University of Montana
ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers

Graduate School

2000

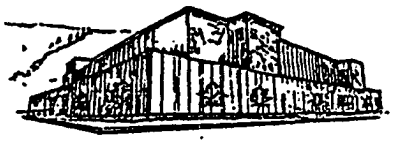
Preparing for Japan| A practical guide for navigating the web of culture, communication and history

Matthew A. Taylor
The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd
Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
Taylor, Matthew A., "Preparing for Japan| A practical guide for navigating the web of culture, communication and history" (2000). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3290.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3290

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY

The University of
Montana

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature

Yes, I grant permission ✓

No, I do not grant permission _____

Author's Signature: [signature]

Date: 12/21/00

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.

Preparing for Japan:
A practical guide for navigating the web of culture, communication and history.

by:
Matthew A. Taylor

B.S. The University of Montana-Missoula, 1993
B.A. The University of Montana-Missoula, 1996

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
The University of Montana-Missoula
December 2000

Committee Members:
Dr. George Cheney (Chair)
Dr. Philip West
Dr. William Wilmot

Approved by:

George Cheney
Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

12-21-00
Date

UMI Number: EP34339

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent on the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI EP34339

Copyright 2012 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This edition of the work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Taylor, Matthew A. M.S. December 2000 Communication Studies

Intercultural Communication, Japanese history, economics, politics, communication and culture, Organizational culture, Interpersonal Conflict, Mediation and Negotiation

Director: Dr. George Cheney

Cultural differences between the United States and Japan, particularly in the realm of interpersonal communication and business negotiation, commonly prove problematic for Americans traveling to Japan or interacting with Japanese individuals on home soil. Numerous, well-informed scholarly studies and popular readings have dealt with this issue in light of the increased interactions and interdependencies of the two nations. Unfortunately, much of theses scholarly works and the accessible, popular literature that is written for the "busy" person often only highlight specific communicative contexts. Such works typically leave aside the importance of understanding the historical and cultural underpinnings behind such contexts. In this primer, the author covers broad ground in order to inform the reader of the numerous intersections between Japanese organizational culture, national culture, and history as they bear on intercultural communication processes commonly problematic to Americans. Throughout, the author underscores the centrality of Confucian values on this process and, though utilizing numerous important and necessary cultural generalizations, the impact of individual sense-making and the reciprocal influence of Japanese and American values and interactions. Grounded in interpersonal communication theory and historical studies, the work is written in a highly accessible style intended for those with little previous exposure to Japan.

Preface

Cross-cultural interactions between Japan and the United States often reveal that the most basic concepts regarding self, society and communication found in the two countries are radically different from one another. Of course, in both countries these concepts are extremely varied and can only be accurately studied when the preferences of individuals, not group generalizations are considered. This would be a daunting and almost unimaginable, if not impossible task. And so, as is the case with this work you are about to read, broad generalizations are commonly made which attempt to paint a uniquely Japanese *modus vivendi* or way of living.

Such generalizations are made in the hope that these macro strokes will provide you with a road map or, more accurately, a *legend.* Through this you will hopefully be able to successfully interpret and understand the communicative actions of your Japanese colleague and yourself during the complex web of interaction and interpretation that joins you both. If this all sounds like an obtuse apology: it is. Some would in fact say that an apology is itself a very Japanese quality and a fitting way to start such a paper.

It comes as both a caveat and a plea. It is a caveat to make sure an impression is not given or taken that the lists and examples here are in any way exhaustive. As a plea it comes to remind that every cross-cultural exchange is filtered through the interpretations and life experiences of the individuals present in a way that generalizations, scholarly or not, can never capture or predict. Despite these cautionary notes, if there is to be a predictor of success in cross-cultural relationships it will come about primarily through individuals with flexible worldviews who possess broad understandings of the cultural context behind such interactions. These understandings commonly find their grounding

in works that provide cultural generalizations and then are filtered through the interpretation and knowledge of specific situations. So, while wrought with limitations, such works clearly have their value and serve as a strong springboard for deeper knowledge.

Some terms used in this paper deserve mention. *Gaijin*, the Japanese term for foreigner, is used often and is, in fact, quite revealing to the Japanese view of both themselves and foreigners. When this word is written in the traditional script of kanji, you can see two Chinese characters come together: *soto* (outside) and *hito* (person). To be *soto* is in direct contrast and even conflict with being *uchi* (inside). Both of these terms dive much deeper to the heart of Japanese culture than mere words that reference physical proximity would suggest.

Uchi is also the same word for "home" and thus is understood as a place of grounding, sincerity, and trusted relations. That said, to be *soto hito* (again, standing in stark contrast to *uchi*), or *gaijin* is particularly awkward position for an individual wishing to strike good accord with a Japanese colleague. Japanese make a clear distinction between these concepts and in most cases distinct psychological lines are drawn around an individual's *soto* and *uchi* relationships, even among their fellow countrymen.[1] This is not to say that a foreigner cannot create long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. You clearly can, and being a foreign visitor to Japan can be quite a flattering experience given the gracious attitudes often extended to temporary visitors. In fact, to be *soto* can have its particular advantages in negotiations. However, as any seasoned foreigner who has lived in Japan for many years will tell you; once a *gaijin* always a *gaijin* and it is not uncommon for such graciousness to slowly dissolve

and ultimately swing like a pendulum to a more isolated and guarded position. As you read this paper and see the word *gaijin* used, or when heard in conversation, it will serve you well to remember its implications in Japanese society.

The words foreigner, Westerner and *gaijin* are used interchangeably here since, for the purposes of this paper they refer to the same thing; you and me. "Westerner" is intended to refer to North Americans and, in particular, citizens of the U.S. who orient primarily to the cultural norms of the county. This is all a slippery slope since, as I will discuss, a definition of "culture" is difficult to pin down and culture and cultural norms are neither monolithic nor static. Similarly, use of the term "American" is intended to refer to residents of the U.S. even though it is far more accurate and less ethnocentric to realize that "American" could or perhaps *should* refer equally to anyone from North, Central, or South America.

Finally, in this paper Japanese names are written with the family name first as would be spoken in Japan. If you can become accustomed to reversing names in this way and if you are also able to add the appropriate honorific suffix, typically *–san*, both to the degree that they become second nature, you will have come a long way in understanding Japanese society and furthering your chances for success in the fascinating, frustrating, and undeniably rewarding journey that awaits you.

---

[1] Distinctions among Japanese terms here have been simplified in order to be less confusing to the layperson. In actuality, Japanese refer to their inner or *uchi* relationships as *uchi no hitto* or, more commonly *mi-uchi*. Regarding, *soto* relationships among Japanese, the term *tanin* is used. Although the concept of *soto* still bears, it is realized that there are common points of reference and understanding. If nothing else, the member's Japanese-ness is shared (and that goes a long way). When viewed this way, the term *gaijin* takes on even more weight because it is considered so far removed from Japanese society and the Japanese ways of understanding relationships.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	iii
Introduction	1
Section I - Japan: A nation that can't sit still	6
Economic malaise	6
The little Big Bang that might	8
Standing on a whale, fishing for minnows	10
New blood for a lifeless economy	15
Howdy Stranger	18
Section II - Intercultural communication skills: Now more than ever	21
Forget the economy - "Its the Culture stupid"	21
Ethnocentrism: My way or the highway	26
Technology and Globalization: Bigger, faster,.. better?	31
The global melting pot?	38
Pulling it all together: Intercultural communication skills in your life and work	42
Section III - A brief view of Japanese history and its impact on communication	47
Location, Location, Location	49
We the people…	51
Mind if we borrow your government?	54
Religion in Japan	58
Tokugawa, Bushido, and the dynamic evolution of a nation	61
Post WWII Japan , a phoenix ready for flight	67
Tradition, Equality, and the Japanese women caught between?	71
Section IV - Organizational culture in Japan	79
All in the family	80
The importance of being earnest…*and indulgent*	85
The essence of being human	89
Seeing culture in an organization	91
Section V - When the rubber hits the road: Communication dilemmas for *gaijin*	101
Honorific Language	102
Seeing the social structure of communication	104
Ura or "back – stage" setting in communication and conflict	106
Groupism	108
Power sharing and hierarchies	109
Sensitivity and "Face"	110
Ambiguity	111
Avoidance	112
Physiological Responses	113
Silence	114
Negotiator Characteristics	115
Conclusion	117
Works Cited	121

Introduction

There are dramatic changes underfoot in Japan and foreign businesses that consider themselves "global" should stand and take notice. Those who believe its "business as usual" in Japan should think again. And those who aspire to do business there, yet are slow to act, may see a priceless opportunity pass them by.

These changes have been sparked by that nation's financial crisis of the 1990s: a crisis set in motion long before. They are changes being enacted in the private sector while conservative bureaucrats who once held the reigns of the foretold, yet never delivered Japanese economic revolution, stand on the sidelines and watch. While pundits questioned whether the recent Asian economic meltdown would spell an end to the glowing outlook of the 21st century as the "Pacific Century", many in the international business community knew a gold mine of opportunity was around the corner.

Japan now sits poised on what acclaimed Japan scholar Frank Gibney and former head of Japan's powerful Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI), the late Mr. Naohiro Amaya, hoped would be a "third opening" for the country.[1] This change will be brought about by the continued loosening of bureaucratic controls over the Japanese economy,[2] the burgeoning self-reliance of Japanese consumers and investors, and the increased presence of foreign firms and management styles. Perhaps most importantly, it will also be driven by a new generation of young Japanese who will demand these changes and want to partake as equal players in the technologically driven globalization of the world. Indeed, these changes are already underway. Given the dire straits many Japanese firms

still find themselves in, the time is ripe for many foreign businesses to make inroads in Japan and seize the growing momentum these emerging changes are creating.

Of course, making such inroads has never been easy. The path is littered with tales of continuous, and seemingly well-planed yet failed endeavors, endless red tape courtesy of a control-happy bureaucracy that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Japanese society, and culturally based communication differences that challenge the most enlightened and internationally seasoned business people. While some of these issues may become less problematic as Japan's doors continue to open, the barriers will remain high. To surmount these challenges it remains critically important to understand both the current organizational climate in Japan and the historical and cultural underpinnings driving Japanese communication patterns and business perspectives.

Perhaps you are planning to embark on your first trip to Japan for business or are considering whether or not to attempt to gain entry into the Japanese market for your products. Regardless of your intent, this paper will serve as a good starting point for understanding Japanese, culture, communication, and business. It is intended to go far beyond many of the "quick-read" mini-manuals intended for "busy" people because most are virtually worthless and may in fact serve more harm that good. However, this paper is by no means exhaustive and only scratches the surface of cross-cultural knowledge that is needed to greatly enhance chances for success. Should you have the time and interest to pursue additional reading, I will offer suggestions after each section.

To set the stage, I will use Section I to describe, in some depth, the complex changes sweeping the Japanese economy. Having a primer on conducting business in Japan without looking at these changes and discussing the current bureaucratic landscape

would be foolish since many of the changes will fundamentally impact the way you conduct business and the manner in which your efforts are received. Through looking at these issues it should become clear why now is an amazing time to begin such a journey. Surprisingly, looking at Japan in this light is a discussion that has received little commentary in the popular media and even less in academic circles. The reasons for this involve the fact that the changes are both complex and relatively recent and that there is still more than enough bad, eye-catching news to go around. To be sure, you have undoubtedly heard many dismal stories in the last several years about the financial crisis in East Asia and Japan. It is now time for a hard, yet fresh look at where Japan sits today on this subject. Through this I hope to dispel any lingering images of Japan as an economic wasteland and present a clearer picture of why the time is right to be considering Japan as a land of renewed opportunity.

Section II will turn from this timely starting point to consider why intercultural understanding is both critical and problematic now more than ever. Through this I will consider how technology and the thrust toward globalization is changing our perceptions of the importance of culture. Additionally, I will look at ethnocentrism as a fundamental component of ourselves.

I will then turn to a close look at key developments in Japanese history and culture. Section III will look at those periods of Japan's development that have had significant impact on Japanese communication styles and business practices. This will include a discussion of religion and a closing section on the issue of Japanese women's roles. This issue is one foreigners will certainly encounter in business settings and which

many find interesting, confusing, and in certain cases, troubling. Both of these subjects have bearing on communication patterns of Japanese individuals.

The amount of time spent in this section deserves brief explanation. Although this work is designed to educate you about communication issues, this cannot be separated from a careful look at history. Without this background, virtually all of other sections of this paper would have a hollow resonance at best and you may find yourself ill equipped to handle circumstances beyond those outlined here or in similar cross-cultural primers. Truly, it is the understanding of context as much as the specifics of a given situation that will be most beneficial to you in Japan and facilitate your acculturation process. Additionally, having an understanding of Japanese history, if only on a broad level, will make your time abroad much richer and may often serve you well in the "casual" conversations that are central to gaining ground in business negotiations.

I will then turn attention my attention in Section IV to the organizational structure in Japan and to the importance and difficulty of distinguishing between organizational and national culture. Although risking being a continuation of Section III, this will include a discussion of both the evolution of organizational structure in Japan and the parallels organizations have with modern and historical family structures.

In closing with Section V, I will spend time reviewing specific patters of Japanese communication and behavior or communicative situations which foreigners often find confusing and problematic. It is hoped that by the time you reach this section a number of its points, mentioned throughout the paper, will become very salient. Throughout all these sections, side boxes will include interesting information and practical examples intended to show the "real world" application of concepts presented in this paper.

[1] Gibney, 1998 p.12-13.

[2] Japanese Bureaucracy has its roots in the nation's feudal history and is a reality that in many ways was ironically strengthened by the American Occupation forces as they sought to dismantle the wartime economic and political power structure of the country. When individuals refer to the bureaucracy they are commonly focusing on the elaborate system of both national and prefecture level government ministries, agencies, departments and divisions, including those without "official" government designation that interact comfortably with the private sector, and who regulate much of Japanese society and international trade – often to the exasperation of foreigners. In many cases, leading bureaucrats hail from the country's most prestigious universities, most notably *Todai Daigaku (Tokyo University)*, a distinction that is highly regarded in Japan and commonly positions such individuals in the nation's trust and thus, often above public scrutiny. What is critical to keep in mind however is that it is far too easy for foreigners to critically judge the bureaucratic structure of Japan from the vantage of their own cultural values and perceptions. In actuality, the system has worked well for the Japanese in many respects and can be seen as a natural extension of their society. For more information on the historical underpinnings of Japanese bureaucracy see Section IV.

I. Japan: A nation that can't sit still

Economic malaise

Obituaries abound on post bubble Japan. News headlines report an endless string of executives and politicians exposed for corruption. In 1995, the Nikkei plunged to bounce along new bottoms and has since failed to gain much ground despite major intervention by the government. Both the nation and international business community reeled in November 1997 as three major national banks: Sanyo Securities, Hokkaido Takushoku Bank, and Yamaichi Securities all closed their doors.

Regional competition is also heating up as technological change threatens to make economic leaders less distinct. China now surpasses Japan as the world's second largest economy and continues to make impressive technological strides - though Japan still clearly rates as technologically the second most advanced in the world behind the U.S. and its GDP, as expressed per capita in purchasing power parity, far outstrips China.[1] And late Summer, 2000, the Bank of Japan made front page news in the internationally read *Financial Times* when it quietly announced corporate bankruptcies rose 21% in the past year with total debts of these companies raising three-fold to a post-war high of $40 billion.[2]

Behind the wheel of this melodrama has been an endless stream of conservative politicians and a bureaucracy with a penchant to micro-manage. Numerous ministries, most notably the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), and powerful business associations such as Keidanren have created cozy

gridlocks that historically encouraged "market manipulation rather than market competition".[3] The expansive and deeply imbedded *keiretsu* system (a set of affiliated firms centered around a sympathetic financial institution or final manufacturer) has been an equal player in this economic quagmire.[4]

Language in Perspective

In the English language the word "deregulation" is commonly understood bluntly to mean "get rid of regulation"

The closest Japanese equivalent would be "*kisi kanwa*" which means literally "to soften regulations"

When Japanese policy is considered, especially in comparison to American deregulation practices, it is useful to keep this distinction in mind.

(This problem was encountered during collaborative work between the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs and the Brookings Institute in 1996) Source: Gibney 1998

If headlines were all you read, the picture would appear bleak indeed and the national symbol would clearly be setting, not rising. But a longer timeline will lend a broader picture and help put Japan's dark decade in perspective. Through this perspective a unique dualism becomes evident. Japan is a conservative nation that embraces tradition and has often sought to highlight, and at times exasperate its differences from the rest of the world. At the same time, it is also a nation that demonstrates an impressive ability to transform key aspects of its society in the face of internal and external pressures. Some of the most impressive moments in Asian, and world history for that matter, have come about when the Japanese turned their collective energies to articulating their culture during the Tokugawa era, to rapid modernization in the Meiji period, and to rebuilding and, in many ways, redefining their country after WWII. (More on these changes in Section III)

True, old habits die hard in a country with a history as long and complex as Japan's. Yet it is not unreasonable to consider that this latest setback may merely prove yet another opportunity for Japan's dynamism to flourish. The stakes are high and as I

will discuss, maintaining the comfort of the bureaucratic, protectionist status quo could prove the country's undoing. If the past is any gauge, the Japanese do not sit still for long.

The little Big Bang that might

In 1996 Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and his cabinet announced the "Big Bang" initiative to make financial systems more transparent and accessible. These reforms have been slated to occur in stages between April 1998 and March 2001. Although the process at times appears painfully slow and sounds more like a fizzle than a bang, the reforms are setting the stage for a fundamental transformation of the Japanese economy and of Japan itself.

It is an initiative named after Margaret Thatcher's plans in the 1980s to revive the British economy. Diana Helweg summarized the proposal in the July/August 2000 edition of *Foreign Affairs*. The plans called for the loosening of the insurance and securities sectors, the provision of tax cuts for corporations, and the restriction of MOF's regulator power by establishing the Financial Reconstruction Commission, the Financial Supervisory Agency, and an independent Bank of Japan.[5] International financial consultant, diplomat, and scholar Stephen Harner puts the initiative, from the Japanese financial institution's perspective more succinctly when he states the imperatives of the Big Bang as "change, restructure, innovate, or die."[6]

Changes to emerge have come at a disappointingly, though not entirely surprising slow rate. Numerous reform proposals have been scrapped or reneged after their approval in light of political power shuffles, pre-election posturing and private sector

whimpering in the face of potential competition, both domestic and foreign. Meanwhile the Japanese economy lost further ground. Yet the combination of changes that have been eked out and the further economic contraction of the country have created a momentum of change and urgency that is bringing an emerging revolution of openness to Japanese business.

In brief, as the malaise continued, the banking sector, now crippled by the collapse of the "bubble economy" was forced to open its doors to competition and consolidation. In mid August 1999 for example, the presidents of Japan's three largest banks agreed to merge to form the world's largest financial institution – a move that jolted financial markets around the globe. It was a move seen as the tip of the iceberg. Bad loans created a severe shortage of capital and when the government could not continue to write off such loans, institutions were forced to seek foreign capital to survive.

With the banks more cautious than ever, the *keiretsu* system began to unravel. Businesses in this system could not continue covering up the fiscal improprieties and insolvency of their "affiliated" organizations. The central firms and banks in this system put the breaks on generous lending practices that had been the lifeline driving the rapid expansion of the economy; a practice based far more heavily on relationships, honor, and real estate speculation than on sound financial planning. As stock prices continued to sink, numerous business, including some of the largest in Japan, realized they could not repay their loans and now found themselves stuck with unprofitable investments outside their core business areas, excess capacity, and frantic creditors. The impenetrable aura of a strong Japanese economy that was once the envy of the world began to vanish.

With the banks and other companies unable or unwilling to prop many of these firms up, they have had nowhere to turn for critical assistance than abroad. Regulatory changes are facilitating such movement and making it easier than ever for small companies to raise capital. As Helweg states: "In less than a year, the time it took a company to "go public" has dropped from 30 years to a month." Thanks in part to financial liberalization originating in the Big Bang, foreign banks can underwrite many of these plans. As a result of the numerous changes occurring, the desperately needed foreign investment in both startups and established companies is happening at a record pace and has increased over 100% since 1997.[7] Despite these and many other promising regulatory changes, much remains the same since the present structure and mindset of the Japanese bureaucracy is not conducive to accepting radical change. Grasping the breadth and stodginess of this bureaucracy is fundamental since your journey into Japan will undoubtedly encounter it.

Standing on a whale, fishing for minnows

In order to jumpstart the economy, the Japanese government launched nine immense stimulus packages between 1992 and 1999 that totaled $1.2 trillion dollars.[8] Unfortunately these packages have pushed Japan into a spending rut and perilously expanded the national deficit. With every stimulus initiative there is a slight surge in economic growth, consumer optimism, and public works spending. But the effects of this pump priming are often short lived and the nation seems to continuously slip back into recession. Public confidence in government continues to wane and there has been a

growling fear among many Japanese that it is the public who will soon be propping up the government and paying for its spending addictions and stopgap measure policies.

The issues of public works projects have become particularly bittersweet for Japan and can bee seen as a telltale sign of the bureaucracy and its fiscal nearsightedness. While the massive and seemingly continuous public works projects to expanded highways, bullet train lines and "dubiously useful" dams, have created numerous jobs, they have also created boom to bust scenarios is numerous towns and have filled the media with scandalous headlines and both human and environmental health concerns. Most of these projects seem to have some form of corruption associated with them and are typically a financial wreck due in part to high construction costs (often 40% higher than in the U.S.). Yet such a situation is hardly new. In the 1970's for example, Japan was spending more on pubic works projects that the U.S. was spending on defense during the height of the cold war.[9] A classic and ironic example of this is the construction and planning of the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi Prefecture near Nagoya. Although the

Hand me the red tape please...

- If a local government in Japan wishes to move a stop sign, it must obtain permission from the Ministry of Transportation.
- Government bureaucrats informed Daiei, one of Japan's largest retail chains, that it must apply for two separate permits to sell hamburgers and hot dogs if the products were displayed in different sections of the same store.
- Prospective investors must file approximately 75 applications relating to 26 different government permits to open a large multi-purpose store.
- If a golf club member wants to play, but cannot get a reservation because the club telephone is busy, he or she can invoke 1993 government guidelines that guarantee all private club members are able to play a certain number of times a year.

