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Intercultural Communication and Negotiation: Insights on the U.S. – Japanese Relationship

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Introduction/Abstract

This article looks at some general principles and pointers from the intercultural communication and negotiation fields about how to deal with similarities and differences between cultures that can affect their perceptions of each other and resulting interactions. Key similarities and differences in the socialization of people in U.S. and Japanese cultures—in different areas in which people learn their respective cultures—are then compared. The article concludes with recommendations about the importance of “doing one’s homework” and learning at least some basic knowledge about another culture—and its similarities to and differences from one’s own culture—before going to visit, interact or negotiate with, or do business with its people.

Key Principles of Intercultural Communication and Negotiation

There are a few basic principles from the intercultural communication field that give important insights into the dynamics of relations between peoples from different cultures—especially when the people from these two cultures do not know much about the other culture with which they are negotiating or interacting.

The first principle is that the message sent is often not the message received—especially when people come from different cultures who do not know each other, and can therefore interpret each other's behavior or words differently. A second principle notes the importance of DIE, short for learning to distinguish between describing, interpreting, and then evaluating (or judging) the behavior of someone from another culture. Describing the behavior of someone from another culture is a purely factual statement of the behavior exhibited or words spoken; which then leads quickly to interpreting (or misinterpreting) the meaning of and reasons for that behavior (which will be based on whether one knows that other culture or not), which can then lead to an evaluation or judgment (positive or negative) of the other person's behavior.

The interpretation stage is where people get into trouble when they do not know the other person's culture and interpret the other person's behavior based on what it would mean in their own culture, where the meaning can be very different, and thus misinterpret the meaning of the behavior to the other person. Then evaluating or judging the behavior of someone from another culture as positive or negative follows, based on how one has interpreted that behavior. The problem is that people often end up with a negative judgment of the behavior of someone from another culture and think they are still just describing that behavior.

When people from different cultures come together to negotiate, they not only have the visible issue (known to both parties) on which to negotiate; they also have less visible (or known) cultural negotiating styles that get superimposed on the issue to be negotiated—often without the parties' awareness—if they don't know each other's cultures. If parties do not understand each other's cultures and negotiating styles, that increases the chances of misinterpreting each other's behavior, which can lead to negative judgments of each other's behavior, which can then undermine the chances of ever reaching any agreement on the issue at hand.

Because of the above dangers of misinterpreting the reasons for behavior of people from other cultures, the intercultural field recommends the following policies: (1) do your homework and learn at least some basic information about the other party's culture before going to negotiate or do business with them; (2) find a mentor from the other culture who you can go to when you have questions about proper behavior and the meaning of different behaviors in that culture; and (3) be careful not to stereotype all people from other cultures as "the same" and instead get to know each person from another culture, to determine how much they reflect their culture or not. Also realize that all people share things in common as human beings, but that they've grown up in and learned different cultural patterns of behavior, beliefs, and underlying values that can influence their behavior; and that it is also useful to get a sense of where people from different cultures have areas of socialization in common, as well as areas of difference.

Hypotheses on Dealing with Similarities and Differences of Cultural Socialization

To understand the particular dynamics in the relationship between any two countries or cultures in the international system, it is useful to first find out where those two countries or cultures have key similarities of socialization in different areas, and key differences of socialization in other areas, and then how these similarities and differences of socialization may effect the dynamics of the relationship and interactions between them.

One can hypothesize that in general, when two parties from different countries or cultures have similarities in their socialization in various areas that this *should* (in most cases, with a few exceptions) create some basis for possible understanding between them, since they will have each experienced something similar in this area of life. There are obvious exceptions however, as when two countries or cultures each claim the same territory—though often for differing reasons. Such a situation can obviously create conflict and tension between them. Another example is if two countries are both capitalist economic superpowers, as in the USA-Japanese case below, though with somewhat different forms of capitalist economic systems. This creates both a basis for understanding and trade between them, and economic interdependence, but can also lead to significant competition between them, as when they are both producing similar products—such as automobiles—for the global market. But in general, similarities of socialization should at least create the potential for understanding between such actors.

On the other hand, when two countries or cultures have differences in key areas of socialization between them, there is an increased possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of each other’s behavior—especially if actors are not knowledgeable and informed about each other’s culture. In that case, they are likely to interpret the behavior of the other party based on its meaning in their own culture, since they do not know the other culture, which can then, in some cases, lead to negative judgments of the other actor’s behavior.

