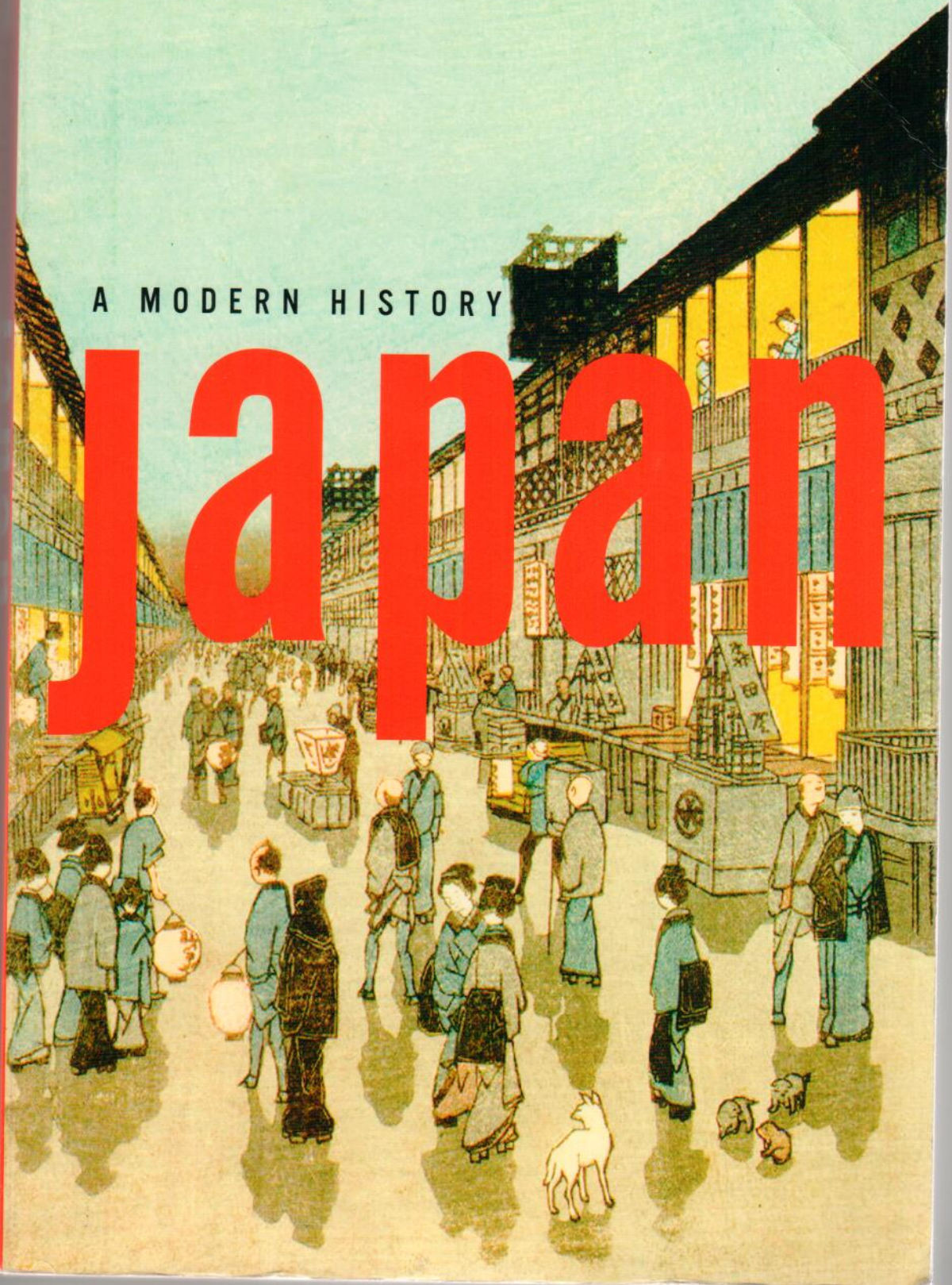


JAMES L. McCLAIN

A MODERN HISTORY

# Japan



## Another New Century

On January 7, 1989, the Shōwa emperor died, and his elaborate obsequies recalled the grand farewell that the nation paid his grandfather, Emperor Meiji, in 1912. At the beginning of the century the booming of the funeral cannon sounded to the novelist Natsume Sōseki "like the last lament for the passing of an age." At century's end the death of the Shōwa emperor likewise signaled to many Japanese the conclusion to another momentous period in their history. The Shōwa emperor had assumed the throne in the 1920s, when political parties first claimed a leading role in policy formation, *mobo* and *moda* defined new cultural norms, and Japan was a friend to the capitalist nations of the West. Twenty years into his reign, Japan was a defeated nation, condemned in the eyes of the world for militaristic policies and an insular mentality, its future bleak and unpromising. Some four decades later, at the end of the longest imperial reign in Japan's recorded history, the country had regained its international standing, surprised everyone with its economic prowess, become a more open and egalitarian society, and affirmed its status as one of the most advanced, modern nations on the face of the globe. With the death of the Shōwa emperor, there was much to pause and reflect upon, and to many, Japan seemed to have completed its quest for modernity.

The Shōwa emperor's son and successor, Crown Prince Akihito, chose Heisei for his reign title. Taken from passages in the Chinese classics *Shi ji* ("Book of History") and *Shu jing* ("Book of Documents"), the era name expressed a hope for achieving peace everywhere, in heaven and on earth, at home and abroad. Japan's new monarch soon discovered, however, that peace was not synonymous with serenity and tranquillity. During the first Heisei decade

Japan's apparently unstoppable economy hit an abrupt speed bump and then broke down in recession, the LDP watched power slip from its grasp, a younger generation questioned the relevance of middle-class values, discontented minorities challenged the validity of an imagined cultural homogeneity, and the collapse of the Soviet Union reordered the international landscape.

The upheavals of the 1990s opened up questions about plotting the future course of democracy in Japan, renewing economic growth, discovering a way to maintain social cohesion while encouraging individual self-fulfillment, and interacting with the outside world. Suddenly, rather than being the pursuit of a fixed, achievable goal, the quest for modernity seemed more like a journey on a turbulent river that flowed on forever, always changing, never ending. Nearly one hundred years earlier, at the juncture of the Meiji and Taishō eras, Japan looked back on a half century of rapid change, put aside nostalgia for the past, and began to take up the challenges and explore the opportunities of a new century. It was time to do so once again.

### *Bursting Bubbles*

Enriched by an excessively strong dollar, in the early 1980s Americans feasted on a rich diet of goods purchased from Japan and other exporting nations. In quick order, America's ravenous appetite for foreign products led to chronic trade imbalances, and protectionists began to call for import restrictions and other measures to insulate U.S. manufacturers against foreign competition. Concerned that such sentiments for trade limitations ultimately might endanger the free trade system of the postwar era, representatives from the leading industrial powers met at New York's Plaza Hotel in September 1985 and decided to intervene in foreign exchange markets in order to bolster the yen and weaken the dollar. Such monetary engineering, experts concurred, would right the balance of trade by dampening demand in the United States for suddenly expensive foreign goods and encouraging America's trading partners to purchase cheaper U.S. manufactures. In addition, Japan and other major exporting nations agreed to stimulate domestic demand as a way of encouraging imports from the United States. As a consequence of the so-called Plaza Accord, the value of the Japanese yen quickly doubled in value, while at home the Japanese government boosted consumption by sponsoring a stimulus package that included lower taxes, reduced interest rates, and easier credit.

The Plaza Accord did not achieve its intended results, however. The robust yen permitted Japanese firms to import raw materials at cheaper prices

than before and to invest in modern new plants, with the ironic consequence that lower costs of production fueled a renewed spurt in Japanese exports; between 1985 and 1987 Japan's annual trade surplus with the United States skyrocketed from forty-nine to eighty-seven billion dollars. Awash with profits, Japanese firms expanded abroad. From 1986 to 1991 Japanese overseas investment amounted to more than 200 billion dollars, as the Sony Corporation laid out a massive sum to buy Columbia Pictures, and Matsushita purchased MCA, making those two Japanese companies proud competitors in the global entertainment market. Meanwhile, Honda and other automobile manufacturers opened production facilities in the American heartland, and Japanese real estate firms snapped up famous golf courses and luxury hotels in Hawaii and California. At home full employment, higher wages, and growing corporate investments climaxed in a frenzy of speculation, the Nikkei index of leading stocks tripled from just under thirteen thousand points in January 1986 to nearly thirty-nine thousand in December 1989, while housing and land prices in major urban centers spiraled upward at the same dizzy pace.

The air rushed out of Japan's overheated "bubble economy" in 1989. A recession in Western industrial nations and intense competition from developing countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe trimmed corporate sales. With profits slumping, the Nikkei went into a nose-dive, plummeting by nearly 40 percent, from thirty-nine thousand to twenty-four thousand points, between December 1989 and the end of 1990, before shedding another ten thousand points to close at the fourteen thousand level in August 1992, a loss of nearly 65 percent from its peak. At the same time, companies tabled their expansion plans, home buyers hesitated, and the real estate market collapsed, wiping out paper assets worth hundreds of trillions of yen.

With the pricking of the speculative bubble, the 1990s turned into a decade of declining consumption, business retrenchment, stagnation, pessimism, and finally a stubborn, disheartening recession. Between 1992 and 1995, real rates of economic growth crept along at barely 1 percent per annum, the most anemic performance of the postwar era, and an embarrassed Matsushita sold MCA at a bargain-basement price, while Sony swallowed heavy operating losses in order to hang on to Columbia Pictures. Worse was still ahead. As the economy slid into the doldrums, speculators who had taken out bank loans to finance their stock and real estate acquisitions could not meet repayment schedules, nor could they sell their rapidly deflating assets to pay off their obligations. By some estimates, Japan's banks were stuck with the equivalent of one trillion dollars' worth of nonperforming

loans, and as they cut back on their lending in the mid-1990s, a severe credit crunch added to the nation's economic woes.

