

Social and Business Culture in China and Japan: A Comparative Model

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The purpose of this paper is to offer one possible basic framework within which a comparative study of Japanese and Chinese business culture and social values might be conducted. As yet, no comprehensive comparative study has been undertaken. This paper will confine itself to offering some comments at a basic level of comparison, offering seven macro-level contrasts that should set into perspective the different ways in which culture and values were developed in China and Japan. Under each heading, I will suggest some modern traits that *prima facie* can be linked to the antecedent tradition. These consequences of the macro-comparisons may also be observed in practical and day to day levels of thought and behavior in modern social and business settings.

Introduction

Much attention has been devoted to the study of Japan and the contrasts that Japan's value system presents when compared with the values that dominate western cultures. These contrasts are significant and their implications have been explored in relation to Japanese styles of management, negotiation, corporate organization and industrial structure. These studies have been illuminating and suggestive and have gone a long way to replacing outdated stereotypes of Japan with more appropriate and relevant working models. This has been particularly helpful in understanding some of the unique factors involved in Japan's modernization and economic development.

Now that the modernization of China has been progressing since 1949, some analogous type of study involving Japan and China would be a contribution to a wider perspective on the socio-economic development of modern Asia. With regard to China, there appear to be quite conflicting views on whether China in her modern transformation is closer to Japan or to the West in style. I see merits and demerits in both claims, but since this paper is devoted to Japan and China, the issue of China and the West belongs to another discussion. Of more significance are arguments about similarities and differences between China and Japan, their modernization and development.

Consider the perspective that China and Japan are highly similar, and that outsiders to Asia can learn from Japan how to deal with China. There are serious grounds for advancing this. Much of the high culture of Japan came from China, including the written language, art, religion (Buddhism) and many artisan skills. The Japanese value system is based upon Confucianism, and many of the ideals enshrined in Japanese society were originally Chinese, including the concept of harmony and the importance of human relations. The Chinese shut out the western world just as did the Japanese, and after Japan's emergence, China is now following a century behind. The Chinese government has translated the entire economic history of post-war Japan as recorded by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Contrast this with the west where only a synopsis is translated into English. Ostensibly, the case stands. Again, however, closer scrutiny may yield a different picture. The frustrations of Chinese who live and work in Japan suggest that the differences between them create problems that are very real. There may be veiled reverence for ancient China in Japan, but that does not translate into a simple system of cross-cultural respectful communication. The issues between them are deep and wide, although business concerns are bringing them closer. Significant gaps remain. I have heard many Chinese expressing frustrations about Japan similar to those that are heard from westerners, which lend credence to the theory

that China is closer to the west than Japan. However tempting, the two perspectives must be so heavily qualified that their value as working hypotheses are extremely limited.

A 1996 work by a Chinese named Ko Ken (孔健) entitled “日本人は永遠に中国人を理解できない” *The Japanese can never understand the Chinese* (Tokyo: Kodansha International) created a controversy by suggesting that the gap in thinking between Chinese and Japanese is in fact wider than that between Japan and the West. The basis for the contrast lies in the kind of anthropological generalizations popular among *Nihonjinron* thinkers of the post-World War II period. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1946) used the motif of sin (West) and guilt (Japan) as the basis of a contrast model. Japanese thinkers responded with gatherers (Japan) and hunters (West), carnivores (West) and fish eaters (Japan) and so on. Ko Ken talks about horsemen of a great continent in contrast to island farmers, turbulence, revolution and poverty versus stability, peace and prosperity, socialism and arbitrariness as against the rule of law. *Prima facie*, it looks persuasive, but a few minutes reflection will show that these differences like all the earlier contrast models, are not absolutes upon which a theory of civilizations can be built, but differences of degrees of certain tendencies more dominant in one culture than in the other.

The only way forward is to offer a comparison of the value contrasts that exist between China and Japan in order to show where similarities and differences exist and how these are relevant for the understanding of both cultures. Such distinctions should not be considered absolute in the sense that they are exclusive to each side. They are cultural tendencies that are to be found as major influences accounting for basic differences of approach to social values. It is the degree of importance to be attached to the relative percentages of similarity and difference that determines significance. The ultimate percentage of difference may only even be two on a scale of one to ten, but that contrast factor of two may be more important than the similarity factor of eight.