Cultural differences can also lead to great creativity and innovation coming out of the interactions between people from different cultures, but for this to occur, it is usually important that both parties are aware of important cultural differences between them and open to learning about the other culture and what it has to offer. One is much less likely to fall into negative judgments of another culture’s behavior that differs from one’s own ‘if’ one has done one’s homework and learned something about what that behavior means in the other person’s culture. If both sides do this, and are open, then both can dialogue with each other and learn new things from the other culture and creative things can result, where both parties are able to move to a third position or new creative idea or product, as a result of their interactions.

In short, differences of socialization between two cultures can lead to misunderstandings and even conflict, if parties are unaware of each other’s cultures, but with some knowledge and awareness and openness, creativity and innovation can also result, which is a very positive potential in today’s world, as all the cultures and peoples of the world are now increasingly interacting with each other.

Insights on the United States-Japanese Relationship

For any two countries or cultures interacting in the world today, the particular areas of socialization where key similarities or differences of socialization exist will be unique to that particular relationship. This section examines key areas of socialization (or learning of one’s culture) between the United States and Japan, noting areas where key similarities of socialization exist (providing potential areas for understanding), as well as areas where key differences of socialization exist (which can potentially result in misunderstandings and conflict—especially if both parties are unaware of these cultural differences). First similarities of socialization are examined, followed by differences of socialization.

Key Similarities of Socialization Between U.S. and Japanese Cultures

General

Developed Countries Both countries are modern, developed countries.

Economics

Economic Superpowers	Both countries are <u>economic superpowers</u> .
Capitalist Economies	Both countries have <u>advanced, capitalist economic systems</u> , though both are suffering in the current global recession.
Pacific Rim Leaders	Both countries are key economic leaders and powers in the Pacific Rim, where the information revolution emerged and is driving the global economy.

Technology

Technological Powers	Both countries are <u>advanced, technological powers</u> .
Information Economies	Both countries are <u>leaders in the post-industrial, computer/information revolution</u> . Earlier, both countries were also competing <u>leaders</u> in the development of fifth generation computers or <u>artificial intelligence</u> .
Robotics	Both countries are <u>developing robotic technologies</u> , although Japan is ahead in this development, since they have a shortage of younger workers entering the workforce, and thus do not have to unemploy workers when robotic technology is introduced into the workplace. Indeed, Japan has had robots making robots on the factory assembly line for many years.
Energy	Both countries have relied on <u>nuclear energy plants</u> for some of their electrical energy needs. Despite the dropping of bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese still support the development of nuclear energy because their lack of domestic energy resources makes them energy dependent.
Space Programs	Both countries have <u>significant space programs</u> .

Geostrategic

Isolationism history.	Both countries have had significant periods of <u>isolationism</u> in their history.
Moat Mentality	Both countries could be said to have a “ <u>moat mentality</u> ”—being surrounded by water and ocean on both sides (USA) or on all sides (Japan). This has <u>helped protect both countries from attack</u> by other countries in their history and has allowed for periods of national development relatively cut off from European influence (USA) or from Chinese/Asian influence (Japan), as well as from Western influence (Japan until World War II and its aftermath).

Shared Military History

Mutual Military Targets	During World War II, both countries were the <u>target of military attacks by the other country</u> —the United States by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which brought the United States into World War II; and the
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Japanese by the United States bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which led to the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II.

Mutual Adversaries

During World War II, both countries were adversaries—the United States being part of the Allied Powers, the Japanese being part of the Axis Powers. Because the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan, and Japan is the only country in the world to experience such devastation, this human tragedy (which some people claim was necessary to end the war more quickly) forever binds the two countries together—although this is not really a similarity.

Western Allies

Both countries have been Western bloc allies since the end of World War II in the Cold War alliance against the Soviet Bloc, continuing after the end of the Cold War.

Political System

Democracy

Both countries have democratic political systems—the United States since the beginning of the republic; Japan since the end of World War II, when a democratic system of government was introduced into Japan, as part of the peace settlement under General MacArthur. The Japanese democratic system is based partly on a U.S. model, i.e., the Constitution and Supreme Court, and partly on a European model, i.e., the Japanese Diet or Parliament.

