Edwin O. Reischauer

and the American Discovery of Japan

GEORGE R. PACKARD

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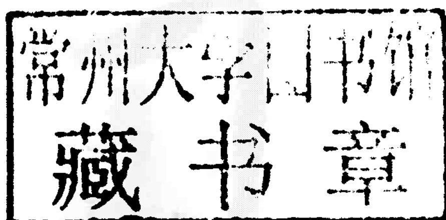

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For Lavinia

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Preface

The idea of writing a biography of Edwin Reischauer occurred to me as early as 1965, after I had served for two years as his special assistant in the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. I saved notes and documents from the period, but soon found myself caught up in new challenges as diplomatic correspondent for *Newsweek* and managing editor of the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. The next decade was turbulent and all-consuming for a journalist, with coverage of the Vietnam War; the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy; the antiwar protests; the social, racial, and sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s; the election of Richard Nixon; and the Watergate scandal. Japan seemed far away. I ventured briefly into politics, running for the U.S. Senate in 1976 and losing in the primary.

I returned to the scholarly world as deputy director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars from 1976 to 1979 under the charismatic leadership of Dr. James H. Billington. Jim, who would become librarian of Congress, was in charge of the "living memorial" to Woodrow Wilson. He was fascinated by the notion of scholars who can influence policymakers. He had already set up an institute honoring George F. Kennan, and he encouraged me to write the story of a scholar-turned ambassador who single-handedly changed the relationship between Japan and the United States. I worked up an outline and a few chapters for the book, and told Reischauer of my intention. He gave me no encouragement, but did agree to sit for several extended interviews.

Then life took another twist. For my sins, I was appointed dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, a position I held from 1979 to 1993 and that allowed little time for personal research and writing. I continued

to make plans for the book, but in 1986 a new challenge fell out of the sky: Reischauer published his own autobiography, *My Life Between Japan and America.*[1] After reading it, I decided that he had told his own story sufficiently well and that there was not much left for me to cover.

But, as you can see, I changed my mind. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of trauma in U.S.-Japan relations. Reischauer died in September 1990 at the age of seventy-nine, fearing that all his efforts to improve understanding between the two nations might go down the drain in the trade wars and ugly media portrayals of a Japan threatening to destroy Americans' jobs and security. Attacked by leftist scholars and "revisionist" journalists, he went to his grave wondering if his life had been a failure.

Then three things happened. With the bursting of Japan's economic bubble and the rise of a new enemy—Saddam Hussein of Iraq—the squabbles between the United States and Japan were all but forgotten. Japan entered a long period of stagnation and recovery. I also got a chance to see the original manuscript of Reischauer's book, thanks to his assistant at Harvard, Nancy Deptula. Nancy felt that his editors had eviscerated some of the most interesting aspects of his life, as did Marius Jansen, a close friend and, with Reischauer, coauthor of *The Japanese Today*.[2] I agreed.

I knew from personal experience that Reischauer wrote all his books in longhand on yellow lined pads, making many revisions. Once his secretary typed up these pages, he continued to revise and rework the manuscript until he was completely satisfied. The manuscript that Nancy gave me was a finished product—731 double-spaced, typewritten pages—the fourth and final iteration of the book he wanted published. As I read it through, I realized that it had enough new and important material to warrant a more complete story of his life. The words on the cover sheet in his handwriting, "complete unabridged manuscript," told me that it was not some hasty first draft, but rather the version of his life that Reischauer wanted to tell the world. Peter Grilli, one of his former students at Harvard, confirmed this point. At a book-and-author event at the Japan Society in New York, Reischauer said that the published book contained the trunk and main branches of his story, but the twigs had been cut off. His wife, Haru Reischauer, told Marius Jansen that the editors had knocked out big gobs of what Ed had written about his embassy years, and she even considered writing her own version of those years.[3] I have tried to mine some of the nuggets in that longer version and in my own observations.

The most important reason for this book is that we now have a broader perspective of Reischauer's life and his role in helping to shape U.S.-Japan relations. His own book is sophisticated and graceful—the work of an accomplished scholar and writer—and nothing I have written should supplant it. Because he

was a meticulous historian, the facts and dates he provides are invaluable. But he could not have known his full impact on Japan and America—he seldom reflected on his own place in history—nor could he foresee that his confidence in Japan would be justified. With the passage of several decades, it is easier to assess his contributions and situate his role in history. Japan's development as a peace-loving democracy and America's acceptance of Japan as a vital partner have more than justified his faith, although he could not live to see it.

