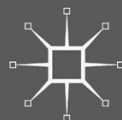




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# **Contemporary Japan**

**Third Edition**

Duncan McCargo

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# Preface and Acknowledgements

I am an Asia specialist, but a Japan generalist; I have spent three years living and teaching in Japan, but I have no academically useful knowledge of Japanese. This book is largely a synthesis of English-language secondary sources, drawing on many years of teaching Japanese politics to undergraduates at the University of Leeds. With a non-specialist readership in mind, I have taken a couple of contentious editorial decisions. Macrons (used to indicate vowel length) have been omitted from Japanese words, and Japanese names have been written in the western style, with the family name second (for example, Ichiro Ozawa, rather than Ozawa Ichiro).

I should like to repeat the thanks I have offered in previous editions to all of my friends and former colleagues in Japan, especially Wayne Wilson, and to everyone else who has supported my work. Stephanie Winters helped me to see Japan through fresh eyes during our visit in 2009. Special thanks are due to my research assistants, Kanako Hiraoka, Jacqueline Hicks, and Chunyao Yi, for earlier editions. While preparing this third edition, I benefited greatly from my discussions with Gerald Curtis, Reto Hoffmann, Hisahiro Kondoh, Aiko Mizumori, Haruka Matsumoto and Paul Waley, among others. Interviews cited in Chapter 6 were originally conducted by Lee Hyon-suk for a previous joint publication (McCargo and Lee, 2010). This time I was very ably assisted by Saya Kurita and by Yoshimi Onishi, who created all the tables. It was my privilege to finalize the manuscript at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University: warm thanks are due to my hosts there, especially Myron Cohen, Carol Gluck, Waichi Ho, and Andrew Nathan. Many thanks to Keith Povey for his editorial work on all three editions, and to Anthony Horton for preparing the index.

Steven Kennedy has been a very supportive publisher since he originally commissioned the first edition of this book more than

fifteen years ago. Helen Caunce has been a great help with the third edition. As before, the mistakes are all mine.

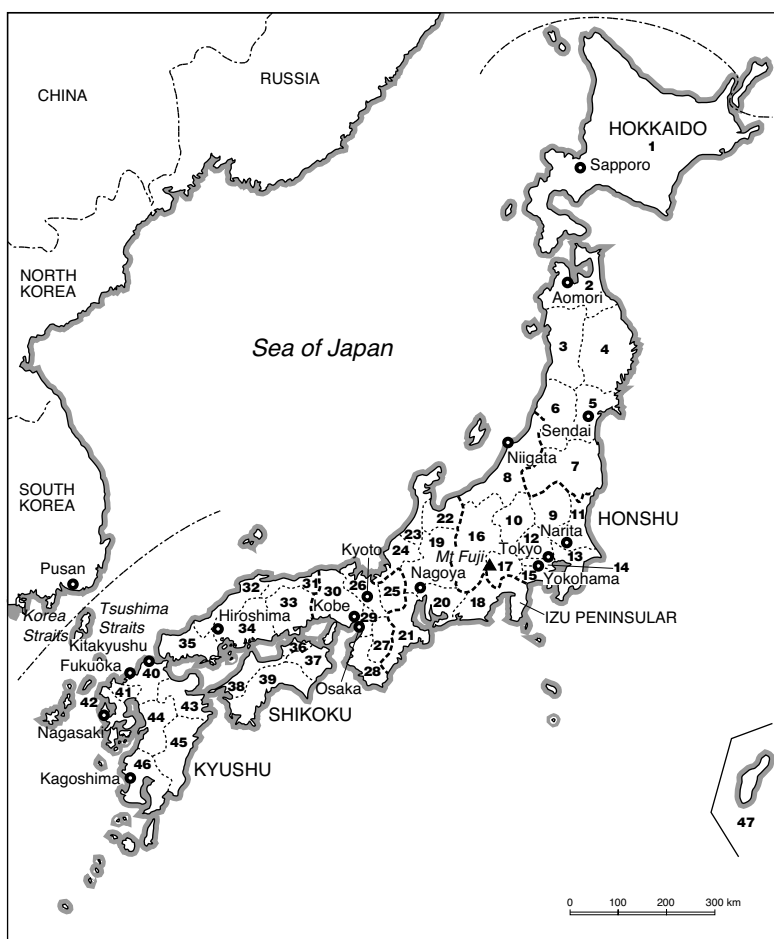
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# List of Abbreviations

APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Summit Meeting
CM	Citizens' Movement
DLP	Democratic Liberal Party
DP	Democratic Party
DSP	Democratic Socialist Party
EAEC	East Asian Economic Caucus
EU	European Union
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JCP	Japan Communist Party
JDP	Japan Democratic Party
JET	Japan Exchange and Teaching programme
JLP	Japan Liberal Party
JNP	Japan New Party
JRP	Japan Renewal Party
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
LDC	Less Developed Country
LLDC	Least among Less-Developed Countries
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LP	Liberal Party
MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry
MTDPE	Mid-Term Defence Programme Estimate
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Association
NDP	National Defence Programme outline
NFP	New Frontier Party
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHK	Japan's semi-governmental broadcasting agency

NIC	Newly Industrialized Country
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PKO	Peace-Keeping Operation
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
SDF	Self-Defence Forces
SDP(J)	Social Democratic Party (of Japan)
TEPCO	Tokyo Electric Power Company
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership



<b>HOKKAIDO</b>	<b>KANTO</b>	<b>CHUBU</b>	<b>CHUGOKU</b>	<b>KYUSHU</b>
1 Hokkaido	<b>KOSHINETSU</b>	18 Shizuoka	31 Tottori	40 Fukuoka
<b>TOHOKU</b>	8 Niigata	19 Gifu	32 Shimane	41 Saga
2 Aomori	9 Tochigi	20 Aichi	33 Okayama	42 Nagasaki
3 Akita	10 Gunma	21 Mie	34 Hiroshima	43 Oita
4 Iwate	11 Ibaraki	22 Toyama	35 Yamaguchi	44 Kumamoto
5 Miyagi	12 Saitama	23 Ishikawa		45 Miyazaki
6 Yamagata	13 Chiba	24 Fukui	<b>SHIKOKU</b>	46 Kagoshima
7 Fukushima	14 Tokyo		36 Kagawa	
	15 Kanagawa	<b>KINKI</b>	37 Tokushima	
	16 Nagano	25 Shiga	38 Ehime	47 Okinawa
	17 Yamanashi	26 Kyoto	39 Kochi	
		27 Nara		
		28 Wakayama		
		29 Osaka		
		30 Hyogo		

**Map of Japan**

# 1

## Introduction: Themes and Debates

You are now entering contested territory. The nature of contemporary Japan is hotly debated by specialists and observers, both inside and outside Japan. Whether the topic is Japan's domestic politics, international relations or economic order, apparently simple questions such as 'Is Japan a liberal democracy?', 'Is Japan a superpower?', or 'Does Japan have a free market economy?' will provoke radically different answers from different scholars and analysts. Facts about Japan are often buried under different interpretations and perspectives. When reading books or articles about contemporary Japan, we need to be constantly alert to the biases and preferences of their authors. This book starts from the assumption that in order to understand much about contemporary Japan, we need to understand the alternative perspectives to be found in the literature on Japan.

Accordingly, this book will invite you to view Japan from three alternative perspectives, which will be referred to regularly in each chapter: mainstream, revisionist and culturalist. In reality, of course, there is a much wider range of perspectives, which can be used to explain and to understand contemporary Japan, and many individual students of Japanese society and politics draw on elements of more than one. The three approaches presented here, however, provide a clear indication of the extent of debate and its range and character.

Japan is currently in the throes of a new wave of national soul-searching, brought on by the terrible events of 11 March 2011: a huge earthquake, a terrible tsunami, and then the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl. These events have so far left nearly 20,000 people dead or missing, have shaken popular faith in bureaucrats, business leaders



## 2 *Contemporary Japan*

and politicians, and clearly demand a renewed sense of collective purpose. So far, the verdict remains out on whether post-tsunami Japan is responding effectively to the challenges created by the triple disasters of March 2011. To a large extent, opinions on this issue vary based on the perspective of the commentator.

### **The mainstream perspective**

The first approach might best be described as the ‘mainstream’ perspective, and is generally the most common perspective to be found in the literature about Japan. Using methods derived from the sub-discipline of comparative politics, the mainstream perspective emphasizes points of comparison between Japan and other societies. Indeed, some books written from this perspective explicitly compare Japan with one or more other countries, often including the USA. More commonly, however, the comparisons are implicit rather than explicit. Japan is treated as having economic, political and social systems that are broadly similar to those of other developed countries. Typically, Japan is seen by mainstream scholars as a fully functioning liberal democracy with a free market economy (albeit with minor variations).

