Japan—Its People, Its Language, and Its Culture

By Jeff Berglund

Putting together thirty-five years of living in and learning about a country culture that is completely different from the one in which one was first enculturated is a very difficult task, but one that I shall attempt in this paper. Before I begin, let me just say two things about undertaking a description of a culture, any culture. First, words are not the things they are used to describe; they are simply sounds or symbols that we use to sort out the myriad of information that our senses gather, and to communicate with other people about the commonalities or differences in our experience or perception. We acquire knowledge of the world around us, the natural world as well as the cultural world, directly, without language acting as an intermediary, and we are able to get along quite well with the people and things around us because of this acquired knowledge. This acquired knowledge is a physical thing, not part of our mental awareness that is so dependent upon language. Language helps us sort out our acquired knowledge. This is what Edward T. Hall（1957）refers to as“*learned* information（type A）and *acquired* information（type B）.” I have a great deal of acquired information about Japanese people, language, and culture that I have never really sorted out and put into words. Although the task seems daunting, I am looking forward to exploring in language some of my type B information.

Secondly, all type A information about something as broad and complex as the culture of a country cannot be complete. Any cultural trait that I try to pin down will only be one point along the continuum of possible expressions of that cultural trait. All cultures exist along continua. For example, if I were to say that Japanese people are on the whole more reserved than Americans, I would not be making a blanket assertion that *all* Japanese people are *always* reserved or that *all* American people are *always* uninhibited. I would simply be pointing out that the sum total of Japanese cultural expression is further toward the reserved side of the reserved → uninhibited continuum. Anyone who has attended a baseball game between the Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers at Koshien Stadium in Osaka and has observed the outfield cheering section of Tigers’ fans will undoubtedly agree that Japanese people can be truly uninhibited. All humans are capable of experiencing and expressing all the variations along a certain cultural continuum, but we learn that our culture has a particular inclination to focus on a particular point of that continuum for a particular TPO (time, place, and occasion). As Richard Brislin (1993) says, "An important part of socialization is that children are guided *away from* this total set of behaviors. Instead, they are encouraged to engage in the more limited set of behaviors that are considered acceptable and important within any one culture" (p. 95). So when I write about Japanese people, language, and culture, I will be making generalizations that do not apply in every case.

I have decided to look at my experience chronologically, with the confidence that I now know more about Japanese people, language, and culture than I did when I first came in June of 1969. Also, the division of my Japanese experience into people — language — and culture is completely arbitrary, and of course the three cannot really be separated. There is quite a bit of overlap both in real life and in this paper.

Japanese People

I was born and brought up in the American Midwest. There were no Asian-American students or Black-American students in my elementary school, junior high school, or high school. The only students who weren't Caucasian were Sioux Indians. [It's interesting to note that both the word Sioux and the word Indian are not native American words. Sioux is a French word adapted from an Algonquian phrase that literally means "speaker of a foreign language." In the Sioux's native language, they are the Dakota or Lakota. And of course the word Indian is a mistake on the part of the first European explorers to the North American continent who thought that they had reached India and were encountering "Indians." The English name Japan is also quite different from the Japanese word for their country: *nihon* or *nippon*, two common pronunciations of the Chinese characters 日 (sun) and 本 (origin) that make up "the land of the rising sun," 日本. We can see from this rather long aside that cultures and languages are quite mixed together.] The first time that I met a Japanese person was in the summer of 1968 at a large resort and campground facility in Wisconsin where I worked for three months during the summer between my sophomore and junior years of college. There were about thirty college students working at the American Baptist Convention Center in Green Lake and one of them was Japanese, a twenty-year-old boy named Hideo Kawasumi. All of the students lived in dormitories (one for men and one for women) with two to a room. My roommate was Hideo.

Hideo was different from the people that I had grown up with. One of the biggest differences is something that Edwin O. Reischauer (1986) refers to as the Japanese tendency to be more self-conscious about the impression one makes on others than judgmental on how others impress oneself（p. 10）. Hideo said that since“life is but a stage, and we the actors upon that stage,”we should“learn our own lines well.”Partly because of this way of looking at the world, and partly in order to give Hideo practice in English, we often got together at night and wrote out scenarios together with dialogue for the next day. I remember one time when we had been roommates for about a month when Hideo proposed the following scenario. He would go into a local bar“looking forlorn,”order a beer, take the beer to a corner table, and sit sipping the beer while staring at the wall as if he were both lonely and had something on his mind. I would go into the same bar a little later, order a beer, and stand at the bar drinking it. My eyes would wander to the sight of the lonely, musing Japanese boy reflected in the large mirror over the bar, and I would walk over and ask if I could sit down. We would act as if we were meeting for the first time—Hideo would ask me to sit down, we would introduce ourselves, and Hideo would proceed to tell me about his problem in asking an American girl for a date because of his limited English and because of his lack of experience in American culture. I would offer him advice and he would become visibly more relaxed and happier as we talked, and we would end up laughing together and leaving the bar together—new found friends. The next day we did exactly as we had planned and spoke the dialogue that we had written out the night before. No one else at the bar realized that our encounter was anything other than what it appeared to be: an unexpected first meeting of two people. We were the only ones who knew that we were acting. At first I thought that all Japanese people were like Hideo and sat around planning scenarios and practicing dialogue, but I was wrong. Hideo is a rare Japanese person. ［Generally speaking, when we encounter someone from a cultural group with which we are not familiar, e.g. a disabled person, we tend to think of that person as representative of that group. If the first wheelchair bound person we meet is quite outgoing, we may later remark to a friend,“People in wheelchairs are really outgoing,”even though our experience is limited to one person.］

Although Japanese people do not usually go to the extreme of writing out scenarios and dialogue in their everyday interactions, they do like well-orchestrated situations. They are less tolerant of ambiguity than Americans in most situations and most relationships. B. L. De Mente（1993） points out that Japanese are highly conscious of the“way of doing things.” He explains that the Japanese word *shikata*（仕方）“includes more than just the mechanical process of doing something. It also incorporates the physical and spiritual laws of the cosmos. It refers to the way things are supposed to be done, both the form and the order, as a means of expressing and maintaining harmony in society and the universe”（p. 1）. I was surprised by the number of meetings and ceremonies that take place at the workplace in Japan. For example, the high school where I worked for the first twenty-two years that I lived in Japan had a teachers meeting for all the staff at least once a week, with committee meetings involving six to ten teachers nearly every day. There were eight ceremonies every year attended by all the students and staff: the Welcoming Ceremony at the beginning of the school year for the newly incoming students, the Opening Ceremony and Closing Ceremony at the beginning and end of each of the three school terms, and a Graduation Ceremony at the end of the year for the outgoing students. There were also innumerable meetings to plan each ceremony and, after each ceremony there was a *hanseikai*（反省会), or a meeting to review or reflect on the details of the ceremony with a view to improving the smooth running of the ceremony the next time. Japanese people like to be prepared; they don't like surprises.

This intolerance of ambiguity makes many Americans feel uncomfortable, but it makes for a smooth running society. The trains always come on time, hotel reservations are never lost, and luggage always arrives at its destination. The bullet trains, *shinkansen*, that travel at speeds over 200 kilometers per hour and the tracks that they run on are checked daily, so there has never been an accident that involved a fatality（with the exception of the occasional suicide who jumps onto the tracks）since they started operating in 1964. They are always on time. （When a typhoon or flood causes a delay, there is always an announcement apologizing for the delay.） I was amazed to learn that the schedules that each bullet train driver carries are divided into thirty-second intervals. In other words, although the posted schedule for passengers may show that a particular train gets in at 4:14 and leaves again at 4:15, the train may actually reach the station at thirty seconds after 4:13 and leave at thirty seconds after 4:15. In any case, the passengers have only one or two minutes to get off or get on the train. Japanese passengers stand up and move toward the doors of the train while it is still moving because they know that they have only a short time to get off and the passengers waiting on the platform to get on.

Yet one of the major complaints of many Americans living in Japan or those who have extended contact with Japanese people is the ambiguity of many Japanese people in their responses to specific questions. "Why can't Japanese people give a definite answer?" "Why do they seem to say one thing and do another?" These are comments frequently expressed by Americans about the Japanese people that they deal with. In fact, U.S. President Bill Clinton reportedly told his Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin in April 1993, "When the Japanese say 'yes' to us, they often mean 'no'"（November 3, 2000, The Japan Times）. When the founder of Sony, Akio Morita, and the present governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, wrote the book The Japan that Can Say 'No', they might just as well have titled it The Japan that Can Say 'Yes' because in the book they argue that Japanese must forgo their usual ambiguity in dealing with Americans. They must learn to say “yes” or “no” in a clear enough way for Americans to understand. When I first started living in Japan more than thirty-five years ago, I, too, wondered why Japanese people seem to have a hard time saying what they really feel.

I came to Japan for the first time in June of 1969 with a group of twenty-six students from Carleton College for a summer seminar on Japanese religion. The seminar lasted about two months and after that five other students and I decided to stay in Japan and study at Doshisha University for four months. The day that our seminar group arrived in Kyoto, we were met by Ken Akiyama, a professor in the English literature department at Doshisha. He became the advisor to the group, and he was the person who found homestay families for the six of us who stayed on for the fall term. He took our group of twenty-six in a bus around Kyoto and pointed out many points of interest, including many temples and shrines, the Imperial Palace, and the Doshisha University campus. When we were passing by the foot of Narabi-ga-oka (the place where Yoshida Kenko lived when he was writing the *Tsureguregusa*, or Pillow Book), Mr. Akiyama pointed to a house with blue roof tiles and said that it was his house. He invited us to visit him if we were ever in the neighborhood. A couple of weeks later, I happened to be in the neighborhood, and so I stopped in to visit Mr. Akiyama. He didn’t seem so happy to see me, however, and when I told our Japanese translator the next day about my experience, she explained that Japanese often say “Come and visit us any time,” without really meaning it.

The longer I stayed in Japan, however, the more I came to understand that the ambiguity (called *aimaisa* in Japanese) in language makes for smoothness in interpersonal relations. Westerners in general, and intercultural communication specialists in particular, often point out that Japanese are much less tolerant of ambiguity than Americans. I believe that this intolerance of ambiguity applies more to the physical setting than to interpersonal relationships. Japanese like to have a fixed schedule, a fixed meeting room, and sometimes almost demand that the smallest details be attended to before any communication transaction take place. However, I believe that Japanese allow a great deal of ambiguity to enter upon the relationships that they have with other people. For example, one of the Japanese expressions that is very difficult to put into English is, “*Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*” (宜しくお願いします). Literally, this phrase means, “Please make it just right,” implying that the relationship between the speaker and the listener should be “just right.” English (and Western culture) demands that relationships be much more explicit and not so ambiguous. If the person using this expression has mainly a business relationship with the listener, an appropriate English expression might be, “I hope we can continue doing business together." If the relationship is more personal, the speaker might say, "I hope we can keep doing things together because I really enjoy your company." If a parent who is sending off a child to a foreign country for a homestay experience with a family of strangers wants to write a word to the parents of the homestay family, it might be, "Please take good care of my child and see that he doesn't get into trouble." To Westerners the Japanese expression seems to encourage an ambiguity in interpersonal relationships that feels a bit uncomfortable. The Japanese use this expression many times every day and I believe that *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, really means, "Let's do our best to keep our relationship going smoothly."

One of the things that struck me when I first started living in Japan is how often one can observe *douage* (胴上げ), when one person is tossed into the air by a group of people. This happens to the manager, coach, or star player after a victory in a sporting event, but it also happens at going away parties, or other gatherings where one person is being singled out to receive the congratulations of the group. The person being thrown into the air knows that the group of people will catch him before he falls to the ground. I believe that this is a very visible expression of the Japanese pattern of relationships: the life or existence of the individual is dependent upon the group. The ambiguity of language in interpersonal relationships allows the group to maintain cohesion without "dropping" any of the individuals. This ambiguity was quite disturbing the first few years in Japan, but now it is the single thing that I like best about living in Japan.

I believe that the turning point in accepting *aimai* culture (曖昧文化), a culture of ambiguity, came about a year after I arrived in Japan. The incident itself takes place in a doctor's office in Japan. There are three characters involved in the incident: the mother of the Suzuki family that took me in for my first year in Japan, the family doctor that all the Suzuki's went to when they were sick, and myself. I was 21 years old when the incident took place in the late autumn of 1970. I was born and brought up in the United States where a twenty-one-year-old is considered an adult. I had lived away from home during my college years and considered myself a strong individual, quite capable of taking care of myself without coddling from my parents. The mother of the Suzuki family was in her early fifties. She was born and brought up in a small fishing village in Okayama Prefecture and had married her husband through *omiai*, or arranged marriage. She had three sons, the third of whom was my age and still living at home at the time. I called her *Obasan*, which means aunt or older woman in Japanese, but I really thought of her as my second mother. The doctor was about sixty years old at the time of the incident. He was a typical local doctor, with a small clinic next door to his house serving the people in the immediate neighborhood. His specialty was internal medicine, but what that means is that he was the primary health care consultant for the people who came to see him. If they had health problems that went beyond the usual cold, flu, or upset stomach, he usually sent them on to a hospital staffed with specialists in all branches of medicine.

