イマッジン

Imagine - My Lost Decade in Japan
http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/imagine/index.html

平成３年８月に来日して、東京横田にある米軍基地でメリーランド大学の教師としてアメリカ人と日本人に経済学の原理を教え始めた。同年１０月から１２月まで横浜の飛鳥学院で日本語の基礎を学んだ。平成４年２月大学を退職し、横浜に引越した。経済的理由から日本語の学校も退校し、フリーランスの英会話教師として働く傍ら、永田町や大手町等で日本の参議院の研究者、大手企業の経営者に日本の政治・経済を教えて頂いた。その頃毎日東京都立中央図書館に行き、毎週３０〜５０時間位日本語の書き方を自習して、日本人の高校生と日本語で話しをするレベルに達した。

平成５年埼玉大学の企画部に入り、７年間の外国人の非常勤講師のキャリアを開始した。その間日本の言語と経済に限らず、日本の歴史、社会、文化、国際関係を身につけた。毎日日本の新聞、雑誌、書物等を読み、毎月で多くの会議に参加した。

平成１１年９月には、５年間の埼玉大学の授業で書いた小論文を収集し、教科書として印刷することになった。同年１２月には翌年の４月に日本の大学での専任教員になれないことが分かって、平成１２年の正月には鎌倉に参拝に行かなかったし、江ノ島から初日の出も見なかった。その代わりに出国しなくてはいけないことを決意し、同年８月に実際出国した。その前に東京都北区の住居で９年間の日本の経験を纏めて、「イマッジン」という本を書いた。その次に香港中文大學で一年間のフルタイムの仕事を始めた。

この本は日本人論（問題）、人類入門（想像）、国際交流（結果）の３部分におおよそ分かれている。一番めの「日本人論」というのは、現代の日米関係の、その歴史的でありそうな基盤を究め、日本の現代の考え方を分析して説明すること。二番目の「人類入門」というのは、西洋の学的な共通知識と自分の経験で国際交流の原理を考慮し、比較的な国際交流のモデルを作成すること。三番目の「国際交流」というのは、日本人論に基づいて考える日本人と西洋の国際理論を基にした外国人が会うと、その当然の結果を説明すること。

この本の対象読者は、出国したい日本人、来日したい外国人、国際化したい在日の日本人と外国人の３つに分かれる。文学作品として、この本は風刺な文体を含んでいる。学問的なものではなくても、実際の例によって、論理的に分析したものである。簡単に理解できる側面も、難しくて直ぐ理解できない側面も含まれるかもしれない。大学一年生の読者達を想定していない。

Imagine
The rudiments of a book about Japanese Society

by Hashimori Iwato

The Great Deception

Art of deception
Piercing the veil of contradiction
Negative consequences
Art of segregation
An important part of Japan's national mythology
Postwar propaganda

Motivation for deception
The nature of deception
Lifetime employment
Trade and investment barriers
Democracy
Legitimacy

Mechanics and structure of deception
Public education
A long way to the top
La petite bourgeoisie du Japon
Politicians and journalists
Guardians of the peace
Protective umbrella
The privilege of information
Sensei
Surface communication

Images of Japan

Image collecting

Collage One
Society at peace
Industrious society
Studious society
Orderly and polite society
Difficult language
Closed society

Collage Two
Tradition bound society
Japan/US friendship
International society
Unique society
Authoritarian society

Collage Three
Mercantilist economy
High-Trust society
Collective society - Privacy and private property
Rice culture and village society
Neurotic society - A nation of many complexes

Racially pure society

Western Imagery,
Social Roles, and Boxes

Introduction

Images of Self and Other

An important aspect of human nature is the need for recognition. Each of us has an image of who he and the other is, but one's image of oneself, and the image that others have of one, do not always correspond. When these two images match we are generally happy and get along; when they do not, communication must occur so that each can adjust his image of himself with that of the other. When the relationship includes only two people, this adjustment is often straight forward, but not without its complications. This is because the number of images are six including the image that each of us has of himself, the image that each of us has of the other, and the image which each of us has of the total relationship -- namely, how both people see themselves when viewed by a third party. As you can readily imagine, even between two people the matching can sometimes be difficult.