Its banking sector in crisis, Japan could not avoid being drawn into the pan-Asian recession triggered by the collapse of the Thai currency in the summer of 1997. By early fall, Japan's unemployment rate and the number of business bankruptcies reached new highs for the postwar era. In November, Sanyo and Yamaichi Securities, two of the country's leading brokerage houses, and Hokkaidō Takushoku, a large bank in northern Japan, went under, making that month "one of the most troubled in the annals of Japanese financial history," according to one analyst, and conjuring up frightful comparisons to the banking crisis of the late 1920s.<sup>1</sup> A year later, in the autumn of 1998, some optimists averred that Japan's economic fundamentals were solid and foresaw an eventual turnaround, only to hear the head of the Economic Planning Agency announce that the nation's economy had contracted by -0.7 percent in fiscal 1997 (April 1, 1997-March 31, 1998) and then predict that the numbers would worsen as it headed toward the new millennium. Indeed, the gross domestic product fell by 1.4 percent in the fiscal quarter of October-December 1999, and in the spring of 2000 the unemployment rate stood at 4.9 percent, a postwar high.

The LDP's political bubble also burst at the beginning of the Heisei era. In the spring of 1989, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru, who had taken over Tanaka Kakuei's faction within the LDP, resigned his office after the public learned that he had accepted 150 million yen in illegal donations from Recruit Cosmo, a publishing and real estate company. The LDP suffered further embarrassment when news leaked out that Takeshita's successor, Uno Sōsuke, had been paying for a geisha's favors and then slipped her hush money to keep quiet about the tawdry details of their long-running affair. Uno stepped down in disgrace after just six weeks in office, and the LDP turned over the party presidency, and thus the office of prime minister, to Kaifu Toshiki, a little-known Diet member whose chief virtue was that he had not been tarred by any scandal. Although Kaifu proved to be unexpectedly popular with the Japanese public, when his second term expired, the LDP reverted to the norm and tapped an old-time insider, Miyazawa Kiichi, to lead the party and the nation. It was not a happy choice. In March 1993 Kanemaru Shin—Takeshita's successor as head of the old Tanaka faction and Miyazawa's deputy prime minister—was arrested for taking illegal contributions from Sagawa Kyūbin, a parcel delivery service, when police raids uncovered one billion yen's worth of gold bars secreted in his office and under the floorboards of his home.

The Recruit and Sagawa scandals, together with the LDP's inability to deal effectively with Japan's economic woes, undermined confidence in the

TABLE 17.1 Prime Ministers in the First Decade of the Heisei Era

PRIME MINISTER	PARTY AFFILIATION	CABINET NUMBER	CABINET TERM
Takeshita Noboru	LDP		November 6, 1987-June 3, 1989
Uno Sōsuke	LDP		June 3, 1989-August 10, 1989
Kaifu Toshiki	LDP	First	August 10, 1989-February 28, 1990
Kaifu Toshiki	LDP	Second	February 28, 1990-November 5, 1991
Miyazawa Kiichi	LDP		November 5, 1991-August 9, 1993
Hosokawa Morihiro	JNP		August 9, 1993-April 25, 1994
Hata Tsutomu	JRP		April 25, 1994-June 30, 1994
Murayama Tomiichi	SDPJ		June 30, 1994-January 11, 1996
Hashimoto Ryūtarō	LDP	First	January 11, 1996-November 7, 1996
Hashimoto Ryūtarō	LDP	Second	November 7, 1996-July 30, 1998
Obuchi Keizō	LDP		July 30, 1998-April 5, 2000

LDP denotes affiliation with the Liberal Democratic Party.

JNP denotes affiliation with the Japan New Party.

JRP denotes affiliation with the Japan Renewal Party.

SDPJ denotes affiliation with the Social Democratic Party of Japan (previously, Japan Socialist Party).

party and ushered in a period of political instability. Disillusioned with their elders, a number of younger politicians defected from the LDP and formed several independent parties, including the Japan New Party, the Japan Renewal Party (Shinseitō), and the New Party Harbinger (Shintō Sakigake). Voters also shunned the LDP, which lost control of the House of Representatives in elections held in July 1993. After elaborate negotiations, Hosokawa Morihiro, head of the Japan New Party, cobbled together a seven-party coalition and on August 9, 1993, became the first non-LDP prime minister since the party was formed in 1955. When it came to light that he too had suspect dealings with Sagawa Kyūbin, Hosokawa resigned, to be followed by two other non-LDP prime ministers before the Liberal Democrats regained control of the cabinet under the leadership of Hashimoto Ryūtarō.

The future of the LDP remained unclear, however, as Japan headed into the new century. The public showed little confidence in Hashimoto's successor, Obuchi Keizō, who professed himself to be a "mild-mannered and plodding" individual.<sup>2</sup> When Obuchi suffered a stroke that left him hospi-

talized and brain-dead in April 2000, LDP veteran Mori Yoshiro took over the helm of state and announced that his administration would work for the "Rebirth of Japan" by creating a society, "rich in spirit," where people "live in security," realize their "dreams for the future," and engender "the trust of the world."<sup>3</sup> As lofty as those goals appeared, public opinion polls indicated that most Japanese had little faith in the ability of any politician to lead Japan out of its economic and political wasteland.

### *Assessing Blame and Finding Cures for the End-of-the-Millennium Blues*

As Mori's sloganeering suggested, the events of the early Heisei era evoked serious discussion about the economic and political future of Japan. On the political side of the ledger, the decade of the 1990s opened with calls for the return of "rugged" statesmen in the tradition of Itō Hirobumi and Yoshida Shigeru, who frequently were portrayed as "farsighted and courageous" leaders with great "strength of character."<sup>4</sup> Within the ranks of the LDP itself, Hashimoto Ryūtarō and other politicians who maneuvered to grasp power liked to bill themselves as "new leaders" who would bring fresh perspectives and renewed energy to the governing process. In that spirit, Hashimoto's cabinet in December 1997 announced plans for a comprehensive reform of Japan's financial system, nicknamed the Japanese Big Bang after the sweeping deregulation of the British securities industry undertaken by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1986. However, the inability of the cabinet to translate such talk into specific measures that would "rescue the nation from a slump that seems to have no end," in the words of one commentator, left most Japanese unimpressed.<sup>5</sup> In July 1998 voters handed the LDP a humiliating defeat in the election for the House of Councillors, prompting Hashimoto's resignation. The elevation of the uninspiring Obuchi and Mori to the nation's highest political office left many Japanese wondering aloud about just how to attract more capable individuals into politics.

Rather than focus on individual personalities, other critics posed systemic questions, asking whether Japan should move toward a two-party or multiparty system. Decades of single-party rule by the LDP, some charged, had encouraged money politics, tempted party leaders to ignore popular opinion and make decisions behind closed doors, and brought about an unfortunate state of affairs in which timid "politicians deal with little problems but not with the greater issues."<sup>6</sup> More open competition between two or more parties, in that view, would unleash a "meaningful rivalry of ideas" that

could generate vigorous and substantive public debate, result in the formulation of more imaginative policy alternatives, and compel the prime minister and Diet members to serve the public in a more responsible manner.<sup>7</sup>

In that context, speculation arose about whether the LDP could, or even should, survive a shift to a more pluralistic system. Election results clearly demonstrated that a vast proportion of the Japanese public had exhausted its patience with the LDP, and surprisingly, party regulars themselves were divided on the question. Some politicians, like Hashimoto and Obuchi, clearly hoped to recapture the glory of the past, but others thought "it would be a relief if the LDP just dissolved," as one old-timer said. "We oldsters should hang up our gloves and retire from the ring, taking pride in what we accomplished. The youngsters should be out there forming a new party—or they can join another party, if that's what they want. The thing is, sooner or later the party is going to break up. If that's the case, I'd rather it cut loose its ballast and relaunch itself now while the time is ripe instead of waiting for the entire ship to sink."<sup>8</sup>

Others who surveyed the wreckage of the 1990s turned the spotlight on the bureaucracy. With a few vocal exceptions, almost everyone agreed that during the late Meiji and Taishō periods, and then again for the half century that stretched from the occupation until the twilight of the Shōwa epoch, the national ministries were the preserve of Japan's "best and brightest," home to capable and conscientious professionals who crafted economic programs, designed educational systems, and authored social legislation that won worldwide respect. But somehow, something had gone wrong, and Kasumigaseki, the area of downtown Tokyo where most major ministries were headquartered, had turned into a bog inhabited by unimaginative, arrogant, rigid-thinking dullards who merely were "obsessed with maintaining the status quo" and "protecting vested interests." As a result of such shortcomings, some claimed, "the entire government" was "losing dynamism" and no longer was able to respond nimbly to emergency situations.<sup>9</sup>

Popular discontent with bureaucratic ineptitude reached a crescendo in the wake of the Great Kanshin Earthquake, which rocked Kobe and neighboring areas on January 17, 1995, killing more than 5,000, damaging over 100,000 buildings, and leaving 400,000 people homeless. Officials monitoring the situation from their perches at Kasumigaseki grossly misjudged the extent of the catastrophe, and the prime minister was slow to mobilize the Self-Defense Force and the national Fire Defense Agency. Because of the "shameful inaction, indecision, and inertia" on the part of the officialdom, critics charged, fires raged for days after they should have been extinguished, and hundreds trapped in the rubble died unnecessarily.<sup>10</sup> As

public dismay over the calamity mounted, Prime Minister Murayama acknowledged the government's failure to act expeditiously, but that April angry citizens threw his words back at him as children continued to carry drinking water and emergency food to school, damaged tracks still prevented travel by Bullet Trains from Osaka to Kōbe and points west, and the Diet sat around endlessly debating funding bills for relief and rehabilitation.