Before I left for Japan I tried to prepare myself for the different "reality" that I knew I was going to experience. I practiced the Japanese language because I realized that I would meet few people in Japan with whom I could communicate in English. I practiced eating with chopsticks so that I wouldn't be clumsy at mealtimes. I read all that I could about Japanese lifestyles and learned about differences in bathing habits and sleeping arrangements. The one thing I was completely unprepared for, however, was the change in climate. I was born and brought up in South Dakota, the Sunshine State, and had never owned or used an umbrella before I came to Japan. I arrived in June during the rainy season, so my first purchase in Japan was a new umbrella. The summer is not the only time that Japan has high humidity, however. The winter is also wet, and Kyoto, which is situated in a sort of "bowl" surrounded by mountains, is known as the place in Japan with the worst cold, damp winters. Japanese houses at that time were not insulated and did not have central heating. I had some "electric slippers" and a small electric "stove," the Japanese word for a space heater. I could see my breath in my room as I studied or read in the Suzuki home.

I had started teaching at Doshisha High School as a full-time teacher, six days a week, and I was commuting between home and school by motorcycle, about half an hour each way. I had a jacket and gloves and boots, but they couldn't keep out the cold, damp wind that kept hitting me as I drove my motorcycle. I was always cold: at home, on my motorcycle, or in class (no central heating at school, either). I reacted to this situation by getting a high fever and a rash all over my body. Not only was I terribly sick physically, I was also exhausted mentally and emotionally after trying to adjust to Japan for nearly a year. It was getting on towards Christmas and the realization that it would be my first Christmas away from my American family made me feel even less confident about recovering on my own. In discussing culture shock as a kind of stress reaction, LaRay Barna (1983) says, "Especially in the case of the sojourner who maintains a determined, positive, and open approach, it [culture shock] could come in the form of ill health" (p. 30).

Obasan was very concerned about my health and took me to see the family doctor. Although it was only a short walk from the Suzuki house, I was so weak that I almost needed *obasan*, who is only half my size, to support me. It was my first time to visit a Japanese doctor, and I was completely unprepared for the event. He had me sit on a stool with *obasan* standing beside me to answer his questions, as he didn't seem to find my Japanese ability up to snuff. Even when I did manage to understand a question and make a stab at answering, he failed to look at me, but only waited for *obasan* to clarify my answer, to say it again in more intelligible Japanese. I gathered from the few questions that I did understand, and from the general flow of the conversation between the doctor and *obasan*, that he was ascertaining the causes for my condition. He took a metal tongue depressor（a bit larger than a nail file）from an alcohol filled glass on his desk and told me to open my mouth, the first time that he had spoken directly to me. He proceeded to hold down my tongue with the depressor as he peered at my throat. It was the first time I had ever seen such a metal tongue depressor（called *atsuzetsu-ki* in Japanese）and when I nearly gagged on its cold, wet surface, I remember wondering if it was safely sterilized and worrying about whose mouth it had been in before mine.

While we had been in the waiting room along with five or six other Japanese patients, *obasan* had shown me how to take my temperature with a thermometer that I stuck in my armpit, reaching under my jacket, shirt, and undershirt to do so. The doctor asked obasan for that information and she and I both replied that I had a fever of about forty degrees. Even as I answered, I was trying to compute just what that would be in Fahrenheit. When the doctor wrote that down on my chart, I noticed that he was writing not in Japanese, but in what appeared to be English. Upon further examination, however, it turned out to be German, the language that many Japanese doctors use on patient charts. He then had me take off my jacket and pull up my shirt and undershirt so that he could look at my rash and also so that he could thump my back with his big finger, listen to my heart and lungs with his stethoscope, and prod my stomach and intestinal areas with his finger tips. He asked *obasan* a few more questions that were beyond my Japanese ability and wrote a few more things on my chart in German as she answered him. He then dismissed us and we went back out into the waiting room to sit and wait for the woman who assisted him to make up some medicine for me. After getting the medicine and paying some money, *obasan* and I went back home.

The medicine came in powdered form and was in little plastic packets. It was my first experience of medicine that is not in pill or capsule form. *Obasan* explained to me that I should just tear open a packet, dump the powder into my mouth, and wash it down with some lukewarm water. The first time I tried that, however, I gagged at the taste and texture, and it took quite a few years in Japan before I felt comfortable taking powdered medicine straight. It was also quite a few years before I felt comfortable with the doctor—patient relationship as it is in Japan, or with the ambiguity of interpersonal relationships in general.

This incident illustrates an important change, a change in perhaps the most important fundamental area in my view of reality: the way I see myself. At the same time it illustrates other important changes in the ways in which I communicate with others and in how I handle interpersonal relationships. My USAmerican/English view of reality told me that I was a capable adult and should be treated as such. Especially in a situation that involved my own health care, I wanted to have as much information as possible in order to make a decision, *along with the doctor*, about the best possible course of treatment. I wanted to know exactly what was wrong with me, and what the doctor, as a health care professional, proposed to do about it. I saw the doctor and myself as equals. But both the doctor and *obasan* saw me as a big American child who needed taking care of. This incident demanded that I change my view of myself. I had to see myself as a child, as someone who is not capable of making decisions or of taking care of himself. I had to view the doctor and *obasan* as adults, as decision makers, and as people who could take care of me.

It was not just a “swallowing of pride.” It was much more fundamental. I had to switch to the Japanese view of reality, a view that says we are all dependent on the group, on others, for our very being. It also says that we are responsible to the group, not to upset the group but to keep intra-group relationships running as smoothly as possible. This change in my view of reality dissolved the meaning of self as well as the meaning of interrelationships that I had brought to Japan. I had to accept the ambiguity of the situation. Because it was a change in such a fundamental area, it was extremely threatening to my mental and emotional stability. It was a terribly disruptive change. As Marris (1974) says, “If events contradict crucial assumptions about our world of experience, they threaten to overwhelm the structures of thought on which we depend to assimilate and adapt to life” (p. 17). In this case the change also included the added factor of the incident being involved with my *health care*. If a wrong decision were made in the method of treatment, I might not recover. In fact, I remember at the time thinking that I might even die.

Even though I felt terrible and was in such a weakened physical condition, my analytical self was trying to grasp the enormity of the change in my view of reality that the situation was demanding. I believe that my intellectual understanding of the situation was fairly good. I was used to wooden, disposable tongue depressors, thermometers under the tongue, and medicine in capsules. But it wasn't only the physical differences. I couldn't accept the cultural differences. I could assimilate the idea that I had to view myself and my relationship with the doctor in a

Japanese way, but I couldn't make the emotional adjustment to the situation. I was just plain scared. I remembered an activity that I had taken part in during a sensitivity training camp when I was in college. "One member of the group stands in the center of a closed circle. He closes his eyes, knees straight, feet together. His entire body is reasonably stiff (not rigid) and he falls back. He is caught and passed around the circle, or across the circle at different speeds, in different directions." (Sense Relaxation by Bernard Gunther, Collier Books, 1968) You have to trust the other members of the group; you have to believe that they won't let you tip over (much like the *douage* in Japan). Intellectually I could believe, but emotionally I didn't find trust so easy. As I said earlier, it was quite a few years before I learned real emotional trust in a Japanese sense. Now I feel that sense of trust in the group at the deepest level of my awareness. I even feel a sense of well-being that is close to joy when I am on a packed commuter train and with nothing to hold onto, I allow myself to sway with the group of strangers that I find myself in touching contact with. I now crave dependence in interpersonal relationships in Japan in much the same way that I craved independence in interpersonal relationships in the United States. I also crave ambiguous communication in interpersonal relationships.

Which brings me to an introduction of the Japanese person who has had the single most influence in my Japanese acculturation process, my wife. J. Khatib-Chahidi, et. al. (1998) conclude from extensive interviews and personality tests of women in "international mixed marriages," that these women usually have feelings of marginality and that they share certain personality traits such as being generally more adventurous, freethinking, unconventional and emotionally stable than the average (p. 64). My Japanese wife, Kaoru, fits this profile to a T. She was an exchange student at an American high school in St. Louis in 1968 and although she only spent one year in the United States, she received a high school diploma with high scholastic honors. After returning to Japan, she spent another year studying in high school (Doshisha Girls' High School) before receiving her Japanese high school diploma. After graduating from the Department of English Literature at Doshisha University in Kyoto, she went to work for a British import/export company. During her university days she was the manager of the football team. While she was in the United States, she had learned quite a lot about American football, so she knew more than many of the players, who had started playing football for the first time in college, as there are almost no junior or senior high school level teams. Managers at other schools all over Japan were male, but even though she was the sole female manager, she was very successful and gained the respect and trust of other managers all over Japan as well as that of the players on the team she managed. She had been raised to look beyond the boundaries of gender or nationality that often hold people back from doing the things they really want to do.

I had been in Japan more than two years when I was first introduced to Kaoru. I often tell people that I met my wife through *omiai* (arranged marriage), but it wasn't a formal *omiai* in which resumes and photographs are exchanged before any actual meeting takes place. I asked a professor of Doshisha University, where I had studied as an exchange student for six months from June to December of 1969, to introduce me to a young Japanese woman for the purpose of marriage. I really liked living and working in Japan, but there were many things about the language, the customs, and the culture in general that I didn't understand. I had all kinds of questions and I wanted someone who would always be around to answer those questions. All of the foreigners I knew who had married Japanese women had met with strong opposition from the women's families. In some cases the opposition was so vehement that the parents refused to meet the foreigner or even to talk to him on the phone. I figured that an arranged marriage was the perfect strategy for avoiding the parental opposition that other foreigners had experienced. Since the parents would know beforehand that the prospective husband was not Japanese, they would be able to stop the meeting before it ever happened if they were opposed to their daughter marrying a foreigner.

I told the Doshisha University professor that I had five characteristics that I was looking for in my prospective bride. I told him that she should be: 1) fluent in English; 2) Christian; 3) fairly good-looking; 4) intelligent; and 5) strong minded. Even though I spoke Japanese quite well by that time, I wanted to marry someone who would be able to communicate with my American family and who could enjoy English literature and American movies with me. Although I am a pluralist in matters of religion, I thought that a Christian background would assure a similar value system and would also provide a religious focus for future child rearing. I actually didn't say "fairly good-looking." I said that I wanted to meet someone who was not so concerned with looks, someone who didn't use much make-up, but was personable. Intelligence comes in many forms, but I wanted to marry someone who was at least my intellectual equal, if not superior. I had heard that many Japanese women are meek and obedient, but I wanted to build a family with someone who had her own opinions about things and wasn't afraid to express those opinions. The professor whom I had asked to help me in my "arranged marriage" proposition said that he only knew two or three young women who met these five qualifications out of the thousands that he had taught. I asked him to introduce me to the one he thought most likely to "fit" with me, and Kaoru was the one he chose. We have been (mostly) happily married for more than thirty years and have three sons, one granddaughter, and one grandson.

When we were first married, I wanted to have an American style relationship, one in which both parties try to express everything verbally and any differences of opinion are talked over. After the boys were born, there were many times when Kaoru and I felt quite differently about how they should be raised. I would try to talk things through with my wife, but she would just move to another room of the house and ignore me. I finally learned that human relationships is one area that Japanese mostly leave to *aimai* culture, the culture of ambiguity. My wife always believes that things will "work out" without having to talk about them. The problem with talking about things is that Americans often express ideals that are quite removed from the reality of the relationship, or they focus on small details that often cannot be changed without major personality changes. For example, my wife is wonderfully outgoing and adventurous, but she has a problem putting the lids back on things she has used. Every night before I go to bed, I put the cap back on the toothpaste tube, the covers back on both sides of her contact lenses' case, and the lids back on anything in the kitchen that is sitting around. I have learned that this is one way in which my wife communicates with me: she makes me feel needed. Whenever all the lids are back in place when she goes to bed, I know that she is communicating that she is worried about something. I make it a point to step lightly the day after the lids are shut tightly. If my wife were more concerned with *always* getting the lids shut tight, she would probably be less carefree and outgoing in personality.

One difference between Japanese women and American women is the relative importance that they attach to their husbands and their children. If you ask American and Japanese women to rank themselves, their spouses, and their children in order of importance, American women will usually place themselves first, their husbands second, and their children third, while Japanese women usually place their children first, themselves second, and their husbands last. After our children were born, I felt that I lost my relationship with my wife; at least, the style of the relationship that I had with my wife changed abruptly. Kaoru refused to go out with me on the weekends to a movie, a restaurant, or anywhere else. She said that she wouldn't have a good time because she couldn't stop worrying about the boys. In Japan babysitting is quite uncommon, and even when the younger couple lives with the older parents in a three-generation situation, it is often difficult for a young mother to leave her children in the care of her husband's parents unless she is doing so because she is working. Kaoru started working as soon as our youngest boy started nursery school and she still works today. However, as a part-time high school English teacher, she is always home by four p.m. The boys never came home to an empty house. When our boys reached grade-school age, we started to do things together as a family, but it wasn't until quite recently（with only one 27-year-old boy still at home）that Kaoru has“come back”to me and our relationship is much like it was when we were first married.