Japan and China present many similarities, but in this case, the key is in the changes effected in Japan that give the Japanese adaptation of values the two points of difference that render the eight point similarity useless for comparison and worthless in advancing a theory of cultural identity between them.

The basis of a comparative study that is to have any indicative value should not be based upon superficial contrasts in behavior and style. These are the historical outcome of much deeper traits, which underlie the manner in which civilization developed because of the way in which historical experience was understood. The difference between hunters and gatherers is not between types of people, but between environmental influences that mould behavior. In this sense Watsuji Tetsuro's famous discourse on the influence of climate (See Bibliography) on culture, is a less heralded but much more profound and philosophical study, recognizing that climate plays an enormous role in the formation of a civilization. This paper will simply list and define seven macro-level issues that lie in the background to the contrast between Japan and China, and include under these headings some tendencies that arise in part from these and from the conditioning reality of historical experience, following the model created by Nakamura Hajime. This will provide one possible framework for further research.

I: Historically China was a Civilization in Search of Nationhood.

Japan has Always been a Nation Seeking Fresh Expressions of Civilization.

China became a unified nation for the first time in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1893–1976). For over four thousand years, the Chinese have known the ways of the world and have understood medicine, science, human learning and the arts. They exported their culture all over Asia, and, according to some authorities on the subject of its

science and technology, China had achieved all the technological developments that eventually precipitated the industrial revolution in the west. Yet it never happened in China. China's weakness was its administrative problems, the endless conflicts and dynastic changes and the precarious position in which most governments found themselves.

In contrast, Japan as an island had the basis of a defined sense of geographical identity bounded by oceans, but lacked the enriching qualities of high civilization. When China's rich Buddhist civilization of the T'ang Dynasty (618–907) was visited, it was enthusiastically imported and developed to such an extent that present day western scholars on Japan still make the mistake of suggesting that Japan became a sinified Buddhist nation. Here is the key to one fundamental point that affects all Japanese imports. They are adapted on arrival to fit into the space that has been made for them. Thereafter, they become Japanese. This is true of everything from Buddhism to baseball, as any American baseball player who goes to ply his trade in Japan will confirm. La Fleur in his work *Liquid Life: Buddhism and Abortion in Japan* (Princeton: University Press, 1992) describes Japanese acquisition of culture as bricoleur, a process that is esthetic in character and goal.

China remained a diverse nation of many races, tribes and cultural variants. Japan by contrast, became a rice culture and by the 17th century, under the hegemony of the Tokugawa Bakuhan system that lasted from around 1600 to 1868, it became a rigidly ordered hierarchical society in which diversity was perceived as a threat to order and was firmly suppressed. Deng Xiaoping (1905–1997) successor of Mao Zedong, by contrast, declared that governing China was like trying to control fifty wild horses that wanted to run in every direction.

Cartographic representations of China do not define boundaries. They place China, the central kingdom, in the middle of the world, with other islands scattered around. What constituted China seemed less important than that China was perceived as the center of the world. This is perhaps best summarized in the words of the Chinese Emperor, who in rejecting the overtures of the McCartney mission of 1792, sent from the United Kingdom by Prime Minister William Pitt, declared "We, being the center of the world, are in need of nothing...." Indeed, the total rejection of the mission was a tribute to this kind of thinking. The entire debacle is well documented in two separate accounts of the expedition: Singer, Aubrey *The Lion and the Dragon* London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1992, and Peyrefitte, Alain *The Collision of Two Civilizations* London: Harvill, 1992.

For a nation about to be humiliated in the mid-19th century by the rejected suitor barbarians, it was arrogant bravado that belied the truth. For all China's size and seeming power, it was an undefined political reality that lacked integration, common purpose and national commitment. That took until Mao Zedong to bring into being, and it was he who brought into being the China about which Napoleon warned, when he declared, "Let China sleep. When China wakes, the world will tremble."

II: Japanese Confucianism Became More Rigid and Hierarchical than the Chinese System.

The Japanese adaptation of Confucianism was designed to create a stable and co-operative society. Confucianism was absorbed in two waves. The first, associated with Shotoku Taishi (574–622), was Confucianism allied close to Buddhism, stressing harmony as the goal of society. The second was a form of Neo-Confucianism imported by the Edo period (1615–1868) government, which, amongst other things, amended the order of relations to place Ruler/Subject at the pinnacle.