(Source: from a speech given by Lucien Elington, May 1995 entitled: Japan's Economy: 21st Century Challenges Mr. Elington is the Associate Director of the Center for Economic Education, Director of the Japan Project, and UC Foundation Associate Professor of Education at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga)

theme of the Expo is entitled "Rediscovering Nature's Wisdom" and is centered around environmentally sustainable technology and development, the plans have called for the destruction of substantial forestlands and use of the most cost effective means of construction with clearly less consideration for environmental impact and sustainability. Pollution concerns have been high and the plans have been wrought with controversial financing. Through continuous pressure from special interests groups and the discovery of numerous scandals surrounding the project, the plans now call for the project to be 1/5 of its original size and proposed site has been moved. As a result of such problems there is now considerable speculation that the entire project may now receive rejection from the Paris-based International Bureau of Expositions.[10]

Developments such as these and the continued economic malaise of the country are forcing bureaucrats to make some surprising changes fully independent of the Big Bang initiative and its subsequent reforms. In August 2000, senior politicians in the methodic Liberal Democratic Party, Japan's ruling coalition, in order to test public reaction at controlling "pork barrel spending," unexpectedly announced they would scrap $26 billion in public spending projects. These would be projects, identified by various Ministries, that were deemed unnecessary or woefully behind schedule (though this is nothing new) including a nationally controversial dam in Tokushima prefecture.[11] Many Japanese however feel that such changes are yet another attempt to muster public political support and detract attention from the fact that officials fail to be able to deal with the stagnate economy and often backpedal on reform proposals.

The public has just cause to feel that the bureaucrats are fumbling. The political will to engage in hard reforms is lukewarm at best. In November 1999 a group of LDP

politicians created a "Committee to Reconsider Deregulation." Ironically, this group was headed by Kabun Muto who had previously taken the lead the LDP's Administrative Reform Promotion Committee. At one of its early meetings, the national *Nihon Keizai and Asahi Shinbun* newspapers reported that the group vowed to fight the tyranny of American-style Deregulation. Muto said: "when you adopt American-style market principles, the law of the jungle would leave only the strongest and as a result, consumers would suffer from the tyranny of the survivor." [12] By March of 2000 the group size had grown to 165 which is just under half of the LDP's total membership in the Japanese parliament. Current Prime Minister Yoshio Mori resigned his membership in this committee only upon moving into his new post in April 2000.[13] While reform talks continue, the piecemeal approach to initiating changes in the bureaucracy seems to have little effect at reducing its own size.

Not that changes in leadership haven't been occurring. The list of name's in the country's top seat changes readily. In the span of 13 years since 1987, Japan has had 10 Prime Ministers and numerous cabinet shuffles, a fact which Frank Gibney states "makes its own commentary on the current political process."[14] In the latest shuffle to occur in early December 2000, Prime Minister Mori, facing almost record low popularity ratings, brokered for his entire cabinet to resign in the Japanese tradition that the top dog is the last to loose face. His new cabinet includes such notables as former Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro to head reforms.[15] Yet even Hosokawa, a relatively radical reformer during his leadership post in the early 1990s, was booted prematurely from power when formerly PM. But then again, new names in Japan rarely equal new blood. The list of political leaders in Japan reads as a Who's Who in the LDP; a party whose main

supporters include constituents who typically oppose deregulation and economic liberalization.

Similarly, in the 21 months between December 1998 when the Financial Reconstruction Commission (FRC) was established until August 2000, the FRC has seen 4 leaders resign or forced out and the position is increasingly seen as an *okimon* or demon's gate that opens to misfortune.[16] Such a revolving door policy in these and other leading bureaucratic institutions does little to bolster public confidence. Plans to reduce the number of ministries and government agencies appear to be little more than paper shuffles. And the proposals to privatize the mail and postal savings and insurance systems appear stymied.

Unfortunately, the conservative buck does not stop within the government bureaucracy thanks to a long held system of placing former officials in key private sector jobs; a process called *amakudari* or "descent form heaven."[17] As a result of *amakudari*, the conservative attitudes so common in the Ministries find their way into many corporate boardrooms.

Descending from Heaven to your business

Although the common process of *amakudari* has gained much criticism, it is a basic fact of Japanese business that is not going to disappear any time soon. Foreigners can use it to their advantage by courting such people. It represents a golden opportunity to affiliate with established individuals. By doing this you will gain invaluable *jinmyaku* (personal contacts and influence) something deeply respected in Japan and fundamental to successful entry.

(See suggested readings for additional information on this process)

It is clearly understood that the bureaucrats do not want to let go of the regulatory power that allows them to maintain control over the economy. In a sense, the politicians continue to hold the bat but no one is swinging. Increasingly however, it is the bureaucracy that is getting left behind as a new generation of Japanese and slew of foreign interests take to the plate.

New blood for a lifeless economy

Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Michael Armacost, commented that the Japanese establishment has slowly realized its economy has been far too reliant on a strong manufacturing sector and, as such, has been like a "bird flying on one wing."[18] What is emerging, he contends, is the realization that Japan's service industry, particularly in the arenas of telecommunications, health care, financial services and technology need a shot of fresh insight and energy – especially if it wants to remain a leader in the increasingly competitive and high-tech environment of East Asia. Here is where a new generation is taking their place and in fact it is here that the dramatic changes in the Japanese economy are becoming perhaps most evident.

In late summer 2000, *Newsweek* published a special edition report called "The New Asia" and described this generation of East Asian and particularly Japanese individuals as "young, bold, and wired…techno-savvy and entrepreneurial." Much of this stems from the increased internationalization of Japan and the growing presence and impact that both the Internet and wireless communications have on young people's lives. The Internet is particularly creating a buzz and much of the vision of a 21st century Japan appears to be emanating from Tokyo's Shibuya district that has been recently dubbed "Bit Valley". It is a vision of a venture economy driven by courageous investors with a respect for the entrepreneurial spirit. As Nishikawa Kiyoshi, the president of NetAge Inc., Japan's leading Internet business incubator states: "Our mission is simple: dismantle the system of Old Japan and create the New Japan."[19]

While such a manifesto may appear brash, the growing enthusiasm and forward thinking style of young, bright Japanese suggests it is not mere fantasy. For starters, the

government does not over regulate such high tech sectors and secondly, individuals in these areas are driven to maintain technological leadership in East Asia and catch up to the perceived superiority of Western technology and profits. Parallel emotions are also beginning to surface in the financial arenas. Since 1998 Japanese firms have watched foreign companies such as Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley emerge among the most profitable and powerful in the Japanese markets while the "home teams" continue to fumble. These competitive, self-conscious emotions are the same that drove the Japanese during the previous two major internationalization periods or, recalling Gibney and Amaya's earlier term, "openings" of Japan – the Meiji era and the post-WWII, occupation years.

Japanese in small and large towns alike, from all walks of life, and particularly younger people are increasingly entering the stock market through the Internet. This fact alone represents a significant shift from the traditionally conservative, risk-adverse mindset that has been so prevalent. While most of this change comes from increased exposure to the Internet, a mounting distrust in the bureaucracy, and an emerging sense of

Communicating in an I-Mode world
"O-Ha Watson-san,.. can you hear me?"

While Japan may still lag behind the U.S. in household connections to the Internet, it is still truly a wired country. So much so that its cellular phone usage is light years beyond anywhere else in the world. (Cellular service is increasingly cheaper than traditional phone usage in Japan thanks to the bureaucracy clouding the traditional telecom industry) In fact, cell phone usage now approaches 37 million users – almost 30% of the entire population.

With streaming video and email now fundamental components of most DoCoMo services (Japan's wireless giant) the communication landscape is changing. Such "I-mode" correspondence is far less formal and hierarchical than that which the Japanese have been accustomed. In an "I-mode" world there is no bowing or roundabout language. Short text messages are direct and efficient. For example, the standard morning greeting *"ohayo gozaimasu"* (the -gozaimasu indicating politeness and humility) is increasingly supplanted for *"o-ha"*.

(Source: "DoCoMo Conquers All" in "The New Asia" *Newsweek* (special edition) Summer 2000 p 56-57)

self-reliance in the face of decreased job security nationwide, some of these trends may be credited to the reforms. Big Bang initiatives are now allowing employees to invest their own retirement funds, a change that is causing increasing numbers of individuals to change their savings allocations in and from the government run Postal Savings System. In the late 90s this system had over $3 trillion dollars in it – enough to pay off three fifths of America's national debt at the time. Fitting to Japanese conservatism, it is also a system that has been labeled "the most stagnate pool of money in the world".[20]

Japanese consumers are also becoming increasingly confident and price sensitive, and this too is changing the business climate of the country. As mega-stores and supermarkets grow on the landscape (thanks to deregulatory pressures and a weakened *keiretsu* system), Japanese are becoming less sympathetic to high prices. This is compounded with the fact that more than ever before, Japanese are both travelling and studying abroad. In the process of these travels they are becoming increasingly accustomed to paying half price for the same products they purchase at home. Both consumers and businesses it seems have their eyes increasingly on the bottom line. As a result, supply chains have begun to respond more to pricing and competitive delivery than to company obligations, thus further weakening the *keiretsu* system and the bureaucracy that is entwined in it.[21] It is truly a welcome sight for companies abroad.

Companies such as DimlerChrysler, Renault, Costco, Wal-Mart, Office Depot, Land's End, Eddie Bauer, Starbucks, Tower Records, Kinko's, Amazon.com, Cargill, Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, and numerous other foreign firms, large and small, are taking increasingly significant steps into Japan and in the process, shaking up the status quo. Examples abound. In an unprecedented move in early September 2000 Mitsubishi Motor Corp (MMC) asked Daimler Chrysler, now MMC's largest shareholder, for new leadership amid scandals surrounding president Kawasoe Katsuhiko and the company's handling of customer complaints and safety violations. Months earlier, NTT, the nation's largest telecom company, confirmed plans to cut 21,000 jobs and shut down 440 sales offices in the effort to trim costs in the face of foreign competition. Corporate Japan is even seeing a dramatic surge in employee interest in learning business conversation level English in hopes of satisfying managerial demands and increasing job security.[22]

Nissan in particular has gotten a rude awaking of *gaiatsu,* or foreign pressure, after its sink or swim comprehensive tie-up with Renault. Without wasting much time, Carlos Ghosen, Nissan's new chief operating officer and 18 other new foreign top execs implemented bold and brash new plans. These included making English the official language of the company (though most Japanese employees still conduct meetings in their native language), slashing off unprofitable suppliers (another serious blow to the *keiretsu* system[23]), and eliminating over 20,000 jobs. These announcements came within the same week that two of the nation's biggest banks agreed to merge and a trio of Japanese casualty insurers agreed to join hands and form one of the nation's largest holding companies. In the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a Tokyo correspondent only

half-jokingly stated that it might go down in business history as "The week that changed Japan."[24]

Yet with these dramatic changes in the business climate in Japan and the virtually unprecedented opportunities for foreign firms comes increased risk. Regulatory changes and opening markets to not spell easy access or success for foreign interests. However, in the rush to seize the moment such illusion may be taken. Surprisingly, even changes as brash as Nissan's receive some positive press in Japan and growing numbers of Japanese see such changes as the future of the nation's business if it wants to stay afloat as one of the world's leading economic superpowers. The imperatives of Mr. Ghosen and other like-minded executives are very recent and come at a time of desperation in Japan's corporate world. Despite any apparent warm reception such imperatives may receive in certain Japanese circles, they are clearly an experiment and aspiring entrants should consider their long term sustainability highly questionable.

While such caution should be obvious, the brashness and ethnocentrism of human nature, particularly in the Western business community is very stubborn. As I will discuss in the next section, this is due in part to the rapid technologically driven rate of change as firms and countries rush to become "globalized" and the growing, and I believe misguided, belief many have in the emerging "borderless" culture of international business. As any seasoned foreigner in Japan will tell you, the cultural barriers remain high and the need to understand Japanese history and communication remains critical and is necessitated now perhaps more than ever before.

Suggested Readings:

- Japan's Financial Revolution and how American firms are profiting by Stephen M. Harner, 2000. M.E. Sharpe
- Unlocking the Bureaucrat's Kingdom Edited by Frank Gibney, 1998. The Brookings Institution
- For an optimistic view of the nation and a furture articulation of the tone set in the preceeding chapter read: *Japan: A Rising Sun?* M. Diana Helweg. Foreign Affairs. July/ August 2000. P.26-39
- A fitting contrast to the above, with its particular focus on the stoginess of Japanese beuaracracy see: *Japan: A Setting Sun?* Aurelia George Mulgan. Foreign Affairs. July/ August 2000. P.40-52
- A detailed analysis of Japanese markets, networkings, and advertising can be seen in: Marketing in Japan. Ian Melville, 1999 Butterworth Heinemann p 98-109 (Regarding establishing *jimmyaku*)

---

[1] The World Factbook, Jan, 2000.
[2] *Financial Times,* Aug 15,2000 p.1.
[3] Helweg, 2000 p.29.
[4] see also Allinson, 1999 p. 150-153 and 159-162 for a concise overview of these entities.
[5] Helweg, 2000 p.30.
[6] Harner, 2000 p.4.
[7] Helweg, 2000 p.31.
[8] Mulgan, 2000 p.41.
[9] McCormack, 1973 p.33.
[10] *Nikkei Weekly,* July 31,2000 p.2.
[11] *Financial Times*, August 29, 2000 p.4.
[12] Japan Digest 11/10/99 p2. For a critical reading on varieties of global capitalism including the state of Japanese Society in the context of globalization and global capitalism's impact on the social fabric of counties such as America see John Gray's 1999 work *False Dawn. The Delusions of Global Capitalism.*
[13] Mulgan 2000 p.42-43.
[14] Gibney, 1999 p.6.
[15] Japan Digest, December 6, 2000 p.1.
[16] *Nikkei Weekly*, August 7, 2000 p.2.
[17] Melville, 1999 p.100.
[18] Armacost,M in Gibney 1998 viii.
[19] Nishikawa, in "The New Asia" *Newsweek* (special edition) Summer 2000 p.20.
[20] Sayle, 1998 p.86.
[21] Helweg, 2000 p.35.
[22] Ishibashi, Asako. "Corporate Japan learning to speak a new language" *Nikkei Weekly* 5 May 2000 p1
[23] This step caused particular alarm and caused numerous commentaries and lead stories in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *Nikkei Weekly*, and the *Assahi Shinbun.*
[24] Dawson, Chester. "Brave New World." Far Eastern Economic Review 28 Oct. 1999 p.76.

II. Intercultural Communication Skills: Now More Than Ever

The opportunities mentioned in the previous sections suggest both considerable challenges and opportunities to foreigners conducting business in Japan. At the same time, one must also consider the opportunities and challenges raised by the rapid "globalization" of business and the impact this may have on our perceptions of intercultural exchanges. In this next section it is useful to turn our focus away from a discussion exclusively of Japan and consider instead both the impact of culture on communication and broader changes in our approach to business and communication that are, in part, driven by globalization and technology. Even with the broader focus of this discussion, I will highlight ways these changes may impact our exchanges with the Japanese and our perception of them as partners. Considering these combined issues should reinforce why effective intercultural communication skills are critical to posses at this stage in the relationship between our two countries.

Forget the economy - "Its the Culture stupid"

As technological advancements further the ease with which we may interact across cultures, it is increasingly important that we understand our own culturally biased communication styles and learn to appreciate those of our partners. When we interact with countries such as Japan this is particularly true since many of these styles are dramatically different from our own. This disparity is often problematic for Americans because many Japanese are very skillful at adapting, or at least appearing to adapt, to their foreign counterparts and this may leave foreigners with the incorrect assumption

that their Japanese colleagues agree with or, understand the dynamics of a given interaction.

In fact, in many such exchanges Americans may be at a substantial comparative disadvantage to their Japanese counterparts because of the lack of knowledge we have in our understanding of Japan's cultural and business patterns. This lack of understanding is grounded in our Eurocentric orientation and the resulting vacuum of knowledge we posses regarding other parts of the world, such as Asia, and the rich histories and cultural traditions of its peoples.

Differences between the commitment Japan and the U.S. demonstrate toward educating their children regarding foreign countries and in particular, each other's cultures is itself a reflection of the cultural values of the country. For example, it is mandatory for Japanese students to begin learning English at age 13. However, many Japanese children actually being learning the language much earlier while they attend the common, evening hours "cram schools" that are intended to improve student's performance on the competitive and socially important high school, and college entrance exams. The popularity of English conversation schools attended by young and old alike attest to the high value Japanese place on language acquisition.[1]

Much of the formal business training in Japan, while focusing first on Japanese approaches, involve a significant exposure to U.S. practices. Additionally, many more Japanese travel to the United States than vice versa. In 1998 for example, Japanese students made up the largest foreign student population in the U.S. and virtually every college campus in the U.S. with a foreign student population remains a reflection of that statistic today. Indeed, the scale of intercultural knowledge must be more equitable in

order to further strengthen relations and for individuals to conduct international exchanges in a manner that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

Something as simple as defining "culture" can, in fact, be quite confusing. One can make the distinction between what scholars term *objective culture*, such as the visible, tangible aspects of culture including artifacts, clothes, food, names etc., and the *subjective culture* that refers to aspects of a group of people such as their attitudes, values, communication styles, and norms of behavior.[2] In the classic anthropological sense, *culture* refers to the "cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, meanings, beliefs, values, attitudes, religions, concepts of self and the universe (and the relationship between the two), hierarchies of status, role expectations, spatial relations and time concepts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations".[3] Even though culture may be seen as a "cumulative deposit of knowledge" it should never be viewed as a static phenomena. Culture is evolving every moment, both internally within you and I and collectively as people interact, create, and reflect. Ultimately, its definition is highly fluid and extremely personal.

The notion of *intercultural communication* is also defined differently by varying scholars. Gudykunst and Kim, two leaders in the field, explain intercultural communication as "a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures".[4] Samovar and Porter suggest a slightly broader definition by stating that "whenever the parties to a communication act bring with them different experiential backgrounds that reflect a long-standing deposit of group experience, knowledge, and values, we have intercultural communication".[5] When

viewed this way it is easy to see that many of our daily interactions, even with individuals of our same ethnic group, may be considered as intercultural experiences.

Many people associate culture with race. This is understandable because differences among various racial groups, many driven by the group's cultural norms, are often the most striking examples to identify. Culture is not limited by race however and even race itself can be a problematic concept made increasingly difficult as racial identification becomes less clear in our multicultural society. For example, if you were to join a particular religious group, transfer to a new university, move to a different part of the country, or even start a new job you may find that there are patterns of behavior you are unfamiliar with. These may include acceptable ways of dressing, relating to authority and standards of communication. You may need to adjust to these differences and incorporate them if you are to interact successfully in those settings. Though the racial backgrounds of the individuals you interact with may be similar to your own, it is likely that you are crossing cultural boundaries. In both personal and business settings, the stakes can be high. For example, when company representatives

Cultural questions in your life

You may not have taken time before to seriously consider culture and how you define it. Yet the values you place on this will have dramatic impact on the way you interact with the Japanese and, in fact, within our own multicultural domestic workforce. Take a moment:

1) How do you define culture?
2) Name some examples where you feel you have recently crossed cultural boundaries successfully.
3) Now reflect some cultural boundaries that you have crossed with less success. What was it about your attitude, or your knowledge, or the situation that contributed to the problem?
3) Finally, consider cultural transitions you make on a weekly basis.

Did you really take a minute to consider each one of these carefully? If you didn't, is that action a personal or cultural attitude at play?

If you did, then congratulations! You are likely already experienced in cross-cultural interactions and can translate many of these skills to your interactions with Japanese people. Although these situations may involve many factors you are unfamiliar, making them potentially more challenging than the situations you considered above, they will still require much of the same adaptability that you have already demonstrated.

attempt to conduct business without demonstrating appropriate adaptations to the host culture (or at least efforts to that end), negotiations are likely to go array. This situation will reflect just as poorly on the company as the individual and will make it twice as hard for the company to re-establish negotiations through subsequent representatives.[6]

Organizations, or more specifically, organization leaders and members are particularly noted for their ability to create their own cultures by developing specific symbols and channels of communication and predicating acceptable behaviors within the organization for which acceptance equals adherence. Whether or not members truly accept these parameters on an internal personal level is of course a different issue. It is an issue that becomes further complicated when considered in light of multi-cultural workforces. One thing is for certain, while it may be difficult to articulate what constitutes culture, it is easy to sense when you have traveled into a different culture. (More on organizational culture in section IV)

Gaining effective intercultural communication skills are an excellent vehicle for understanding your own cultural predispositions. For starters, communication may be seen as one of the central ways we come to understand and express ourselves. The former is particularly true for the United States where cultural norms suggest that individuals come to shape their identity, work through issues and establish themselves in society through verbal, explicit communication.[7] It has been stated that communication is "an outcome of the composite values and cognitions associated with a particular culture."[8] Seen in this light, culture shapes behavior and influences communication because it structures one's perceptions and ideas of the world. Culture is a code that we

learn and share through communication and as a result, communication and culture are inseparable.[9]

Ethnocentrism: My way or the highway

Despite the advancements in communication technologies and increasingly common international exchanges, adequate cross-cultural understanding still presents one of the greatest challenges to the people of the world. You and I still naturally demarcate between that which is culturally familiar and that which is "foreign". Even the most culturally sensitive and "enlightened" individuals cannot help making such distinctions. Whether we admit it or not (and despite our best intentions), the labeling of something as "foreign" brings to bear a number of judgements and assumptions, however hidden, of the "other" as somehow inferior and less preferred. Much as we try, we cannot enter our journey into the world of cross-cultural communication with a "clean slate".[10] Through years of socialization we have become naturally biased to our native culture. We have come to prefer our own way of life and this then is the standard by which we measure other cultures.

Though we may attempt to think of the word "foreign" in neutral terms, it still generates relatively negative connotations such as *strange*, *alien*, *outlandish* and *unfamiliar*.[11] As a result, when you interact with the Japanese it is natural to be constantly comparing and judging cultural norms by the standards of your own world view. Such distinctions of the culturally foreign and familiar can become quite problematic. Exchanges between "Western" countries such as the Untied States and "Asian" countries such as Japan demonstrate the challenges and realities that evolve when we make such

distinctions. They may facilitate psychological barriers to communicators and result in illiberal accusations from one country to the other in order to explain trade disputes as well as social and political misunderstandings. Being continuously sensitive to this matter, and striving to be almost instinctively flexible in the interpretation of your perceptions when interacting with other cultures will be critical to your success in developing meaningful and productive relationships with the Japanese.

From the United States' perspective some of the most influential work that has shaped "Western" views of Japan have come about through the opinions of a number of important American individuals. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict's landmark work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* sought to explain Japanese culture and was written during the 1950's in part out of a government request to learn what it would take to make the Japanese surrender during WWII. Given the nationalistic culture of America at the time as well as the fact that much of her research was conducted with Japanese living abroad, Benedict's work was impressive. In many cases, the work was quite objective and it set the stage for much of the research on Japan that would follow in later years.

Another scholar who has been prominent in helping American business people, politicians, and scholars formulate perceptions of Japan is Edward Hall. His work has been influential in explaining the relationship between culture and communication and such specific points such as how individuals communicate using personal space and cultural preferences to explicit communication versus that which requires a great deal of understanding about the context in order to interpret correctly.