I feel that two important differences in the physical upbringing of children in Japan compared with that in the United States contribute much to the differences in cultural expressions of individuality later in life. The first difference is that whereas most American parents don't sleep in the same bed with their children, almost all Japanese parents do. I realize that there are many different kinds of American parents（even those of Japanese ancestry who may raise their children according to Japanese cultural norms), but many of the parents of my generation used Dr. Spock as a guide to child rearing. Dr. Spock condemns sleeping with children because it may result in an inability on the part of the child to become truly independent as an adult. When our oldest son was born, I called my parents in the States to inform them that they had become grandparents. The first thing that my mother said after“congratulations”was“Don't sleep with your son in the same bed or he'll never really be able to achieve independence.” She had read that Japanese parents usually do sleep with their children and she wanted to make sure that we raised our son“American”style. We ended up sleeping with all three sons from the time they were born until the time they entered junior high school（the start of puberty). I believe that this experience of sleeping with parents is at the base of the groupism in Japanese society. Japanese people don't believe that independence is the most important goal in human growth. The interdependence of Japanese people in neighborhoods, in schools, in the workplace, and in society in general is fostered by the strong sense of interdependence that years of parent-child sleeping together produces. This development of a sense of interdependence is encouraged by Dr. Matsuda Michio, the Dr. Spock of Japan.

Another difference is communal bathing. Although public communal bathing has become less and less common with the increase in the number of private baths in houses as well as in apartments, most families still bathe together. I bathed with my three sons from the time they were toddlers until they reached the age of puberty. Sometimes my wife would take my place, and it is quite common in Japan for the other-gender parent to bathe with the child. I believe that a special kind of bond develops when people are able to bathe together. There is an expression in Japanese“hadaka no tsukiai”（裸の付き合い）that refers to the kind of relationship that people have when they are naked, without pretensions. Intercultural communication literature acknowledges that people often communicate much about themselves indirectly through their clothing and the things they surround themselves with, like fashionable brand-name handbags or expensive cars. Being able to communicate with someone in a communal bath, without any external props, encourages a special closeness in the relationship. Seeing your parents or your children as they really are, without clothes or makeup, contributes to the sense of interdependence that binds the family group together. This interdependence within the family leads to the interdependence of people in other groups such as neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, etc. The ideal form of this interdependence is what Lebra（1976）calls *ittaikan*（一体感), the feeling of oneness. Lebra also points to child rearing practices as the basis for this sense of self. Lebra includes other aspects as well, but all have *body contact* in common. Lebra says:

> Infant-care practices — including breast-feeding and bathing, co-sleeping, transport on the back or in the arms, and, I might add, the practice of helping the child eliminate by holding him above the toilet — all sensitize the child to the *ittaikan*, the feeling of oneness, that adult Japanese seek in intimate interaction.（p. 142）

I have strayed a little from a chronological introduction of the Japanese people that have had the largest influence in my life, so I would like to look at the three people who prompted the above discussion of Japanese child-rearing practices: my three sons. With an American father and a Japanese mother, my sons were born cultural marginals. According to Janet Bennett (1993), "Whether through immigration, sojourning, marriage, adoption, or birth, a wide range of people are actively carrying the frame of reference of two or more cultures" (p. 110). "The use of the term 'marginality' in this context carries no negative valence, but rather is intended to indicate a cultural lifestyle at the edges where two or more cultures meet, which can be either encapsulating or constructive"（p. 113). Although they were born at the edges of American and Japanese cultures, my wife and I tried to raise them in one culture and one language（一言語、一文化）because we thought they would be more "grounded" that way. I didn't speak much English with my sons when they were children, and even now, our language of communication is Japanese. I have included my sons as Japanese people who have influenced me because I believe that they are basically Japanese with a slight strain of American cultural perception thrown in. Never having lived in the United States as children, my sons were unable to internalize American cultural values. My middle son has lived in the United States for more than ten years, since he went as a high school student at age sixteen, and is now truly bilingual and bicultural. My oldest son has been doing research in the department of medicine at Duke University since the spring of 2002, but this is his first long-term stay in the United States. My third son has not really spent any significant amount of time in the United States and doesn't speak English very fluently. He is currently spending two months in England studying English to be followed by three months in the United States studying English. He wants to join his brothers in the bilingual group of cultural marginals.

Because I didn't grow up in Japan, I experienced my Japanese acculturation process as an adult. I was able, however, to vicariously experience what it means to grow up in Japan through my sons. For example, I saw how growing up in one house and one neighborhood（Americans move once every two and a half years on the average）contributes to the feeling of being anchored that my sons and other Japanese people seem to always carry around. This feeling of *ochitsuki*（落ち着き）lies nearly at the opposite end of the permanently settled → mobile continuum from the American feeling of "a rolling stone gathers no moss." Americans seem to value mobility, whereas Japanese value permanent roots. When Americans are asked, "Where are you from?" they sometimes answer the place they were born or grew up and they sometimes answer the place they are living now. When Japanese are asked the same question, they almost always answer the place where their family, as well as they individually, has permanent roots. In the family register there is a place for *honseki*（本籍）, translated into English as one's permanent address, but actually signifying the place that the family traces its roots back to. For example, the Berglund family that I belong to came to the United States from Sweden five generations ago, but if we had a family registration system in the States, Sweden would probably still be listed as my *honseki*. On my driver's license in Japan, my *honseki* is simply アメリカ, or America written in the *katakana* phonetic alphabet that Japanese use for writing foreign words. Although I, as a foreigner, have no family register in Japan, my three sons are listed in my wife's family register under her family name of Ando.

The feeling of *ochitsuki* that I have described above leads to the feeling of belonging that Japanese experience through membership in various groups, including the family, the neighborhood, the school, the workplace, etc. Lebra（1976）says that this group belonging "involves cooperation and solidarity, and the sentimental desire for the warm feeling of *ittaikan*（'feeling of oneness'）with fellow members of one's group［that］is widely shared by Japanese"（p. 25）. Because my sons were raised as much as possible in one language—one culture, they experienced almost none of the ostracism that seems to be experienced by many children of mixed marriages. We lived in the same house, in the same neighborhood, until the boys were in high school, and we have spent all thirty years of our marriage in the same general area in the same city, Kyoto. My sons went to school with other children from the same neighborhood and they became such close friends that they still see one another quite regularly. It is very common in Japan for people to attend a reunion for elementary school as well as for junior and senior high school. Even thirty, forty, or fifty years after graduation from elementary school, there are enough people in the same neighborhood to hold a reunion. I give public speeches all over Japan and I often ask my audiences how many of them still live in the same house they were born in. In a big city only ten or fifteen percent raise their hands "yes," but in more rural areas the percentage may go as high as seventy or eighty. Many Japanese live in the house where their father, or even their grandfather, was born. Although we don't live in the same house, we still live in the same general area, so our sons have a fairly typical Japanese background.

I also experienced the Japanese educational system vicariously. I was really surprised when my eldest son started elementary school and I found out that everything he took to school had to be labeled. We had to buy him a box of markers for his first math class that had literally hundreds of tiny pieces inside. For example, there were thirty small plastic rods of different colors that were used for learning addition and subtraction. Each rod had to have Ken's name on it. God forbid that one of the small yellow plastic rods belonging to one child should get mixed up with those belonging to another child. Even his underwear had to be tagged with his name in case it somehow got mixed with another boy's underwear. The paradox of all the children having exactly the same box (and therefore having all the same small pieces), but having to make sure no child's things were mixed with another's struck me as a good example of the paradoxes one often faces in Japanese society.

My sons are now all graduated from college and working. My oldest son got his Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo and is now doing research on nerve cells in the eye at Duke University in the United States. My second son is working for a high-tech computer company in Boulder, Colorado. Both of these sons seem to speak English quite capably and also seem at home with their cultural marginality. My youngest son, who still lives at home, is working for the famous computer game company, Nintendo. Although he doesn't speak English very well, he is a fascinating young man and seems to get along well with all cultural groups, including very young children, the aged, highly introverted computer specialists, etc., and also seems quite comfortable with his cultural marginality. I have excellent relationships with my sons and often call on them for advice when I am confronted with a situation in which I'm not sure what to do. They always offer sound advice, which seems to be based in the multiple perspectives of their cultural marginality. Rather than feeling inhibited, or encapsulated, by their marginality, they seem to feel quite free to frame-shift between Japanese and American perspectives. They are well-adjusted constructive cultural marginals.

Although I have had contact with literally thousands of people in Japan (the number of students that I have taught directly in class has passed more than 14,000), the people that I have outlined above have had the greatest influence on me. The teachers that I have worked with over the years, the friends that I have made, the people I have had daily contact with in the same neighborhood, the people I work with on radio and television, as well as the many people that I have had only passing relationships with, all of these people have influenced me, too. I do not have the time nor space to introduce all of them, but I would like to introduce two more Japanese people who also had a strong impact on me, Genpu Sensei and Takada Sensei.

Before I got married I was living with a couple of Americans and a Japanese *noh* teacher in the large house that Doshisha High School provided me along with my job as a high school English teacher. One cold winter day an elderly Japanese man with a long white beard and dark colored kimono appeared at the door. He said that he had an appointment with Roman (one of the Americans who lived with me), but Roman wasn't home yet. I invited the man in and we sat near the space heater, warming our hands and talking about his first meeting with Roman. The man said that his name was Genpu, written with the Chinese characters 玄 (meaning "deep and dark") and 風 (meaning "wind"). He was carrying a very long bamboo flute that he proceeded to play for me. The standard Japanese bamboo flute is called *shakuhachi*, which literally refers to its length. One *shaku* (a traditional Japanese measure) is about one foot in length. A *shaku* is in turn divided into ten *sun* (pronounced with a long "u"), each a little more than an inch long. The *hachi* in *shakuhachi* means "eight," so a *shakuhachi* is one *shaku* and eight *sun* long, or about two feet in length. The flute that Genpu Sensei played, however, was twice that long and had a very deep tone, similar in pitch to a cello. The sound was indeed mysterious, like a deep, dark wind. I fell in love with the sound, and after hearing that Genpu Sensei had walked more than ten kilometers to get to the house because Roman had promised to become his first student, I said that I would become his first student. I ended up studying with Genpu Sensei for more than ten years, until his death in 1984.

Genpu Sensei looked the part of what many Americans of my generation thought of as the "old Zen sage." He had craggy white eyebrows, a sun-darkened visage, and a long, white beard. Not only did he look the part, he lived it. Genpu Sensei had originally been an elementary school teacher in Kyushu, but when his wife died and he reached retirement age, he decided to become an itinerant *shakuhachi* player, what the Japanese call *komuso* (虚無僧), a wandering Zen monk. He walked around Japan with a bamboo basket over his head to hide his face, a sort of negation of ego. The woven basket allows the wearer to see through the interlaced fibers and the *shakuhachi* can be played while wearing the basket. Genpu Sensei would play his *shakuhachi* and beg for food or money from passersby. He would sleep at temples or shrines one night at a time. When he got to Kyoto, the sheer number of temples and shrines (more than 1,000) tempted him to set up permanent residence. He could move around the city, playing his *shakuhachi*, begging, and sleeping at a different temple every night.

Genpu Sensei loved *sake*, however, and one warm spring afternoon, he drank too much and fell asleep leaning against a stone in one of the gardens of a large temple in the northern part of Kyoto, Daitoku-ji. In his dreams he heard a sound he had never heard in his waking hours, the deep sound of a bass bamboo flute mixed with the sound of waves crashing against the rocks of the sea near his childhood home in Kyushu. When he woke up, he tried to imitate the sound he had heard in his dreams, but his *shakuhachi* would only make the high-pitched sounds that it is famous for. Genpu Sensei dashed his *shakuhachi* against the stone he had been leaning against and broke it in his anger at not being able to produce the deep sound that still remained in his ears. After that he started cutting bamboo from forests around Kyoto and making his own bamboo flutes, each longer than the last. The flute that I started learning on was one of his best creations. It is almost four feet in length and has a wonderful resonance that brings serenity to the heart of the listener. At the time of his death, Genpu Sensei had just finished a bamboo flute that was more than five feet long. His quest for the sound he had heard in his dreams was ended.

Genpu Sensei lived in harmony with nature. He never traveled by car, bus, or train; he walked everywhere he went. Every Sunday afternoon he would come for my lesson, usually walking more than ten kilometers. In the summer he wore only a tank-top undershirt, a pair of khaki shorts, and wooden clogs. In winter he wore a heavy dark-colored kimono, a Japanese hat, Japanese socks, and wooden clogs. He didn't have any other clothes. He was deeply suntanned from always being outside, walking everywhere. He didn't like the air inside big buildings like supermarkets, hotels, or department stores, so he never went inside. He went to bed when the sun went down and he got up when the sun rose. After I became his student (and after me four or five more foreigners—it was easier for us because the long bamboo flute required a long reach), he had enough money to move into a small, rundown apartment near Kyoto Station. He spent most of his time walking in the mountains on the east side of Kyoto, playing his long bamboo flute, and making new bamboo flutes. When he came for his lesson, the first thing that we did was drink a little bit of *sake*. Then Genpu Sensei would play a song for me listen to, a song for me to learn that lesson. After drinking the *sake*, however, the sonorous tones of Genpu Sensei's bamboo flute would put me to sleep. After he finished playing, Genpu Sensei would wake me up and show me how to play the song he had just finished. Then it was my turn. About two years after I started studying with him, Genpu Sensei fell asleep while I was playing. Afterwards, he said, “You finally make a sound that calms the soul.” When my children were babies, I would play my bamboo flute for them whenever they were having problems getting to sleep. The deep sounds of the flute never failed to put them to sleep.