Embarking on the book once again in 1994, I was amazed to discover how many lives Reischauer had touched in both America and Japan, and how large was his impact on academic studies of Japan. I was also stunned by the harshness and vitriol of the attacks against him by those with opposing viewpoints. Finally, I was surprised to see how he has been forgotten by some of those who profited most from his life's work.

As I continued to write, I could feel the critical eye of the sensei (teacher) watching me and warning me to get the facts right. Having his autobiography at my side was a blessing and a curse. He was an intensely private person, shrewd but without guile, as one of his former students put it. I have tried to round out the complex human being who often hid behind a scholarly facade.

Some of Reischauer's harshest critics have declared in advance that this book will be mere hagiography, and several have tried to prevent its publication. Their zeal has driven me forward. If Reischauer got Japan right in most essentials, then these critics were mostly wrong. Even revisionists need to be revised, as John Lewis Gaddis has wisely noted.

I am keenly aware of Anthony Grafton's cautionary words, however: "To write the history of the learned, in short, one had to be more learned than they were."[4] I make no claim to such learning. But I have lived in and with Japan as an army officer, Foreign Service officer, journalist, and scholar for many of the past fifty-two years and have had a front-row seat to observe and test Reischauer's judgments about the nation and its people. I am convinced that no one else could have thrown more light on the "dark side of the moon." He seized a unique moment in history—a moment when East Asia began its return to the position of economic center of the world—and helped Americans to understand why this mattered.

A Note on Language

I have followed the Japanese custom of placing Japanese surnames first and have omitted the macron over long vowels on the ground that readers of Japanese will know where they belong and those who don't read Japanese will not care.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people for help in writing this book. Although it is by no means an authorized biography, Edwin Reischauer's three children, Ann, Robert, and Joan, agreed to be interviewed and cheerfully responded to my queries. With the combination of modesty, reserve, irreverence, humor, and self-confidence that I discovered in their father, they seemed mildly amused and slightly surprised that anyone would be writing a biography about him at this late date. I can only hope they will recognize the figure that emerges in these pages.

I am grateful to the late Nancy Monteith Deptula, Reischauer's longtime assistant and friend at Harvard, for sharing with me the unedited manuscript of his autobiography, parts of which have never before been cited, as well as copies of both his letters to his family from 1961 to 1966 while he served as U.S. ambassador to Japan and his letters to others later in his career. I owe thanks also to Jill Conway Villatoro, who served as an assistant to Reischauer at Harvard and then as my assistant and colleague at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and at the U.S.–Japan Foundation.

I am deeply grateful to John Curtis Perry, a former student of Reischauer and John K. Fairbank and now the Henry Willard Denison Professor of Diplomatic History at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, for sharing his insights, encouragement, and wise comments on the manuscript. In addition, I am grateful to Gerald L. Curtis, Burgess Professor of Political Science at Columbia University, for reading the entire manuscript and offering thoughtful suggestions.

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Two of Reischauer's Harvard colleagues, Albert M. Craig and Howard S. Hibbett, were generous with their time and made thoughtful comments on parts of the manuscript. Other scholars and former students who offered valuable insights were George Akita, Robert N. Bellah, Marshall M. Bouton, Roger W. Bowen, Roger Brown, Kent E. Calder, Richard Dyke, Henry F. Graff, Peter Grilli, Robert M. Immerman, David Janes, Merit E. Janow, Donald Keene, James W. Morley, Fred Notehelfer, Susan J. Pharr, Sumner Redstone, John D. Rockefeller IV, Robert A. Scalapino, Orville Schell, Arthur W. Schlesinger Jr., Benjamin Schwartz, Shinoda Tomohito, Michael J. Smitka, Yoshi Tsurumi, and Ernest Young. None of these individuals should be held responsible for any errors of fact or opinion in the book; I alone am responsible.

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I am grateful to my colleagues at the U.S.–Japan Foundation, especially to our courageous chairman, Tom Johnson, and his board of trustees, and to Teresa Sham, who patiently guided me into the digital world of the twenty-first century, as well as Christine Manapat-Sims, Elizabeth Gordon, and Kanayo Oshima Schlumpf, who lent their moral support.

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I owe an enormous debt to my mentors who introduced me to Japanese history, politics, and foreign policy: Allan. B. Cole, Marius Jansen, Ishida Takeshi, and Eto Shinkichi of Tokyo University, as well as Matsumoto Shigeharu and Kato Mikio of the International House of Japan, and Professors Homma Nagayo and Inoki Masamichi.

