

A NEW SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF THE JAPANESE

by Nathaniel B. Thayer

The postwar resurgence of Japan is one of the most amazing events in modern history. At the end of the war, the Japanese people faced the devastation of a costly struggle, the uncertainties of foreign occupation, and a hostile international environment. Today, 32 years later, Japan has regained its sovereignty and has become a valued ally of the United States and a major supportive force in the international system.

How have the past three decades of momentous economic and political change affected the psychology of the Japanese people? To find the answers, researchers for the Institute of Mathematical Statistics in Tokyo conducted a series of surveys at five-year intervals from 1953 to 1973. The results often contradicted the image of Japan presented in Western news media.

In aesthetics, they found that traditional Japanese concepts have grown stronger, despite an apparent predilection for American movies, McDonald's hamburgers, and blue jeans. During each survey, they showed 3,000 to 4,000 Japanese citizens a photograph of a Western garden and a photograph of a Japanese garden and asked, "Which garden is better?" In 1953, 79 percent said the Japanese garden was better; by 1973, the percentage had risen to 90 percent.

On the other hand, some ideas about the family showed a trend away from traditional values. In 1953, 73 percent of the husbands and wives queried said they would adopt a child to carry on the family line if they had no progeny (conforming to prewar practice). In 1973, fewer than half said they would adopt a child for

this purpose (36 percent), although 17 percent said that they might, depending on circumstances (Chart 1).

Religious values have changed scarcely at all. In the four surveys made from 1958 to 1973, researchers asked Japanese citizens whether or not religious faith was important. Each time, roughly 70 percent said Yes; however, another question showed a decided slip in the number of Japanese formally affiliated with an established church.

Ideas about nature, however, have seesawed. "To be happy," the questioners asked, "should man adapt to nature, use nature, or conquer nature?" Japanese who, during the 1960s, had discarded the traditional concept that man should adapt to nature returned to that belief in the 1970s (Chart 2).

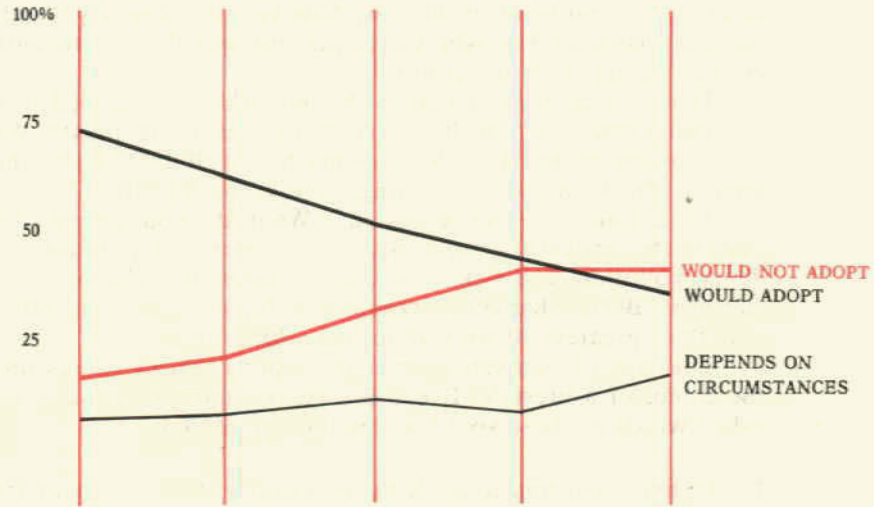
Do the answers to these and thousands of other survey queries produce a coherent picture of the Japanese people today? That is the question that five researchers attached to the government television and radio network NHK asked themselves. As a first step, they gathered 1,500 national public opinion surveys conducted after World War II by the nation's leading newspapers, government ministries, and research organizations. For two years, they studied the responses to 20,000 questions and in November 1975 published their findings in *Sengo Seron Shi* [History of Public Opinion in the Postwar Era].

The results provide a mosaic of a complex society undergoing significant change, yet sustaining cultural coherence. In the following analysis, I have borrowed liberally from the findings of the NHK researchers and from other material found in the first three volumes of *Nihonjin Kenkyu* [Study of the Japanese People] published in Tokyo, 1974-76, by the Society for the Study of the Japanese People, a research organization established in 1972 to analyze contemporary Japanese characteristics and culture.