Judiciary

Both countries have a Supreme Court, but they are viewed and used somewhat differently, due to the different cultures of the two countries. In the United States, with its focus on individual assertiveness and competitiveness, the number of people suing other people and taking their cases to court is very high. Indeed, the United States can be seen to be a very adversarial society in this respect. In contrast, Japanese culture still places a high premium on group identity and harmony, and therefore, if a conflict is irresolvable outside of court, necessitating going to court, this is seen as an admission of failure, to be avoided if at all possible.

Democracy in Action

While both countries are democratic, Japan is a much newer democracy. Also, the Liberal Democratic Party or LDP has largely dominated Japanese politics for 55 years in the post-war period—since 1955. By some accounts, U.S. influence, motivated by a desire to limit the power of the socialist and communist parties, played a role in this. Prior to August 2009, it was only for 10 months in 1993-1994 that other political parties formed a majority coalition in the Parliament or Diet, allowing them to select the Prime Minister. Political power has largely alternated between different factions within the Liberal Democratic Party. Nonetheless, a big change occurred on August 29, 2009, when the Democratic Party of Japan or DPJ won a landslide election. One sign of a more mature democracy is having more than one viable national political party.

Demographics

Social Class	The great majority of people in both countries consider themselves to be <u>middle class</u> . Nonetheless, the range of income between the wealthiest and poorest in society is much greater in the USA than in Japan.
Women's Movements	Both countries have significant <u>women's movements</u> , although the issues being dealt with in the U.S. and Japan are somewhat different. Women in the U.S. are seeking access to higher positions of authority, responsibility, and decision making in business, government, academia, and community organizations, while women in Japan are to a greater extent trying to gain greater benefits for female part-time workers, since many Japanese women, after they marry, are in this position. Indeed, women in Japan are largely responsible for the household budget and for the education of their children, while men, including "salarymen," work very long hours, making such long hours difficult for women with children. Nonetheless, 40 percent of working-age women in Japan are working, and increasing numbers of married women are working.
Aging Populations	Both countries—as indeed all developed countries—have <u>aging populations</u> (due partly to declining birth rates and to longer lifespans), meaning there will be an increasing shortage of younger workers entering the workforce in both countries in the future. In the U.S., immigration has made up for declining birth rates. In Japan, declining birth rates have led to robots being introduced into the factory assembly line and workplace at a faster rate, without putting people out of work as a result.
Children and Family	Both Americans and Japanese have children, family, and friends whom they care about and love, and children that will form the next generation, whom they want to survive and prosper.
Culture	
Art and Culture	Both countries have <u>rich cultural and artistic traditions</u> —including art, music, literature, theatre, dance, etc.—although Japanese culture is obviously much older and the traditional art forms are also different.
Synergistic Cultural Influences	While United States culture is originally more European and Western based, and Japanese culture is originally more Chinese and Eastern based, both countries are currently having <u>significant impacts on each other's cultures</u> —in technology, legal, philosophy, lifestyle, food, and other areas. Indeed, because both cultures are in some respects polar opposites of each other (United states culture focusing more on individual identity, and Japanese culture focusing more on group identity and harmony), some believe that U.S. and Japanese cultures can actually learn much from each other. Abraham Maslow said that a synergistic society would be one in which the needs of the individual and the group could both be met. If so, then both Eastern and Western cultures (including Japanese and American cultures) each have half of the puzzle for figuring out how to create global synergy!

