Rational Japanese

A Guide to Understanding Ordinary Japanese Behavior

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Introduction

> *The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unassertive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways.*
>
> Ruth Benedict

There is an extensive literature that describes Japanese society and culture as unique, inherently different from those of the rest of the world. Ruth Benedict was one of the pioneers who tried to explain the psychological and behavioral differences between Japanese and Westerners by using dichotomous classifications. By labeling Japan as a "shame culture," and the West as a "guilt culture," Benedict focused her documentation on the uniqueness of Japan, but failed to make a comparative analysis of the shame *and* guilt psychologies together, which are both found in Japan and other cultures. Even though her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* invited many criticisms, it seems to have inspired many other observers of Japanese culture to focus their studies on the uniqueness of Japan. For example, Japan was characterized as a "*tate shakai* (vertical society)," and its hierarchical relationships were described and contrasted against horizontal relationships in the Western culture. Other "unique" characteristics of Japanese culture were described by using such concepts as *wa* (harmony), *groupism* (vs. individualism in the West), and *amae* (emotional need for dependence).

By emphasizing uniqueness, many studies of contemporary Japan contributed to creating and reproducing stereotypes of the Japanese national character. For example, Japanese workers were characterized as group-oriented, harmonious, loyal, and cooperative, in contrast to American workers who were portrayed as individualistic, independent, self-assertive, and confrontational. And then those characteristics of Japanese attitudes and behaviors were attributed to the workers' "unique" traditional values and beliefs. We often hear tautological arguments such as: Japanese are harmonious because of their emphasis on the traditional value of *wa* (harmony).

Japanese culture is unique only in the sense that every culture is unique. Japanese values, behaviors, and institutions may seem more or less "unique" when compared to other specific cultures. In many respects, the Japanese are different from other peoples, but there is nothing "inscrutable" or "enigmatic" about Japanese behaviors that intrinsically rejects theoretical or scientific explanation. Japanese society is comparable. It can be compared to other societies so that

differences and similarities can be observed or discovered. Japanese behaviors are just as explicable and predictable as other peoples' behaviors.

In addition to the comparability of Japanese culture, "rationality" is another assumption that is made in this book—an assumption that is explicitly or implicitly made by many social scientists in their analysis of human behaviors. Rationality here pertains to the *process* of choosing a course of action, and not to personal values and preferences. People's values and preferences are considered neither rational nor irrational. Rationality by no means indicates universality of values and moral standards. Individuals are rational when they are *consistent* in their attempt to maximize their satisfaction or minimize displeasure, given their preferences. According to this definition, even a serial murderer may be regarded as rational (and somewhat predictable) if he is consistent in his attempt to victimize individuals who have similar profiles.

Rational choices are made on the basis of an individual's best judgment, considering whatever information is available. People make poor judgments and often have to make choices on the basis of inaccurate or inadequate information. Individuals often make choices they later regret. People may fail to achieve their objectives when they receive benefits only in the relatively distant future, while incurring immediate costs. (Consider, for example, the future benefit and the immediate discomfort that a smoker will experience when he or she tries to quit smoking.) People do not always know what they want, and they may act on their emotions. Despite those qualifications, most people are assumed to be rational most of the time; they *consistently try* to make themselves as well-off as possible, given their preferences and the information available. For example, most drivers stop at a red traffic light because that is usually considered a better course of action compared to the alternative, and because the expected benefit of observing the traffic signal exceeds the expected cost, under normal conditions. (To a criminal who is chased by the police, however, running against a red light may well be the rational choice.)

Most Japanese act as rationally as, say, most Americans do. Both Japanese and Americans consistently try to make themselves as well-off as possible, even though their individual preferences and cultural values may differ. Depending on the given situation, Japanese and Americans both act individually or collectively, competitively or cooperatively, formally or informally, spontaneously or cautiously, openly or evasively, and so on. In other words, both act rationally—choosing the best possible course of action, given their preferences and the information available to them. However, individuals with different sets of preferences may make different rational choices, even when they face the same or similar situations. Preferences vary from one individual to another; they may also differ between culturally different populations. For example, it is believed that the average Japanese places a greater value on interdependence in interpersonal relationships than the average American does, even though both live in a world of interdependence.

This book is designed primarily as a guide for Americans to understand ordinary Japanese behavior. It is especially for those people who *want* to

communicate and work better with Japanese. In Part One, I explain how and why Japanese communicate and behave differently from Americans. This is done by comparing the ways in which Japanese and Americans: (1) depend on each other to satisfy their wants and needs, and (2) make distinctions among different people and act on them. I focus my analysis on predictable patterns of Japanese behavior and Japanese communication styles commonly observed among individuals in interpersonal relationships and in public.

Part Two of this book presents fictional cases or stories to illustrate the points that are made in Part One. These cases represent realistic cross-cultural situations that Americans will often encounter when communicating and interacting with Japanese. Part One and Part Two are complementary. Theoretical explanation alone would be too abstract to be helpful in understanding and participating in Japanese culture; and anecdotal examples alone will not lead to better understanding of predictable patterns of Japanese behavior. The realistic cases in Part Two will help not only to understand Japanese behavior, but also to better communicate, deal, and work with Japanese. Each case consists of a description of the main characters and situation, followed by a set of questions to consider, and analysis by the author. These cases are fictions, but are based on real situations the author has experienced and on stories told by colleagues and students, as well as by Japanese and American business people.

PART ONE

An Analysis of Rational Japanese Behavior

1
System, Culture, and Predictable Order

We wish to do whatever we want, without any constraints being imposed on us. But we know that society will fall into anarchy if everyone acts with absolute freedom. People try to limit their own freedom and others', in one way or another, so they can bring some predictable order to society.

In democratic societies, people maintain predictable order by agreeing to limit their freedom, on condition that everybody else does the same. Formal law, to the extent that it is observed, brings predictable order; it insures that individuals are not treated arbitrarily by other individuals or organizations. The traffic law, for example, enables a driver to predict, to a certain extent, a course of action that will be taken by another law-abiding driver. Modern streets would no doubt turn into anarchy without traffic laws. Organizational rules and institutional arrangements also bring some predictable order. They not only protect members from arbitrary treatment by other members, but also provide each member with constraints and incentives to consider in order to make rational choices. The employment contract and job description, for example, make employees act and expect to be treated in certain predictable manners.

Predictable order is brought not only by the system—the formal law, organizational rule, and institutional arrangement—but also by culture; that is, by the informal, unwritten code of conduct, as well as by values and beliefs commonly shared by individuals. Every society has its informal, cultural code of conduct and communication, which is socially given for individuals regardless of their preferences. Such a code may suggest ways in which people treat each other, inquire about and express preferences, demonstrate abilities, compete, compromise, and negotiate new relationships for advantageous results. To the extent that it is observed, such a code decreases uncertainty over human interaction, and makes each person's behavior more predictable. However, commitment to such a cultural code also means that individuals will lose some autonomy or opportunity to use their skills and resources to achieve the upper hand in interpersonal relationships. Most people do not want their actions or manners dictated to them, even though they also don't want to be in a situation where the behavior of others is too unpredictable to make any rational planning. The cultural code developed in society, reflecting its people's values and beliefs, strikes a balance between a decline in autonomy and a gain in predictability. The ways in which such a balance is struck seem to differ from one society to another.

Individuals are born into a society which already has its system and culture. Even though individuals may acquire different sets of values and beliefs, they have to face formal laws and institutional arrangements, as well as cultural codes of conduct, as given at any point of time in their life. Like people's individual values and beliefs, these systems and cultural codes do change over time. At any given point, individuals who make a rational choice consider not only their values and their beliefs but also the constraints and incentives provided by the system and the cultural code of their society.

System and culture are not independent of each other. The legal and political systems in a democratic society, for example, reflect values and beliefs shared by its people, and those systems are also instrumental in shaping people's values and beliefs. However, when we try to understand the predictable nature of the behavior of individuals in a society, it is helpful to analyze separately the relation of predictable behavior with system, as distinguished from culture.

When comparing societies, systemic differences are often easier to identify and understand than are differences in informal, unseen cultural codes and values. When Westerners have difficulty in understanding Japanese behavior, it is often because of their lack of understanding of Japanese cultural code and values, rather than their unfamiliarity with systemic differences. For example, even if a Westerner has read many books on the Japanese system of employment and personnel management, he or she would be puzzled and frustrated once interacting face to face with Japanese at the workplace. In order to understand, and to even predict Japanese behavior, one has to know what key values they share and what cultural code they are expected to observe.

An Interdependent World of Individuals

Most people live in a world of interdependence. Interdependence is the reality of life in human societies, although independence or autonomy may also be emphasized as a cultural value or belief. The word "interdependence" here means the state of being mutually dependent, where (1) an individual's choice affects, or is affected by, another person's choice; or (2) individuals rely on each other to satisfy their wants and needs. In the global economy, for example, high interest rates in one country may affect economic choice in another country or countries. This definition indicates some loss of control or autonomy in individual choice processes. The other definition underscores the reality that no one in society lives sufficiently independent of others to satisfy his or her needs and wants. Individuals depend on others whom they know personally, as well as on those whom they have little or no contact with. Individuals rely, for example, on their family members, friends, and colleagues in interpersonal relationships; and in the market, they depend on invisible producers or consumers.

People in modern market economies benefit a great deal from depending on each other. Individuals are not created equal. They differ in wants and needs, as well as in skills, abilities, and resources. Through the division of labor and the

market, individuals receive an enormous variety of benefits that self-sufficiency cannot possibly provide. The benefits of such dependence in the market economy seem to outweigh the costs to most people, who would not want to live like Robinson Crusoe. In interpersonal relationships as well, individuals depend on others who are different in many respects. For example, small children depend primarily on their parents; but as they grow up they learn to rely on different people, including teachers, friends, spouses, and colleagues so that they can obtain something of value that would not otherwise be obtainable.

The choice of dependence presents an individual both with an opportunity to increase well-being and with an opportunity to lose something of value. One chooses to depend on others for something that cannot be obtained by oneself, or that is more efficiently obtained by reliance on others. An individual may obtain money, food, information, connection, respect, affection, or anything else that he or she values. By depending on others, however, an individual has to give up something of value that would not otherwise be foregone. It may be a certain degree of autonomy or control, a sense of dignity, pride, self esteem, or anything of value that one can keep if one chooses not to depend on others. Rational people try to balance these interests with regard to interdependence and to association with groups.

Much has been said about the Japanese group orientation, their predominant value of group over individual when contrasted to the Western value of individual over group. This dichotomous presentation is erroneous. Group affiliation or activity is not a Japanese monopoly. And no society can exist if individual interests always prevail over the group or the community to which the individual belongs. Rational people balance interests: they try to maximize satisfaction (or minimize displeasure) from group affiliation or interdependence, considering both the benefits and the costs.

Four Types of Attitude toward Interdependence

Although most people live in a world of *inter*dependence, there is no doubt that some people value autonomy or *in*dependence more. Some try to maintain as much autonomy and control as possible in an otherwise interdependent society, while many seem willing to accept choices and actions affected by others. Furthermore, the *nature* of interdependence is important even for those who already acknowledge and value it. Interdependent relationships can be egalitarian (symmetrical) or hierarchical (asymmetrical).

When individuals choose to depend on others to satisfy their needs or wants, they may seek someone who is either different or alike in age, sex, rank, wealth, etc., depending on what they want or need. For example, when Japanese adult women want to have a pleasant conversation in a relaxed, casual, non-competitive atmosphere, they may exclude men from their social gathering. Then, they will not be bothered by the rules and customs they may have to observe if “different”

people are present. In other words, such female friends may seek “equal” or “symmetrical” interdependence.

To satisfy their needs and wants, people also depend on those who are significantly different in age, rank, experience, skill, talent, and so on. For example, when a young, inexperienced Japanese employee needs instruction and advice at his workplace, he will rely on his senior colleagues or his immediate superior. In return, the young worker is expected to show deference and loyalty, which his senior or superior needs in order to effectively carry out his own duties. This interdependence is asymmetrical in the sense that the relationship between the two parties is hierarchical, one being more dependent or dominant than the other.

Individuals can be more or less interdependent, and interdependence can be symmetrical (equal) or asymmetrical (differential or hierarchical). People differ in their willingness to depend (or give up autonomy) and in their willingness to acknowledge hierarchical difference or asymmetrical relationship. Each individual seems to have a unique combination of values assigned both to interdependence and to status or hierarchical difference. Focusing on these differences in the nature and scope of interdependence, I identify four representative types of attitude toward interdependence, types which will be useful for understanding differences in predictable behavior between Japanese and Americans (see Figure 1). These types are denoted as follows: Type A (Autonomous), Type B (Bossy), Type C (Cooperative), and Type D (Differential).

Figure 1. Four Types of Attitude toward Interdependence

		Nature of Interdependence:	
		Equal	Hierarchical
Scope of Interdependence:	Less	**Type A**	**Type B**
	More	**Type C**	**Type D**

Individuals with Type A (Autonomous) attitude value both autonomy and equality in interpersonal relationships. They wish to maintain as much independence as possible, and are willing to respect others’ autonomy as long as their own respect is reciprocated. Type A persons try not to bother others, and expect others to leave them alone. Type A persons may not hesitate to offer help to others, as long as it is absolutely their own choice or freedom to do so. With voluntary action of their own choice, Type A persons feel they will not lose their own autonomy or independence.

Type B (Bossy) persons also value freedom and autonomy; they try to avoid being dependent on others in order to maintain freedom and autonomy. Unlike Type A persons, however, Type B individuals acknowledge or respect hierarchical differences or asymmetrical relationships and try to maximize their independence—by being dominant and having others be dependent on them. They try to obtain or negotiate higher status in interpersonal relationships. Type B persons always want to be in control, and dislike having their values, freedom, and dominance questioned or challenged by others. To them, independence and dominance are synonymous. Type B persons expect to be treated properly, according to the status they believe they have earned.

Type C (Cooperative) persons value interdependence in symmetrical relationships. Acknowledging limitations to individuals' abilities, they are more willing to rely on other equals for mutual security, for assistance, and for a sense of closeness. Type C persons, for example, may not hesitate to ask for directions when lost, while Type B persons may hesitate. Type C persons believe in having an equal opportunity to compete when they have to, and feel uncomfortable in asymmetrical or hierarchical relationships. Unlike Type A, Type C persons value a sense of community, belonging, and involvement; and unlike Type B, they prefer harmony through discussion and compromise to dominance and control from competition and direct confrontation. When wanting others to do or not do something, Type C persons tend to be more indirect than Type B persons—using suggestions rather than orders.

Type D (Differential) persons value interdependence and acknowledge the significance of status or hierarchical order in interpersonal relationships. They value interdependence both in symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. They are willing to rely on individuals, groups, and organizations for mutual security, protection, assistance, companionship, emotional support, sense of belonging, and so on. It is important for Type D persons to make distinctions among individuals in status or hierarchy, and to treat them properly according to such differences. To the extent that people act according to their relative status, such differentiation helps to avoid open confrontation and negotiation of status, and therefore to bring predictable order to their interdependent world. Even those who are higher in status or hierarchy are willing to depend on others for what they need, such as knowledge, information, companionship, and loyalty. Type D persons expect to be treated properly—more than Type B persons do—according to their status relative to others.

Type D persons may be divided into two sub-types: those who are more likely to accept a subordinate status in exchange for relying on others for what they want; and those who are more willing to be depended upon in exchange for enjoying a dominant status. For expediency, let the dominant type in asymmetrical interdependence be denoted by the symbol Type Dx, and the subordinate, by Type Dy.

The four types of people described above will be found in many societies, but each society seems to have varying proportions of the different individual attitudes toward interdependence. The U.S., for example, seems to have more Type A, Type

B, and Type C persons, combined, than it has Type D persons alone. Japan seems to be populated more by Type D individuals than by any other type. Although Type D persons seem to be a majority in Japanese society, it is important to note that there is much more individuality than it may appear among Japan's population of nearly 127 million people. There are significantly different types of individuals in Japan as well as in other parts of the world.

Different types of people often misunderstand and frustrate each other without fully recognizing their differences. They may do so even when they know that they are different. The following illustrations show how different types of individuals might look at each other. I focus on Types B, C, Dx, and Dy. To make it easier to associate the differences, let's call a Type B person, Bob; a Type C person, Cathy; a Type Dx person, Daisuke; and a Type Dy person, Yoko.

1. Type B Bob vs. Type Dx Daisuke. To Daisuke, Bob is independent and dominating, but less status-conscious than Daisuke. To him, Bob is often too confrontational, trying to negotiate status relationships to his advantage. Status is not something negotiable to Daisuke, who often finds Bob not showing enough deference to those who are obviously higher in status. It seems to Daisuke that Bob tends to do things by himself without consulting people who may be affected by his choice or action. Bob also seems more conscious or defensive of the boundaries of his rights, duties, and responsibilities. To Bob, on the other hand, Daisuke often seems indecisive and evasive, concerned too much about consensus, compromise, and harmony. Bob also believes that Daisuke is often too indirect, that he should speak out more, and that he apologizes too often.

2. Type B Bob vs. Type Dy Yoko. Bob finds Yoko more dependent, accommodating, and accustomed to hierarchical relationships than Cathy. Although Bob feels comfortable being dominant and independent, he is sometimes concerned that Yoko relies on him too much. Yoko finds Bob less status-conscious than Daisuke, and inclined to treat her on a more equal basis—even though superficially. Yoko knows that she is willing to rely on Bob, but she wants him to depend more on her, instead of trying to control everything.

3. Type C Cathy vs. Type Dx Daisuke. It seems to Cathy that Daisuke is more inclined than Bob is to accept the idea that a person is affected by the choices of others and has to rely on others. However, she is very uncomfortable with the kind of division of labor that Daisuke takes for granted, which is based more on one's role, place, and status in society than on symmetrical interdependence. To Daisuke, Cathy's emphasis on the egalitarian principle is perplexing, to say the least.

4. Type C Cathy vs. Type Dy Yoko. Cathy is more independent and equality-conscious than Yoko is. Yoko is somewhat envious of Cathy's insistence on symmetrical interdependence, but she also believes that she may emulate Cathy only at a price not easily justified by the benefit. Yoko might have to give up some of the comfort of relying on her partner for her well-being. Cathy feels more comfortable interacting with Yoko than with Daisuke, but sometimes she finds Yoko, even by her standards, too indirect in expressing preferences, and too

concerned about what others think of her. Yoko is more circumspect and indecisive.

The four types of individuals (A, B, C, and D) are representative, or stereotypical. Obviously, not every person fits neatly into a representative type. An individual, for example, may be as interdependent as a Type C person, and more status-conscious, but significantly less so than Type D persons. One may find oneself closer to one type than to the others, or see how uniquely different he or she is from each of the representative types. One may use a single type as a reference point to consider how similar or different he or she will be in terms of attitudes towards interdependence. In other words, one may compare oneself for willingness to depend on each other and for the acknowledgment of status or hierarchical differences. I believe that such comparison will help to decrease misunderstanding and frustration when communicating and dealing with people, whether in the same society or in different cultures.

Distinction, and Bias toward Predictability

People make distinctions between each other and act on such distinctions. We notice differences or make distinctions between ourselves in terms of race, ethnicity, sex, age, role, rank, wealth, and so on. We also acknowledge that individuals differ in talents and abilities, as well as in wants and needs. Such distinctions constitute a basis for human behaviors and interactions, including trade (a mutually beneficial exchange), cooperation, competition, discrimination, exploitation, and control. Difference in sex, for example, is a basis for prostitution (a business transaction, or exploitation), marriage (cooperation and interdependence), or sexual harassment (discrimination and control). Every society has a cultural code for differentiating among people, but each differs in what distinctions it emphasizes. U.S. society seems to place a greater emphasis on differences in individuals' abilities and skills, striking a balance between gain in autonomy and loss in predictability. Japanese society, on the other hand, seems to emphasize status differences; it is biased towards gain in predictability over loss in autonomy.

As individuals grow up, they learn to communicate and interact with others differently, depending on whom they deal with and what settings they are in. For example, children learn at school how to treat their peers and teachers differently. However, beliefs and customs on how to treat different individuals vary from one society to another. Americans are supposed to believe in equalizing, or at least not openly emphasizing, differences in such attributes as race, ethnicity, and gender in interpersonal and business relationships. Although, in reality, some are treated more "equally" than others, such belief and effort are important in the U.S. to maintain unity with racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. In contrast to this egalitarian belief, most Americans emphasize or respect differences in individuals' abilities, talents, and personalities. Type B (Bossy) Americans, for example, will

not hesitate to openly acknowledge and demonstrate individuals' differences in talents and abilities, in order to negotiate status or relationship to their advantage.

