

JAPAN AS-*ANYTHING BUT*-NUMBER ONE

Also by Jon Woronoff

HONG KONG: CAPITALIST PARADISE

KOREA'S ECONOMY, MAN-MADE MIRACLE

JAPAN: THE COMING SOCIAL CRISIS

JAPAN: THE COMING ECONOMIC CRISIS

JAPAN'S WASTED WORKERS

INSIDE JAPAN, INC.

WORLD TRADE WAR

* JAPAN'S COMMERCIAL EMPIRE

THE JAPAN SYNDROME

ASIA'S "MIRACLE" ECONOMIES

* POLITICS, THE JAPANESE WAY

JAPANESE TARGETING

THE JAPANESE MANAGEMENT MYSTIQUE

* THE "NO-NONSENSE" GUIDE TO DOING BUSINESS IN JAPAN

* THE JAPANESE ECONOMIC CRISIS

*Also published by Macmillan

Japan as
—anything but—
Number One

Jon Woronoff

Second Edition





© Jon Woronoff 1990, 1996

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1996 978-0-333-65824-6

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published in Japan by Yohan Publications 1990
First published in the United Kingdom by Macmillan 1991
Second Edition 1996

Published by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-65825-3 ISBN 978-0-230-37129-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230371293

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96

Contents

Preface to the Second Edition	7
--	----------

1. Introduction (Appearances Can Be Deceiving)	
Welcome To Wonderland	11
Distinguishing <i>Honne</i> From <i>Tatema</i>	19

PART ONE: SUPERIOR GRADES

2. Japanese-Style Management (Fact Or Fiction?)	
How It Really Works	29
Not Quite Lifetime Employment	35
Harmony Or Else	39
Less Lovable Than Effective	46
3. Japanese Companies (The All-Mighty <i>Kaisha</i>)	
Company Families	51
The Seven Cs	56
When Better Is Worse	59
4. Industrial Policy (Promoting And Meddling)	
Targeting Techniques	69
Industrial Overkill	74

PART TWO: SATISFACTORY GRADES

5. Economic Progress (Onward If Not Upward)	
No More Growth Hero	81
Good Sectors, Bad Sectors	87
Productive, Not Fruitful	92
6. Education (What Is Learning?)	
World Champion Test-Takers	99
Lower Higher Education	105

Education Or Induction	112
(Almost) Time For Reform.....	116
7. Crime (Integrating The Criminal Element)	
Japanese Criminals As No. 1	125
Crime? What Crime?.....	132

PART THREE: UNSATISFACTORY GRADES

8. Politics (The Japanese Way)	
Politicians: Fronting For The System.....	141
Bureaucrats: Making Things Run.....	149
Businessmen: Pulling The Strings.....	156
People: Accepting But Not Approving.....	163
9. Society (Discordant Harmonies)	
Solidarity Outward, Not Inward	171
Gender, Generation And Other Gaps	179
Meritocracy Or Schoolocracy?.....	186
10. Internationalization (Time To Join The World)	
Leadership Or Followership.....	197
The Closed-Country Syndrome.....	205
The U.S. Connection	210

PART FOUR: INFERIOR GRADES

11. Quality of Life (If You Can Call That Quality)	
The “Rich” Japanese	221
All Work And No Play	227
To Make Life Worth Living	234
12. Amenities (Be It Ever So Humble)	
Life In A Rabbit Hutch.....	243
Glorious Plans And Mirages	252
13. Welfare (What Is There To Be Entitled To?)	
Desperately Seeking Welfare	261
Letting The Future Take Care Of Itself	266

**14. Conclusion (Japan As No. 23, Or 57,
Or Whatever)**
Learning From Japan ... Sometimes 273
Friends—Or Enemies—Of Japan? 279
Containing The Apologists..... 285

EPILOGUE: REVISING GRADES

15. The End of a Myth (... Maybe)
Taking A Turn For The Worse..... 291
More Demerits Than Merits 294
Say “No” To Myths 309
Bibliography 319
Index 325

Preface to the Second Edition

When this book first appeared, coming not long after the publication of *Japan As Number One*, it was deemed strangely out of place. Nearly everybody abroad knew, or thought they knew, that the Japanese had risen to the top in many sectors and it was folly to argue otherwise. Even in Japan, where most people knew better, they were too happy with the adulation to disclaim it... at least before foreigners. Among themselves, the Japanese were considerably more forthright. Thus, for years, the book and the author were roundly condemned for drawing an inexcusably bleak picture.

Now, the situation has changed. Japan has patently gone wrong in so many ways and so often that it is no longer regarded as much of a model. That it was not even an ideal model a decade ago has also sunk in. And it would be foolhardy to publish anything like *Japan As Number One* today. Nor would the many books on learning from Japanese education, management, law enforcement, social harmony, political stability and so on fare any better. The incredulity would be too great.

This is, however, an excellent time to publish an updated version of *Japan As—Anything But—Number One*. There will be much more receptivity to its message. Things that once seemed improbable or even impossible now appear much more believable and likely. Just enough of the illusions have been shattered and just enough of the myths have been dispelled for many more people to actually want to see the other side of the moon, a side that was long hidden. They do not have to like what they see, but they should at least have something to balance the more widespread overly favorable images.

Moreover, although it is only a few years, a lot has happened. Japan has been evolving, and not always in the most promising directions. The situation in certain sectors has not only worsened, it has become downright worrisome. The already negative report card would have to be revised downward in more cases than not. These events, and some alarming trends, must be considered when looking at Japan today. Much of this is described in the Epilogue.

But there is another reason to revisit the scene, as the assorted apologists and sycophants who produced the earlier versions of the illusions and myths have not withdrawn. Most of them are still active, and more have joined the fold. They still generate many books, articles, lectures and presentations that go out of their way to make Japan look better than it actually is. Nowadays, they have to be more cautious and cunning, but it is still possible to accentuate the positive whilst overlooking the negative, if not denying outright its existence. The Japanapologists still outnumber by far the “revisionists” and other critics.

This means that the foreign public should be informed more exactly of what the problems are, where Japan went wrong and why it is unlikely that improvements will occur very soon. It is necessary to show the fallacies in the most common apologies and indicate what the new variations on the old tales will be. This is essential for foreigners who have to deal directly with the Japanese, whether in business, politics or socially. Even those whose relations are more distant deserve to know, since they may find that they are in trouble if they heed calls to “learn from Japan.”

This exercise is even more important for the Japanese. They know that there are serious problems, some of them reaching crisis proportions, and they know that something should be done. But they live in a very conformist society in which it is hard for the individual to criticize. This is also a consensual one, which makes it difficult for leaders or followers to get a

detached view. It is much easier for outsiders to coldly observe the situation, note the problems, say what they think is wrong, and how it might be solved.

For such reasons, I have never felt that criticizing Japan makes someone its “enemy.” Japan desperately needs this sort of criticism. In the same vein, praising Japan does not make someone a “friend,” especially if this is empty flattery. So, I shall continue criticizing where necessary (and also praising on occasion) even if this earns me a reputation of a “Japanbasher” and even if this reputation has thoroughly unpleasant consequences personally and professionally, as it certainly has had over the past decade or two.

JON WORONOFF