The role of the bureaucracy also moved to the center of debates about the economic malaise. According to some experts, the economic bubble had become dangerously large and then exploded because the "mandarins" in Kasumigaseki turned a blind eye to reckless practices by banks and brokerage houses. At the heart of the problem, it was said, were "cozy ties between regulators and those being regulated."<sup>11</sup> The notion that the Ministry of Finance had "become a hotbed of corruption" took on a sharper edge in 1995 and 1996 after officials in the ministry were found guilty of accepting handouts from the very financial institutions they were supposed to be overseeing. Such transgressions led to the arrests of 4 high-ranking MOF officials, while 112 subordinates received some form of "administrative punishment," ranging from written reprimands to suspensions and pay cuts. It all made for a bleak future. "As long as incompetent bureaucrats remain at the helm, refusing to relinquish their power," one particularly irate critic wrote, "our prospects are too dismal even to consider."<sup>12</sup>

Few were shy about offering solutions to overcoming bureaucratic corruption and lassitude. Everyone hoped to attract more talented and ethical individuals to government service, and most watchdogs also agreed that it was wise to reduce the size of what was judged to be an overstuffed, and therefore clumsy and unresponsive, bureaucracy. Thus, when the Administrative Reform Council, a body of experts especially convened by Prime Minister Hashimoto, in December 1997 recommended consolidating the existing twenty-two ministries and cabinet-level agencies to just twelve ministries and a Cabinet Office, the premier received applause for recognizing the need "to perform much-needed liposuction on a grossly obese bureaucracy."<sup>13</sup> Others put forth a different argument, declaring that the key to the future was to restore "constitutional balance"—that is, to reestablish the right of the Diet and the cabinet to control the mandarins who ran the ministries. Consequently, when Obuchi assumed office in July 1998, he admitted that "public mistrust of politics has risen to a truly high level" and called for "a restoration of political authority," by which he meant that it was "essential" for elected officials "to exercise true political leadership" by "unambiguously reversing the power balance between political leaders and bureaucrats."<sup>14</sup>

Although bankers and the heads of other financial institutions came under fire in the 1990s, most other corporate leaders moved through the decade with their dignity and public respect intact. As the ongoing recession and recurring financial crises took their toll, supporters of the business community put forth proposals about how to revitalize the economy. In plotting future economic directions, some analysts urged Japan to try to outdo the United States in the development of new computer and software industries. Others suggested that the best choice was to continue on course as a manufacturing nation. After all, as one observer pointed out, the "recession has not sapped the nation's manufacturing strength," and in the words of another, Japanese should remember that "making things is what their country does best."<sup>15</sup>

Events at the turn of the century provoked a great deal of skepticism about those prescriptions, however. In the summer of 2000 shareholders of the tire maker Bridgestone watched the value of their holdings plunge by half after people worldwide initiated legal action against its wholly owned U.S. subsidiary, Firestone, for design and manufacturing mistakes that caused fifty deaths and hundreds of injuries. At virtually the same time public confidence in a once-proud automaker evaporated when prosecutors twice in a single week raided the headquarters of Mitsubishi Motors to seize evidence concerning the company's systematic cover-up of manufacturing defects. Not long thereafter, fifteen thousand people fell ill after consuming contaminated products distributed by Snow Brand, a leading dairy firm. An investigation revealed that the company routinely falsified certificates of freshness and recycled old milk returned from stores. That scandal touched off a wave of consumer complaints against other food companies, and the mass media soon had more stories than they could carry about flies in canned juices and dead lizards in potato chips.

The crisis of the nineties—the "lost decade," in the words of many—hung over the future of all Japanese, and the debates about how to overcome the end-of-the-millennium blues were heated and noisy. Still, it was important to listen to silences and to remember what went unsaid. However much discord scarred the initial decade of the Heisei period, few Japanese voiced any doubt that democracy and capitalism were the appropriate roads to follow as they prepared to step forward into another new century. Despite the sluggish, disappointing economic performance of the 1990s, and despite having endured a succession of lackluster prime ministers whose apparent incompetence threatened to paralyze the nation, there were no serious calls to abandon parliamentary democracy or the private enterprise system. Rather, the belief that Japan's successes during the twentieth cen-

tury came when party government and market-based capitalism flourished, and that failures mounted when the nation turned in other directions, was almost universal. As the Heisei era folded itself into the new century, then, the questions revolved around how to promote a better-functioning constitutional system and free market economy based on the private ownership of business.

### *Japan in the Global Community*

Japanese foreign policy rested on several axioms in the late Shōwa period. The first, hand-wrought by Yoshida Shigeru and reaffirmed by successive LDP cabinets with varying degrees of enthusiasm, was that Japan place an absolute priority on its relationship with the United States. The United States–Japan Security Treaty, agreed to in 1951 and amended in 1960, set the parameters for that alliance by committing Japan to strategic dependence upon the United States and economic interdependence with its new Pacific ally. In practice, that meant Japan would align its economy with the capitalistic nations of the West, rely on the United States to protect it militarily, and not resist overtly the lead of its mentor when major world crises erupted.

Attempts to repair diplomatic relations with neighbors in Asia constituted the second hallmark of postwar Japanese foreign policy. Cold War tensions and Tokyo's decision to take shelter under the wing of the American eagle, however, created a number of complications. America froze China out of the negotiations that culminated in the San Francisco System after Mao Zedong marched triumphantly into Beijing and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949. Consequently, on the same afternoon that Japan signed the peace agreement in September 1951, Tokyo concluded a separate treaty with Taiwan and joined the United States in recognizing that island regime as the official government of China. Those actions did not sit easy with many Japanese, who believed that in the long run Japan needed to be on good terms with China proper, whatever its government's political orientation. That possibility materialized only in the early 1970s, when the United Nations admitted the PRC to its ranks and the United States did an abrupt about-face on the China question. Shortly thereafter, in September 1972, Prime Minister Tanaka traveled to Beijing and signed a joint communiqué whose clauses provided for the exchange of consular officials, recognized the PRC as "the sole legal government of China," and specified Japan's "full understanding" that Tai-

wan constituted "an inalienable part" of the sovereign territory of China. Finally, on August 12, 1978, Tokyo and Beijing signed the China–Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty to reaffirm their earlier agreement and completely normalize relations.

Tokyo and Seoul required prolonged negotiations before representatives of those two nations finally signed the Korea–Japan Treaty in June 1965. That accord, together with a set of supplementary agreements, recognized the Republic of Korea as the only legitimate government on the peninsula, established diplomatic and consular relations, and called for cultural cooperation. Left in a state of limbo was Japan's relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Branded a pariah nation by the United States after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1951, North Korea remained almost a noncountry in Japan's eyes as well throughout the late Shōwa period.

Japan's attempts to put a new keel under its relations with the Soviet Union involved more heavy lifting. The two old foes signed the Soviet–Japanese Joint Declaration on October 19, 1956, ending the state of war that had existed since August 9, 1945, and restoring official diplomatic linkages. Nevertheless, Japan's inclusion in the defense perimeter that America was building around the USSR and the so-called Northern Territories issue—irreconcilable counterclaims by Moscow and Tokyo to rights of sovereignty over four small islands lying off the northern coast of Hokkaidō—combined with a long history of mistrust to make friendly ties nearly impossible.

Within the limitations imposed by the San Francisco System, the third guiding principle for Japanese policy makers was to decouple politics from commerce as far as possible so that Japan could become a trading friend to the world. Such efforts encountered no insurmountable obstacles in Western Europe or the Americas, even after Japan's escalating trade surpluses brought forth charges of unfair competition and an emotional, self-indulgent round of Japan bashing by Western politicians and businesspeople in the late 1980s. In 1990, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, and Italy were among Japan's top ten trading partners, and incidentally, the amount of Japan's enormous import and export trade with the United States approached that of the other nine nations combined, as seen in Table 17.2.

In Asia the rebuilt diplomatic structure opened up ample commercial opportunities for Japanese corporations across the region, North Korea excepted. As early as 1952 Japan concluded the first in a series of trade agreements with the PRC that enabled bilateral trade to grow to U.S. \$1.2 billion

**TABLE 17.2** *Japan's Leading Trading Partners, 1970-1990*  
(in millions of U.S. dollars)

	1970		1980		1990	
	JAPANESE EXPORTS	JAPANESE IMPORTS	JAPANESE EXPORTS	JAPANESE IMPORTS	JAPANESE EXPORTS	JAPANESE IMPORTS
United States	5,940	5,560	31,367	24,408	90,322	52,369
West Germany	550	617	5,756	2,501	17,782	11,487
South Korea	818	229	5,363	2,996	17,457	11,707
Australia	589	1,598	3,389	6,982	6,900	12,369
China	569	254	5,078	4,323	6,130	12,054
United Kingdom	480	395	3,782	1,954	10,786	5,239
Canada	563	929	2,437	4,724	6,727	8,392
France	127	186	2,021	1,296	6,128	7,590
Italy	192	143	955	939	3,407	5,008
Soviet Union	341	481	2,778	1,860	2,563	3,351

Adapted from *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993), p. 399.

by the time relations were regularized in 1972 and then to U.S. \$18.1 billion by 1990. In addition, so-called private trade with Taiwan continued to expand even after Tokyo severed official diplomatic ties, and had the "private trade" been entered into official ledgers, in 1990 Taiwan would have been Japan's fourth-largest trading partner, importing U.S. \$15.4 billion of Japanese goods and sending U.S. \$8.5 billion worth in return. Trade with the Republic of Korea grew even more rapidly: In 1990 Japan's imports from Korea totaled U.S. \$11.7 billion, and its exports U.S. \$17.5 billion, figures that made Japan Korea's third-largest trading partner. Japan-USSR trade remained at much lower levels, but Russia was a major market for Japan's steel producers and construction industries, while the Siberian provinces sold oil, lumber, and metals, such as platinum and nickel, to Japanese firms.