In comparison, Japanese are expected to ignore, or not to *openly* emphasize, differences in talents and abilities *among in-group members*, who are regarded as equals. Such "equals" are, for example, students in the same class at the same school, or male colleagues of the same rank at the same workplace. This equal or uniform treatment of "equals" is emphasized in order to preserve superficial harmony, by avoiding open confrontation, competition, or even comparison. This egalitarian belief is to minimize chances for equal in-group members to feel embarrassed, defeated, jealous, or contemptuous. Such in-group members, in reality, do compete with each other in one way or another, but they should not do so directly and ostentatiously. At the workplace, colleagues who show off their talents and abilities are considered not only unsophisticated but also unfit for team work. This principle is not applied, however, to out-group members, or when dealing with people who are different in many other ways.

Although differences in abilities and talents should not be emphasized among "equal" Japanese persons, it is believed that different individuals should be treated properly on the basis of many other differences, such as social status, age, role, and gender. Japanese are expected to communicate and interact with each other differently—in a greater degree and scope than Americans—depending on whom they deal with and what settings they are in. To most Japanese, "different" people means (1) foreigners, and (2) Japanese nationals—other than ethnic minorities such as Koreans, Chinese, and Ainu—who are ethnically and culturally homogeneous but different in status, age, sex, role, etc. Among Japanese nationals, emphasis on such differences is not a matter of who is better than others, but a matter of acknowledging one's proper role or place in society.

Ethnically and culturally, Japanese society is relatively homogeneous, since the population of ethnic minorities is small and these minorities have been assimilated into, or submitted to, the mainstream culture. Paradoxically, this relative homogeneity seems to have made it possible to emphasize status and other differences in interpersonal relationships while maintaining social unity. Without such ethnic and cultural homogeneity, it would be difficult to agree on and maintain elaborate social rules for people to communicate and interact with each other. This constitutes a contrast with the U.S., where ethnic and cultural diversity requires simpler and more universal rules that do not *openly* emphasize differences other than in abilities, talents, and personalities. Differences in race, ethnicity, and gender are dealt with more subtly and discreetly in the U.S. than in Japan.

The Japanese cultural code of differentiating people on the basis of status, age, role, and gender decreases uncertainty during interactions between people. A person is expected to treat or be treated by another in some predictable manner that is based on status and other differences. Type D Japanese are biased in favor of such predictable order, although they know that the price is a loss of some autonomy and a diminishing of individuality. They often feel more comfortable with such differentiation than with the open negotiation or competition for higher status. Such predictable order is conducive to the development of interdependent

relationships. For example, a Japanese boss and his subordinate will find it easier to depend on each other than their American counterparts, because the former will feel more secure in their relationship. The Japanese superior-subordinate relationship is based not only on formal positions or titles but also on seniority, symbolic status hierarchy, and expected roles as benevolent boss and loyal subordinate. They are less likely to negotiate status and to show off their skills and abilities than are their American counterparts, who work in a more openly competitive environment.

Socio-Economic Values

Many observers of Japanese culture, from Ruth Benedict to Chie Nakane and Karel van Wolferen, have argued that the Japanese do not have fundamental values, ideals, or principles, but that they are guided by situational considerations, like *gaiatsu* or foreign pressure. Such an argument for uniqueness of Japan can be refuted by merely citing the rigid Japanese adherence to such principles as the Article 9 of its Constitution, as well as to its government policy to ban on exportation of military hardware. During the Persian Gulf War against Iraq, for example, Japan could not, and did not, participate militarily, despite strong criticism and pressure from the United States. The Japanese government had no choice but to act in accordance with Article 9 of its Constitution, which prohibits "the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes." The question, here, is why so many people think the Japanese are guided only by situational considerations; and why the Japanese themselves fail to articulate their own values and principles to the world outside. In this section, I try to answer these questions by comparing how certain basic socio-economic values are demonstrated in Japan and in the U.S.

"Socio-economic values" here refers to how individuals view the role of the government in the market economy, how much they emphasize social values when striking a balance between individual liberty and communal values, and how they look at their relationships with foreign nations. In order to understand the differences in such values between Japanese and Americans, it will be helpful to review the four attitudes towards interdependence introduced in the previous section.

Type A (Autonomous) persons, who value both autonomy and equality, tend to have a "libertarian" political philosophy. They want to maintain as much independence as possible, and are willing to respect others' autonomy as long as their own is equally respected. Type A persons believe strongly in the individual freedom to make choices by and for themselves—whether economic or social. Concerned more with "government failure" than with "market failure," they believe that the best government is the one that governs the least. Although economically conservative, believing in laissez-faire economics, Type A persons tend to be socially liberal. They may oppose, for example, government interference in what they regard as matters of individual choice, such as abortion, school prayer,

and sexual preference. Type A persons may be in favor of maintaining an adequate self-defense force, and against interfering in the domestic affairs of other nations, but they are likely to oppose expansionism by a foreign nation if they believe that nation may threaten their own independence.

Type B (Bossy) persons, who value independence and acknowledge hierarchical differences, try to establish and maintain autonomy by being dominant and having others be dependent on them. As business entrepreneurs, Type B persons believe in superiority from individual effort and competition, and oppose government regulation if it interferes with their profit maximization. They may opt for government intervention or "capture" regulation if it helps them to compete or dominate in the market. Fiscally conservative and mistrustful of government activism, Type B person prefer a "smaller" government in terms of budget. They are biased in favor of economic efficiency and competition over equality. Socially conservative and not very tolerant of the ideas of others, Type B persons tend to proselytize their own views over individual choice in matters such as abortion, gay rights, or school prayer. In foreign affairs, they advocate strong defense and anti-Communism (or did, before they "won" the Cold War); they want to maintain as much autonomy in international relations as possible, by being superior economically, politically, and militarily.

As political entrepreneurs, Type B individuals believe in exercising an elitist, or paternalistic, strong leadership. If economic individualism is not strong among business entrepreneurs, Type B political entrepreneurs may assert themselves by exercising the economic controls of the state, in much the same way British Conservatives and French Gaulists supported the nationalization of selective industries after World War II.

Type C (Cooperative) persons, who acknowledge limitations to individuals' abilities, value interdependence and equality in human relationships. While emphasizing a sense of community, belonging, and involvement, they value the liberty and the equal right to participate in civic discussion and decision-making. Concerned more with inequality, poverty, and various forms of "market failure" than with "government failure," Type C persons tend to believe in "positive" liberalism, for an active role of government in the economy sympathetic toward affirmative action, social welfare, government jobs, minimum wage, government health care, and environmental protection programs. They may oppose an increase in military spending that is made at the expense of domestic spending. Type C persons tend to be socially "liberal" in the sense of being open to and tolerant of the ideas of others, refraining from imposing their community values over individual liberty. In that respect, they may be pro-choice on abortion, and opposed to legalizing prayer in public schools. Unlike Type A persons, however, Type C persons are more interested in searching for ways to agree on common values, without which agreement the moral fabric of society unravels. In foreign affairs, Type C persons tend to believe in international cooperation and negotiation rather than in direct confrontation and military intervention. They may also be concerned with human rights and poverty in other nations, as well as with pollution of the global environment.

Type D (Differential) persons, who acknowledge the significance of status or hierarchical order, value interdependence both in symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. They believe they need to depend on each other, with individuals performing various expected roles and functions. To Type D persons, it is natural for government to play a significant role in the economy. (This does not necessarily mean a "big" government in terms of budget; perhaps just a greater degree of government control and regulation.) It is important to note, however, that the extent to which government regulation, direction, or planning is appreciated depends on the relative strength of business entrepreneurs competing in domestic and international markets. Generally speaking, the more competitive businesses are, the less appreciative they are of government regulation. Workers and consumers also expect government to provide security and protection. Although Type D persons strike a balance, as other types of persons do, between individual liberty and collective values, they are biased towards predictable order, more willing to accept traditions, customs, and the prevailing social norms. In that respect, they are socially "conservative." If, for example, abortion has been a socially acceptable practice, a Type D person is not likely to vocally challenge it, even if abortion is against his or her personal belief. In international affairs, Type D persons believe that the status of each nation depends primarily on economic and military power. They believe that although nations are not equal, they should cooperate in accordance with their international status, with the degree of interdependence among them. Type D persons are not interested in proselytizing their own values in the international community.

As political entrepreneurs, Type D are more willing than other types to depend on each other (and on others, such as businesses and bureaucrats) in order to hold power and to maximize their re-election potential. Because of such interdependence, Type D politicians are often not in a position to exercise strong leadership when it is needed to cope with urgent economic, social, and international problems.

It is important to keep in mind that these four types are representative, or stereotypical. Each has a unique combination of his or her own views about how much government is enough, and about how to strike a balance between individual liberty and common values. It is also important to note that the labeling of socio-economic values as either "liberal" or "conservative" is often confusing or misleading, as demonstrated in the above discussion of only four representative types.

A nation of pluralism, the United States has distinctly different types of individuals voicing different values and political philosophies. The existence of such different people and values makes each individual all the more conscious of his or her own values; it forces Americans to articulate their values and philosophies in order to compete, or to cooperate with others, within and outside of their society. In an attempt to establish dominance and autonomy, for example, Type B persons may openly declare their principles, in order to show who they are and what they expect of others.

Japan, on the other hand, lacks such pluralism: the predominant socio-economic values are those of Type D. Japanese find little need to articulate and explain the values that are taken for granted in their society; for example, abortion, gun control, and school prayer are not much in the way of social issues in Japan. Abortion is legal; possession of firearms is strictly regulated; and prayer in public schools is the last thing that teachers, students, and their parents are concerned with, if they ever are. These matters are not discussed with the "liberal" and "conservative" language that they are in the United States.

Another reason many Japanese fail to articulate their basic values and principles has much to do with what I call a "silent" principle of differential interdependence. The meaning of "silent" is twofold: first, it is observed without being fully recognized as a "principle"; and second, the principle itself expects Japanese to refrain from voicing their values and philosophies. A cultural norm that reflects the values of Type D Japanese, this principle affects the thinking and behavior of a Japanese individual, whatever type he or she is.

Under the principle of differential interdependence, refraining from the proselytizing one's own values is regarded as mature conduct. Such reservation is believed to help maintain interdependent relationships, where each individual is expected to behave in accordance with status and role that are determined by the nature and the degree of interdependence. According to this principle, human relations should be appreciated more in shades of gray, rather than as black and white struggles between good and evil. Ambiguity is viewed as something natural, and it is therefore built into the Japanese language.

The Japanese reaction to the Gulf War is one example of this silent principle in action. Many Americans thought that Japan, an economic power second only to the U.S., had a moral duty to maintain world order by participating in the war. Adhering to its Constitution, the Japanese government responded to U.S. pressure by promising to share in the financial burden. This was not a popular policy, either among Americans or Japanese, but for different reasons. Believing in Article 9 of the Constitution, a majority of Japanese did not, and still do not, see Japan's role in the world community as a military one. However, Japan did not claim that its policy was right and that the U.S. policy was wrong; nor did it argue as morally wrong the use of force as a means of setting international disputes. Although embarrassed and bewildered by U.S. criticism, the Japanese government did silently respond to U.S. pressure, considering the significance of its relationship with the U.S. But it did not proselytize the Japanese stance.

There is another aspect to the Japanese view of the Gulf War. According to the principle of differential interdependence, the differentiating and prioritizing of interdependent relationships is regarded as only natural, individuals helping and cooperating with each other, depending on the nature and the degree of interdependence. For example, it is viewed as rational and right for an individual to put the needs of family members, relatives, and friends before those of strangers or acquaintances. The Japanese did not see any urgency in sending forces to a foreign land so distant from their own country. Although the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait may have been deplorable, it did not pose a serious threat to the world order as Japan

saw it. Oil was available from countries other than Kuwait and Iraq. Kuwait should have made security arrangements with a powerful ally in order to deter Iraq from crossing its border. Although such an arrangement often costs a great deal in terms of money, land, national pride, decline of autonomy, etc., this is often the necessary price a small nation must pay to survive in an interdependent world. The Japanese, however, did not openly advocate such a view, as this would have violated the “silent principle” I have described here.

2
Predictable Behavior Among Individuals and In Organizations

Every society has its cultural code of communication and conduct for interpersonal relationships. Such a code, to the extent that it is observed by people, makes each individual's behavior more predictable. Many Japanese are biased toward predictability in interpersonal and business relationships. They feel more awkward or uneasy than most Americans do when they have to deal with others whom they don't know, until they find out who and what others are, and what the differences are between them so that they can apply a proper code of conduct and communication. (The Japanese ritual of exchange *meishi* or business cards should be looked at in this context.) The Japanese, whether Type D (Differential) or not, are expected to observe the cultural code of conduct and communication that is supposed to decrease uncertainty and facilitate interdependence by making proper distinctions among individuals. Once the Japanese know the differences in rank, age, status, role, etc., among them, they are expected to act properly, according to rules of conduct based on these distinctions. The ways in which they behave and communicate are also affected by such factors as the setting they are in, their familiarity with each other, and their degree of dependence upon, and indebtedness to, others.

Status Differences: Age, Role, and Gender

According to their cultural code, the Japanese are expected to behave, and expect to be treated, in the manner proper to their age, role, and gender. They are, for example, expected to show deference to older people. Deference is also shown to such professionals as doctors and lawyers, whose knowledge and skills are often vital to one's well-being. In the marketplace, buyers or customers generally outrank sellers, and sellers are thus expected to show respect and humility to buyers. At the workplace, a majority of Japanese women are still expected to play a subordinate role in support of their male staff and managers. Such status differences often reflect the asymmetry of interdependence—of which side is more dependent than the other.

The difference in age often represents other differences, as in financial resources, acquired skills, and experiences that come with age. Those differences will be the basis for the asymmetry of interdependence. When children are young, for example, they are more dependent on their parents, because the young lack sufficient financial resources, skills, and experience to live by themselves. Even

though Japanese are expected to treat older people respectfully, other factors behind the age difference are often more important in determining the ways to treat older people. There is an old saying that goes, "*Oitewa koni shitagae* (Aged parents should obey their children)." This implies that the elderly cannot be depended upon as much as when they were younger, and as a result the asymmetry of interdependence between parents and children is reversed. In fact, Japanese senior citizens generally do not receive as much respect once they have retired and are no longer playing substantial roles in social or public settings.

It is important to note that status variables such as age, role, and, gender interact with each other in determining the proper way to deal with different individuals. For example, even though younger people are expected to show deference to older people, age difference can be insignificant when the organizational status of a younger person outranks that of an elder. Gender difference can also be insignificant when differences in age, role, or rank are more relevant in determining the relative status. Even though there are considerably fewer Japanese women who hold significant positions in the private and public sectors, gender difference can be insignificant when women play an important role, or when they are higher in organizational rank than men.

Status differences and the asymmetry of interdependence are also found in economic roles that people play in society. (Status in modern Japan mostly concerns individual differences, not social stratification or class; status is not determined by inheritance.) Japanese society has been biased in favor of producers or businesses, many of which have been "subsidized" by consumers/workers who have traded off higher prices for economic stability and job security. However, there is no doubt that the individual buyer or customer outranks the seller. The customer is the king (or "god" as it is in Japanese). Many Japanese business people and their families living in the U.S. are surprised at the lack of respect and humility shown to them as customers; and in business negotiations with Americans, Japanese buyers are often offended by attempts on the American side to ignore or equalize the status difference between the buyer and the seller.

However, it is important to note that the higher status of buyers is qualified by the calculus of interdependence or the balance of bargaining power in the market. For example, attendants of neighborhood gas stations or grocery stores in Japan are generally much politer and more deferential than are cruising cab drivers, some of whom are very rude. Local gas stations or grocery stores are more dependent on regular customers, who can choose other sellers if they are not satisfied with the service they get. Those sellers would have to pay a high price if they were rude to their customers. Cruising cab drivers, on the other hand, do not have regular customers they depend on, and tipping is not customary in Japan. Their business performance is affected little, if at all, by their attitude towards each customer, to whom the cost of distinguishing polite cab drivers from rude ones far exceeds the benefit.

Japanese are status-conscious. If not properly treated according to status differences, many Japanese, especially Type B (Bossy) and Type D (Differential), are very likely to feel offended or frustrated. Foreigners are generally not expected

to know the subtle rules and etiquette customarily observed when interacting with people who are different in status. However, as their oral proficiency in Japanese improves, foreigners are expected to take part in Japanese culture accordingly.

Settings or Surroundings

Rational individuals, whether Japanese or American, express preferences and opinions either directly or indirectly, specifically or generally, clearly or vaguely, depending not only on whom they interact with, but also on what setting they are in. Setting or surroundings may be formal or informal, public or private, inclusive or exclusive, friendly or hostile, competitive or cooperative, and so on. Politicians, for example, communicate differently with their constituents and interest groups in an attempt to maximize their re-election potential. When politicians publicly address a large number of people with diverse views, their speech tends to be general and vague so that it won't alienate some voters in favor of others. On the other hand, politicians may be more informal, specific, and direct when they have a private meeting with a small group of supporters or generous contributors of campaign funds. Career diplomats also speak and act differently to maximize their chance of succeeding in negotiations, depending on whether they are in the public eye or in secret, closed-door meetings.

Rational Japanese behave differently depending on what settings they are in. As the setting changes, foreign visitors are often surprised to see that the same Japanese person acts differently towards them—formally or casually, friendly or indifferently, practically or emotionally, and so on. Such a Japanese is, of course, not schizophrenic. Setting, occasion, and surroundings are important variables for Japanese to consider—more so than for many Americans—when communicating and interacting with others.

So that they may decrease uncertainty and facilitate interdependence, the Japanese have more distinct rules than Americans have about how to behave in different settings. In negotiating with Japanese business people, for example, Americans are often surprised to find that these same ritualistic and formal Japanese negotiators begin to communicate and act informally, even casually, and more openly and spontaneously, when they socialize over drinks in the evening. This seems especially true if a small group of staff members or junior-ranking managers socialize with their counterparts of equivalent ranking. In such an informal setting, the Japanese side may convey *hon'ne* (private truth, or what is expressed in private) that might not be revealed at a formal meeting. There is, however, a tacit agreement among Japanese that whatever is revealed in an informal setting is not an official stance until it is expressed in a more formal meeting.

In a formal setting, where each person plays a different role in an official capacity, Japanese feel that an open, bottom-line discussion may result in embarrassing someone in front of others, especially if that person's preferences and opinions are not known in advance. In a world of interdependence, nobody is

certain of whom he or she will have to depend on in the future. It is, therefore, a rational strategy for Type D Japanese to be indirect and vague in a formal meeting, so that they won't embarrass any potential clients or partners whom they don't know well.

Following brief small talk, Japanese negotiators can get down to a detailed business discussion when they negotiate with other Japanese companies with whom they have already established a business relationship. But when they deal with unfamiliar foreign companies, Japanese tend to be very cautious and formal—taking time to sound out those companies' intentions and reliability. Japanese negotiators want to know if the other side is a good candidate for establishing a long-term interdependent business relationship. Even when Japanese decide not to do business with a foreign company for the time being, they may not tell this directly to the negotiators at a formal meeting. The Japanese side may employ *tatemae* (public truth) and say "*Kangaete okimasu* (We'll give it a thought)." It is important, therefore, for foreign companies to develop an informal channel of communication with the Japanese side in order to better understand their *hon'ne*.

Tatemae (public truth, or what is expected to be appropriate in a public situation) is only as real as *hon'ne* (private truth). To the Japanese, the use of *tatemae* and *hon'ne* does not represent a division between telling and not telling the truth. This is not a double standard. In their own language, Japanese rarely confuse what is outwardly expressed in public with what they really feel—even though it is often difficult to tell exactly what their real intention is. In the above example of business talks, "*Kangaete okimasu* (We'll give it a thought)" would be understood by Japanese as a *tatemae* to avoid embarrassment on both sides, and as an appropriate thing to say. No interdependent society would function well without the *tatemae* component of diplomacy.

Many Westerners living in Japan complain about lack of privacy—not only in physical space, but also in interpersonal relationships. It is true that privacy is in short supply in Japan's crowded society, where differential interdependence is a predominant value. Neighbors are always curious and watchful about what each other is doing. There is little privacy in the workplace, where even senior managers do not have their own separate rooms. Age and status are asked of those who meet for the first time, so that a proper level of politeness in speech can be determined. However, Japanese make every effort to protect whatever little privacy they have, and they carefully distinguish between what is proper to discuss in private, and what in public. One's views or opinions on serious topics such as religion, politics, and philosophy are considered very personal, and such topics are most appropriately talked or inquired about in private among close friends or relatives. Personal concerns and problems are not casually discussed with colleagues and acquaintances in social gatherings. Serious discussion of an academic nature will also be avoided at social gatherings: it may develop into an argument, or even a quarrel, that will spoil these colleagues' very purpose—having fun and feeling a sense of belonging and closeness.

