Shikoku, the fourth largest of Japan's islands, is a pleasant part of the country with a warm climatic environment. One of the southernmost parts of Japan, it has mild winters, early springs with cherry trees blossoming at the end of March, and hot rainy summers.

Typhoons occasionally affect the Pacific coast in summer and the fall. It is a hilly-to-mountainous island with most of the flat land along the northern Inland Sea coast and rather isolated southern coastlands (see map of Japan, page 238 of Bradshaw: The New Global Order, 2nd edition). Some of the natural subtropical forest is preserved and the higher parts have temperate woodlands. For long Shikoku stood apart from the rush of industrialization and urbanization in Japan.
The building of three bridges to the main island (Honshu), beginning with the Seto Great Bridge that took 10 years to build and was opened in 1988, increased the rate of economic and cultural changes affecting this part of the country. M, now in her early twenties, grew up in one of the ancient fort towns on the northern coast overlooking the Inland Sea. They were the headquarters of warrior clans during the feudal era up to 1867 but are now industrial and commercial centers. She goes to university there, but has traveled to the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Like many Japanese young people, she is attracted to Western influences, and wishes to speak English and other European languages as well as than Chinese or Korean. She also values Japanese traditions.
Environmental Case Study

Living in Japan

M's family lives in a two-story wooden house next to her grandmother, although a larger, high-tech home is being built of new materials at present. Her father is a very busy engineer whose working day typically takes him out of the house from 6am to 7pm, with one week of vacation each year. He has worked for the same company since leaving school. In his small amount of spare time he enjoys craftwork, for example buying wood to make his own designs of furniture. With her mother also working throughout her lifetime, M and her sister were brought up largely by her grandmother.

Grandmother clings to the old traditions and attitudes. Born and raised on one of the small islands in the Inland Sea, she married a sailor and spent her whole life as a homemaker. She continues to cook traditional meals with the basic ingredients, care for her home, and maintain social customs and the rules of politeness. For long she continued to sleep on the floor, but was eventually persuaded to move into a bed. She finds it difficult to relate to foreigners such as a U.S. exchange student who stayed with the family for a few weeks. She did not want M to go to other countries, afraid for her safety. Singing in a choir at the community center provides her relaxation and main social activity: weekly practices lead to annual public performances of traditional Japanese songs. She is not happy with modern technology from vending machines to computers.
M is fairly typical of the generation of Japanese young people who have grown up to expect a good education, a consumer society, the use of modern technology, world travel, and a long life. She will have a professional job when her university education is completed, although it may be in a traditional field such as Japanese calligraphy. Teaching in elementary school might be a possibility, but is extremely competitive because of its high status and excellent government pension. She likes using a computer, exchanging emails with her friends, and looks forward to designing her own website. She enjoys a wide range of Western and Japanese music, preferring relaxing pieces. While friends took up part-time jobs as store assistants or restaurant waiters, M worked with an organization that helps exchange students since she enjoys meeting people from different countries. She goes to movies and karaoke parties, is a member of swimming and tennis clubs, and skis for a week each year.

A student at her local university, M is used to studying very hard. While at high school, there were no vacations because extra study filled the time. At home, the cable TV was exchanged for the fewer channels on satellite TV so that she would not be distracted from her studies. Like other Japanese people, she has had regular health checks at school, university, and in the workplace, and her family check blood pressure regularly at home. People in Japan are very concerned with their health. Doctor and hospital costs are met through her parents' employer-supplied insurance cards. Although the traditional Japanese diet includes a lot of fish, home meals are now more varied, including pasta and Chinese dishes, while fast food restaurants are very common.
M is proud of her Japanese heritage, but enjoys living in other parts of the world and wishes to make the most of new experiences gained from her times in Western countries. She compares the benefits and difficulties of living in Japan with what she found abroad. She is critical of the fact that in Japan a focus on work and rising incomes means that families are able to meet talk less. Furthermore, the changing cultural focus is not only replacing Japanese with Western ways, but is resulting in a less polite society. One Japanese habit that has not changed is the refusal to discuss religion with family or friends. This has resulted in conversation remaining an undemonstrative, matter-of-fact activity, focusing on educational and economic achievements and hopes. And yet, M is proud to be Japanese and her life continues to center around her family.