

# The Baha'i Faith and Japanese Culture

Kazuo Kitahara

## Abstract:

All the nations of the world have different customs and ways of thinking, but the Baha'i Faith teaches that if they can come together like the instruments of an orchestra, a wonderful harmony will be created in the family of humanity. Japan, of course, has its own distinct characteristics that have developed during the hundreds of years of the nation's history. Most Japanese feel that their way of doing things is only natural and are not aware of it as being distinctive. But when viewed by non-Japanese eyes and judged by the standards of different countries, some of our characteristics will appear to be virtues, while others will seem to be faults.

This paper is, therefore, an attempt to help us Japanese value our virtues and correct our shortcomings, while also striving to explain the background of Japanese culture so that foreigners can understand Japanese people and work together with them in harmony. It begins with a brief outline of the earliest known Japanese religion, Shinto, and explains how this way of life was affected by progressive waves of outside influence, first from Confucianism and Buddhism, then from Western rationalism. As a result of these influences, today's Japanese tend to evaluate Japanese culture negatively, yearning instead for Western values. Thus, the Baha'i teaching that we should love not our own country but, rather, the world, is hard to grasp, as Japanese have become overly egocentric and have little love for their own country.

Moreover, since the end of the last century, many new cults teaching the unity of all religions have sprung up, so Baha'is need to be careful about how they teach progressive revelation. "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship" (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*) is probably the best policy. Also, Baha'is need to be aware of the distinctive way in which Japanese people perceive language. This means that while some souls may be taught the Faith in English, it is vital for teaching to be carried out in the Japanese language if the bulk of the nation's population is to be reached.