The Japanese house (or *uchi*, which also means "inside"), however small, is a fortress to guard privacy for the family. An out-door intercom is the first defense,

making any visitors identify themselves before opening the front door. The next defense is *genkan*—a tiny space inside the entrance door. Here, welcomed guests take off shoes and step up onto a raised floor that leads to the rooms and the kitchen. Delivery men, bill collectors, and other visitors, who are in a hurry, unexpected, or not welcomed, are met at the *genkan* and are not expected to take off their shoes. The last defense is *ousetsuma* or *kyakuma*—a guest room for formally welcoming or entertaining visitors—that is separated by a wall and a door from *ima* (the living room) or *chanoma* (the family room). The whole house (*uchi*, or the inside) stands to separate the family from the outside (or *soto*).

Familiarity

Japanese are expected to use a formal and polite level of speech to show respect and humility when they talk to people who are older and/or higher in rank or status. Formalities and rituals are especially important until individuals come to know each other well. Familiarity, however, will make each other's intentions and behaviors more predictable, and may increase opportunities for interdependence. Even at the Japanese workplace, subordinates and superiors will communicate and interact less formally as they get to know each other better. Rigorous adherence to formalities at this stage would hamper the development of interdependent relationships.

In the calculus of interdependence, it is rational to treat people differently, depending on familiarity. Japanese are more likely than Americans to distinguish between members of their "in-group" (or *uchi*, which also means "house" or "inside") and others, or outsiders. The in-group is a reference group against which others are regarded as an "out-group" (or *soto*, which also means "outside"). The reference group may be a family, a class of students, a team of players, co-workers of a section or department, employees of a company, or the Japanese as a nation compared to foreigners. When the family is a reference group, all others are outsiders; when the company is a reference group, all others, whether clients or competitors, are outsiders. The out-group people basically fall into three classifications that depend on the nature and level of interdependence (or lack of it): (1) actual or potential friends and allies with whom the in-group members are more or less interdependent, or want to be; (2) competitors or adversaries; and (3) strangers.

Japanese well acknowledge that no one in society can live without relying on others in one way or another, and that no one is sure of whom he or she will depend on in the future. Like Americans, many Japanese also feel good by helping others, without expecting any reciprocity in the future. The acknowledgment that human relations are complementary in nature makes many Japanese try to be at least polite, even when they interact with out-group competitors or strangers. But there are definite differences about the way Japanese treat out-group people in each of the three classifications above. To out-group friends and allies, such as clients, guests, and invited visitors, in-group members show respect and humility by

honoring outsiders and by humbling themselves and other in-group members. Out-group competitors will encounter fierce competition even when they are treated politely on the surface, and will be excluded from important affiliations and alliances. Strangers are generally treated with equal politeness, distance, or indifference, as long as they play the expected role of a stranger.

Dependence and Indebtedness

In interdependent relationships, rational individuals, whether Type A (Autonomous), B (Bossy), C (Cooperative), or D (Differential), constantly—almost unconsciously—strike a balance between commitment and autonomy. That is, they evaluate and re-evaluate how much they should rely on, or be relied upon, by others.

To Type D Japanese, it is important to consider whom they deal with, and in what settings. Equally important is the consideration of who is more dependent, and which side will be indebted for a received favor. When Type D Japanese feel indebted to others for a favor, it is likely they expect, and are expected, to return the favor, or be depended upon for one, sooner or later. Such expectation makes the Japanese selective and exclusive in developing and maintaining interdependent relationships, which involve not only benefits but high costs. Some asymmetry of interdependence may be unavoidable if there are substantial differences between individuals, in rank, age, financial resources, abilities, skills, etc. Such asymmetry may be the basis for influencing people in interpersonal relationships. When Type D Japanese want to maintain parity or status quo in interpersonal or business relationships, they try to avoid situations where they feel obliged to receive favors. If they accept favors, they try to return them as soon as possible, so that some parity or equilibrium of indebtedness is restored. Some Japanese utilize this psychology of reciprocity and indebtedness in an attempt to influence others; they try to do others a favor pre-emptively, to make them feel indebted.

The strong emotional need or drive for dependence—"*amae*"—should not be equated with Type D value of interdependence. It is true that children, and even some adults in intimate relationships, may show "*amae*," a strong expectation or need to depend on others for understanding, affection, and favorable treatment (Doi 1971). Such children and adults may feel frustrated, disappointed, angry, or even betrayed if their needs or desires are not met by others on whom they depend. However, Type D Japanese acknowledge that, since individuals are limited in their abilities and resources, each should make up what is lacking in the other. To them, *reciprocity* is essential to life in a world of interdependence. Japanese adults who frequently fail to reciprocate favors, or to be depended upon, are regarded as selfish, and thus do not function adequately in interpersonal and business relationships.

The concept of "*amae*" is often used to explain away anything viewed as "uniquely" Japanese in interpersonal, or even in organizational, relationships. It is true that Type D Japanese are generally more interdependent than Type A, B, and

C Americans, and it seems that Type D Japanese have a stronger need to depend on others. Most Japanese use the word "*amae*" when an individual deviates—excessively, in most cases—from the socially accepted norm of fair dependence on others. When a Japanese is told he or she is displaying "*amae*," that person is being criticized for his or her excessive expectation or desire to depend on others. There are some occasions, however, where an individual, if he is too reluctant to admit his limitations or to seek assistance and cooperation from others, is encouraged to open up and show a little more "*amae*." Such a person may seem a little too independent to an observer who represents the social standard of interdependence.

Systemic Ambiguity and the Power of "Spinach"

Organizations have a system of formal rules and procedures that delineate the rights and responsibilities of their employees. To the extent that such a system unambiguously defines each member's rights, functions, and duties, employees are, at least theoretically, protected against arbitrary treatment by management. They know not only what they will be expected to do, but also what they will not be asked to do. Whereas, an elaborate delineation of individual rights and duties might provide employees with an incentive to be less flexible and less cooperative among colleagues.

When it comes to the delineation of individual rights and responsibilities, the Japanese white-collar workplace is known for organizational ambiguity. For example, a new recruit does not receive his or her own job description, as in the U.S. Workers' functional roles and middle managers' authority and responsibility lack the specificity found in the U.S. organization. Job title and rank are not necessarily accompanied by the corresponding formal delegation of authority typically found in the U.S. organizational hierarchy.

Office work routines are not as standardized as those at the factory. Broad directions are often given by managers to office workers, who have to interpret them to choose a specific set of actions. The decision-making process is much more diffuse in the Japanese workplace, and the staff members and junior managers have greater opportunities to influence or participate in the process than do their American counterparts. Credit and responsibility are often shared collectively by colleagues and managers.

Such systemic ambiguity serves as a basis to maintain loose cross-functional boundaries and to encourage flexible, cooperative, and interdependent relationships among the staff and managers. However, this organizational ambiguity is also a source of uncertainty, misunderstanding, and confusion, especially when subordinates carry out tasks assigned by their superiors. In order to minimize such negative effects, there must be trust and careful communication between superiors and their subordinates. Japanese companies emphasize the significance of *hou-ren-sou*, which means reporting, informing, and consulting. The word *hou-ren-sou* was formed from the initial Chinese characters of the three words, *hou-koku* (reporting), *ren-raku* (informing), and *sou-dan* (consulting), and this business term has the

same sound as a Japanese word that means “spinach.” A company president, who coined this word, said that *hou-ren-sou* makes the company strong (as spinach makes Popeye strong).

In the Japanese workplace, it is subordinates who are expected to engage in this *hou-ren-sou* communication. Subordinates should report the progress of an assignment before their bosses inquire. They should provide any new information they obtain, irrespective of its relevance to the current assignment. They should also consult their senior colleagues and superiors whenever they feel they need help in carrying out their assignments. Japanese managers are extremely concerned with how their subordinates are doing their assignments, especially when their outcomes will seriously affect other colleagues and superiors within, or across, sections and departments. They worry very much when their subordinates fail to engage in *hou-ren-sou* communication. Subordinates must understand that assignments should be done in communication and consultation with their superiors. Capable Japanese managers will ask their subordinates various questions, designed to help them resolve, before they start or finish, any possible mistakes or misunderstandings with regard to the requirements of an assignment. Large Japanese companies, characterized by ambiguous delineation of authority and responsibility, do not function well without constant, effective *hou-ren-so*u communication.

For *hou-ren-sou* communication to be effective requires that some conditions be met. Most importantly, its significance must be understood by employees. It should be based on trust and good interpersonal relationships between subordinates and superiors. Even when managers do not explain why an assignment is important in a larger context, and how it should be done in detail, subordinates should be assisted by senior colleagues; or they can learn by watching how others carry out similar assignments. However, the fact that Japanese managers have to repeatedly emphasize the significance of *hou-ren-sou* communication indicates that it is easier said than done, even in Japanese companies.

Japanese managers of affiliates in the U.S. often complain that American workers do only what they are told to do, or what is specified in their job description. They also complain that, once given some authority, American subordinates tend to isolate, doing jobs incorrectly and without face-to-face communication and consultation with superiors. American employees, on the other hand, complain that Japanese managers don’t explain the exact steps, authority, and responsibility to carry out an assignment, failing to let their workers know what is expected of them. Many Japanese managers don’t understand why such explanations, such direct feedback and encouragement, are important to American workers. They fail to recognize that American employees often lack the Japanese sense of security, the collective sharing of credit and responsibility, and the interdependent relationship among staff and managers that compensate for organizational ambiguity. Even when they do understand the situation, most Japanese managers have difficulty communicating in English with their American subordinates. It also happens that Japanese managers sometimes do not have sufficient specialized knowledge and information to give detailed explanations and

instructions, because they have been trained as generalists and are not familiar with the American market. Such lack of specialized skills and knowledge would not be a serious problem in interdependent organizations in Japan, where superiors and subordinates can rely on each other for specialized skills, knowledge, and information.

Japanese-owned companies in the U.S. generally have more problems in managing office workers than in managing factory workers. A major reason for this is that systemic ambiguity is far greater at the office than in the factory, where work is far more standardized. If such companies are not run in the American way, with authorities and responsibilities clearly delineated, then *hou-ren-sou* type of communication is needed more among the staff and managers in the office. The problem is that many Japanese-owned companies lack the conditions to effectively carry out the *hou-ren-sou* type communication. American staff and managers naturally feel uneasy when their authorities and responsibilities are not clear; they understandably become defensive in carrying out assignments. American employees normally do not understand what the *hou-ren-sou* communication is, and how important it is in Japanese organizations; they don't even like someone watching over their shoulders while an assigned task is completed. Japanese managers cannot expect American senior colleagues and junior managers to compensate for the lack of organizational clarity by functioning as mentors for junior workers. Japanese management cannot expect *hou-ren-sou* type communication from American employees—an expectation that is difficult to carry out even in Japanese companies in Japan.

Conformity and Uniformity

An organization, American or Japanese, requires that individual members' wants and needs be compromised for the "common good" of all its members, or for the organization as a whole. Individual members conform to formal rules and procedures, as well as to informal codes, customs, and traditions that have been observed in their organization. Many organizations, for example, have a fixed time set aside for lunch break, so that work coordination and cooperation among employees, as well as customer services, will not be disrupted by individual arrangements.

When employees' function and authority are not clearly defined, and credit and responsibility are shared collectively, each individual will likely have a greater incentive to "free ride," or to be hesitant in taking initiative. An analogy will help to understand this. Make a comparison between a large group of individuals participating in a tug-of-war match, and a team of professional baseball players, whose functions are highly differentiated and whose performance can be individually measured, evaluated, and rewarded. It won't be difficult to tell which group would have a free-rider problem. In order to minimize or control such a problem, the group or organization may need a set of rules and regulations that apply equally to its members. The tug-of-war team, for example, could have a rule

stipulating that every member be equally rewarded or penalized, depending on victory or defeat.

Organizational or group pressure on each individual to conform to informal rule and tradition seems to be stronger in Japanese organizations, where interdependence is emphasized and a higher degree of system ambiguity exists. Furthermore, Type D employees in the Japanese organization would make efforts to avoid inconveniencing co-workers by "selfishly" deviating from existing standards and expectations. The Japanese organizational culture disapproves of, or strongly discourages, individual exception to or exemption from uniformity; just one such incident, it is feared, might have a domino effect and disrupt organizational order. Such a concern is minimized if individual rights and duties are formally and clearly defined.

To illustrate the above point, let us look at a typical Japanese attitude toward taking a leave of absence with pay. Many Japanese employees, especially managers, do not use up the days to which they are formally entitled for leave with pay. Most of them do not request leave with pay for a "long" vacation of, say, ten consecutive days—even though, officially, it is up to them to allocate their own annual leave days. It is an unwritten code that employees take leave of absence in such a way as not to inconvenience their colleagues and the organization. Although many young Japanese want to take a longer vacation, they don't want to be the first employee to make such a request, only to be branded as "selfish."

Even if a majority of members in an organization is dissatisfied with the existing state or condition, it is far more difficult to change the status quo than to make an original choice from possible alternatives. As Buchanan (1975) points out, the "uniqueness of the status quo lies in the simple fact of its existence" (p. 78). Under the status quo, an organization's interest is known to its members. However, an individual who wants change will have to first find, and then communicate with, others who are dissatisfied with the status quo. Costs of obtaining information, negotiating, and making arrangements will be discouragingly high. In addition, it is often a rational strategy not to reveal one's true preference, so that one can be a "free rider" while others try to change the status quo for everyone's benefit. In the Japanese organizational environment, it is costly and risky to reveal one's dissatisfaction with the status quo and to try to find sympathizers. Such a revelation may give others a chance to brand as "selfish" any person who opposes the known "common good" and disrupts the predictable order of interdependent relationships. It seems more difficult to change the status quo in a Japanese organization than in an American one, even when a majority of members want change.

3
Predictable Order in Public

Social order is regarded as a public good or a good that is collectively consumed or jointly shared once it is provided. The economic theory of public goods tells us that collective-consumption goods and services, such as law and order, are not adequately provided by voluntary action among a large number of individuals. Among large numbers, an individual has an incentive to be a "free rider" who maximizes his or her well-being, refraining from contributing to the provision of a public good and the sharing of its cost. In large-group settings, the individual tends to think that his or her own behavior will have little effect on the behavior of others and on the potential provision of a collective good. Then, social disorder as a public "bad" will result, if there are not mechanisms, such as law and police, that make individuals consider the effects of their own behavior on others. Maintaining predictable order in public, however, requires not only social systems or institutional arrangements, but also shared values and beliefs, as well as informal unwritten codes of conduct, to which individuals willingly conform. Such systems and codes interact to make people feel accountable for their own behavior, to maintain predictable order in public.

In Public or *Seken*

When a person behaves in public, his or her behavior is visible, open to the scrutiny of others, or "the people." Such "others" or "people" are usually referred to as "*seken*" in Japanese ("e" pronounced as in "sect"). The word *seken* usually means: (1) the world, people generally, or the community as a whole; and (2) the range of one's association and acquaintance, or people outside one's family—including friends, colleagues, associates, neighbors, and acquaintances—that one considers as a basis of comparison. *Seken* often implies reference to the lifestyle of ordinary people as well as moral and behavioral standards that are commonly accepted in society. Type D Japanese are very concerned with how they are different, or deviated, from their own *seken* in terms of its common lifestyle and worldly standards. I will refer to the first definition above as "large *seken*," and the second as "small *seken*."

Here are some examples of the usages of *seken* that are often found in daily conversation:

- *Seken o sawagasu*: lit., to disturb *seken*; this is used when one's behavior or an event is so deviated from *seken*'s standards that it creates a sensation.

- *Seken shirazu*: lit., a person who does not know *seken*; this refers to an inexperienced or naive person who has yet to learn how things are in the world or in the ways of *seken*.
- *Seken nami*: lit., being as ordinary as *seken*; this refers to the state or condition of being ordinary, average, or common, as *seken nami no seikatsu* (ordinary, average lifestyle or standard of living).
- *Seken banare shita*: lit., away or deviated from *seken*; this is used to refer to a person whose attitudes, manners, or talents are deviated from or are far above the commonly accepted standards of *seken*.
- *Seken tei*: lit., one's appearance before *seken*; this is used when one is concerned about reputation, or about appearance before a group of people.

Conformity in Small *Seken*

Rational people living in an interdependent world compare themselves with their own small *seken* to see if or how they are significantly different, or deviated, in terms of the lifestyle and standards commonly accepted in their *seken*. Type D Japanese feel emotionally secure, or at least not isolated, when they confirm that they are not very different from their *seken*. Some may feel inferior, or at least embarrassed, when they believe that their possessions, abilities, accomplishments, etc., are substantially below the standards of their *seken*. Such people may also believe that their *seken* looks down on them. Type D Japanese are more conscious than most Americans are about what their *seken* thinks of them, of their families, and of their choices—such as the things they wear, the cars they drive, the people they associate with, as well as their education, occupation, marriage, and so on. College-educated parents, for example, will normally oppose the marriage of their daughters to high-school graduates. Parents will say, among other things, that they will be embarrassed in the eyes of their *seken*.

Japanese, living in their interdependent *seken*, are expected to do as other people do—following rules for greeting, showing deference, socializing, giving and receiving gifts, participating in community events and activities, putting out garbage at the neighborhood collection spot, and so on. Afraid that substantial deviation from such rules and standards may result in rejection by, or psychological isolation from, their *seken*, Type D Japanese try to conform to such informal rules, as well as to the behavioral and moral standards of their *seken*. For most Type D Japanese, the mere thought of such isolation or rejection will normally be sufficient deterrent to being very different from their *seken*.

In the rural areas of old Japan, people who broke the rules of their village were often ostracized, and so lived a miserable life in isolation. Villagers were highly interdependent with each other for their survival, helping each other especially in irrigation and rice cultivation. (And the rice paid as rent was the primary source of revenue for the feudal government.) Such village ostracism was called "*mura hachibu*," or "eight-tenths ostracism": there were two exceptional occasions where villagers would still help such rule breakers—fire and death in

those households. Such ostracism is no longer practiced, but its "spirit" is still alive even in the urban "villages" or *seken* of contemporary Japan. Modern nonconformists may have to endure rejection, discrimination, psychological pressure, cold treatment, or indifference by the *seken*. At school, modern "*mura hachibu*" manifests itself as the collective bullying of a nonconforming child by his or her peers.

The Japanese urban community has "voluntary" neighborhood associations run by residents. These associations are known as *chounaikai* or *jichikai*, to most Japanese an integral part of their small *seken*. Even in large cities, most households are members of such associations, and they cooperate and help each other in a variety of activities—including the management of garbage collection spots, dissemination of public-service information, fire and crime prevention, local festivals, and funeral services customarily held at households of deceased persons. Many *chounaikai* are small enough for each household to know almost every other household in its neighborhood—except for short-term residents living in apartments.

In 1940, before the Pearl Harbor attack, neighborhood associations or groups known as *tonarigumi* were made mandatory and used as semi-official arms of the government. In post-war Japan, *chounaikai* is, in theory, a voluntary association; but in practice, it is difficult for anyone to be an informed resident and a good neighbor in the community if he or she is not a member of the association. Administrative branches of local governments in Japan depend on *chounaikai*'s cooperation for providing some of their services—including garbage collection, dissemination of public information, fire and crime prevention, and delivery of municipal news letters and forms of the national census. For example, garbage is collected not at each household, but at a collection spot designated and managed by each neighborhood association. An unknowing nonmember can easily irritate his or her neighbors by putting out garbage without observing a rule and without contributing anything (such as time and membership dues). *Chounaikai* also cooperates with the local administration to disseminate public information. The association regularly receives a notice for circulation, called "*kairanban*," from one of the various offices of the local administration, and then asks each household to pass it door-to-door.

The neighborhood association has been sustained not only by tradition and government policy, but also by the residents' awareness of its usefulness. The existence of *chounaikai* reflects the Japanese acknowledgment that one must depend on others to satisfy even basic needs, and that the individual is affected by others' choices external to his or her control. In densely populated neighborhoods, for example, an amenity like a quite evening at home cannot be enjoyed without cooperation among neighbors. They depend on each other to refrain from playing a stereo loud or from letting their children practice piano in the evening. *Chounaikai* also exists as *seken* in the minds of residents, and it helps them to become accountable for the behavior of their own that may affect others in the community.

Orderliness in Large *Seken*

People in large *seken* are not familiar with each other. When Japanese are among fellow strangers, they are ordinarily far less interdependent with each other than they are with their relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors, or acquaintances. In the previous chapters, I explained that Japanese are more likely to treat others differently than Americans are, depending on who and what those others are. Differences in age, gender, and rank are especially important to Type D Japanese. However, such differences are often irrelevant or less relevant in guiding behavior in large *seken*. Japanese strangers in public are often regarded as "equals," with equal opportunity, rights and obligations. When competing for scarce goods or services in the public domain, such as seats in a crowded bus or train, most strangers, young or old, are basically equal, following the rule of "First come, first served."