The room we had our lessons in was a brightly-lit upstairs room with plenty of windows to let in the outside air that Genpu Sensei required. We sat on cushions on the *tatami* floor（or lay down when we drifted off）and took turns playing. Beside us was a closet with *fusuma* doors. The picture on the *fusuma* was of mountain peaks. The mountains were drawn in black ink with the peaks clearly delineated, but the bases slowly fading to invisibility. Genpu Sensei used the drawings to teach me something about playing the bamboo flute. He said that new students always aim for the clearest sound they can make, a clarity symbolized by the peak of the mountain. However, such clarity of sound requires a control that Genpu Sensei explained was “too human-centered.” He said that I should aim for the far-off base on the other side of the peak, a less controlled sound that allowed the player and the bamboo to be in true harmony. Sometimes, when Genpu Sensei was playing, the sound would fade out, but he never forced the stream of air from his lips to hit just the right spot to get the clear sound that most people associate with good music. Genpu Sensei admitted that the thin sound of the beginner and the thin sound that he sometimes produced were similar, but he stressed that passing over the peak, when the bamboo flute player is completely in charge of the sound, is necessary for a true understanding of the harmony to be found at the far off base of the mountain.

This is a very Zen-sounding explanation. The famous ox herding pictures of Zen Buddhism show an ox herder in the last picture who looks very much like the ox herder in the first picture. But he has gone through the five stages of training and the stage of *satori*, or enlightenment that is symbolized by the emptiness of the seventh picture. The ox is said to symbolize the strong nature of man that refuses to “bend” to the will of the ox herder—we can’t control our own nature. But when the ox herder succeeds in taming his own nature, he finds that the world around him looks just like it did before enlightenment, but now he doesn’t “cling” to anything; he moves in harmony with everything. Reischauer（1964）says, “In Zen the emphasis was on being in harmony with the cosmos—on achieving oneness with nature... It’s adherents sought sudden intuitive insight as a result of extreme physical discipline and mental concentration, rather than wisdom through book learning or through logical thought.”（p. 60-61）Zen philosophy is at the base of the tea ceremony, flower arranging, calligraphy, and other Japanese artistic expression. I believe that I was exposed directly to this Zen philosophy in the person of my bamboo flute teacher, his lifestyle and the way he taught me.

The final person that I would like to introduce is Takada Sensei, my *shorinji kenpo* teacher. *Shorinji Kenpo*（少林寺拳法）is a form of martial arts that came into Japan from China. It originated in the training of monks during the sixth century and came into Japan just after World War II. I became interested in *shorinji kenpo* because unlike other martial arts, it incorporates the study of Buddhism with the physical training. Every training session starts with the chanting of a Buddhist sutra that extols the virtues of hard physical training and a "pure heart." Oh, I almost forgot. Before the chanting and before the actual practice, all the students were required to clean the garden around the temple building where we practiced as well as clean the temple building itself. Wiping the wooden floors with a wet rag during the cold winter months was a good teacher of *gaman*, the Japanese word which is usually translated as "patience," but which actually implies putting up with things no matter how unpleasant they may seem.

Every practice session Takada Sensei would teach each level of students a new technique. Actually, he would model the new techniques with his assistant and then each level of students would take turns teaching the students at the level below them. The lowest level white belt students would be taught by the green belt students above them. The green belt students would be taught by the third level brown belt students above them, who in turn would be taught by the second level brown belt students above them. The first level brown belt students would be taught by the first level black belt students, the first level black belt students being taught by the second level black belt students, and so on. This style of teaching, with students slightly more advanced teaching their *kohai*, or juniors, is found in most traditional Japanese learning situations, from calligraphy and flower arranging classes to the workplace in traditional crafts. I learned something very important from Takada Sensei and from this style of learning: we only truly understand or know something when we are able to teach it to others. The level of ability required in actively teaching a new technique is much higher than that required in passively learning a new technique. Like Genpu Sensei, Takada Sensei has passed on, but his memory remains with me and I realize that part of the Japanese identity that I have developed owes something to his teaching.

Japanese Language

In this section I will attempt to elucidate what I feel are five of the strongest characteristics of the Japanese language: 1. Sensitivity to the verticality or power in interpersonal relationships; 2. A group culture orientation that often uses "announcements" in interpersonal relationships;" 3.

A vagueness （already mentioned in the above section as *aimaisa*） that smoothes the rough edges in human interactions; 4. A recognition of the importance of “face” in human relations; 5. A grammatical structure that, by putting the verb at the end of the sentence, emphasizes the concrete over the abstract. When I say that these are characteristics of the Japanese language, I am referring mostly to the spoken language. The written language is a completely different matter. However, the written language influences the spoken language in many ways, and when I feel it is appropriate, I will be pointing out such influences. I realize that it would require the writing of a book to get into real depth about these characteristics of the Japanese language, but I will offer a brief explanation of each.

1. Verticality

One of the first things that strikes Americans who study Japanese is the absence of pronouns. In English we always need a pronoun to serve as the subject of a sentence, but in Japanese the subject is left out when it is obviously understood. For example, “What does your father do?” is answered by, “*He* (absent) works at a bank in Osaka.” Upon closer inspection, however, although he, she, it, and they are almost always absent, the Japanese language is rich in pronouns for I, you, and we. If we include regional usage and special cases（for example, the Emperor), there are more than 70 different ways to say “I” in Japanese. Most of these can be pluralized to express “we” and there are almost as many variations on both singular and plural “you.” Which I, you, or we should be used in a particular situation depends on the relationship between or among the communicators. I quickly learned that mastering the Japanese language requires an acknowledgement of the power factor, the verticality, in interpersonal communication.

English uses formal language to reflect the power distance in certain situations. For example, when an average citizen is meeting the mayor, or better yet, the president of the United States, the average citizen feels a need to speak clearly without using slang and without eliding too many syllables. There isn’t really a separate vocabulary that reflects power distances. In Japanese, however, not only the pronouns, but also the verbs change depending on the power distance involved in the communication situation. For example, if I’m speaking with my wife, I’ll use the pronoun *boku* to express “I” and the verb *iku* to mean “go” when I’m telling her that I’m going somewhere. If I were talking to the mayor, I would use *watakushi* for “I” and *mairu* for “go.” The verb endings would also be different: more informal in the former case, and more formal in the latter case. In cases which might fall between the familiarity of husband/wife and the formality of citizen/mayor, there are many different degrees of power distance, but people who use the Japanese language are usually highly aware of verticality.

Let me offer an anecdote to illustrate the sometimes funny side of this awareness. I was riding on the Shinkansen bullet train between Tokyo and Osaka when I happened to overhear the conversation of the two Japanese men sitting in front of me. Strangers do not usually strike up conversations with one another unless there is something in the situation that requires verbal expression. In this case the need for verbalization arose when one of the men had to use the toilet which is located between cars. The man sitting in the window seat said, "*Chotto sumimasen*" (Excuse me) when he edged past the other man, and "*Itsumo sumimasen*" (Always excuse me) when he returned to his seat. This was enough of a change in the parameters of the relationship for the man in the aisle seat to then ask the first man if he was going to Tokyo or returning to Tokyo. The first man said that he was a native of Osaka and was going to Tokyo on business. The man in the aisle seat (AS) was obviously much younger than the man in the window seat (WS), so WS used the pronouns *kimi* (you) and *ore* (I) to reflect the age power distance, the older person being in a higher position than the younger person.

After a few more exchanges of information, the time came (as it often does in formal or semi-formal situations in Japan) for the exchange of name cards. Upon examining AS's business card, however, WS suddenly stood up and blurted out, "*Taihen shitsurei itashimashita*" (A thousand pardons). I couldn't help but crane my neck a little to glance at AS's business card, which I saw said that he was the president of his company. Since the power distance that comes from position in the company (even if it happens to be a small company) usually supersedes the power distance that comes from age difference, WS was apologizing for having misjudged the vertical relationship and for using pronouns (and verb forms) that were inappropriate. Something similar might happen when a person of equal company rank to another person suddenly becomes aware that the other person, who he thought to be about the same age, is actually quite a bit older. Probably one of the reasons for the popularity of name cards is the ease with which they allow vertical relationships to be ascertained. The necessity for awareness of power distance may also be the reason that Japanese people seem to be so concerned with a person's age. (Foreigners often ask, "Why are Japanese people always asking me how old I am?") When age difference is not easily ascertainable from looks, we must make sure by asking. Japanese people often do this quite indirectly by saying something like, "I was born in the year of the ox. How about you?" When they hear the other person's answer, they can figure out the age difference by referring to the Chinese zodiac that most Japanese people know offhand.

2. Announcements

When I give talks on intercultural communication (about 60 a year), I usually tell the audience that becoming successful in communicating with people from a very different culture requires that we go through three stages. The first stage is observation: we must ascertain just exactly what communication strategies are used in that culture. Observation involves taking in information about the other culture with all our senses, not only with our eyes. The second stage is what I call borrowing or copying: we try to mimic the communication strategies of the other culture. This leads to the third stage, transformation. We become enculturated to a lesser or greater degree in the new culture. I call this putting on the belt, or *obi*, of intercultural communication. OBI stands for Observe—Borrow—Integrate. When I first arrived in Japan, I observed that Japanese people tend to use the same expressions in the same situations. The group culture orientation encourages a uniformity of expression, and many of these expressions are what I call the announcement type.

One of the first Japanese expressions that I learned after arriving in Japan was *ittekimasu*, which might be translated as "I'm leaving." It actually is an announcement type of expression that is used when someone is separating oneself from the group. Everyone uses it when they leave home, yelling "*Ittekimasu*" to anyone inside the house. The people in the house respond with "*Itteirashai*" (literally "Please go and then come back again"). It may also be used by someone in the workplace when they leave their desk to go to the post office or even just to the copy machine or the toilet. It is used by everyone setting out on a trip, whether to another part of Japan or to a foreign country. There is a similar announcement made when one returns: the returnee says "*Tadaima*" (I'm back) and the people who stayed behind say "*Okaerinasai*" (Welcome back).

Let me give three more brief examples of this announcement style and how it often causes misunderstandings among outsiders from strongly individualistic cultures. I was very surprised my second day in Japan when someone knocked on the door of the toilet at the Japanese inn where I was staying while I was using the toilet. I had never really thought about it, but to Americans, with a strong base in the individualistic culture of the United States, a knock on the door of your room is usually taken as a semi-command: "If it's alright with you, let me in." We don't knock on toilet doors because we know it's ***not*** alright to disturb someone in the toilet. Public toilets usually have an open space at the bottom of each door so that we can see whether a stall is occupied or not. In Japan a knock is an announcement, "I'm out here." So the person inside the toilet replies in turn by knocking with a similar announcement, "I'm in here." Since Japanese almost always close the door of the toilet after they've finished using it, without this system of knocking to announce one's presence, it's hard to know whether a toilet is occupied or not. It being only my second day in Japan, however, I wondered if someone wanted to get into the same toilet with me. I now know that they simply wanted me to announce my presence.

I lived with a Japanese family for my first year in Japan. I had a chance to observe, borrow, and integrate Japanese language strategies on a daily basis. It's easy to make mistakes, however, when one comes from a strongly individualistic culture. My room was on the second floor of the house, alongside five other rooms. The family's three sons had their rooms next to mine, and the other two rooms had boarding students who were distantly related to the family I lived with. My room was at the top of the stairs, and I observed that whenever one of the sons or students went past my room and headed down the stairs to the bath, they yelled "*Osakini*," a phrase that at the time I thought meant "I'm going to take a bath." So whenever I went to the bath, I also yelled "*Osakini*." The problem is that *osakini* actually means "Pardon me for going ahead of you." Because I spent so much time studying Japanese in my room, I was always the last to take a bath. My *osakini* was laughed at by everyone.

I realized my mistake one day when an old Japanese woman dressed in kimono said "*Osakini*" when she got into the bus before I did. At the time I was surprised because she was using an expression that I thought was only used when about to take a bath. When I asked one of my friends about this, he explained to me what osakini really means. In the individualistic culture of the United States, we say "After you" to someone when we "allow" them to do something before we do it. We do not have the expression "Before you," however, and when we *do* do something before someone else, we usually don't even notice that we are doing so. In the group oriented culture of Japan, however, it is necessary to announce that one is doing something "before" or "after" other people in the group. We must always be aware of our "position" vis-a-vis the group.

My last example involves a mistaken use of English in the announcement style. It happened on an international flight about four or five years ago. I have lived in Japan so long (35 years) that my communication strategies are often Japanese culturally based even when I use English. I was sitting in an aisle seat with an American businessman sitting behind me. I wanted to tilt back my seat, but before doing so I turned to the man behind me and said, "I'm going to tilt back my seat." He looked at me strangely, almost as if I had said something insulting to him, and replied, "You're free to do anything you want to do." I puzzled for a few moments over this miscommunication, and then realized that I had used the Japanese announcement style in English. Whenever a Japanese is going to do something which might be considered even a little bit self-centered, it is necessary to announce her/his intentions to the group, a sort of apology for disturbing the harmony of the group. The man and I were both members of the same group — passengers on a plane bound for San Francisco, so I had to announce my intentions to him to get his blessing. In Japan he would have said, “*Dozo. Okamainaku*,” which means, “Go ahead. Don’t worry about me,” recognizing that my announcement was made with the intention of showing that my self-centered act might deprive him of a small portion of his legroom.