Japanese scholars of the past often noted how Confucian values worked better in Japan, through the minute regulation of social behavior, than in China, where it was practiced with a macro rather than micro emphasis. Yamaga Soko

(1622–1685) in his *Haisho Zanpitsu* (Autobiography in Exile) made the following remarks:

“I once had the idea that Japan was very small and inferior to China, and that it was only in China that a true sage could emerge. This was not merely my opinion, but the received view of those scholars who have devoted themselves to the study of things Chinese. Recently, I have considered that this is a serious error. We have ‘believed in what we have heard too easily rather than what we could see with our own eyes; we have been ignoring what is close to hand while we seek what is distant.’ This is most serious flaw in our scholars. I tried to make this point in my *Chūchō Jijitsu* (The True Realities of the Central Kingdom). What follows is a brief summary of what I said there.

Japan has been ruled from the age of the *kami* to the present by its one true imperial line in legitimate descent from the *kami* of the Sun (*Amaterasu*) without a single generation of interruption. The Fujiwara, as loyal servants and supporters of the Throne have also survived, with men of each generation serving as ministers of state. This unbroken succession has been possible because traitors and rebels have failed to plot successfully; this in turn has been the case because of the widespread and prevailing nature of the great virtues of humanity and righteousness in Japan.

From the age of the *kami* and now for seventeen generations, the throne has been occupied by emperors of supreme virtue, assisted by wise and capable ministers. They upheld the Way of Heaven and Earth, established a court and administered the provinces, created rules and regulations for the four classes of people (note: *shi-no-ko-sho*, the four classes were samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants) regarding the necessities of daily life—clothes, food, shelter along with procedures for initiations, marriages, funerals and festivals—so that the mean was achieved in all these matters.

They taught the way of the ruler and the ruled and thus set an example for all ages to come so that people could be secure and the country at peace. Is this not evidence of their divine virtues of great intelligence and sacred wisdom?”

Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769), of a later period in his *A Study of the Idea of the Nation* (1765, original text from *Sekai Daishiso Zenshu* Vol. 54 pp. 2–10 and Dumoulin, *Monumenta Nipponica* II, 165–92), declares:

“Someone made a comment to me in these terms: ‘I have no interest in the triviality of Japanese poetry. I am interested only in the Chinese Way of national government.’ I merely smiled but did not reply. Later, I met the same man again.... ‘I would like evidence that the Confucian Way of Learning has actually succeeded in governing a country effectively?’ I replied. Without delay, he listed the cases of Yao, Shun, Hsia, Yin and Chou, amongst others. On being asked if there were more recent cases, he answered that there were none. On following up with a question about the antiquity of the Chinese tradition, he suggested that thousands of years had passed since the age of Yao to the present. I then challenged him with the point ‘Why did the Way of Yao expire with the age of Chou?’ If you quote only cases that existed thousands of years ago, your case might stand. But it is based on legends of antiquity. To govern a nation calls for more than mythical ideas!”

This merely added insult to injury. He continued to rave about the ages past. I challenged him directly. “You are not being objective. You say that Yao yielded the throne to a villain called Shun? Perhaps that was good for the country. But in Japan, we would reject that as ‘too good’ (meaning having potentially negative consequences). Chinese history is full of similar villains who led rebellions and insurrections, killed their emperors and seized power. In Japan, we would call this too bad, and we would try to avoid this also. Good in excess can lead to evil in excess.... Chinese history went from one period of chaos to another. Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty seems to have been an exception. His beneficial rule seems to have been inspired by the teachings of Lao Tzu. But the principle seems to obtain that whenever a peasant revolutionary assassinates the emperor and replaces him, the people simply bow in acknowledgement. Worse than that, when what the Chinese contemptuously refer to as ‘barbarians’ invaded and one became emperor, they all prostrated themselves in acceptance....

Consequently, in spite of China's record of centuries of chaos and lack of good government, they still think they can, by referring to the Way of Confucius, explain how the entire world is governed. When you have heard their case, there is little to understand, because their teachings are little more than trivial disputes. Formally, and perhaps superficially, everyone in China respects and desires more than anything, good and stable government. But at a deeper level, they do not seem to care. When Confucian principles were introduced into Japan, it was on the grounds that China had experienced good government because of them. This was absolute dishonesty...."