A crowd of strangers in large *seken* is also seen by the individual as part of his or her own environment, which he should be respectfully indifferent to and stay remote from. The passenger in the commuting train, for example, pretends that other passengers are part of his own environment, and not persons whom he may casually exchange a few words with, or even smile to. In such an environment, the individual is expected to refrain from public display of sentiment, or attracting the attention of others—not to mention making a scene. The individual should not disturb an environment made up of anonymous people. *Chikan*, or train gropers, take advantage of this psychology to touch young women in the jam-packed trains. Many female victims try to move away, or they just bear such molestation silently because they don't want to make a scene.

Foreign visitors from the West often point out that Japanese are not considerate of others in public, and that there is no social etiquette comparable to that found in the West, such as holding the door for someone immediately behind, or saying "excuse me" when touching someone accidentally in a busy street. Against such criticisms, one may say that social etiquette and propriety in public are not universal. Some conduct perceived as "improper" by Westerners is normally accepted by Japanese, and visa versa. Some people in densely-populated urban areas are, by the standards of each culture, less civil and/or less friendly towards strangers. Japan is no exception. However, it seems that the difference between one's behavior in small *seken* and in large is greater among Japanese than it is among Americans. Since individual Japanese are perceived by Westerners to be polite and courteous in face-to-face encounters, the different behavior toward fellow strangers—often characterized as "indifferent" or "inconsiderate"—seems striking to some Westerners. Still, it can be said that Japanese, in public or in large *seken*, are comparatively civil and behave in a predictable and orderly manner.

Civility—however superficial—is still prevalent in contemporary Japan. There are many socio-economic and cultural factors to consider to explain the prevalence of civility in Japan, but one such factor is the Japanese acknowledgment of interdependence as a normal or unavoidable state of the world. The Japanese

youth, for example, is expected to grow *from dependence to interdependence*, while the American youth often struggles *from dependence to independence* in a world that has become increasingly interdependent. This difference seems to have a significant implication. When individuals feel social pressure to become independent, and believe they should exercise control over their own fate and environment, they may feel insecure and become frustrated in their attempt to bridge the gap between their belief and the reality of increasing interdependence. People who value autonomy, Type B persons in particular, may become more assertive, competitive, and/or aggressive when they try to regain control over their environment—especially if that environment includes the people around them, with whom they interact in private or in public. Type D Japanese, on the other hand, feel little need to reconcile their belief with this reality: to them, interdependence is the value and the reality of their life.

People have psychological needs to be different from others, wishing to have their individuality recognized by others. At the same time, individuals need to be accepted as members of their in-group or peers. American kids, for example, ask their parents to buy those clothes and footwear advertised on TV in the back-to-the-school sales campaigns. Trying to avoid looking like a "geek," these kids often end up looking alike in their fashionable shirts, pants, and sneakers. Individuals try to achieve a psychological balance between the needs to be distinct and to be similar. Japanese often try to achieve this balance by distinguishing the settings in which to be different and by behaving in a group where they feel secure enough to show off their difference to the public.

Polite, reserved, and distant—this is the stereotypical image of the Japanese held by many Westerners. Some visiting Westerners are surprised to discover Japanese ostentatiously performing in public—on silly TV game shows, at company parties, at *karaoke* bars, (previously, on the floors of disco clubs) or on picnic blankets under the cherry trees in April. Men and women sing and dance. Some enjoy a narcissistic display of their personalities, and others are "coerced" to perform. Such showy display is accepted and even expected *at a proper time, place, and occasion*; it is a ritual to help release tension and strain, sharing merriment and silliness, thus enhancing a sense of connectedness. These are moments of relief (or nightmares to some people) before returning to more formal and serious aspects of life, where Japanese should suppress their desire to stand out or to be conspicuous among colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers.

4
Dealing with Uncertainty

People seem to deal or cope with uncertainty in different manners. Some people, like Type B individuals, want to exercise as much control as possible over uncertain situations and unknown people or things. They try to reduce or cope with uncertainty by obtaining information through open inquiry, forecasting the future, forming strategies and contingency plans, negotiating, competing, and bargaining.

When dealing with uncertainty, many Japanese distinguish interdependent relationships among themselves from those of the world that is external to them. Japanese tend to look at the uncertain external world—whether human or natural—as something dynamic and uncontrollable, and they think it is most often better to react or adapt to reality than to try to control it. In their interdependent relationships, however, many Japanese try to deal with uncertainty by relying, as much as possible, on their shared rituals, customs, and tradition—instead of resorting to open inquiry, discussion, negotiation, or competition.

Unknown Preferences

In formal or unfamiliar settings, Japanese often hesitate to do something they want to do and would prefer to do, even when someone else has made the suggestion or invited them to do it (this reservation or hesitation is known as *enryo*). An American host, for example, may see his Japanese guests hesitate and fail to say anything when he asks, “Would you care for something to drink?” In the first place, the guests are not used to such a question, asking directly about their preferences. It is considered improper to openly express one’s preferences among people who are not familiar with each other. Moreover, expressing preferences will have consequences. The guests may feel that answering “yes” would put them in a situation where they have to make a choice about what to drink. What if the host does not have what they ask for? If they were the host, they would be embarrassed. The guests would feel more comfortable if the host were to serve tea or something without asking them.

In a group setting, such hesitation or self-constraint also occurs when several acquaintances or colleagues decide on, say, which restaurant to visit for lunch. Japanese individuals hesitate to directly express their own preferences when the preferences of others in the same group are not known. They know that if someone in their group expresses his or her preference directly, others will feel obliged to accommodate that preference. Type D Japanese do not want others to think that they are selfish or inconsiderate of others’ wants or needs. A rational strategy in

such a case would be to sound out others' preferences, not by asking, "Where would you like to go?," but by making a suggestion like, "The tempura I ate at such and such a restaurant was tasty."

Japanese are often expected to do something quite the opposite of reservation or hesitation; that is, to take the initiative to do something even when they are not openly told or requested to (this initiation by presumption is known as *sasshi*). Such reservation and initiation are often two sides of the same coin. For example, a Japanese host serves tea or coffee (cold drinks in summer) without asking his or her guest, "*Nanika onomini narimasenka* (Would you care for something to drink?)." This is because the host knows the guest would say, "*Douzo okamainaku* (lit., Please don't bother)" if the guest were asked such a question. In offices where institutional ambiguity exists, Japanese workers are often expected to carry out tasks, or even to find or create them, without a specific request from their superiors or senior colleagues.

Foreign guests who have been invited to visit Japan often feel overwhelmed by the many receptions and the detailed schedule prepared by a well-meaning Japanese host who has not asked for their preferences. When Japanese want to show good will toward someone with whom they hope to develop a friendship or an interdependent relationship, they often engage in preemptive giving. Japanese hosts, for example, lavishly entertain and give expensive gifts to guests whom they meet for the first time. They may do a favor for their guests even when it is not requested. Japanese hosts assume that it is not polite to directly ask their foreign guests about it, and that such a favor will be appreciated.

Foreign Strangers

Those strangers who are easily (sometimes falsely) identified as non-Japanese by their appearance, are treated differently from Japanese strangers. A majority of Japanese, excluding those who want to practice speaking English, shy away from Western strangers. They feel uneasy about dealing with those "inscrutable" and "unpredictable" foreigners, who are not expected to act according to the Japanese cultural code of communication and conduct. A large number of older people have had mixed emotions of admiration, awe, and fear toward white Caucasians, who are usually larger in stature and have, in modern history, represented economic prosperity, superior technology, and military power. In addition, Japanese don't want to be embarrassed in public by being seen as unable to communicate with foreigners. Ordinary Japanese in Japan, for example, would never ask foreigners on the street for directions, as Americans do in the U.S., where they cannot at first glance distinguish foreigners.

Still, there are many other Japanese who treat foreigners, especially Westerners, with much curiosity and hospitality, as if the visitors were their own invited guests or celebrities. Most Japanese are generally lenient towards foreigners who don't follow Japanese etiquette and customs if they can speak little or no Japanese. However, the higher their level of oral proficiency in Japanese, the more

they are expected to understand and *participate in* the Japanese culture. Some Westerners hold to the myth that, as their Japanese improves, Japanese people become less friendly, hospitable, or interested. Those Westerners do not seem to understand that, as they become proficient in Japanese, they should also behave in culturally correct ways, and that they are less likely to receive preferential treatment. It is essential to keep in mind that the speaking of Japanese is the performing of Japanese culture. It often happens that, from their short stays in Japan, some Western visitors incorrectly generalize about how Japanese communicate and interact with each other. Such visitors don't realize that they have been treated as *okyakusama*, or visiting guests, who are not expected to follow the dictum, "When in Japan, do as the Japanese do." And many other visitors take advantage of the freedom of being a foreigner, a freedom from their own social rules that they cannot enjoy back in their own country.

Unfamiliar Surroundings and Situations

Most Japanese are not committed to any religious doctrines or ideologies that claim to explain the origin of the universe and guide people into the eternal future. Most Japanese do not believe in any absolute entity that supposedly created, and is in charge of, everything in this universe. To them, the universe is dynamic and uncertain; this world is almost as uncertain as the other world after death (most old religious establishments in Japan are of little help in coping with uncertainty in both of these worlds). When Japanese face unfamiliar situations or foreign affairs, they take a wait-and-see attitude, and then try to work things out by trial and error, hopefully making incremental improvements. When dealing with uncertain situations, most Japanese are not great chess players, supposed to anticipate the future and plan alternative strategies. Type D Japanese need to know what others have in mind before deciding on their own position and their plan to react.

Since each uncertain situation or circumstance may be different or unique, Japanese do not like to be bound by a policy or principle that applies equally to all cases of a given event, or by detailed contracts that attempt to anticipate all possible circumstances. In fact, phrases like "step by step (*suteppu bai suteppu* in Japanese)" and "case by case (*keisu bai keisu*)" are often heard in Japanese negotiations. This attitude is also reflected in Japanese business contracts. Japanese companies prefer a business contract that is general and vague in nature; they also want to re-negotiate a contract if the circumstances under which it was originally signed change substantially. Such companies stress the spirit of a contract more than its letter, reflecting a business relationship based on trust.

Another way in which Type D Japanese face uncertainty is sharing fear, risk, and/or responsibility among interdependent individuals. This posture or strategy is typified by a frequently-cited popular saying, "*Akashingou min'nade watareba kowakunai* (We wouldn't be afraid of crossing against the red traffic light if we all did together)." Even when used for constructive purposes, this strategy, like any other strategies, can bring positive or negative consequences. Japanese companies,

for example, have been using the *ringi* system and consensus decision making to share risk and responsibility among management and staff. Once a decision is made, it is carried out effectively—or sometimes recklessly, as if no one were responsible for its consequences. Another example of risk/fear sharing can be seen when traveling overseas in tour groups organized by travel agencies. There is, of course, nothing uniquely Japanese about this economical and safe way of visiting foreign lands. However, many Japanese are more likely than Americans to become audacious or irresponsible when in groups—although individually they might tend to be rather inconspicuous and restrained.

There are two opposing views among students of Japanese regarding how quick or slow the Japanese are to change or to adapt to new circumstances. Some argue that the Japanese are very slow to change because they are group-oriented conformists, who emphasize consensus decision making based on past experiences and precedents. Others refute this argument, pointing out how Japan has flexibly adapted to enormous changes in its political and economic systems since the Meiji "revolution," which dismantled the feudal system in the late 19th century.

These two views do not seem to contradict each other, because they focus on different aspects of Japanese attitudes. Generally speaking, Japanese are flexible and readily adapt to new circumstances brought about by the world that is external to their interdependent relationships. But they are slow to change the very nature of their interdependent relationships, or the rules of the game that govern those relationships. Japanese tend to accept new circumstances as unavoidable and uncontrollable when brought about by the external forces—such as typhoons, or the "Black Ships" of Commodore Perry. Japanese are likely to react and adapt to a new reality rather than try to change or control it. Such external environments, however, represent uncertainty, unpredictability, and insecurity, which the Japanese want to minimize. To compensate for such uncertainty, Japanese seek security, stability, continuity, and comfort in their interdependent relationships—as they do from family, friends, colleagues, political factions, business affiliations, and so on.

Japanese interdependent relationships are by no means immune to change. The restructuring of businesses in the aftermath of the burst "bubble" economy has been changing intra- and inter-firm relationships. A growing number of women are demanding re-definition of the roles they play in society. A younger generation of Japanese, raised in an affluent Japan, value autonomy to a greater degree and interdependence to a smaller degree. However slow they may be, Japanese will adapt to the new realities of their interdependent relationships.

PART TWO

Cases of Rational Japanese Behavior

5
Learning Japanese

Case 1. Classroom Manners

Main Characters:

- Students in a beginning Japanese class at a U.S. university.
- Mr. Osamu Yamada, from Japan, a fifty-four-year-old professor of Japanese literature, visiting the U.S. university through a faculty exchange program. This is his first time to teach Japanese in the U.S.

This is the third meeting of JPN 102, Beginning Japanese. Professor Yamada has given a short quiz. One of the students, who finishes the quiz early, stretches her arm forward with the quiz sheet in her hand, suggesting that the professor come to get it. After the quiz, Professor Yamada finds one student wearing a baseball cap and drinking a soft drink, and another chewing gum while they are practicing some expressions. While the professor is explaining grammar, one student has his feet on a chair nearby. At this point, Professor Yamada stops his lecture and tells the class that some of the behaviors he observes would be considered disrespectful to the instructor. Then, some students argue that these behaviors are not necessarily rude or disrespectful, and are not uncommon in a classroom on a U.S. college campus. They also point out that when they took JPN 101 last semester, their instructor, Ms. Tanaka, did not say anything about such behaviors in the classroom. Ms. Tanaka is a native speaker of Japanese who has received an M.A. degree in linguistics from an American university. While this discussion goes on, one student hurriedly leaves the classroom without saying a word.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the students' behaviors described above?
2. Why do you think Ms. Tanaka did not say anything about her students' ehavior in JPN 101? Do you think she does not consider such behavior disrespectful to an instructor?

Analysis

Proper manners and etiquette differ across cultures, and change over time. In contemporary Japan, the classroom (or *kyoushitsu*, which literally means "the room

for teaching") still represents a formal setting, where learners should show respect to the individual whose role is to teach, and who tends to be older. The behaviors described in this case would be regarded as bad manners in Japan today. This does not mean, of course, that all Japanese students behave in a respectful manner: there is always a gap between the expected norm and the reality, especially in large group settings, which will increase the degree of uncertainty.

Ms. Tanaka would agree that some of the students' behaviors are considered disrespectful to instructors in Japan. One difference between Ms. Tanaka and Mr. Yamada is that the former is much more familiar with how American students behave in the classroom. She has probably become accustomed to their occasional eating and drinking during class. In comparison, Mr. Yamada, an older, male Japanese professor, expects the greater degree of deference shown by his students in Japan.

Another possible difference between the two instructors might lie in the ways they look at cultural proficiency. Some instructors of Japanese in the U.S. let their students behave the way they "normally" do in other classes, as long as their behavior does not interfere with instruction or with other students' learning and practice. Those instructors are more concerned with improving students' linguistic skills than with making them observe the Japanese code of conduct. After all, they are not in Japan Other instructors think that a foreign language class should be different from classes in other disciplines, which might use a lecture format. They believe it is essential to foreign language instruction that students not only understand, but also practice, the target culture.

As learners' oral proficiency levels improve, they are expected by Japanese to have a corresponding proficiency in Japanese culture and to behave accordingly. Achieving a level of oral proficiency in Japanese might do more harm than good if it is not accompanied by an equivalent competency in Japanese culture. Those instructors who emphasize cultural proficiency believe they should simulate, as much as possible, the cultural environment of Japan in the classroom. If Professor Yamada had had much experience teaching in American school environments, during the first class he might have explained the significance of cultural proficiency and specified the rules to observe in his class.

Professor Yamada is fully aware that many young Japanese today are unable to use the honorific language properly, and that some students in a huge lecture hall ignore a boring lecture, constantly whispering, or even sleeping. However, once they are employed by Japanese companies, those young people have to go through training to speak and behave properly in the Japanese business environment. To most American students, the Japanese language class will be the only opportunity to practice Japanese culture. It is up to students whether they will choose, in the future, to observe Japanese culture in accordance with their language proficiency level. But Professor Yamada seems to believe that it is his responsibility to let students know what older Japanese regard as proper manners.

I recommend that the following manners be observed in the Japanese class:

- Turn in a completed exam or homework assignment preferably holding it with both hands, and with the front page turned so that that the instructor can easily read it. If you have difficulty walking toward your instructor in a crowded classroom, at least stand up and show that you are trying to.

- Stop eating and drinking when the class starts. Chewing gum, when it is done discreetly, might not be a problem in a large lecture class, but it is not recommended in any foreign language class that requires speaking practice.

- Don't put your feet or legs on a chair nearby or on the top of a desk.

- Take off your hat or cap. Compare sitting in a classroom to visiting a church, or a sacred shrine or landmark. Incidentally, the Japanese equivalents for "Christian church" (kyou-kai) and "classroom" (kyou-shitsu) use the same kanji (Chinese character), kyou, which means "teaching" or "religion."

- Tell your instructor in advance when you have to leave the classroom early.

Case 2. *Arigatou* or Thank you?

Main Characters:

- Laura Johnson, an eighteen-year-old freshman who studied Japanese in high school for four semesters. She has been placed in JPN 102, Beginning Japanese, which is a sequel to JPN 101.
- Professor Hiroshi Noguchi, an instructor of Japanese at a U.S. college.

Laura came to the Japanese class five minutes late. As soon as she sat down, Professor Noguchi came to her seat and gave her a handout. Laura said, "Doumo arigatou," to mean "thank you." To her surprise, she was told by the professor that the phrase was not appropriate. Laura was puzzled. She remembered that "arigatou" and "arigatou gozaimasu" were translated in her high school Japanese textbook as "thank you" and "thank you very much," respectively. She also remembered that "doumo" would make "arigatou" a little politer. To Laura, "doumo arigatou" seemed most appropriate on this occasion.

Later in the class, the students learned and practiced an expression "Otomodachi desuka (Is he/she your friend? or, Are you his/her friend?)." Laura already knew the expression. She asked Professor Noguchi this question, referring to a student sitting next to her. The professor hesitated a moment to answer the question, and then somewhat reluctantly said, "Iie (No)." But he explained in English that he knows the student well, and that he is happy to have good students like him in his class. His explanation was interrupted by the bell.

Laura is the only student in this class who waived JPN 101. All the other students took JPN 101 from Professor Noguchi. From her classmates she heard good things about the instructor, including that he had held a party the previous semester for all his students. It seems to Laura that the professor has developed good rapport with his students. Although she finds the class enjoyable, and the instructor kind and gentle, Laura feels a remoteness of some sort in his formal manner. She also wonders why the professor does not regard his students as friends.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think the reason "arigatou" or "doumo arigatou" is not polite enough to express her gratitude is because, as a new student, Laura lacks the familiarity the other students have with Professor Noguchi?
2. Why do you think Professor Noguchi said "no" when Laura referred to a student and asked, "Otomodachi desuka"?

Analysis

One of the most common mistakes learners of Japanese make is the use of "arigatou" to thank *meuenohito*, or people who are older and/or higher in status. "Arigatou" is most appropriately used when thanking persons who are younger and/or lower in status, such as children, as well as family members, friends, or acquaintances of equal status. Students should not say "arigatou" to their teachers. When expressing gratitude to *meuenohito*, adding "doumo" to "arigatou" makes little difference, unless it is followed by "gozaimasu." Since "arigatou" and "arigatou gozaimasu" are usually translated in Japanese language textbooks as "thank you" and "thank you very much," respectively, many students tend to think that "arigatou" is appropriate for most occasions. Laura should have said to the professor, "arigatou gozaimasu," which is most appropriate when thanking *meuenohito* such as one's teachers, business clients, and workplace superiors.

Laura simply could have said "doumo," without "arigatou," to adequately express her gratitude to the professor. "Doumo," which by itself means "very" or "very much," is used to emphasize either "arigatou" or "sumimasen (lit., I'm sorry)," but adding "doumo" to either word hardly changes the level of formality or politeness of speech. When it stands alone, "doumo" is an abbreviation for either "doumo arigatou" or "doumo sumimasen." This "sumimasen (I'm sorry for your trouble or thank you)" is used as a polite expression of gratitude, although it is not as formal as "arigatou gozaimasu." Therefore, when "doumo" is used alone, it can mean "doumo sumimasen," which could be appropriately used to thank the professor in this case. The following examples will illustrate the difference between "arigatou" and "doumo."