When an American hears such an “announcement,” she/he often misunderstands it for a semi-command. The man behind me was probably a little peeved because he thought I was asking him to move his knees so that it would be easier for me to tilt back my seat. The same thing might happen if an American announced, “I’m going to the toilet,” to the person in the cubicle next to her/him. Taken as a semi-command, this announcement might be interpreted as meaning, “Watch my cubicle for me while I’m gone to make sure my belongings are okay.” A request followed by compliance or rejection is often the normal pattern for communication between people in an individualistic culture. There are far fewer cases of what I call the announcement type communication. In Japan we must always be aware of group harmony and announcements are useful in calming any waves created by even slightly self-centered behavior. T. S. Lebra (1976) believes that “an intuitive, roundabout form of communication based upon empathy is necessary to maintain the Japanese way of life.” Although she believes that empathy is usually expressed in nonverbal communication, she adds, “When one must resort to vocal communication, one should be sensitive to what is implied rather than to what is expressed.” (p. 47) Most “announcements” in Japanese actually imply, “Let’s maintain the group harmony.”

3. Ambiguity—Indirectness

Another thing that strikes many Americans when they start studying Japanese is the lack of definite and indefinite articles as well as the lack of singular and plural. In my talks I often refer to Japanese culture as *jushinsha sekiningata bunka*, literally “a culture in which it is the receiver’s duty to decipher communication.” I contrast this with the United States, which I believe is a *hasshinsha sekiningata bunka*, “a culture in which it is the sender’s duty to make communication understandable.” When it is the sender’s duty, clarity is the hallmark of communication; there is more direct communication, and context is not so important. It is the opposite when it is the receiver’s responsibility. Communication becomes much more indirect, and context is very important. This uncertainty makes many Americans feel uncomfortable, but Japanese people are comfortable with a certain amount of ambiguity in interpersonal relationships. The sender’s message is so unclear that the receiver is left to decipher the message, to react to the ambiguity. The Japanese language, I believe, lends itself to this ambiguity and the type of communication that it engenders helps to create the serenity that many people feel in

Japan.

According to S. K. Maynard（1998）one of the most common forms of Japanese discourse is the *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*, a four part organizational principle that probably has its origins in ancient four-line Chinese poetry. Maynard is talking mainly about written Japanese ― essays, short stories, and even scholarly writings, but I believe that this style is the epitome of the ambiguous form of communication that I’m talking about. Maynard offers an example of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* from Nagano Masaru（1986）.

大阪本町糸屋の娘。	The daughters of the Motomachi thread shop in Osaka.
姉は十六、妹は十五。	The elder is sixteen, and the younger is fifteen.
諸国の大名は弓矢で殺す。	Feudal lords kill with bows and arrows.
糸屋の娘は目で殺す。	The daughters kill with their eyes.

The first line, *ki*, introduces the topic. The second line, *sho*, develops that topic. *Ten*, the third stage in this form, implies change and refers to the introduction of a surprise, something which seems only vaguely related to the original topic. The conclusion, *ketsu*, however ties everything together. Another example from Matsu Basho, with which most Americans are familiar, will serve to bridge the gap between written discourse and what I want to say about spoken Japanese.

古池や	Old pond
蛙飛び込む	A bullfrog jumps in
水の音	A splash

In this case we have only the first three stages: *ki-sho-ten*. The topic introduced is *visual* and the development is also *visual*. The surprise comes with the reference to *sound*. The reader of the haiku is left to supply the conclusion on her/his own: the *scene* is filled with other *sounds*, like the rustle of the willow leaves caught in the breeze or the voices of insects, and suddenly what seemed like a simple poem is actually a doorway to understanding. We often *see* things from only one point of view, but there are lots of other *voices*, or ways of looking at things. The thing that I really like about this haiku is that the last line, literally “the sound of water,” wakes us up, just like a dash of cold water on our face. This style of communication is quite common in daily life: saying something that seemingly has nothing to do with the “topic,” but actually gets people to modify their behavior. I believe that this communication style is most effective in situations where there is friction in interpersonal communication.

Let me give an example. A person（A）is using the copy machine at the office. Another person（B）comes into the copy room and stands waiting behind A. B says to A, “Don’t break the copy machine this time. The last time I was waiting for you to finish, you broke the copy machine.” B replies, “I did not break the copy machine. You made me feel nervous and I pushed the wrong button.” To which A says, “You always break the copy machine.” B says, “No, I don’t.” This part of the communication is the *ki* and *sho* of the pattern. The two people’s voices become louder and louder, and there is the feeling of interpersonal friction that group oriented Japan always tries to avoid.

A third person（C）walking by the copy room hears the loud voices and pokes his head into the room, saying, “Did either of you see my coffee mug? I think I left it over there.” He points between the two quarrelers toward the shelves of paper in back of the copy machine. He really didn’t leave his coffee mug in the copy room. This is a ploy to get the two co-workers to settle down. This is the surprising change, *ten*, that, I believe, makes this style of communication so effective as a tool for conflict resolution. C doesn’t say directly that the two should stop fighting, but the indirect message, which A and B pick up on, has two different nuances. First, C is redirecting the focus of the two quarrelers and making it difficult for them to resume their spat. But more importantly, C is saying, “I made a mistake by leaving my coffee mug somewhere. We all make mistakes. A may have made a mistake in the past when the copy machine got broken, but fighting about it is a bigger mistake.” This is the conclusion, *ketsu*, that brings the conflict to an end. Something that must not be overlooked, however, is that it requires a finely developed sense of perception on the part of the receivers of C’s communication to decode the highly indirect meaning of that communication.

When foreigners complain about the Japanese being ambiguous in their replies, they are usually looking at Japanese communication from a low context, “sender’s duty” cultural perspective. Ambiguous replies are often actually pleas for maintenance of good interpersonal relationships. For example, when someone refuses to clearly say, “No,” they may be implying that it is difficult to reply in the affirmative, but they are asking for understanding. They imply, “Even if I can’t agree to your proposition, I want to maintain our friendship”（or as the case me be, “business relationship”). When someone says, “Come and visit me anytime,” they aren’t actually offering an invitation for a visit, but an invitation for maintenance of a good relationship. The ambiguous phrase which is probably most commonly used in Japanese, “*Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*,” (very difficult to translate into English without knowing the situation) is nothing more than a request for efforts in maintaining good interpersonal relations. T. S. Lebra（1976）says that “the Japanese are extremely sensitive to and concerned about social interaction and relationships.” (p. 2) She believes that this “social preoccupation” is at the base of Japanese culture.

4. Face Concerns

In the section on Japanese culture, I will be going into detail concerning face and facework in Japan, but in this section I would like to examine how the Japanese language affects face and facework. First of all, what is "face?" S. Ting-Toomey (1994) says, "Face entails the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture." (p. 1) Facework refers to the strategies of "saving face," "maintaining face," "giving face," etc. that are an inevitable part of social interactions. Lim (1994) adds that "facework involves the actions oriented toward one's own face as well as the actions oriented toward the other's face." (p. 211, 212) Since the Japanese are "preoccupied" with maintenance of good interpersonal relationships, refusing to comply with a request causes loss of face, both to the person who refuses and to the person who made the request. Therefore, the Japanese language allows people to reply in the affirmative even when they are refusing to comply. The request can be grammatically structured so that an affirmative reply actually indicates negative compliance.

The grammatical structure of a request in English has no effect on the reply. I can say, "Do you want to go to the mall with me?" or "Don't you want to go to the mall with me?" The reply will be the same. If you want to go with me, you'll say, "Yes, I do," and if you don't want to go with me, you'll say, "No, I don't." In Japanese, however, the person making the request can choose the negative form if she/he infers from the context that the other person is probably disinclined to accompany her/him to the mall. If the request is phrased in the negative, "Don't you want to go to the mall with me?" the reply can be, "Yes, I ***don't*** want to go with you." Actually, the reply would probably be something like, "Yes (read 'no'), I have a lot of homework to finish." The affirmative form of the reply allows both parties to maintain face. Becoming adept in this pattern of communication requires that the sender of the message be sensitive to the face needs of the receiver. High context "scanning" is an imperative. As a low context American, I found this very difficult at first, but after a long re-enculturation process, I have become more sensitive to the face needs of those around me.

One Japanese phrase that often comes up in request situations is *kamaimasenka*, literally "Doesn't it bother you?" For example, we might say, "I'm going to open the window. Doesn't it bother you?" Since the request is structured in the negative, the receiver of the request can reply in the affirmative, "Yes, it doesn't bother me." The most commonly used American expressions in this case, "Sure, go ahead," and "Be my guest," lack the nuanced understanding of face needs that the Japanese language seems to foster.

Another important aspect of face is the question of identity; in the strongly group oriented culture of Japan, this often means the question of belonging. Japanese people often give face to someone by identifying the person with a label. Many of these labels are originally used within the family, so in my public talks I often refer to Japanese culture as a “family oriented” culture. We can call an older woman *obaachan* (grandmother) or an older man *ojiichan* (grandfather) even though we have no idea whether or not they actually have grandchildren. They are society’s grandmothers and grandfathers. We can call a middle-aged woman *okusan* (wife) even though we are unaware of her marital status. We can call a young woman *oneisan* (older sister) or a young man *oniisan* (older brother) without knowing whether or not they have any younger siblings. There is also the label *sensei* (literally “elder”) which is used for schoolteachers, professors, doctors, dentists, politicians, artists, and anyone else who is in a respected position. These labels all help to give identity, or face, to the person so labeled.

When I started living in Japan, I was bothered by the label *gaijin* (literally “person from outside” =foreigner), but after more than thirty-five years here, I have become quite attached to it. There is a movement in Japan to get rid of *gaijin* and use the more bureaucratic *gaikokujin* (literally “person from another country"), but I prefer *gaijin*. We can even attach -san to the end of *gaijin* to make it more honorific. The only problem I have with *gaijin* is that it tends to be used more for Caucasian foreigners than for Blacks or Asians. Black people are often called *kokujin* (black person) and Asians are usually called by the name of their country, e.g. *taiwanjin* for Taiwanese. This can lead to a perverted ranking system which in turn leads to racial discrimination. Personally, however, I identify with *gaijin* as a label for myself, even though I seldom actually feel like an outsider now in Japan. In the same way, I suppose many older people who are called *obaachan* or *ojiichan* even though they have no grandchildren also identify with the label. These social labels give us face.

5. Concrete vs. Abstract

Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956), the noted linguist, has pointed out that in many ways language influences the ways in which we perceive the world and the ways in which we relate to one another in a particular language. I believe that the grammatical structure of Japanese, with the verb at the end of the sentence, encourages a perceptual stance that starts from the concrete and moves toward the abstract. English, with the verb coming before the object, is just the opposite. A simple sentence will serve as an example. “I eat rice every day.” The verb “eat” is abstract, so we begin with the abstract. “Rice” and “every day” are more concrete, so we move from the abstract to the concrete in English. The word order of the same sentence in Japanese would be, “(I) every day rice eat.” We have a progression from the concrete to the abstract. Another thing which should not be overlooked is that Japanese verb forms are more abstract than English verb forms as far as tense is concerned. Present and future are expressed with the same verb form and there aren't the nuances that we find in English with past, present, and future perfect tenses. However, Japanese verb endings reflect the Japanese preoccupation with social relations: verb endings encompass both the formal/informal aspects of human relations as well as the power dimension aspects. In this sense, Japanese verbs may display a more concrete side than English verbs, but the progression from the more concrete to the more indirect aspect, I believe, is still one of the main characteristics of the Japanese language.

I was very surprised during one of the workshops in intercultural communication that I attended at Antioch University a few years ago when we did an activity to illustrate the D-I-E concept of approaching an unknown culture. The facilitator took out an object that no one in our twenty-six-member cohort had ever seen before. No one knew what it was. The facilitator told us to pass the object around the room and when the object came to us, we should say something about it. His exact words were, "Say something about the object." I was surprised when every American in the group leaped in at the I (interpretation) or E (evaluation) level. Everyone said something like, "I think this is a tool used in ceremonies," or "It's a beautiful piece of art." There were only two Japanese in the group, myself (after thirty-five years speaking mostly Japanese, I have a mostly Japanese sense of perception) and a Japanese woman. We said, "It's small," and "It's mostly brown in color." We were definitely starting at the D (description) level and couldn't understand why no one else said any of the "obvious" things that should be included when someone tells you to "say something" about an object. I believe that the grammatical structure of Japanese fosters this perspective.

The characteristics of the Japanese language that I have detailed here are by no means an exhaustive list. The Japanese language is not difficult for most Americans in regards to the pronunciation of Japanese sounds. There are only five basic vowel sounds. There are no consonants, but an initial consonant sound can be added to each vowel sound to make five combinations of each consonant sound. Vowel sounds can also be combined to make long, or double vowel sounds. The grammatical structure of Japanese, with a lack of pronouns and the verb at the end of the sentence, offers more of a challenge. The hardest thing about mastering Japanese, however, is code shifting at a deep level from the individualist culture of the United States to the group oriented culture of Japan. Culture is something that I will attempt to address in the third part of this paper.