Geert Hofstede also had dramatically influenced our understanding of culture. In many respects, Hofstede's work is some of the most commonly cited among intercultural

communication scholars.[12] He conducted broad, impressive studies with 116, 000 people across 40 countries to determine value preferences across cultures, particularly as evidenced in work environments. These included such concepts as ones comfort toward the unequal distribution of power, the degree of uncertainty they are willing to tolerate, and though titled poorly, masculine vs. feminine traits (ex: assertiveness, performance, competition vs. quality of life, personal relations service). In keeping with many of Hall's work, Hofstede also focused on employees' time orientation and their preferences toward collectivist vs. individualistic attitudes actions, including the degree to which certain Confucian values influence work behavior. These last 2 points, in fact, are often stated as the most fundamental differences between Japanese and American communication and value preferences.[13]

In the world of business, the American statistician and businessman Edward Deming has been equally influential. His work with the Japanese and the development of quality circle models of organization and production which were well suited to Japanese organizational culture can be seen as a partial explanation of that country's economic, and specifically, manufacturing success in the last half of the 1900's. American leaders and Japanese firms attempting to implement many of Deming's principles found less success on American soil however, making clear the point that "culture matters."

Similarly, William Ouchi's 1981 best-selling book *Theory Z* has also been influential in explaining differences between managerial styles and promoting a new commitment to the motivation of employees. In this seminal work, Ouchi advocates enhancing production via creating an environment where workers feel like an intimate part of the organization and the development of trusting relationships among organization

members, particularly between management and subordinates. Additionally, one of its central themes revolves around the need for managers to understand the subtitles of both human nature and their employees personal distinctions so as to be better able to understand how to structure work teams and how to identify employees who may need additional nurturing. Although it was written from a Japanese perspective and tended to romanticize the climate of Japanese organizational culture, it was nonetheless oriented toward an "Western" audience and it was warmly received in America and Europe. Of course, the implementation of such structures and values is difficult and its success will be relative to the cultural norms of the workplace and the society at large. While the tenets of his work sound attractive, many have found, not dissimilar to Deming's work, its fruition on American soil more a pipe dream. Finally, it is important to note that the glowing reception afforded Ouchi's work, and others like it, by many American business leaders should be seen in light of American's fascination with Japanese business culture at the time. It was particularly embraced as a way to explain Japan meteoric economic rise as foreign countries scrambled to replicate whatever they believed was driving the boom.

Regardless of the dramatic influence of these works, they are still predominately rooted in "Western" perspectives and value systems and thus often steeped, though usually unknowingly, in Eurocentric preferences. As stated earlier, even with the best of scholars it is virtually impossible to enter into cross-cultural research with a blank-slate of values and unbiased perceptions. That these scholars often center their work on drawing distinctions of Japanese communication and culture against similar phenomena

Ethnocentrism in Action

- Coca-Cola wanted Chinese characters for a phonetical equivalent of Coca-Cola, so they choose *Ke Kou Ke La*, which translates as "bite the wax tadpole." For Japan, Coke translated "Coke adds life" and got something like "Coke brings your ancestors back from the dead."

- In September 1999, NASA lost the Mars Climate Orbiter, critical to the doomed Mars Polar Lander mission several months later, because Lockheed Martin, a supplier, used inches instead of metric measurements and assumed their international colleagues, including other design teams, would use the same. No one caught the mistake, which cost $125 million dollars.

- Chevrolet attempted unsuccessfully to market its Nova compact car in Latin American countries. In Spanish, *No Va* means "does not go" or "it doesn't run."

Examples 1, 3 Source: *Intercultural Communication: An Introduction.* By Fred Jandt, 1995, Sage Publications

in American only suggests a bias toward those American or Western preferences. It is as if these preferences are the norm by which others must be measured.

One of the central problems with ethnocentrism and why it can be so detrimental to our cross-cultural interactions is that it can be so insidious. Take for instance the very notion of word "American". When used it is usually in reference to United States citizens. In actuality "Americans" would correctly designate people from North and South America, and from countries of vastly different cultural backgrounds and preferences. Even when we do refer to "Americans" with the specific intent of describing United States citizens, we imply certain blanket cultural generalizations even though there are many different cultural traditions in the United States. When we cast such a label we are usually referring to our own cultural preferences which we then generalize as representative of all U.S. citizens.

Yet another example is that Europeans and Americans have considered themselves as "Western" and Asians as "eastern." Such delineation suggests that the identity of Asia is dependent on Europe. So too should we note that our school

curriculums are predominately rooted in "Western" history, music and art despite the fact that the world's oldest civilizations can be found in Asia and that 3 out of every 5 people on earth can be found on the Asian continent. Similarly, terms such as Western and Eastern tend to suggest that all of the respective constituents share mass similarities, which is grossly inaccurate. If "Western" refers to the U.S., Europe, South and Central America, and Canada there is amazing diversity there just as the case that "Eastern" or even "Asian" terms risk suggesting a sort of cultural uniformity that is dangerously misleading. While all these represent a more subtle form of ethnocentrism, such Eurocentric attitudes represent a *cultural nearsightedness* that has dramatic influences on how we approach our intercultural interactions.[14]

Technology and Globalization: Bigger, faster,.. better?

Effective intercultural communication skills should be a fundamental component of any international traveler's or businessperson's toolkit given the "globalized" context of our interactions and the rapidly increasing multiculturalism of our own domestic work force. The US Department of Labor estimates that African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and other minorities will account for 59% of new workers between 1998 and 2008. During this period the Asian labor pool in the US is expected to grow the fastest of any other minority group, presenting a 40.3% growth.[15] Recent statistics released by the Census Bureau show that a similarly frenetic pace occurred in the US population between 1990 to 1999. During this span the Asian minority group grew the fastest – a whopping 43% increase that lends further credence to the labor projections mentioned above.[16] With such facts in mind, it is important to place emphasis on effective intercultural communication skills even if you were not considering conducting business in Japan

since your own workplace is likely to be a microcosm of cultural diversity in the near future, if it is not already.

Fortunately, such an educational journey is now readily facilitated. Indeed, information about foreign cultures and ethnic differences are more accessible than ever and this is one of the main reasons why such skills should now be expected. The pace of technological change allowing such experiences and the often-subtle impact this can have on our worldview is yet another reason such skills are critical.

Advancements in technology are dramatically reshaping our perceptions about time, distance and the cultural diversity of the planet. Yet with these changes comes a problematic dualism. As I will discuss further, these changes can afford us a greater understanding and respect for cultural differences through our repeated exposure to different cultures and varying points of view. Similarly, they also create unparalleled opportunities for us to formally study intercultural exchanges and improve our intercultural communication skills. A quick look into the ever-expanding array of reading material on the subject of intercultural communication suggests that the demand for such understanding is high.

At the same time however, changes toward "globalization", or at least the popular conceptualizations of these changes, can encourage the misperception that cultural differences are becoming increasingly blurred and thus, less relevant given our increasing exposure to one another. The noted communication scholar Fred Jandt has commented that one of the main barriers to intercultural communication is in fact one's tendency to assume similarity instead of difference in many cross-cultural settings.[17]

The belief that "shared" understandings commonly come as a result of intercultural exchanges is a natural one. As I will discuss in an upcoming section, such *cultural synergy* does, in fact, occur but the faith that such understandings will emerge in one's interactions is both misguided and dangerous.

The process of technological change that is affording many of these opportunities for international exchange is not a new phenomenon of course, and has been an ongoing process since before recorded history. An exploratory journey across uncharted oceans was once unthinkable. Advancements in ship designs, craftsmanship and navigational techniques soon turned this notion on its head however, and such journeys became commonplace and critical to the expansion of empires and the sophistication of international markets. The current pace of change is dizzying to many, however, and a number of the barriers to interaction across national, and cultural lines appear to be

The Tower of Babel:
That was then, this is now

It is not uncommon for American firms to overestimate foreign comprehension of English given the amount of business now conducted in the language. Nissan's English-only policy is but one example.

A more personal example comes from my own work in Japan and my organization's reluctance to commit money and resources to adequate translation of materials into Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. This despite the firm's guiding philosophy being grounded in the promotion of cross-cultural understanding.

Because many Japanese and Koreans begin learning English at an early age it is often believed that it is unnecessary to spend time translating documents or conversations. The problem with this assumption is that it fails to emphasize the point that East Asian's usually lack schooling and experience in *conversational* English.

In fact, while most documents from our foreign colleagues arrive to us already translated into English, it is not uncommon for documents from our firm to leave *without* similarly appropriate translation. It is assumed that if the recipient's training or experience in English (an assumption itself) is inadequate, someone in the organization will be able translate effectively. Even if this were the case, this belief still represents a ethnocentric bias and lack of appreciation for the challenges facing individuals for whom English is an second language.

Source: personal reflection

dismantled on a weekly, if not daily basis.

As these changes have taken place, so too have our views of the world and its people also changed. Indeed, the very process of communication with regions of the globe once thought inaccessible has dramatically expanded both the possibilities of intercultural exchanges, their resulting success and failures, and the ripple effects such outcomes have on the perceptions different cultural and ethnic groups have of one another.

For example, increased interaction with the Japanese may accordingly see a proportionate number of failed exchanges that are an inherent part of international business. Yet cumulatively, these failures may further certain stereotypes such as the common lament of American business people that the Japanese often hide their true intentions and readily reverse course on previously agreed upon details. Similarly, such exchanges may reinforce to Japanese that Americans are bullheaded negotiators with little regard for the subtitles and pace of Japanese business relationships. As these individuals share their experiences with colleagues, the net result is further misunderstanding of the rich cultural dynamics at play in such circumstances and the possibilities for solutions, an attitude further exasperated by the belief that an increasingly global business climate should reduce the likelihood of such misunderstandings.

As a result of all these technological developments, the concept of thinking from a "global" perspective now permeates many aspects of our societies and becomes a mandated vantage in a number arenas including environmental issues, human rights, medical and genetic research, diplomacy, and for our purposes, business. To lack such a

perspective may be considered as demonstration of a fundamental lack of understanding of the interconnectedness of our all cultures, ecosystems, and economies. In business circles, it is often assumed a precursor of economic suicide.

The case for Japan is an increasingly clear one. It is often stated that any company who wants to be taken seriously as a "global" firm simply must have a presence in Japanese markets.[18] As suggested previously, the driving point behind this comment lies in the power of the Japanese economy, regardless of its recent history, and the fact that it is and will continue to be the economic locomotive of Asia for much of the foreseeable future. All this too, in the face of Japan's dangerously top-heavy population pyramid.

The sheer number of Japanese consumers eager for foreign products and who appear increasingly willing to part with their hard won and internationally coveted savings should be a welcome sign to foreign firms. Indeed, Japan has often been considered the greatest consumer society on Earth in terms of its per capita spending, and production, even outpacing the United States. A brief walk through any commonplace *shotengai* (downtown, covered mall) or through Tokyo's buzzing Akihabara district will show you that the new generation of Japanese consumers make this point resonate louder than ever before in the nation's recent history. If these reasons were not enough, the striking business opportunities in the wake of the country's economic meltdown and the resulting deregulatory opportunities now available to foreign firms drive home the point that Japanese soil is rich for foreign business interests. Some firms may seek entry into Japan not only for these reasons but also for the mere fact of not wanting to be caught off the "global" bandwagon.

Of course *talking* about being global and actually *being* global are very different points entirely. As much of a buzzword as it still is, the concept of "globalization" has lost some of the luster it had only a few years ago as we have begun to realize that articulating what it means to think globally is still a problematic task.[19] Increasingly, both popular and scholarly literature is focusing on the darker side of globalization and global capitalism. Leading figures such as John Gray, who once assisted in reinventing British markets during Margaret Thatcher's tenure – reforms that served as a guide-marker for deregulation in Japan, are now leveling serious criticism toward such changes. In his recent book *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* Gray suggests that movements toward free market systems are not natural but rather the result of American, and to a lesser degree European political power, that they rapidly encourage the destructive gap between rich and poor, and that they will actually erode the social and cultural fabric of our nations.[20] Indeed, most recent criticisms of globalization, including Gray's, are grounded in the belief that the dynamic force of market economics erodes social cohesion, traditional culture and the institutions that give human beings a sense of security.

In the late 1980's popular business discourse began to frown upon the previously heralded *multinational* or *transnational* business model to instead uphold the virtues of *postnational*, stateless or global enterprises that would operate in a "borderless" world. The powerful corporations that were heralded during this period were seen as taking into account their potential markets across the globe and their firm's internationally dispersed facilities to meet the market demands. In this sense, the corporate poster children were making a commitment to the "global integration of their entire production process." The

self-sufficient, separate subsidiaries of the transnational era were partially seen as clunky machines unable to react fast enough to international competition and incapable of maintaining a uniform organizational culture necessary to the firm's survival. The belief was that a firm's new commitment to borderless internationalism would eventually outweigh their roots in any one country. [21]

What is increasingly understood however, is that a balance between the two ideals is more realistic and that that a commitment to regional understanding is necessary to penetrate markets successfully, to ensure quality control and maintain employee commitment. In scholarly circles it became increasingly clear that true realizations of the term "globalization" were more fiction than fact because true "globalization" would mean that there should exist roughly uniform capital flows in to all developing regions. Of course, this does not happen. Some areas receive more economic attention than others and there are pockets of stagnant growth were human and natural resources are underutilized. As such, the world markets remain not truly globalized but rather, regionalized.[22]

The mere use of the concept of globalization within organizations has been another point muddying the conversation. It is quickly easy to realize that a number of different interpretations of the term itself exist. What constitutes an organization's members thinking individually or collectively from a "global" focus is varied and problematic. A multi-national corporation for example, may see itself as "global" because it has production plants and management teams spread across numerous countries and thus the base of control is relatively decentralized.[23] Conversely, a small regional organization's members may consider the organization "global in focus" because they are

merely thinking about distributing their products across geo-political boundaries. Yet another firm may consider their managerial concerns to be "global" because of their multi-cultural workforce. In any of these situations there is however a common thread. Each articulation of what it means to have a "global focus" still necessitates an understanding of cross-cultural similarities and differences and how these become manifest in human interactions.

The global melting pot?

The distinctions between thinking in terms of "assumed similarities" and distinguishing the other as "foreign" (and many shades of thinking between) mentioned previously may be cast in light of two significant, mindsets. These are the notions of globalization and cultural variability as described by assumptions of *convergence* or *divergence*.[24] They are assumptions that underlie many discussions of global business, foreign policy, culture studies, intercultural communication, and a host of other disciplines.

In essence, convergence perspectives, specifically from anthropological and speech / organizational communication perspectives, imply that globalization and the economic imperatives of global business result in shared cultural patterns, communication scripts, and similar organizational structures and rules across nations and cultures. Even when cultural differences are recognized, greater attention is given to emphasize the cultural or structural similarities. The cultural synergy concept discussed previously is alive and well in this perspective and indeed this belief is driven, perhaps dangerously so, by "assumed similarities" that I discussed earlier as so problematic.

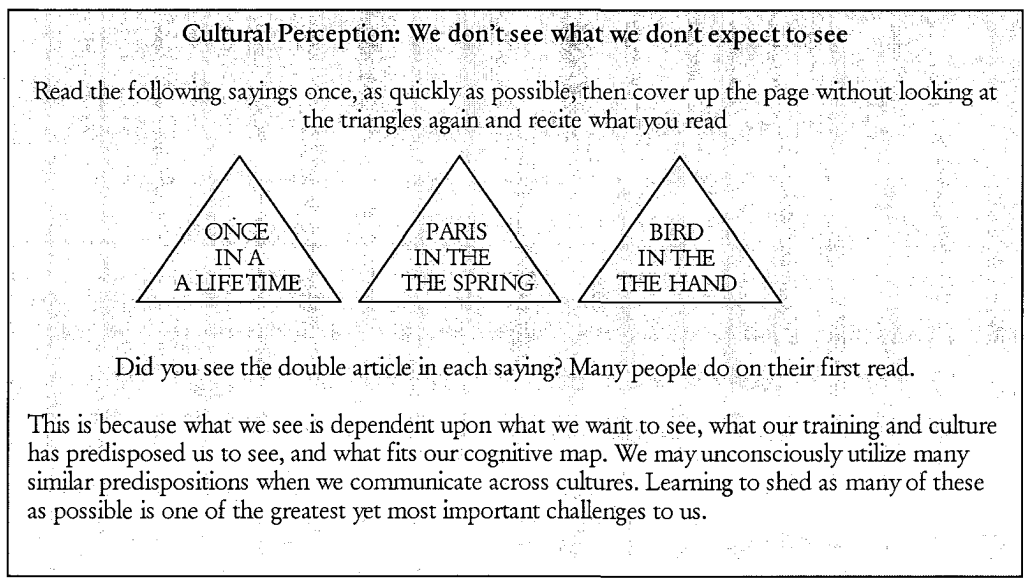
Communication scholars focusing on this theory have paid particular interest to the degree and direction of cultural convergence that occurs over time as a result of communication between members of different cultural groups.[25] Interest has also been given to the degree in which cultural and organizational convergence influences worker's identity and commitment to their work and the organizations of which they are members.[26]

Though there are many situations where this perspective may be appropriate, I believe that such thinking, particularly when found in organization settings, can easily tend toward unconscious ethnocentrism that is counterproductive to intercultural exchanges. While certain communication patterns or trade rules may appear similar to members of two distinct cultural groups, each member's interpretation of the patterns or rules may be quite distinct and exclusive of the other.[27] This issue then suggests the second major perspective: *divergence*.

Divergence perspectives on the other hand, focus on the differences across cultures. It acknowledges there may be an increasing frequency of intercultural interactions allowing individuals from different cultural groups the opportunity to experience cross-cultural communication and learning acquisition. Despite this, cultural differences remain critical to understand. Furthermore, even when these individual's actions may suggest a growing cultural similarity, the distinct cultural backgrounds each individual brings to the interaction deserves greater attention as it will still likely be the most influential underlying, perceptual filter through which the individuals interpret and react to the interaction. Once again, "culture matters."

In the case of public perception, popular literature, and scholarly research predominately written from North American, Australian, or European perspectives, related to Japan, such as those I mentioned in the previous section, one can see a strong bias towards the *divergence* perspective. The image of Japanese culture as "exotic" and, in some important respects, a polar opposite to many of the most significant cultural norms of the countries mentioned above has been an underlying theme in virtually all of these cases.[28]

Of course, there are many other views about the relationship between culture, globalization, and communication. One of interest, though more situation-bound than general in scope, finds a potentially happy medium between convergence and divergence perspectives. *Cultural synergy*, a concept mentioned earlier, is said to occur when two or more groups, representing different cultures, come together and by necessity create a new method for interaction.[29] As a result, they transcend their previous cultural communication styles or perceptual frameworks in order to understand the perspectives of the other members and to mutually construct a new way of relating to one another that



will foster effective cross-cultural communication, decision-making, mutual respect, and, in some cases, trust. Such is the goal of many cross-cultural training programs.

Ultimately however, sense-making (and for that matter the day-to-day evolvement of our world-views) is a cerebral, cognitive phenomenon. This assumption has been a key foundation of most cross-cultural communication research and training. Because it is such a personal phenomenon, individuals must be careful not to assume similarity merely based on perception.

Such inference is perhaps one of the most problematic points of intercultural exchanges in a world where such exchanges are becoming increasingly common. Indeed, many failed negotiations and breached contracts, particularly between individuals from East Asian and "Western" cultures, may be seen as a result of this error in perception. Although economic and technological pressures on organizations and individuals encourage convergence or similarity, such movements ultimately clash with the powerful pull of cultural identifications, traditional values, and conventional practices of social life.[30]

Pulling it all together: Intercultural communication skills in your life and work

Given all the points mentioned in this section it is not surprising than many noted communication scholars have found that well-developed and appropriate communication skills are one of three central dimensions viewed as important to an individual's effective functioning in a foreign culture. The other two main dimensions are the ability to deal with intercultural stress and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships.[31]

Four specific "culture-general" skills that you would demonstrate if you were an effective intercultural communicator may be found in Kelley and Meyers' Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory.[32] First, you are likely to be successful in your exchanges if you have a high degree of *emotional resilience*. This refers to your ability to maintain a positive emotional state regardless of the many obstacles you may encounter both overseas and in cross-cultural interactions. Second is the predisposition to *flexibility and openness* that will allow you to be accepting of alternative worldviews and ways of doing, interpreting, and perceiving. In other words, this is representative of the ability to take a *ethno-relative* perspective.[33] Third, a high degree of *perceptual acuity* indicates your sensitivity to both verbal and non-verbal messages and will likely suggest that, when coupled with cultural knowledge, you may be more likely to accurately understand the different meanings associated to those messages. Finally, *personal autonomy* is important

How do you rate?

1. Consider the 4 characteristics mentioned in the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory above. Honestly considering your own personality in light of them (plus how and if you need to change) will greatly enhance your success when interacting with Japanese people.

2. Now, take a moment and reflect on a cross-cultural experience you have had recently. This could be a trip to a foreign country, travel into a part of town racially or culturally different where you are comfortable or usually associate. It could also be when you joined a new church group or organization. How would you rate yourself in that situation regarding the following traits?

a) *emotional resilience*
b) *flexibility and openness*
c) *perceptual acuity*
d) *personal autonomy / self-worth*

because the more comfortable you are with your self-identity the less likely you are to feel a decrease in self-worth (which would bear on the communication process) given the stresses of intercultural settings.

When participating in cross-cultural meetings as well as one-on-one exchanges there are two more "culture-general" skills that can be seen as very important. Perhaps one of the most important communication skills, regardless of the communicator's cultural background is *active listening*.[34] How one demonstrates this however may be culture-specific. As we will discuss in more detail later, some Japanese individuals may demonstrate active listening by lowering their head, avoiding eye contact, giving little reaction, and hesitantly responding to questions. Someone from another cultural background, such as the United States, may interpret these actions as a sign of disinterest or even rejection. This is why another skill, the ability to understand *cultural con*text, is so important.

Every culture has its own worldview, way of thinking of activity, time and human nature, its own way of perceiving self, and its own system of social organization.[35] The context of any communication interaction is very much culturally driven. Complicating matters is the fact that in any given interaction many different contexts may collide. These could be the context of the actual meeting, the broad cultural contexts, the context of the organization, and the context of the communicator's own preferences and previous experiences. While no communicator can realistically and accurately understand all of these contexts in each situation, the more the better. In many ways, much of the popular literature designed to give travelers and business people quick, "10 minute" introductions and checklists to cultural differences give the dangerous and inappropriate suggestion

that cultural context is relatively simple to understand. Similarly, by default they may suggest that knowing the patterns of behavior rather than the factors that drive those patterns are sufficient to understanding intercultural encounters. For this reason, the work you are reading attempts to go deeper into the cultural contexts that drive communication in Japan so that you may understand the behaviors more thoroughly and have a greater likely hood of interpreting and responding to them in an effective, culturally respectful manner. With this in mind, it is appropriate to now turn our attention to Japanese history, particularly as it bears on communication patterns and international business negotiation.

