

Masao Miyamoto, M.D.

STRAITJACKET SOCIETY



An Insider's Irreverent View of
Bureaucratic Japan



"*Straitjacket Society* is an extraordinary book—funny, touching, and politically insightful all at the same time."

—James Fallows

Foreword by **Juzo Itami**, writer-director of *A Taxing Woman*

Translated by **Juliet Winters Carpenter**

STRAITJACKET SOCIETY

**An Insider's Irreverent View
of Bureaucratic Japan**

Masao Miyamoto, M.D.

Foreword by Juzo Itami

Translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter

KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL
Tokyo • New York • London

The publisher wishes to thank Juliet Winters Carpenter and Eric Gower for their assistance with this volume. For their translation work on Mr. Itami's piece, the publisher gratefully acknowledges S & G Japan, Inc.

Published in Japanese by Kodansha as Oyakusho no Okite.

*Distributed in the United States by Kodansha America, Inc.,
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011, and in the United Kingdom
and continental Europe by Kodansha Europe Ltd., 95 Aldwych, London
WC2B 4JF.*

*Published by Kodansha International Ltd., 17-14 Otowa 1-chome,
Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112, and Kodansha America, Inc.*

*Copyright © 1993, 1994 by Masao Miyamoto. English translation copyright
© 1994 Juliet Winters Carpenter and Kodansha International.
Foreword copyright © Juzo Itami. All rights reserved.*

Printed in Japan.

First edition, 1994

First paperback edition, 1995

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99 98 97 96 95

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Miyamoto, Masao, 1948-

[Oyakusho no okite. English]

*Straitjacket society / by Masao Miyamoto; introduction by Juzo Itami;
translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter.*

*1. Civil service ethics-Japan. 2. Japan-Officials and employees-Conduct of
life. 3. Bureaucracy-Japan. 4. Miyamoto, Masao, 1948- . I. Title.*

JQ1629.E8M6913 1996 306.0952-dc20 94-11563 CIP

ISBN 4-7700-1995-5

"*Straitjacket Society* is an extraordinary book—funny, touching, and politically insightful all at the same time. Dr. Masao Miyamoto has uncovered crucial truths not just about Japan's modern predicament but about the larger struggle between big, rigid organizations and quirky, irrepressible individuals worldwide. This book will be an enjoyable if poignant read for anyone interested in the way individuals can fight back against the bureaucracies that often threaten to squash them."

— James Fallows

"While Miyamoto is an entertaining intellectual, his book is disturbing in that it depicts the highest echelons of power as a parochial village of feuding interests wed to mediocrity."

— *Daily Yomiuri*, Tokyo

"Anyone concerned about the way Japan is being run should read this book."

— *Cross Section*

"For the last eight years Masao Miyamoto has waged a solo crusade within the government for individualism at work, openly flouting what he describes as the [Japanese] bureaucrat's unwritten, yet paramount code: "Don't take holidays. Don't compete. Don't display initiative." His unflinching refusal to bend to the dictates of government has branded Miyamoto a misfit and an egotist. . . [but his book] is now a best-seller, making Miyamoto a *cause célèbre* in Kasumigaseki."

— *Japan Times*

"Though whistle-blowing is a well-entrenched tradition in the west, the feat is harder to pull off in Japan. Masao Miyamoto's unflinching look at the abuse of power by the boys in Kasumigaseki is thus all the more remarkable."

— *Asahi Evening News*, Tokyo

To Lori

Contents

Foreword	<i>Juzo Itami</i>	9
Introduction		17
1.	Rules for Aspiring Bureaucrats	27
2.	Welcome to Groupism	53
3.	The Rite of Budget Revision	73
4.	Japan: A Bureaucrat's Paradise?	93
5.	The Bureaucrat as Actor	115
6.	The Masochistic Personality and the Psychology of Bullying	133
7.	The Three Great Principles of Life in the Japanese Bureaucracy	153
8.	What Happens to Violators of the Code	177
Afterword		191
Acknowledgments		197

"*Straitjacket Society* is an extraordinary book—funny, touching, and politically insightful all at the same time. Dr. Masao Miyamoto has uncovered crucial truths not just about Japan's modern predicament but about the larger struggle between big, rigid organizations and quirky, irrepressible individuals worldwide. This book will be an enjoyable if poignant read for anyone interested in the way individuals can fight back against the bureaucracies that often threaten to squash them."