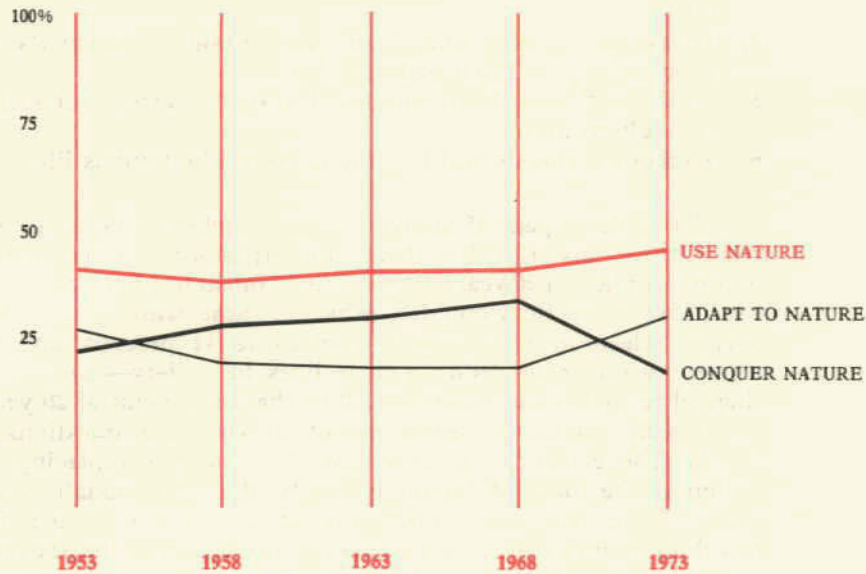
In prewar Japan, the state and society took precedence over the individual. In postwar Japan, the situation has been reversed. Can the individual be called upon to sacrifice his freedom for the welfare of the state? An increasing number of Japanese reject

Nathaniel B. Thayer, 47, is director of Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. He received his B.A. (1955), M.A. (1967), and Ph.D. (1967) from Columbia University and served as a foreign service officer for almost a decade in Asia, principally in Japan. He has taught at Columbia, City University of New York, and Harvard. He is the author of How The Conservatives Rule Japan (1969, 1973) and is currently at work on a history of Japanese diplomacy since World War II.

1. IF YOU HAD NO PROGENY, WOULD YOU ADOPT A CHILD TO CARRY ON THE FAMILY LINE?



2. TO BE HAPPY, SHOULD YOU ADAPT TO NATURE, USE NATURE, OR CONQUER NATURE?



this suggestion each time it is made by pollsters. More and more Japanese subscribe to the proposition that the welfare of the nation depends on the happiness of the individual. When asked in 1974, "Do you want to do something for your country?" only 9 percent answered Yes, whereas 48 percent said they would rather get something from the country.

The growing importance of the individual is reflected in the national craze over health. "What do you value most? What concerns you most? What is necessary for a full life?" To all these queries, the Japanese gave a single reply: good health.

To a fourth survey question, "What do you worry about most?" the answers were, in order of importance, inflation, accidents, pollution, and sickness—the last three of which are bodily concerns. Better than 80 percent of the Japanese over age 60 said that their greatest desire was to live a long time.

The lack of concern over civic responsibilities shows up in the choice of a lifestyle. Every five years, Japanese citizens were asked which of these six lifestyles they preferred:

1. To live according to one's tastes without thinking about fame or fortune (the tasteful life).
2. To live from day to day without worrying (the happy-go-lucky life).
3. To work diligently and become a man of wealth (the monied life).
4. To live as correctly and cleanly as possible, abjuring the improper things of the world (the clean life).
5. To live selflessly, devoting oneself to the betterment of society (the selfless life).
6. To study seriously and become famous (the famous life).

The table on page 65 shows that the number of Japanese who want to live "tastefully," without thinking about fame or fortune, almost doubled in 20 years. Those who want to live happy-go-lucky lives have more than doubled, whereas those who want to lead correct, clean lives decreased from 29 to 11 percent, and the number wanting to dedicate their lives to society—never more than 10 percent—was down to half of that at the end of 20 years.

Closely related to questions of lifestyle are questions of family. The evidence suggests that the family is replacing the nation as the focus of Japanese loyalty, though nationalism still exists. First, the family takes precedence even over personal health in inquiries into values. Second, 70 percent of the Japanese queried say that they continue to revere their ancestors, an

WHICH LIFESTYLE DO YOU PREFER?

	The Tasteful Life	The Happy- Go-Lucky Life	The Monied Life	The Clean Life	The Selfless Life	The Famous Life	All Others
1953	21%	11%	15%	29%	10%	6%	8%
1958	27	18	17	23	6	3	6
1963	30	19	17	18	6	4	6
1968	32	20	17	19	6	3	3
1973	39	23	14	11	5	3	5

answer that I interpret as an expression of family rather than religious, interest. Third, although they are not willing to adopt a child, most husbands and wives want their family to continue from generation to generation. Most Japanese still adhere to the tradition that the family estate should not be divided at death but should be handed down intact to a designated heir; fewer Japanese now insist, however, that this heir be the eldest son. Fourth, 70 percent of the Japanese say they will be satisfied with their lives if their families can live in peace and harmony.