Not surprisingly, trade issues tended to shape interactions with the nations of Southeast Asia, most of which signed diplomatic accords with Japan in the 1950s. During the 1960s Japanese corporate outposts and billboards advertising everything from Hondas to Sonys sprouted up along city horizons from Manila to Singapore. By the late Shōwa period Japan had become a regular customer for Indonesian oil and the products of light industry from other countries, while flooding the region with appliances, automobiles, machine tools, steel, and so forth. In 1990 Japanese trade with the na-

tions of Southeast Asia topped U.S. \$50 billion, although every country except Indonesia ran a significant trade deficit with Asia's economic titan.

Throughout the late Shōwa decades the Japanese debated the merits of the San Francisco System. Some believed that "subordinate independence" served their country reasonably well. Businesspeople could see clearly how economic imbrication with Europe and the Americas and the restoration of peace with Asia contributed in multiple ways to high-speed growth and the impressive domestic prosperity that the Japanese had come to enjoy. Anti-Communists appreciated the safeguards erected against Japan's old nemesis, the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, those who abhorred their country's aggression in the 1930s and 1940s felt some assurance that the reduced size of its armed forces, when considered with the provisions of Article 9 in the constitution, had made any possible resurgence of militarism unlikely.

Critics were quick to note, however, that there had been enormous trade-offs. Psychologically the subordination of Japan's national interests to those of another country, its conqueror, constantly ate at Japanese pride. That sense of humiliation deepened when the security treaty signed in 1951 authorized the United States to administer Okinawa directly, recognizing only Japan's "residual sovereignty" over the prefecture. Until those islands reverted to Japan in 1972, the U.S. government ran affairs there almost as if the prefecture were a colonial possession, and its military built so many bases that Okinawa, in the view of some, resembled a gigantic American aircraft carrier. Moreover, some Japanese remained forever skeptical about claims that U.S. forces stationed on bases in Okinawa and across Japan would deter external threats to Japan. Rather, they feared that the presence of those foreign troops might embroil Japan in an unwanted conflict or even place it in the path of a horrible nuclear showdown between Cold War foes. Finally, resentments over the San Francisco System caused considerable domestic unrest: In 1960, millions protested the renewal of the security treaty and toppled the Kishi government, and during the anti-Vietnam War movement of 1967 to 1970, eighteen million Japanese took to the streets to demonstrate against the war and demand the immediate reversion of Okinawa.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union in December 1991 punctuated the flow of history. Just as in Europe, those events marked the end of the Cold War era in Asia, and to many Japanese they further suggested that the San Francisco System had become an anachism. If the death of the Shōwa emperor and the bursting of the economic and political bubbles spurred Japanese to reconsider their domestic futures, the early 1990s also presented a fresh opportunity to evaluate foreign pol-



icy tenets and objectives. Near the top of almost everyone's agenda was a reexamination of the relationship with the United States, and not far behind was a reconsideration of Japan's future role in Asia and on the world stage.

The new international environment, according to some political figures who traditionally had criticized the San Francisco System, represented a long-awaited chance for Japan to disentangle itself from the alliance with the United States and stake out a more autonomous foreign policy. Other important government officials and influential media pundits, however, were not so ready to separate past from future. Rather, they argued, Japan needed to stay close to America, if for no other reason than that the complex economic interrelationships linking the two countries made mutual cooperation a prerequisite to the future prosperity of both. Moreover, while the USSR no longer posed the threat it once had, the remnants of the Cold War persisted more stubbornly in East Asia than elsewhere in the world. The Korean peninsula remained bitterly divided, tensions between China and Russia occasionally approached the flash point, and the new Russian Federation showed no inclination to settle the Northern Territories dispute. Given those unstable conditions, many still considered a military alliance with the United States the surest guarantee that a local conflict would not expand and wrap its tentacles around Japan.

Among the leading politicians and officials in Kasumigaseki who wanted Japan to stay tethered to the United States, many wished their country to assume a role on the world stage more commensurate with its economic standing. At the beginning of the Heisei period one prominent academic noted that Japan was a "financial power" with a GNP 50 percent greater than that of a united Germany. "For a country of this size to remain a minor player politically and militarily," he wrote, "is no longer acceptable."<sup>16</sup> Such rhetoric was not intended to imply that Japan ought to become a military superpower. Rather, it supported the view that the country should contribute to global security by participating in what some called collective self-defense. Unpacked, that phrase signified that Article 9 should be interpreted as allowing the Self-Defense Force to join operations organized by Japan's allies or the United Nations to maintain international stability.

Finally, some Japanese urged their country to exert its influence more in Asia. For many members of the LDP, that meant emphasizing security issues. "As an Asian country," one of the party's position papers noted, "Japan must strive to preserve peace and maintain stability in the Asian region, always seeking the understanding and support of other Asian countries."<sup>17</sup> What one writer termed "the problem of Japan's past," however, made it difficult for his country to win much sympathy for its position.<sup>18</sup> In particu-

lar, the Japanese government's stubborn refusal to express remorse to former "comfort women" or to pay compensation to the victims who survived that terrible indignity aroused anger across Asia. In addition, Japan's neighbors never completely accepted official expressions of contrition for the war. When leaders of the People's Republic of China visited Tokyo in April 1989, the Heisei emperor personally apologized for Japan's wartime activities in China, and at a state banquet that May, he rose to tell the president of Korea, "I think of the sufferings your people underwent during this unfortunate period, which was brought about by my country, and cannot but feel the greatest regret."<sup>19</sup> Many Asians were not persuaded of the sincerity of such words, however, and the Chinese president Jiang Zemin cast a pall over his state visit in November 1998, when he pointedly and repeatedly called upon Japan to offer more heartfelt expressions of remorse. "In Japan," he stated in a press conference, "there are still people in high positions who constantly distort history and try to beautify aggression. It is important that the Japanese squarely face history and learn a lesson from it."<sup>20</sup> Sometimes, it seemed to some, no amount of apologizing, of expressing regret for the past, would ever be acceptable to the generation of Asians who had suffered so much at the hands of the Japanese military.

As Japan stood on the brink of the new century, an evolutionary reorientation of its foreign policy seemed to be taking recognizable form. At home the government reaffirmed its commitment to the security alliance with the United States. On the world stage Japan's profile still cast a lesser shadow than those of many other leading world powers, but Japanese delegates were assuming more leadership roles in the United Nations and international financial organizations. Simultaneously, Tokyo began to move toward collective security. It sent minesweepers to the Persian Gulf following the conclusion of the Gulf War in 1991, and in September 1992 it dispatched Self-Defense personnel to Cambodia as part of a UN peacekeeping mission. Within Asia, Japan tried to rebuild its image by beefing up foreign aid assistance and funding scholarship programs that enabled tens of thousands of Asian students to learn Japanese and study at Japanese universities.

### *Social Obligation, Self-Fulfillment*

New social realities also filled the first decade of the Heisei era. Japan, many began to realize, rapidly was becoming a "gray society." In the year 2000 somewhat more than 10 percent of the population was sixty-five years of age or older, by 2025 the sixty-five-plus share of the population would

reach 27 percent, or more than thirty million people, giving Japan the world's most top-heavy population pyramid. Juxtaposed against the image of an elderly, infirm Japan was the figure of an energetic, articulate, and more autonomous woman who was establishing a place for herself in corporate and professional offices at century's end and forging new kinds of relationships with the men in her life. Youth also pushed its way into the picture, too often, many believed, by adopting behaviors that undermined traditional social covenants and by committing crimes that horrified society. Bewildering and disturbing to some, exhilarating and filled with promise for others, the changes reshaping society at the turn of the millennium opened the door to bold, new discussions about gender, family, the workplace, and school.

The challenge of caring for the elderly, especially the 5.5 million expected to be either mentally incapacitated or bedridden in 2025, renewed a national debate about the role of women. From one perspective, the changing demographics plucked the strings of the familiar refrain, nearly as old as Japan's quest for modernity itself, that society's needs required housewives to stay home and care for their families. To a degree that surprised some observers, such rhetoric continued to define a comfortable role for many middle-class homemakers, who derived gratification and a sense of self-esteem from the creative nurturing of family. It was fortunate for the country that they did so, for while most elderly claimed they did not want to live with their children, few alternatives were available, and the daughter or daughter-in-law remained the primary caregiver as Japan headed into the twenty-first century. Overall, in 1990, one of every fifteen nonworking women in her forties was providing home care for the elderly, and predictions put that share at one in five in 2005 and an astounding one in two in 2025, barring massive government investments in nursing homes and other facilities.