1. A secretary has made photo copies for her superior.
   Superior: Arigatou.
   Secretary: (makes a slight bow without saying anything).
2. You want to thank an adult stranger who has shown you directions.
   You: Doumo (or doumo sumimasen).
   Stranger: (usually says nothing).

Although Japanese become less formal as they get to know each other better, they are still careful to observe an appropriate level of formality that depends on whom they interact with and what settings they are in. Professor Noguchi seems to believe he should maintain a certain degree of formality in his Japanese class. This will probably be his way of showing his students a proper manner to interact with teachers and other *meuenohito*. Nevertheless, Professor Noguchi can be a "friend" of his students in the English sense of the word. But the professor cannot be their "tomodachi." The Japanese word "tomodachi" means a friend with whom one has a horizontal or equal interdependent relationship. The Japanese instructor cannot be, by definition, a "tomodachi" of his students, because of the acknowledged difference in role and status between students and teachers. Professor Noguchi realized that Laura used "tomodachi" in the English sense, but he could not answer

in the affirmative because it would have been culturally incorrect. He momentarily hesitated to answer the question because it made him feel awkward to answer, in front of other students, “Iie (No, he’s not my friend).”

The following examples are some other casual-familiar level phrases which students should avoid when talking to their instructors:

Casual/familiar	**Appropriate**
1. Un (Yes).	Hai.
2. Wakatta (I understand).	Wakarimashita.
3. Iiyo (That’s fine).	Iidesu.
4. Gomen’ne (I’m sorry).	Sumimasen.
5. Chigau (That’s incorrect or different).	Chigaimasu.
6. Honto (True. Really?)	Hontou desu (ka).
7. Sou (That’s right).	Sou desu.
8. Chottto mattte (Wait a second).	Chotto matte kudasai. Shou shou omachi kudasai.
9. Mou ichido (Say it again).	Mou ichido onegai shimasu.

Case 3. Contact and Connection

Main Characters:

- Professor Kayoko Matano, who teaches Japanese at a U.S. university.
- Bill Parker, a senior student majoring in Japanese and minoring in English. He took three Japanese courses from Professor Matano.

Bill wants to go to Japan after he graduates. He has heard from his friends that many Americans teach English—regardless of their educational qualifications—at private language schools in Japan and that they earn more than enough money to pay for living and travel expenses. But he has read somewhere that those good days are over in the post-"bubble" economy. It no longer seems as easy as it was to work legally at a reputable language school. Bill has also learned that he will have to find an employer who will apply for a proper visa for him before going to Japan.

One day Bill drops by Professor Matano's office during her office hours. He explains the situation and asks her to suggest a few language schools to contact. Bill is an amicable, polite student with good academic standing. His enthusiasm impresses the professor. She tells Bill that one of her old friends in Japan has an uncle who runs a language school in Osaka, and promises to ask the friend to inquire of her uncle if there is a teaching position available.

Four weeks later, Bill receives good news from Professor Matano. Her friend's uncle is willing to hire Bill for one year. Bill is pleased, and immediately contacts the school by himself to make necessary arrangements. Everything goes smoothly, and Bill is to leave for Japan in early July.

Bill graduates in May. One month later Professor Matano receives a phone call from her friend in Japan, who says that her uncle got a letter from Bill expressing his regret that he would not be able to come. Professor Matano is very upset and disappointed; she even feels "betrayed."

About two months later, she gets a phone call from Bill, who asks her to write a letter of recommendation to a graduate school to which he is applying for admission.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think Professor Matano was more than upset when she learned that Bill was not going to Japan? What seems to have been the logic behind Bill's failure to inform the professor of his decision as soon as possible?
2. What should Bill have done to avoid this situation?

Analysis

In his mind, Bill made a rational choice between going to graduate school or working temporarily in Japan. After he sought information from Professor Matano and got assistance from her, Bill contacted the school by himself and made necessary arrangements. The school offered the job and Bill accepted it: it was an agreement between Bill and the school. When he changed his mind, he immediately notified the school of his decision. In his letter, Bill apologized to the school for any inconvenience his decision might have caused. He had already thanked Professor Matano for her help before he graduated, and so he felt that he should take care of the matter without bothering her any further.

Professor Matano was upset because Bill failed to consult her before he made his final decision, or at least to inform her of his decision before notifying the language school. In her mind, Bill's choice affected not only the school, but her friend in Japan and the friend's uncle, as well as herself. She did Bill a favor by asking her friend to contact her uncle, Mr. Kobayashi, who runs the school. She is indebted to the friend for her help, and the friend to her uncle for helping her friend. And Mr. Kobayashi's decision to hire Bill affects the operation and personnel management of his school. Mr. Kobayashi decided to offer Bill a job, without formally interviewing him in person, because he thought he could trust a student recommended by a university professor, who was also a good friend of his niece's. Such a student, Mr. Kobayashi reasoned, would not let his professor down. If this trial case were successful, Professor Matano thought, she might develop an interdependent relationship with the language school. Such a relationship would benefit not only her students who want to go to Japan, but also Mr. Kobayashi, who could expect her assistance in selecting and securing reliable teachers of English. Bill's action frustrated this possible scenario, and caused her and her friend a loss of face.

Bill has every right to change his mind, but he should have explained it to Professor Matano so that she could notify and apologize to her friend and Mr. Kobayashi before Bill did. The last thing she wanted was to give them the impression that she couldn't care less once she introduced her student. Developing and maintaining good contacts and connections is essential for Japanese to effectively deal or work with others in their highly interdependent society. Bill's conduct by no means helped Professor Matano in this respect.

Postscript

When she received a phone call from Bill for the first time since his graduation, Professor Matano had already seriously reflected on this unfortunate incident and on Bill's lack of cultural awareness. She had begun to think that the fault lay partly with her. She acknowledged that, like many other instructors of Japanese, she had been preoccupied with improving students' language proficiency, but had neglected to develop their cultural competency. Although Bill had taken courses like Japanese history and Japanese arts, he apparently had had

little opportunity to learn the ways in which contemporary Japanese think, communicate, and interact with each other in their interdependent relationships. This incident gave Professor Matano an opportunity to reconsider the roles that college instructors of Japanese should play.

6
Living in Japan

Case 4. Close Encounters of the *Gaijin* Kind

Main Characters:

- Debbie Cole, a twenty-three-year-old Caucasian, participating in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program sponsored by the Japanese government. Debbie studied Japanese for four years at a university in the U.S. and six months in Japan. She speaks Japanese well.
- Amy Onoda, a friend of Debbie's, visiting Japan for the first time. Amy is a third-generation Japanese-American who speaks only "survival" Japanese.

When Amy arrived at Narita International Airport, she found that some of the Japanese immigration and customs officers were just about as unfriendly and bureaucratic as their American counterparts. As she passed through the final gate, Amy was very glad to spot Debbie waving to her among a crowd of Japanese. Two of them took a train to downtown Tokyo and spent a few days there before going to a small town in Tochigi Prefecture, where Debbie was teaching English at a high school.

Amy was fascinated with Tokyo, dazzled by both the foreign and the familiar. She especially enjoyed walking into one fine shop after another. It was not like driving to a shopping mall in the U.S., where one finds many franchise stores that display the same merchandise. And she had never seen so many people walking so fast in a clean, bustling street—and in such an orderly fashion. By the end of her first day in Tokyo, Amy had already had an interesting experience. When she had gone to a restaurant with Debbie, the waitress had spoken to Amy, but not to Debbie, even though it was Debbie, in her fluent Japanese, who had actually ordered for Amy.

The two Americans left Tokyo for Debbie's small town in Tochigi Prefecture. It was a two-hour train ride. When their train stopped at a small station, an old lady with her little grandson rushed in and looked for open seats. Several people were standing in the car and every seat seemed to be occupied. When the old lady came close to Debbie, she stood up and offered her seat, saying "*Douzo*." The old lady looked a little surprised and hesitated for a moment. Then Amy repeated the same word, which means "Please." The old lady quickly responded, "*Sumimasen* (Thank you)," and let her grandson take the seat. The little boy also looked a little

surprised, and whispered to his grandmother, "*Gaijin* (foreigner)," as he took Debbie's seat.

Debbie had obtained a Japanese driver's license. She was able to lease an economy car for almost nothing from a local dealership owned by one of the PTA members of her school. It took a while to get used not only to this Japanese car, with its steering wheel on the right-hand side, but also to the Japanese traffic signs. In this car, Debbie took Amy to Nikko, the most famous tourist spot in Tochigi. The Toshogu Shrine in Nikko was full of visitors, including groups of high school students on a field trip. A group of students approached Debbie and asked her, in broken English, to pose with them for their group picture. One student said to Debbie, "*Sain, puriizu* (Sign, please)," asking her to write her name on a piece of paper. This would be for the memory of his first close encounter with *gaijin*. Other members of his group followed suit, asking her for her "autograph."

On their way back to Debbie's apartment from the day's trip to Nikko, they were stopped by a police officer for a minor traffic violation. As soon as the officer saw Debbie behind the wheel, and Amy sitting next to her, he said to Amy, "*Doushite otakuga unten shinaino* (Why aren't *you* behind the wheel?)." Unable to understand what the officer said, Amy started talking in English, while Debbie asked him, in Japanese, what seemed to be the problem. Apparently confused, the officer let them go without issuing any ticket.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did some Japanese interact differently with Amy and with Debbie?
2. Do you think Amy and Debbie had the above-mentioned experiences just because they happened to meet those Japanese who rarely see foreigners face to face?

Analysis

Gaijin is a colloquial abbreviation of "*gaikokujin*" and means "a person who is from another country." However, the term *gaijin* used in informal speech usually refers to a person who is identified by appearance as "non-Japanese," most often a Caucasian. Japanese tourists visiting the U.S. often refer to Americans as *gaijin*, even though those Japanese are themselves *gaijin* in a foreign land.

Today, for the first time in Japanese history, a large number of foreigners visit, live, and work in Japan, and millions of Japanese travel abroad. The Japanese market is flooded by foreign products and popular culture, especially American. Still, even today, a majority of Japanese have little or no personal contact with foreigners, and most don't have any non-Japanese friends with whom they are willing to discuss personal matters or in whom they can confide. Because of Japan's historical isolation and cultural-language differences, most Japanese simply don't know how to communicate and interact with *gaijin*, who are believed to exist outside the realm of Japanese predictable order.

To be Japanese—in the mind of Japanese—one must meet at least three conditions: look Japanese, speak Japanese, and act Japanese. Obviously, appearance is the first thing that Japanese observe when identifying foreigners, especially Westerners. Debbie Cole is no doubt a *gaijin* in the eyes of Japanese; but Amy Onoda looked Japanese to the waitress in Tokyo, to the old lady in the train, and to the police officer who stopped Debbie's car. Amy was assumed to speak Japanese, while Debbie was not. Incorrect assumptions confused and embarrassed the old lady and the police officer.

Foreigners are a familiar "sight" to people in big cities, who are better prepared to look indifferent, instead of watching *gaijin* with conspicuous curiosity. This does not mean, however, that city folks are better able to communicate and interact with foreigners. It really depends on individuals—on their personality as well as on their language skills and cross-cultural awareness. In comparison to adults, kids are far less prepared to look indifferent, whether they live in big cities or in small towns: they show natural curiosity when they see someone who looks quite different from Japanese.

Throughout their life most Japanese do not have an opportunity to learn how to treat or communicate with foreigners—not from their parents, not from their teachers, and not from their colleagues. The Japanese cultural code of conduct is no guide for them, either. Facing uncertainty with no proper guide, some Japanese shy away from foreigners; some adventurous ones try their English on Westerners, assuming that all of them speak English; and others treat *gaijin* as if they were their invited guests or celebrities. Still, there is an increasing number of Japanese who are making friends with foreigners, as both sides are trying to minimize language and cultural barriers.

A final note. When Debbie offered her seat to the old lady, she didn't sit down herself, but let her grandson take the seat. This is not uncommon in Japan. Many Japanese parents and grandparents tend to "overprotect" their children or grandchildren when they are among a crowd of strangers. It is rational for such adults to put the well-being of their "helpless little dependents" before their own and others'. You will rarely see young passengers offer their seats to the elderly on a bus or train. Instead, you will notice the sad reality that many elderly people are very competitive in finding and occupying a seat. Strangers in public are, after all, "equals," among whom scarce goods like open seats are allocated on a "first come, first served" basis.

Case 5. Your Japanese is Good!

Main Character:

- Amanda Harris is the forty-five-year-old wife of an American businessman. She and her husband lived in Hong Kong for three years before he was assigned to his company's branch office in Tokyo.

After having lived in Hong Kong, a dazzling, bustling modern city in the Far East, Mrs. Harris thought she was well prepared for her new life in Tokyo. She soon found, however, that besides superficial similarities Japan is quite different from Hong Kong, especially the people and their attitudes toward foreigners. She felt that it was much easier to get acquainted and make friends with Chinese in Hong Kong, who, she thought, were more open and straightforward than the Japanese.

Soon after she and her husband settled in an expensive but small (large by Japanese standards) Western-style apartment, Mrs. Harris had opportunities to meet a group of foreign nationals, American and European. It didn't take a minute to find that they didn't like living in Japan. Like Mrs. Harris, they were there not by their own choice. Every time they got together, they complained about Japan and the Japanese: "Why can't affluent Japanese do things the ways we do them back home? Houses are cramped, with no swimming pool. Everything is so short and small. Ceilings are low; streets are narrow and chaotically winding; trains and buses are always jam-packed. Everything is so expensive. We can't even afford maids, like we had in Thailand, the Philippines, and India. The Japanese are superficial, unfriendly, deceitful, ethnocentric, chauvinistic, exclusive, and discriminatory. And most of them can't speak English...." Mrs. Harris decided to stay away from this group; she was determined to know Japan better, and to make friends with Japanese.

Mrs. Harris started taking Japanese language and cooking classes. She also volunteered to teach English for a small group of Japanese housewives. In the cooking class, every Japanese praised her Japanese, "*Nihongo ga ojouzudesu ne* (You speak Japanese well)," when she said simple phrases like, "*Hajimemashite* (Pleased to meet you)." Some classmates tried to use English and apologized for their poor English. Many repeatedly asked her the same questions, such as where she was from, if she liked Japanese food, and if she had children. The conversation usually went no further.

Mrs. Harris became well acquainted with several Japanese women of her age. She enjoyed going out with them, having lunch, shopping, watching sumo, attending concerts, visiting museums, and chatting at fancy coffee shops. These women were always polite, considerate, sensitive, and circumspect; they were all good listeners. Nevertheless, she knew she missed something in her association with them. Conversations with them were enjoyable, but somewhat superficial. They only rarely discussed social issues; nor did they talk about their marriage,

their personal concerns, or their problems. It seemed to Mrs. Harris that this had little to do with the lack of language competency on either side. She heard from her husband that his Japanese colleagues at the office seldom talked about their wives and marriage; nor did they express their personal opinions on political, religious, or philosophical issues. Mrs. Harris wondered if she could cultivate a more open and candid friendship with Japanese.

Questions to Consider

1. Japanese tend to praise foreigners' Japanese regardless of their proficiency level. Is it just an empty compliment, or does it imply something else?
2. Japanese seem to feel they have to speak English to Westerners in Japan, and often become embarrassed when they fail. Why do you think this is the case?
3. What seem to be the obstacles for Mrs. Harris in establishing open and candid friendships with Japanese?

Analysis

When people of different cultures meet, which language to choose is not only a personal or cultural matter, but also one of relative political and economic power. The difference in attitude between many Americans and Japanese towards choice of language is reflected, respectively, in the following statements one often hears: "They don't speak English over there"; and "*Nihongo ga ojouzudesu ne* (Your Japanese is good)."

Many American tourists do not hesitate to talk to Japanese strangers and store attendants in English, asking, "Do you speak English?"—which sometimes sounds like a demand rather than a question. Japanese visitors in the U.S., on the other hand, would not dare to speak in Japanese to Americans they don't know. To many Americans, English is part of an American culture and institution that should be universally emulated. It is *the* language for international business and diplomacy, as well as for science and technology. To most Japanese, their language is only for Japanese who are born Japanese, look Japanese, and act Japanese. They don't normally expect Westerners to be proficient in Japanese—although they often see some *gaijin* personalities speak fluent Japanese on TV. The concept, "They don't speak Japanese over there," does not exist in the Japanese mind: English is the language that Japanese are supposed to learn and use when communicating with Americans.

"*Nihongo ga ojouzudesu ne*" is simply an expression of surprise, and is not meant to be a statement evaluating or praising foreigner's competency in the Japanese language. It is a compliment to a foreigner for making an effort to speak Japanese. (If you meet a Japanese who never compliments you on your Japanese, he or she might be one of those demanding, professional language instructors.) Some Westerners, who have stayed in Japan for many years and speak Japanese well, get really tired of this compliment or surprise. Some of them have come to

conclude that the Japanese believe foreigners will never master or truly appreciate the language.

Most Japanese students study English for six years in high school. However, the English oral proficiency level of most senior high graduates is lower than the Japanese oral proficiency level of American college students who have studied Japanese for only a few semesters in a good Japanese program. This poor performance is by no means the fault of Japanese students. It is a total system failure: almost everything is fundamentally wrong with the Japanese (public) English education. Those who can speak English have learned at expensive private language schools, have taken private lessons from native speakers of English, have studied by themselves using audio tapes and CDs, and/or have studied abroad. Many Japanese who cannot speak English really feel embarrassed when they are spoken to by foreigners; they envy the foreigners' courage and effort to speak Japanese. "*Nihongo ga ojouzudesu ne*," then, is a sincere compliment as well as a surprise.

Interdependent Japanese are circumspect, mindful of the possible consequences of what they say about people around them. In social gatherings with a group of people who are not their intimate friends or relatives, many Japanese try to bring up such topics as sports and entertainment, which everybody can discuss without expressing their private or personal views. They try to avoid religious, philosophical, and political topics, because these are considered private in nature—things most appropriately discussed only among close friends or relatives. Japanese know that every individual has significantly different views and opinions on these subjects. Many Japanese fear that open and candid discussion of such topics may lead to unnecessary argument or personal embarrassment, frustrating the purpose of a group gathering—experiencing connectedness and camaraderie. Unlike the youth, mature Japanese adults are also expected to refrain from serious academic discussions in social gatherings where acquaintances or colleagues meet.

Many Japanese would feel uneasy and be at a loss for what to say if someone were to make a casual reference at a social gathering to his or her own personal matters, concerns, or problems, such as the breaking-up of a relationship, a divorce, or a cancer treatment. Personal concerns and problems are most appropriately discussed in private, with intimate friends and relatives.

Japanese can cultivate and maintain durable, trustful friendships, sharing common interests and sentiments—without discussing social and political issues, and even without inquiring in detail into friends' private or personal matters. Like Americans, Japanese do share personal feelings and concerns candidly with their friends, but they are more selective and cautious about whom to confide in, and under what settings. The language barrier will normally make it harder for foreigners to form friendships with Japanese. Ironically, however, cultivating friendship may be much harder if foreigners tend to rely almost entirely on words. Japanese are more suspicious of words, or what is verbally expressed; they are more heedful of one's attitude and sincerity, and rely more on nuance, indirectness, gut feeling, and non-verbal communication.

Postscript

Mrs. Harris eventually became acquainted with Mrs. Tsuchiya, who had spent three years in Michigan when her husband had been assigned to his company's subsidiary plant near Detroit. The two women agreed to be conversation partners, using English and Japanese alternately. One day, when they were alone at Mrs. Harris' place, chatting over a cup of coffee, Mrs. Harris told Mrs. Tsuchiya about some of the difficulties and troubles she was experiencing in Japan. After listening to her attentively, nodding silently, Mrs. Tsuchiya began to talk about the rough time she had had in Michigan, her loneliness, her sense of isolation, and her worries about her kids' education—above all, her helplessness and guilt over the inability to function as a good mother and wife in that foreign environment. She couldn't even help her children do their homework in English, which was devastating to this good "education mother."

This exchange was magic. Both women felt much closer after that, and Mrs. Harris knew that a new friendship was beginning to form.

Case 6. Curiosity and Hospitality

Main Character:

- Sandra Tracey is a twenty-nine-year-old high school teacher from Michigan. She teaches Spanish and coordinates the ESL (English as a Second Language) program at her school in Michigan. Ms. Tracey has been invited by Shiga Prefecture to teach English at local schools. She has studied beginning Japanese for one year.

Her plane landed at Kansai International Airport, which is on a man-made island in the Bay of Osaka. Ms. Tracey was cordially greeted at the airport by a Japanese teacher of English and a staff member of the prefectural office. From there, it was a two-hour train ride to Otsu City, the prefectural capital of Shiga-ken. Sandra was barely awake when she crawled into the small bed in her hotel room.