The criticism of China runs like a vein through the writings of the period, with the Japanese taking the view that they improved upon Confucianism, although they often preferred not to use the name. Increasingly, the famous work by Professor Nakane Chie on the structure Japan's vertical society, is a sociological exposition of Confucian structure, that oddly enough never refers to Confucian values at all.

These and other related concepts still have enormous cultural power. Both China and Japan incline to a positive view of human nature, but perceive its "purification" and "culturing" in different ways. Shinto ethics acquired from idealistic Confucianism, the idea of the original goodness and innocence of human nature. In general, human nature was, and is, viewed from the viewpoint of its potential for good (*sei-zen-setsu*), as against its propensity to evil (*sei-aku-setsu*). In Japan, impurity, (*tsumi*) can be washed away. In China, education is accepted as a way of training people. Chinese Confucianism enshrines the principle that "learning should make a man a saint". Education is not the imparting of skill, but the training and culturing of the *ki*, the seat of the emotions and consciousness.

The preference in Japanese corporate culture, for example, for all round culturing is a direct consequence of the Confucian heritage. Training in-house after graduation and moving through many specialties is a culturing process, but it works only because of the functioning of another superordinate value, namely, loyalty, which is effective by virtue of the former. Newtonian mechanics model of business school specialists—in one company area through many companies like machine parts. In this sense, education for culturing stands in contrast to education for skills.

Other features of Japanese culture that can be traced to Japan's adaptation of Confucian values are the *Sempai-Kohai* relationship of senior and junior found in everything from college fraternities to order of entrance to corporations, date of joining the PTA to seniority in condominium residence, seniority being the important word. Such phenomena, while not unknown in China, were carried to a degree unimaginable in China, but which gave to Japan its distinctive social and cultural character.

III: The Japanese Understanding of Relation is More Extended than the Chinese.

One consequence of the contrast in styles of Confucianism is the influence this has had on the central concept of relation within society. The idea of *ningen kankei* (also referred to as *aidagara*, human betweenness, in Japanese) is quite different from *guanxi* in Chinese, although the Chinese characters are the same (關係). The Japanese ideal is cultivated through socializing and involves primarily business associates who are kept strictly apart from the family. The Chinese basis of *guanxi* is the family and its natural extensions.

In terms of the ideal of group harmony, China comes closer to the West than to Japan. In Chinese Buddhist and Confucian Idealism, the individual is part of group, but his or her existence is not necessarily defined exclusively by that membership. In Japan, it is collective co-operation for collective success as against confrontation for individual success. The individual versus the political or social system was a major motif in Chinese thought. The definition of the individual in terms of the self as a meeting point of network relations in Japan contrasts sharply with the view of the

self as an irreducible entity. Part of the background to this was the manner in which, in China the family and its life were considered as tied to the land. The social system of China was (and probably still is) one of the most complex and well organized in the world. The oldest existing dictionary of the Chinese language lists more than 100 terms for family relations. Japanese comes nowhere close.

Confucianism values taught respect for family relationships and emphasized social responsibility. Taoism by contrast emphasized the spontaneous side of human nature. Both, however, shared a common concern for the effective and proper management of the state and the wellbeing of the people within it. One key point of difference is that while religious values mediated this in China, Tokugawa decreed it in Japan. Japanese farmers were at the bottom of the political ladder and were expected merely to defer to those above.

One interesting context in which the contrasting understandings of relation are in constant interaction is the Chinese province of Taiwan. While heavily Chinese in culture, although having an earlier independent history, Taiwan was influenced and educated by Japan for almost seventy years, and shows signs of the presence of both systems. It was greatly supported by the U.S.A. after the Kuomintang had fled there in 1949, and regained a Chinese identity, but after 1945, and Japan's economic growth began, Taiwan became one of the first offshore manufacturing regions for the expanding Japanese economy. Many Taiwanese go to the United States for study, Many still make their way to Japan. Taiwanese society has as many Japanese traits as it has Chinese, and consequently its culture manifests many interesting features. The concept of relation as understood in Taiwan combines the Chinese family based *guanxi* with the Japanese ideals of *kankei*, giving the Taiwanese social system enormous political power. This is manifested in the way in which major political and business families, who have power based on *guanxi* also intermarry in the Japanese style of cementing relationships to create even more effective power-oriented alliances. Studies of Taiwan's leading families in business and politics provide abundant evidence of this reality.