Other social critics took a contrary view of women, arguing that daughters and wives had to get out of the house and into the workplace. Projections suggested that in 2025 each retired person would be supported by just 2.3 people of working age (those between fifteen and sixty-four), down from 5.8 in 1990. Compounding the problem was another new social reality: In the 1990s women were not as quick to marry as those of previous generations, and they were choosing to have fewer children. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, in 1994 the fertility rate, a measure of the birthrate for women of childbearing age, had fallen to a historic low of 1.46, a decline of nearly 30 percent from 1975 and well below the level needed to sustain the population at a stable level. Very clearly, in the calculations of many social scientists, more women had to take jobs and pay taxes if

Japan were to honor its social obligation to provide the aging population with adequate pensions and medical benefits.

New conceptions of self-worth and a stronger emphasis on the self-fulfillment of the individual prompted women themselves to consider employment and the workplace from fresh perspectives. Increasingly, female activists questioned the inevitability of a preordained domestic destiny and insisted that women had the right to select from a menu of life choices. In that spirit, Atsumi Ikuko, scholar and founder of the journal *Feminisuto* ("Feminist"), wrote that "men's role has been the production of materials outside, and women's role has lain in the production of life at home. Japanese feminist theory considers that both are equally important. Men should be more involved in the production of life, and women in the production of materials. The current feminist movement," Atsumi added, in words that echoed the ideals of the Taishō period activist Yosano Akiko, "aims at the kind of society in which a woman can not only be economically independent but also be free to choose the way she wants to live. In such a society, if she wants to be a housewife, it's all right, but a woman who wants to work can do so without being discriminated against. The movement seeks to change roles not only in the family but also in society."<sup>21</sup>

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO) of 1986 further altered contemporary realities and remolded future visions. It called on businesses to "endeavor to give women equal opportunity" to compete with men for any job and stipulated that everyone should receive equal pay for comparable work. Two years later revisions to the Labor Standards Law eliminated restrictions that dated to the Taishō era on women's overtime and work deemed dangerous to their health and safety. Some critics complained that the laws did not achieve their intended effect. A decade after the enactment of the EEO, Japanese women still earned just over half of what men did (compared with about 75 percent in the United States and 90 percent in Australia), and one graduating senior at a prestigious university in Kyoto bristled when the company official interviewing her for a position with a major newspaper asked, "Are you sure you won't quit after you marry? We wouldn't want to take such a risk."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the EEO and the new labor standards legitimized women's aspirations and raised public consciousness about work and gender.

In combination, the mix of changing demographics, new social ideals, and revised legal norms drew increasing numbers of women into the workplace. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, full-time female employees outnumbered full-time housewives, and fully half of all mothers with school-age children worked. To be certain, women remained especially visible in

small, family businesses and service industries, and in large corporations the overwhelming majority still were compartmentalized as pink-collar OLs or stuck in dead-end jobs on the production line. At the same time, however, unprecedented numbers of women were invading previously all-male domains to become engineers, architects, and doctors; in 1998, 200 of the 932 engineers joining the electronics giant NEC were women. Even in the corporate offices of major companies, dressed-for-success career women could be seen leaping aboard executive elevators in ever-increasing numbers; the number of white-collar women managers doubled, to about 8 percent of all executives, in the decade following the implementation of the EEOL. Still, success did not come easy. "In Japan," one young female manager noted, "glass ceilings are barely centimeters off the floor."<sup>23</sup>

Working women challenged companies to reform themselves to meet the needs of a more diverse work force. With increasing boldness, women demanded equal pay and treatment, as provided by the EEOL, and *sekihara* ("sexual harassment") entered the Japanese vocabulary as women came forward to complain about offensive and discriminatory behavior by male coworkers and employers. Working mothers added other items to the reform agenda. In particular, they insisted that companies provide such amenities as flex time schedules, family care leave time, holidays coordinated with school vacations, job sharing, and on-site day care. The vision of the future advanced by such women included rewarding jobs, fair pay, and the opportunity to be good mothers, in Japanese terms. They did not want to be clones of male workers, they claimed; rather, drawing on the legacy of Yosano Akiko, they wanted recognition of the many diverse roles they performed in life.

Japanese women also put gender relations and marriage on the table for discussion in the 1990s. As single women explored the greater career opportunities available to them, many discovered that they could support themselves without having to rely on a man, either financially or psychologically, and they began to delay marriage and celebrate the single life. In 1993 the average age at marriage for Japanese women had risen to twenty-seven years, up by nearly five years since the 1950s and second highest in the world to Swedish women. Moreover, at the turn of the century more than 8 percent of women in Tokyo who had passed through the so-called marriageable years (ages eighteen to forty-four) had never wed, suggesting that the single life gradually was emerging as an acceptable option in the country's larger cities. Self-reliant and autonomous from male dominance, greater numbers of single women created for themselves liberated lifestyles that recalled the openness of Japan's urban centers in the 1920s. According to one newspaper account, young women in the 1990s wanted "to live in-

dependently, self-sufficiently, take on lovers and have relationships based on equality."<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the lure of the not-married-for-life alternative, most single women in their twenties—94 percent according to one government poll conducted in 1992—assumed that eventually they would wed, manage households, and raise children. But those women too cast up new visions about an ideal marriage. In one startling twist, nearly 90 percent of the single women employed at the time of the 1992 survey declared that they intended to keep on working after marriage. Such women, it seemed, wanted it all—the self-satisfaction of a career and the self-fulfillment of family—and they posed another challenge to government and private enterprise to help women find a way to balance the responsibilities of work and home.

As matters turned out, the reality of meeting the heavy demands of career and family life proved considerably more daunting than most women expected before they married, and in the early Heisei period about half of all wives left the work force when children came along. The fact that Japanese society continued to honor the "separate sphere" of the housewife and to give full credit to women for what they did as mothers eased the transition from office to home and helped homebound women feel fulfilled. Nevertheless, many full-time housewives endorsed the emerging vision of a more egalitarian, caring relationship with their spouses. More than ever before, married women, whether they worked outside the house or not, felt it important for their husbands to participate substantially in family life and to share wholeheartedly such responsibilities as child care and housework.

In addition to the availability of jobs, women used new notions about divorce to gain a certain leverage in pressing their demands. The divorce rate in Japan approximately doubled between 1970 and 1995, and at century's end there were about twenty-four divorces for every hundred new marriages, compared with thirty-two in France, forty-two in Great Britain, and fifty-five in the United States. As in the West, women in Japan who had the temperament and skills to move into full-time jobs were especially apt to consider divorce if their marriage turned sour. As one expert noted, if a middle-aged salaryman came home drunk and his wife greeted him with the announcement "I've decided to start working," he had better have a glass of water, compose himself, and ask, "Full-time or part-time?" If the answer was "full-time," he must recognize that the situation was "dangerous."<sup>25</sup>

Change is seldom easy, and in provincial Japan men of the older generation had a particularly difficult time accepting new ideas about marriage. Asked if he loved his wife of thirty-three years, one cattle farmer in a small town nestled in the rolling hills of Mie Peninsula some two hundred miles

southwest of Tokyo, furrowed his brow, looked perplexed, and replied, "Yeah, so-so, I guess. She's like air or water. You couldn't live without it, but most of the time, you're not conscious of its existence."<sup>26</sup> A seventy-two-year-old neighbor, Uemura Yuri, reported, "There was never any love between me and my husband," and revealed sadly that her mate of forty-plus years had never told her that he liked her, complimented her on a meal, held her hand, given her a present, or shown her affection in any way. He even used to beat her, Mrs. Uemura recalled, "But, well, we survived."

Younger males in Japan's larger population centers were quicker to come to grips with the new realities, but even there some could be heard muttering, "This is a terrible time to be a man."<sup>27</sup> Epitomizing the new low for urban middle-class husbands and fathers was the television advertisement for a double-binned clothes washer that showed a neatly dressed housewife, nose wrinkled in disgust, picking up her husband's underwear with a pair of extralong chopsticks and tossing them into the heavy-duty bin as her young daughter said, "Let's keep Dad's yucky stuff separate." Still, whatever media images abounded in the early Heisei period, a considerable number of younger men accepted and even welcomed the new trends in marriage. In one 1987 survey 52 percent of men (and 37 percent of women) agreed with the statement "Men work outside of the home while women work in the home." In the middle of the 1990s just 35 percent of men and 25 percent of women held the same view.

To a significant degree, the willingness of both younger men and women to enter the new-style marriage was intertwined with the continuing evolution of household patterns. Across Japan the nuclear household, which to a noticeable extent had defined the middle-class ideal during the late Showa era, almost entirely had replaced the multigenerational extended family by the end of the twentieth century. Under the older arrangements, most marriages were arranged, and friends, family, and society expected couples like the Uemuras to set aside personal feelings about their spouses and make a go of the union for the sake of the household. Within the smaller, "couples-oriented" nuclear household of the early Heisei era, the private, horizontal relationship between husband and wife took precedence over the vertical relationships across generations. As a consequence, young men and women in the 1990s, even more so than the New Middle Class of the 1970s and 1980s, saw conjugal love as the primary reason to get married. By the mid-1990s three-quarters of all weddings were self-declared "love marriages," compared with about one-half in the early 1960s, and modern couples preferred more romance in their relationships than had been typical for the older generation.

As new attitudes took hold at the turn of the century, more and more young men could be seen strolling the supermarket aisles with their wives, taking a turn doing the dishes and diapering the baby, and treating the family to a Sunday drive and dinner at a "family restaurant." Despite the rising divorce rate, most women seemed to agree that the couples-oriented lifestyle resulted in happier marriages and a more contented homelife. As indicated in Table 17.3, in the 1990s the majority of Japanese women, far more so than their American counterparts, believed circumstances had improved for wives and mothers over the past two decades. Even Mrs. Uemura said that her husband was treating her better. "The other day, he tried to pour me a cup of tea," she remarked excitedly. "It was a big change. I told all my friends."

