

## The Japanese Society in the 1990s

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is, among other things, to inform the reader of the dramatic changes in contemporary Japanese society, the true implications of which are still a puzzle to the Japanese themselves. These changes are partly due to the aftermath of the internal dynamics of Japanese society itself including, particularly, its 'miraculous' economic recovery from the ruin of the war-shattered infrastructures, and partly due to the impact of changing international surroundings, notably after the end of the Cold War. To make clear the nature and characteristics of contemporary Japanese society, I would like to develop this essay along the following lines:

1) to divide the postwar Japanese historical process into three stages— the Age of Recovery (1945–70), the Age of Harvest (1970–90), and the Age of Postmodernity (1990– ), and to explain some peculiar characteristics of each period;

2) to focus upon the current trends and problems, which result in the need of reconsideration of the accustomed Cartesian dichotomous categories to interpret these changes, namely liberal versus conservative (the end of ideology?), Japanese versus foreign (internationalization or globalization), male versus female ('new family?'), health versus illness (aging), and nature versus culture (environmental concerns). These changes can also be attributed to the coming of the information society, internationalization, aging, and the changing capitalism in today's Japanese society;

3) to conclude the essay with a tentative analysis of the feeling of 'ambiguity' or 'uncertainty' now prevailing on the part of Japanese people concerning where to go and what to prepare for the coming 21<sup>st</sup> century domestically, as well as internationally.