Many scholars who adopt this perspective are based in the USA. This is unsurprising on one level, since the United States contains the largest concentration of Japan specialists outside Japan itself. At the same time, the American Occupation of Japan at the end of the Second World War was an immensely important factor in shaping the course of Japanese history. The United States attempted to reshape Japan into something more closely resembling its own image, and American officials and scholars have consistently sought to emphasize the success of the Occupation project and the extent to which its goals have been realized. The mainstream perspective on contemporary Japan is partly a continuation of the philosophy and objectives of the US occupation. At the same time, the enormous differences between Japan and the United States raise serious questions about the utility of comparing the two countries.

There are strong arguments for comparing Japan with various European countries (which share such features as constitutional monarchies, parliamentary systems, multi-party systems, centralized education systems, capital-city dominance, and economic interven-

tionism by the state). Even more salient arguments exist for comparing Japan with other Asian territories such as South Korea and Taiwan (economies characterized by state-led development), or Thailand and the Philippines (political orders characterized by factionalism and structural corruption).

The scholars most closely identified with the mainstream approach have been affiliated with Harvard University. One of their gurus was the historian and former US Ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, author of numerous books including *The Japanese* and *The Japanese Today*. Reischauer promoted a positive image of Japanese society, politics and culture, and played an important role in maintaining the strong relationship between the two countries which persists to this day. He argued that although there were many differences between the Japanese political system and the politics of western countries, Japan 'appears to measure up quite well as an effective system of democratic rule' (Reischauer, 1977: 327). In *Japan as Number One*, his colleague Ezra Vogel (1979) sought to present Japan, not simply as a successful imitator of American values and systems, but as a state which was succeeding in displacing the USA from a position of industrial and political dominance.

Many American political scientists (for example, Ellis Krauss, Bradley Richardson, Scott Flanagan, Gerald Curtis and John Creighton Campbell) have adopted a broadly positive view of Japan which could well be described as mainstream, and the themes of their work are shared by well-known Japanese counterparts such as Takashi Inoguchi. They see Japanese politics as pluralistic, characterized by free elections, genuine political parties and open public debate. Japanese society is typically depicted as meritocratic, stable and characterized by limited class conflict. Vogel and others have even argued that other countries need to 'learn from Japan' in order to increase their levels of economic productivity, to limit social inequalities, and reduce problems such as drug abuse and crime. The mainstream approach reached its zenith of popularity during the 1980s, when Japan's extraordinary economic growth seemed to pose a real challenge to the global hegemony of the West, and especially the position of the United States. However, some mainstream analysts have been guilty of exaggerating the successes of Japan, glossing over the shortcomings of the Japanese system.

### **The revisionist approach**

The late Chalmers Johnson – a leading ‘revisionist’ – argued that the majority of American Japan experts:

spend their time not studying the Japanese state itself but looking for candidates within the Japanese political system who, they hope, might one day assume political direction over the activities of the state. If they could find such a person or group, this would help confirm the American proposition that democratic politics inevitably conforms to the pluralist paradigm. (Johnson, 1995: 14)

If the mainstream perspective sometimes fails to see the darker side of Japan, the revisionist perspective often concentrates on little else. Revisionists typically see Japan as a different sort of country altogether from western liberal democracies. They view Japan as operating according to distinctive principles of its own: typically, they regard it as undemocratic, and as characterized by a deeply flawed political system that features a considerable degree of structural corruption. They view Japan’s economic system as far more state-led and far less open to outside competition than mainstream analysts typically acknowledge. Some revisionists go so far as to see Japan as a kind of ‘soft authoritarian’ state, characterized by repressive elements of social and political conformity. Revisionists typically view Japan’s relations with the rest of the world with a sceptical eye, arguing that Japan cynically manipulates its trade, aid and defence policies for its own advantage. Indeed, the revisionist view of Japan became popular during the intense trade frictions between Japan and the USA in the 1980s. Pro-Japan commentators labelled revisionist scholars and analysts ‘Japan-bashers’, and some revisionist themes were taken up by American politicians who sought to play to domestic electorates (such as the congressman who put a sledgehammer to various Japanese appliances).