Male views about company life also were changing. As early as the mid-1980s some social commentators noted the appearance of the *shinjiru*, a "new breed" of young Japanese workers, according to the newperson who coined the term, "that the older generation finds impossible to comprehend or communicate with."<sup>28</sup> The new generation, critics claimed, scorned the maxim, expounded by the Tokugawa period thinker Ishida Baigan and repeated by many thereafter, that the meaning of life is found in the discipline of work. In sharp contrast with that received wisdom, observers noted, blue-collar workers in the 1990s refused to take the *k* jobs, employment they considered *kitanai*, *kitsui*, *kiken* ("dirty, difficult, dangerous"). Recent college graduates interviewing for white-collar positions, meanwhile, wanted plenty of holidays, no overtime, and generous salaries right away, while they

TABLE 17.3 Women's Attitudes in Japan and the United States toward Marriage and Family, 1990

Percent of women who responded to the question, "How have things changed for women since 1970?"

	MARRIAGE		ROLE AS MOTHER		ROLE AS HOMEMAKER	
	JAPAN	U.S.	JAPAN	U.S.	JAPAN	U.S.
Improved	59	34	50	36	56	37
Haven't changed	28	16	31	20	33	23
Gotten worse	10	45	17	41	10	37

Adapted from Iwao Sumiko, "Japanese and American Women Today: A Comparison," *Japan Echo* 20:3 (Autumn 1993), p. 70.

were still young, rather than have to wait until they climbed their way to the top of a particular firm's seniority ladder. Confirming the new attitudes, even Japan's most prestigious companies became distressed by the growing number of young white-collar employees who quit after just three or four years on the job, and a government white paper on labor issued in July 1990 revealed that young workers in Japan were less satisfied than those in the United States and Britain with their wages, working hours, chances for promotion, and opportunities to utilize their own individual talents.

Some social commentators saw the younger generation's desire for more leisure time, better pay, and more comfortable working conditions as a reaction against the overemphasis on single-minded dedication to the job that major companies had imposed upon white-collar workaholics in the late Shōwa period. Others blamed society. Salarymen, one high-placed official noted, "are no longer respected as noble corporate warriors" and, as a consequence, "have grown ashamed of their habitual devotion to the job."<sup>29</sup> Still others vented their anger at the younger people themselves. Since they had been "brought up amid material indulgence" and "raised in an environment of leniency," one observer concluded, it was only natural that Generation Xers wanted "to take life easy" and exploit a tight job market for their own selfish ends.<sup>30</sup> However one assigned responsibility, all agreed that the evolving attitudes posed grave challenges for the new century. Some foresaw the end of the lifetime employment system, while others, more alarmist, believed the new antiwork ethic meant that eventually "society will languish, and Japan, deprived of the industriousness of its labor force, will become a second-rate country."

### *Youth in Trouble, Schools under Fire*

Adolescents and children also made headlines at the beginning of the Heisei period. Few social critics would dispute that the majority of Japanese young people were sensible, cheerful, and well adjusted, and in public opinion surveys teenagers demonstrated a keener sense of social responsibility than their elders regarding such issues as the need to become good global citizens, preserve the environment, and improve the quality of life, even at the expense of economic growth. Nevertheless, during the 1990s the older generation grew increasingly troubled by an elusive, but to them readily apparent, breakdown in social morality, manifested in their children's estrangement from parents and siblings, eating disorders, teenage promiscuity, and recreational drug use.

Persistent bullying, or *ijime*, also scandalized the nation. Part of the schoolyard scene from the early 1970s, bullies typically ridiculed, humiliated, and beat their victims almost daily. In one case the culprits forced a classmate to run constant errands, doodled mustaches on his face with felt markers, forced him to climb a tree and sing the school song as other kids looked on, and even staged his mock funeral. Analysts were not surprised to learn that perpetrators of *ijime* often came from dysfunctional families in which alcoholism and spousal violence was commonplace, but they could scarcely fathom the mentality of the more ordinary students who meekly acquiesced to their own victimization. After classmate thugs repeatedly squeezed him for large sums of money, including an impossible demand for 120,000 yen, Ōkōcho Kiyoteru, an eighth grader in Aichi Prefecture, hanged himself on November 27, 1994, one of several distraught youths who committed suicide that year after being bullied. Kiyoteru's lengthy suicide note was filled with relentless phrases of self-blame and a painful sense of guilt about every aspect of his young life. "If I had just refused to pay the money," he wrote, "nothing like this would have ever happened. I am really sorry. Please do not blame the people who took the money. I should be blamed because I was the one who gave the money so willingly." To his parents, he added, "I am really sorry that I have always been the cause of worry for you. I was such a selfish child. It must have been really difficult to have me as your son."<sup>31</sup>

A spurt in the number of adolescents charged with criminal misconduct added to society's unease. During the postwar decades, crime rates had trended downward, and between 1986 and 1996 the number of teenagers classified as delinquents by the police plunged from 1.6 million to just over 800,000. Then, in 1997, juvenile crimes jumped by 20 percent over the previous year. Moreover, in 1997 youths aged fourteen to nineteen, who constituted just 9 percent of Japan's population, committed 34 percent of all murders and robberies and fully 45 percent of violent crimes, such as assault and battery. Included in that latter number were twenty-five hundred muggings of middle-aged men, what young ruffians called *oyaji-gari* ("old-man hunting").

For many pundits, the fact that most young delinquents came from the middle class was even more worrisome than the spike in crime rates itself. One might understand why poor kids would go old-man hunting in the immediate postwar years, when ten thousand muggings a year were commonplace, and in 1955 about half of Japan's juvenile offenders came from impoverished or dysfunctional families. By the mid-1990s, however, nearly four-fifths of young miscreants lived with both parents, and about 90 per-

cent could be described as thoroughly middle class. To the shock of most adults, adolescents arrested for theft reported that their main motive simply was to get money for entertainment. As the Japanese became materially affluent, the social commentators cried, they seemed to become spiritually bankrupt.

A surge in teenage prostitution, euphemistically called subsidized friendship, seemed to confirm that judgment. Middle-aged men infatuated with younger girls only had to dial commercial voice mail services to screen such messages as "I am a sixteen-year-old high school girl. I am looking for someone to meet me tomorrow for some subsidized friendship. I am 165 centimeters tall and weight forty-nine kilograms. I think I am pretty cute. My price is '5' [50,000 yen] for about two hours."<sup>32</sup> Beeped through, the man might meet a chirpy, well-dressed, and to all outward appearances ordinary student, who engaged in sex simply because she wanted 100,000-yen designer handbags and other brand name luxuries that she could not afford from her family allowance. In 1995 the National Police Agency placed under protective custody more than five thousand female minors for prostitution and other sex-related crimes, and 4 percent of the high school girls questioned in a survey conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in October 1996 claimed they had engaged in friendship for pay.

As juvenile delinquents and teenage prostitutes multiplied in number, the education system came under fire for failing the country's youth. Perhaps the chief reason that juvenile crime so horrified the nation was that there existed, as one expert put it, a "national consensus that Japan's most important resource is its children, and the nation's most important job is their education."<sup>33</sup> Thus arrows of reproach crisscrossed the air. Some parents criticized teachers for being too lax, while others claimed that the school system's overly severe treatment of their children led to pent-up stresses that found relief in criminal conduct. Teachers pointed the finger back at parents. "A large portion of the blame for the emergence of students who are selfish and stubborn," wrote one teacher, "must lie with the way adults have raised them. Children have been left to their own devices: The goal of child-rearing is no longer to prepare an independent member of society, but to emphasize individuality."<sup>34</sup> Another blamed parents for having "no moral structure in their lives" and coddling children, even to the extent of protesting teachers' evaluations, "calling up on the phone and saying, 'I know he's better than that,'" in the irate words of one eighth-grade instructor.<sup>35</sup>

Those entrusted with educating students in the 1990s had to contend with two differing traditions. On the one hand, from the late Meiji period through the Greater East Asia War, educational policy had placed a strong

emphasis on moral training and on preparing individuals to be loyal, responsible citizens who would support their government. On the other hand, at the end of the nineteenth century Japanese such as Miyake Setsurei and Ueki Emori had argued that education should "encourage and nourish the development of man's naturally given abilities" in order to create an enlightened and autonomous citizenry that would help advance world culture. Similarly, the SCAP-sanctioned Fundamental Law of Education, promulgated in 1947, declared that the basic objective of the education system was to help each child reach his or her full potential as an individual so that s/he could "contribute to the peace of the world and welfare of humanity by building a democratic and cultural state."

The dual legacies of the past weighed heavily on teachers in the early Heisei period. Not surprisingly, some members of the profession urged fellow educators to bring the creativity inherent in each child to full flower, while others clung to the notion that "The real challenge for schoolteachers," as one declared at a roundtable discussion, "isn't academic instruction. It's guidance—teaching kids how to behave in school and society."<sup>36</sup> The debates on education repeated the concerns about adjusting marriage, family, and the workplace to the realities of the new century. In all those cases, social obligation and individual self-fulfillment stood as opposite poles that seemed to define the range of future possibilities.

### *Challenges from Minorities*

The sense of middle-class homogeneity that pervaded the 1970s and 1980s was the grandchild of efforts to inculcate a sense of common national community that extended back to the Meiji era. At that time partisans for the new order spoke about a distinctive Japanese personality, forged over aeons, and defined a code of civil ethics that drew on an idealized mythohistory in order to mold *kokumin* ("citizens") who embraced collective goals and aspirations. The rhetoric of the war years heightened the feeling that the Japanese were a "special race" whose members descended from a common ancestry, spoke a single language, and ascribed to a specific set of religious beliefs and cultural practices that distinguished them not only from Westerners but also from their neighbors in Asia.