The next day was the start of a hectic few weeks marked by a series of formal and informal receptions, and by sightseeing tours, as well as meetings with teachers, school board members, and government officials. The Japanese hosts had everything arranged in minute detail, not only for those meetings and receptions, but also for everything else for Sandra—including lodging, transportation, and even what she ate and drank. After formal receptions and meetings, Sandra's Japanese colleagues took her to restaurants for casual dining and drinking. Even then, they ordered every meal and drink for her and picked up the bills. Sandra was at first excited with the gorgeous receptions and exotic food, as well as with all the attentions given to her, but after only a few days of this lavish hospitality she began to wish that her Japanese hosts had consulted her before making choices and arrangements for her sake.

Sandra settled in at an apartment the Shiga Prefecture rented for her. Her landlord, Mr. Ikeda, lived in a large wooden house with a small pond in its beautiful traditional Japanese garden. He had a granddaughter who went to the school where Ms. Tracey would teach English. He asked his granddaughter's Japanese teacher to tell Ms. Tracey that he wanted to invite her to dinner. With all the receptions held for her, Sandra had never been invited to a Japanese home, and she had heard about Mr. Ikeda's gorgeous house. She understood that many Japanese are reluctant to invite *gaijin* to their cramped living quarters, often referred to as "rabbit hutches." She thought this would be a good opportunity to experience Japanese home cooking and casual entertainment by a Japanese family.

Sandra was wrong. She was escorted instead to a large room in an elegant Japanese restaurant. Ms. Tracey, or Toreishii-san, was introduced to Mr. Ikeda's relatives—his wife, his married children and their children—and to his friends as well. On the tables were dozens of dishes of Japanese cuisine, including local delicacies of fresh water fish caught in Lake Biwa. The Japanese hosts and guests paid undivided attention to how Sandra used chopsticks and how she reacted to

Japanese cuisine every time she tried a new dish. Some of them looked reassured by Sandra's reactions. As they relaxed after a few rounds of drinking, some guests started asking "usual" questions, such as: "What is your impression of Japan?"; "What do you think of Japanese customs and etiquette?"; and "How do you like raw fish?" Then an elderly lady surprised her by asking, "*Mada ohitori*? (lit., Are you still single?)" Trying to be polite, Sandra simply said "yes," without mentioning that she had got divorced a few years earlier. The elderly lady continued, "You should get married soon so that your parents will stop worrying about you."

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the Japanese hosts arrange everything without consulting Sandra? Do you think that Japanese hospitality is based on the paternalistic attitude of "father knows best"?
2. Why do you think Mr. Ikeda invited Sandra to a restaurant and not to his home?
3. Westerners are often asked both the "usual" questions and some too-personal questions by Japanese whom they have just met for the first time. Why do you think this is often the case?

Analysis

Interdependent Japanese are biased toward predictability in interacting with people. One way for them to reduce uncertainty is to behave according to the roles they are expected to play, such as those of host toward guest. When a host has to make arrangements for a series of meetings, luncheons, and dinners with different people, he needs to plan everything ahead of time so that everyone can rely on each other to welcome the guest in a properly predictable manner. The expected role of the guest is then to appreciatively accept and participate in the host's arrangements. It will save time and possible confusion, or even embarrassment, if everything is arranged ahead of time. Japanese guests should hesitate to reveal their preferences, because such a revelation burdens the host, who is trying to make a variety of arrangements to accommodate different preferences. Anticipating a guest's reservations or reluctance, a Japanese host will therefore not consult with that guest about his or her preferences.

Consider the following hypothetical situation where a party of ten Type D Japanese dine at a Western-style restaurant. The party is made up of an invited guest and individuals who differ in age, status, and role. The guest will have to face the awkward honor of ordering first. No one, especially an individual who is younger and/or lower in status, will want to order something more gorgeous or expensive than what is ordered by the guest or by those higher in status. The guest thus tries to show modesty and reservation, giving the impression that he is not taking advantage of the host's hospitality. At the same time, the guest suspects that others who want to play it safe may order the same thing he will order. To the

guest, the benefit of individual choice is outweighed by the cost of decision making and by worry over making a bad choice that may affect other people. The guest might prefer to eat at a Japanese restaurant where the host orders the same set meal of several dishes for everyone, or where everyone shares a special order of several dishes prepared for the whole party.

In the case of Ms. Stacey, the Japanese acted according to their expected role as good hosts: they tried to please the guest and everybody else by avoiding confusion and embarrassment. The hosts were especially careful to reduce uncertainty, since they had to deal with an unknown, a guest who had come all the way from a foreign land. Detailed arrangements, they reasoned, would avoid possible embarrassment for both the hosts and the guest.

Japanese entertain guests either at their "humble" home or at a restaurant, depending on the occasion and whom they are entertaining. In addition to these two factors, the number of guests is a significant determining factor, because most Japanese houses are small and not designed to hold as large a party as is common in the U.S. It is considered most appropriate to entertain at a fine restaurant guests who are higher in status, such as important clients, or anyone special, like an invited foreign visitor to whom the host wants to show his or her honor and respect. On special occasions, such as *houji* (a Buddhist memorial service for the dead), many Japanese entertain even relatives such as aunts and uncles at a nice restaurant.

Mr. Ikeda's choice to entertain the guest at a restaurant was probably motivated by two considerations. Most importantly, he wanted to show his respect and honor to Ms. Tracey, who was to be a foreign guest teacher at the school his granddaughter attended. In addition, he probably wanted to impress his relatives and friends by his association with a *gaijin* tenant and guest. It was probably a novel experience for his relatives and friends to meet and dine face to face with this *gaijin* teacher.

There is a fundamental difference between Japanese and Americans in the assumptions they make when dealing with foreigners. Japanese assume they have to make adjustments and *cope with* how to communicate and interact with *gaijin*, while Americans expect anyone, when in America, to do as Americans do. The "usual" questions, which may annoy Western visitors, are part of a first screening that many Japanese unconsciously conduct when dealing with *gaijin*, unknowns who represent something external to the Japanese world of interdependence. Before getting to know each other as individuals, Japanese want to know first if foreigners *like* Japan and things Japanese, and if and how they will *try* to learn and adjust to Japanese culture. Type D Japanese are very much concerned with what other Japanese think of them as individuals. In dealing with a *gaijin*, however, many Japanese first want to know what he or she thinks of Japan and Japanese culture—before wishing to know how the foreigner views them as individuals.

Questions such as, "Do you like grilled eels?" and "Have you ever eaten *nattou* (fermented soybeans)?" represent Japanese curiosity about foreigners' interest in things Japanese and about their willingness to *try* to adapt to Japanese culture. If a foreigner says she likes *nattou*, the Japanese reaction will be

amazement (there are many Japanese who don't like this "smelly" food). On the other hand, if she doesn't like *nattou*, it will help Japanese to confirm the stereotypical image of foreigners. It matters little whether she likes *nattou* or not. What matters is if she has ever tried it; or that, by doing so, she has shown respect to Japanese culture.

Ms. Tracey was surprised by the elderly lady's abrupt, "personal" question about whether she was married. To many Japanese, however, marital status is not too personal a question to be asked by acquaintances, and even by those whom one has just been introduced to. In a culture that emphasizes differential interdependence, information about one's age, gender, occupation, marital status, family, and so on, is not considered too personal or private. The question, "Are you married?," is considered no more personal than the question, "Do you have brothers and sisters?" Such information can be easily obtained anyway, from sources other than the person himself or herself. Information about one's marital status is not very personal—not as personal as one's religious faith or political belief, which can be kept to oneself if one chooses. "Are you married?" is often heard as part of an ordinary social conversation as people become acquainted. Such information may later become useful in developing interdependent relationships.

Case 7. Bad Experiences

Main Characters:

- Anonymous travelers, students, or expatriates who feel they have experienced discrimination overseas.

A journalist has interviewed 145 tourists, students, or expatriates, and has documented the accounts of their experiences in her book (its bibliographical information is provided in the analysis section below). The following accounts are brief summaries of some of the incidents reported in her book.

- When Mr. A walked in the street, local kids often called out to him using a derogatory term or a racial slur. When he rode a bus or train, it often happened that no one took a seat next to him.
- When Mr. B went to a disco by himself, he was often denied admission.
- Ms. C and two other ladies went to a restaurant that was almost empty. The waiter obviously saw but ignored them. When Ms. C called the waiter, he said, "I'll be with you." The ladies waited ten minutes, fifteen minutes, but the waiter never came to their table.
- When Ms. C went to a fine shop, she was ignored by the female clerk. The same clerk, however, gave a friendly smile as soon as she saw another customer of her own race.
- Mr. D opened the door of a store and held the door open for someone coming after him. Then a group of well-dressed, middle-aged ladies passed Mr. D in an arrogant fashion and entered the store without saying a word.
- From his seat in a plane, Mr. E saw a cute little girl toddling around in the aisle. When he said "hello" to her, her mother scolded her, saying "Don't play with anyone of that race."
- Mr. F was waiting in the line of one of the cashiers in a supermarket. When Mr. F's turn came, the cashier let a customer behind him cut in and attended to her first. Whenever this happened, Mr. F would say to himself, "Not again!"
- Miss G attended a school in a small town. Whenever she went out to town, where she stood out because of her complexion and hair color, somebody always watched her behavior. Back at the school later, her classmates often told her things like, "You were walking with a boy along the street in town, weren't you?" She felt she had little privacy.

The above examples represent only a small number of the accounts reported in the journalist's book, and these incidents are not as serious or offensive as many others documented in it.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think is the nationality of the people who had such bad experiences overseas?
2. Have you ever had similar experiences at home or overseas?

Analysis

All these incidents represent a small sample of what some *Japanese* tourists, students, or expatriates have experienced overseas. They are from Ikuyo Satoh's book, *Kaigaide Sabetsu Saretakoto Arimasuka* (Have you ever been discriminated against overseas?; Tokyo: Shufunotomo Sha, 1995). I have introduced the above examples here in my book because some of them are similar to what many foreigners complain they experience in Japan. Satoh writes that it is significant for Japanese to know what it is like to be discriminated against, and to consider their own discrimination against fellow Japanese and non-Japanese (p. 7). I cannot agree with her more.

Mr. A had bad experiences in Australia. In English-speaking nations, Japanese walking in the street are sometimes called "Jap," "Chinaman," or "Chink." Many Westerners in Japan don't like to be referred to as "*gaijin*," which, as I explained in Case 3, means "a person who is from another country." It is important to note that *gaijin* is not a derogatory term. By calling Westerners "*gaijin*" or "*gaijin-san*" (*san* is an honorific suffix equivalent to Mr. or Ms.), Japanese might show a lack of cross-cultural awareness or sensitivity, but not contempt or hostility against Westerners.

Some Japanese will hesitate to sit next to a *gaijin*, even if every other seat is taken. This is primarily because they are afraid of being spoken to in foreign languages. It would be embarrassing to be seen unable to communicate with *gaijin* in public. There are certainly some people who just don't like to be so close to the unknown that is represented by those who are not expected to behave like Japanese.

Mr. B was denied admission to a disco in New York. Ms. C felt unwelcomed at a restaurant in Munich, Germany, and she was ignored by a white clerk at an expensive shop in Beverly Hills, California. In Europe, many high-class hotels presumably have a quota for Japanese guests, and expensive restaurants segregate Japanese tourists in a section that is distant from good seats set aside for Western guests. It is often explained that Japanese tourists are not welcomed because of their "bad manners." In other words, they don't know how to dine and act according to proper European manners. Similarly, some restaurants, night clubs, and inns in Japan politely say, "No *gaijin*, please." They want to avoid any possible trouble with *gaijin*, who are not expected to know Japanese customs.

At a store in Great Britain, Mr. D was treated as if he were a doorman. This is an interesting case. It is not part of Japanese etiquette to hold a door open for someone behind you in public places. To Japanese, public space is something

“equally” shared by everyone—a space where each person is generally responsible for his or her own well-being. Mr. D held the door open, following British etiquette, and was mistreated by middle-aged white ladies.

Mr. E was aboard a plane bound for the U.S. when he heard a white woman say to her little daughter, “Don’t play with the yellow.” Mr. F often experienced this “nothing-out-of-the-ordinary” type of incident at supermarkets in the U.S. Miss G’s feelings that she had little privacy occurred in a small town in France.

Prejudice prevails throughout the world of rational people; it doesn’t discriminate against races, ethnic groups, or regions. Some Japanese consciously discriminate against non-Japanese individuals, especially against other Asians and black people; and many others are not fully aware that they do discriminate. Today a great number of Japanese travel or live overseas, and many of them experience the pain of being subjected to bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination. It is time—and always the right time—to turn attention to discrimination at home.

Case 8. A Host Family

Main Characters:

- Eric Peterson is a nineteen-year-old college student from Ohio, who has yet to declare an academic major. Eric first became interested in Japan when Honda Motor built a huge automobile plant in Marysville, Ohio, a small town east of Columbus. He decided to travel to Japan during the summer and study Japanese at a private language school. Through a non-profit organization, he has luckily found a host family in Saitama Prefecture who will let him stay for three months.
- Yuriko Mizuno, a thirty-nine-year-old housewife, who lives with her husband in a medium-sized town in Saitama Prefecture. The couple has an eleven-year-old son. The Mizunos are a middle-class family.

Mrs. Mizuno had a friend, named Yokota-san, who attended an *eikaiwa* or English conversation class at a private language school. Mrs. Yokota proudly told Mrs. Mizuno that the Yokotas would soon have an American student, Eric, living with them for three months. Mrs. Yokota was excited about the opportunity to use her English, and hoped that this visit would have some educational effects on her children.

Ten days after Eric's arrival, Mrs. Yokota fractured a bone in her right arm and found it hard to do household chores—especially cooking—with her arm in a cast. Recalling that the Mizunos were also interested in becoming a host family, Mrs. Yokota asked Mrs. Mizuno if she could look after Eric until her arm was healed. Mrs. Mizuno consulted with her husband, and then agreed to have Eric with them. Mrs. Yokota offered to pay for living expenses for Eric, but Mr. and Mrs. Mizuno politely declined her offer. They insisted that "*hoomusutei*" or "homestay" should be volunteerism. Mrs. Yokota told Mrs. Mizuno about Eric, his family, what kind of food he liked, his daily routine, how she treated him, and so on.

Eric moved to the Mizunos. Mrs. Mizuno hastily bought a new *futon* mattress large enough for him, and let him occupy *kyakuma*, or the guest room—the only available room in their house (*kyakuma* is primarily for entertaining guests, not for long-term occupancy). She also bought Eric *a yukata* (a cotton summer kimono), which can be worn for comfort after a bath or at summer events such as the *Bon* Festival (which honors the spirits of ancestors). Eric loved traveling. He suggested some places he wanted to visit. Over the weekends, the Mizunos took him to many sightseeing spots.

Eric would get up at seven, take a shower, eat an American-style breakfast, and attend Japanese classes in the morning. In the afternoon, he would give English conversation lessons to several Japanese women whom Mrs. Yokota had introduced to him. He was happy with this arrangement: he was well paid out of their pocket. When he wasn't teaching English, Eric would often hang around with

Japanese girl friends he had met at the language school. He often brought such friends to his room. He also talked for a long time with his friends over the phone, and made overseas calls at least once a week. Eric was expected to come home by seven thirty for dinner, but often came home late—although he would call Mrs. Mizuno a few hours before the dinner time. Eric did not care for traditional Japanese food, so Mrs. Mizuno cooked Western-style dishes for dinner almost every day. When he came home, he always took a shower—even if late in the evening. The Mizunos bathed in the Japanese style at regular times. The Japanese summer was very hot and humid, Eric complained. His room was air-conditioned whenever he was in.

About seven weeks had passed since Eric first began to stay with the Mizunos. Mrs. Yokota's arm was now healed. However, Eric wanted to stay with the Mizunos for the remaining five weeks of his stay in Japan, instead of moving back to the Yokotas and making adjustments again. Before leaving for a weekend trip with some Japanese friends, Eric asked Mrs. Mizuno if he could stay with her family. Mrs. Mizuno said she would consult with her husband and with Mrs. Yokota.

When Eric returned from his trip, he was asked to come to the office of the association which coordinated homestay in that area. He was told that he should move back to the Yokotas. It was explained to him that the Yokotas were his "real" host family, and that his returning would be the right thing to do.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the formal explanation given to Eric for the reason he should move back to the Yokotas?
2. Why didn't Mrs. Mizuno tell Eric in person that he should return to the Yokotas?

Analysis

Many inexperienced host families in Japan have a tendency to regard their primary role as "looking after their foreign guests." (When they look after high school students, they often expect a letter from the students' parents, expressing gratitude and asking good care for their sons or daughters.) Such host families feel they have to make as many adjustments and special arrangements as possible, so that their guests will find their stay to have been not only comfortable and enjoyable, but also memorable. They often buy a new bed or *futon* mattress, new kimono, and other gifts. They try to find an English-speaking doctor if their guests catch a cold. They even make substantial changes in their diet, such as serving beef or chicken every day, rather than fish and *tofu*. Obviously, such an arrangement does not last long without causing strain or stress on the family, especially on the housewife. Some foreign students or visitors truly appreciate their hosts' efforts, but others are not even aware that their hosts are making many adjustments to their lifestyle. To some visitors, homestay is little more than an extremely cheap and

convenient alternative to renting an apartment, which is not only very costly but also procedurally complex for foreigners.

It seems that there are two major reasons for the Mizunos' decision to send Eric back to the Yokotas. First, it is very likely that Mrs. Mizuno felt stress, and that the family wanted their normal life back. Seven weeks is too long a time for them to endure cross-cultural differences under such conditions. An experienced host family will tell its visitors in advance about house rules, and will respect foreigners' privacy and autonomy, as long as they observe these rules, and to the extent that their stay will not excessively interfere with the family's normal lifestyle.

Mrs. Mizuno was a novice as a host mother, and she had another disadvantage. She had been told by Mrs. Yokota what kind of food Eric liked, how he spent the day, and how he had been looked after at the Yokotas for the first ten days. Highly conscious of this precedent as a basis of comparison, Mrs. Mizuno seems to have felt obliged to follow suit: she probably wanted to be favorably compared with Mrs. Yokota as a host mother. As a result, the Mizunos ended up making more adjustments than they felt comfortable with.

A second, equally significant, reason is provided by the formal explanation given to Eric. Mrs. Mizuno was a pinch hitter, so to speak. Mrs. Yokota asked for her help only when she thought she could not look after Eric herself. Eric could have been happy with just free room and board, without being looked after; but Mrs. Yokota believed that it was her responsibility to look after him. Now that her arm was healed, she wanted, and was expected, to fulfill her responsibility. Besides, the Yokotas probably had made many plans for Eric and themselves. Eric's return to the Yokotas was a happy solution for both families.

When a conflict of interest or difference of opinion exists, Japanese are more likely than Americans to use an intermediary rather than to settle face to face. This is an approach preferred by Type D Japanese, who want to maintain harmony between interdependent persons. By using an "impartial" third party, Mrs. Mizuno tried to give the impression that Eric's returning to the Yokotas was something recommended by the association, independent of her family's preferences. The Mizunos did not even reveal their preferences to Eric. Such an intermediary is perceived as something that exists external to one's interdependent relationships—something that is beyond one's control and influence. Therefore, the logic goes, interdependent Japanese should accept or adjust to any suggestions or recommendations made by the intermediary.

To many foreign students, homestay is an attractive alternative to renting an apartment. However, it is important to keep in mind that most middle-class host families will usually end up making substantial financial sacrifices when they have an additional person in their households. Utilities such as water, gas, and electricity cost much more in Japan than in the U.S. Most Japanese houses do not have central heating and cooling systems, partly because of the high utility costs. Food is also a lot more expensive in Japan than in the U.S. And in the Japanese household, it is the role and responsibility of the housewife to make ends meet *and* to save every penny, or rather yen.

Case 9. Living in a Small *Seken*

Main Character:

- Janet Cramer is a thirty-four-year-old editor for an English-language newspaper in Japan. She came to Japan eight months ago and taught English until she found the editor's job in Tokyo.

A few weeks after she had moved into her apartment, Janet was visited by her friend, from whom she learned that her landlord had received a complaint from the chair of the *jichikai* (neighborhood association) about her disposal of garbage. Accompanied by her friend, Janet soon paid a visit to the chair, introduced herself, presented a small gift, and apologized for whatever inconvenience she had caused to her neighbors. Then, her apology was matched by the chair, who said that it was his fault to fail to explain the proper procedure. *Sumimasen* (I'm sorry).