Taiwan aside, most overseas Asian Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia look directly to the mainland as their spiritual home showing that their identity is with China. The same may be said of the Hong Kong and Malaysian Chinese who live and work in Europe and the U.S.A., although now that the second to fourth generations have been born in abroad, links may becoming more tenuous. But the sense of being Chinese remains. In contrast, second generation Japanese abroad become completely indigenized. Chinese can adapt and live anywhere, because, as will be explained later, they can also find their way back home. In short, China's modernization will benefit enormously from returning Chinese who will be welcome and used. Therein lies one basic difference with Japan that prefers still to keep some sense of purity, wisely or otherwise. The notion of relation in Japan is beneficial for domestic concerns, but weakens Japanese potential abroad.

Both began with the oldest tradition of family business, but while much of Chinese business remains family based, Japan evolved beyond that to what has been called a Kin-tract system (kinship-contract), a balance of kinship and contract. Chinese preference for family employment security grew out of someone becoming part of the family. Japan introduced new blood by making outsiders with talent, members of the family through marriage or adoption, contract dressed up cleverly as kinship.

IV: The Imperial System of China was Radically Transformed to Meet Japanese Ideals.

A second major transformation by Japan of a Chinese institution was the way in which the Imperial system was conceptually modified to become a mythology of divine descent and not based on a Heavenly Mandate. The Chinese

title *huandi*, read as *kotei* in Japanese was dropped in favor of *Tian huan* (Tenno), the Heavenly Ruler.

Please refer for more detailed analysis to my paper “The Imperial Systems in Traditional China and Japan: a comparative analysis of contrasting political philosophies and their contemporary significance,” *Journal of Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1997: 109–121.

The issue of the legitimization of power is the key to understanding the role of the Emperor system in Japan. Japan’s postmodern stability arose from the central role of the imperial institution which stood through the ages as a symbol of durability and continuity, the central concern of the entire tradition.

The sense of unity of the past, present and future in Japan exists also in China, although the Revolutionary period resulted in an equal respect for discontinuity, now giving place to a renewed sense of pride in national tradition. Here, Japan and China have much in common. Ancestral reverence, although Mao Zedong tried to destroy the concept by banning private funerals and graves, still survives in China. The grave of Confucius was closed, although after Mao’s death, it was reopened. Mao himself still lies in state and has become a protective deity, an idea he would have ridiculed in his lifetime, but testimony as to how difficult it is to dislodge the influence of the ancestral tradition. Heads of houses such as the Japanese Emperor (who is 125th in the succession, including some legendary figures) transcend the actual house as symbols of its continuity. Respect for history and tradition is demonstrated by an evidenced commitment to duration and continuity. This creates a natural present and future orientation focused on the survival of the institution or house. Another consequence in both Chinese and Japanese history is the tendency is to long term thinking as against the short term. The Chinese 99-year wait to reclaim Hong Kong is testimony to a patient, but resolute way of thinking.

One further interesting contrast is the way in which the Chinese concept of the Mandate of Heaven, (*Tian-ming* read as *Ten-mei* in Japanese), was narrowed into becoming a concept of destiny within Japan’s history. The notion of the heavenly mandate gave authority to Chinese emperors in the past was also the entitlement to revolution, because it could be seized by the ambitious. In Japan, it was something to be passively accepted.

V: China is a Civilization that Ultimately Integrates.

Japan Assimilates or Rejects what Appears Alien to Social Order.

China has faced several waves of invasion, which resulted in new dynasties, the Mogul and the Manchu being the two most obvious examples. Much of old Beijing was created by the Mongols who replicated their tent formations in the *futong* style of housing, now in decay and being replaced by modern apartment buildings. It was the Manchu dynasty that first successfully united north and south China. In Mao Zedong’s ‘communist’ ideas, a foreign ideology was employed to achieve national unity and a more egalitarian society.

Consider a question referred to earlier which I raised with a Japanese colleague who went to live and work in the U.S.A. I was interested in the number of Chinese millionaires in Asia and elsewhere, many of whom like Li Ka Shing who have offered their wealth and expertise to assist in the modernization of China. Why do no such Japanese exist? He pointed out that Chinese may leave, become successful and and go back and find a welcome at any time. Once someone has left Japan, that person has lost his or her place in the system and may not recover it. In this regard, overseas assignments are often unwelcome and may even signal the end of a career, or a least the marginalization of an individual in terms of decision-making processes that will determine a new generation of leadership.