In the 1970s, after two decades of rapid change, some intellectuals and social commentators produced a vast literature under the rubric of *Nihonjinron* ("debates on being Japanese") that set out once again to discover the essential features of a unique Japanese culture and singular national character.

Some analysts produced serious and insightful works; others advanced outrageous claims. Among them was the agricultural minister who maintained that Japan should not import Australian beef since the intestines of his countrymen were shorter than those of Westerners and therefore ill suited to digesting meat and other Western staples. However fanciful and narcissistic the *Nihonjin ron* debates became in the late Shōwa era, however, they contributed to the emerging notion that everyone who lived on the Japanese islands belonged to a particular race-culture. Indeed, when Japan ratified the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1979, its representative reported, "The right of any person to enjoy his own culture, to profess and practice his religion or to use his own language is ensured under Japanese law. However, minorities of the kind mentioned in the Covenant do not exist in Japan."<sup>37</sup>

*Burakumin* and members of other minority communities in Japan saw matters differently. In the late Shōwa decades, the Buraku Liberation League, successor to the prewar Suiheisha, rekindled the old fight for equality. In the 1950s and 1960s the league waged "administrative struggles" against local governments to better the living environment in *burakumin* neighborhoods by improving housing, paving streets, and supplying purer water. That campaign bore fruit in 1969, when the national government issued the Special Measures and Enterprise Law concerning Assimilation that served as the basis for a series of community development projects. Between 1969 and 1993 the national and local governments spent nearly fourteen billion yen to lay sewer systems, upgrade streetlighting and fire-fighting services, construct high-rise apartment buildings, and build schools, medical clinics, and community centers in specially designated target areas.

Although government efforts narrowed many of the gaps between *burakumin* neighborhoods and mainstream society, the Special Measures Law did not provide legal sanctions against many guileful forms of discrimination. Consequently, in the late Shōwa period, activists campaigned for unequivocal statutory regulations banning all forms of social intolerance. Concurrently, some community leaders revived the older tactics of denunciation in order to combat subtle expressions of prejudice. In one particularly prominent incident in Hyōgo Prefecture, supporters of the Buraku Liberation League confined fifty-two teachers to school premises and threatened to keep them there until they signed statements of self-criticism and promised to establish a study group on *burakumin* problems at the school. When the teachers refused, the *burakumin* protesters subjected them to intense verbal harassment that put forty-three emotionally exhausted teachers in the hospital, thirteen of them for as long as six weeks.

Japan's Ainu population also regarded pronouncements about an all-embracing homogeneity as dangerously misleading. Throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, Ainu communities remained mired in poverty, children continued to encounter negative stereotypes and overt discrimination in the integrated schools that the prewar Ainu Society had struggled for, and adults ran into stubborn prejudice when they tried to find jobs or marry outside Ainu circles. Matters began to change only in the 1970s, when a new generation aggressively began to confront society's hostility. Some activists drew inspiration from the efforts of *burakumin* to overcome marginalization, while the emergence of indigenous people's movements worldwide stimulated activity by other groups of young Ainu. Domestic events, especially the celebrations held in Sapporo in 1968 to mark the centennial of the Meiji Restoration and one hundred years of "Hokkaidō History," also had their effect. Attended by the emperor, and mounted at considerable public expense, those festivities scarcely mentioned the Ainu, and planners made no place for them at either the newly constructed Pioneer Village or Museum of Development, except to depict them as guides or coolies for early explorers.

All Ainu resented the historical amnesia of 1968, which seemed to deny their very existence. In reaction, some groups such as the Utari ["Our People"] Society, successor to the Ainu Society, pressured the central government to finance twelve billion yen in development projects similar to those being undertaken in *burakumin* communities. More radical, and usually younger, Ainu borrowed the tactics of denunciation from the *burakumin* and successfully forced the cancellation of television programs that portrayed them in a negative manner, extracted public apologies from magazines that printed discriminatory cartoons, and took on the country's largest travel agency after it advertised a tour to visit a "real Ainu village" and experience "the ancient customs and culture of the famed hairy Ainu."<sup>38</sup>

The increasingly positive sense of self-identity evident in the 1970s and 1980s sparked a rapidly growing interest in Ainu history and culture. In ever-greater numbers, communities hosted festivals that featured prayers in the Ainu language, recitations of oral literature, performances of recreated dances, and displays of traditional embroidered costumes. Activists even created new symbols of "Ainuness." An Ainu flag appeared in 1973, and people began to speak wistfully of the *Ainu Moshiri* ("the quiet earth where humans dwell"), both a mythological golden age and physical space where Ainu had lived communally and in idealized harmony with nature before being overrun by Japanese colonizers. As self-perceptions changed, the Utari Society, which claimed to represent half of Japan's seventeen thou-

sand Ainu, articulated its aspirations for the future in a proposal it issued on May 27, 1984. Entitled the New Ainu Law, the document set forth model legislation that would recognize the ethnic and economic "self-reliance" of Japan's indigenous people, allow them to preserve their language and culture, abolish all forms of racial discrimination, and guarantee them basic human rights and full participation in the political process.

Koreans made up Japan's largest ethnic minority at century's end. About 90 percent of the approximately 700,000 Koreans resident in Japan then were the children, grandchildren, and, increasingly, great-grandchildren of the men and women who had come to Japan, voluntarily or otherwise, during the colonial period. Japan had extended certain prerogatives of citizenship to Koreans, such as the privilege of seeking employment throughout the empire, after the annexation in 1910. When the San Francisco Peace Treaty went into effect, however, the Japanese government totally disenfranchised the Koreans remaining in the country, demoting them to the status of resident aliens and leaving them only a legally precarious right to live in Japan permanently. Since Japan confers citizenship on the basis of parental nationality (*jus sanguinis*, "law of blood," as opposed to *jus soli*, "law of soil"), and since the naturalization process was a technically complicated process made more dreadful by steely-eyed, acid-tongued bureaucrats who took pride in intimidating applicants, most Koreans who chose to stay in Japan after 1952 lived there without full rights of citizenship. So too have their descendants, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority were born in Japan, have spent their entire lives there, have been graduated from Japanese schools, and speak only Japanese.

In addition to living in legal uncertainty, the Korean minority has had to endure the same burdens of social and economic discrimination as other marginalized groups: schoolyard taunts, whispers in supermarket aisles, vacant apartments suddenly rented out, engagements broken when parental disapproval became too great to bear, hermetically sealed doors at major corporations, removal from blue-collar jobs after concealed identities came to light, and pressure on successful athletes and entertainers to pretend they were Japanese. Sometimes the lack of legal standing combined with social prejudice to place Koreans in particularly galling and frustrating straits. In August 1945 an estimated total of seventy thousand Koreans were in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many conscripted to work in factories producing war matériel. Approximately forty thousand of those Koreans died in the atomic bombings or within a year from bombing-related diseases and injuries. In 1959 and again in 1968 the Japanese government passed legislation that extended special medical services, health care allowances, and tax exemptions

to those who suffered disabilities or illness as a result of the atomic bombings. Although neither of those laws contained a nationality requirement, a full twenty years later fewer than five hundred of the seven thousand or so Korean survivors of the bombings who were still alive and residing in Japan had received any benefits, largely because of legal difficulties in proving that they were in Hiroshima or Nagasaki at the time of the bombings. Denied compensation, they endured further anguish when municipal authorities refused them permission to erect a cenotaph to stand alongside a memorial to Japanese victims at the Hiroshima Peace Park.

Like other minorities, Koreans joined the struggle against discrimination and prejudice in the late Shōwa era. Community leaders demanded that Korean neighborhoods be included among the target areas for public works projects, citizen groups publicized examples of egregious intolerance, and individuals sued companies over discrimination. In 1989 the Korean Youth Association in Japan sent to the UN Commission on Human Rights a letter that summarized the leading demands of the Korean minority. Prominent among them were guaranteed human rights for Koreans as "indisputably constituent members of Japanese society," freedom "in the selection of employment and the pursuit of economic activities," access to social security benefits, the right to vote in local government elections and run for local office, and relief measures for Korean atomic bomb victims.

Regardless of the distress experienced by marginalized groups, even the most radical activists would acknowledge that protest, remonstrance, and the cultivation of more positive self-images combined to improve the situation for minorities over the final decades of the twentieth century. For *burakumin*, Ainu, and Koreans—as well as the ethnic Chinese, Okinawans, repatriated descendants of Japanese emigrants, and resident aliens from other parts of Asia who formed Japan's other sizable minority groups—living conditions became more comfortable, discrimination less blatant, and opportunities for advancement and self-fulfillment more plentiful. More specifically, by the mid-1990s, 62.7 percent of *burakumin* families owned their own homes (compared with a national average of 59.8 percent), the proportion of *burakumin* children entering high school approached that of the mainstream population, and 20 percent of all *burakumin* adolescents (versus 28 percent of other Japanese) attended college, whereas only 2 percent had done so in the 1960s. Ainu efforts to develop a political voice paid off internationally in 1992, when they were invited to participate in the opening ceremonies for the United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People, and domestically in 1994, when Kayano Shigeru became the first Ainu elected to the Diet.