I am grateful to members of the staff of the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library; Linda M. Seelke of the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial Library; Roland M. Bauman at the Oberlin College Archives; Linda Carlson of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies Library; Tim Driscoll and his wonderful staff at the Harvard University Archives; Robert A. Wampler of the National Security Archive at George Washington University; Jonathan Green, research associate at the Ford Foundation; and Kimberly Gould Ashizawa, senior associate at the Japan Center for International Exchange.

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Finally, I owe more than I can say to my beloved Lavinia, who tolerated my long hours of isolation with admirable good humor, grace, and understanding. To her, I joyfully dedicate this book.

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1

Born in Japan

In September 1945, just a month after Japan surrendered to the United States, ending the bloodiest war in history, a shy, thirty-four-year-old, Harvard-trained American scholar sat down with a pencil and pad of yellow lined paper and wrote a short book in two months. He called it Japan: Past and Present.

Remarkably, Edwin O. Reischauer used no history texts, reference works, or notes. The book grew out of a series of four or five hours of lectures on Japanese history that he had given while serving as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army during the war. "I . . . figured that the three years away from history books had allowed inessential details to drop out of my mind, leaving the basic outline of Japanese history all the clearer."[1]

Even more remarkable was the fact that Reischauer had no formal training as a specialist in Japanese history. He could not find a teacher in the 1930s who knew the subject and had decided instead to specialize in ancient Chinese history. His years of Ph.D. research focused on the diary and travels in China of the ninth-century Japanese Buddhist monk Ennin (Jikaku Daishi).

Japan: Past and Present was an overwhelming success. Written for the general reader, free of scholarly jargon, and devoid of the hatred and racism that marked all references to the "Japs" of the Pacific War, the book gave Americans a surprisingly positive look at the nation that had attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. Sir George Sansom, then dean of Japanese historians, wrote, "I can truthfully say that I do not know of any short book on Japanese history which gives so much useful information in so brief and simple a form."[2]

This little book and its revised editions in 1952 and 1964 became the standard account of Japanese history in the United States and elsewhere for the next

twenty-five years and would become a major influence on several generations of students, scholars, government officials, and the media. Reischauer wrote and rewrote the book for most of his scholarly career, expanding on his major themes and adding colorful details in *The Japanese* (later titled *The Japanese Today*).[3]

Japan: Past and Present offered Americans an extraordinary new look at Japan. Wartime propaganda in the United States had painted a picture of the Japanese as fanatic subhumans, apes, and vermin who needed to be exterminated. In contrast to the notion of a "good German," there were no "good Japanese."[4] Reischauer saw Japan's descent into militarism and aggression in the 1930s as a tragic aberration rather than as an inevitable continuation of the warlike samurai or feudal tradition. He pointed out the beauty and originality of Japanese culture to a nation that had looked down on the Japanese largely as pathetic imitators of more advanced societies. He portrayed the great leaders of modern Japan as quite different from the kamikaze pilots who blindly sacrificed their lives for their emperor. He placed Japan squarely in the main currents of modern world history and refused to see it as some sort of exotic outlier.

His interpretation of modern Japanese history flew in the face of prevailing theory among left-wing Japanese and Western scholars: he found in Tokugawa Era Japan (1603–1868) the benign origins of modernization where influential Marxist historians saw only the dark shadow of feudalism. He viewed Japan's efforts to avoid being colonized and to catch up with the West in the Meiji Period (1868–1912) as an extraordinary triumph for a non-Western nation. He placed a high value on Japan's early experimentation with parliamentary democracy and believed that Japanese citizens were fully capable of managing democratic government under their new constitution of 1947. In short, Reischauer shook up the received wisdom about Japan on both sides of the Pacific. He cast a spotlight on the dark side of the moon.

By 1960, Reischauer's preeminence at Harvard as America's leading Japan specialist brought him to the attention of President-elect John F. Kennedy, who appointed him ambassador to Japan in April 1961. For the next five and a half years, he became a beloved public figure in Japan. Almost single-handedly, he ended the "occupation mentality" of the U.S. officials who treated the Japanese as defeated inferiors. No American, with the possible exception of George F. Kennan (another of Kennedy's ambassadors), has had greater influence over a relationship with a foreign nation. But the death of President Kennedy in 1963 and the escalating war in Vietnam cast dark clouds over Reischauer's mission. Antiwar critics would accuse him of being an agent of "American imperialism" in Asia.