Suggested Readings:

- Dispelling the Myth of Globalization by Hazel J. Johnson, 1991. Praeger Publishers
- Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the power of the local Kevin R. Cox; Editor, 1997. Guilford Press.
- The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy & Prosperity by Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Sachumann 1997. Zed Books Ltd
- ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age by Andre Gunder Frank, 1998. University of California Press
- The Borderless World by Kenichi Ohame, 1991. Harper Perennial
- Understanding Cultural Differences by Edward T. Hall, 1990. Intercultural Press
- Intercultural Communication: An Introduction by Fred Jandt, 1995 Sage Publications
- Intercultural Communication: A Reader Larry Samovar and Richard Porter: Editors.1976. Wadsworth Publishing Company Inc.
- Confucius and Economic Growth: New Trends in Culture's Consequences by Hofstede and Bond, 1988 *Organizational Dynamics* 16 (4) 4-21. (Hofstede's landmark work - though a rather dry read, is Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related values 1980, Sage Publications)
- Theory Z: How American Business can meet the Japanese Challenge by William G. Ouchi, 1981 Addison-Wesley Publishing

---

[1] *Japan. Profile of a Nation* 1994. Japanese middle-age businessmen have, until recently, exhibited little interest in attending English conversation schools. Now, given domestic economic pressures and the growing presence of foreign firms in Japan, their attendance has dramatically surged.
[2] Cushner & Brislin, 1996 p.6.
[3] Samover and Porter, 1972 p.7
[4] Gudykunst and Kim, 1992 p.13-14.
[5] Samover and Porter, 1972 p. 1.
[6] Cushner & Brislin, 1996 p. 5.
[7] Carbaugh,1996.
[8] Alder, 1997 p.22, 25.
[9] Smith, 1966.
[10] Donahue, 1998.
[11] *Random House Webster's* 1991 as cited by Donahue 1998.
[12] See Geert Hofstede's 1980 work: *Cultures Consequences. International differences in work-related values.*
[13] While the works of noted scholars such as Hall and Hofstede have been incredibly valuable in assisting people across the world to appreciate cultural differences, it should be noted these their works are not

without their limitations. For example, such studies tend to treat such differences, and even culture itself, in rather reductionist terms to the degree that a cookie cutter tone surfaces. As stated in the preface of this paper, broad cultural generalizations may make such complex topics more manageable. However, they seriously overlook the influence of individual sense-making in the creation and interpretation of both culture and cultural differences. Similarly, by virtue of the categories they place cultural differences into, they may inadvertently constrain our ability to see culture in other, particularly non-Western ways.

[14] Jandt, 1995 p.41.

[15] Cited in the Section 2 of: *The changing workforce and workplace* of the Department of Labor's Strategic Plan FY 1999-2000.

[16] *New York Times*, Sept 30, 2000, A15.

[17] Jandt, 1995 p. 40.

[18] Melville, 1999 the same points are also articulated in Andre Gunder Frank's seminal work *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* 1998.

[19] We have yet to know if the increasingly common international backlash that we see at IMF and WTO gatherings at the turn of the 21st century against globalization trends, particularly in the private sector will continue. It is a far cry from the enthusiasm once displayed toward such trends in recent years. For more academic discussions of this topic, including critical perspectives of globalization see additional readings above.

[20] Gray 1999 *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*. While Gray's work is presents an important critique of global capitalism and introduces the topic of social change in Japan that globalization has brought about, he perhaps oversimplifies the importance of state involvement in Japan's economic growth. Additionally his treatment of traditional societies, clean of free market havoc is far too idealized and suggests a frame of reference only possible by one living comfortably in the luxuries of Western society.

[21] Mair 1997 in *Spaces of Globalization*, p 64-67.

[22] for a more full description of this argument see Johnson 1991.

[23] see also Weick & Van Orden 1990.

[24] Adler, 1997.

[25] Barnett & Kincaid, 183 p.173.

[26] Erez & Early, 1995.

[27] For an intimate look on different levels of global trend's influences on "local" cultures see George Cheney's 1999 book *Values at Work: Employee Participation Meets Market Pressure at Mondragón*.

[28] Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986.

[29] Moran and Harris, 1981, as cited by Adler, 1997 p.26.

[30] Alder. 1997 p5.

[31] Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978 as cited by Hammer, 1989 p.249.

[32] Kelley, C., & Meyers, J.E., 1992. *The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory manual.* La Jolla, CA: C. Kelley & J. Meyers.

[33] Brislin and Yoshida, 1994 p.90.

[34] Harry Webner-Behrman, 1998.

[35] Jandt, 1995 p.26.

III. A Brief View of Japanese History and its impact on Culture and Communication

It is not uncommon for foreign business people entering Japan to have a basic, yet shallow context-specific knowledge of Japanese cultural patterns and communication styles. Unfortunately, very few take the time or interest to understand the historical underpinnings behind these patterns and styles. The disparity in the level of education Americans and Japanese have of each other was noted at the beginning of Section II. Language education accounts for the most notable and far-reaching difference. Because many Japanese understand English, if only in limited terms, and because language is one of the most fundamental aspects of culture, they can be seen to have a comparative advantage over Americans – particularly in the realm of negotiations.

Surprisingly though, given the high education level of most Japanese, many know relatively little about American history or world history for that matter. For Americans, the story is similar. For example, many demonstrate a relative lack of interest and knowledge in history and geography – regardless of the culture or nation in question. Nationally reported studies attest to this apathy through the often-appalling results of history and geography surveys given to students and the general public.

This said, Japanese are very impressed when Americans can demonstrate knowledge, however limited, of Japanese history. Such knowledge can be particularly useful since many aspects of business negotiation specifically *do not* entail talking about "business matters" as Westerners often conceptualize them. Instead, "social" talk is very important and a time where conversations of history and culture can be appropriate and, if done correctly, may create a neutral and mutually comfortable platform of rapport.

Such moments can be a very valuable way to score points and "face" as a *gaijin*. For example, the foreign businessperson is likely to see a marked increase of acceptance by demonstrating something as simple as knowing the human figures on Japanese Yen notes and, if only briefly, their contribution to Japanese society. Other useful things to educate yourself on could be knowing how *sake* is made, or knowing the importance of the cherry blossom season which occurs mid to late spring, is a favorite time for company picnics, has a dear place in the hearts of most Japanese and is known as *Hanami*. As suggested previously, having an understanding of the history of Japan will of course also help you understand the context of a given encounter more accurately and make your generalized understandings of communication styles significantly more adaptable.

Such a topic is, of course huge, and this section skims over many critical moments in Japanese history. The significant changes that occurred during modern Japanese history in terms of business/organizational structure will be mentioned in Section IV. One particularly complex period, WWII and the American Occupation, receives little airplay here due to space constraints and the fact that this period, more than any other, is likely to be moderately familiar. Again, interested readers are encouraged to pursue the suggestions for additional readings at the end of this section. Instead of focusing on those pivotal moments in recent Japanese history, I have decided to look deeper into the past for the some of the underpinnings behind how the Japanese view themselves, their country, international relations, and communication.

Location, Location, Location

After flying over great expanses of water such as the Pacific Ocean, the sudden presence of an island is always striking. It is no less the case with Japan. What quickly becomes equally impressive however is the amount of *un*inhabited and *un*cultivated land in the country. This is because the land is so mountainous and densely vegetated. By contrast it underscores how densely populated the narrow valleys and plains truly are.[1] Edwin Reischauer's opening lines of his widely cited book "The Japanese Today" state perhaps the most obvious yet fundamental aspect of Japanese society: "The Japanese, like all other peoples, have been shaped in large part by the land in which they live. Its location, climate, and natural endowments are unchangeable facts that have set limits to their development and helped give it specific direction."[2]

A dual sense of isolation and congestion begins to settle in. Isolation by the mere nature of being an island and one quite poor in many natural resources demanded by modern society. And a sense of congestion in the quickly overpowering fact that Japan has by far the highest density of both population *and* production per square mile of habitable land compared to any country in the world. When taking your first subway ride in Tokyo, Osaka, Sendai, Nagoya or any other major Japanese town, it won't take long to consider why having a culture based on harmony, hierarchy, and respect rather than rugged individualism is so important.

A packed house

According to the country's National Land Agency in 1997, land used for human dwelling, in the most densely populated nation on earth (over 126 million people), only amounted to 4.6% of the countryside while the amount devoted to roads was 3.3%, and agriculture 13.3%.

Source: *Japan Almanac 2000* published in 1999 by the Asahi Shinbun, p 51, 56

Given its climate of hot summers, ample rainfall occurring during a long growing season, and its historical abundance of seemingly tireless human "resources," Japan has

long demonstrated a tradition of intensive agriculture. Current archeological research confirms that organized farming occurred in Japan as far back as approximately 4000 BC. Many Japanese take such pride in the centrality of rice in both their culture and cosmology that they believe rice has been grown in their country since time immemorial. However, their people were actually the last of the Asian nations to adopt rice cultivation.

> ***"This is the best rice I've had since breakfast"***
>
> Rice, or *go-han*, is absolutely central to the Japanese diet. When hosted in Japan you may find yourself eating it three meals a day, with other foods of course. The Japanese are proud of *their* rice (even when its imported) and you can never go wrong by attesting to its delicious nature. Of course, too much flattery is quickly seen as quite insincere. The Japanese are comfortable with a little flattery, but only a little. After that, it becomes quite embarrassing and can create a serious loss of face for both you and your Japanese colleague.
>
> Take time to learn how to use chopsticks (*hashi*). It will score you points. When faced with an array of foods in a given meal it is always fitting for the first bite to be rice. Finally, *never, never*, place your chopsticks into the rice in such a manner that they are left standing. This symbolizes death and is how rice and *hashi* are left for a funeral or in memory of a deceased ancestor. Most Japanese take its symbolism quite seriously.

The current practice of wet-field rice cultivation was probably inherited from ancient south China when rice first came into Japan at approximately 1000 BC.[3] The small floodplains, moist climate, and narrow valleys did not require large-scale water projects similar to those in Egypt, Mesopotamia and north China which had been used to harness the destructive forces and agricultural potential of great river systems. In turn, these projects helped establish mass authoritarian societies in these regions. There are no such river systems in Japan.[4] Instead, what was required was close cooperation in the sharing of water among smaller groups. Reischauer speculates those critical cooperative efforts over the centuries, though environmentally driven, contributed to the Japanese preference for group identification and group action.[5]

In its early stages, the country was divided into many small units of terrain that were conducive to local separatism. These may have contributed to the developments of a decentralized, feudal pattern of government that existed in Japan's medieval times.[6] Despite these divisions, which typically made geographical sense, as early as the seventh century the Japanese saw themselves as unified people living under a single nation. This feeling was in no small part driven by their island-bound isolation and influenced by the powerful example a unified, intimidating Chinese empire next door which was regarded as a model civilization by the early Japanese.

We the people...

A number of scholars, including several Japanese historians, postulate that the contrast many early Japanese, particularly the ruling class, drew to the Chinese empire, may have helped to create a insular resentment and feeling of inferiority. This was further influenced by the fact that their country was resource poor, and rarely taken seriously in international circles. These feelings over time may have contributed to the Japanese competitive or "fighting spirit" that is commonly cited in the nation's business culture as well as the belief that they must always prove themselves least they be endlessly taken advantage of by unscrupulous foreigners. As I will discuss, up until recent decades these feelings interestingly paralleled the evolving notion among many Japanese of theirs as a superior race.

This feeling of unity, though challenged from time to time in moments of regional rebellion, has grown through the ages with the help of the most homogenous national constituency in the world. It has also blossomed through a worldview partially driven by

the native Shinto religion that has been used to underscore the "special" place of Japanese people and the divinity of their islands. It is a feeling that particular fueled the imperialistic fervor which drove the nation's expansionistic drive in the early 1900s. Though sagaciously watered down today, these feelings still drive nationalistic pleas of right wing patriots and some present day leading politicians. Case in point: Governor of Tokyo Prefecture (one of the most highly educated and cosmopolitan electorates in the world), Ishihara Shintaro who wrote the internationally provocative book *A Japan That Can Say No* in 1990 and who is widely popular, controversial, and well-publicized.[7]

In many ways it is the same feelings that ground some ethnocentric beliefs that *being* Japanese, understanding culture and communication styles is something foreigners can never do. Again, the notion that the Japanese are "uniquely unique." This discussion

When in Rome,... forget about being Roman?

While it is important to make cultural accommodations when in Japan, and indeed that is one of the main points of this paper, it should be noted that if a *gaijin* becomes "too Japanese" it may actually work against them and create confusing situations.

Perhaps because of their pride in Japanese culture and their belief in its uniqueness, many Japanese feel uncomfortable when foreigners become too adept at their language and cultural patterns. In fact, many Japanese explicitly prefer *not* to do business with such a person, perhaps because what may often be perceived as a cultural/language advantage would become less distinct.

For example: When in the early planning stages for an international conference to be held in Japan, I wrote a proposal of collaboration on behalf of my organization. This letter was then sent to a specific Japanese official who was familiar with our program. Significant effort was taken to craft the letter in a Japanese style; emphasizing the long-term relationships, using indirectness in the suggestions, emphasizing the philosophy behind the proposal etc,. The official and his colleagues were confused by this letter because they had come to expect much more blunt correspondence from Americans. As a result, initial negotiations were awkward and delayed.

Later, we were informed that the letter had been "too Japanese" to have come from Americans and was thus unclear. If, we were told, the same letter had come from a Japanese company they would have easily understood it and the importance of its proposals.

Although such misunderstandings are relatively uncommon they are an example of the pitfalls of cross-cultural sensitivity. They become particularly troubling when both sides have made such cultural accommodations for the other that, as a result, both parties may become very confused since their cultural expectations have become completely disorganized and rendered inoperable. Communication scholars have labeled forms of this phenomenon by the term "*cross-over divergence*."

gained particular fervor within Japan itself in the 1970s as scholars, popular media figures, and politicians debated the nature of *Nihonjin-ron* or what it means to be Japanese. This discussion particularly emerged from an international identity crisis many Japanese were feeling which stemmed from the issue of Japan being seen, both at home and abroad, as both a world *leader* and a world *loner* due to its deeply seated sense of cultural separateness - despite its propensity for borrowing.[8] The fallout from this debate, which still continues in many circles, was the country's thrust, particularly in the 1980s, toward *kokusai-ka* or "internationalization."

It should be noted that the belief of Japanese "uniqueness" has a number of notable critics both in and outside of Japan. As suggested above, many would argue that this belief system parallels the perception of Japan as a homogeneous nation, both ethnically and socially. Critics state that while this may appear true on the surface, a closer look at individual interpretations of cultural values and the degree to which they see the nation moving to one "rhythm" would suggest a far less "unique," homogeneous and harmonious society as is popularly perceived. Similarly, the abstruse discussion revolving around what actually constitutes *Nihonjin-ron*, as well as a look at the complex nature of multiple identities within the society, and a look at particular social movements in Japanese history equally suggest a society far less uniform the often espoused. In essence, the ostensible belief system of Japanese "uniqueness" is seen instead as little more than a deeply seated sense of cultural nationalism that is hostile to both individual experience and the notion of internal socio-historical diversity.[9]

Mind if we borrow your government?

In part because of its proximity to the great empire of China (*Chung-kyo*, the Middle Kingdom, the center of the civilized world as far as much of Asia was concerned) and the cultural conduit of the Korean peninsula, and as well because Japan is a land sparse of many natural resources, it has often sought to borrow from other countries, particular in times of international pressure or opportunity. In fact, many of the most significant components of Japanese culture have been borrowed from countries such as China and Korea including writing systems and religious and social philosophy. Many would argue that this tendency drives to the core of Japanese culture. More recently, Japan has borrowed much from Western countries, particularly Europe and the United States, as I will discuss in a moment. What is borrowed however, has been almost always altered into a form that makes it uniquely Japanese.

To the untrained eye Japan may look very Westernized but seasoned foreigners will tell you in moves to an entirely different rhythm and that "modernized" – on Japanese terms, is a much better description for Japan today than "Westernized." In fact, religion can be a good indicator of this fact. Christianity is certainly a cornerstone of Western culture and if Japan were truly Westernized should it not hold true that Christianity would be widely accepted? In actuality, the Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 1997 that only 0.8% of the Japanese would align themselves with the Christian faith.[10]

This tendency toward borrowing has deeply impacted how other countries view Japan and how the Japanese view themselves. In the former case it holds particularly true in business negotiations and trade / copyright disputes. The frustrated attitudes toward

this propensity toward borrowing as well as the protectionist nature of Japanese business and society fueled much of the well-documented "Japan-bashing" emanating from the U.S. and Europe during the mid 1980s to early 1990s. In many situations still today, this tendency creates endless frustrations among foreign trading partners, both on an individual and national level, numerous lawsuits and failed ventures, and in response, an often resolute defensiveness on the part of the Japanese. In Japan this pattern has created a fascinating mix of old and new as well as unique collisions of cultural values which cannot evolve at anywhere near the rate of technological change. In many ways these challenges have strengthened the native characteristics of Japan as its citizens must continuously assess and reaffirm their identities under such pressures.

The cultural roots of this tendency toward borrowing and other problematic areas for U.S. Japanese business negotiations such as the adherence, or more commonly lack thereof to negotiation agreements and the context-dependent nature of some ethics are very complex. These patterns may be seen "practical" to the Japanese perhaps because relationships and behaviors or, to a broader level, ethics, are seen as *situational and relativistic* more than they are universal; just as specific intragroup and intergroup relationships may reasonably take precedence over universal principles. Religion is another example. Many people of the world consider their religious views to be basically exclusive, in other words they only subscribe to one religious belief system (regardless of what they may actually practice). In contrast, virtually all Japanese consider themselves *both* Shinto and Buddhist, two very different religious traditions, depending on the context of the season or life event at hand.

This relativistic sense of acceptable behavior is even given credibility through ancient Japanese mythology in works such as the *Kojiki* and the now mythic tales of paramount heroes such as Yamato-Takeru-no Mikoto. He was distinguished and upheld not only for his heroic efforts, devotion, and wisdom but also for his ability to outsmart and trick his opponents through cunning, deceit and actions Western values might sometimes chastise. What is more important in these stories was not the actions themselves but rather the context of the situation, the merit of the final outcome and the value of maintaining certain relationships and honor.

One of the earliest clearly identifiable periods of significant borrowing can be seen in the late Yamoto period (approx 600 AD) and the rise to power of Prince Shotoku Taishi who was actually a regent under Empress Suiko. Just before his time, the ruling class in Japan began importing Buddhism and writing systems from Korea. Shotoku Taishi shifted more of this borrowing focus toward China and officially established a political / imperial system fashioned after the Middle Kingdom. He also dramatically strengthened the importance of Confucianism in Japan, a social philosophy that gives central form to Japanese value systems today. As mentioned throughout this paper, this ideology has dramatic impact on organizational and social structure, on Japanese communication styles, and on contemporary negotiations. These include the deference to authority and hierarchy, the critical need to maintain harmony, the importance of education, family and social relations, and the role of women visa vi men. The opening words of Article One in the Seventeen Article Constitution of 604, Japan's first constitution which Shotoku wrote, drove home the importance of this social philosophy by stating the words of Confucius: "Harmony is to be most valued."[11]

These early efforts of borrowing were attempts to further unify and empower Japan. It was also timed to take advantage of political weaknesses in China during that time. Prince Shotoku and Empress Suiko went so far as to send a letter to the Chinese emperor suggesting that the sun rises on Japan but sets on China. It was not long after his death that a detailed mythology was crafted to create a direct connection between the emperor and the sun goddess Amaterasu. By doing this, the imperial line was justified to be an unbroken chain of divinity and thus the emperor was unquestionably deserving of sacrosanct power over his subjects. This lineage continues to this day, although without the divine mandate, and was often used by the Japanese, particular military leaders, to justify imperialism after the Tokugawa Shogunate ruling of the Edo period (1603-1868) and to imply that the Japanese were a superior race.

This notion and justification would have profound impact on early U.S. – Japanese relations and the initial images most Americans would have of the Japanese. They would be perceived as exotic, foreign, mistrustful, bloodthirsty, imperialistic, and an international, and particularly American, threat. Still, to this day, one of the most common complaints of foreign business people in Japan is that one can never know and trust what a Japanese colleague is thinking or planning. As we will see in the final sections of this paper, this attitude is largely driven by the ambiguous nature of much of Japanese communication. However, I feel it is also still driven by the fact that for many Americans, our first early contacts with the Japanese was to see them as an enemy rather than a trading partner and this colors, however subtly, our contemporary impressions.

Religion in Japan

A foreigner in Japan cannot help but notice the proliferation of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples throughout the nation's countryside and towns. Indeed, it is an aspect that many sojourners are drawn to because of the striking beauty, sense of history, and "mysteriousness" of these sites. If you find yourself being hosted for any length of time, especially as a first time visitor, it is likely you will be taken to such locations. Because of this and in light of the previous comments about Japanese mythology and the divination of the imperial line, it is worth taking a few moments to discuss religion before carrying on with our discussion of Japanese history.

While it is common to see these places, it is similarly common for visitors to ask their Japanese colleagues or guides what appear to be relatively basic questions about religions and these religious sites. Often such questions are only met with confused stares and statements such as "I don't know" or "I've never thought about it" or better yet, "It is so American to ask *why* all the time." The fact of the matter is that for all its religious appearance, modern day Japan is actually a relatively secular society that is informed much more by Confucian social doctrine than strict religious ideology and daily spiritual formality.

What is important for many Japanese is to participate in religious ceremony and ritual not because it is a spiritual necessity in their lives but rather because *it is what the Japanese do* and as such, is an appropriate part of one's personal and social obligations or desires. For many, this reality is more important and *appropriate* than a need to possess an intellectual understanding of the tradition and philosophy behind the ritualized actions being performed. Being able to appreciate these facts will help you when engaging in

casual conversation with your Japanese colleagues. Though religion is rarely talked about in Japanese life outside of festivals, religious sites, or particular occasions, foreigners often find themselves asking questions. Inadvertently they often put their Japanese hosts off guard and occasionally into embarrassing positions of publicly admitting that they don't know something that is supposed to be fundamentally Japanese.

In a nutshell, Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion whose institutionalization can be traced back to the establishment of the great national shrine in Ise in 5 AD but whose roots probably go back much further. It is a pluralistic religion that acknowledges spiritual powers in thousands of striking natural phenomena, from a grove of trees, to a waterfall, to the wind. These deities are known as *kami*. It is also a religion that gives form to Japanese cosmology and the important deities *Izanagi* (male) and *Izanami* (female) who created the Japanese islands and gave birth to the Japanese race.

Functionally speaking, Shinto can be seen as a loosely structured set of practices, creeds, and attitudes that are rooted in local communities. As such they become an important part of local customs which may even differ strikingly from neighborhood to neighborhood. On a different level it can also be seen as a highly organized, and strictly designed imperial religion molded to serve the nationalistic attitudes of the ruling powers throughout Japanese history since the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1195) periods. The notion of purity is central to the belief system still to this day and is the reason why shrines have fountains for you to wash your hands and mouth. Because these shrines are often considered historic and very scenic places, it is not unreasonable to say that many of the Japanese visiting shrines do so out of a sense of nostalgia or for sightseeing rather than for religious reasons.