Nevertheless, most revisionists themselves reject the ‘Japan-basher’ label, and it is difficult to generalize about the perspectives of so-called revisionists, who constitute a heterogeneous group with divergent views. They range from Chalmers Johnson, a political economist and Asia specialist, to Karel van Wolferen, a Dutch journalist, former US trade negotiator Clyde Prestowitz, and James Fallows, an American journalist. They also include scholars who

have arrived at similarly critical views of Japanese society from a Marxist-influenced perspective, including Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto. Stockwin lumps these (and other) critical scholars together under the catch-all category of 'controversial approaches' (Stockwin, 2008: 34–5, 260).

A common feature of the revisionists is their collective exasperation with what they see as the successful public relations of the Japanese government, and the unduly sympathetic line on Japan adopted by mainstream writers and academics. Partly because of their sense of adopting a minority position that challenges academic orthodoxies, the revisionists have sometimes been unnecessarily combative and provocative in their writings. At the same time, writers such as Johnson and van Wolferen produce books and articles which are far more readable than the relatively turgid output of some mainstream scholars, and their work is often highly persuasive, not to say seductive.

### **The culturalist perspective**

To paraphrase L. P. Hartley: 'Japan is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' To study Japanese politics (or, indeed, the politics of any Asian country) it is necessary to understand that what people raised in a western society take to be the normal rules of social behaviour do not necessarily apply. Adherents of the culturalist perspective typically seek to explain the nature of Japanese politics, economy and society primarily by reference to cultural differences. Many of the originators of this perspective were American anthropologists (such as Ruth Benedict and John Embree); however, their arguments have been elaborated and developed by numerous Japanese scholars, giving rise to a vast literature on 'Japaneseness' which typically accentuated the supposedly distinctive and even unique character of Japan. Dale has strongly criticized this approach, which he reduces to three core assumptions: a belief that the Japanese possess 'a culturally and socially homogeneous racial identity' which has not changed since prehistoric times; that the Japanese are entirely different from other peoples; and that they proceed from an intensely nationalistic basis which is hostile to non-Japanese sources (Dale, 1986: i). This approach is more difficult to grasp than either the mainstream or the revisionist approaches. At the core of the culturalist perspective is a stress on the Japanese as 'groupist' rather than indi-

vidualist, an approach often referred to as the 'group model' of Japanese society.

A problem with the so-called 'group model' is that it can suggest a simplistic image of a harmonious, virtually conflict-free Japanese society. Many works by Japanese scholars – a genre known as '*nihon(jin)ron* literature' – emphasize the supposedly 'unique' nature of the Japanese 'miracle'. Among the most notorious is Tadanobu Tsunoda's *The Japanese Brain: Uniqueness and Universality*, which argues that Japanese brains function differently from those of non-Japanese (Tsunoda, 1985). Other books 'explain' Japaneseness by reference to characteristics such as the Japanese 'non-carnivorous' diet, and (a very widely believed argument) the rice agriculture theory of Japanese society. Although these examples of *nihon(jin)ron* literature differ in their answers to the enigma of Japaneseness, they belong to the same strain of popular scholarship, a scholarship of admiration for Japan.

The assumptions behind this 'group model' literature need to be teased out and questioned. Harumi Befu has argued that Japanese groups are not nearly so internally harmonious as has been suggested. In particular, Japanese education is ruthlessly competitive, especially at senior high-school level when pupils prepare to take entrance examinations for the prestigious universities (Befu, 1980). Befu also challenges the idea that there is no class conflict in Japan, arguing that the Japanese have their own 'native concepts' of social classes, which testify to the existence of horizontal strata in Japanese society.

Mainstream and revisionist scholars may themselves make use of culturalist arguments: some mainstream scholars refer to Japanese culture as one of the sources of Japan's political, social and economic virtues. Revisionist scholars are typically more critical of culturalist interpretations. Yoshio Sugimoto has argued that what he calls the 'learn from Japan' school has a built-in elite bias, concentrating on examples from government and big business while neglecting less impressive areas of the Japanese order. Sugimoto questions whether Japan really is a consensual society, asking firstly 'Who defines the content of consensus?', and secondly 'In whose interests is consensus formed?' He suggests that:

Groupism is itself an explicit ideology directly communicated to subordinate groups in an attempt to routinise the obedience of individuals to the so-called needs of the company, school, or state. (Sugimoto, 1986: 68)

Whilst such criticisms of the group model challenge over-idealistic views of Japan, the existence of a potential for competition and conflict between individual Japanese, between employees and employers, and between different social classes, offers the possibility of more dynamic interpretations of Japanese politics. Instead of a static, harmonious and self-sustaining system, Japanese politics is seen as a system of competing interests.