Should Husbands Help?

How exclusive is this concern of a Japanese with his family? One survey posed the question "If you and your family are more or less secure, are you willing to concern yourself with other people in the world?" Only 7 percent answered Yes.

Japanese opinions about many other family matters have changed. Before the war, most parents believed they should arrange their children's marriages. Nowadays, most young people insist on selecting their own mates. Before the war, three generations lived under a single roof. Now many parents and more young

couples choose to live by themselves. In the prewar home, the husband worked and the wife managed the household. Nowadays, many younger wives work or want to work (the issue comes to a head after the first child is born). In the prewar family, the husband decreed and the wife obeyed. Now most couples agree to talk over household purchases and the children's upbringing.

"Should husbands help in the kitchen?" In 1952 a majority said No. In 1973 a majority said Yes. Family planning has become an integral part of Japanese life: 95 percent know about birth control; 61 percent use birth control devices. Before the war, a large family was considered desirable. Nowadays, 80 percent of Japanese couples prefer two or three children born less than three years apart.

Not everything about the family has changed. For example, most Japanese still believe in filial piety, and about half of all Japanese endorse the practice of staging elaborate weddings and funerals if the family can afford it—in spite of newspaper campaigns against such practices.

A majority of both sexes still believe that men are superior to women in reasoning and organizing ability. A majority of both sexes still believe that men lead the "harder" life and that a woman cannot support herself solely through her own labors, although the size of this majority is decreasing.

Wifely Discontent

Some Japanese women express "economic dissatisfaction," but most prefer the role of wife and mother to that of worker outside the home. Most wives do not register discontent so long as their real family lives are not too different from their ideal. In 1973, 80 percent of the women said that they were satisfied with their lives, and 70 percent found their lives meaningful. On five occasions from 1950 to 1973, Japanese women were asked, "Would you want to be reborn as a man or woman?" In 1950, only 16 percent wanted to stay female. In 1973, it was 51 percent.

So long as Japanese concern is directed toward the family and the fulfillment of private desires, the Japanese woman will probably be content, since she is a central figure in the family. But should Japanese concerns come to be directed toward public and international problems at the expense of the family, her discontent may grow rapidly, since she is presently excluded from these fields.

Japanese thinking about government and politics is changing, too. The trend is toward greater insistence on personal rights,

dissatisfaction with government in general, and reluctance to participate in politics.

In 1946, the American occupation authorities rewrote the Japanese constitution, articulating many new rights for the people. At first, the Japanese either paid little attention to these rights or opposed them, believing that they were unnecessary and not in accord with Japanese values. But in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Japanese began to change their opinion, coming to believe that the state should serve the people rather than the people serve the state.

If a Messiah Comes

In 1958 and 1975, surveys queried citizens on whether they had opinions about civic matters. The respondents fell into three categories: those who had no views; those who had views and articulated them; those who had views but talked to nobody about them. The largest category was citizens who had no views. In 1958, they totaled 61 percent, but by 1975 they had declined to 39 percent. Citizens who had views and articulated them remained at a constant 22 percent. Citizens who had views but remained mute were 17 percent of the total in 1958 and 29 percent in 1975 (10 percent in 1975 did not respond). In 17 years, people had become more interested in civic affairs, but their interest had not advanced very far in the direction of the talking, much less action, stage.

Other evidence buttresses the impression that the Japanese are increasingly unwilling to personally participate in politics. "How can we achieve the ideal society?" one survey asked. The two most popular answers, as revealed by two different polls, were to vote for politicians who would try to achieve such a society (43 percent) and to wait for good politicians to appear (26 percent). If a political messiah should come, would he be welcome? Twice, surveys asked for confirmation or denial of this statement: "When a superior politician appears, the nation benefits if its affairs are turned over to him rather than have the people decide those affairs themselves." In 1953, the respondents split evenly; 20 years later, only a slender majority (51 percent) opposed this sentiment.

So much for political leadership. What about political institutions? Twice a year, Japanese citizens have been asked, "Does the Diet [the national legislature] reflect public opinion?" In 1954, a third of the people said it didn't; 20 years later, the percentage had almost doubled (61 percent). "Does local govern-

ment reflect public opinion?" In 1952, a small percentage (16 percent) answered No; by 1975, the percentage had quadrupled (48 percent.) The Japanese, apparently, are dissatisfied with government at all levels.