Janet was advised by her friend to initiate *aisatsu*, or greetings, whenever she saw her neighbors, saying "*ohayou gozaimasu*" in the morning and "*kon'nichiwa*" in the afternoon. Her friend explained that such simple greetings, with a slight bow, would make a great difference toward a better relationship with people in her neighborhood. Her friend was right. Soon Janet found her neighbors friendly and helpful. They provided useful information about daily living, such as about nearby discount stores, cleaning shops, beauty salons, and the post office, as well as about how to discard large-sized trash and how to repel or kill bugs and insects. When exchanging greetings with her neighbors, however, Janet still found one thing odd: their greetings were almost always followed by a brief reference to the weather.[1]

In late spring, Janet was sneezing at home and in the workplace for several days. Her boss recommended a doctor whose office was located relatively near their workplace. Janet went to see the doctor and described the symptom. She found the doctor neither very friendly nor sympathetic; he simply said that she probably had hay fever. She was not satisfied with this diagnosis, because she had never had allergic reactions to pollen before. Then the doctor asked her what she was doing in Japan. When she presented her business card and mentioned the name of her boss, the doctor suddenly looked and sounded very friendly to her. The doctor then even volunteered to write a letter of introduction to an allergy specialist at a university hospital.

One day, when Janet dropped by a supermarket on her way home from work, one of her neighbors approached her and said that her next-door neighbor, Mrs. Kobayashi, had been hospitalized for acute appendicitis. Mrs. Kobayashi was a most helpful and kind neighbor to Janet. She had given Janet her used furniture,

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[1] Phrases such as "*Ii tenki desune* (A nice day.) "and "*Atsui desune* (Hot, isn't it?)" are more or less equivalent to the English expression "How are you?" as a greeting. The Japanese translation of "How are you?," "*Ogenki desuka*," is not used as a daily greeting; it is closer to "How have you been?"

household utensils, and many other items—including an *omiyage* (a souvenir gift) she had brought back from her last trip to Kyoto. The next day Janet told a colleague about Mrs. Kobayashi and asked him about the etiquette of visiting a patient at the hospital. She was surprised to hear that she should put a 5,000-yen bill in a special envelope and give it either to the patient or to one of her family members.

In late October, Janet received a card from one of her Japanese friends, inviting her to that friend's wedding reception. This time, Janet wasn't surprised to hear from her colleague that she had to present the couple with an envelope containing money as a wedding gift—although she was amazed at the amont of money that a friend is generally expected to give. Janet called up her friend and wished her happiness. She imagined that her friend must be very busy and worried with last minute preparations and confirmation. Contrary to her expectation, Janet was a little surprised by her friend's matter-of-fact remark, "It's all taken care of, you know."

Janet was planning to visit her parents back in Nebraska during the Christmas and New Year holidays. She went to a department store to buy some Christmas gifts for them. One large section of a floor was staffed by an army of sales clerks who were busy taking orders for *oseibo*—gifts given at year end as an expression of appreciation for favors received during the past year. These sorts of gifts are delivered by a department store mostly to one's business clients, superiors, instructors, doctors, and others from whom one has received favors, as well as to close relatives living far away. The year does not end without this most important gift-giving part of the season.

Questions to Consider:

1. The *jichikai* chair apologized to Janet for his failure to explain the association's rule regarding garbage disposal. Admitting his fault, why did he bring the neighbors' complaint to Janet's landlord in the first place?
2. Why did the doctor apparently change his attitude towards Janet?
3. Is it true that weddings are not a big deal to most modern Japanese women?
4. Why do you think giving gifts (including money) is so prevalent and socially important in this culture?

Analysis

Janet had to rely on her Japanese friend as a guarantor when she signed the lease contract. When her neighbors brought their complaint to the chair of their neighborhood association, he went to her landlord, who turned to Janet's guarantor as an intermediary. It seems that neither party wanted to deal with the *gaijin* face to face. Apparently not a Type B American, Janet visited the chair and apologized. She didn't know that garbage must be divided into two types, burnable and non-burnable, and that the collection spot and day differ for each type of garbage. The chair matched her apology, instead of accepting it. This counter-apology was most

appropriate from the standpoint of maintaining harmony and *equal* status among people in the neighborhood, of which Janet is now a member. Japanese also say "*Sumimasen* (I'm sorry)" even when they are not directly responsible for something; they apologize for any inconvenience they might have caused in one way or another.[2] It does not necessarily mean admission of fault or responsibility. Remember this magic word.

Introduction, personal or otherwise, thereafter transforms a stranger into an active member of the small *seken* or in-group through which Japanese are connected. Japanese are well aware that the way in which they treat such an introduced stranger has an effect on their own interdependent relationship with the introducer. The effectiveness of such introduction depends on differences in relative status, familiarity, and on the degree of indebtedness between the introducer and the one who receives the introduction. The doctor that Janet saw probably knows her boss well, either personally or businesswise. He and her boss might have attended the same school or university. In any case, the doctor would not have been embarrassed if Janet had at first told him that Mr. so-and-so had recommended to seeing him. And wherever you go, on any occasion, don't leave home without *meishi* (a business card). *Meishi* establishes one's identity in the *seken*.

Gift giving in contemporary Japan is both personal and social, part of a larger system of differential interdependence. Gifts are given or exchanged to confirm and re-confirm interdependent relationships, as well as to show affection, friendship, sympathy, gratitude, or respect. Gifts today can be classified into two types—one requires money in the form of new bills, and the other consists of goods or products. Gifts of money are given to those who are expected to need a substantial amount of cash for special occasions, happy or unfortunate, such as weddings or funerals. Other recipients of money gifts include the sick who are hospitalized, victims of disasters such as fire and floods, and children celebrating the New Year, who "need" more money than their regular allowances in order to buy toys and other goods, and to save money in the bank. The New Year's gift, or *otoshidama*, is given to children by parents, grandparents, and close relatives such as aunts and uncles.

There are two important seasons for giving non-monetary gifts, *ochuugen*, in the middle of the year, and *oseibo*, at year's end. (The terms *ochuugen* and *oseibo* also refer respectively to the gifts themselves.) Such gifts are given to show respect to people who are higher in status, such as one's superiors at the workplace or one's instructor in tea ceremony, as well as to people from whom one has received specific favors. Most *ochuugen* or *oseibo* gifts are things that can be enjoyed by the family members of the recipients, such as gourmet food, fruits, sweets, and drinks. Other important customary gifts include *omiyage* and *temiyage*. *Omiyage* or souvenir gifts are brought to one's relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and so

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[2] The expression "*sumimasen*" is used on two other occasions: when expressing gratitude for an act of kindness (I'm sorry or thank you for your trouble); and when attracting attention, as of a sales clerk (Excuse me).

on when one returns from a trip. *Temiyage* is a small gift, such as a box of sweets, that one takes when visiting a friend, relative, or acquaintance.

The culture of differential interdependence has specific rules that the recipients of gifts should observe with respect to returning a favor or giving a return gift—who should give what, when, and how. For example, the recipients of *kouden* (incense money)—that is, the family members of the deceased—should give a return gift equivalent to about one-half the value of *kouden*, once the funeral rites of forty-nine days are over. In the case of *ochuugen* or *oseibo*, recipients are not expected to return the gift if they themselves are higher in status than, or have granted specific favors to, the givers.

Weddings have the important function of seeking social recognition for a marriage. Attendants at a Japanese wedding ceremony and/or its reception generally constitute a who's who of the most important or influential people in the couple's interdependent relationships. The average wedding reception is attended by fifty to 100 guests, who include workplace superiors, co-workers, business partners, as well as close relatives, friends, and (much less frequently) the go-between (*nakoudo*) accompanied by his or her spouse. Recently, the reception—where the couple and their families show their social status—has become more elaborate, extravagant, and ostentatious. The average reception is estimated to cost between 35,000 to 45,000 dollars.[3] It is common that a large portion of such a financial burden is borne by parents and other relatives, who wish to make the family and their child look better in the eyes of their small *seken*. Most weddings are held at hotels, wedding halls, or Shinto shrines, which arrange and conduct every phase of a wedding ceremony and its reception. The engaged couple does not have to worry about the priest, a master of ceremonies, wedding gown and coat, flowers, a photographer, a video cameraman, cake for the cake-cutting, food, honeymoon arrangements, etc. The couple can rely on the professional people for almost everything.

[3] According to a survey conducted by Recruit, the average cost for a wedding ceremony, reception, and honeymoon in 2008 was 4,210,000 yen. "Zexy Kekkon Torendo Chousa," October 2008.

Case 10. Young People

Main Character:

- Edward MacDowell is a twenty-one-year-old exchange student from a university in Arizona, studying at a private university in Kyoto. He is in a special program for exchange students whose Japanese is not proficient enough to participate in regular classes for Japanese students.

At a reception party held for foreign students, Ed spotted Professor Uemura, with whom he had become acquainted when the professor was a visiting scholar at Ed's university in Arizona. Ed remembered that he had played golf with him a couple of times and that they had eaten dinner at a Japanese restaurant in Phoenix. Ed approached Professor Uemura, who was speaking in Japanese with some Korean and Chinese students. Half wishing to show off his acquaintance with the professor, Ed said in a loud and friendly voice, "Uemura-san, *hisashiburi ne. Ogenki*? (Uemura-san, it's been a long time. How have you been?)" Professor Uemura looked embarrassed and made a slight frown.

Ed found his academic schedule was not very demanding, and so he occasionally sat in on large lecture classes for Japanese students. Many students looked bored with the ninety-minute lectures. Some slept in the lecture hall; some came late or left early; and others whispered with their neighbors.

Ed wanted to make friends with many Japanese students, rather than hang around with the other Americans. He learned that Japanese students join athletic and non-athletic clubs on campus, where they make friends, and through which they have opportunities to socialize with many other young people. Since Ed loved to play tennis, he decided to join the tennis club. Tennis courts are in short supply in Japan, as are many other inexpensive facilities. Joining the tennis club made sense in that respect, too.

The club turned out not to be the one for Ed. It took him only a few weeks to decide to quit. Ed felt as if he had joined a feudal society: the hierarchical club was, he thought, ruled by a class of *senpai* or senior members, to whom new and junior members must show deference. He was often scolded by his *senpai* for his failure to use honorific language when talking to them. Daily practice was mandatory, and the same "inefficient" routine was imposed on every member, regardless of ability or experience. When Ed made a few suggestions to improve the training method and the practice routine, he was branded as "*namaikida* (cheeky or saucy)." Even when not practicing, club members always hung around together, eating and drinking. It seemed to Ed that their lives revolved around the club.

Ed soon found that he had picked the "wrong" group or association: he should have joined, and *did* join, the tennis *saakuru* (circle) instead of the tennis *kurabu* (club). With the tennis circle, Ed could schedule his own practice and enjoy tennis in a more casual, friendly atmosphere. He made many friends, both male and

female. Getting to know many young Japanese, Ed discovered more differences than similarities between them and their American counterparts.

He noticed, for example, that young people, especially women, wore casual clothes of expensive famous brands. He wondered why many young Japanese seemed to be blindly loyal to such brands. It was considered fashionable to wear such expensive clothes, as long as it was in a discreet, unostentatious manner. Ed also found that many girls were indecisive; or, rather, he thought that they had given up their "right" to express preferences and to make decisions. "What would you like to eat?," Ed would ask his date. "Anything will be fine" would be the usual answer. If he asked, "Where would you like to go?," she would answer, "*Wakan'nai* (I don't know)." Recently, however, Ed has reassessed this view about his dates. It now seems to him that those "indecisive" girls somehow get what they want—in the final analysis.

Ed observed that Japanese college students were generally gentler and softer than their American counterparts. Japanese students were generally passive in class; they seldom expressed their own opinions in public. The average Japanese college student did not study as hard as the average American student. Most Japanese students were supported financially by their parents, but many worked part-time to earn spending money for pleasure. He learned that many of the private universities in the Kyoto area mailed grade reports directly to the students' parents, most of whom were paying the tuition for their kids. Ed did not feel that these young Japanese projected an image of the "corporate warriors" who were the driving force of a nation once known as an "economic animal."

Questions to Consider

1. Why did Professor Uemura frown and look embarrassed?
2. Is there a rational explanation for the "brand loyalty" prevalent among many young Japanese women?
3. What seems to be the difference in attitude towards interdependence between young Japanese and older generations?

Analysis

Ed used an improper level of formality and politeness when he talked to Professor Uemura at the party. He should have used *keigo* (honorific language), saying something like, "*Uemura sensei, ohisashiburide gozaimasu....*" The suffix "*-san*" (meaning Mr., Mrs., or Ms.) is not appropriate when addressing one's teacher. When he first met Ed in Arizona, Professor Uemura was not an instructor at the university where Ed was studying. The professor probably talked with Ed in English on an equal basis. But now Mr. Uemura was Professor at the Japanese university where Ed was studying: he must be respected in such a capacity and status, especially in public. Ed's words sounded rude in front of the Asian students the professor was talking with. (Some instructors of Japanese in the U.S. are too

lenient towards—and, therefore, not truly kind to—students who unknowingly speak rudely to them.)

Individuals tend to balance a wish to be different from others and a need to be accepted by peers or people around. Type D Japanese, especially young women, are more likely than other types to fear rejection by their peers. Being very different in the wearing of clothes runs the risk of being rejected in two different ways—either by failure, or by too much success. A young woman senses the subtle disapproval of her peers if she fails to show individuality in a fashionable manner. If she succeeds too much, however, she may be resented by jealous peers for breaking the unwritten code of harmonious egalitarianism. Here famous brands come to the rescue. By definition, a famous brand is one that is accepted by many people as something good; it is available to anyone who is willing to pay the price. In addition, variety within a single product line provides opportunity to express individuality in a fashionable way, acceptable to peers. With famous brands, rational young Japanese are able to seek "individuality" without appearing to be appreciably better or worse than their peers.

Ed did not know about a significant aspect of contemporary college campus life—the difference between *kurabu* (club) and *saakuru* (circle). In a sense, *kurabu* represents a fading tradition, while *saakuru* symbolizes a trend among youth to seek a new way of interdependence. Until recently, college students have been expected to join one of the clubs on campus, where they have learned, among other things, how to adapt to cooperative group living in a hierarchical environment. Students belonging to athletic clubs have been preferred candidates for positions as Japanese corporate warriors. They had the essential qualities Japanese corporations sought in their employees: endurance, obedience, and the ability to work as team members. Recently, this alternative to the club has emerged and has been flourishing. Today, far more students than join traditional clubs join circles, where they enjoy sports and other activities in a more equal and relaxed environment.

Most young Japanese, both male and female, still value interdependence; they seek intimacy and a sense of belonging in a small group. They do their best to avoid isolation from, or rejection by, their peers and people around them. They are circumspect—very heedful not only of others' words and deeds, but also of the circumstances or settings they are in. They are more sensitive to peer pressure than are older Japanese. They won't easily open up, even among friends—unless they are very close friends, who can trust each other. Older Japanese are a little more open in this respect. Young people today also show less tolerance for status differences and hierarchical relationships. Their attitudes towards interdependence may be shifting a little closer to Type C on the equality-hierarchy scale. Compared with older generations of Japanese, however, young people now seem to be more dependent, especially on their parents, than interdependent.

There seems to be a small but increasing number of young people who feel lonely or empty by themselves, but who do not want to incur the costs of commitment and emotional involvement that are associated with interpersonal relationships. These youth may enjoy casual superficial associations, without friendship or commitment; or they may engage in activities such as playing video

games, which they can enjoy without human interaction. In searching for their own self in affluent Japan, they may be too delicate and irresolute to be either “independent” or “interdependent” in their attitudes towards the people around them.

7.
Business Settings

Case 11. Am I Doing All Right?

Main Character:

- Diane Wright, twenty-three years old, is expected to graduate in December with majors in business administration and Japanese. She lived in Japan for three summer months while attending an intensive program in Japanese. During her short stay in Japan, Diane became acquainted with, and taught English to, a Japanese manager from a large chain of retail stores that had affiliates in the U.S. Through that contact, she was given the opportunity of a job interview before returning to the U.S. to complete her joint-degree program.

The interview was a bit of a surprise to Diane. The Japanese language classes she had taken did not teach anything about how to prepare for *mensetsu*, or the job interview. The interview was conducted both in English and in Japanese. In addition to the sort of questions commonly asked in the U.S., the Japanese interviewers asked Diane questions such as:

- Tell us what type of persons you don't like.
- How long do you intend to work for our company?
- What would you do if you disagreed with your superior regarding an opinion or order he has given?
- What does *kyouchousei* (cooperativeness) mean to you?

Diane worried about how she did in the interview, because she could not answer some of the questions in Japanese very well. Two months after her return to the U.S., Diane received a phone call from a manager with the personnel department, offering her a job. He said that the salary and benefits would be comparable to what new Japanese recruits with university degrees receive. She accepted the offer, although she was not sure what she was expected to do. She thought it would be a good experience, anyway.

Soon after her arrival in Tokyo, where the company's head office was located, Diane participated in an orientation program for new recruits. She learned something about the company, but did not learn much about what her responsibilities were, or how to carry them out. She was told that she would learn those things on the job.

Diane was first assigned to the international department, where she primarily wrote letters in English and checked translations. Her male co-workers were generally friendly and cooperative, although her boss seemed formal and somewhat cold. Most of the female workers in the department were called OL (office ladies) and carried out only clerical work. Diane thought that OL might better stand for "*ochakumi* (tea-serving) ladies." It turned out that this tea-serving practice soon put Diane in an awkward situation. She was the only female employee in the department who was herself served tea, instead of taking turns serving it. Diane thought, on the one hand, that taking part in such a demeaning practice was out of the question: she was not an OL anyway. On the other hand, she felt a sense of envy and rejection from the other female workers, whose assistance and cooperation were needed to get her work done. Diane felt that something must be done about the situation. Her boss simply told her to be flexible.

Six months later, Diane was re-assigned to the sales department. Many of the staff members there tried to speak to her in English, which they apparently wanted to practice. She was often asked to participate in after-hours socializing. Diane still remembers the morning following the night she first went to a few bars with her colleagues in the international department. That evening, everybody seemed to be having fun, talking casually in both English and Japanese, and singing in a *karaoke* bar until late at night. Diane was called on a first-name basis, instead of Wright-san. She thought that she had broken, or even "melted," the ice in the relationship with her colleagues. The next morning, when Diane greeted her colleagues in a much more informal/familiar manner than before, they all looked very embarrassed. Diane was Wright-san again.

Nearly a year had passed since Diane first joined the company. She began to feel that she was not learning anything significant at this workplace. She felt she was not given any important or meaningful assignments she could carry out on her own. Diane always worked together with her senior male colleagues, assisting them one way or another. In addition, she was unhappy with the lack of positive feedback from her boss; she had no idea how she was being evaluated, or where she was going in terms of her career. She brought her concerns to her boss, but he just asked her to be patient and flexible. Later, Diane was told that her salary would be raised substantially the next year; but that did not satisfy her.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think is the rationale for the company's employment of Diane?
2. What do you think are the intentions of the interviewers, asking questions such as those listed above?
3. How would you cope with the tea-serving situation if you were in Diane's shoes?
4. Why did her colleagues look so embarrassed when Diane spoke to them the morning following the night of socializing?

Analysis

Diane Wright was probably not hired because of her experience and skills, but more likely because of her educational background and potentials. The company may have had two motives for the employment of Diane. One motive may have been to promote *kokusaika* (lit., internationalization), a term vaguely referring to individual or institutional efforts to become functional in the international arena—political, economic, or otherwise. The company may have wished to increase the Japanese employees' awareness of *kokusaika* through face-to-face interaction with foreigners. Another motive may have concerned the company's wishful thinking regarding its overseas employment strategy. The company was not expecting Diane to stay long with them in Japan. But they may have hoped that, were Diane patient enough to stay for a few years and to learn their way of running business, she might eventually have become a good candidate for a managerial position at one of their affiliates in the U.S.

Companies will not invest much to train employees who are not expected to stay with them for very long. It is often said that it takes five years of on-the-job training for Japanese university graduates to become worth the salary they receive, while it takes only half a year in the case of female clerical workers, known as OL, who are expected to quit when they get married. Japanese companies are also reluctant to hire the eldest son of a family whose father or uncle runs a small or medium-sized business, because such a son may some day quit in order to succeed his relative as an executive. Many Japanese companies assume that American office workers will not stay long with one company, and they are not as eager to invest in them as they are in Japanese male university graduates. Since such American employees, especially the talented ones, will often become unhappy with the treatment they receive, they will quit the companies, thus contributing to the apparent validity of this self-fulfilling prophesy by Japanese management.