At the same time, some revisionists have flirted with cultural explanations in their analyses of contemporary Japan: Karel van Wolferen, for all his criticisms of the Japanese order and his emphasis on the political origins of culture, appears to regard Japan as a unique country, distinctively characterized by a multi-tentacled 'System', rather than a conventional state. Although it is possible to differentiate between mainstream, revisionist and culturalist approaches, there are numerous points of intersection, overlap, and crossover between these three perspectives.

## **The country and its people**

What is Japan? Our images of other countries are shaped by a variety of sources, including popular culture, consumer goods, art, music, literature, and our (often hazy) understandings or misunderstandings of history. Japan is often seen as remote and rather mysterious. Picturesque scenes of *geisha* and Mount Fuji are typically mixed up with high-tech images of robot-like factory workers, and bullet trains. Whilst these images contain elements of truth, they are also stereotypes. Westerners frequently view the disparate facets of Japan as highly bizarre and contradictory: a favourite image is the salesman in the electronics store, totting up a customer's bill on a wooden abacus. Japan is seen as a place where tradition and novelty, the ancient and the modern, the very simple and the highly sophisticated, exist side-by-side in a kind of profound contradiction, which the Japanese are uniquely able to create and to comprehend. Bemused western visitors are always writing books and articles about the deep paradoxes of Japan, writings that often tell you more about the deep ignorance of their authors than anything else. Serious students of Japan need to pass quickly through this phase of initial bafflement and awe. To see Japan primarily in terms of 'otherness' and to be preoccupied by its difference from the West exemplifies what Edward Said calls 'orientalism' – a tendency to make essentialist and patronizing generalizations about non-western societies.



**Illustration 1.1** Tokyo skyline

It is important to remember that Japanese people are not defined by their Japanese-ness: they are human first, and Japanese second, not the other way around. A European country such as Britain, with its ancient monarchy, often fusty traditions and its long history, displays many of the same discrepancies and overlaps between the new and the old which are evident in Japan. A comparison of Japan with other Asian countries such as India, Thailand or Singapore quickly reveals that there is nothing at all unusual about mixing the ancient and the modern in a single country.

The origins of the Japanese people are obscure and controversial. Reischauer argues that there was 'a broad flow of peoples from Northeastern Asia through the Korean peninsula into Japan, especially during the first seven centuries of the Christian era' (1977: 35). However, other accounts emphasize the continuities between prehistoric settlements and modern Japan, implying that the Japanese have existed in some form for many thousands of years. Certainly, many Japanese people are resistant to the idea that they might be of Chinese or Korean origin.

Japan is an island nation, perhaps in more ways than one. Japan's island identity has significant psychological and political implications. Although non-Japanese think of Japan primarily as one country in Asia, the Japanese for the most part tend to feel that they are a

**Box 1.1 Key facts about Japan**

Government type	Constitutional monarchy
Capital	Tokyo
Currency	Yen
Highest point	Mount Fuji, 3776 metres
Population	127,078,679 (July 2010 est.)
Population growth rate	-0.191% (2010 est.)
Urban population as a % of total population	66% (2008) 127.51 million (2009)
Total area	377,915 sq km (2010) (Nearly 1.5 times the land area of the United Kingdom or slightly less than that of California)
Land use	Agriculture Land      12.5%  Forest and Fields      66.4% Others                    21.1% (2010)
Nature resources	Negligible mineral resources, fish
Labour force	65.93 million (2009 est.)
Unemployment rate	5.2% (July, 2010)
GDP	\$4.15 trillion (PPP, 2009 est.)
GDP per capital	\$32,700 (PPP, 2009 est.)
GDP composition by secto	Agriculture: 1.6% r Industry: 21.9% Services: 76.5% (2009 est.)
Major cities (in population)	Tokyo (8.41m), Yokohama (3.58m), Osaka (2.51m), Nagoya (2.16m), Sapporo (1.88m), Kobe (1.5m), Kyoto (1.38m), Fukuoka (1.37m), Kawasaki (1.34m) (2008)

*Sources:* Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, Japan, *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2010*; CIA (2010), *The World Factbook 2010*.