Buddhism on the other hand is a fully imported religion. The Mahayana sect, dominant throughout most of East Asia, was officially brought from Korea in 552 AD by a mission to the Japanese emperor sent by the Korean king of Paekche. It was accepted and promoted by the powerful Soga clan but came to be widely accepted through the later efforts of Prince Shotoku and Empress Suiko who, unlike their predecessors, did not feel that the religion threatened the native Japanese belief system.[12] Later, additional sects were imported, most notably the Tendai and Shingon by the aristocracy in the Heian period (794-1185) and Zen Buddhism from China by the dominate military class in the early Kamakura period (1185-1333).[13] Buddhism was particularly important during the Tokugawa era because it was the chief vehicle used in eradicating the spread of Christianity by foreign, particularly Portuguese, missionaries.

Today the impact of Buddhism can be seen in individual family beliefs particularly regarding the afterlife. It can be argued that the religion's emphasis on life as suffering and the need to rise above individual desires partially drives the Japanese work ethic and fuels the suppression of selfish attachment in lieu of broader group interests. Finally, although not currently widely practiced in its traditional form, Zen practices still have dramatic impact on the Japanese sense of aesthetics, from flower arranging, to calligraphy, to gardening, which are all commonly practiced. Additionally, top seated business executives still cite Zen influences on their managerial styles and the organizational culture they try to foster including a commitment to sacrifice, flexibility and the importance of acquiring an intuitive understanding of organizational issues.[14]

Tokugawa, Bushido, and the dynamic evolution of a nation

The propensity for large scale borrowing, for which religion is a key example, of course did not stop with Prince Shotoku and Empress Suiko. Perhaps its most dramatic moment came near the turn of the last century, after the arrival of U.S. Admiral Perry in 1853, at a time referred to in the introduction of this paper as the first dramatic "opening" of Japan. This was a period when rapid cultural acquisition became a critical matter of maintaining both Japanese dignity and sovereignty. This chapter in Japanese history is truly fascinating and the following brief summary only scratches the surface. To understand this moment in Japanese history it is first critical to understand the key years leading up to 1853, a period many believe lies at the heart of Japanese communication and cultural preferences to this day.

The Tokugawa era / Edo Period (1603-1867) was marked by over 250 years of widespread peace. This was a major change since up until this time the country had been wracked by much civil strife as local warlords jockeyed for provincial power. A ruling Shogun warrior family (Tokugawa) manipulated the divine and imperial mandate of the emperors of the day so as to wield true power across the land and unite warring factions in a manner unprecedented to the Japanese people. They governed the peace through a extensive network of sympathetic and generally malleable local warlords, or *daimyo*, who in turn were granted semi-autonomous regional power and thus enjoyed exceptional status and relative security from outside threats.[15]

One of the most important features of this period was the official establishment of a tightly demarcated social structure that, foreshadowing it own undoing, placed merchants and businessmen on the lowest rung, trumped in status by artisans, farmers,

and finally the samurai class.[16] It also saw a dramatic rise in a money economy, the growth of cities and the arts, a strict policy of international isolation mandated by the Tokugawa Shogunate and his advisors (perfect for further entrenching the island mentality and notion of Japan as "unique") and a rapid rise in education and literacy levels (see box below).

Critical to communication patterns was the rise of the samurai code of ethics, also known as *bushido*. The samurai code of ethics and the lifestyle of the samurai class, though functionally dismantled nearly a century ago, still has strong implication in Japanese society and business communication / negotiation styles today. The values of this class are a reflection of much that is cherished in Japan. For example, the preservation of face, the use of silence and an emphasis on restraint (*enryo*), indirectness or silent communication (*hara-gei* - speaking from the belly), a commitment to discipline and sacrifice, cherished refinement of cultural arts, and the emphasis on obligation and indebtedness (*on*), are all basic components of current communication styles. This code also has had strong impact on the business community because much of the samurai class moved into positions of prominent business status. If you ask many Japanese business

Mentor to the Masses

By the end of the Tokugawa era literacy rates in Japan were comparable to the most advanced European nations of that period. This proved particularly important as the Japanese read accounts, by immeasurably influential authors such as Fukuzawa Yukichi of "Western" superiority and accordingly took to modernizing their country at full pace.

Fukuzawa was the author of *Conditions of the West* which was written in 1866 and which sold 150,000 copies in Japan on its first press. The Japanese eagerly devoured its descriptions of Western life, institutions, values, and artifacts. By the time his subsequent writings had reached Japanese hands, his works had sold an astonishing 7.5 million volumes.

Fukuzawa's legacy remains strong to this day as his portrait dominates the 10,000¥ note.

Source: *Modern Japan: An American Nexus* by John Boyle, 1993, Harcourt Brace Publishers.

leaders to this day, the values that guide them will sound much like the samurai code of the Edo period whether they directly credit it or not.

The Tokugawa reign can be seen to have laid the tracks for the dramatic internationalization that occurred within Japan during the Meiji period (1868- 1912) and the subsequent era of Japanese imperialism and economic modernization, including after WWII. This is because of the stable social, economic, cultural, and political systems that developed during the Tokugawa time, the strength they brought to Japan, and how well positioned certain powerful figures were to initiate the sweeping changes of the following period.

But the trait of isolationism characterizing the Tokugawa rule / Edo period is equally substantial because, when Japan finally opened its doors at the end of the nineteenth century it was shocked by how economically, technologically, and militarily "inferior" they appeared when compared to Western and European nations at that time. With the deep Japanese aversion to embarrassment, they launched themselves into an unrelenting process of modernization that continues to this day. It is a process that has unquestionably benefited the nation but which has resulted in numerous conflicts with Western powers including many unequal treaties imposed by the West which have driven a sense of resentment into many Japanese; a feeling that some argue still influences many present-day business negotiations.[17]

The modernization and internationalization of the Meiji period was catapulted with the arrival of U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry and his small, yet imposing fleet of "black ships" (steamships which some Japanese mistook for being on fire) to Tokyo Bay in 1853. What followed was a forced opening of the country through Perry's tenacious

"gunboat diplomacy." For the Americans this meant economic opportunity and domination as well as a strategic foothold into East Asia. For the Japanese this meant a sudden confrontation with social customs that often seemed barbaric and technology that was dazzling, confusing, promising, and frightening.

Once the Japanese polity embraced the need to change, focus turned to sending individuals abroad to learn as much as possible with the charge to return and implement changes. Here we see the nation's propensity to borrow in its full regalia. The desire to internationalize was radical, well timed, mandated by the divine emperor (though once again written by the oligarchs since the emperor had no functional political power), and institutionally sincere. Even before the Meiji emperor's residence had been transferred to Tokyo the political power base in Japan was thirsty for a dramatic shift and crafted the Charter Oath of 1868. This decree called for the complete dismantlement of the Tokugawa structure but also went so far as to command that the "evil" practices of the past should be abandoned, and that actions should instead be based on international usage. It continued by stating that knowledge should be sought all over the world, so as to strengthen the foundations of the country's imperial rule.[18]

What followed as a result of this mandate was an event unparalleled in world history. In 1871, while the Meiji government was still establishing itself and dismantling the samurai system, the political leadership of the country decided to send itself abroad to re-negotiate unequal treaties. They also sought to absorb as much of the world's best of foreign culture, technology and social and political organization as they could. More than 50 top-ranking members and at least that many promising young students who were accompanying "unofficially" embarked on what was to have been a nine-month tour.

Instead, the project, called the Iwakura Mission, lasted 631 days, including seven months in the U.S., seven on the European continent, and four in England. As the noted historian John Boyle states: "no government in history had dispatched its top leadership overseas for such a long period of time and at such a critical juncture in its life."[19] While the group failed to gain the revised treaties it had previously wished for, they fully succeeded in the acquisition of knowledge from which they sought to reinvented much of Japan. For example, from America they borrowed the education structure, from England came communication systems such as the telegraphy and postal systems, and the new constitution was modeled after Russia's.

While the country internationalized as fast as possible there came a further strengthening of the notion of emperor as divine and of the Japanese people as one unified group, joined together under the emperor. The popular discourse of the day was of a nation working as for the betterment of the nation and the repayment of their indebtedness to their family, the nation, and the emperor; all forms of *on*. The rallying call proclaimed from every street corner, newspaper headline, and from virtually every citizen was that of "*Fukoku-kyohei*!" or "rich country, strong army."

This period also saw a dramatic increase in Japanese imperialism since that was the mark of modernization at the time. In 1854, when Perry had returned to Japan to force finalized treaties on Japan, his gifts to the Japanese emperor were a sign of Western modernization and a testament to how Japan stacked up in American eyes. They consisted of a telegraph machine, a toy model of a train, and a pair of six shooters from the Samuel Colt company who hoped to capitalize on accurate reports that the majority of Japanese warriors carried swords not guns. In a remarkable span just over 50 years

beginning with Perry's first visit, Japan had gone from a nation without any of the Western-style military and technological sophistication of the day, to a nation that took on and won significant wars against two major world powers. She defeated China 1895 and Russia in 1905. The latter victory was critical in the eyes of the world because it marked the triumph of an Asian power over a Western one.

The imperialist thrust of the nation continued through WW I as Britain called upon Japan to defend British territories in Asia from German attack. The Japanese saw this as a perfect opportunity to expand its power base in East Asia and began by quickly taking the Shantung peninsula in north China in 1914.[20] For its efforts throughout the Great War, the League of Nations granted Japan administrative control over numerous former German territories in the region. After the League and the administrative mandate began to fall apart in the 1930s the Japanese took to fortifying these outposts, many which would prove powerful strongholds for the nation in WWII.

Another interesting moment in the "modernization", some would say "Westernization" of Japan was born out of tragedy. On September 1, 1923 a massive earthquake and subsequent tidal wave or *tsunami* hit the entire Kanto Plain area around Tokyo and Yokohama, killing well over 100,000 people.[21] Because the majority of homes were built out of wood and because it hit at midday when many stoves were being fired up with charcoal, a devastating fire soon swept the cities leaving 3 out of 4 families homeless.[22] In the end, the most densely populated section of Japan and its economic and political hub was virtually leveled. This provided an opportunity to rebuild the area by the standards of the day and the resulting towns looked far more like New York City than the Tokyo of a year before. As occurred during the revolutionary Meiji period, many

young people embraced idealized Western lifestyles including cinema, increasingly direct, and at times confrontational, communication styles, Western attire, automobiles and subway, and a fascination with the works of Marx with which they often challenged their parents.[23]

Post WWII Japan, a phoenix ready for flight

WWII saw a meteoric rise in Japanese nationalism, particularly driven by an imperial mandate and the perception the people had of their emperor as divine and to who was obligated unrestrained self-sacrifice. Comparatively, its outcome dealt a massive blow to the national psyche. Particularly acute was the ramification of the Allied occupation after the war, including constitutional changes and the humanization of the emperor.

A new, American-created constitution ironically "forced" democracy and "freedom" onto the Japanese. It was a document proclaimed to be by "the will of the Japanese people" yet it was written exclusively by Americans, with many sections lifted from the state constitutions of Montana, Alabama, and Colorado, and it was imposed on the Japanese.[24] This constitution and the presence and might of the allied forces and SCAP (the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers; General Douglas MacArthur) brought about a number of important changes. They include: the disruption of the ziabatsu business circles to be mentioned soon (though they were shortly thereafter practically reinstated out of economic necessity), the censorship of the media (to downplay criticism and to further humanized the emperor) and the removal of the military elite. Similarly important were the abolishment of the *ie* family structure and the

mandated equality of women, the latter of which was radical even by American standards of the day. Critically important was the fact that the emperor as officially stripped of his divinity although he was left as friendly figurehead who then "legitimized" the social changes. Finally, Japan was officially demilitarized according to the famous Article 9.

Like was the case with commodore Perry, the Japanese were humiliated in the terms of the surrender. At the moment of signing, the West sent its clear message of superiority to the Japanese by filling Tokyo Bay with Navy ships and air squadrons flying by. The short statured Japanese officials were surrounded by tall, confident Allied personnel. MacArthur even referred to Japan as a nation paying for its great sins and some began referring to Japan as a "fourth rate" country.

But the occupation also created many positive views that the Japanese and Americans had of one another and which still impact interactions today. The Allied troops were, for the most part, surprisingly benevolent to the Japanese and the Allied soldiers found the Japanese to be friendly, civilized, and industrious individuals willing to embrace change and rebuild their country. The Japanese often praised their captors and referred to them as their mentors and providers. These emotions became particularly apparent after the exhaustion and weariness of the war (*kyodatsu)* began to wear off.[25] It must also be said that Japan was absolutely devastated at the time of the surrender, and particularly the Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki areas, and that such embrace was critical for survival.

This period also saw the Japanese dealing with the inconsistencies of the Allied troops and many patterns of behavior that they knew they could not come trust. For example, even though MacArthur said that Japanese had drafted the constitution, the

public knew better. Similarly, many Japanese were confused and angered by the fact that emperor was essentially cleared of any wrongdoing when they had come to passionately believe he had been their figurehead and, through their defeat and his surrender, had betrayed them. MacArthur felt this was important however not only because he is said to have personally liked him, but also because the emperor strongly disliked communism. Communism was a concern of MacArthur because of growing civil and labor unrest and the dire economic situation of the nation. Additionally, the role of a figurehead such as the emperor and the maintenance of much of the previous political structure were seen as the most stable way to initiate change. What is puzzling to many foreigners, and even to the Japanese, is that to this day the Japanese have not re-written the constitution on their own terms even thought the provision is now there for them to do so.

Finally, also important was the Occupation's impact on Japanese business structure. Before WWII the structure of Japanese business enterprises followed strong family lines. These family owned, bank-centered holding companies or *zaibatsu* dominated the Japanese economic landscape during the Meji era, through WW I and onto WWII. As discussed in Section II, these holding companies owned virtually all of the shares of their subsidiary companies or satellite organizations and these created tight networks of economic activity, all held together by the glue of social and family obligations. The four largest companies, Sumitomo, Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Yasuda are all economic power brokers still to this day.[26]

As the national embraced imperialism, these companies became the economic locomotive driving the military buildup of the country. In particular, by the 1930s the military had come to dominate the government and they set about dismantling much of

the old *zaibatsu* structure which was dominated by a samurai view, however weakened, that mercantilism was a profane activity. The impoverished soldiers of the samurai tradition had contempt for the remaining politicians and wealthy *zaibatsu* of the previous era who they though were responsible for the nation's weakness after Perry's arrival. A "new" *zaibatsu* structure was established with leaders who were much more sympathetic to the military. This structure then ventured into new industries such as electric, heavy machinery, and automobiles.

In order to restructure Japan and dismantle the military power base of the nation, the Occupation forces undertook a process of dismantling this *zaibatsu* system. They believed this move would not only crush the economic lifeline of the nation's imperialistic actions but that it would create a more "democratic" system of business that would be more permeable to foreign influence.[27] Power heads were removed, socially ostracized as the cause of Japan's defeat, and in some cases imprisoned. Additionally, the American Holding Company Liquidation Committee, created in 1946, began selling off shares of the *zaibatsu* to virtually anyone who would buy them. Social connections ran deep and the majority of buyers were ex-employees, banks, and other sympathetic businesses.[28] The Occupation forces would have continued on this course were it not for the devastated nature of the economy, its lack of revival, the American's growing fear of communism emerging in the country, and the concern that the reforms were too radical and too quick.

After 1947, the Occupation's central concern focused on helping Japan get on its capitalist feet. In place of the *zaibatsu* holding companies possessing all the shares of their subsidiaries, the subsidiaries instead began cross-shareholding with one another.

The net result was the same. The tight network remained and the family or social loyalties not fully dismantled began to drive the machine again. Once the Occupation force left, central banks moved into key positions within these networks and the modern system known as keiretsu, described in Section II, took hold and continues to dominate to this day.

Tradition, equality, and the Japanese women caught between?

The status of women in Japan is a complicated issue that both fascinates and troubles many feminists, scholars, foreign travelers, politicians, and social critics. While the constitutional mandate of gender equality instilled by MacAurther and the Occupation forces certainly catapulted the issue to the forefront of many people's minds, many would say that the shape of women's lives has changed far less than anticipated. Much like the mention made earlier in this paper that since Christianity has not been widely adopted, perhaps Japan is not as "Westernized" as many would like to believe, the same can be true about the role of women especially in light of MacAurthur's actions almost half a century ago.

It is true that throughout much of Japan's history women have occupied roles that are easily adduced as inferior to Japanese men. Although Japanese women continue to transform their status in Japan, many beliefs, traditions, and social realities still exist that continue to reinforce "unequal" roles. Disparate pay, limited social and professional choices, restrictive language, and marital obligations are only a few of the examples one can cite when justifying the assumption that Japanese women are seriously constrained

by their society. Despite these realities however, many Japanese women do *not* feel they are treated as unfairly as Westerners may assume.

In her book *The Japanese Woman,* Iwao Sumiko states: "Equality is an ideal, but the question of what women want to be equal to is crucial."[29] Many, in fact, feel they are actually more fortunate than Japanese men in a number of important situations. It is easy to assume, for example, that many Japanese women are frustrated by the limited employment opportunities available to them in the business world, and for many this is certainly true. This seems particularly appropriate from a Western perspective because, as Iwao believes, "most American women seem preoccupied with attaining equality with men." In Japan, however, the male experience, particularly in the business world, is rarely to be envied by women because men's lives are "confined and regimented to an extreme which often leaves them alienated from their households and deprived of time to engage in culturally [and personally] enriching pursuits."[30]

Japanese family life, and particularly the role of the woman in this context, is often misunderstood by Western observers. Before turning to our next section on organizational culture, in which the influence of Japanese family structure is important, it is useful to spend some brief comments on this subject as it relates to women's issues. Foreigners, and particularly many American women or at least feminists, often assume that most Japanese housewives and mothers lead unsatisfied lives and that they are in many cases unequivocally controlled by their husbands. As is often the case with Japanese society, however, looks may be deceiving and the maintenance of Confucian hierarchy is often known in Japan to be a *public* affair whereas in private settings realities may be far different. The woman is, in fact, often in control of many family matters

(including finances), despite some public appearances to the contrary. In essence, they are the "pivot in the fan of the family."[31]

Despite this high status in the family, motherhood remains a complicated issue for most Japanese women, as it is for women worldwide, because at the same time that it is highly revered, and often personally satisfying, it is also professionally and at times personally limiting. Much of the framework for Japanese conceptualizations of motherhood and women's roles in general, stems from the imported Confucian traditions that, as suggested in the last paragraph and throughout this paper, make clear social distinctions between men and women. It sought to emphasize the acts of childbearing and child rearing as the most important duties of women. Confucian ideology also upheld marriage as an act of social organization more than an act of love. Although an increasingly less common attitude among the young generation, this is still widespread in Japan today. Furthermore, women were expected to take a subordinate position to men in family matters, the *ie* structure, and the system of family registration known as *koseki*.[32] In communications, women were, and still generally are, expected to be deferential to men, especially in public settings and this is certainly likely to be the case in business negotiations.

As time progressed in Japan, the notion "good wife, wise mother," or *ryosai kenbo*, developed to become a major expectation of Japanese women. The "wise mother" side of this role became particularly important as the country embraced the idea of *fukoku-kyohei*, the nationalistic rallying call of the Meiji period mentioned earlier.[33] During this period motherhood was seen as integral to the survival of the Japanese populace, the government's imperialistic intentions, and the divine wishes of the

emperor. The latter point was demonstrated in the common saying: "The Emperor's will is the mother's will and the mother's will is the Emperor's will."[34]

The emphasis on motherhood continued in postwar Japan, slowly overshadowing, yet never fully eclipsing the role of "good wife." Many factors contributed to the further ascendance of motherhood through the middle and late twentieth century. Demographic changes occurred in society and democratic ideologies became more prevalent in politics, especially after the 1947 Constitution. Furthermore, women's servitude to their in-laws diminished and continues to do so. Modern appliances made household work less time consuming, and fewer women worked for family enterprises.[35] These changes gave more free time to women than ever before. Because attractive job opportunities were minimal or non-existent, most Japanese women focused their free time on the duties of motherhood. Still to this day, motherhood is seen by many to in fact, be liberating because as children age their mothers find themselves with much more free time and a broader range of lifestyle choices available to them than to their husbands.

The years since the Allied Occupation after WW II have been important years for the Japanese feminist movement. It has seen significant strides in the advance toward gender equality in Japan. Today, Japanese women play an increasingly visible role in politics and social organizations. Dramatically growing numbers of women are choosing to stay single or are choosing to become married at a later age. In doing so, many future mothers are able to work or attend school for a greater number of years before deciding to have children. When children reach school age, many mothers re-enter the work force in order to support the family. In fact, the number of families wherein both parents are working is also rapidly on the rise.[36] Despite this change, a large number of women, and

the majority of men, just as in other countries, see dual wage earning as detrimental to the family structure and the task of child rearing because it takes the mother away from the home.

Equally important is the impact of education and evolving attitudes of young people. A growing number of young women are attending colleges and universities in Japan and an increasingly significant number of these women are choosing to study abroad. Upon return to Japan many of these students, as did the 5 Japanese women who participated in the Iwakura Mission mentioned earlier, will bring new skills and attitudes with them which are influenced by intense exposure to societies where gender equality is more established. The cumulative influence of these women is likely to further the cause of the Japanese women's movement.

Despite these changes, the belief that Japanese women still suffer gross social inequality is understandable when Japan is viewed through the lens of Western ideology and social structure. The very notion of gender and human equality (which is often defined as equal rights and equal opportunities) is, essentially, a Western ideal. Democracy and equal rights may be mandated by the Japanese constitution of 1947, however, as mentioned above, the doctrine was completely written, and hastily I might add, by Americans. As implied throughout many points in this paper, we must remember that the ideological assumptions which serve as the foundation of Japanese society are different than those which define the United States and many Western cultures. As such, we must be careful not to use the status of American women as the benchmark from which we measure the status of Japanese women. Such comparisons are appropriate if we are willing to believe that the majority of Japanese women wish to be treated by their

society as American women are treated in their homeland. However, the degree to which Japanese women desire this *particular* change is questionable. It is similarly important to be cautious when thinking of Japanese women in monolithic terms. Individual differences vary as much on this topic as any other.

When considering this history of the women's movement in Japan as reported by Japanese feminists, it is important to question whether the vantage, philosophy and rhetoric is not merely an echo of American feminist philosophy. If this is true, one could question whether the ideals, as presently articulated, of most Japanese feminists can truly take hold in their country, which is rooted in non-Western ideologies. The male dominated power structure not withstanding, it could similarly be considered one of the main reasons the women's movement in Japan has not advanced further than its present position. It could also explain why so few women seem actively engaged in its cause despite the growing social acceptance of expressing dissenting political opinions.