Now, add a third person, and see how rapidly the number of images which must be matched increases. To simplify things consider only one person of the threesome at a time. He has his own image of himself, an image of each of the other two, an image of each person's relationship to himself, an image of the other two's relationship to each other, an image of his own relationship to the group, an image of each of the other's relationship to the group, as well as an image of the other two's relationship to the group. Finally, there must be an image which each has of the entire group when viewed by others from the outside. Have I forgotten any? Now multiply this number by three! If it is too much to count, please do not be concerned, because this list is likely not exhaustive. There are always the images that one has of the images that others have of oneself. Moreover, what has been ignored in all of the above combinations is the possibility of deception -- namely, the purposeful manipulation of appearances in order to conceal from others, what one believes to be the real truth. Huh? The *real* truth? If you have ever wondered why living with others can sometimes be difficult, then perhaps you should consider more carefully what these images truly entail.

In Japanese society appearance is not everything, but one's image of himself and others does perhaps receive more emphasis than in most other societies. Evidence for this is the frequency with which Japanese take and exchange photographs at social gatherings. Of course, imaging need not apply only to our perceptions of each other, it can also apply to the things that we eat, the clothes that we wear, the automobiles that we buy, and the ways in which we wrap and display our merchandise. By way of example, USAmericans are very concerned about power and function; Japanese on the other hand, place important emphasis on form and structure. As a result, Japan has created some of the world's best architects and one of the most tightly knit social organization in the world.

Importance of Social Roles

Of course, living our lives, always conscious of the aforementioned permutations of perception, could be nerve wracking. This is one reason that we assign roles to ourselves so as to simplify our interpersonal relationships. Moreover, each society has a different way to minimize the number of images with which each of us must deal by encouraging certain kinds of behavior. For example, in a *low-trust* society, in which everyone is suspicious of everyone else, because no one trusts anyone who is not a member of one's group, there is a high premium placed on organized activity. Is this not Japan?

With each person playing a carefully assigned role, that he often shares with a large number of other people his behavior can be easily monitored and controlled. In order for organized group activities to succeed, however, they require a strong degree of cooperation between those who organize and participate in them. The strong emphasis on group spirit and self-discipline that characterizes Japanese society provides the basis for this cooperation. Unfortunately, it also tends to squelch Japanese individual identity, not to the point that it is extinguished, but to the point that it is no longer readily discernible. Thus, no one really insists that one's individual identity be exposed in the first place. This is not to say that Japanese are generally confused or without a point of view, rather simply that the lucidity with which they perceive themselves, the direction that they place before themselves, and the determination with which they pursue their goals, are often confounded with the role that each must play in his or her respective group. When removed from their group context individual Japanese can appear just as self-serving, conceited, generous, and loving as anyone from any other society, and sometimes even more so. Indeed, without the presence of the group to constrain their action, that which they feel most, suddenly emerges in proportion to what was held back.

Pyramids of Boxes Inside Boxes in a Box

What makes Japanese society Japanese is the characteristic way of organizing activity -- a pattern of behavior that repeats itself over and over throughout Japanese society. Indeed, it is this aspect of Japanese society that gives Francis Fukuyama the foolish audacity to label Japan a "high trust" society.[1] Indeed, Japanese are one of the most distrustful nations of people I have ever encountered. Japanese are forever stabbing one another in the back, playing malicious pranks (*itazura*) on one another[2], and venting their frustrations out on the general public and their neighbors behind facades of innocence, pretension, and deceit.[3] What makes Japan a "high trust" society in the Fukuyama sense is the patterned way of organizing things -- not a deeply rooted psychological predisposition of generosity and comradeship towards complete strangers. Japan and US society are hardly comparable in this regard. Complete strangers

[1] Francis Fukuyama. 1996. Trust. The social virtues and the creation of prosperity. Chapters 14 and 15. New York: Free Press Paperbacks, pp. 161-183.
[2] Natsume Soseki. 1978. Bocchan. Jyunia-ban. Nihon Bungaku Meisakusen 4. (Bocchan. Junior Edition. Selected Japanese Classics. 4th edition). Tokyo: Kaiseisha, KK.

simply to not come together spontaneously to do anything in Japan! Rather, someone has an idea and good friends in the right places. Together they pool their means and according to a pre-established way of doing things introduce something new, say an industrial technique, a recently discovered material or design, or even a club or association devoted to the consideration and further development of a new idea. *Voila*! A new product or service appears! Little or nothing new is invented by way of social organization; only the inputs, outputs, and targets of a pre-established social order changes.