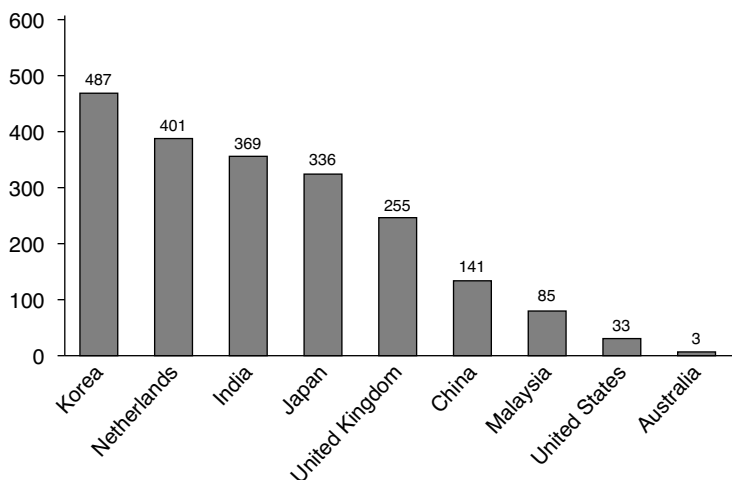
distinct civilization in their own right. There is an obvious comparison here with Britain's ambiguous relationship with the rest of Europe. Japan is a very sizeable country in population terms, with around 127 million people in 2010: the population is concentrated in



urban areas, since many parts of Japan are mountainous and largely uninhabitable. Japan's population density in comparison to other countries is shown in Figure 1.1.

Less than a fifth of Japan's land area is sufficiently level for agriculture or other economic activity, and apart from the tiny city-states of Singapore and Hong Kong, Japan has the world's highest population density per square mile of habitable land. Japan's mountains are steep, but not especially high. Japan consists largely of 'long stretches of forest-covered hills interlaced with narrow valleys that form slim strips of agriculture and habitation' (Reischauer, 1977: 5). Central Honshu contains several ranges of mountains known as the Japan Alps, which reach heights of 3,195 metres. Mount Fuji, at 3,776 metres, is Japan's highest mountain. The only sizeable plains area in Japan is the Kanto area, around Tokyo. Before the construction of modern roads and railways, sea transportation was widely used to move goods and people around different parts of the country. Japan's difficult terrain probably contributed to the emergence of a medieval feudal order, long controlled by local warlords. Apart from an abundance of water, Japan is singularly lacking in natural resources, and very reliant upon imported raw materials (though there

Figure 1.1 Population density ((pop. per km<sup>2</sup>) 2010)



Source: United Nations, Population Database, *World Population Prospects*, <http://esa.un.org/unpp/>.

is a significant domestic timber industry). All in all, Japanese topography is singularly unsuitable for the task of building a powerful and centrally managed industrial economy.

The relationship between Japanese people and nature is a complex one. On the one hand, the Japanese have been very destructive of the natural environment in their quest for rapid industrialization; yet at the same time they retain a close affinity with the idea of nature, and constantly celebrate nature's transient beauties. The Japanese are extremely aware of the changing seasons: there are numerous special foods, festivals and social rituals marking seasonal changes. Certain places are renowned as beauty spots at particular times of the year, and may receive hundreds of thousands of visitors within a given two-week period. Japan has four seasons, roughly corresponding to the climate of the east coast of the United States: a hot, humid summer, a beautiful autumn, a winter which can be surprisingly severe (especially on the Japan Sea coast of Honshu, where snow-filled winds blow in from Siberia), and a short, spectacular spring (symbolized by the famous *sakura*, or cherry blossoms), which is over almost as soon as it has begun. Some observers argue that Japan has five seasons, since June and July typically see intense spells of heavy rain, followed by a wave of typhoons in late summer and early autumn. The Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 was just the latest in a series of terrible disasters to strike Japan, including the 1923 Tokyo and 1995 Kobe earthquakes. Such events are an accepted fact of life for the Japanese, who often see themselves pitted in a sort of cosmic struggle with potentially hostile natural forces.

Japan's four main islands comprise: the central island of Honshu – by far the most important – which contains the great cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, the ancient capital of Kyoto, and the three largest urban regions (Kanto, Kansai and Tokai); Kyushu, to the south, home to Nagasaki, Kagoshima and Fukuoka; Shikoku, the smallest of the main islands, to the east of southern Honshu; and Hokkaido (Japan's equivalent of Scotland), a far less densely populated island to the north. In terms of size of population and economic importance, Japan is dominated by the three main urban regions along the Pacific Coast of Honshu: Kanto (greater Tokyo), Tokai (greater Nagoya), and Kansai (greater Osaka). These regions include the ancient capitals of Kyoto and Nara, and Tokyo's huge siblings, Yokohama and Kawasaki. The country is divided into 47 prefectures for administrative purposes. Politically, Tokyo rules supreme (see Illustration 1.1): despite the existence of elected politicians at prefectural, city and

municipal level, purse strings are controlled largely by ministries in the capital. There are big disparities in income between urban and rural areas.