— James Fallows

"While Miyamoto is an entertaining intellectual, his book is disturbing in that it depicts the highest echelons of power as a parochial village of feuding interests wed to mediocrity."

— *Daily Yomiuri*, Tokyo

"Anyone concerned about the way Japan is being run should read this book."

— *Cross Section*

"For the last eight years Masao Miyamoto has waged a solo crusade within the government for individualism at work, openly flouting what he describes as the [Japanese] bureaucrat's unwritten, yet paramount code: "Don't take holidays. Don't compete. Don't display initiative." His unflinching refusal to bend to the dictates of government has branded Miyamoto a misfit and an egotist. . . [but his book] is now a best-seller, making Miyamoto a *cause célèbre* in Kasumigaseki."

— *Japan Times*

"Though whistle-blowing is a well-entrenched tradition in the west, the feat is harder to pull off in Japan. Masao Miyamoto's unflinching look at the abuse of power by the boys in Kasumigaseki is thus all the more remarkable."

— *Asahi Evening News*, Tokyo

STRAITJACKET SOCIETY

20063830

**An Insider's Irreverent View
of Bureaucratic Japan**

Masao Miyamoto, M.D.

Foreword by Juzo Itami

Translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter

KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL
Tokyo • New York • London

The publisher wishes to thank Juliet Winters Carpenter and Eric Gower for their assistance with this volume. For their translation work on Mr. Itami's piece, the publisher gratefully acknowledges S & G Japan, Inc.

Published in Japanese by Kodansha as Oyakusho no Okite.

*Distributed in the United States by Kodansha America, Inc.,
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011, and in the United Kingdom
and continental Europe by Kodansha Europe Ltd., 95 Aldwych, London
WC2B 4JF.*

*Published by Kodansha International Ltd., 17-14 Otowa 1-chome,
Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112, and Kodansha America, Inc.*

*Copyright © 1993, 1994 by Masao Miyamoto. English translation copyright
© 1994 Juliet Winters Carpenter and Kodansha International.
Foreword copyright © Juzo Itami. All rights reserved.*

Printed in Japan.

First edition, 1994

First paperback edition, 1995

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99 98 97 96 95

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Miyamoto, Masao, 1948-

[Oyakusho no okite. English]

*Straitjacket society / by Masao Miyamoto; introduction by Juzo Itami;
translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter.*

- 1. Civil service ethics-Japan. 2. Japan-Officials and employees-Conduct of
life. 3. Bureaucracy-Japan. 4. Miyamoto, Masao, 1948- . I. Title.
JQ1629.E8M69I3 1996 306.0952-dc20 94-11563 CIP*

ISBN 4-7700-1995-5

To Lori

Contents

Foreword	<i>Juzo Itami</i>	9
Introduction		17
1.	Rules for Aspiring Bureaucrats	27
2.	Welcome to Groupism	53
3.	The Rite of Budget Revision	73
4.	Japan: A Bureaucrat's Paradise?	93
5.	The Bureaucrat as Actor	115
6.	The Masochistic Personality and the Psychology of Bullying	133
7.	The Three Great Principles of Life in the Japanese Bureaucracy	153
8.	What Happens to Violators of the Code	177
Afterword		191
Acknowledgments		197

Foreword

THIS BOOK provides an inside glimpse of Japan's notorious bureaucracy from the eyes of a psychiatrist-turned-bureaucrat. The modifier "notorious" will, no doubt, offend some people. There's actually a wide range of opinions, from the laudatory to the disparaging, on the Japanese bureaucracy. A short recap of the history behind this institution will, I think, help non-Japanese readers appreciate the poignancy of Dr. Miyamoto's sketches of life within the bureaucracy.