What Francis Fukuyama would label social capital in Japan is not built on implicit trust among individuals sharing a common set of values or philosophic principles. Rather, it is a common way of organizing any and all activity in Japan, so as to ensure cooperation. In Japan it is more a matter of guilty until proven innocent, than presumed innocence. Comparing Japanese society to the US Marine Corps would certainly be a more fruitful endeavor, than intimating that Japanese are even vaguely similar to the "slugs" of Washington, D.C. and Springfield, Virginia.[4] Neither approach is likely to amount to much, however. The label Japan Inc. introduced by others is not completely without merit in this regard; though it can lead one wildly astray.[5]

With the exception perhaps of the dual peaks formed by the Ministries of Finance and Education there is no single mountain of authority from which all power emanates in Japan. What does exist, however, is a pattern of social organization on the order of Mt. *Fuji* that repeats itself over and over throughout the Japanese social landscape. In the end few Japanese know very much about who controls their society, but everyone has an approximate idea of the mechanisms employed, and certainly everyone knows who stands directly over him -- be it his spiritual ancestors, parents, teachers, mentor, or boss!

If put to the task of characterizing Japanese society with a single metaphor, then it would be pyramids of boxes in boxes in a box.

With the exception of the outer most box, which is Japan itself, at the top of each box is a lid controlled by those inhabiting the next outer most box. In such a scheme one arrives at the top of one's own social pyramid -- namely, the top of the largest box -- only by passing through each of the smaller boxes contained within it. Though one can try to open the lid to one's box from the inside, such behavior is generally frowned upon, and likely to be punished with confinement in one's current box. Notwithstanding, those who occupy the outer boxes are free to open the lid's of lower boxes and view inside. Indeed, such viewing is even welcome by those within the smaller boxes, because it is only in this way that those inside become recognized and are allowed to pass into the next larger box. Within each box most everyone works together in a fairly egalitarian and democratic environment in which they determine what goes on in their own box. Because creating a disturbance in one's box is likely to disturb those in other boxes, social harmony within each separate box is very

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[4] Francis Fukuyama. 1999. The great disruption. Human nature and the reconstitution of social order. Chapter 8, Where do norms come from? New York: The Free Press, pp. 143-144.
[5] James C. Abegglen and George Stalk. 1988. Kaisha: The Japanese Corporation. No place: Perseus Books Group.

important. Of course in the smallest box, one is completely alone and able to do what one wants, but the time spent in one's own box is more for rest than the pursuit of individual activity. In the end it is preferred to be in a larger box with others so as to avoid feelings of isolation. It is this need to be with others while still alone that Japanese have appropriately labeled *wabi-sabi*.[6] Of course the boxes that form these pyramids are not always air tight, but one does not pass through the occasional holes within one's box without notice, and quickly returns for fear of being caught.

Few appear to offer younger Japanese, those who usually occupy the smaller boxes at the bottom of the pyramid, a picture of the entire scheme of things, because such a picture might entice them to push through the lid of their own boxes before it is time. Notwithstanding, after passing through several boxes in the prescribed manner one necessarily gets the hang of things and can easily imagine how things are handled in the next bigger box or even at the top of one's own pyramid. What transpires between the pyramids of boxes, however, remains a mystery to all but those who have reached the top. Yes, there are those who are able to obtain a glimpse of other pyramids from the outside by passing through the holes in the walls of the boxes of their own pyramid, but there is little they can hope to accomplish outside, because part of the requirements for moving upward from the smaller boxes to the larger boxes is the experience of having lived in the smaller boxes contained within a single pyramid.

In the end this form of social organization makes it very difficult for foreigners to enter Japanese society as anything other than special guests with permits to pass through the boxes to which they do not officially belong. Moreover those who do eventually become members of a Japanese box and pyramid are unlikely to have the credentials required to move into larger boxes, because they have never occupied smaller boxes of the same pyramid as anything more than visiting guests. Moreover, foreigners generally lack the procedural familiarity required to move from one box to the next -- familiarity which few Japanese have themselves, until they have already passed through several boxes on their own. Thus, more often than not special boxes are built for foreigners, which although contained within the largest box of the pyramid do not generally form a part of the same hierarchical arrangement through which most Japanese members of the pyramid must pass.