It seems that most Japanese companies who hire foreigners for the sake of *kokusaika* have neither a special training program for them nor a specific, well-coordinated plan to utilize their talents and skills—except in the case of those with highly technical skills, such as computer systems analysts and securities traders. Diane was hired, not because of any request by a department to fill a position or meet a need, but probably because of the personnel department's decision, pursuing the company's *kokusaika* policy. Apparently, neither the company nor the departments where Diane worked thought much about how to train or employ her. If the company wanted Diane to stay longer, to qualify for a position at an affiliate in the U.S., they should have sat down and discussed with her the necessary steps to take toward such a career path.

The types of questions often asked in Japanese job interviews reflect emphasis on applicants' attitudes as significant criteria for evaluation. Japanese interviewers stress such qualities as endurance, cooperativeness, enthusiasm, adaptability, flexibility, and responsibility. They also emphasize *sekkyokusei*, the initiative to begin a task or to take action without being told what to do. This is because interviewers think many Japanese candidates lack this ability or quality. By Japanese standards, American *sekkyokusei* may be regarded as an

aggressiveness, that may lead to the making of arbitrary choices without consultation with colleagues and superiors.

Regarding the tea-serving situation, there will be no “correct” solution until this practice is discontinued. This is what Diane did, who is probably a Type C person. She made a compromise between her principles and her need to get along with other female employees. Whenever possible, Diane went to the small kitchen area and helped them prepare to make tea or clean up, but she did not bring a cup to any colleagues or visitors. At the same time, she engaged in brief chitchat in order to build up good rapport with her fellow female employees.

In the Japanese business culture, it is essential to change gears quickly, even abruptly, between informal-social modes and formal-business modes of communication and behavior. As explained in Chapter Two, Japanese, who are biased towards predictability, interact with others more variously than do Americans, depending not only on who the others are, but also on what settings they are in. Japanese have more distinct rules about how to behave in different settings; this decreases uncertainty and facilitates interdependence. An informal-social mode may be most suitable for after-hours socializing, to establish rapport and exchange information, but it disrupts the predictable order of the hierarchical interdependence that prevails in the Japanese workplace. A certain level of formality must always be maintained in business settings, no matter how familiar you become with your colleagues.

Case 12. Those Japanese Bosses

Main Characters:

- Taichi Shimizu, forty-six years old, is a sales manager at a Japanese-owned company in the U.S., sent from the parent company in Tokyo.
- James Watts, twenty-eight years old, is am employee working under Mr. Shimizu. James lived in Japan for three years, attending an international high school in Kobe, when his father was working for a U.S.-owned company.

James thought Mr. Shimizu to be unlike any of the Japanese he had known in Japan; he considered that his boss perhaps didn't like him. One day, Mr. Shimizu told James to refrain from speaking to him in Japanese. He said that James' "aggressive" Japanese bothered him. James did not quite understand this remark, because he had always been careful to use the polite level of speech, instead of the casual/familiar level to which he had become accustomed in Japan. James thought that, rather, it was his boss who sounded direct, even curt, when making requests or giving orders, lacking the usual Japanese politeness and indirectness. He also thought that Mr. Shimizu's English lacked sophistication.

James believed that Mr. Shimizu was not as competent as American managers of comparable rank and position. Mr. Shimizu did not seem to know much about the principles of American-style marketing. He rarely gave specific instructions or explanations for carrying out his orders; he would often tell his subordinates to figure out how to implement an order that had come from his own Japanese boss. Both Mr. Shimizu and his boss, for that matter, were indecisive; they were always reluctant to make decisions without first consulting the head office in Tokyo.

James complained that Mr. Shimizu had told him to be flexible, to cooperate with other colleagues, and to take action without being told, even though he was given neither clear authority nor directions. James believed that his boss did not trust him to carry out an assignment; his boss often asked him not only how a job was progressing, but also many questions about detailed points of the assignment. James would think to himself, "I am not a child."

One day Mr. Shimizu asked James if he could complete an assignment by a certain deadline. When James said that he was not sure, his boss told him to try to do his best. In a week or so, Mr. Shimizu asked James how he was doing, and James replied that he could probably get the job done by the deadline. As the deadline approached, Mr. Shimizu, who had gone off on a five-day business trip, now returned, expecting that James' assignment would be done. He found, however, that James had taken a leave of absence to attend the funeral of his uncle, who had died three days before. When James returned, he told Mr. Shimizu that it had been an emergency, and that he had told Mr. Shimizu's boss. James knew that his boss was angry, although he said nothing but "*Komatta* (I'm in trouble)."

When the assignment was finally completed, Mr. Shimizu found that James had not used the data that should have been used. James said he had not been aware of the data, and pointed out that Mr. Shimizu himself , his boss, had failed to mention it. Mr. Shimizu was furious this time, insisting that everybody in the office knew about the data. He demanded that James answer why he had not consulted him, or his colleagues, if he had not been familiar with the subject matter of this particular assignment. He continued to ask why James had not asked for help from his colleagues in order to finish the job before taking leave to attend his uncle's funeral.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think that Mr. Shimizu is an arrogant, rude man, whose communication style lacks the politeness and indirectness commonly found in most Japanese? Why do you think Mr. Shimizu does not want James to speak to him in Japanese?
2. Why is it that many Japanese managers overseas are reluctant to make decisions without first consulting the head office in Japan?
3. If James were a Japanese, how do you think he would have handled the situation of not being able to meet the deadline?

Analysis

As every learner of Japanese should know, there are three kinds of polite expressions commonly used in daily conversation: (1) *teineigo*, the neutral polite expression (with -masu or -desu endings); (2) *sonkeigo*, the honorific expression that shows respect to superiors by honoring the action or state of the superiors themselves; and (3) *kenjougo*, the humble expression that shows respect to one's superiors by humbling the action or state of oneself. Even native speakers, especially youth, often have difficulty properly using these polite levels of speech, called *keigo*. It is quite easy to offend your Japanese superiors or customers *if you speak Japanese fluently* but don't use *keigo* properly. Novice-level speakers of Japanese are not expected to use *keigo*; they are in most cases off the hook.

When he was in Japan, attending an international high school, James probably had little opportunity to learn, not to mention to use, those polite levels of speech. It is most likely that James learned Japanese from young Japanese of his own age, among whom a casual/familiar level of speech is most common and appropriate. Even though James knew the grammatical difference between the casual and polite levels of speech, it was a different matter to actually use *keigo* in conversation with his Japanese superiors.

In speaking to Japanese superiors, there is a more difficult problem than linguistic difficulty. Even if you can use *keigo* properly, your boss may still feel that your Japanese sounds "aggressive," owing to the differences in communication style between Japanese and Americans. For example, when exchanging opinions with your Japanese boss, the English "I disagree" or "I don't think so" may not

present a problem; but their Japanese translations may sound "aggressive" to your Japanese boss, even when expressed using *keigo*. You should not be a yes man (or person), but expressing disagreement to your boss must be done in a roundabout manner. A general rule in Japanese corporate culture is that it is only appropriate to express your own opinion when asked to by your superior. You must be careful even when you praise your boss. Suppose, for example, that you have asked your boss to make a speech or presentation on the Japanese QC circle, and that, after the speech, you want to say something like, "It was an excellent or impressive speech." The Japanese translation of this, "*Totemo yoi hanashi deshita*," should be avoided, because a word like "*yoi*" (good) here implies a judgment or evaluation of your superior's ability by a subordinate. It is more appropriate to say, "*Okagesamade benkyou ni narimashita* (Lit., Thanks to you, I (or we) learned a lot)."

When speaking in Japanese, a Japanese boss is culturally allowed to be blunt or abrupt in making requests of subordinates. The problem is that many Japanese incorrectly assume that Americans prefer to express themselves only in a direct and straightforward manner. When speaking in English to their subordinates, Japanese managers often fail to use expressions such as "I'd appreciate it if you could...."

A majority of Japanese sent by parent companies to their foreign affiliates will stay no longer than five years. Their primary concern is to play safe overseas, without committing any blunder, and to be rewarded later for the hardship of living away from home—often separated from their wives and children. Such employees have a strong incentive to get their head office involved in any important decision, in order to share responsibility with them. With the approval by the head office, it will be everybody's shared responsibility if something happens. The head office also wants to be involved in its affiliates' decision making. As I explained in Chapter Three, when a Japanese organization has an ambiguous delineation of individual authority and responsibility, one of the ways to compensate for the ambiguity of the system is face-to-face contact and communication among the staff and managers. A head office is always concerned about how its branch offices in Japan are following its policy and strategy. However, in the case of overseas subsidiaries, a head office worries much more, because of both the physical and cultural distance. Decision making takes a longer time due to the Japanese emphasis on consensus. As much as an overseas office wants its head office involved in decision making, so does the head office wants to be involved in that process.

About the final question. When he returned from the funeral, a Japanese subordinate would have, first and foremost, apologized to Mr. Shimizu. Mr. Shimizu understood that it was an emergency, but any Japanese would apologize for the inconvenience that he or she might have caused. The culture of differential interdependence requires a Japanese subordinate to apologize to his or her boss even if the subordinate believes that he or she is right. Remember that "*Sumimasen* (I'm sorry)" does not necessarily mean admission of fault or responsibility. In many cases, it is simply an admission that one's choice has caused inconvenience to others in one way or another. An immediate sincere apology would have made the situation much better for James.

The next thing a Japanese employee would do is report to his boss about progress on the job, to make sure that he is doing what the boss has in mind. Then he would work overtime to finish the job as soon as possible. When the job was completed, he would apologize again for the failure to meet the deadline. In a Japanese organization, it might have been possible to ask colleagues for help, since it is likely co-workers within the same section would know what each member was doing.

Case 13. What Consensus?

Main Character:

- Benjamin Clark is a twenty-six-year-old employee of a Japanese-owned company in the U.S. He started working for the company six months ago. He majored in finance at college, and has no Japanese-language background.

When Ben first entered the company, it was explained to him that although this U.S. corporation (*i.e.*, incorporated in the U.S.) is basically run in the American way, the management also emphasizes Japanese-style consensus and cooperation. Half a year later, however, Ben began to doubt what consensus they were talking about.

Ben remembered the day when he made a proposal for the first time at a meeting that was chaired by *buchou*, the department head. He came up with a new idea which he then developed into a proposal, after thoroughly reviewing it himself. He believed—and still does—that it was a good idea which was worth at least consideration and discussion among colleagues in the department. At the meeting, Ben threw out his new idea and briefly explained its merits. When he stopped talking in order to see the reaction of his colleagues, an awkward silence permeated the meeting room. The silence was broken by the department head, who said, "It's an interesting idea, but not feasible at the present time." With that remark, the meeting had been adjourned, all the items on the agenda already approved.

As soon as the meeting was over, Ben was approached by his immediate boss, Section Manager Takeuchi. He looked very upset. "Why didn't you tell me about your proposal before the meeting?" he questioned Ben indignantly.

"Why wasn't my idea even discussed?" Ben shot back.

"You need to know the importance of building up consensus," Mr. Takeuchi argued.

"That's exactly what I wanted to do at the meeting," Ben complained. "But I wasn't given any opportunity."

"You don't seem to understand what I'm saying," said the section manager. "Anyway, I must know about anything that is on the agenda *before* a meeting is held. I was really embarrassed before all those people."

"You mean you didn't see the memo I sent the day before yesterday?" said Ben.

"What memo?" Mr. Takeuchi asked. "You should talk to me in person about such a matter."

Since this incident, Ben has begun to believe that Japanese decision making is basically top-down rather than bottom-up, contrary to the image depicted by some management books. There were many informal, small-group meetings where everyone could freely exchange ideas and opinions. In fact, there were too many

such meetings, often seeming to Ben to be a waste of time, the typical agenda having little to do with what he himself was working on. However, Ben believed that the important decisions were made by the top management or the head office in Japan, and that these meetings were often used just to obtain their ceremonial approval. If not by the top management, Ben suspected, decisions were made by a group of Japanese managers and staff who did not engage in open discussion or argument. "Consensus," he lamented. "But whose consensus?"

Questions to Consider

1. How do you think Ben's idea of consensus differs from Mr. Takeuchi's?
2. What do you think of Ben's view of Japanese decision making?

Analysis

Consensus is "an opinion or position reached by a group as a whole or by majority will."[4] There would be little disagreement between Ben and his Japanese boss on this definition of consensus, although Type D Japanese prefer unanimity to majority will. Ben's complaint seems to be directed against the way in which consensus is reached, including the seeming lack of opportunity to participate in the process. Ben apparently believes consensus should be reached through open discussion or argument, even if often heated, where differences of opinion are expressed. If an opinion cannot win unanimous agreement, consensus must be reached by majority.

Like many Type D Japanese, Mr. Takeuchi seems to believe that consensus should be reached in different manners, depending on the nature of a group and the settings a group is in. The important thing is to make sure that a decision by consensus, once reached, is then implemented cooperatively and smoothly within the framework of interdependence. When consensus is sought informally, within a small group of familiar individuals who are not much different from each other in rank or status, ideas and opinions may be openly and freely exchanged. However, consensus tends to be sought informally *before* a formal meeting is held if that meeting is to be attended by a larger number of people representing different interests across sections or departments. Series of informal meetings are held between individuals, as well as within and across small groups, in order to make adjustments and to iron out differences before a formal meeting is held. This informal process of building up consensus is well known today as *nemawashi*. Type D Japanese want a formal meeting to proceed in a predictable manner, without openly embarrassing or antagonizing important members with any unexpected or heated discussion. The *nemawashi* process is essential to Japanese organizations who emphasize interdependence.

Knowing about the concept of *nemawashi* is one thing; effectively participating in the process is quite another. One must often use the *nemawashi*

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[4] *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

process intensively and vigorously in order to build up consensus and to finally have a new idea or proposal accepted at a formal meeting. *Nemawashi* is a constant, never-ending process. Employees must develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships with their colleagues; they also must share and exchange information by actively attending many meetings, some of which may not be directly related to each participant's work. After-hours socializing is often part of the *nemawashi* process.

Ben is obviously out of the *nemawashi* process. Not only does he not understand the significance of *nemawashi*, but such a consensus process is probably not his style. However, a more basic problem lies with the Japanese side, who supposedly run this corporation in the American way. Many American employees, like Ben, often feel left out of the *nemawashi* process. Japanese managers and staff constantly receive information from their head office, and much of this information is presented and disseminated in Japanese. They often meet by themselves to discuss important matters and to reach consensus. They naturally find it much easier this way to reach consensus. Having individuals like Ben participate in such a process would complicate the discussion, not only because of language problems, but also because of the difference in the amount and nature of the information they share. If Japanese want to stick to the *nemawashi* process, they should actively help American employees to effectively participate in this process.

In hierarchical organizations, most important decisions are either made or approved by formal leadership or top management. In Japan, there are many small and medium-sized companies run from the top down by dominant owners or presidents, known as "*wanman*" (very likely Type B persons). In many large Japanese corporations, however, decision making below top management is a more diffused process in which even lower-rank employees have a comparatively good chance to influence the decision. There is also a formal process of decision making, known as *ringi*, in which a proposal in the form of *ringisho* (circular letters) is initiated by middle managers and staff, then circulated to various sections and departments for approval. Changes in the original proposal are made using the *nemawashi* process. By the time the proposal reaches top executives for final approval, the process has already involved, from the bottom up, many of the people who are most likely to be affected by the proposal's implementation.

When Japanese executives make important decisions, they often give broad directions to middle managers—most likely *buchou* or department heads—requesting the formulation of detailed plans to implement the decisions. In this way, executives get middle managers and staff involved in the decision-making process before formalizing their decisions. By the time these final decisions are presented at formal meetings, it is likely they are already known to the attendants and are ready to be implemented.

Case 14. Negotiating with Japanese

Main Characters:

- Yoshio Abe is a fifty-two-year-old *buchou* or general manager of a large Japanese manufacturer, which is contacting several American companies as possible suppliers of electronics parts. Mr. Abe heads a negotiation team of six Japanese.
- Henry Moore is a forty-nine-year-old vice president of a medium-sized company in the U.S., which has been contacted by Mr. Abe's company. His negotiation team consists of three members, including himself.

The Japanese manufacturer thoroughly researched the American company and its products. Before formally meeting with Vice President Moore, Abe *Buchou* made one of his section managers contact the American company for a preliminary meeting. The Japanese section manager presented a list of the company's desires, needs to be met with regard to any possible purchase of parts. It looked to the American side like a set of stringent demands specifying price, delivery, and quality.

Abe *Buchou* and his team visited the American company. Vice President Moore welcomed them, although he was a little disappointed that the Japanese side did not send a decision maker who matched his own rank. He thought that this was a sort of "scout" team to gather information and exchange opinions. In accordance with the agenda agreed upon prior to this meeting, Mr. Moore told one of his managers to make a presentation that would respond to the "desires" expressed by the Japanese side.

The presentation was carefully worded; nonetheless, it was an attack against the Japanese demands. The manager aggressively criticized the Japanese position point by point, to the extent that their suggested terms were out of the question. Providing figures and charts, he passionately demonstrated how his company's products were excellent in quality and competitive in price. He offered an alternative set of terms to be discussed. It was an impressive presentation—at least to the American side. Then Vice President Moore did not forget to play his part: he sounded more conciliatory, stressing that his company was eager to work hard to reach an agreement for mutual benefit.

Stone-faced, the Japanese team members all listened quietly to the presentation. There was a moment of silence after Mr. Moore's remark. Then Abe *Buchou* opened his mouth. An expression of dismay crossed his face. "I'm sorry you regard our position as out of the question. You are only one of the several companies we are considering as a business partner," said Mr. Abe in a forceful voice. He then stood up and led his team out of the meeting room. Expecting a counterattack, the American side was dumbfounded with this abrupt ending of the negotiation. They had expected a long series of meetings with the Japanese, given

their emphasis on consensus decision making. They wondered whatever had happened to Japanese patience and reservation.

Soon after news of this broken-up negotiation spread throughout the American company, a junior employee, Mike Stafford, found that a member of the Japanese team, Ken'ichi Ogata, was someone he personally knew well. Mike had met Ken'ichi when they were students at a university in Washington; he had occasionally helped Ken'ichi with his English writing lessons. Mr. Moore decided to let him contact Mr. Ogata informally, although Ken'ichi was the most junior member of the Japanese team. Mike explained the situation to Ken'ichi and expressed his company's wish to resume negotiations. Mr. Ogata reported this informal meeting to his immediate boss, who then talked to General Manager Abe. Fortunately for both sides, it was decided that the business talk would be started again.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the Japanese team was headed by a *buchou* instead of someone whose rank matched that of Mr. Moore?
2. What do you think made Abe *Buchou* decide to walk out of the negotiation?

Analysis

Type D Japanese with Japanese organizations assume strikingly different attitudes towards negotiation, depending on their relative status and their bargaining position vis-à-vis the companies they deal with. Generally, the larger a company is, the higher its status. Since buyers normally enjoy a higher status in the competitive market, when a larger company is the buyer, its negotiators expect to be treated with respect, both for themselves, and more importantly, for their terms of trade. When there is ambiguity over relative status and bargaining position, Type D Japanese are uncomfortable with any notion of negotiation that implies possible confrontation. When a company believes it is in an inferior position, it shows respect to the other side's demands. At the same time, by explaining the hardship it will suffer if it accepts the original demands without any change, the weaker company tries to gain understanding, sympathy, and hopefully some concessions from the other side.

The Japanese manufacturer in the above case apparently believes that it is superior in status and bargaining position. The company came to the negotiation table with a consensus on what it wanted and on what terms. The Japanese side might eventually have made some concessions, but it definitely expected the other side to show respect to its position and needs. The American side, on the other hand, tried to equalize the status difference, believing negotiation to be a process of recognizing difference of opinion, then reaching agreement through bargaining and compromise. To them, confrontation, attack, and counterattack are the normally expected elements of such a game. However, the game they played not only

offended Abe *Buchou*, but it also made him feel he could not deal with a company who made outrageous demands of a "superior" buyer.

Abe *Buchou* has its title translated into English as General Manager, but Department Head is a more accurate translation. In large Japanese corporations, it normally takes a long time to be promoted to the rank of *buchou*—often as long as three decades from the time one enters a company, if one is capable and lucky. The rank of *buchou* with a large Japanese corporation is a very respected and influential position. It is often considered comparable to the rank of junior vice-president in American corporations. A large U.S. corporation will have several vice-presidents, but a Japanese corporation in Japan, large or small, will have only one or two executive vice-presidents. The Japanese believe that their *fuku-shachou*, or vice-president, is generally higher in rank and status than most junior vice-presidents in American corporations.

It was fortunate for the American company that it happened to have an employee who personally knew a member of the Japanese negotiation team. Having an informal channel of communication is very important when dealing with the Japanese. Although most Japanese corporations are status-conscious, they also firmly believe that building personal trust is an important step toward establishing mutually beneficial business relationships.

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