Religious Roots	Both countries have <u>significant, though differing religious traditions</u> existing since the founding of both countries: Shintoism, and later Buddhism, plus a much smaller percentage of Christians, in Japan; and Christianity, plus Judaism, and now almost all religious traditions in the United States—especially in major urban centres, where immigrants from all world cultures and religions now live in sizeable numbers.
Sports	Both countries have significant and <u>diversified sports programs</u> —including <u>baseball</u> , which is a very popular sport in both countries (showing U.S. influence on Japan), as well as the <u>martial arts</u> (showing Japanese, Korean, and Chinese influence on the United States), and other sports.
Other	
Organized Crime; Corruption	<u>Organized crime</u> and political plus economic <u>corruption and greed</u> exist in both countries. The U.S. has the Mafia and Japan has the Yakuza. In the U.S., Mafia families still play a role. In addition, greed, corruption, and lack of sufficient regulation of the private sector can be seen in the recent subprime loan housing crisis, bank failures, and Wall Street financial crises. In Japan, ties between the Yakuza, Japanese government, and certain businesses go back before World War II to the 1600's and continue today.
Pollution	Both countries have <u>pollution problems</u> , which in both countries are largely the result of the industrial revolution. These pollution problems are still with us today, even though both countries are leaders in the information revolution.
Earthquakes	Both countries (being influenced by the “ring of fire” surrounding the Pacific Basin) are <u>earthquake prone</u> .
Global Warming	Both countries, as the world in general, are facing <u>effects of global warming</u> , including dangers of sea levels rising, which can endanger coastal cities. This includes the East and West coasts of the USA, and the coastlines of Japan's four major islands.
One Planet	People from both countries—indeed all countries—breathe the same air from planet earth. We are also all part of nature and all tied to earth as our life-support system, and therefore all responsible for being stewards of the earth—even though we do not all recognize the importance of this yet.
One Humanity	People from both countries share a common humanity and common features of the human condition, i.e., we are born, we live a life, and ultimately we are all mortal and die. This human condition gives us much we share in common in terms of seeking to find and create a meaningful life for ourselves and our posterity while we are here.

Key Differences of Socialization Between U.S. and Japanese Cultures

Demographics

Ethnicity

The U.S. has a very heterogeneous, multi-ethnic population mix (indeed, a mini world in many large cities today). While people once thought this would lead to a “melting pot,” the “salad bowl” model (based on unity and diversity) is now more prevalent.

Japan has a very homogeneous population – indeed one of the most homogeneous population in the world, being 99% Japanese, with a small percentage of AINO (in Hokkaido) and Koreans (who, though Asian in appearance are not accepted as Japanese, although some take on Japanese names).

Origins

The rich, diverse cultural mix of the American population is no doubt due to the fact that (except for the Native Americans who were already there), the U.S. is almost totally a nation of immigrants—coming not only from European Nations but also from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The origins of the Japanese people are not totally known, although the Japanese—including the Emperor and his family—claim to be descendants of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, who founded Japan. There are different theories, but no definite conclusions, about where the Japanese people originally immigrated from. It has been hypothesized that some came from Southeast Asia and others from East Asia.

Assimilation

U.S. culture is more inclusive, traditionally a nation of immigrants welcoming people from many countries. Indeed the Statue of Liberty—beckoning people from many lands to the Eastern shores of the U.S. with strains of “give me your tired, your poor, your teeming masses yearning to be free”—best epitomizes what the U.S. symbolizes at its best to its own citizens and to citizens of the world.

Japanese culture is more tribal and exclusive, partly based on a period of isolationism, when their identity as a people deepened. While Japanese are most hospitable and helpful to foreign guests visiting their country, if you not born Japanese, you will never be accepted as a member of “The Japanese Tribe.” This tribal nature of Japanese identity is now being tested, as Japanese economic influence around the world grows, making interactions with many cultures of the world inevitable and necessary.

Identity

The U.S. is a more individualistic culture, i.e., one’s identity comes through one’s sense of oneself as a separate individual. From the moment one is born, one is rewarded for standing out as an individual from the group—in great contrast with Japan, making the two cultures almost polar opposites in this respect.

Japan is a more group-oriented culture i.e. one’s identity comes through one’s relationship with others in groups and with nature. Indeed, there is little sense of an individual identity, separate from one’s relationship with the group. From an early age, one is rewarded for subordinating one’s own needs to those of the group (“the nail that

stands out is hammered down”) and for being in harmony with the group. If the group does well, members of the group will do well.

Culture

Context

The U.S. is a more low-context culture—indeed, one of the most low context cultures on earth. In short, American culture is very goal oriented. Americans like to get down to business and to a discussion of details right away, so that they can arrive at an agreement as quickly as possible, and begin the work. Americans say “time is money” and are known as a very practical “can do” culture.

Japanese culture is a more high context culture as are most non-Western cultures. In short, identity comes through one’s relationship with others, and one must take time to establish such relationships as a prerequisite for doing business or negotiating with someone, which takes time. One cannot get down to the details of a negotiation until this broader societal context is first established.