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[6] The expression *wabi-sabi* apparently originated from the Japanese words *wabishii* and *sabishii*. *Wabishii* translates into English in wide variety of ways including cheerless, comfortless, dreary, disconsolate, forsaken, recluse, sunless, and wintry. *Sabishii* can be rendered as depressed, unfulfilled, lonely, cutoff, and solitary. (See Iwanami Kokugo Jiten Dai Go Ban. (Iwanami Japanese Dictionary, 5th Edition) and Riidaazu Eiwa Jiten (English-Japanese Reader's Dictionary). Shisutemusofuto denshi jiten 3.3. (SystemSoft's Electronic Dictionary, V.3.3.) Together these two expressions capture the notion of the individual Japanese alone in his group.

Western Imagery in Japanese Society

Exploited imagery

Advertising is a useful source of information for discovering a nation's self-image. Because those who produce advertisements seek to sell their clients' products, they must understand well their clients' patrons -- namely, the consumers who purchase their clients' products.

One of the most striking things about Japanese advertising is the frequency with which it contains Western imagery. This imagery is not, as one might expect, limited to famous people like foreign-born, professional *sumô* wrestlers, baseball players, and other world renown talent; rather, it includes a whole host of nameless models, whose faces and bodies appear on advertising posters, television commercials, and magazine adds. The products that these images accompany run the entire gamut of Western goods available in Japan, as well as many Japanese produced goods and services with no Western counterpart in Japan. Frequently these advertisements contain only a single Western image, but it is not infrequent to find them together with more familiar Japanese images. Moreover, these images are not restricted to the *hakujin* of North America and Western Europe, but include images of people from all over the world.[7] Truly the selection is diverse, but all of it caters to that one important source of revenue -- the internationally conscious Japanese consumer.

Foreign Imagery

Of course, what is particularly fascinating about these images is the way in which Japanese advertisers cater to Japanese tastes. By way of example, consider how one of Japan's major foreign language schools frequently displays models with caucasian features made to appear like humanoid aliens -- including greenish gray skin, protruding antennas, and pointed ears suggesting an "alien" intelligence. Although surely meant as a joke for some, these posters are likely better thought of as a rude, social critique on Japan's international mentality by many others.

Still another series of posters advertising brand name coffee produced in Japan portray a young Japanese dressed in North American buckskin next to the portrait of a much older North American Indian. Does this advertisement suggest a second migration of North Asians to the North American continent, prehistoric North Asian entrepreneurship in North America, a merging of ancient North American traditions with modern Japanese entrepreneurship in Japan, or an expectation of second-class citizenship on the part of overseas Japanese living in the United States? Or have I missed the meaning altogether, and it is simply a critique on the continued USAmerican military presence in Japan? In

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[7] Although it is not clear when the terms *hakujin* (white man) and *kokujin* (black man) were introduced into the Japanese language, they appear to have been around for a very long time. A careful look at 16th century Japanese paintings of Portuguese traders demonstrates this clearly. See Portuguese Embassy, Japan. 1993. Porutogaru to nihon. Nen no tsuioku (Portugal and Japan. Reminiscing of years long past). C&C Offset Printing Co., Ltd. Various pages.

the end, what do any of these images have to do with coffee likely grown in South America, Southeast Asia, or East Africa? Might a Japanese find stimulation in seeing himself dressed in North American buckskin?

On still another poster advertising Japanese beer a somewhat older Japanese *sarariiman* (salary man) is found clinking beer mugs with what appears to be a Western European gentleman clad in medieval european armor.[8] This *daliesque* confusion of ancient European chivalry with international business and the modern Japanese *kaisha* is unlikely mistaken coincidence.[9] The loyalty of Japanese *sarariiman* (salary men) to their firm is sometimes, if not often, equated with the fidelity once demanded of ancient Japanese *samurai* (warriors) by local *daimyô* (feudal landlords) during Japan's early and middle *Edo* periods).[10] This feudal bonding, although an important part of both European and Japanese history, played a much smaller role in the history of North America. Both Europe and Japan are often criticized by their North American competitors for wallowing in traditions that retard productive efficiency and hinder economic growth. In contrast, both Japanese and Europeans chastise North Americans for what they perceive to be a chaotic, innovative society run amok. Alcohol is often employed by Japanese *sarariiman* and their section chiefs (kachô) as an elixir to mend interpersonal relationships that have soured.[11] Wounded individual pride and ambition can be detrimental to good teamwork, and alcohol tends to smooth over the rough edges of damaged personal relationships by drowning them in *dionysian* euphoria.