Dissatisfaction with politics became most evident during the 1970s. In 1971, respondents who said politics were advancing in a discouraging direction totaled 47 percent; by 1973, even before the Lockheed scandals, this percentage had climbed to 70 percent. During the early '70s, Japan was struck by the oil crisis, double-digit inflation, and the full effects of pollution, developments to which the government responded, but not quickly or effectively. Perhaps these factors accelerated a growing disenchantment with politics, but the Japanese had undergone more serious crises in earlier years without losing faith in government. In 1971, people who were optimistic about political trends totaled 70 percent; by 1973, this percentage had shrunk to 40 percent. In yearly surveys between 1974 and 1976, only 20 percent of the populace was willing to express even partial satisfaction with politics.

Why? Responses to statements made in scattered surveys conducted by the NHK television and radio network over a nine-year period between 1965 and 1974 suggest an answer: The populace is estranged from government, and the estrangement is growing. In 1966, 40 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement "Politics are decided by powers that the common people cannot control." By 1969, the percentage was 56 percent. Also in 1969, 53 percent agreed that "Political and economic policies are determined by persons the common people cannot touch." And in 1974, 78 percent conceded that "A small group wields power and moves society."

Estrangement from Government

The Japanese citizen, then, wants to expand his personal freedom. He has political opinions but is reluctant to voice them, much less act on them. He awaits the coming of a national leader but worries about granting this leader sufficient power to govern. He has little faith in either the national or local government. He feels estranged. In the 1970s, this estrangement has contributed to widespread expressions of dissatisfaction with politics. One may hope that this dissatisfaction is a prelude to a greater popular involvement, but as of now the Japanese citizen appears to be politically passive.

How strongly do the Japanese identify with their nation?

How does Japanese nationalism differ today from the days before the war? Measuring Japanese nationalism is a tricky business. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the Japanese regarded nationalism as one of the causes of the disastrous Pacific War, and no one had anything good to say about it. In the '60s, this revulsion became less vocal. After the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the Japanese realized that nationalism was not inextricably associated with war and began to evaluate it more rationally. Rather than use the prewar words for nationalism with their unfortunate connotations, the Japanese invented new words or borrowed English words to describe their feelings. They still do, and answers to questions regarding the subject will differ, depending on the Japanese word for nationalism used in the question.

Flag and Anthem

The two great symbols of nationalism in any country are the flag and the national anthem. In Japan, neither flag nor anthem creates a semantic problem. In surveys made in 1961 and 1975, sentiment has been the same, first and last. About 60 percent of the populace feel love and respect for the flag and anthem; less than 1 percent feel antipathy.

Beyond the flag and the anthem, a symbol of nationalism unique to Japan is the Emperor Hirohito whose family has reigned since the 6th century, when history was indistinguishable from myth. Japan's 1889 constitution decreed that the Emperor was a "sacred and inviolable" sovereign, holding "the supreme rights of rule." During the 1945-52 occupation, the Americans changed the Emperor's status by having him declare himself to be a human being. The new 1946 constitution downgraded him from a sacred sovereign to a symbol of the state and of the unity of the people, declaring further that he shall not have powers related to government. Sovereignty now resided with the people.

As early as 1946, public opinion polls asked, "Should we or should we not have an Emperor?" Various versions of that question were asked six times from 1946 to 1965, and the answers were always the same. Although the feeling was held more strongly by older than by younger respondents, over 80 percent wanted to keep the Emperor. Initially, sentiment existed to restore his powers, but by the mid-1960s that sentiment was expressed by no more than 10 percent. Roughly 80 percent supported the clauses in the constitution that made the Emperor the symbol rather than the sovereign of the state.

"Do the people still regard the Emperor as godlike?" Accord-

ing to a 1950 survey, 81 percent considered him to be a "normal human being." "What emotions do the people hold towards the Emperor?" Throughout the 1960s, two-thirds of the people said they felt affection and respect; one-third felt nothing; less than 3 percent felt antipathy. At the beginning of the 1970s, the ratio changed. The affection-and-respect group shrank to 50 percent, and the no-feeling group grew to 40 percent, the antipathetic group remaining constant.

"What role do the people see the Emperor as performing?" A 1974 survey confirms a 1967 survey in which a few people still saw the Emperor as occupying the center of the political system, and a few people said he had no function. The rest of the respondents split fairly evenly, one group claiming that his role was no more than ceremonial and the other group asserting that he provided spiritual support to the people.

Does Japan Need an Army?

In brief, the Japanese want to keep the Emperor but see his role as ancillary and symbolic. No one wants to change his status, but more and more people are thinking less and less about him.