Archetypes

Since identity in the U.S. is more as a separate individual, and the culture is goal-oriented, this represents the male principle, which U.S. culture (and Western culture in general) represent.

In Japan, since identity is more in relationship to others and the culture is more process oriented, this represents the female principle, which Japanese culture (and Eastern culture in general) represent.

Creativity in Science and Technology

The individualistic goal oriented nature of American culture seems to translate into a gift for new ideas, including new scientific discoveries on a more abstract level (many Nobel Prizes in science) and new technological innovations on a more applied level—a major reason why the U.S. is called a “can-do” culture.

The more group and process-oriented nature of Japanese culture seems to translate into a gift for taking ideas originally borrowed from elsewhere (China at one time, then the West) and then using a group consensus-building process, to find innovative ways to move towards perfection of an existing form or product (leading to many patents today), as well as numerous worker suggestions for improving the factory production process itself.

Basic
Communication
Styles

The U.S. is a more direct culture, i.e., people say what they think, get right to the point, and have no difficulty saying “no.” Indeed the U.S. is one of the most direct cultures on earth. Foreigners, in contrast, often view this behavior as somewhat rude and aggressive, making them feel uncomfortable.

Japan is a more indirect culture, i.e., people find it very difficult and uncomfortable to say “no.” out of a desire to maintain the harmony of the group. Instead of “no,” people often say “Yes, but...” or “Yes, maybe later,” which Westerners often interpret literally and therefore incorrectly, creating frequent misunderstandings in East-West negotiations.

Cultural Memes

In summary, U.S. culture has individual identity, is low context and goal-oriented, and has a direct communication style, creating a dominant U.S. cultural meme.

In summary, Japanese culture has collective/group identity, is high-context and process oriented, and has an indirect communication style, creating a dominant Japanese cultural meme.

NOTE: Because the two cultures are so different in this respect, U.S. and Japanese people must each stretch to understand each other's cultures and must put themselves in the place of each other's culture. The people can also learn much from each other as well, including that their respective cultures are learned maps or visions of reality, not ultimate reality.

**Communications
Styles**

Eye contact

In the U.S., people look directly into each other’s eyes. Americans believe that people who do not look you directly in the in the eyes are hiding something or are not being honest.

In Japan, people traditionally do not look directly into each other’s eyes. They often look instead at someone’s throat or Adam’s apple area (though with younger Japanese people, this is somewhat changing). Japanese believe that looking someone directly in the eyes is rude or overly intrusive.

“yes” and “no”

Americans are more direct and say what they are thinking or feeling. Americans can say “No.” When Americans say “yes,” they mean “yes, I agree with you.”

Japanese are more indirect and say things indirectly and nonverbally, out of a desire to maintain the harmony of the group. Japanese people have great difficulty saying “no.” A famous article on Japan talks about “16 ways to say no without saying no,” including “yes, but,” “maybe later,” and non-verbally via sucking in air through the teeth and then saying a “SA” sound. When Japanese people say “yes,” they mean “yes, I hear you,” not “yes, I agree with you.”

Silence

Americans have great difficulty dealing with silence, feeling uncomfortable with too much silence, and often feeling compelled to talk to break the silence. Americans also often interrupt each other while talking.

The Japanese believe that interrupting another person who is speaking is very rude. After another person speaks there is also a period of silence to reflect on what that person said, before beginning to reply.

Verbal /
Nonverbal

Americans talk a lot and communicate much more via verbal communication, believing the truth lies in the words themselves (with Western religious scriptures starting with “In the beginning was the word.”). Americans use non-verbal communication and body language but may be less aware of its meaning.

Japanese people are more naturally distrustful of verbal forms of communication, and due to their more homogeneous culture, they have evolved a lot more non-verbal forms of communication, including certain guttural sounds (which unaware Americans often totally miss).

**Conflict
Resolution**

Basic Tenets

The U.S. is an individualistic and conflict-prone culture, which often uses adversarial techniques, such as litigation, direct confrontation, and bargaining, to try to resolve conflicts.

Japan is a group-oriented, and conflict avoidant culture, which seeks to maintain the harmony of relationships (build up over long periods of time) at all costs. Thus direct adversarial negotiations and bargaining are very painful to most Japanese and they seek to avoid such confrontations.

