tokyo . . . 259* *Creative Cultural Activities*  
*Happen Only in Tokyo . . . 261* *Regions Perform the*  
*Manual Labor . . . 262* *The Japanese Elite Cannot*  
*Produce New Ideas . . . 264*

THE LIMITS OF THE ULTIMATE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY:  
THE COMING JAPANESE TRANSFORMATION • 266

- Japan's Three Big Problems . . . 266* *Administrative*  
*Guidance Favors Producers . . . 268* *Scandals Rooted*  
*in Protection and Collusion . . . 270* *A Frugal and*  
*Group-oriented People . . . 271* *Three Sources of*  
*Pressures for Japanese Reform . . . 274* *Aging and*  
*the Spending of Assets . . . 276*

## EPILOGUE TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION:

GETTING ALONG WITH JAPAN, OR, A WAY INTO THE JAPANESE  
MARKET • 278

- Finding the Japanese . . . 278* *Three Barriers to*  
*Japan . . . 280* *Within Japan: The Impenetrable*  
*East, the Accessible West . . . 283*

Major Events in Japanese History • 286

Facts About Modern Japan • 292

Glossary • 293

Index • 303