Another significant national symbol is represented by the armed forces. Pollsters have plumbed Japanese attitudes toward militarism most thoroughly. On at least 20 occasions since 1950, they have asked, "Does Japan need armed forces to protect the nation?" The answer has been remarkably consistent. Some Japanese refuse to comment, but about 30 percent say Japan does not need armed forces, and 60 percent say that it does. In another 12 surveys, 70 percent of the respondents were supportive of the need, possibly because the questioner replaced the words "armed forces" with "self-defense forces." The rub comes when the Japanese are asked what the armed forces do. In two surveys 10 years apart, less than 5 percent of the respondents replied that the armed forces defended the country. About 80 percent said they best served as a disaster relief force. "Should the armed forces be strengthened or weakened?" Throughout the 1950s and '60s, the Japanese were mildly in favor of strengthening the armed forces; in the 1970s the trend is toward their reduction.*

The Pacific War was the first war in which the Japanese had ever met defeat, and that defeat set off waves of self-doubt and feelings of cultural inadequacy when they compared themselves to other nationalities. A 1963 survey asked, "Are the Japanese

*The Fourth Defense Build-Up Program (1972-76) called for total expenditures equivalent to about US\$15.3 billion, or less than 1 percent of Japan's GNP.

people superior to or inferior to Western peoples?" More Japanese than not answered Inferior. But that was the last year when the Japanese gave themselves the short end of the stick. By 1973, 39 percent of the Japanese considered themselves superior, 18 percent thought themselves equal, and only 9 percent considered themselves inferior.

In 1973, the Japanese were asked to rate themselves on levels of scientific technology, artistic achievement, economic strength, standard of living, and richness of emotional life. In science, art, and economics, they rated themselves extremely—or quite—high. In living standards and emotional life, they weren't sure if they were quite high or quite low. Clearly, however, the Japanese had recovered their self-esteem.

Since 1960, the news service JIJI has asked 2,000 Japanese every month which countries they like or dislike the most. The United States was the most-liked country until 1966, when disenchantment with American action in Vietnam sent its popularity to a new low and gave the lead to Switzerland, a country about which other surveys have shown the Japanese know very little. The Soviet Union has consistently been the most disliked nation, though in recent years it has been getting strong competition from the two Koreas. Since 1975, the Japanese have disliked South Korea more than North Korea. There is a noteworthy tendency for more and more Japanese respondents to say that they like or dislike no country. In the '70s, their percentage climbed above the halfway mark.

A Renaissance of Pride

Over the past decade, the Japanese people have become greatly concerned with the destruction of the environment and the spread of pollution. Most analysts see this concern as a reaction against a postwar high-growth economic policy that has damaged or polluted the nation's air, land, and waters. Concern with pollution and the environment has grown apace with the renaissance of pride in country, suggesting that this reawakened love of the land is a manifestation of the new nationalism.

The pattern of Japanese perceptions, then, is like a set of rings enclosed in concentric circles. The outermost ring represents the international community. Color it pale blue; like the sky, the Japanese know it exists but they don't pay it too much attention. The second ring is the nation itself. Color it any of the earth colors; unlike prewar nationalism, which was fueled by a resentment against the outside world, today's sentiment seems to focus

on the land itself. The third ring comprises the government. Color it a somber shade; the Japanese are most pessimistic about it. The fourth ring comprises the family. If white is the most intense of colors, then color this ring white; the family is the quintessence of each citizen's loyalty, energy, and attention. Within the innermost circle—right smack in the center—is the individual. Color him grey-pink, the color of the Ueno cherry blossoms undulating in a March breeze, or orange-brown, the color of the wood in the Kiyomizu temple at sunset, or black-green, the color of the Matsu-shima pines in a misting rain. The Japanese citizen's views of his obligations, rights, and outlook are singular, derived totally from his culture. In Japan, the age of the individual is at hand.



JAPAN'S CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

by Koya Azumi

Three themes usually dominate discussions of Japan at work: the homogeneity of the Japanese people; the diligence, loyalty, dedication, and high morale of Japanese workers; and the paternalism of management.

I submit that these stereotypes are false, or at least seriously outdated. The Japanese are, in fact, highly heterogeneous. Worker loyalty in Japan is a product of economic self-interest, not sentiment. And morale is often lower than it is among comparable workers in the United States and Europe.

It is indeed true that the Japanese are homogeneous in terms of race, language, and culture, especially in contrast to Americans. Overemphasis, however, can lead to a unitary image, which is unwarranted and misleading, particularly in matters where race, language, and culture have little relevance. It is better, I believe, to keep in mind that an industrialized society is necessarily hetero-