Litigation vs.
Mediation

Litigation is the most common traditional form of conflict resolution in U.S. culture, and it can be very adversarial. There is therefore a recent movement towards alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques, including negotiation, arbitration, and mediation, to provide alternatives that are less adversarial. This has been called a social movement and an alternative to litigation and violence.

Mediation is the most common, traditional form of conflict resolution in Japanese culture, where a third party mediator (trusted in the community) goes back and forth informally between the parties to help resolve any conflicts more indirectly and with less overt conflict. More recently, Japan has begun importing western lawyers, for certain kinds of cases, but generally it is still considered a sigh of failure to have to go to court to resolve a conflict. (Courts were established in Japan at the end of World War II by the U.S. occupying forces under general MacArthur, as part of the democratic institutions imposed on Japan as part of peace settlement. This is an interesting case of where institutions transported from one culture to another do not always function the same way in the second culture.)

Negotiating Style

Self-expression

Americans are more likely to express what they think and feel, as they go along in negotiation.

Because Japanese are taught to suppress their individualistic feelings, to maintain the harmony of the group, occasionally those feelings may erupt—but only after being patient for a long time.

End Goal

Americans negotiate a legal contract, and can do business with anyone—even someone they do not like, since their legal rights are protected under law and via the terms of their agreement.

Japanese negotiate a relationship, which they cultivate and plan to maintain for many years into the future. The more important the agreement to the Japanese, the more time they will spend getting to know another party before consenting to sign an agreement with them, since they have to know that they can rely on that part in business after that. The legal agreement is only secondary; what is of primary importance is the relationship.

Bargaining

The American main negotiating style is to present strong initial demands and then expect via hard bargaining back and forth to eventually come to a back-up compromise position, where both parties get part of their initial demands met, but not all. This negotiating style is based on the domestic political process in the U.S., where one gets at the truth via hard bargaining and where compromise is considered an admirable outcome.

Japan's main negotiating style is to spend a lot of time developing a consensus during the pre-negotiation phase, and to present what they think is fair to both parties at the beginning of negotiations, and wait to see if the other side will concur or not. Adversarial bargaining is avoided, as it is very uncomfortable to the Japanese.

Emphasis

As a low context culture, Americans like to get right down to negotiating the details of an agreement and don't spend as much time on the pre-negotiation phase.

In Japan, a high-context culture, developing relationships and a group consensus on fair policies for both sides is essential before negotiations begin. Thus much more time is spent on the pre-negotiation stage in Japan.

Flexibility

Americans often change their position in the middle of negotiations, when they get a new idea. U.S. negotiators are also given leeway to introduce such new ideas, if they seem appropriate, during the negotiations, without first having to return home to get an approval.

Japanese people come to negotiations with an initial position which they think is fair to both parties, and they find the U.S. tendency to change positions mid-stream disconcerting, since it means going back home and having to develop another consensus again within their own group before returning to the negotiating table.

Business Practices

Decision-Making	<p><u>Decision-making</u> in U.S. companies was traditionally by <u>management</u>, with participatory management (under various names) emerging in more recent years as an alternative. Traditionally, <u>relatively quick decisions</u> leading to actions were the norm, since “time is money.”</p>	<p>In Japan, <u>decision-making</u> is <u>more by consensus</u>, which often <u>takes longer</u>, but once the decision is made, everyone is behind it, creating fewer unexpected problems later. What came to be called “Japanese management” was influenced by Deming’s idea of quality circles, which fit well with the group identity nature of Japanese culture. (Once Japanese management worked well in Japan, Westerners became interested in it, although Deming had earlier proposed the idea in the U.S.)</p>
Objectives	<p>Americans often seek more <u>short term profit—often to satisfy stockholders</u>.</p>	<p><u>Japanese seek more long-term relationships</u>, by which they seek to establish market share. Japanese companies will sometimes forgo short-term profit, in order to establish such relationships for the long-term.</p>
Purchasing Practices	<p>U.S. companies generally seek to buy goods needed for the products they produce via <u>competitive bidding</u>, seeking the lowest price.</p>	<p>Japanese companies—due to <u>Keiretsu Relationships</u> established over many years between a large corporation and its subcontractors and sub-subcontracting companies—seek consistent, reliable products from known suppliers, which is more important than getting the lowest price.</p>
Workplace		
Job Stability	<p>In the U.S., people <u>seldom have lifetime employment</u> with the same company. Indeed, the average person has at least three different careers, and ten or more different jobs, in his/her lifetime. A job is defined as ongoing employment with the same employer, while a career is defined as a chosen pursuit, profession, or occupation.</p>	<p>In Japan, people who work for <u>large corporations</u> (or MNCs) usually have <u>lifetime employment</u> with the same company. While this is beginning to change, especially with some young people, it is still generally seen as a negative thing to change jobs. People working for smaller companies, however, do not have the same job security. Many women, after they marry, also have part-time jobs.</p>