Then too, there are the cigarette posters of an Australian yachting team, a single women with an exposed navel and the caption "Be yourself", and any number of other Western images that must appeal to the physical appetites, cultural habits, and already deeply embedded mindsets of bored, middle-aged workers and young adults. Escape from previous misadventures and unrealistic aspirations appear to be the invisible themes that underlie much of this ad-work.

In addition, there are advertisements of Canadian prefabricated *ji-taku* (single family houses), spacious ultramodern kitchens designed for large North American homes, and handsomely dressed Japanese men in polished automobiles striding the Western Rockies and Mexican Baja Peninsula with

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[8] The term *sarariiman* in its simplest form can be thought of as a salaried employee of a Japanese firm. Associated with this word is an entire complex of thought related to the Japanese firm, Japanese life-style, and Japanese industrial organization not included in its English pseudo-equivalent -- salary man.

[9] Like the word *sarariiman* the Japanese word *kaisha* (firm or company) suggests a way of organizing a nation's factors of production considerably different from that typically thought about in the West or at least North America.

[10] The word *sarariiman* can be translated as either salary man or salary men. In some cases it can also be translated to mean salary woman and salary women. The words *samurai* (Japanese ancient warrior), *daimyô* (ancient Japanese feudal landlord), and *Edo* (an ancient city that preceded modern *Tôkyô*) have already been discussed elsewhere.

[11] The Japanese word *kachô* (section chief or head), like the Japanese words *sarariiman* and *kaisha*, is poorly understood from its English equivalent. Not only does the Japanese *kachô* wield far more power in a Japanese firm than does a person of similar rank in say a US firm, but the path by which one becomes a *kachô* also differs considerably.

Japanese *bijin* (beautiful women) waving as they pass.[12, 13] What one observes in this jungle of confused Western and Japanese imagery is hardly a developing country aspiring to modern Western living standards, rather, a cross-section of an advanced industrial, psychologically distraught society with a need for international recognition and global definition.

How these images are chosen is difficult to say, but consideration of the Japanese press might contribute to one's better understanding. Unlike their domestic counterparts, who are busy at home cultivating interpersonal relationships and their respective group identities, Japan's international press corps roam the European and North American continents in search of news to send back home. Much of this news has to do with the personal life-styles of overseas Japanese whom these reporters meet at tourist hotspots and sophisticated urban hangouts frequented by overseas *sarariiman*. Of course, overseas life-styles and leisurely pass-times are not the only things that peak the interest of Japanese consumers; overseas violence regularly flatters Japan's domestic self-image of a peaceful nation.

Moreover, it would be wrong to consider much of the Western imagery as a generally pro-Western attitude on the part of the Japanese public. In many cases, it is more probably a tool employed by Japanese and Western advertisers in Japan to cater to various segments of the Japanese population each with its own set of stereotypical prejudices that may or may not be flattering to the West. How these images play themselves out in cross-cultural communication between Japanese and foreigners living both inside and outside of Japan is important, but not always easy to understand.

At least two sides to every image
Since the vast majority of people living in Japan are Japanese, one easily assumes, as was performed above, that advertisements employing Western imagery are not targeted toward a Western audience. Nevertheless, these images serve as the visual backdrops before which Japanese and foreigners alike must associate in most public places.

In addition to the obvious cultural biases with which Japanese and foreigners necessarily interpret the same commercial imagery, there is another important source of difference that may be less obvious to one or both -- namely, the ability of either to read and understand the captions that accompany the imagery.