Suggested Readings:

- To learn more of the impact surrounding the humanization of the Japanese Emperor, the Allied Occupation, the nation's apparent easy transition to a democratic society and its phenomenal rise from the ashes of WW II see the engaging: Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WW II, by John Dower. 1999, W.W. Norton & Company.

- For a good read on the Tokugawa era and the events leading from that period to WW II consider: Modern Japan, The American Nexus, by John Hunter Boyle. 1993, Harcourt Brace College Publishers. Chapters 2-6 (Chapter 1 also includes a concise overview of the Japanese land and prominent social philosophies.

- For a history of Modern Japan particularly in relation to business and social movements see: The Columbia Guide to Modern Japanese History, by Gary D. Allison. 1999, Columbia University Press

- With its particular focus on Japanese language and psychology consult the opening chapters of: The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness by Peter N. Dale. 1986, St. Martin's Press.

- Finally, perhaps the first major book on Japan culture and history most students read and one that is virtually indispensable to foreigners given its accessibility and breadth is the most recent edition of: The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity by Edwin I. Reischauer. 1995, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

---

[1] This sense of proportion may be somewhat lost if you only travel into the Tokyo area because it is located in the Kanto Plain of Japan. This happens to be the country's most "expansive" lowland area – yet it only stretches 120 miles at its longest point and in total comprises a mere 6,244 *square* miles.

[2] Reischauer, 1995 p.3.

[3] For intriguing and concise summaries of ancient Japan, particularly in the Jomon period (13,000 – 300 AD) of cave dwelling and hunter gathering, the Yayoi period (300 BC- 300 AD) of increased immigration, emerging social stratification and political relations with China, and through the pivotal Kofun/Yamoto period (AD 300-710) which saw the development and importation of writing, religious and political systems as well as the divination of imperial rule, see: Kenneth Henshall's *A History of Japan. From Stone Age to Superpower* (1999) pgs. 1-18.

[4] The most important river system in Japan is probably the *Tone*, which runs through the Kanto Plain, but it is easily dwarfed by any of the world's important river systems.

[5] Reischauer, 1995 p.15-16.

[6] Reischauer, 1995 p.8.

[7] See also "Governor who says No" *Far Eastern Economic Review* Oct 7, 1999. p28. *A Japan That Can Say No* (Japanese version published by Kodansha Publishers) was a large success in Japan, despite its complaints about Japanese society, given its highly critical tone of American attitudes to the superiority of their own industrial production. It was similarly critical of American double standards both politically and culturally and their attitudes toward Japanese business and culture. Readers pursuing the English version of this text translated by Frank Baldwin (published by Simon & Schuster in NewYork in 1991) should be aware that this version is more a *revision* and *alteration* of the original than an accurate portrayal of the work that took Japan by storm. The tone of the English version is decidable toned down and much more critical of Japan than the initial version. Additionally, the English language version omitted chapters contributed by Akio Morita, the former chairman of Sony. An English version of the original Japanese text has been distributed "unofficially" via the Internet although the accuracy of the translation has not been verified. To view it see: http://home.earthlink.net/~rufusis/japanno/

[8] Reischauer, 1995 p.395.
[9] See also Peter Dale's *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (1986), St. Martin's Press, New York
[10] *Japan Almanac 2000*, p 262
[11] Henshall, (1999) p14
[12] *Japan. Profile of a Nation* (1994) p206-210 and Henshall, (1999) p12
[13] The dominant sects in Japan today are the Jodoshu, Shinshu, and Nichiren. (Reischauer p 206)
[14] See also: "Zen and the art of making profits" *Financial Times*. Aug 29. 2000 p. 10
[15] These warlords were considered not only militarily powerful but, perhaps more importantly given the value system of the day, they were known to be highly honorable, learned, and at times religious men well versed in the Japanese traditional arts.
[16] This structure in many way proved its own undoing because the samurai class became increasingly impoverished as a result of decreasing agricultural yields and rural discontent (farmers were the tax base) and the obligation of a yearly and very costly pilgrimage and tribute to the Tokugawa Shogunate in the nation's capital. Ultimately, the samurai class "devolved" economically to the point that they lost much political control. At the same time, the merchant class had begun to profit handsomely from stability of the nation. Over time, the now fragile loyalty of the *daimyo* structure began to disintegrate and the combination of foreign pressure, namely the arrival of Admiral Perry, and internal disagreement over the state of Japanese values, spelled the end of the Tokugawa shogunate between 1853 to 1868.
[17] One such example would be the Washington Navel Conference of 1922. This conference was a slap in the face for Japan because they were given recognition as a 2nd rate, 1st world superpower and thus allowed fewer armaments than the U.S. and U.K. In many ways this is one of the most significant of numerous events defined by unequal treatment of the Japanese, including the Anti-Immigration Act of 1920, and is an event still cited by Japanese as a defining moment in US-Japanese relations.
[18] Boyle 1993, p. 87.
[19] Boyle 1993, p. 93.
[20] Boyle 1993, p.153.
[21] The magnitude of the earthquake was similar to that of the San Francisco quake of 1906. However only about 500 people lost their lives in that event.
[22] Boyle 1993, p.157.
[23] The nation's first subway and the first U.S. Auto production in Japan - Ford and General Motors -- were established in the Tokyo area between1927-28.
[24] Boyle 1993, p. 325.
[25] For a particularly engaging portrait of this period of Japanese history, including powerful accounts of the *kyodatsu* condition see: John Dower's seminal work : *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WW II*, 1999, W.W. Norton & Company.
[26] Melville, 2000 p.7-11.
[27] Johnson, 1991 p.21-27.
[28] Melville, 2000 p.9.
[29] Iwao 1993, p.12.
[30] Iwao 1993, p.17.
[31] Iwao 1993, p.152.
[32] Yoshizumi 1995 p.187.
[33] Ohinata, 1995 p.200.
[34] Ohinata, 1995 p.202.
[35] Uno, 1993 p.304.
[36] It is important to note, however, that these demographic changes may well be reactions to economic necessity not, as some Japanese feminists may argue, the primary result of an active women's liberation movement. Similar demographic changes can be seen in most post-war, industrial, capitalistic societies. Economic stagnation, inflation, and the rise of incessant consumerism have led to economic pressures that often necessitate the employment of more workers, male and female alike. Furthermore, the dramatic increase in life expectancy and the subsequent decrease in birth rates in Japan combine to create labor shortages. This, in turn, requires a broader workforce that includes women.

IV. **Organizational Culture In Japan**

Understanding not only national culture but also the organizational culture that defines a particular group of individuals is a critical yet, at times, fuzzy task. That importance can be no less true yet considerably more difficult while attempting to make such considerations as a foreigner in Japan. It can be strongly argued that national and organizational culture have reciprocal and reinforcing influences on one another. It is also true that certain aspects of organizational culture may stand distinct from the broader cultural climate of the nation. These are all important to understand because organizational culture drives to the heart of the unseen forces guiding daily decision-making, communication and organizational structure. If you can gain a good sense of this when working with Japanese colleagues, and then cast this understanding in light of the knowledge you have about Japanese society and history, you will see the interconnectedness of all these elements and greatly enhance your chances for successful and satisfying interactions.

For purposes of this discussion, organizational culture will be articulated primarily on the works of the noted scholar Edgar Schein. It focuses on the shared, taken-for-granted basic assumptions held by the members of a group or organization which guides their daily activities and forms the invisible backdrop for their interactions and decisions.[1] This culture is something that is critical to nurture on the part of decision-makers and management because it can be the cohesive spirit that creates a shared vision and commitment among employees.

Organizational culture is not a static phenomena and, just like our broader understanding of culture, it is continuously being formed and reinterpreted through the

sense-making activities of all the organization's individuals; not just management. Nor is organizational culture necessarily uniform in a given firm. Large companies for example, may have many different cultures within them and thus it is not fully appropriate, for example, to think of "Mitsubishi-culture" or the "culture" of MITI because it may vary from plant to plant or from division to division.

In a nation such as Japan the sense of a common organizational spirit or culture is often powerfully reinforced by the broader cultural values of society. This is particularly true in regard to the importance of group affiliation, commitment to group values in place of individual desires, and the appropriateness of a tightly defined hierarchical social structure; once again, all centrally informed by Confucian philosophy.[2] Of particular interest in this section are the ways Japanese perceptions of family and the nature of *being* human, including the reality of *inter*dependence, all influence, shape, and reinforce organizational culture. Similarly, how companies and management foster this culture through the use of rituals and symbols or "artifacts."

All in the family

The concept of "family" is a central component of Japanese culture and the organizational setting is one place to see it in action. While the conveniences of Japanese household life and the daily routines of its inhabitants may seem very similar to that in the West, there are many aspects of Japanese family structure that appear dramatically different when viewed in comparison. The *Ie*- or household family structure can be seen as a direct reflection of Japanese and, in specific, Confucian values. Despite its official termination (in the legal sense) as a result of the Allied Occupation after the Second

World War, its legacy still remains and underlies many families and businesses in present day Japan.

Nakane Chie drew a striking connection between the biological and organizational concepts of family by defining the *ie* as: "a personalized relation to a corporate group based on work, in which the major aspects of social and economic life are involved."[3] Connections can even be made when one looks at etymological evidence into the original terms used in many early Japanese labor organizations. *Oya,* or the parent (superior) and *ko*, or child, represents the subordinate. Accordingly, the *oya* is responsible for the well being of the *ko*.[4] When one can understand that the boss himself becomes somewhat of a protectorate or father to his employees, at least in many settings, it is easier to understand the devotion to be accredited him by his employees. In many settings this is a relationship inextricably bound by *on*, mentioned previously, and driven by *amae,* which will be discussed momentarily.

Perhaps the most defining characteristics of the *ie* structure is the emphasis it places on order, respect, and the continuation of the family lineage, including the inheritance of property and business. Despite significant demographic and value changes in the society, the latter is still particularly ordered around a system of primogeniture. These realities are all mirrored in organizational contexts by the clearly delineated hierarchies, the prevalence of honorific language and deferential communication along this hierarchy, and the structure of advancement based, a least historically, less strictly on merit than on one's age and tenure. Additionally, the traditional *ie* structure only allows one couple (ideally the first-born son and his wife) to become the head of the family; other members are encouraged to establish new structures of their own. This broad web

of related *ie* structures, known as *dozoku*, becomes an important network for economic activity.[5] This tradition is compounded with the still common practice of corporate nepotism and the coterie keiretsu relationships that, though weakening as mentioned in Section I, still dominate Japan. This makes it exceedingly difficult for many foreigners to navigate through such networks.

A married couple and their one or two children may be the standard definition of family in Japan, yet technically, functionally, and practically in the minds of the Japanese their family structure extends to encompass many members both living and deceased. Granted, this attitude is not culturally unique but the degree to which living members posses obligations to maintaining the honor and traditions of deceased relatives, even those from several generations past, is particularly powerful. While this definition may be seen as heavily connected to blood ties, the notion of family has historically been extended to the Japanese people in general, a concept with direct connections to our previous discussions about the homogenous and proclaimed "uniqueness" of Japanese society. It is also often used to describe one's workgroup in a corporation or in business relations. Indeed, there has long existed a legacy of placing the family business above the importance of defining a family along bloodlines because at times, non-related individuals may be literally adopted into the family in order to continue the business.

As Jane Bachnik discusses, the critical point of succession in a family is at the time of marriage.[6] From Japanese marriages, she states, historically succession could be viewed from the following arrangements in order of desirability: (1) the man is from the "in-group" and the women is from an "out-group" (the usual version of marriage), (2) the woman is from the "in-group" and the man from an "out-group." This man is a so-called

adopted bridegroom or *muko yoshi*. (3) In the event of a childless marriage or one in which the children are unsuitable for, or unwilling to carry on family matters, both an "out-group" man and woman may be literally "adopted" into the family (*fufu yoshi*). At this point these individuals, though unrelated to the family by blood, were officially allowed to be entered into the *koseki* or national family registries.[7]

As this demonstrates, the *ie* system is flexible enough to allow families to adopt unrelated individuals into positions of high family status in order to maintain the structure and business. In this context Dorinne Kondo explains that the *ie* system's imperatives demand that individuals shape themselves and their identities, at least those socially manifest, to fit into the structure; the organization does not expand to fit the individuals, as it might in a Chinese patrilineal system.[8] This has direct bearing on the organizational culture of many Japanese corporations because the needs of the organization are commonly expected to supercede the needs and desires of the individual or their biological/legal families.

In Western cultures, individuals are often considered mature when they strike out on their own in the pursuit of a new life independent from the family. Within the traditional Japanese family structure however, such behavior could be construed as selfish and akin to immaturity. Appropriate behavior in the *ie* system is to submit such desires to the continuation of the family structure, even if this means continuing in a family business which holds little attraction to the individual.[9]

Similar sacrifice is encouraged through the organizational culture of many Japanese firms. Although the reality of lifetime employment is becoming increasingly unstable it is still a prominent feature of many companies and the massive job reductions

mentioned in news headlines typically come in the form of hiring freezes, attrition, and early retirements. Individuals are encouraged to suppress their desires to pursue potentially more satisfying careers elsewhere and are instead given job transfers and a high degree of horizontal mobility in order, as some Japanese managers say, to "keep things interesting." Management reinforces this by the fact that some large companies will specifically discriminate against applicants who have worked for other firms. The clear preference here being that you start young in an given organization and stay with them for the majority of your life, regardless of later personal career interests. Through such tenure you demonstrate your commitment to diligence and organizational values. As William Ouchi states in *Theory Z*: "In the United States we conduct our careers between organizations but within a single specialty. In Japan people conduct careers between specialties but within a single organization."[10]

Hard work is particularly valued in the *ie* structure but is realized in organizational contexts. Traditionally, love, within the Japanese family, is most appropriately demonstrated through respect from the children to the parents, and sacrifice from the parents to the child. Thus viewed, we may begin to understand some elements of the Japanese work ethic and why so many Japanese fathers do not appear more visibly distraught over the lack of time they spend with their families. It is not uncommon for individuals to experience a mandated job transfer that forces them to relocate in a city far from their family. This situation, known as *tanshin-funin* typically does *not* involve a "household" move as it likely would in the U.S. Instead the father merely lives apart from his family, often for many years. Such a situation, especially over such an extended period of time, would be considered terrible in the United States yet in Japan it is a way

of life that encounters little social resistance. The regional head of the third largest insurance company in Japan, Meiji Life (part of the Mitsubishi keiretsu), once explained *tanshin-funin* to me this way: he said that while it was true this procedure mandated significant sacrifice on the part of the employee, it could also be seen as a benefit to the individual. Whereas in the United States, where employees often get bored with their jobs or have little understanding of the broad functions of the organization, *tanshin-funin*, he suggested, provided workers with interesting job challenges and provided refreshing changes. He also believed it engendered a sense of unity among workers to the company by giving them the opportunity to understand the interconnections of the whole organization and how one plant must understand and appreciate the efforts of another. When pressed about his own absence from the rest of his family for a number of years, he commented that this was the sacrifice of a "good" father.

Contrary to many occidental interpretations, "sacrifices" on the part of the Japanese worker are actually genuine signs of their commitment to their families and their personal repayment of *on* or indebtedness and obligation. To reiterate, within the Confucian tradition, notions of duty, sacrifice, and equanimity are more valued than basic Western principles such as informality, individualism, and the pursuit of pleasure.

The importance of being earnest... and indulgent

The notion of reciprocal relationships, of the father sacrificing for the family, of the mother carefully nurturing her children and particularly supporting them in the realm of education, and of the employee working hard for the superior and the superior or the company in turn taking care of the employee, can all be seen as closely connected with

the Japanese concept of *amae*. Although this is essentially a psychological construct its manifestation in the work place creates one of the backbones of organizational culture in Japan because it creates an unwritten, shared set of values and expectations that govern communication and interaction, particularly between subordinates and superiors. It is a concept commented heavily upon by many scholars, perhaps most notably Doi Takeo in his 1973 work landmark work Amae no kozo (The anatomy of dependence). It is a book considered by many to drive to the heart of Japanese psychology and subtleties of social relationships.

The concept of *amaeru* (*amae* is the noun form) that Doi describes finds its most resonance within intimate, *uchi* relationships, most specifically between the mother and son. The term has the same root as *amai* which is an adjective that corresponds to "sweet." As Doi states:

> "A*amaeru* has a distinct feeling of sweetness, and is generally used to express a child's attitude toward an adult, especially his parents. I [Doi] can think of no English work equivalent to *amaeru* except for "spoil," which, however, is a transitive verb and definitely has a bad connotation; whereas the Japanese *amaeru* does not necessarily have a bad connotation although we say we should not let a youngster *amaeru* too much."[11]

Doi and many other noted Japanese scholars believe that this concept can also be understood as indulgent love upon which reciprocal obligations are connected. It is a way of *being* that is just as commonplace in the adult world as in the children's world, though it may be less obvious. A person who is not willing to indulge the needs of another or who is unwilling to accept the graciousness of another, perhaps out of aversion to becoming officially or unofficially indebted to them, may be seen as selfish or *katte*.

In the U.S., the idea of independence is one that is seen in a relatively positive light. Indeed, too much interdependence can be seen to parallel co-dependence, a trait

usually viewed as unhealthy in interpersonal relationships. We come *into* our own by striking *out* on our own, by articulating our personal positions and defending them vigorously. Statements such as "I need my own space" or "I have to be my own person" or even "Mind your own business" all suggest a value system that moves in an opposite direction to the interdependence of *amae*. "*Katte ni shiro*!" is a Japanese phrase which encourages independence since it roughly translates as "Do as you please!" However, the centrality of the word *katte* indicates that to be independent is to be selfish and to be selfish is to lack understanding of the need to indulge in the right amount of interdependence through which you can preserve the harmonious integration (or *wa*) of the group.[12]

For our purposes *amae* can be viewed in the relationship between superiors and subordinates in the work place (at least among those who are considered to act honorable in their respective roles within the organization). The subordinate is to indulge the needs and wishes of the superior and in so doing can be confident in their dependence to the superior who will reciprocate with benevolence for the employee and, in certain circumstances such as weddings, funerals or in times of crises, also to the employee's family. A person who knows how to indulge correctly is also said to know how to look after others well and is commented on as "*mendoomi*

The art of being a host?

It is not uncommon for business guests in Japan to be invited out to eat or drink, even upon the first evening's arrival, with their Japanese counterparts. While the traveler may often prefer to retreat to the comforts of their hotel room such a move could be costly.

By accepting such an offer you may find yourself in an important position to produce good impressions outside of the formal business settings. Also, as Japanese themselves note, this offer is a way of not only showing hospitality but testing to see if the guest is committed to nurturing good relationships or if they are *katte* (selfish) and unwilling to indulge in such generosity.

** In fact, when a person who normally indulges in *amae* holds back, the Japanese call this aberrant behavior mizukusai (overly reserved) or *yosoyososhii* (acting like a stranger); both terms that Japanese may use interchangeably and thus are quite revealing.

ga ii hito."[13] This is a quality highly sought after in managers.

If a Japanese manager were to treat his employees like commodities (and to be sure, many do - just as in the U.S.), as a means of production which may be conveniently discarded in times of economic hardship or when the workers prove inefficient and non-cost-effective, he would likely loose honor among other business leaders, among his employees, and in his community. Certainly the culture of the organization or division would quickly become seriously tainted. In fact, unlike in the United States, when management announces significant job cuts or is exposed for dishonorable behavior, the executives almost always step down. When an employee experiences this level of respect and commitment he is naturally disposed to remain more loyal to his company than those workers who do not experience such benefits.

To foster an organizational culture of fairness, acceptance and devotion, Japan's corporate structure often appears to be more egalitarian, at least when viewed in terms of managerial attitudes, than many comparable Western structures. It is an attitude that is exemplified by salary issues such as the fact that, unlike in America, company officials and managers rarely earn extravagantly more than their subordinates. Japanese executives often socialize with their "average" employees after regular business hours: much more frequently than the typical, once-a-year corporate Christmas party in many Western societies. It is not uncommon to see the managers pouring drinks for their employees and asking questions regarding the health of their employee's family, thus demonstrating sensitivity to their co-workers needs. Japanese executives also frequent the same cafeterias as their employees and often do not enjoy special parking privileges. All these serve to propagate an organizational culture wherein members generally feel

valued and connected to one another. Of course, not all organizations in Japan truly engender such a culture, or even attempt to. And certainly, individuals see these interactions and the practicalities of *amae* through their own experiences, not the often rosy, monolithic generalizations of foreigners and scholars. Still, such organizational culture is nonetheless, often commented upon as a hallmark of Japanese corporate life.

The essence of being human

The subject of a Japanese concept termed *ningensei,* which may be (loosely) translated as "human beingness" or, stated differently, the core characteristics of human nature is closely connected to *amae.* At its essence it is understood to mean that to be a human being is not to necessarily be an independent entity but rather a being that is interconnected to another and for who reality is dependent on the context of that relationship. The strikingly simple, yet revealing kanji character for "human" in fact underscores this relationship. It is one simple line that is leaning on, or supported by and thus dependent on another smaller line. The symbolism is no accident. Because this concept has direct bearing on how individuals view one another, it has direct bearing on communication, which is a fundamental component of organizational culture.

Alan Goldman highlights how *ningensei* informs a myriad of Japanese communication behaviors and relational perceptions in his article "Communication in Japanese Organizations" which was published in the 1994 International and Intercultural Communication Annual. He emphasizes the centrality of this concept in Japanese multinational communication practices by stating that it spans "arenas of organizational,

negotiation, proxemic, and performance protocols" and that *ningensei's* roots are traceable to Confucian presuppositions which are now "operationalized in contemporary organizations."[14]

Goldman postulates that Western individuals who seek successful interactions with Japanese organization members must have a deep, almost instinctive understanding of *ningensei*. Some would say that lack of such understanding and its complementary relationship with *amae* and the Japanese belief in relativism (mentioned in Section III under "borrowing") has been at the core of many Japanese-Western business tensions.

Goldman divides his discussion of *ningensei* in Japanese organizational communication patterns into an analysis of four categories that he feels are very relevant to individuals who will be conducting business in Japan. These categories are organizational behavior and protocols, public table negotiations, proxemic arrangements, and speechmaking / oral presentations.

Confucian principles can be seen as an intrinsic characteristic of *ningensei*. This includes the concept of *jen*, which may be seen as concern for the 'other.' Also central is the notion of *shu*, which implies the process understanding, or stepping into another person's reality. Similarly, the concept of *i* involves concern for the welfare of the group (in this case referring usually to the organization), and finally the Confucian dimension of *li* which refers to the outward manifestations of the previous three. *Ningensei* is a fundamental way of existing in the world. It is a belief that each person is inextricably connected and reliant on others. It is the effective manifestations of *ningensei*, such as *shu* and *jen* that may be circumstantially manipulated and altered in organizational settings.

In essence, Goldman states that *ningensei* values influence all these components of Japanese organizational behavior and protocol by creating individuals who make clear distinctions between people who are *uchi* or part of an in group and those, such as Westerners, who are *soto* or outsiders (both concepts introduced in the Preface and to be discussed in more detail in Section V). This distinction predicates the use of a high degree of *tatemae* and necessitates the relationship building process that many Westerners find so tedious, ambiguous and costly. (*Tatemae* refers to the principles or standards by which a person is bound, at least outwardly, in a public setting.)