Hiring Practices

In the U.S., people are usually hired because they can do a particular job, task, or skill well. While training comes on the job, employees are expected to bring certain skills with them to the job.

In Japan, people are usually hired because they can work well with others in teams of people in a company and rotate jobs, gaining experience in different parts of the company. Training comes more on the job.

Worker Participation

In the U.S., management traditionally made decisions, without much worker input, on how to improve products or the production process, although this is now changing with participatory management in some companies.

In Japan, workers are encouraged to offer suggestions on how to improve products, and those suggestions are often acted upon. (About 95% of the worker suggestions in a Toyota factory were implemented, for example).

Lifestyles

Workplace and Family

While there are workaholics in the U.S., most people consider their family at home their family.

Japan: For the mother/wife, her family at home is her family; for the father/husband, his main family—if he is the typical “salaryman”—is the corporation.

Leisure Time and Vacation

In the U.S., people increasingly like having leisure time, to do other things in their lives besides working—including time to spend with their families. People generally take all the vacation time allotted to them per year.

In Japan, people often do not take all their allotted vacation time, often finding it difficult to be away from their work group for more than ten days. Younger people are taking more of their allotted vacation time than their elders, though often still not the total allotted time.

Society

Social Status

In the U.S., social status tends to be based more on income. Youth is also idealized.

Social status in Japan is based on age, sex, and position within a company, as well as on the company one works for and the university that one attended.

Social Structure and Income

U.S. society is more egalitarian and democratic in values, but the income range is much greater between the highest and lowest ranking people within the same company, and indeed within society as a whole.

Japanese society is more hierarchical in structure, which is reflected in the different ways that people address each other, which varies depending on whether someone is higher or lower status than you are; yet the income range is much less between the highest and lowest ranking people within the same company, and indeed within society as a whole.

Education

Emphasis

U.S. schools get progressively better as one goes from lower to higher grades, including universities and graduate schools. Education in grade schools is not always what it should be in terms of quality. Analytical, creative problem-solving, and verbal communication skills are stressed. Students learn to ask “why” things are as they are.

Japanese education is known as being quite good—in terms of achieving a high average level of learning for the population as a whole. However, education focuses more on rote learning to pass entrance exams for the next level of education, rather than on creative problem solving and analytical skills. Verbal skills are not stressed as much. Students learn correct answers, but don’t always ask “why” these answers are correct

University Acceptance and Graduation

It is easier to get accepted into a university, but harder to graduate, in the U.S.

It is harder to get accepted into a good university (due to the difficult and competitive entrance examinations), but easier to graduate in Japan. Indeed graduation is almost assured, once one is accepted to the university.

Homework

Students in U.S. universities are expected to do homework and study a lot to pass their courses.

Japanese university students often focus more on their social club activities than on their studies. This is also the only time in their lives when they can take time off from studying or work.

Grading

In the U.S., grades are not automatic. One must do the work to get the grade.

Most Japanese students, if they take the tests (by studying at the end of the term), will receive A’s or B’s for their classes— whether they attended regularly or not.

Instructional Methodologies

In the U.S., lectures and class discussions are usually combined. Students frequently ask questions on the material presented in class or assigned readings.

In Japan, lectures are the main form of class presentation. Students rarely ask questions in class. Some people thus say that Japanese education does not teach good analytical and problem solving skills.

Family Life

Roles

Men in the U.S. spend more time with their families, coming home earlier from work, and learning to help out more at home—especially since so many women and mothers are now working as well (out of both economic need and desire).

In Japan, men are typically seldom home during the week—arriving home late at night and leaving early in the morning. Sunday is usually the day set aside for fathers to be with their families. Wives have almost sole responsibility for the education of their children and for the household budget.