Although pictures can tell a thousand words, captions are often a crucial way to influence the way in which viewers interpret what they see. Even if Japanese and foreigners could interpret advertising imagery in the same way without captions, the presence of captions -- often incomprehensible to foreigners lacking a solid understanding of Japanese script -- lead different viewers to different interpretations of the same images. Since most foreigners, with the important exception of Chinese and Japanese-born Koreans, cannot read Sino-Japanese

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[12] The term *ji-taku* refers to a dwelling inhabited by its owner. The character *ji* refers to the self. The character *taku* has a variety of meanings including dwelling, residence, and home.
[13] The term *bijin* literally means beautiful person. In Japanese advertising it usually refers to an especially attractive model.

characters well, one is led to conclude that these various interpretations are both commonplace and frequent among foreigners. In addition, the imagery forms the backdrop to most public discourse, and as a result its actual content rarely comes to the surface of discussion. Rather, it guides subtly in different directions the subconscious awareness of everyone present. Furthermore, not only do both sides interpret the same imagery differently, but many receive only a portion of the message. Thus, whereas USAmerican, French, and Australian visitors may feel something warm and fuzzy, while standing in front of a poster colored white, red, and blue, their Japanese counterparts may feel a strong desire to burst out laughing or turn away in utter disgust depending on the captions that their foreign counterparts can neither read nor understand. In summary both sides incorporate this imagery into their waking consciousness in subtle ways that ultimately finds expression in the way they talk and associate, but is never touched upon directly.

This same phenomenon must surely apply to noncommercial media and other environments void of media content. For example, when a bilingual Japanese is talking in English to his non-Japanese speaking foreign counterpart, he is often listening to at least two conversations at once: the one in English with his foreign partner, and any number of other conversations in Japanese occurring in his immediate vicinity. Because the foreigner is often unable to understand these other conversations, he is only partially in tune with his social environment. Thus, the probability of miscommunication, even with someone whom he knows fairly well, is likely to be high.

Moving beyond the way in which Western imagery is passively interpreted by its receivers and actively employed by commercial producers, let us examine still another utilitarian aspect of this imagery -- the way in which it is actively employed in everyday life by those with no commercial intent.

If it's from the West, it might just be permissible!

Because Japanese place a high priority on group conformity, Japanese can sometimes escape burdensome collective rituals by opting for the use of foreign loan words and imagery. By using well-chosen and adequately measured foreign elements in their speech, dress, and conduct Japanese are sometimes able to achieve special outcomes otherwise not possible in their own language and behavior.

On the one hand, they can introduce something into their group, that might otherwise be considered inappropriate or difficult, if it were introduced in Japanese. On the other hand, they can introduce it with little or no risk of blame or disapproval should it not be well received. In the first instance they consciously or subconsciously play on Japanese international pride; in the second they play on Japanese collective self-awareness. If the introduction is well received, then its introducer automatically succeeds in elevating the status of his group; if the item, word, thought, or behavior is rejected, then it is simply regarded as foreign and everyone laughs. This social game works because Japanese have a strong need to see themselves as international on the one

hand, but never so international that they risk sacrificing their Japanese identity on the other. It is for this reason, that there are few things in Japan that are simultaneously authentic in origin <u>and</u> enjoy broad-based appeal. Certainly this is a tendency everywhere in the world, but it is particularly strong in Japan.

Extrapolation and Extension
Now consider the foreigner whose primary identity within the group is almost always his foreignness. Such people can be very useful to Japanese seeking change, so long as they are not identified too closely with them. On the one hand, the foreign presence elevates the prestige of the group by making it appear international; on the other hand, because the foreigner is not considered Japanese anything that he says or does can easily be excused or admonished by the simple fact that he is foreign. Thus, whoever can befriend the foreigner can also utilize the friendship to bring about change within his group. This is especially true when the foreigner suffers from a Japanese language deficit and is unable to perceive clearly how he is being used.

Of course, some foreigners do not seem to care how they are used, just so long as they can achieve their own selfish ends, be it special guest treatment, a lucrative pecuniary reward, or simply "*gaijin* attention".[14] Moreover, when it comes to bringing about change within the group, these same foreigners regard any reflection of their own culture in Japanese society as a feather in the cap of their ethnocentric pride. Insofar as many Japanese are forever stating how different and unique Japanese society is, one can easily understand the motivation for such feelings.