In 1854, American ships under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Bay and forced Japan to open itself to trade. By then the Great Powers had already divided most of the world into spheres of influence. Japan, which had existed in self-imposed isolation for nearly three hundred years, was thrown into social and political upheaval. The new leaders who led the overthrow of the feudal system fourteen years later felt compelled to catch up quickly. Rapid modernization followed in the wake of the revolution, along with the adoption of a constitution, a national legal system, a version of parliamentary democracy, and other elements of the modern nation state, all modeled more or less along Western lines. The Emperor became a constitutional monarch.

Japan's ultimate goal was economic and military equality with the Great Powers. To achieve this national goal in the shortest amount of time, an elite group of proto-bureaucrats—mostly

former samurai who came to dominate the government—took it upon themselves to force a then relatively ignorant citizenry in the desired direction. All human, natural, and other resources were mobilized to realize the grand national design envisioned by these bureaucrats.

In this rush for parity with the Great Powers, the bureaucrats accumulated tremendous power. Their control was accepted by the people, who, having just emerged from feudalism, had no experience with anything other than hierarchical rule. In short, the new bureaucrats replaced the daimyo fief-holders and samurai retainers, who, as their role of warrior declined, had come to exercise most local administrative duties at the apex of political power.

From the start, the Japanese bureaucracy was based on the premise that the citizenry was ignorant and needed leaders, and since parliamentarians were chosen by an ignorant electorate they too were ignorant. Under this assumption, the bureaucrats felt it was natural and proper that they become the *de facto* national leaders. Today, in 1994, these assumptions remain unchanged.

Under this arrangement, Japan almost became a Great Power itself before losing everything in the disaster of World War II. During those cataclysmic years, the bureaucrats invaded every conceivable area of people's lives, justifying their actions as wartime necessities. The powers nominally vested in the Diet and in political parties evaporated, as the "Emperor's bureaucrats" assumed virtually dictatorial control.

From the ashes of defeat, Japan was remodeled, more or less, into an American-style democracy at the fiat of the United States. A new constitution was written by the Americans, providing for a separation of power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The constitution also granted far more autonomy to local jurisdictions.

In the American-written constitution, the popularly elected Diet was to be the sole repository of legislative power. Naturally, this blueprint of where power would legally reside presented the ultimate crisis for the bureaucrats: the new constitution was about to effectively deprive them of their control of the reins of the Japanese legislative process.

To circumvent the intent, if not the letter, of the constitution—which explicitly forbids bureaucrats from taking part in the legislative process—the bureaucrats sneaked through a clause in the Cabinet Act that allowed them to propose bills. They then added a similar clause to the Diet Act, permitting them to join Diet deliberations of their own proposals as formal members of the various committees.

Almost by default, elected representatives—few of whom had any specialized expertise in the legislative process itself—left the actual drafting of bills to the bureaucrats. Diet debate became a mere formality. Cabinet ministers and Diet members literally read to each other from scripts authored by the same bureaucrats. In the end, the bureaucracy reemerged as the dominant force behind Japan's legislative process.

Local autonomy suffered a similar fate. The bureaucrats needed powerful centralized control to realize their aims. An American-style division of states, each with its own independent legislative, executive, and other institutions like a local militia, police, and courts, was their worst nightmare.

Acting counter to American occupation policy, the bureaucrats first manipulated to bring governors under the central government's control. Officially, governors were still elected locally, as spelled out by the Americans, but since their jobs had both local and national implications, the bureaucrats made a case that "uncooperative governors" could hinder national efforts. Once this claim was accepted, the central government gained the power to issue directives to locally elected governors