Ningensei also encourages Japanese individuals to be less confrontational in negotiations, more likely to extend the negotiation process into social venues, and utilize the ambiguous *haragei* or "gut instinct" communication. It also affects the spatial layouts of Japanese plants such as the creation of more group work areas, U-shaped assembly lines, and maximum visibility among workers. These factors help enhance the interdependencies and control of workers, a concept which often becomes problematic in Japanese-Western joint venture manufacturing plants.

Seeing culture in an organization

While individual organizational members will have their own interpretation of the group's culture, there are still strong elements or "artifacts" of shared organizational culture that are apparent at a macro level in Japanese companies. Such artifacts included "material and nonmaterial objects and patterns that intentionally or unintentionally communicate information about the organization's technology, beliefs, values, assumptions, and ways of doing things."[15] Schein sees artifacts, rituals, myths, and

socialization processes, as the most basic, yet difficult to decipher layer of organizational culture.[16] Through this level, the organization's values and assumptions are transmitted to, and socially constructed by individuals until they become collectively understood, or at least recognizable, organizational realities. Obvious examples can be seen in a Japanese company's mission statement or a mascot (often particularly cartoon-like and always a point of curiosity to foreigners) or a company song. However, they may also include such elements as meeting or workroom layouts or even decorations such as flower arrangements and selections of artwork.

Workplace seating arrangements are a particularly interesting example to consider. When you walk into an average corporate or government division office you will likely see employees sitting at desks in long double rows, two employees working directly across from each other without any partitions, perhaps 8 or 10 in total. One employee, probably a manager, will be at a desk at the head of the row looking towards the group. A given room may have 4-8 such rows. In the middle of the room you may see two large desks for the division director and deputy director. Directly in front of them, without any barriers, may be a comfortable meeting place, tables and chairs, were decision-making meetings or the hosting of guests may occur in plain sight and earshot of the directors and other employees. This says a lot about the organizational culture of the division in terms of the value it places on hierarchy, participatory decision-making, group identification, and perhaps more than anything, control.

The commonplace Japanese ritual of engaging in group exercise or signing the company song in the morning within a particular work team could be better understood as a demonstration of a cultural *assumption*. In other words, it is assumed this activity

should be done, much like singing the national anthem at a U.S. baseball game, but the degree to which individual members actually feel a sense of solidarity through this event remains unseen. This is often the case with cultural artifacts. It is more difficult to gauge the degree to which an understanding, perception, or feeling about that song or exercise is shared among the group members. Accordingly, it is hard to know if the concertive control being attempted by management or those in the organization who are charged with the continuance of the cultural artifacts has actually been successful.

Certainly, aligning members to identify with the company and its goals is one of the central functions of organizational culture in Japan as it is elsewhere. The sheer realities of Japanese work life automatically place the corporation as a *primary* site of socialization and social identification for many individuals. This works well in the framework of Japanese culture because Japan is such a group oriented society from the start. Two strikingly powerful images come to mind; ones you may encounter. First, as will be articulated in the final section, business cards are highly revered in Japan and they reveal much about how an individual views their place in the context of a situation, or perhaps even life.

Over time, you may come to notice that, when exchanging cards (*meshii*) Japanese individuals often introduce themselves by stating that they belong to the company. For example Mr. Matsunaga Yuichi from Meiji Life Insurance company would say "*Meiji Seimei* (life insurance) *no Matsunaga desu*." The *no* is a possessive reference and the *desu* means, essentially, to exist. In other words, the statement would roughly translate as "I exist as belonging to Meiji Life Insurance Company and (secondly,) to the Matsunaga family (since there is no reference to his first name,

Yuichi)." Now, whether this is a mere formality or a statement of identity that the individual truly embraces is, of course, a fair question. However the more you may come to know your Japanese colleagues, particularly if they are male, in management, and from a large company, the more this reference may appear an accurate portrayal. Perhaps the best way to determine the sincerity of these statements and the degree to which an individual buys into the culture of the organization is actually in the informal, late night work gatherings so common and important in Japan. Although these gatherings, typically in bars, restaurants or *karaoke* clubs, further underscore the sense of group identification in the work place, they are often the only "safe" environments for employees to let their shirts out and express cynicism of the managerial directives and operationalized culture.[17]

Second, the process of becoming socialized as a new employee to an organization in Japan is particularly interesting. Socialization may be seen as the process by which newcomers learn the language of the company and through which the leaders transmit organizational values in the hopes of ensuring commitment.[18] Fred Jablin states that this is the process by which the individual becomes integrated into the "reality" of the organization.[19]

The term "assimilation" has also been used, primarily by Jablin, to describe the socialization process. It is a process that scholars view in four primary ways. First, the active participation by organizational newcomers has been a primary focus. In other words, socialization and assimilation have been viewed as a reciprocal process through which organizations and individuals develop relationships. In this phase there are both deliberate and unintentional efforts by the organization to "socialize" the employee. Individuals become engaged in the active process of learning organizational values,

norms and behaviors.[20] Conversely, there is also a process whereby the employee attempts to "individualize" or modify their roles, organizational environment, and personal expectations and interpretations of the organizational culture so they can better satisfy their *own* needs, ideas, and values.[21]

Next, socialization has been understood in terms of a communicative process that takes place over time. It is a process that transforms an individual from being an "outsider" to an "insider" or, in Japanese terms, from the firm's "*soto*" to "*uchi*" circles. Its duration is highly variable and does not at all cease when one has passed successfully through an orientation phase. Indeed, organizational controls are continuously attempting to define and reinforce the organizational culture and thus the socialization process can be seen as forever ongoing.[22]

Third, focus has also been given to the specific outcomes of the socialization process. In other words: to what degree did the employees come to align themselves with the organization's goals? This is a focus that particularly embraces issues of identity. As such, it is a very personal issue to gauge and difficult to measure in the public, front-stage organizational context of many Japanese firms since considerable social and organizational pressure is upon individuals to identify with the firm.

Finally, attention has also been given to the specific turning points in the socialization process. These involve moments when members come to feel particularly connected, or disconnected, to the organizational goals. Research has often suggested that these points are commonly not those that are contrived by management. Individual's reflections of these points are particularly revealing to the true nature of the

organizational culture and the highly personal sense-making processes that are central to its continuance.[23]

Indeed, formal orientations are one of the most easily recognizable mediums for the socialization process and it is almost taken for granted that Japanese employee orientation programs in medium to large companies will last several months. These orientations typically include multi-week retreats that entail rigorous training from sunup until well past sundown and that also involve guest lecturers, participation in competitive games with their fellow recruits, and careful indoctrination to the rituals and long history of the firm.

This period is comprised of a barrage of mediated and non-mediated forms of communication from management, which are "ambient" in nature. In other words, they are relatively non-contingent, nonselective to all newcomers.[24] While management typically puts a great deal of money, time, and other resources into such periods, research suggests that its effectiveness is quite questionable. What are considered much more important are the employees' interactions with supervisors and coworkers, two scenarios that are tightly controlled in the early stages of an employee's integration into a Japanese company.

Once a regular employee of the company has completed the orientation period, it is common for the individual to be paired with another colleague, always older, who has worked within the company for some time. This is the well-documented *senpai* (senior/teacher) - *kohai* (junior/student) relationship and through it the greenhorn will be guided through an understanding of the subtitles of the organization and its culture which are less easily articulated in formal orientation settings. Central to this relationship is the

dependent reciprocity of *amae*, which was discussed earlier. Firms generally take care to select *senpai* who have a high degree of organizational loyalty and who, recalling our earlier discussion, are said to be "*mendoomi ga ii hito*" or a person who knows how to look after others well. As a result of this close relationship and the relative malleability of newcomers in terms of their desire to fit into the culture and be looked upon favorably, this period often has a positive impact on individual's willingness to align themselves with organizational goals.

The issue of interaction with co-workers is also important and interesting in Japan. This interaction is often considered perhaps the most influential of all the socialization processes and the one most out of the organizational leader's control. In many large Japanese firms it is not uncommon for sets of new recruits to be kept in the groups established during orientation sessions. Rather than being immersed in the full organizational setting, they are often limited to primary socialization with one another and, most importantly, their respective *senpai*. The competitive drive, group identification, and commitment to the organization are all assumed to be strengthened during this period in the hopes that when they are more fully integrated with seasoned employees they will have aligned themselves to organizational goals.

These examples of cultural, organizational artifacts and the relationship of the *ie* structure and *amae* to organizational culture in Japan are just a few that can be cited. What is important to realize, now that we have looked at Japanese history, the present state of business in Japan and an overview of intercultural communication, is that all are connected. Similarly, that organizational culture in Japan is a close reflection of the societal values at large, which are heavily influenced by Confucian traditions.

Throughout these discussions I have made continual reference to specific communication patterns and situations that are often striking to *gaijin*. It is useful in the next, final section, to turn attention to specific communicative traits or situations that may prove particularly awkward and to go into further detail to those already mentioned.

Suggested Readings:

- Organizational Culture and Leadership. 2nd Ed. By Edgar H. Schein. 1992. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- A must read for anyone serious about delving into a deeper understanding of Japanese relationships is: The Anatomy of Dependence. By Doi Takeo. 1974. Kodansha International Ltd. Tokyo.
- For an exploration of Japanese social strucutre, particularly as relevant to organizational contexts can be found in: Japanese Society. By Nakane Chie 1970. University of California Press. Berkley.
- Dorinne Kondo. Crafting Selves: Power Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace. 1990. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago.
- The Impact of Confucianism on Organizational Communication by Guo-Ming Chen & Jensen Chung in *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No2, Spring 1994, p93-105.
- *Organizational entry, assimilation, and exit.* By Fred Jablin. In: Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective. (1987) F.M. Jablin, L.L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, and L. W. Porter (Eds.) Newberry Park: California. Sage Publications. (679-740)

---

[1] Schein 1992, p.25.
[2] See Chen and Chung's "The Impact of Confucianism on Organizational Communication" *Communication Quarterly,* Vol 42, No. 2, Spring 1994, p93-105.
[3] Nakane, Chie. (1983) "*IE*" *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 3:259-261. Tokyo: Kodansha.
[4] Yanagida, 1957.
[5] Hendry, 1987 p.25.
[6] Bachnick 1983 "Recruitment strategies for household succession: Rethinking Japanese household organization." *Man* (n.s.) 18:160-182
[7] Bachnick as cited in Kondo, 1990 p 121-128. For a discussion of how this impacts women's rights and roles see: Yoshizumi Kyoko's "Marriage and Family: Past and Present" in Japanese Women Ed. Kumiko Fujimaura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda. 1995. The Feminist Press p183-197 (187).
[8] Kondo, 1990 p.127.
[9] Kondo, 1990 p.131.
[10] Ouchi, 1981 p.33.
[11] Doi, "Japanese patterns of communication and the concept of *Amae*" in Samovar and Porter's *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*. 1976 p.188.
[12] Yamada, 1997 p.7-11.
[13] Literally translated as "a person who looks after others well" Yamada, 1997 p 10.
[14] Goldman, 1994 p.45.

[15] Ott, 1989, p.24.
[16] The next deeper level involves espoused values such as strategies, goals, and philosophies, followed by basic underlying assumptions that comprise the unconscious, taken-for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings of the organization and its members. Each level dynamically influences and is influenced by the others. Schein, 1992 p16-27.
[17] Such revelations are particularly common after excessive drinking has occurred, commonly in the second or third "stages" of these gatherings because alcohol can then become an excuse for having said things not appropriate.
[18] Ott 1998 and Ehrlich 1994, p.495 as Cited in Redeau-Ogle 1998.
[19] Jablin, 1987 .p.693.
[20] Jablin and Krone, 1987.
[21] Schein, 1968 as cited in Jablin 1987, p.693.
[22] Darling, 1986 as cited in Bullis and Bach 1989.
[23] Bullis and Bach 1989.
[24] Jablin, 1987 p.696.

V. When the rubber hits the road: Communication dilemmas for *gaijin*

Sometimes it appears that Japan, more than any other country with which we have substantial economic and cultural exchange, is rooted in ideologies and world views that, to return to our discussion in section III, are "alien" to us. This reality has presented itself time and time again as Western diplomats and business leaders have attempted to negotiate foreign policy, business contracts, and economic and military agendas. For these leaders a recurring question emerges: "How shall we best communicate with the Japanese?" Discussing specific Japanese communication patterns and values that you are likely to encounter is a daunting task in anything short of a long book. For this reason, I will highlight a number of the concepts and patterns that I think are the most relevant. For those presented earlier, I'll go into a bit more depth. Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive and similarly, the issue presented in the Preface of this paper regarding taking a holistic approach to understanding Japanese culture and communication is a serious one and is particularly worth revisiting briefly in this final section. So, before launching into a serious of generalizations, let me begin this section by taking a moment to hoist some final cautionary flags in the air.

Perhaps the greatest danger in creating overviews such as this paper is that they engender a sense of cultural unanimity to the individuals, in this case Japanese, which the work is attempting to generalize. While it may be true that Japan is one of the most ethnically homogenous societies on earth, it is certainly not true that all Japanese think and act alike. Although that sounds obvious, such assumptions insidiously creep into many foreigners' conceptualization of the Japanese. As suggested earlier, this is driven by the proliferation of studies that generalize the actions of the Japanese, the simple need

to find a manageable way to understand cultural differences, and a sense from the Japanese themselves about the cultural uniformity of the country.

While there is much to say for the cultural uniformity of the Japanese relative to other countries, it cannot be understated that ultimately, as is the case anywhere in the world, the perspectives, values, and actions of *individuals* and their own sense of culture, are extremely varied. Indeed, it is this diversity that will come to bear equal weight with group norms, if not more so, when conducting business as a foreigner in Japan; a point many successful and established *gaijin* in Japan will attest to.[1] So now, I will hop from topic to topic with the progression being that which I felt created a smooth flow of information, an order that is not necessarily structured from the most important to the least.

Honorific Language

To the perceptive foreigner it becomes quickly clear that one of the primary considerations a Japanese individual makes when communicating is the status of the person with whom they are talking. They then appropriately adjust their communication style in a manner much more dramatic than that to which we are commonly accustomed in the United States. The Japanese adjustment in style often involves the use of honorific language congruent to the respect that is socially mandated by the other's status. Women, for example, may shift into *onnakotoba*, a version of the Japanese language that is reserved for them and is considered more polite and less "rough" than that commonly used by men.[2] The shift may also determine how long and deep one bows or to what degree one is likely to lend a dissenting opinion. The issue regarding disagreements is, of

course, very relevant to intercultural communication exchanges because, as we will discuss in more depth later, the status of the other party dictates how much a Japanese individual actively engages in conflict resolution.

In his book *With Respect to the Japanese* John Condon explains that as Westerners we rarely alter our common references to one another even though two conversationalists may differ in age, gender, and occupation. "I am *I* no matter who you are, and you are *you* no matter who I am."[3] This is unequivocally *not* the case in Japan. The Japanese, for instance, have at least 10 words that might be equivalent to the English "I", and another 10 for "you" depending on the context of the relationship.

Sometimes these changes are subtle and may be difficult for the *gaijin* to discern. Unless the you are sensitive to the importance of these language shifts, and willing to incorporate them, at least to a small degree (particularly if you are involved in a long-term relationship) you may unknowingly be offending your Japanese colleague. Because Japanese know that Americans have a difficult time understanding such subtitles this is perhaps slightly less important in one on one conversations. In group settings however, small gestures from you may go a long way in demonstrating your integrity and sincerity. You may be seen as working within the social structure of Japan and preserving the face of your Japanese colleague whose integrity is partially on display given their choice of you as a partner.

The shift in language may also determine how long and deep one bows. Fortunately for Americans, most Japanese do not expect foreigners to bow when greeting and are much more comfortable shaking hands since an inappropriate bow from a *gaijin*, in the presence of other Japanese colleagues can prove embarrassing. The honorific shift

is particularly important in negotiation settings the status of the other party dictates how much a Japanese individual actively or outwardly disagrees with the other.

Seeing the social structure of communication

As has been stated throughout this paper, Japan is a society that has a high degree of social structure and is accordingly oriented around significant hierarchies. As we have seen, this fact has been clear throughout Japanese history and is significantly informed by Confucian traditions that emphasize social order and respect. The influential Japanese scholar Edwin Reischauer believes that this tradition is, in fact, at the heart of their culture and has more influence on them than "any other of the traditional religions or

The all-important Meshi ritual

The exchange of business cards or *meshi* in Japan is a very important one to master. If anyone tells you it is not so important given the internationalization of Japan, they are wrong. It is not uncommon for cards to be exchanged even before people say hello to one another. The proper way to accept a card is standing with no obstacles between you and your partner and with both hands. You should then study the card for a moment in order to understand the person's position in the firm. This will then give a gauge as to how long or deep to bow, and how much time you should spend interacting with this individual relative to others. If a greeting has not already taken place it is fully appropriate after cards have been exchanged and studied.

Luckily for Americans, many Japanese with international experience have the front of their cards in Japanese and the back in English. It will be well worth your time and money to find someone to translate your cards similarly. On Japanese cards the company and person's position will often be printed most prominently. Additionally it is common for the family name to be printed first and in capital letters, before the given name. On English cards however, it is becoming increasingly common for the given name to be first. If you have a Japanese side of your card, present that.

During the meeting you should place your new cards on the table in front of you, preferably in rank order. The important things to remember are:
1) Do not accept the card casually and then stick it in you wallet or pocket – that is very crude.
2) Do not forget to pay some attention to the card, even if only for a moment and even if you cannot read it.
3) Do not forget to pick up your cards when the meeting is over.
4) Your card should be in neat order, preferably kept in a specific case.

These are small gestures that go a long way in Japan because *meshi* are taken very seriously since they are a fundamental guidepost that orders conversation. It is always difficult to recover from a poor start so get it right the first time.

philosophies."[4] The complexity of communication in Japan, including the honorific shifts just mentioned, quickly become obvious to foreigners as they struggle to understand the subtle nuances within the Japanese language. These variances signify degrees of respect, acceptable behavior, and social structures that are very unfamiliar to most Americans. Dean Barnlund commented on these differences in a prominent article entitled "The Public and Private Self in Communicating with Japan." Barnlund states: "Nearly all communication in Japan takes place within an elaborate and vertically organized social structure. Everyone has a distinct place within this framework".[5] In the family setting for example, given names are rarely used to address one another. Instead, words such as *oto-san* for father, *oka-san* for mother, *chonan* for first son, *chojo* for first daughter, *jinan* for second son, and *jijo* for second daughter are typically used.

When negotiations and conflict arises between Japanese individuals, and between Japanese and foreigners, communication styles are directly related to aforementioned degrees of status. A woman, regardless of ethnicity, would likely be assumed to defer to the wishes of the male in Japan if the conflict arose in a public setting. This assumption is so strong, in fact, that a conflict may transpire so smoothly as to appear invisible to the uninformed, foreign observer. Many Japanese men, especially those who are presently middle aged or those who have been raised in a conservative family or who have had little experience negotiating with foreigners, would likely have difficulty dealing with a female, Western colleague that is publicly recognized in a position of equal status.

Ura or "back – stage" setting in communication and conflict

Japanese interpersonal conflict does not generally occur in public.[6] In essence, open confrontation in Japan marks the breakdown of social harmony, a most highly cherished ideal and achievement.[7] This is due to the fact that the Japanese do not feel it is appropriate to display much emotion because of how such behavior may impact one's reputation. This belief has a dramatic impact on the Japanese attitude toward the appropriate manner in which to communicate disagreements.

The degree to which it is considered socially appropriate to express conflict in public and engage in open argumentation is, of course, also fundamentally culturally defined. In Spanish, Latin American, and Middle Eastern cultures for example, vigorous discussions and open, emotional debates are considered appropriate and would not necessarily signify the breaking of a close relationship. Openness of this sort may, in fact, be considered a sign of trust and friendship. The Japanese, at the other end of the spectrum, would typically consider such displays very inappropriate and a threat to the social harmony that is so important in daily interactions. The Japanese have tightly demarcated limits of acceptability in terms of where such disagreements are displayed. The United States could be said to fall somewhere between these two extremes.

In order for you to understand the communication of a key discussion that you feel may have conflict or disagreement present, you must look far beyond a physical, spatial comprehension of the "setting." You should ask yourself: how do these party members draw a psychological construct about this setting? Is this setting adequately private and discreet so as to be considered truly *ura* (back stage), or is it instead *omote* (implying open, visible, and in front)? Ishida Takeshi explains this distinction at length

and combines it with Doi Takeo's concept of *uchi* and *soto,* mentioned throughout this paper, to create a conceptual scheme that may prove useful to you in such circumstances. Doi's terms are fundamentally important to understand since they form a significant part of the values that govern the unwritten orders of Japanese society and interaction. Again, in essence, to be *uchi* implies that you are part of the individual's "in" group of relations and thus are accorded more respect and devotion. Examples would be one's family members, work groups, fellow company employees and to a certain degree, close business associates. Conversely, to be *soto* would mean that you are marked as an outsider.

Ishida explains that if the disagreement took place in a *omote-uchi* setting, no conflict should exist and thus confrontation would be shameful because traditionally, Japanese culture does not allow for open conflict between close individuals. If, on the other hand, the relationship present was considered *omote-soto*, then the conflict would be recognized as public as well as the fact that conflict exists with an "outsider." Thus, in order to save one's face, a commonly acceptable solution is to make no concessions and engage in what at times could be a highly visible conflict.

Similarly, if a disagreement evolves in a closed, discreet, non-public setting with

The best seat in the house

If you are hosting a meeting with a Japanese group, the highest-ranking person should be seated away from the door, preferably with the best view in the room of either artwork or an attractive window scene. Serve coffee or preferably tea. You do not need to ask if they want it. Automatically getting the drinks for them demonstrates sincerity and releases them from the feeling of being demanding if you ask them to decide. If you are hosted in Japan the reverse seating arrangement should be true. If you are seated closest to the door it could be strategic placement to help end a meeting quickly and with minimum discomfort, a bad sign for you and your proposals.

Source: *Japanese Business Etiquette* by Diana Rowland. 1993 Warner Books

a member of one's "in-group" (*ura-uchi*) then conflict would be acknowledged but typically resolved implicitly, without direct confrontation. Finally, if one's dispute was *ura-soto* (back-stage with an outsider), then it would be considered appropriate to negotiate and mediate differences provided that neither party would loose face.[8] The use of intermediaries in such circumstances as these is very common in Japan. A person in such a role must have a careful understanding of these concepts in order to determine what are appropriate expectations for resolution and in order to predict and manage to what degree the participants would be involved and committed to resolving the situation.