Marriage

In the U.S., marriages are almost all based on romantic love.

In Japan, marriages are based on both romantic love and arrangement—which in Japan means the original meeting is arranged, but then the parties can agree or not to further meeting, and then to eventual marriage or not.

Other

Alcoholism and Drugs

In the U.S., drinking, alcoholism, and drugs are problems—though society a whole is aware of these problems and many programs exist to help people with such problems.

Drinking and alcoholism appears to be a big problem in Japan, but many people do not see it as a societal problem—requiring intervention and help. Instead, drinking is seen by many as just the Japanese way to have an excuse to go out after work and be more informal and honest with one's co-workers and even one's boss (since the workplace is more formal).

Violence

U.S. society has more violence.

Japanese society has less violence.

Energy Sources and Pollution

The U.S. still depends largely on fossil fuels (coal earlier, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and oil and natural gas, along with nuclear fission, from the 20th century on). Fossil fuels all pollute, so today there is increasing interest in renewable green energy sources.

Despite the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, Japan has been supportive of nuclear fission energy, partly because it lacks domestic energy sources and must import them. Japan also has pollution problems—despite a cultural value of living in harmony with nature—largely due to rapid industrialization from the top down from the 19th century on.

Relationship with Nature

Americans see themselves as separate from nature, often seeking to control or harness the forces of nature—often with the aid of technology—for the benefit of oneself or other humans.

Japanese people see themselves as part of nature, and thus seek to live in harmony with nature, just as with other human beings. There is no identity as separate from nature or groups one belongs to—whether the Japanese tribe or nation, one’s corporation, one’s school class, or other groups to which one belongs.

Conclusions

The above comparisons in similarities and differences of socialization between U.S. and Japanese cultures show how useful it is to know something about another culture that one is about to communicate, interact, or negotiate with, or visit, or work in. In short, it is best to “do your homework” before you go to interact with a new culture. That does not mean that you will not make mistakes, but you will at least be better prepared to expect certain similarities in your two cultures, as well as key differences, and when differences in behavior do occur, you will hopefully not be so surprised and will be better able to deal with the situation. If you understand the differences between DIE (describing, interpreting, and evaluating or judging the behavior of someone from another country), as noted earlier, then if you find yourself suddenly in a negative judgment about the behavior of someone from another culture, hopefully you will be able to stop yourself and ask yourself if that negative judgment is perhaps based on the behavior in question having a different meaning and reason for its existence in the other person’s culture, as compared to your own. If you then determine that that is the case, then you may be able to re-evaluate your negative judgment of the other person’s behavior. At a minimum, you will at least be able to understand why the other person is acting differently than you would act in your own culture, and hopefully this will improve your intercultural relations and interactions with the other person, as well as with other people from that other culture.

Interacting with people from other cultures is an endlessly fascinating experience that can get you out of the limited worldview of your own cultural frameworks and values only, making you aware that a much larger world, with many diverse cultures, exists, and that there are important things that you can learn from any other culture—“if” you are open to learning and interacting with people from that culture. In the process, you may just find your own life enriched substantially.

As a Dove™ candy saying seems to advise, “*Share our similarities, celebrate our differences.*”

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POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- As Groff points out, some cultures are more inclusive (for example, the U.S.) whereas others such as Japan are more exclusive and tribal. Similar descriptors are applicable to various other cultures of the present and past. Some parts of the world can also be characterized by "tribes of choice" – for example, one's workplace, profession, neighborhood, associations, or even socioeconomic groups – that can be fluid (see Rubin article this issue). In your part of the world, what will constitute the primary basis for identity in 2015?
- How can each of the two cultures leverage its respective strengths to prepare for the challenges that various alternative world futures might present?
- Groff identifies several differences between Japanese and U.S. culture. Which characteristics of one culture are making inroads into the other culture, and with what possible impact within the next ten years?
- Citing judicial institutions as an example, Groff observes that institutions transported from one culture do not always function the same way in another culture. Discuss other instances of attempts to "plug and play" elements of one culture into another. Under what circumstances, if any, can this type of approach be successful?
- Groff discusses several differences between U.S. and Japanese business practices and working lifestyles. To what extent will U.S., Japanese, European, or other business practices and working lifestyles become more prevalent throughout the world during the next ten years?