Japanese Culture

Before I begin a discussion of the things I have learned about Japanese culture during my thirty-five years here, I would like to say a couple of things about culture in general. First of all, how shall we define culture? There are literally hundreds of definitions of culture to be found in the literature of sociology, psychology, linguistics, and intercultural communication (S. Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 9). The word culture comes into English via Latin, "cultura," through German, "kurtur," and originally refers to cultivation. In other words, culture basically includes everything that man has "cultivated," or made. In my first year introductory intercultural communication class, when I ask my students to name something that has nothing to do with culture, invariably the first student answers, "Nature," and the other students are stumped. Apart from nature, almost everything that surrounds us is part of human culture.

Culture includes not only the visible components such as architecture, fashion, transportation systems, daily activities, etc., but also the more abstract components such as educational theories, philosophical concepts, religious beliefs, values, etc. Ting-Toomey defines culture as "a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community." (p. 10) Singer (1998) defines culture as "a pattern of learned, group-related perceptions—including both verbal and nonverbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems, and behaviors—that is accepted and expected by an identity group." (pp. 5, 6) Singer goes on to state that "since, by definition, each identity group has its own pattern of perceptions and behavioral norms and its own language or code (understood most clearly by members of that group) each group may be said to have its own culture." In other words, a discussion of "Japanese" culture should encompass discussions of Japanese gender culture, Japanese age culture, Japanese body-ability culture, etc. I will be talking about various characteristics of Japanese culture that are salient to me, but it should not be forgotten that any particular cultural pattern will be more or less pronounced in any of the sub-cultural groups that I have mentioned.

Samovar and Porter (2003) define culture as "the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving." (p. 8) Samovar and Porter go on to list five characteristics of culture that I would like to introduce here before going on to a more detailed discussion of Japanese culture. 1. Culture is learned. 2. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation. 3. Culture is based on symbols. 4. Culture is subject to change. And 5. Culture is ethnocentric.

I took in Japanese culture, or rather I was enculturated, from the day I arrived. This learning process has involved both Type A and Type B enculturation (Hall, 1951). I have transmitted Japanese culture to many people, among them my sons, with whom I communicate in the Japanese language, my students, and Americans who show an interest in Japan. I am using symbols to analyze Japanese culture, the symbols of the alphabet that make up the English writing system. This means that we are at least twice removed from the original symbols of Japanese culture. This discussion is once removed from the Japanese language, which is much easier to use when talking about Japanese culture. It is twice removed from the actual symbols of Japanese culture—the food, the clothing, the art, the history, the economy—as any discussion using language is of necessity removed from reality.

The fourth characteristic, change, is quite apparent to anyone who has been living in Japan through the period of high economic growth of the 1970s and 1980s to the economic slowdown of the 1990s up to today. In many ways Japanese culture has become less Japanese, if that is possible, and more American, or Western. At least on the surface, Japan is trying to rid itself of the strong ethnocentrism of the past and become more "international" (kokusaika—国際化), committed to better intercultural communication. In more than half the public talks that I give every year I address this issue of ethnocentrism, and at the same time I seek to demonstrate how an awareness of the multiplicity of perceptual viewpoints, or cultures, ***within*** Japanese culture can be quite liberating. Lastly, as for Samovar and Porter's ethnocentrism, Japanese culture displays almost the opposite type of ethnocentrism we find in the United States. Many Americans believe that *everyone else* in the world is essentially just like they are, an attitude which M. Bennett (1993) labels minimization in his developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. On the other hand, most Japanese believe that *no one else* is just like they are, closer to the denial stage in Bennett's model.

Now let me try to delineate some of the characteristics of Japanese culture that are most salient to me. First, I believe that Japanese culture is people-people oriented. Lebra (1976) uses the term "social relation preoccupied" to describe this most basic aspect of Japanese culture. If we divide reality into things (nature as well as inanimate objects) and people, Japanese culture sees things as the field (background) and people as the figure (the object of awareness). I believe that this is the same for most Asian, or Eastern, cultures. Most Western cultures, such as the United States, are the opposite; people are the field and things are the figure. I believe that this results in a treatment of people as objects in much Western research and in the treatment of nature as an almost human partner in Eastern philosophy. [One of the ideas that I was first drawn to when I began reading about Japanese culture was Motoori Norinaga's *Mono-no-Aware*, the Japanese belief that part of the human soul is "transferred" to inanimate objects that are very personal in nature. For example, the computer that I am using to write this paper is "my" computer, and since I have been using it for many years, it knows my idiosyncrasies, and even seems to understand my moods. I have a personal relationship with my computer; my computer has become an inexpendable partner.] In the introductory classes in human culture that I teach, I illustrate this idea when I tell the students about two of the oldest known surviving pieces of written language, both about six thousand years old. One is a fragment of a family tree from China (people orientation), and the other is a record of barter (sheep and grain) from the middle east (thing orientation). I believe that this illustrates the essential divide between the East and the West. Samovar and Porter (1997) list Western—Asian as the largest cultural divide in intercultural communication. Whether one agrees or disagrees with this analysis, one is struck when examining Japanese culture by the seeming "preoccupation" with social relations.

Second is harmony. The Japanese call their own land *Nippon*, the land of the rising sun, but the Chinese originally called Japan *Wa-no-Kuni*, or the land of harmony. The Chinese, whose culture has strong roots in the Confucian principles that govern human relations, saw Japan as another country in which human relations were [and of course still are] of central importance. The maintenance of harmony is so important that disharmony is felt almost physically, in the pit of the stomach, by most Japanese. Only two or three months after arriving in Japan, when I was going through severe culture shock, I actually thought of having a card, similar to the name card that almost all Japanese people carry, made with the apology, "Sorry for disturbing the harmony," printed in Japanese. I would be able to hand this card to the people I came in contact with in the neighborhood, at the market, or on the buses and trains in order to relieve the unpleasant feeling I had that I was the cause of disharmony because of my foreignness. Although I still stand out because of my physical appearance, I have learned how to maintain harmony in human relations and I no longer feel that I am disturbing the harmony in Japan. In fact, I get a physical feeling of discomfort, my stomach muscles seem to tighten up, when friction occurs in relationships among the people around me. Even when I am not personally part of the friction, for example when two friends are having a strong disagreement, I feel the disturbance in the harmony.

Condon (1984) maintains that Japanese harmony is based on seven fundamental principles: the go-between, group synchrony, the way, the social order, social reciprocity, double standards, and face. I would like to borrow Condon's seven categories in order to clarify my perceptions of Japanese culture. In the above discussions of Japanese people and language, I have already touched on many of these principles, but at the expense of some repetition, let me cover Condon's seven fundamental principles in order to illustrate how Lebra's "social preoccupation" underlies the harmony of *Wa-no-Kuni*, Japan. Before I begin this discussion, however, just let me say that not only I, but also the other students I came to Japan with, as well as most foreigners that I have talked to, perceive the presence of that harmony from the first day in Japan.

1. The Go-Between

In the above discussion of Japanese people, I mentioned that my wife and I were introduced by a go-between, in an informal arranged marriage. The go-between is someone who knows both the young man and young woman as well as their families. The parents of a child of marrying age will often approach a teacher or someone else in the community who knows a lot of young people. They will ask this go-between to introduce someone with a similar family background and similar values to their child. After the go-between's introduction, if the two young people decide to get married, the go-between also has a role to play at the wedding ceremony and the party or reception which follows the ceremony. My wife and I have been go-betweens eight times. When the couple is married in a Christian ceremony, our roles are similar to the best man and bridesmaid in an American wedding ceremony. Most Japanese are married in a Shinto ceremony, however, and the role of the go-between is a bit more formal. In either case, at the wedding reception that follows the ceremony, the go-between formally introduces the newlyweds to the friends and family gathered to celebrate the marriage. In group-oriented Japanese society, the family is the basic unit of the group, so the introduction includes the occupations of the father(s) or mother(s) as well as the scholastic and extracurricular background of the bride and groom. The couple may also call on the go-between after they are married when they want advice or just to introduce any children that are born.

In the case of marriage, the go-between is a buffer between the two families, a person who can be called upon when problems arise. Because of the Japanese aversion to direct confrontation, many other situations call for a go-between. For example, our house shares a common wall with the houses on either side. If you put a big hole in the wall, you can see into the room of the next house. When the people in the house on our north side put in air conditioning, the outside fan was blowing hot air directly into our bedroom. Instead of going directly to the people and complaining, however, we asked our carpenter to talk to them. (Because the house is so old, we are always having something fixed, so we have a "home-carpenter," just like some people have a "home-doctor.") The carpenter acts as a go-between. In the world of business the go-between plays a vital role in introducing A company (e.g. a wholesaler) to B company (e.g. a retailer) as well as in introducing a customer to a proprietor. In Kyoto there are many small restaurants or bars that have a policy called *Ichi-gen-san Okotowari*, which literally means "first-time customers not admitted." You can only wine or dine at one of these places if you are introduced by one of the regulars, who then becomes a go-between and assures the moral and financial character of the new customer. When taking out a loan at the bank, a formal go-between is often required, a person who actually co-signs for the loan. As Condon says, "In any enterprise of importance, be it a marriage or a business venture, the go-between in Japan plays a prominent role. ...If a union is made, then the go-between remains a human bond in the contract. To dissolve the union, whether a marriage or a business partnership, is also to involve the go-between, and thus there is extra pressure for people to resolve disputes" (p. 14).

2. Group Synchrony

I have used the expression "group synchrony" to label what Condon actually calls "beginnings and endings" in his list of the underpinnings of Japanese harmony. I have already mentioned in the above discussion how much Japanese value formal ceremonies to mark the beginning and ending of the school year and each term during the year. The formal ceremonies that are held for students entering new schools as well as those held for new workers entering the work force are shown on TV, and all of Japan empathizes with the mixed feelings of pride and anxiety that entrance to a new group engenders. The start of each work or school day often begins with calisthenics (although the practice is becoming much less prevalent). The end of the extracurricular club activities after school is marked with a siren or chime (usually about six p.m.) and the end of the workday is often followed by group bar-hopping (this practice too is slowly disappearing). In rural areas there are community-wide chimes or music to announce the start of the workday (usually six a.m.), the lunch break at noon, and the end of the workday at six p.m.

Whether at school, at work, or even in leisure activities, Japanese seem to have a lot of meetings. There are many meetings during the planning stage of even the smallest event as well as meetings after the event, called *hansei-kai* in Japanese, in order to critique the details of the event with an eye to improvements that might be made if the event is to be held again. There are also regular meetings at school or the office to make sure that everything is going smoothly. Group excursions are particularly stressful for the *kanji-san*, or planning committee, and require countless meetings to plan for any eventuality. Since the planning committee has worked hard ironing out every detail of the excursion, it is impolite to “go off on your own,” as many Americans prefer. But Japanese culture is changing, and more and more excursions have “free time” for people to do things on their own. More and more Japanese students are rejecting school-sponsored, group-oriented after school club activities and joining the *kitaku-bu*, a humorous play on words that literally means “going home club.” More and more young workers are declining invitations from their superiors to go drinking after work. Yet there are still many cultural supports for synchrony in group activities and the harmony that this synchrony engenders is not in danger of disappearing any time in the near future.

3. The Way

The way as a religious concept comes from China (Tao), but the way as a social concept is very strong in Japan. The Japanese word for learn is *manabu*, which comes from the word *maneru*, literally meaning “to copy.” In the United States copying is considered a no-no, and the word “copycat” is one of the strongest denunciations American children or adults can use. In Japan copying ensures the stable transmission of culture. The way that something is done is often as important, if not more important, than the finished product. In Japanese calligraphy, for example, the way that one holds the brush, the posture of the writer, and the speed and angle of each brush stroke is important. Copying the teacher exactly will result in praise even though the finished product may lack the individual creativity that many Americans associate with art. Only a person who has completely mastered the way is free to “change” the way and branch out into an individualized style (there is a formal grading system in calligraphy as well as in almost every form of group learning similar to the brown belt—black belt system in martial arts).

The *-do* at the end of Japanese words like *judo* or *aikido* means “the way.” *Shodo* (the way of writing) is Japanese calligraphy, *kado* (the way of flowers) is Japanese flower arranging, *sado* (the way of tea) is Japanese tea ceremony, and so on. Probably one of the best known of these “ways” in the west is *bushido*, the way of the samurai. Each of these schools of learning teaches a way of life, not only how to perform a particular movement or how to create a particular piece. It’s difficult to explain how entrenched the idea of “the right way” is in the Japanese psyche, but I believe it may be the most important element of the seven that Condon mentions as the foundations of Japanese harmony. There is a right way to do almost everything. The first day in Japan we were taught by a former member of the imperial staff how to pick up chopsticks—first right hand, then left hand, then right hand again—as well as how to hold the chopsticks when eating. Many of the small things that we do in public or with other people have a “right” way of being done. As Condon says, “In Japan ... these matters are very important for they reflect upon one’s upbringing, character, and even one’s sincerity in a particular situation” (p. 17).