The foreign presence is best utilized when hesitancy on the part of other members of the group is discovered, or when the Japanese innovator is afraid of potential risks associated with his innovation. In short, new ideas that can be reformulated in such a way that they appear to be coming from the outside sometimes have a better chance of being received and therefore succeeding. If the idea succeeds, everyone is happy, and both the Japanese and his foreign guest receive credit. If the idea fails, then it is easily overlooked, because it was never Japanese to begin with, and everyone can laugh. What do foreigners know about Japan anyway? Certainly some Japanese are more adept at this game than others. Many play it unconsciously, because they have been playing it ever since they realized the general status of foreigners in Japanese society. Such realizations can be made very early in life.

Many foreigners struggling to gain entry into Japanese society never learn how to play the game, because their meager proficiency in the Japanese language simply does not permit them to find out. Then too, many are told by their foreign predecessors, who are avid players and reap important benefits from their own exploited positions. Although mutual exploitation can be mutually

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[14] The term "*gaijin* attention" refers to the special treatment -- either negative or positive -- that one invariably receives in Japanese society by virtue of one's foreignness. The Japanese word *gaijin* (foreigner) is an abbreviation of the word *gaikokujin*, which means someone from a country outside of Japan. This latter term is nearly equivalent in meaning to the German word *Ausländer*. Many people believe that the term *gaijin* is a deprecative rendering of its more formal *gaikokujin* counterpart. To the extent that it is employed more often in a negative than positive context no one appears to know.

satisfying, it is not necessarily the basis for a strong friendship. This appears to be the tragedy of many of the relationships formed between Japanese and their foreign *friends*. Fortunately, not all relationships between Japanese and foreigners are formed in this manner, but mutual exploitation appears to be the norm, rather than the exception.

If the foreigner is diligent, he will realize on his own how he is being exploited, and like those before him learn to exploit his own exploited position to his advantage. The game can be played indefinitely or suddenly come to an end depending on the predisposition of those who are exploited. Many foreigners living in Japan like the game, because neither side feels obligated toward the other, and so long as the exploitation is balanced, the game is fair and can be played indefinitely. In effect, it is cooperative game with limited cooperation in which each side wins something, but neither side is able to maximize the full-potential of the relationship.

Unfortunately, the only way to secure a friendship under such circumstances is for both sides to acknowledge that there is something more to being foreign in Japan than being other. This is difficult to achieve. Foreigners in Japan are too few in number and scattered too far about to bring about the changes needed on their own, and most Japanese are unwilling to challenge the status quo. In the end, the foreigner remains, not because he enjoys being exploited, rather because he is either not aware of the exploitation, or because he knows and takes advantage of his exploited position and exploits back.

Uchi-Soto - Japan's national village

Uchi-soto translates directly into English as "inside-outside" and refers to the differences in the way members of a group relate to each other and those of other groups.[15] So embedded is this notion in the Japanese psyche that it forms an important part of Japanese grammar. The verb forms that one uses to address those outside of one's group and those within one's group, for example, differ remarkably. Although many Japanese consider *uchi-soto* to be a simple extension of ancient village life into modern times, when applied beyond the simple boundaries of modern corporate culture, this notion can become a serious barrier to internationalization.

If it were simply a matter of being a member of a group different from all other groups, then all one should have to do as a group member is to comply by the group's rules, promote the group's goals, acknowledge the group's historical roots, contribute to the group's team spirit, and when necessary make the appropriate personal sacrifices. What more can a group expect of its members?

Well, are you Japanese? Do you carry a Japanese passport? Were you born in Japan? Are either or both of your parents Japanese? Do you have black hair, or can you dye it blond? Are your eyes brown? Do you have a pug nose? Can you <u>do something about your</u> eye-lids? Do you speak with an accent? If so, from

[15] Although conceptually a very simple notion, in practice the linguistic, cultural, and historical means by which it is nurtured, maintained, and enforced are quite complex. This is perhaps the reason why Japanese prefer to write it in *hiragana*.

what part of Japan are you from? Were you born there? Were your childhood classmates Japanese? If we admit you, are you prepared to help us submit others to the same humiliation to which you were subject before entry into the group. No, this is not a fraternity or a sorority; this is a national mentality!

Part of the reason for this extreme exclusionary attitude and nearly prohibitive barrier to entry, can be explained by the following:

One, Japanese generally assume that all Japanese have the same basic idea about what it means to be Japanese. Thus, when a new Japanese enters a group in which foreigners are present, he assumes that everyone treats the foreigner as would most Japanese -- non-Japanese. Such behavior on the part of Japanese newcomers can be troublesome for other Japanese within groups who try to integrate their foreign members fully. As a result there is a tendency on the part of Japanese to limit the degree to which foreigners can become involved in their group's activities.