The attitudes of government officials also seemed to be changing. In the 1990s the city of Nagasaki allocated a significant part of its budget to assist Korean victims of the atomic bombings, and the mayor of Hiroshima finally authorized the construction of a Korean memorial inside the Peace Park. By that time the national government had opened positions in education and local government service to Koreans and extended to most of them the same social security benefits enjoyed by Japanese citizens. Even the naturalization service apparently was experiencing a change of heart as one leading bureaucrat wrote: "It goes without saying that sharing the same nationality does not require people to have a homogeneous culture and lifestyle. Only when naturalized persons become able to say 'I am Japanese of such and such origin' without hiding their previous nationality will Japanese society be said to have internationalized from within."<sup>39</sup>

Despite the changes evident in the 1990s, observers concurred that much remained to be done in the twenty-first century. Prejudice in marriage and employment was still rife, and some observers contended that Japanese authorities overlooked new and increasingly subtle and insidious forms of discrimination. Nevertheless, the burgeoning and very visible demand for minority rights had laid to rest any notion that Japan was a one-dimensional, ethnically homogeneous society. Similarly, minorities had challenged Japanese society to become more open and pluralistic, just as critics of one-party government had issued a call for a more pluralistic, less elitist political system. Moreover, the insistence of the *burakumin* and other minorities that they could contribute to the well-being of the social whole even as they acquired greater opportunities for self-fulfillment roughly paralleled the claims of younger mainstream men and women for more egalitarian marriages and for work relationships that respected the needs of the individual while still doing honor to what were considered legitimate social obligations.

### Of Time and Self

At the beginning of the twentieth century many Japanese looked forward to living in a society that was becoming increasingly democratic and industrialized. At the same time, they hoped that Japan eventually would become part of a global community, a "province of the world" where even people like Henrik Ibsen and Leo Tolstoy were "no longer foreigners." In a manner anticipated by no one at the century's dawn, the Great Depression and Manchurian Incident churned up a tsunami that nearly drowned such

dreams and ambitions. Yet out of the destruction of the Greater East Asia War emerged a renewed commitment to old aspirations, and by century's end the island nation on the far rim of the Pacific had embraced political and economic systems that were not fundamentally dissimilar from the categories of parliamentary democracy and industrial capitalism found elsewhere. Moreover, Japan clearly had absorbed the world. From the range of commodities sold in small-town shopping arcades to the architectural forms found in their major cities, the Japanese shared a common material culture with the citizens of other advanced nations, and they also had internalized the music, art, and literature of Western societies.

Somewhat surprisingly, the celebration of New Year's 2000 paid scant attention to the quantum changes that had profoundly transformed Japan during the twentieth century. Instead, the nation focused its attention inward on the problems of the present. In its New Year's Day editorial the *Japan Times* noted that "the last ten years have been a dismal experience. In the economic sphere Japan has degenerated from the pinnacle of world success to a fumbling giant; the art of governance is in shambles; and the nation has seen the rise of a moral vacuum as classrooms have turned into battlefields and teenagers sell their bodies in the name of 'subsidized friendship.'"<sup>40</sup> No one, however, seemed able to offer any stirring, inspirational formula for overcoming the end-of-the-century malaise. Nebulous platitudes about finding "a new sense of purpose" and "charting a new course for the century" filled the newspapers, and when Prime Minister Obuchi addressed the nation at one o'clock on the morning of January 1, he blandly reported that Japan was experiencing no serious computer-related Y2K problems. Most Japanese approached the new century in the same low-key manner: Some visited Buddhist temples, where the ringing of bells signified the casting aside of the sins of the past year, others went to Shinto shrines to purchase auspicious talismans and ask the blessing of the gods for the coming year, and across the country families gathered together to enjoy special foods and watch the "Red and White Singing Contest."

The absence of any clarion call for dramatic political change suggested perhaps that most Japanese were satisfied that the tools and principles of parliamentary democracy eventually would return good governance and economic prosperity to their country. Elsewhere, however, some individuals wanted to blaze a new cultural path into the future. If most men and women celebrated New Year's 2000 in a way that seemed somehow so Japanese at century's end, others were calling for a new cosmopolitanism. In contrast with the older notion, prevalent at the beginning of the century, that Japan should learn from others and become a country where Ibsen and Tolstoy

were no longer strangers, the new internationalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries implied a responsibility to transcend nationality, look beyond the difficulties of the moment, and contribute something to world culture.

One notable practitioner of the new culturalism was the architect and city planner Tange Kenzō, who designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall in 1955, at the beginning of his career. A decade later he orchestrated the reconstruction of Skopje, Yugoslavia, after an earthquake destroyed that city, and he was the lead architect for Tokyo's stunning new metropolitan office complex, completed in 1991. Reviewing that lifework, many critics lauded Tange for using asymmetry and other traditional principles of Japanese design to shape modern materials into original, boldly imagined buildings that turned the architectural world on its head by separating functionalism from a rigid geometrical style.

Working in another medium, the avant-garde fashion designer Issey Miyake hoped to participate in world culture as just another individual, devoid of any particular national identity. "Away from the home country, living and working in Paris," he once reminisced, "I looked at myself very hard and asked, 'what could I do as a Japanese fashion designer?' Then I realized that my very disadvantage, lack of Western heritage, would also be my advantage. The lack of Western tradition," he continued, "was the very thing I needed to create contemporary and universal fashion. But as a Japanese I come from a heritage rich in tradition. I realized these two wonderful advantages I enjoy," Miyake concluded, "and that was when I started to experiment creating a new genre of clothing, neither Western nor Japanese but beyond nationality."<sup>41</sup> Finally, at long last, at the junction of two centuries, at the union of two millennia, it seemed possible to be both Japanese and modern, even to transcend national identity.

Increasingly in the late Shōwa and early Heisei periods, the world was warming to things Japanese. Around the globe, people ate sushi, bought packages of instant ramen noodles in local food markets, practiced judo and karate, and sang tunes to the accompaniment of karaoke music. Expressions of Japanese values and behavior also piqued the curiosity of people everywhere and often won their appreciation as well. When the Nobel Prize committee in the 1960s first decided to honor a Japanese writer, it selected Kawabata Yasunari, a "purely Japanese" novelist whose works were thought to express a typical Japanese melancholy as they explored the sensuous yet fragile and precarious nature of love and human existence. Closer to the end of the century, films like *Tanpopo* ("Dandelion") and *Shall we dance?* ("Shall We Dance?")—one a string of humorous vignettes about Japanese and food,

the other a sensitive portrayal of how one middle-aged salaryman confronted the loneliness of his existence by gliding into a budding relationship with a beautiful ballroom dance instructor that never quite became airborne and of how his wife reacted to the threat of adultery—played to packed theaters in Japan and abroad.

In other instances people outside Japan were intrigued by how specific depictions of Japanese lifestyles and values might contain some universal meaning. Thus, even while Tange's buildings were winning international applause, the second Japanese to receive the Nobel Prize in literature was Ōe Kenzaburō, whose books examined the Hiroshima experience, antagonisms between mountain villagers on the island of Shikoku and the central government in Tokyo, and a father's life with his disabled son. Although Ōe anchored his novels in the particular experiences of the late Shōwa period, he forged, in the view of one prominent literary critic, "a connection between specific circumstances and a universal outlook." Ōe's approach, he continued, "focuses not on how distant Japan is but how close. Ōe writes of Japan's anguish, and thus of the anguish of all contemporary humanity."<sup>42</sup>

Employing different sorts of images, the serialized TV drama *Oshichi* also attracted a large international following in the forty-one countries where it was broadcast. Presumably many of those viewers tuned in to learn something about the life of ordinary Japanese as they followed the story of Oshin, a woman who spent her childhood in a poor farming village in northern Japan, took a job as a live-in maid, and overcame a series of obstacles to become the owner of a supermarket in Tokyo. But the real secret of *Oshichi*'s international popularity, according to one analyst, was that the leading character exhibited values that transcended linguistic and cultural barriers: "strength of character, warm-heartedness, perseverance, courage, and industriousness."<sup>43</sup> As for Miyake, *Elle* awarded him the highest accolade the French fashion industry can bestow: *Son style dépasse les modes* ("His style goes beyond fashion").

The future course of the new cosmopolitanism is not clear. Nor was it possible in the early light of a new century to know when, or even if, Japan would find a way to overcome its economic and political malaise. Some eight hundred years earlier, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the poet Kamo no Chōmei had become disgusted at a world that for him was too filled with misfortune and calamity. Seeking a more tranquil life, he abandoned the capital of Kyoto to live in a small hut in the nearby hills. There he wrote *Hōjōki*, a short commentary on the nature of existence. "Ceaselessly," Chōmei began his essay, "the river flows, and yet the water is never the same, while in the still pools the shifting foam gathers and is

gone, never staying for a moment. Even so is man and his habitation."<sup>44</sup> A reflection on the Buddhist precept about the impermanence of life, Chômei's thought stands as an appropriate metaphor for the present. Just as his river was ever churning, creating bubbles that quickly disappeared and then reformed again, still recognizable but reconstituted in different patterns, so today do notions about what it means to be modern and what it means to be Japanese endlessly transform themselves in reaction to the swirl of surrounding historical events.

In their wake, changing conceptions of identity produce diversity, contention, and a multiplicity of views about the future of politics, the economy, and society. Over the course of the modern era Japanese notions about who they are and how they ought to coexist with the other peoples of the world have changed enormously. Visions of self and nation continue to transform themselves today, and the Japanese have no single answer to the questions and challenges that face them as they step forward into the new century. Historians, for their part, often prefer to see change as accumulative and evolutionary, but history itself has taught that the flow of time also encounters waterfalls, discontinuities that break the past from the present and make the future always unpredictable.