As Japan becomes more and more “internationalized,” there is a broadening of the criteria by which the “right” way is judged. For example, the ambiguity of *aimai* culture often found in personal relationships results in a “right” way of replying neither in the affirmative nor the negative. In business relations that involve other countries, however, making one’s position quite clear is often necessary. When Shintaro Ishihara came out with The Japan that Can Say No in 1989, he was basically talking about Japan’s relationships with the United States and the European countries. A clear “Yes” or “No” is the right way to carry on dealings with contract-centered, logic-based Westerners. This has filtered down into Japanese society and many young people feel that clarity is important in interpersonal relationships. Condon’s book was published in 1984. He quotes a Japanese journalist who says, “Foreigners in Japan are at their best when they ‘behave with an accent’” (p. 19). At that time, just twenty years ago, most Japanese believed that someone coming into Japanese culture from the outside could never master “the way.” Now there are many foreigners in Japan, myself included, who do almost everything the “right” way, but we have influenced the interpretation of the “right” way.

There are also quite a few Japanese (in 2003 there were nearly one million Japanese living abroad) who have returned to Japan after various lengths of stays in other countries who must make a conscious effort to do things the right way. In some cases they have introduced other ways of doing things that seem to be getting more and more accepted. For example, when I first came to Japan, most Japanese people would only eat pizza with a knife and fork, but now I find most using their hands. “Home” parties with both the host and hostess chatting with the guests have become quite common. Before, the hostess only brought in food and drinks and the host entertained the guests, mostly other men. One of the students in the group I first came to Japan with predicted that Japanese women would someday wear jeans in public, a prediction that was met at the time with ridicule not only from Japanese people but also from the other students in the group. Now everywhere you look in Japan there are women (and men, of course) wearing jeans. I believe that many of the Japanese returnees as well as the foreigners living in Japan do things the “right” way out of “conscious competence.” Ting-Toomey (1999) believes that intercultural communication competence follows four stages from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence and on to conscious competence, followed often in initial enculturation by unconscious competence, but she emphasizes that “competent transcultural communicators often rotate between the conscious competence stage and the unconscious competence stage” (p. 52). Because of the increasing diversity in Japanese society, intercultural communication is becoming the norm rather than the rarity it appeared to be in the past. There is an increasing diversity of “right” ways.

4. The Social Order

Condon’s fourth pillar in the foundation of Japanese harmony, the social order, was identified by Chie Nakane (1970) as a basic verticality in human relationships. In examining the group orientation of Japanese society, Nakane observes that “groups share a common structure, an internal organization by which the members are tied vertically into a delicately graded order” (p. 23). Of course, as both Nakane and Condon point out, every society or cultural group is a combination of both vertical and horizontal relationships, but Japanese culture emphasizes verticality. As I have pointed out above, there is a consciousness of power that is reflected in the labels we use for people such as *onii-san* (older brother) or *sempai* (senior) and the language which is used, especially the pronouns and verb endings. The word *sensei*, which is used as an honorific for teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, or any others in positions of power, literally means “born before,” and is the single word which best symbolizes the verticality that underlies harmonious relationships.

This verticality is not based strictly on age. It is based on the length of time that different members of the group have been involved in the particular sphere of activity that is salient to the members at any particular time. For example, when I started studying *shorinji kenpo*, many of my *sempai*, or seniors, were actually quite a bit younger than I. Two of the *sempai* who taught me the most were high school students. At the time I was a high school teacher. They didn’t call me *sensei* as my own students do, but Jeff-san. I called them *sempai*, when I needed help in mastering a new technique, and we all used *sensei* for Takeda *Sensei*, the top of the power pyramid at our *shorinji kenpo* dojo. When you move into a new neighborhood, all of the people who have been in the neighborhood much longer become your sort of *sempai*. Even in the workplace, unless the person has been hired to fill a managerial position, a newly hired older person will refer to those with more years of service in the company as *sempai*. Probably because of the great importance placed on education, the basic *sempai-kohai* relationships that are formed at school, especially in the extracurricular club activities in which a majority of Japanese participate, usually supersede other possible changes in the status of a relationship. For example, one of my *sempai* at college recently started teaching at the school where I have been teaching for several years. I still call him *sempai*, however, even though I am his *sempai* in the workplace. Condon says, “It is not a matter of who is more famous or powerful. It is a matter of acknowledging one’s proper place in a system that helps maintain reasonably harmonious human relations in a crowded land” (p. 22).

Because Americans place such emphasis on horizontal relationships, and tend to see clearly defined vertical relationships as undemocratic, Japanese verticality may be seen as stultifying, a sort of straitjacket that limits one’s freedom. However, my own experience of Japanese culture is that conscious competency, coupled with a highly refined awareness of the power dimensions at play in most human relationships, can actually be quite liberating. I believe that constructive marginality (J. Bennett, 1996) allows me to choose the option of being actively involved in Japanese cultural verticality and to experience the peaceful feeling that comes from the harmony supported by such a system of verticality. The social order is closely related to Condon’s sixth and seventh principles: double standards (*honne* and *tatemae*) and face. The unconscious competence of many Japanese people, however, can make them feel constrained by the social system, and there are groups which are attempting to change the *koseki seido*, or family registration system, that is a foundation of the Japanese social order (C. Nakane, 1970).

5. Social Reciprocity

Another facet of Japanese culture which is closely tied to the vertical social order is Condon’s fifth principle, social reciprocity. R. Cialdini (1993) maintains that reciprocity is probably the strongest of the social “weapons of influence” available to us. He believes that “human societies derive a truly significant competitive advantage from the reciprocity rule and, consequently, they make sure their members are trained to comply with and believe in it” (p. 21). The application of the rule of reciprocity is quite different in the individualistic and horizontal orientation of American culture than it is the group and vertical orientation of Japanese culture. Americans tend to view reciprocity as one on one, individual to individual, and in like kind. If I treat you to dinner at a restaurant, you have to reciprocate and treat me the next time. In Japan, I found out soon after arriving, reciprocity often takes a different form. Since I was a student, I didn’t have much money. Japanese people were always treating me, but seemed embarrassed when I tried to treat them. If I offered to teach them some English, however, my attempts at reciprocation were well received.

Reciprocity takes many different forms in Japan. When someone has done something for me in Japan, I feel obligated to do something for them, but the content of the reciprocation may seem strange to some Americans. For example, the people in the house next door often bring over food that they have cooked for us to share. They never actually enter the house, but stand in the doorway and hand over part of their evening meal. We reciprocate once a year in mid-summer when we invite them onto the veranda of our house to see the mountainside fire burning festival that they can't see from their house. Since it's a big festival, and we usually have thirty or forty guests that we wine and dine, I guess that they feel like it's a big thing. Part of the reciprocation is also affected by the vertical relationships. We own the narrow path leading into the two houses, and we are responsible for its upkeep, so in a way, we are taking care of them—a vertical relationship that allows them to *amaeru*, or take advantage of our stewardship. (See discussion below on T. Doi's concept of *amae* as one of the basics in Japanese interpersonal relationships.) I don't believe that Japanese people have a stronger feeling than Americans that they need to reciprocate for any favor, but I agree with Condon's assessment that "the Japanese have institutionalized thoughtfulness—and it works" (p. 24). The truly institutionalized forms of reciprocity like seasonal gift giving (summer and winter), mutual gift giving at weddings and funerals, and the mutual pouring of beer and sake, as well as *omiyage*, gifts that are souvenirs from a trip (often given in direct reciprocation for *osenbestu*, the money that people give to someone going on a trip for them to spend while they're travelling), and *osuso-wake*, giving neighbors and relatives a part of a gift (usually food) that one has received from a third party all help to keep interpersonal relationships running smoothly.

Yet reciprocity goes beyond these institutionalized forms. Reciprocity across generations is probably the most common form in Japan. Americans can understand that in many ways they are reciprocating for the care that their parents afforded them when they in turn take care of their own children. Although filial piety as a value rooted in Confucianism is much more Asian than Western, Americans can understand the feeling of indebtedness that children have in the face of loving parental care. This debt cannot be entirely paid off directly, however, even if the adult children look after their parents in their old age. The reciprocity stretches downward across generations. In Japan this trans-generational reciprocity is not limited to the family. As I have mentioned above, I can reciprocate to the Japanese people who did all kinds of things for me when I was first in Japan by helping out young Japanese who want to visit the United States or by assisting Americans when they first arrive in Japan. The company employee who is treated to dinner and drinks by his superior at work can reciprocate by taking his underlings out when he himself rises to a managerial position at work.

The "institutionalized thoughtfulness" that Condon refers to is similar to the concept of *amae* that T. Doi（1973）analyzed in The Anatomy of Dependence. Doi says that *amaeru*（verb form）"is the chief characteristic of the parent-child relationship"（p. 18）. *Amae* is the glue that bonds one Japanese to another, whether in the family or in the society at large. *Amae* is at the base of group-based social relations; it is at the base of harmony; and it is at the base of reciprocity. The extreme individualism of American society looks down on dependence, the English translation for *amae*. The passive form of the verb *amaeru* could probably be translated as "to take advantage of （someone）" and the active form of the verb *amaekasu* could probably be translated as "to baby, or coddle（someone）." When the main goal of socialization is independence, as it is in the United States, taking advantage of people and babying people are seen quite negatively. However, from the position of cultural marginality that I now occupy, a position that M. Yoshikawa（1980） calls "dynamic-in-betweenness," I can see advantages and disadvantages in each social system. *Amae* can produce the warm feeling of *ittaikan* that makes life in Japan so wonderful, but it can also stifle the creative abilities of individuals who are caught in *amae* which is too strong. Dynamic-in-betweenness allows cultural marginals like myself to maintain a balance between the bonds of *amae* and the freedom of independence. With large numbers of Japanese experiencing life abroad in more individualistic oriented societies and with the ongoing Westernization of Japanese culture, such a position of dynamic-in-betweenness is becoming quite common.

Doi does an excellent job of analyzing the role of amae in Japanese society. One of the concepts that he explains is *tanin*（他人）, which literally means "other people," but actually is used in reference to people with which one has no familial or personal connections. In other words, people are divided into those who are connected to us and those who aren't. I believe that this is very close to the division between *uchi* and *soto* that refers to "inside" and "outside," concepts which not only refer to physical spaces, but also to human relationships. In the Kansai area which I live in, the word *uchi* is often used as a personal pronoun meaning "I" or "we." The Chinese character for *soto*, 外 , can also be pronounced *gai*, and is the first part of *gaijin*, the term which many people use to refer to foreigners, people from "outside." People we are connected to are our "inner circle" and people we aren't connected to are "outsiders." Doi says that the ideal *amae* relationship is that between parents and children. "The Japanese idealize the kind of relationship of oneness typically embodied in the parent-child relationship"（p. 39）. Even the relationship between a husband and wife starts as a relationship between two *tanin*, but, as Doi points out, "Even *tanin* have a constant potential for entering on relationships of *amae*"（p. 38）.

The kind of reciprocity which accompanies *amae* is indeed, as Doi says, close to the kind of reciprocity found in the parent-child relationship. This reciprocity is typified by a lack of restraint, or *enryo*, a Japanese word that Doi says “is chiefly used as a negative yardstick in measuring the intimacy of human relationships” (p. 38). The parent-child relationship displays no *enryo* and the reciprocity is permeated with *amae*. Nakane (1970) describes the vertical relationships in Japanese society in terms of *oyabun* (the person with the status of *oya*, or parent) and *kobun* (the person with the status of *ko*, or child). As is often the case in actual parent-child relationships, in many *oyabun-kobun* relationships reciprocity may extend over generations. For example, a young scholar may become the *kobun* of an older, established authority in his field and receive many favors from the older scholar in a relationship based on *amae*. However, as the young scholar ages and himself becomes an authority in the field, he in turn will become the *oyabun* to a new generation of scholars. As a *kobun* his role is to *amaeru*, or take advantage of his *oyabun* scholar's generosity, but in his role as *oyabun* he must *amaekasu*, or take care of his *kobun*. The less *enryo*, or restraint, involved in the relationship of reciprocity, the closer to the ideal of *ittaikan*, or oneness that is experienced in the actual parent-child relationship.

6. Double Standards

Whether Japanese or foreign, almost any scholar attempting to describe Japanese culture will introduce the Japanese words *tatemae*, literally “the outside of a structure,” and *honne*, the “true voice” of the speaker. When I first arrived in Japan, my Japanese language ability was too poor to understand much of what was being said, so I wasn't able to pick up on much of the so-called double standards in Japanese communication. I was immediately aware, however, of the division between *uchi* and *soto* that I mentioned in the above passage on social reciprocity. Before coming to Japan I learned in an orientation session that Japanese take off their shoes before entering the house. I imagined that this was simply a practical matter, because Japan has such a wet climate that mud would surely be tracked into the house, and because Japanese *tatami* floor mats don't wear well when shoes with hard-edged soles and heels are worn in the house. Upon arrival, however, I soon realized there was an almost ritualistic facet to this custom. The *genkan*, or entryway, acts as a demarcation between the outside world, *soto*, where it's often necessary to hide one's true feelings, and the inside world, *uchi*, the world of the family where one can *amaeru* and express what one really feels. Upon taking off one's shoes and saying, “*Tadaima*,” the ritualistic greeting that signifies one has come “home” to the group (literally “Just now”), one is free to shed the public face of *tatemae* to reveal the private face of *honne*.