Traditionally, most Japanese people lived from farming (especially rice farming) and fishing. Some argue that the cooperative efforts involved in rice production and harvesting fostered a group culture among the Japanese (Reischauer 1977: 17), an argument which revisionists find far-fetched. Nevertheless, the Japanese have an emotional attachment to the idea of themselves as an agricultural people and, during the post-war period, farmers have been the recipients of considerable government largesse. The word for rice (*gohan*) is synonymous with the word for meal. The Japanese like to claim that they eat everything produced by the sea, from whalemeat, fish and shrimps to shellfish and seaweed. A typical Japanese meal consists of rice, vegetables and fish. Unlike most other Asian foods, Japanese food is not spicy, but is served with side dishes of sauces and pickles. Great importance is attached to the visual impact of a meal, which is often exquisitely presented and typically served in lacquered containers or ceramic dishes. Noodle dishes are a staple local fast food. In recent decades, the Japanese diet has changed greatly; people now eat far more meat than before and young Japanese people are often considerably taller than their parents. International cuisines – ranging from Italian to Indian, Thai and Vietnamese – are now extremely popular and widely available.

### *Culture*

Japan is singularly rich in terms of culture. The Japanese passion for detail is revealed in innumerable wonderful artworks, such as the many wooden carved Buddhist images to be found in temples, beautifully painted scrolls and screens from various periods, and very fine ceramics. Outside Japan, Edo-period *ukiyo*e prints showing famous landscapes, beauties and actors are widely appreciated and collected, though for most Japanese these prints are ephemeral works rather than high art. Japan has an outstanding literary tradition, as evidenced in genres such as *haiku* poetry, and in the novels of internationally renowned twentieth-century writers such as Soseki Natsume, Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima. Recently, novelists such as Banana Yoshimoto and Haruki Murakami have gained world-wide audiences for their highly contemporary modes of storytelling. The Japanese are avid readers of everything from serious non-fiction to

comic books, especially on long commuter rides between home and work. Traditional Japanese drama, such as *kabuki* and *noh*, continues to be widely performed, and is generating increasing interest outside Japan.

Other important aspects of Japanese culture are the traditional cultural pursuits favoured by many women: the tea ceremony with its combination of the simple and elaborate, *ikebana* or Japanese flower-arranging, and playing musical instruments such as the harp-like *koto*. Previously, mastery of these feminine arts was a prerequisite for finding a good husband. Many people are fascinated by western classical music, and the popularity of the 'Suzuki method' reflects the large number of Japanese children learning to play instruments. In contrast with many other societies, cultural matters are taken very seriously in Japan, and attract considerable attention. Special exhibitions of western painting (often at department stores) or some rarely displayed Japanese screens (usually at a temple, shrine or museum) can draw huge crowds. Certain objects of historical or artistic significance are designated 'national treasures', while outstanding artists may be given the status of 'living national treasures'.

Since the 1990s, traditional sources of Japanese pride have been declining: the economy has been in the doldrums, and questions have been asked about the successes of Japan in areas such as education and crime. Yet at the same time, popular culture in Japan has enjoyed unparalleled growth, and the influence of Japanese comics, computer games, fashions, pop music and mobile phone technologies have transformed the lives of young people. This influence has not been confined to Japan itself, but has greatly affected the rest of Asia and much of the western world. Treat argues of Japan's popular culture that: 'A failure to engage it seriously will mean a failure to take Japan seriously' (Treat, 1996: 30).

In fact, a fashion for things Japanese is not a new phenomenon: 'Japonisme' was all the rage in late nineteenth-century Europe, manifesting itself in everything from clothes to furnishings. But the new wave of Japanese fashion designers who achieved world-wide fame in the 1980s were seen as collectively representing an exotic, stylish and distinctive 'Japaneseness', as foreigners 'orientalized' the designs of Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake (Skov 1996: 137–40). Japanese pop idols like Rie Miyazawa became household names in the new tiger economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong; and to a slightly lesser extent in south-east Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines (Ching,