In 1964, Japan's best American friend was the victim of a bizarre stabbing attack by a deranged Japanese youth at the front door of the U.S. Embassy chancery. Wounded in the leg by a rusty kitchen knife, Reischauer almost bled to death. The blood he received in a nearby Japanese hospital was infected with viral hepatitis C, leaving him with permanent liver damage that led to a painful death in 1990.

Late in his life, he would become the subject of savage attacks by "revisionists" in the 1980s, who would charge that he was an "apologist" for Japan, too soft on the Japanese government, and naive about the prospects for Japanese democracy. Unshaken, he held to his faith in the common sense of ordinary Japanese citizens and in their capacity to grow and change. To a remarkable extent, his faith in Japan has been vindicated. In his final years, he turned to the challenge of educating young Americans for life in the twenty-first century. With prophetic insight, he warned against our provincialism in a dangerous world and anticipated the terrorist threats we face today.

How did Reischauer gain such firm and, for his era, original views? What experiences gave him the confidence to claim that he understood ordinary Japanese citizens? As a scholar whose Japanese acquaintances were mostly other intellectuals, how could he claim to understand the "common man" in Japan? How could he know that democracy would take root in a society saturated with hierarchy, inequality, and emperor worship? What was it about this mild-mannered professor that infuriated other scholars and journalists? That is the story of this book.

From the moment of his birth in a missionary family on the lovely green campus of Meiji Gakuin University, Edwin Reischauer's life would be defined by the missionary spirit. Meiji Gakuin, where his father, Dr. August Karl Reischauer, worked, had been founded in 1863 by two American missionary societies: the Northern Presbyterian Church, to which his parents belonged, and the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church.

Edwin's great-grandfather, Matthias Reischauer, and his family left their home in upper Austria near Salzburg in 1853 and settled in a farming area near Jonesboro, Illinois, in a community of Austrian and German Protestant immigrants.[5] Edwin's grandfather, Rupert, born in 1841, came along as a young boy. Rupert served in the Northern army in the American Civil War until he was medically discharged with an intestinal disease in 1864. He never fully recovered and died an early death in 1888, when Edwin's father was only nine years old. Edwin never knew him. His grandmother, Maria Gattermeier, however, lived to the age of eighty-four and spoke only German.

Edwin's mother, Helen Sidwell Oldfather, had older roots in America. Her ancestors were Protestant Germans from Berlin who first arrived in Baltimore in 1769 seeking religious freedom and then moved on to Pennsylvania and Ohio. Edwin's maternal grandfather, Jeremiah Oldfather, after fighting through the Civil War for an Ohio regiment, entered the Presbyterian ministry and in 1872 set out to become a missionary in Persia, as Iran was known then. Edwin's maternal grandmother, Felicia Narcissa Rice, came from a family from the Palatinate, or German-speaking Switzerland. Her ancestors first came to Pittsburgh in 1755 and moved on to Kentucky and Indiana, where Felicia was born in 1848.

Felicia lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three and was the only one of his grandparents whom Edwin knew well. He remembers her as "a voracious reader who had decided opinions on most subjects. Despite her own and her husband's Germanic backgrounds, she conveyed the feeling to the whole family that we were of Scottish descent, presumably because of our Presbyterian affiliations."[6] Reischauer would later note that his "father was peeved that I described [our ancestors] as coming from 'sturdy, taciturn, God-fearing peasant stock.'"[7]

Felicia and Jeremiah spent eighteen hazardous years in Azerbaijan, Persia. Edwin's mother, Helen, was born there, but because good schools were lacking, Jeremiah abandoned missionary work and became pastor at Hanover College in southeastern Indiana. Helen in her turn became a teacher of Latin at Hanover and met August Reischauer, Edwin's father, there.

Edwin recalled in his autobiography that his grandmother's family "obviously made the transition back to the United States with success; yet I have always been struck by the paucity of Iranian influences and the lack of feeling for the country that they brought back with them after spending eighteen years in Persia. This stands in sharp contrast with the feel for Japan which my early years in that country gave me."[8]

Edwin's father, August Karl Reischauer, born in 1879, spoke only German at home and attended schools where the language of instruction was German, but later switched to an English-language Presbyterian high school and then to Hanover College. Originally a Lutheran, he joined the Presbyterian Church after college and went on to the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Graduating in 1905, he prepared to embark on a career as a foreign missionary, with Brazil as his first choice of assignment and Japan as his second. Because there was no opening in Brazil, he accepted a teaching position at Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo.[9]

Japan was a daunting challenge for Christian missionaries. Portuguese Jesuits, led by Francis Xavier, had gained a tiny foothold there in the 1540s and in the next half century won thousands of converts to the Catholic faith. It has been estimated

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