I believe that many scholars writing about Japanese culture from a western cultural standpoint, where dichotomies are one standard for explaining things, misunderstand *honne* and *tatemae*. Sometimes there is no *honne*. Many social situations require only a ritualistic, or surface, expression of self. For example, when an American meets an acquaintance on the street and is asked,“How are you?”, the ritualistic response,“Fine, thanks,”is not considered an evasion of one’s true feelings even if one is in fact worried about one’s family, job, or health, and not “really” fine.

Japanese people only feel a pull between *honne* and *tatemae* when the dynamics of a certain interpersonal relationship require one to conceal certain feelings, to not express them. In many cases it is similar to what Americans call tact. If a friend asks you what you think of her new hair style, you might say, “It looks good on you,” when you actually feel that the former hair style was much more suitable. If the friend presses you to say what you “really” think, you might then divulge your *honne* feeling that the new hair style isn’t really so great. This is true both in Japan and in the United States. Japanese people seem to believe, however, that pressing people to say what they “really” think often results in hurt feelings and damaged relationships. So when a Japanese person expresses an opinion that seems aimed at not upsetting anyone, no one asks, “Is that what you ‘really’ feel?” That’s why, I believe, Japanese people are often thought to be shallow by Americans. They don’t express their inner feelings like Americans do. They often seem to have no opinion. That’s because they are so adept at feeling out the opinion of the group, or of the person in a leadership role in the group, and adapting their opinion to fit. They don’t really have a *honne*, or separate individual opinion, and the group opinion becomes their own opinion.

As Condon points out, Americans usually consider someone who says one thing and actually thinks another to be devious. Japanese, on the other hand, “do not expect all people to be treated in the same way in all situations, nor do they think it is wise to always speak out what one believes” (p. 25). Context is very important in Japanese communication. The high context—low context continuum, which is often used in intercultural communication when contrasting cultures, places Japanese culture at the peak of high context cultures (Samovar & Porter, 1997). As was pointed out above, the Japanese language allows for nuanced differences in interpersonal communication in the usage of pronouns and verbs. Language is only one facet of the situation, however. Japanese people are sensitive to what is *not* expressed verbally. This may include details of the time, place, and occasion as well as the attire of the communicants. I believe this is one reason why brand name fashions are so popular in Japan. Looking at things in a high context cultural sense, one may be able to pick up on the *honne* of the other through voice inflection, eye contact, and general demeanor, even though the *tatemae* communication is different from the other's "true voice."

Double standards, I believe, are closely related to *aimai bunka*, the culture of ambiguity, and face. Even when something is expressly stated, Japanese are comfortable in a situation that contradicts the "letter of the law." To illustrate, Condon writes of "Japanese only" bars as an example of Japanese double standards, or separation of insiders (*uchi*) and outsiders (*soto*). An American would almost certainly be admitted to such a bar if in the company of a Japanese regular patron of the bar. This may seem ambiguous: Are foreigners barred or not? However, I believe that in such a case the Japanese patron is vouching for the "Japaneseness" of the foreigner. Here is a foreigner who will not disturb the atmosphere of harmony in the bar. Whereas Americans tend to see face as an individual phenomenon, the group face orientation of Japan would allow the staff of the bar to see the foreigner as part of the "face" of the Japanese patron. Following the letter of the law, and refusing entrance to the foreigner would result in extreme loss of face on the part of the Japanese patron. In other words, even double standards are open to ambiguity. The double standard is not always the same. After thirty-five years in Japan, I have adapted to Japanese norms so well that in many cases I am considered an insider. This would allow me, a foreigner on the surface, to bring another foreigner to a Japanese-only establishment because my "face" would be perceived as "Japanese" and the face considerations would then be the same as in the example above. Even double standards may have double standards.

Japan is moving, however, inexorably it seems, toward transparency and single standards similar to those found in American society. When I first arrived in Japan, it was quite common to see groups of college upperclassmen taking freshmen who had joined their sports club or culture circle (similar to fraternities and sororities in the United States) out drinking. In April, when the Japanese school year starts, you could walk along the street in an area filled with cafes and bars and hear, "*Shinnyusei no minasan, kampai!*" ("Freshmen, bottoms up!"). Even policemen walking by would ignore such an obvious violation of the law—most college freshmen are only eighteen years old, but the legal drinking age in Japan is twenty. There are voices now in Japan, however, calling for strict observation of all laws. Proof of age is now required in many drinking establishments as well as liquor stores before alcohol is sold. The business community, especially the banking industry, as well as government agencies are moving toward more openness and adherence to principles. I don't agree with many foreign commentators that these changes are "all for the best." I believe that double standards and ambiguity often soften the sharp corners in human relationships that can cause friction, friction which sometimes leads to fighting or war.

7. Face

The idea of face for most Americans involves “my” face, the subjective face. The individualistic culture of the United States creates the angle from which Americans view face: it is something that the subjective self wears in relations with others. In English we talk about “putting on,” “assuming,” or “presenting” a bold face, a happy face, or a confident face. Americans also assume that those “others” are also wearing faces that express different facets of the self. Face is almost like a mask. At times it may reveal the real self, but at other times it may conceal the true inner feelings of the self. Morisaki and Gudykunst (1994) cite a paper by Choi and Choi (1990), “In Western cultures, face is viewed as being ‘put on as the participants alternate the roles of performer and observer in the due course of interaction.’” (p. 57)

The Japanese sense of face is more interdependent. Face is shared among a group of individuals. Americans sometimes mistake this interdependent face and think that Japanese are concealing their private (and real) face beneath the public group face that they display. This is not true. The group face is the individual face. For example, when a group of Japanese from the same workplace go out for lunch together, they often defer to the most senior of the individuals in ordering. Someone asks the superior what he is having. When he indicates what he wants, everyone in the group orders the same thing. They are not repressing their own desires (faces) in order to promote the face of the superior: they are simply assuming an interdependent face. Everyone “really” wants the same thing as the superior. Just as an American doesn’t know what he wants to order until he sees the menu, a Japanese (in this situation) doesn’t know what he wants to order until the superior has made his desire clear. The superior, in turn, assumes the leadership role of the interdependent face with the understanding that what he orders from the menu will be something that Japanese “normally” order for lunch, e.g. *kitsune udon*. The superior also often foots the bill for the whole group. This is an expression of the larger societal interdependent face that Japanese don in public. Besides, everyone ordering the same thing makes the work easier for the restaurant staff—less possibility of mistakes—and the interdependent face stretches to include the restaurant staff as well. Lebra (1976) says that collectivism in Japan “involves cooperation and solidarity, and the sentimental desire for the warm feeling of *ittaikan* (“feeling of oneness”) with fellow members of one’s group” (p. 54). Whereas Americans might feel that their individuality is being compromised in the donning of a “group face,” Japanese people might feel closer to this “feeling of oneness.”

In comparing American and Japanese child rearing practices, it is quite easy to see how these two different expressions of face are nurtured. As mentioned above, parents sleeping with and bathing with their children creates the foundation upon which group face is based. The desire for the same kind of closeness in interpersonal relationships with people outside the family allows for a blurring of the demarcation border between the self and the other and results in a true feeling of group face. Americans tend to see this as a conscious submission of individual self to the will of the group, but in actuality, it is a quite unconscious act. Morisaki and Gudykunst (1994) say that "in Japan, face is located at the intersection of independent selves" (p. 72). They talk about "interdependent mutual self-face" and "interdependent mutual other-face." Japanese people are not only desirous of having a "face" which fits in with the group, they are also concerned that the "face (s)" of other (s) also fit in. For example, a few weeks ago I took a trip with some friends to a hot spring resort located near the Japan Sea. There were two rooms for the group, one for the four women and the other for the five men. I was the youngest member of the group. All nine members of the group ate dinner and breakfast together in a separate room. All the men slept together on *futon* on the tatami floor mats of the Japanese-style room, but before we went to sleep, everyone went down to take a bath together in the huge communal hot spring bath. The other men had traveled together before, but it was my first time. They all made sure to include me in the group bathing and I felt that they had truly given me a "Japanese" group face. They didn't want me to lose face by taking part in the group trip but not bathing together.

As Reischauer (1986) points out, Japanese people are much more concerned with how they are seen by others than Americans are. This concern with how one is seen by others is instilled in children from an early age. The worst thing that a child can do is *meiwaku o kakeru*, bothering or giving trouble to others, and the highest compliment a child can receive is to be told that she/he is *sunao*, sincere in trying to fit in with the group. When Japanese parents feel that it's necessary to discipline a child in public, the first thing they are likely to say is, "Look! Everyone is looking at you!" The implication is that to stand out from the group and be "looked at" is the worst thing that can happen to a person. The child learns that in fitting her/his face to the group face, everyone gains face. This is the interdependent face that Morisaki and Gudykunst are talking about. There are both negative as well as positive aspects to face in Japanese culture. The Japanese dictionary from Shogakukan Publishing (1995) lists twenty-two idiomatic expressions that start with the word "face." These expressions include: *kao ga awaserarenai* (not having a face to present to others, i.e. extreme shame) ; *kao ga kiku* (face "benefits," i.e. the trust or power that one possesses allows one's "face" to extract favors from others) ; *kao ga* *hiroi*（having a“wide”face, i.e. knowing a lot of people or having a lot of connections）; *kao ni doro o nuru* （rubbing dirt or mud on one's face, i.e. causing someone to lose face）; *kao o kasu*（“lending”one's face, i.e. using one's influence on behalf of another）; and *kao o tsubusu* （to“destroy”another's face, i.e. to cause someone to lose face completely）. As Condon points out, concern with face“is an integral part of basic Japanese behavior aimed at managing interdependence and maintaining harmonious relations”（p. 31）.

I often joke with Japanese audiences during public speaking engagements that thirty-five years of living in Japan has made me more and more Japanese-like physically, but that it started from the feet up and hasn't reached my face yet. After a few more years in Japan, my nose will change in shape, my irises will darken, and my hair will turn black. Then, I will truly be Japanese. The people in the audience laugh, but after listening to me for an hour and a half, most of them realize that I already have a Japanese“face”in the cultural sense.

In Conclusion

Writing the above paragraph reminded of one more thing about Japanese culture that I mustn't forget to mention: humility. Even before I came to Japan, I had heard that Japanese people are polite and humble. My first day in Japan started out with an experience that taught me just how different Japanese humility is from American confidence. Within hours after arriving in Tokyo in June of 1969, I ventured out on my own to explore Japan and buy a couple of things. The first thing that I purchased in Japan was a pack of Japanese cigarettes. At the time I was quite a heavy smoker and I wanted to see if Japanese cigarettes tasted different from American cigarettes. I found a small Japanese tobacco shop and proceeded to buy a pack of *Ikoi* cigarettes, a non-filter brand. Just as I was handing over money to pay for the cigarettes, a Japanese boy about the same age as me, walked up to the counter and asked for a pack of the same brand of cigarettes, *Ikoi*. Having grown up in South Dakota, where the population density is so low that any chance encounter is valued, I decided to speak to the boy. I said,“Excuse me. Do you understand English?”He answered,“No.”But wait. He had understood my question, and he had also answered in English, so he must understand English. I asked another question. “Are you a student?”and he answered,“Yes.” Although his English wasn't perfect, we were able to carry on a conversation, so why had he answered“no”when asked if he understood English. I now realize that it's because of Japanese humility.

When you ask an American if he/she can play golf, he/she will probably say,“Yes,”even if he/she has actually only been out on a course two or three times. “After all, I can swing a club, and I know the rules.” The American would only be expressing confidence, not boasting. A Japanese person who is asked the same question would probably answer, “No,” even if they have been golfing for several years and hold lifetime memberships at several golf resorts. If “10” means nearly perfect, then a Japanese person who is quite good, possibly an “8” or a “9,” will still answer, “No,” when asked directly about golf ability. A friend of mine, Akira Shigeyama, has been practicing *Kyogen* acting since he was a small child. The Shigeyama family is **the** traditional *Kyogen* family; all the boys born into the Shigeyama family become *Kyogen* actors. Akira related an episode about his uncle that epitomizes the Japanese sense of humility. Akira's uncle, Sen-no-jo Sensei, is more than seventy years old, and is now the highest ranking of the Shigeyama school of *Kyogen* acting. In an interview about *Kyogen*, Sen-no-jo Sensei said that he is finally able to understand *Kyogen* a little. If the person who is the best in his field is only “a little bit” good, where does that leave Akira, who has been practicing *Kyogen* for more than fifty years. Japanese humility suggests that there is always a higher level of achievement, so no one should think that they can “do” it, that they have it made.

I have been living in Japan for more than thirty-five years. I have become a cultural marginal, comfortable with both my American and my Japanese identities. However, my Japanese sense of humility makes me feel reluctant to say that I'm any kind of expert when it comes to Japan, the people, the language, or the culture. Let us just say that I have made an attempt to sort out my experience in Japan using the format of an academic essay. There are many more things that I might say about Japan, but I have done my best. I know only “a little” about Japan, but I still have time to learn more, and the next time I sit in front of my computer and start moving my fingers over the keyboard, I hope that I can do a better job of communicating the complexities of Japan.

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