Groupism

To reiterate a point made several times thus far: personal bonds that can be trusted make up the core of the Japanese life.[9] While the same could be said of many cultures, exhaustive studies have shown how Western culture places a great deal of importance on the development of the individual who is able to adapt, survive and succeed independent of the group. For the Japanese, group affiliation may be one of the most significant means by which individuals cope with a world-view that is grounded in *relativism* as discussed in our historical discussion of borrowing. Moral and spiritual codes, for example, tend to be less tightly defined than in Western culture. Life, for the Japanese, is often viewed as uncertain and vague, with appropriate behavior, including communication, entirely dictated by the relativity of a given situation and social group.[10] Group affiliation is viewed as essential to comfort and even to identity, rather than as one choice among many and contingent on one's personality or circumstances at the moment. In contrast,

Americans tend towards the atomistic view that you start with individuals and compose groups from there.[11]

Tendencies toward groupism have direct bearing on communication because communicative exchanges are fundamentally connected with, and perhaps synonymous to, concepts of individuality and the primacy of self. In the United States, as in Japan we often have many varying degrees of mutuality based on the intimacy of a given relationship or the degree to which one's needs are contingent on the 'other.' In Japan, however, these degrees are, to come back, more closely related to whether the "other" is *uchi* or *soto*.

The distinction between the United States' and Japan's sense of the individual is, in fact, one of the most commented aspects of our cross-cultural exchanges and was carefully articulated in Hofstede's land-breaking study mentioned earlier.[12] In short, it represents the contrast between a country that is individualistically oriented with one that is collectivist oriented. Intercultural communication scholar Stella Ting-Toomey's work on "face"-negotiation presents that this distinction is the primary cultural dimension which informs communication styles regardless of nationality.[13]

Power sharing and hierarchies

Though mentioned throughout our section on history, particularly during the Tokugawa era and during our discussion of organizational culture, the issue of power is worth another reminder here at the end of the paper. Power, as associated with status distinctions or hierarchies, is also viewed differently by Americans and Japanese. The Americans, especially in an organizational context, tend to see hierarchies as expressions

of power and control. Those on the lower end of the hierarchy often have strong hesitancies about anyone having power over them. Comparatively, the Japanese typically view hierarchies as a necessary means to harmonious group intimacy and cooperation – or at least the pretense of it. The equal balance of power is almost non-existent in Japanese society. This has direct bearing on the manner in which individuals communicate to each other because it impacts their willingness to share opinions openly, their deference to authority, and their perception of the organizational culture to which they are a part and to which they are simultaneously a player and creator. The existence of equally competing powers is a most unstable situation Japan. Stability always resides in imbalance between power where one dominates the others.[14] Justification of such a system can even be explained in light of Confucian values.

Sensitivity and "Face"

It is often commented that Japanese individuals are easily offended. For the Japanese, every communication event has the potential to either "support or violate" one's sense of face. In low context cultures (LCC) such as the United States, respect is, according to Ting-Toomey, akin to a "commodity which can be explicitly bargained and counter-bargained for."[15] He continues by stating that in high context cultures (HCC) such as Japan, "face" is a "psychological-affective construct" that is closely connected to concepts such as honor, shame, and duty.

Because honor is connected to maintaining the other party's "face" as much as one's own, the Japanese are likely to communicate to each other and in negotiations with foreigners in such a manner as to not embarrass the other individual. Thus it may be

difficult for the *soto* foreigner to understand the true feelings of their colleague if the feelings may, in fact, be critical of the exchange. As mentioned previously, commitment to "face" often entails submitting to the desires of the other, especially if that person holds a position of higher status. To the American, this may seem an unfortunate sacrifice. To the Japanese however, that is just the way things are done in a society where hierarchy is so important and esteemed. Understanding the wishes of top management is, in some cases, more important than the wishes of the negotiator. As a foreigner, it is important to remember this and to recognize that often, Japanese participants purposely strive *not* to get what they secretly want.

Ambiguity

The often ambiguous nature of communication which is so prevalent in Japan is, in fact, considered a trademark of most high context cultures.[16] In essence, the Japanese often communicate via feelings and non-verbal cues which foreigners may be unaccustomed or not perceptive to. Communicating "through the belly" a process called *hareige* or through what Westerners would term "gut-instincts" is an important part of Japanese society.[17] This is an important communicative process because Japanese are continuously caught between the realities of *tatemae* and *honne*.[18] As mentioned in Section IV, *tatemae* refers to the principles or standards by which a person is bound, at least outwardly, in a public setting. This reality is inextricably tied to organizational goals, hierarchical relationships, and the preservation of face. *Honne*, in contrast, refers to a person's "real" or inner wishes. As a result, the Japanese are keenly aware of non-verbal communications.

This communication style necessitates interpretation and is particularly challenging to foreigners. This is a tall order and a skill that only consistently comes with time and the development of a more personal relationship with the colleague; a relationship that is based more in trust and mutual respect. For the Japanese, the process of interpretation is so commonplace that it becomes an instinctive behavior.[19] Even the simple task of saying "no" becomes complex in Japan as evidenced by Keiko Ueda's 1974 work entitled: "Sixteen ways to avoid saying "No" in Japan.

Avoidance

In essence, many communication scholars have concluded that Japan is a nation that upholds *avoidance* as a highly desirable conflict management skill. To constantly engage in open conflict, as we do in the United States, would disrupt the social harmony of the nation and would bring shame upon individuals who, through such displays, would be considered immature, selfish, and rude.

In a study on conflict management among close friends, Itsuso Shirono discovered that Japanese individuals often resolve a conflict by merely accepting the situation "as it is" or by one party member relinquishing control and defaulting to the other's desires in order to maintain the accepted hierarchy. Americans, on the other hand, tend to resolve conflict by rational decisions reached, in part, after all members have actively engaged in the process and both exchanged and upheld their individual opinions.[20] Similarly, Ishida comments that traditional Japanese processes leave a great deal of conflict altogether unexpressed and therefor unresolved.[21] In the process, the

individual often forgoes satisfaction, and the group harmony remains apparently unruffled.[22]

Suggesting that conflict is often avoided or unresolved in Japan carries with it a negative perception when interpreted through Western models of communication. In Western thought we often assume that conflict, so administered, may result in "destructive spirals of negativity" and classic "avoid-criticism" behavior.[23] While this may be true in many circumstances, such behavior may be dramatically less common in Japan than in the United States because cultural norms in Japan encourage the suppression of individual desires and emotions, upholding instead the notion that an individual may not always gain, as so desired, and that the acceptance of this reality is virtuous and honorable. In other words, to think of Japanese conflict resolution preferences in terms of "avoidance" is itself a very Western, ethnocentric view.

Physiological Responses

For the Japanese, physiological responses do not lie. For example, a Japanese may be more aware of the degree to which one's face is flushed or the hidden meaning behind one's posture than an American individual may be. They believe that physical changes do not constitute an obtuse code.[24] These changes *are* something instead of standing for something else as Occidentals may assume. In the United States, for instance, we often feel that we get to know one another through the information we willingly disclose regarding our likes and dislikes, our upbringing, our occupational and recreational pursuits, etc. In Japan however, there is a deeper appreciation for what you learn from an individual's mere presence. The Japanese, like Native Americans, for

instance, may believe that you can tell more about an individual from what he *does not* say rather than what he does.

Silence

The use of silence as an effective communication style also illustrates the oblique nature of Japanese communication. In comparing the United States and Japan, Barnlund states: "in both countries people differentiate conversationally among intimates, friends, and acquaintances."[25] But the evidence also confirms that the Japanese tend to be more formal and restrained, less talkative and revealing of themselves: the evidence indicates equally that Americans are less formal and more assertive, more talkative and expressive of themselves.

In cross-cultural communication this silence may become a difficult issue. The American individual may interpret silence as a form of rejection or reclusively. He / she may assume that there is a problem with the relationship, the proposal or the negotiation process if the Japanese individual does not outwardly express satisfaction and appears to be disinterested in engaging conversation. Barnlund continues his interpretation of Japanese attitudes toward silence by commenting that: "moments of silence in human encounters do not signal the interruption of communication any more than a rest in music or a pause in dance is devoid of meaning."[26] In Japan it is important to remember that speech and silence are equally valued and complementary forms of communication; each acquires significance from the other and thus, silence is often as eloquent as speech.

Negotiator characteristics

Often, when resolving conflicts, the Japanese employ the services of a third party or "go-between." Historically the most obvious example of the go-between is known as the *nakoudo* who arranges marriages. In a way, the use of a go-between to negotiate business matters or to resolve conflict is an extension of the Japanese tendency toward indirect communication. Trust is very important in the process of third party assistance in Japan, as it is in America. How this issue manifests itself in the two countries is, however, distinct.

In the United States we employ the use of an independent third party who is often not directly connected to the deal or the conflict. In Japan however, the inclusion of a stranger into this very important and, in the case of conflict, private process would not be considered. To do so could create an unnecessary loss of face and would be exposing ones private self to the public world. Thus, the preferred third party in, for example, an organizational dispute would be the immediate superior to the disputants.

In the United States, a superior's power and presumed (or actual) partiality would render them a poor negotiator or mediator. But in Japan greater acceptance of hierarchy, and the conception of hierarchy as serving the group rather than those at the top, makes superiors the natural third parties in conflict situations. Furthermore, the fact that a superior would be considered *uchi* (part of the inner circle) may help to reframe the disagreement situation "from difference to commonality."[27]

In a traditional Japanese setting the "face" of the mediator (again, often a superior) is often at stake in negotiation and conflict resolution settings because the

resolution of the conflict reflects his authority over the disputants and his ability to maintain the primacy of group concerns. In this light, the "face" of the mediator/negotiator serves to reinforce the resolution and party members are likely to abide to agreements out of a sense of duty, or *on*, to the mediators reputation. If the mediator was a neutral, third-party member from outside the group (*soto*), as is typically the case in the United States, such agreements would have dramatically less merit.[28]

The negotiator will play a key role in the success of the agreement if he / she approaches the entry phase of the mediation from a relationship building point of view. Because trust is so important to the Japanese, it is imperative that this period be given the utmost priority. In a sense, the Western commitment to trust, and confidentiality in the mediation process bodes well for a cross-cultural transfer when dealing with contentious situations. Care must be taken by the negotiator not to rush the relationship-building process and jump into the traditional Western behavior of "getting down to business." Even the mere physical arrangement of the negotiation space must be carefully considered as Japanese individuals will likely be insulted and intimidated by the "face-to-face" style typically employed in the West.

Similarly, the Western negotiator needs to be sensitive to the fact that the Japanese are far less likely than Americans to be concerned with the details and technicalities of an agreement, a point alluded to in several places of this paper. For the Japanese, broad concepts, trust, values, and the gut-feelings behind a relationship are far more important. The agreement lives in the personal, group relations established during the mediation / negotiation exchange and in the unfolding history of cooperation.[29]

Conclusion

Japanese culture, like any other, is rich and dynamic. Because of the interconnectedness of the world at the turn of the 21st century and in particular, U.S. and Asian political, social, and economic interactions, having a strong base of cross-cultural understandings is critical. Yet the differences between many of the central components of Japanese and American culture are significant and intercultural communication in this context can be extremely confusing to Americans and Japanese alike. While English is increasingly becoming the international language of business and the economic and organizational pulls of globalization are creating many shared managerial practices across national boarders, local preferences and cultural orientations remain at the heart of international business. The need for cross cultural sensitivity and preparation has never been higher.

This work has attempted to compress numerous topics, from communication, to history, to economics, to organizational culture, to religion; each worthy of numerous lengthy books themselves and a lifetime of study and experience. Still, sojourners to Japan must begin somewhere. Many look to quick, overview works that explain specific communication contexts. While we have looked at such scenarios, the historical and cultural introductions presented here have gone much beyond the limitations of the "10 minute manager" approach to deciphering cultural differences. They will allow you a much richer understanding of the fascinating culture you are encountering.

The journey will be frustrating and trying yet, with the right attitude, it will also be undeniably rewarding. It will provide you with a process not only to understand

another culture but perhaps most importantly, it will also provide you with a priceless occasion to learn more of yourself and your culturally informed values and worldviews. You will be able to see them through an entirely new lens. The success or failure of a business venture will be determined primarily by preparation, pace (Don't rush such processes in Japan!), personal connections, cultural flexibility and sensitivity, *and* a deep commitment to resolving differences while maintaining the integrity of both your values and your organization's needs.

Through this reading you have been exposed to many facets of Japanese culture and a solid foundation has been set. Now, take time to consider other readings that will expand your knowledge base - including quick read primers that have lists of do's and don'ts - since you can cast them into broader cultural and historical contexts.

Suit up and dive in. The journey awaits. *GAMBATE*!![30]

Suggested Readings:

- Perhaps the most comprehensive, accurate, and scholarly work specifically relating to Japanese communication is: Communicative styles of Japanese and Americans: Images and Realities. By Dean Barnlund, 1989 Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California.

- With Respect to the Japanese: A Guide for Americans. By John C. Condon, 1984. Intercultural Press Inc.

- For succinct summaries of key concepts driving the hidden culture of Japanese business, including an interesting closing section of key words relevant to business, read: Japanese Etiquette & Ethics in Business. By Boye DeMente, 1993, NTC Business Books, Lincolnwood, Illinois.

- Communication in Japan and the United States. William Gudykunst, (Ed) 1993. State University of New York Press, Albany

- Conflict and its Accommodation: Omote-ure and Uchi-soto Relations.By Ishida, T. In E. Krauss., T. Rohlen., & P. Steinhoff. (Eds.), Conflict in Japan. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii, 1984. 16-38.

---

[1] For more on the diversity of Japanese culture as well as an articulate and well researched challenge to the holistic and generalized approach to viewing Japan, and its group orientation in particular, see Mouer and Sugimoto's 1986 work: *Images of Japanese Society* (KPI Publishers, London).
[2] Orie, 1995 p29.
[3] Condon, 1984 p11
[4] Reishauer, 1995 204.
[5] Barnlund, 1989 p38
[6] Morgan n.d. p10
[7] Lebra, 1986.
[8] For more information on these distinctions see: Ishida, T. "Conflict and its Accomodation: Omote-ure and Uchi-soto Relations" In *Conflict in Japan* as well as Doi, Takeo's. *Amae no kozo: The Anatomy of Dependence.*
[9] Hanami, 1984 p107-135
[10] See also Reischauer, 1995 pp140-148.
[11] Morgan, n.d.; Condon, 1984; Cathcart & Cathcart, 1988
[12] For additional reading on this subject see Bond & Forgas, 1984; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Hofstede & Bond, 1984
[13] Ting-Toomey, S. "Intercultural Conflict Styles: A Face-Negotiation Theory." *Theories in Intercultural Communication.*
[14] Nakane, C. 1970. p53.
[15] Ting-Toomey, 1988 p225
[16] Ting-Toomey, 1988 p225
[17] Reischauer, 1995. p136
[18] Befu 1980.

[19] Condon 1884, also Morgan n.d. p10.
[20] Shirono, 1982 192-212.
[21] Ishida, 1984.
[22] Morgan n.d. p.9.
[23] Wilmot, 1998 p.41-45.
[24] Barnlund, 1989 p.124.
[25] Barnlund, 1989 p. 118.
[26] Barnlund, 1989 p. 141.
[27] Morgan n.d. p.11-12.
[28] Condon 1984; Campbell; 1984.
[29] Morgan n.d. p. 15.
[30] *Gambate*! is a common phrase of encouragement in Japanese. It is full of energy and used in good sprit to cheer another on. Its closest equivalent in English would be "do your best" but it goes much deeper to include empathy for your effort, a sharing of energy – "we're with you", and a reminder the only way to succeed is, to use a marketed phrase, is to "just do it."

Works Cited

Allison, G. D. (1999). *The Columbia Guide to Modern Japanese History*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Barnlund, D. C. (1975). *Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States*. Tokyo: The Simul Press.

Barnlund, D. C. (1989). *Communicative styles of Japanese and Americans: Images and Realities*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Befu, H. (1977). Social Exchange. *Annual review of Anthropology,* Volume 6.

Bond, M., & Forgas, J. (1984). Linking person perception to behavior intention across cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 15, 337-353.

Boyle, J.H. (1993). *Modern Japan, The American Nexus*. San Diego CA: Harcourt Brace College.

Bullis C., & Bach B. (1989, summer). Socialization Turning Points: An Examination of Change in Organizational Identification. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*. 53, 273-293.

Campbell, J. C. (1984). Policy conflict and its resolution within the governmental system. In E.S. Krauss, T.P. Rohlen, & P. G. Steinhoff (Eds.), *Conflict in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii. 294-334.

Cathcart, D., & Cathcart, R. (1988). Japanese Social Experience and Concept of Groups. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter. (Eds.), Intercultural Communication: A Reader 5th Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. 186-192.

Carmody, D.L., & Carmody, J.T. (1988). *How to live well: ethics in the world religions*. Wadsworth Publishers. 160-181(Japanese Ethics).

Chen, G., & Chung , J. (1994, spring). The Impact of Confucianism on Organizational Communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 42, 93-105.

Cheney, G. (1999). *Values at Work: Employee Participation Meets Market Pressure at Mondragón.* Ithica: Cornell University Press.

Condon, J.C. (1984). *With Respect to the Japanese: A Guide for Americans*. Intercultural Press Inc.

Cox, K. R. (1997). *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the power of the local.* Guilford Press.

Dale, P. N. (1986). *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

DeMente, B. (1993). *Japanese Etiquette & Ethics in Business*. Lincolnwood, Il: NTC Business Books.

Doi, T. (1974). *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd.

Dower, J. (1999). *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WW II.* W.W. Norton & Company.

Ehrlich, C.J. (1994 fall). Creating an employer-employee relationship for the future. *Human Resource Management*, 33.

Frank, A.G. (1998). *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. University of California Press.

Fujimura-Fanselow, K., & Kameda, A. (Eds.), 1995. *Japanese Women.* New York: The Feminist Press.

Gibney, F. (Ed.), (1998). *Unlocking the Bureaucrat's Kingdom*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press.

Goldman, A. (1994). Communication in Japanese Organizations. In R. L. Wiseman & R. Shuter (Eds.), *Communication in Multinational Organizations*. Sage Publications.

Gudykunst, W. B. (Ed.), (1993). *Communication in Japan and the United States*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1992). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (2nd ed.). New York: McGrawHill, Inc.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Nishida, T. (1984). Individualism and cultural influences on uncertainty reduction. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 23-36.

Gudykunst, W.B., Stewart, L.P., & Ting-Toomey, S. (Eds.), (1985). *Communication, Culture, and Organizational Processes.* Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications

Hall, E. T. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Intercultural Press.

Hanami, T. (1984). Conflict and its resolution in industrial relations and labor law. In E.S. Krauss, T.P. Rohlen, & P. G. Steinhoff (Eds.), *Conflict in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

Harner, Stephen M. (2000). *Japan's Financial Revolution and how American firms are profiting*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Helweg . M.D. (July/August 2000). Japan: A Rising Sun? *Foreign Affairs*. 26-39.

Henshall, K. (1999) *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hodgson, J.D., Sanon, Y., & Grahm, J.L, (2000). *Doing Business in a New Japan*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related values.* Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hofstede, G. & Bond, M., (1988).Confucius and Economic Growth: New Trends in Culture's Consequences. *Organizational Dynamics* 16, 4-21.

Ishida, T. (1984). Conflict and its Accommodation: Omote-ure and Uchi-soto Relations. In E.S. Krauss, T.P. Rohlen, & P. G. Steinhoff (Eds.), *Conflict in Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii. 16-38.

Iwao, S. (1993). *The Japanese Woman, Traditional Image and Changing Reality.* New York: The Free Press.

Jablin, F. (1987). "Organizational entry, assimilation, and exit." In F.M. Jablin, L.L. Putnam, K. H Roberts, & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective.* Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Jablin, F & Krone, K. (1987). Organizational Assimilation. In Berger, C & Chaffee S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Communication Science.*

Jandt, F. (1995). *Intercultural Communication: An Introduction.* Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Asahi Shinbun: *Japan Almanac 2000.* (1999) Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., Ltd.

Japan: Profile of a Nation. (1994). Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd.

Johnson, H. J. (1991). *Dispelling the Myth of Globalization.* New York: Praeger Publishers.

Keiko, U. (1974). Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying "No" in Japan. In J. C. Condon & M. Saito (Eds.), *Intercultural Encounters with Japan: Perspectives from the International Conference on Communication Across Cultures, International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan: July 1972.* Tokyo: The Simul Press. 184-192.

Kondo, D. (1990). *Crafting Selves: power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lebra, T. S. (1992). *Japanese Social Organization*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Lebra, T.S. (1986). Compensative justice and moral investment among Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans. In: T.S. Lebra & W.P. Lebra, (Eds,). *Japanese culture and behavior: Selected Readings*. Honolulu: The University of Hhawaii. 43-61.

Martin, H.S., & Sachumann, H. (1997). *The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy & Prosperity*. New York: Zed Books Ltd.

McCormak, F. (1973). *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*. New York: M.E. Sharpe

Melville, I. (1999). *Marketing in Japan*. Boston: Butterworth Heinemann.

Morgan, S. (n.d.). *Japanese Culture and American Mediation Techniques: Conflict Communication*. Unpublished manuscript. The University of Montana. Missoula.

Mulgan, A. (July/August 2000). Japan: A Setting Sun? *Foreign Affairs*.

Nakane, C. (1983). IE *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*. 3:259-261. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd.

Nakane, C. (1970). *Japanese Society*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Ohame, K. (1991). *The Borderless World*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Ohinata, M. (1995).The Mystique of Motherhood: A key to understanding Social Change and Family Problems in Japan. Timothy Phelan, Trans. In: K. Fujimura-Fanselow & A. Kameda (Eds.), *Japanese Women*. New York: The Feminist Press, 183-197.

Ott, J.S. (1989). *The Organizational Culture Perspective*. Chicago: The Dorsey Press.

Ouchi, W. G. (1981). *Theory Z: How American Business can meet the Japanese Challenge*. Menlo Park CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Redeau-Ogle, M.J. (1998). *Organizational Culture*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Montana. Missoula.

Reischauer, E. I. (1995). *The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity*. Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (Eds). (1976). *Intercultural communication: A reader*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.

Schein. E. H. (1992). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Schein. E.H. (1968). Organizational socialization and the profession of management. *Industrial Management Review*, 9, 1-16.

Shirono I. (1982). Decision-Making: A Cross-Cultural Perspective. *Communication*. Volume 7.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural Conflict Styles: A Face-Negotiation Theory. In Y. Kim., & W. Gudykunst. (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication* Newberry Park, CA: n.p.,

Yamada, H. (1997). *Different Games, Different Rules: Why Americans and Japanese Misunderstand Each Other*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yoshizumi, K. (1995). Marriage and Family: Past and Present. In K. Fujimura-Fanselow., & A. Kameda (Eds.), *Japanese Women*. New York: The Feminist Press. 183-197.

Wilmot, W., & Hocker, J. (1998). *Interpersonal Conflict*. Boston: McGraw Hill.