But functioning within the Japanese system can also be difficult. Dr. Tonegawa, who won the Nobel Prize for medical discoveries, left Japan in order to further the research that would simply not have been permitted under the

Japanese system. When asked about this, he commented critically, “Science is universal, but in Japan, only some kinds of science are valid.” The powerful urge towards harmony and the explicit need to preserve it at the expense of individual rights or claims results in priority always being given to collective needs. Tokugawa Ieyasu stated the same point in these terms: “The law may upset reason, Reason may never upset the law.”

Group consensus takes preference over either individual interests or interest group pluralism, which is common in the west. Integration of alien ideas takes time. Buddhism required 600 years to indigenize. Christianity will almost certainly never achieve a Japanese identity.

VI: In Communication, Chinese Uses Metaphors to Communicate Symbolically but Indicatively. Japanese Language Inclines to Obfuscation.

It is often said that Britain and America are two nations divided by a common language. Japanese and Chinese could be analogously perceived as being divided by a common writing system. The use of Chinese characters by the Japanese has given rise to all sorts of misunderstanding on both sides. Chinese see kanji, and assume that they will be able to understand Japanese writing, until they seen hiragana, katakana and romanji. What would a Chinese make of the following title of a musical that portrayed the life of a salaried worker? “UR マイ SUN 社員” (from the song “You are my Sunshine” a popular karaoke song during the 1970s and early 1980s). Chinese has never developed gairaigo (foreign language terms), while Japanese imports words wholesale from other languages, but adds a spin of meaning to them that puts them beyond the reach, often, of even older Japanese.

Grammatically, Japanese and Chinese have nothing in common, and yet the borrowing is long and substantial. Japanese imperial eras (gengo) are still named from the Chinese classics, but that is decorational rather than functional in terms of usage. The same applies to the use of Chinese proverbs by Japanese businessmen. Where the two effect a meeting is in the use of language to avoid being direct. But while Chinese revel in symbolic and metaphorical language, Japanese revel in ambiguity, double negatives and sometimes choose to say the opposite of what they mean. Chinese however find this difficult to deal with. The Japanese preference for ambiguity and uncertainty precludes the possibility clarity and finality. The Chinese like indirectness, but give clues as to how a metaphor should be interpreted.

Japanese language, in carrying the loss of face Confucian culture to extremes, prefers to disguise intention by offering a form of words that put the listener at ease, while concealing the actual meaning. Japanese likes nuance and the unspoken while Chinese can be more direct. Consider business negotiation, or argument styles.

Japanese do not bargain in general. They come with their prices prepared and are prepared to negotiate on conditions and details. Prices in shops are fixed and people do not dispute them. Chinese bargain as both an exercise and as entertainment. Occasionally in Osaka, bargaining is known, but the merchants of Osaka are as breed apart from the Edo period (1615–1868), even in Japan, with their well known good morning greeting of “ Are you making money?”

But nothing compares to China. I have heard this conversation dozens of times. The case study is buying a shirt in a shopping center.

“Good price for you, sir.”

“How much?”

“250 yuan.”

“What? Next door has the same shirt at three for 100 yuan!”

“Theirs are nylon. Ours are good cotton.”

“I don’t care. Cotton, eh? I’ll give you 50 yuan.”

“I’m a poor man. You are trying to rob me!”

“I’m kind. How about three for 150 yuan?”

“Two for 200 yuan.”

“Three for 150.”

“No.”

“My last offer is three for 175 yuan.”

“No! No!”

At this point, the prospective customer walks away. Within five paces, the salesperson speaks.

“OK. 175 yuan. You robber”

At that point, the sales male or female will ungraciously take the money, and literally throw the goods at the customer. Then if the customer looks back later, they are smiling. All one great game of survival, with one rule only—force the best deal you can so long as you don’t lose. Stay alive! Stay ahead!

While there is a degree of caricature in the above scenario, the point being made is that negotiating in China occupies a different place in business culture. It is the central activity, and as long as it continues, business moves ahead. In Watsuji Tetsuro’s book on climate, he has a section on China in which he recalls seeing merchants in Shanghai continue trading until the sound of close gunfire heralded the coming of an invading army. Only then did they pack up and run. Foreign nationals were hiding in their embassy compounds, trusting their governments to help. For the Chinese, business was their sole concern, their guarantee of survival.

VII: Chinese Metaphysical Concepts are Based on Space.

Japanese Intuitions are Based on an Awareness of Time.

Consider the length of chopsticks, the sleep after lunch and the general lack of concern with time, characteristic of self-confident continental nations. Such is China, a gigantic continental power with enormous self-confidence abound in its own grandeur. This seeming philosophical issue has enormous practical consequences for social and cultural behavior, and underlies many features that stand in contrast. The long and rather cumbersome chopsticks, especially those made of ivory (although nowadays probably plastic) used by Chinese in contrast to the short highly functional waribashi, wooden chopsticks used by Japanese represent different attitudes to dining, the first type designed for slow, relaxed conversational eating, and the other designed for consumption of rice within the shortest possible length of time. Time, for the Japanese, to use a western legal metaphor, is of the essence of an activity. Anyone familiar with Japanese knows the degree of importance that is attached to time and timetabling. Japanese planning is meticulous. Punctuality and good time keeping are a mark of efficiency and good manners.

Studies appear to confirm the Japanese remain deeply sensitive to time. The newspaper, *USA Today*, carried a brief data report in 1985 (February 26) that compared bank clocks, walking speed, and post offices in the U.S.A., Japan, Indonesia and Italy. Japanese bank clocks varied only 30 seconds fast or slow. Indonesia varied three minutes. U.S. clocks were off by 54 seconds. Japanese walk 100 meters in 20.7 seconds. Indonesians take 27.2 seconds. A postage stamp that took up to 46 seconds to receive in Italy could be acquired in the U.S.A. in 27 seconds, but in 20 seconds in Japan. Time still seems very important in Japan.

In stark contrast with this is Kurt Singer’s observation about ritual in China: “Chinese rituals were sacramental

representations, recreations of cosmic models. Their purpose may have been originally to vanquish the forces of chaos by establishing order and light, harmony and hierarchical power.... This Chinese ritual was powerfully laid out in space; it delighted in majestic orderliness and symmetry; an elaborate configuration of gestures and styles, hymns and sacrifices, was performed at altars and in temples that were spatial symbols of cosmic laws, or great tectonic beauty and well-articulated imperial force.

In Japan, all these spatial elements are reduced to a bare minimum. The most elaborate of Japanese rituals are of rustic simplicity, compared with their Chinese counterparts.” (Singer, p. 112)

The case is made with both logic and delivered poetically, by Singer, whose conclusion states the point with extreme eloquence:

“In China, the accent is on *conformity*, obedience to the laws of the universe, the performance of what is orderly and appropriate by imitating the orderly and appropriate ways of the macrocosm. In Japan, the emphasis is laid on spontaneous action availing itself of a minimum of external lay-out, defying symmetry and demanding the ever-renewed effort to open oneself to the inflow of a divine presence that springs from the very beginning of the world. Here, communing with the gods does not mean imitating a model, but going back to one’s origins. The Chinese mind finds its natural home in Space, the Japanese’ in Time. The one rests in the contemplation of order, the other in the impulse and a tension of movement.” (Singer, p. 113). It is easy to extrapolate from these concepts to their implications for modern manufacturing in such practices as “Just in Time” and “Total Quality Control (TQC)”, which would also be correspondingly more difficult to teach in China. The Japanese use of space is also very economical, as house design and other space-saving systems will demonstrate. In a study conducted by a consulting firm designed to compare the use of space in storage facilities for car parts, between a Japanese and a U.S. manufacturer, the results showed that the parts in the U.S. traveled up to a kilometer inside the shed. The corresponding Japanese part traveled less than 30 meters before reaching an assembly line. Other illustrations could be added, but I think the point being made is now self-evident.

Concluding Comments

Many other points of contrast could be listed, but the seven discussed here should be enough to provide a framework that explains some of the unspoken background to the two systems, and how far apart they are on certain matters. Ultimately, underlying philosophical differences are decisive, determining the approach taken to all aspects of life.

The foregoing should be adequate to make the case for the purposes of this paper, which was intended to offer one possible basic framework within which a comparative study of Japanese and Chinese business culture and social values might be conducted. The scale of that undertaking is quite enormous, but in the materials provided, at least a start has been made. The next stage would be to trace back the historical antecedents of each more thoroughly, to link these to an expanded set of contrasts, and to project these into analyses of contemporary society for verification and clarification, a task for a publication rather longer than a paper.

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