Two, when foreigners are outside of their groups in Japanese society at large, they are subject to stereotypical behavior similar to that which Japanese newcomers bring to groups in which foreigners are present. Thus, even if a foreigner is well integrated into his group, he must readjust each time he reenters Japanese society at large. For there his foreignness is once again cast upon him and his national identity pushed to the forefront of nearly every communication among strangers.

Thus, either the foreigner resigns himself to his foreign identity, or he leaves Japan altogether. If he remains, he takes on the role of ambassador between the Japanese group to which he adheres and his native colony -- namely, other foreigners living in Japan who share his nationality. Of course not all foreigners belong to a colony *per se*, but they do tend to associate with other foreigners, so as to maintain a sense of group identity that is not simply defined by who they are not, but rather by who they are. Few reject their native roots for fear of becoming homeless or refugees before international law. There is a fairly standard joke among internationally conscious *gaijin* in Japan: "Wouldn't it be great, if all Japanese were to leave Japan?"

One of the ways in which one contributes to his group is by adhering to its rules. If the rules are not to your liking, then one must learn to live with them, seek to change them, or find a new group. Whereas most Japanese are unlikely to change them, they do often learn to live with them. Depending on the nature of the group and one's dependence on it, Japanese will also leave a group, if it no longer appears meaningful.

In most cases, if a group does not have a strong central core, the group will not survive. This is because individual members place high demands on their group's leaders, who in return receive respect, courtesy, and privileges not accorded other members of the group. Thus, the disposition of a group's core towards its foreign members is crucial. Because the foreign member of a group is generally held at arms length within his group and Japanese society at large, other Japanese members of his group, be they in the core or not, can easily make trouble for him and other members of his group. This is because every disagreement between him and a Japanese member of his group can be turned

into a national issue, or an "international" issue as it were, based on the foreigner's national -- i.e., non-Japanese -- identity.

In such cases foreigners are placed in the awkward position of either proving to their group that their foreignness or nationality has nothing to do with the issue at hand, or admit that it does and thereby relegate themselves to the group's periphery by virtue of their foreignness. If the "trouble making" foreigner's grasp of the Japanese language is not as good as that of the Japanese who are ill-disposed towards his presence, or if the foreigner is not well-versed in Japanese culture, then his fate is sealed, and he either cedes the point to the aggrieved or leaves the group. Getting to the point where one actually becomes a participating member of the group's core, or even a full-fledged member of the group, can thus be a long and arduous process.

In short, the foreigner is placed in a catch-22 situation in which he is constantly reminded that he can never become Japanese, on the one hand; but if he wants to participate fully in his group, he must *effectively be* Japanese on the other. Thus, belonging to a Japanese organization of any sort is difficult for foreigners, unless the organization's core places important priority on their presence and stands ready to intercede whenever it becomes necessary. As this is not always possible, one often finds Japanese and foreigners belonging to groups whose cores consist of non-Japanese. In such groups the level of foreign alienation is reduced, and the groups Japanese members always have their own society to which they can return.

Whether it is the foreigner in the Japanese group or the Japanese in the foreign group, the workable solution in Japan almost always finishes with division along national boundary lines -- namely, Japanese with other Japanese in the foreign-led group, or foreigners with other foreigners in the Japanese-led group. Of course, there are those Japanese and foreigner group members with good bilingual proficiency who enjoy relatively free exit-and-entry between the minor and major subgroups of the entire group. These are generally highly prized members of any international group in Japan.

Of course, most of what has been explained so far, can be found in any society or group in which one's ability to identify with its members is determined by something other than good familiarity with the group's language, behavior, thinking, and purpose. What makes Japan a particularly difficult place for many foreigners is the exaggerated importance that Japanese place on those aspects of Japaneseness that are not acquirable without having been born in Japan and unto Japanese parents. Moreover, whereas individual identity is determined by one's beliefs and achievements in many other places of the world, in Japan it is largely a function of the group or groups to which one belongs and one's status within those groups.

Finally, because Japanese spend so much time in their respective groups, when they finally do have time to be alone, that is exactly how they spend it -- alone. This makes it difficult for foreigners to relate with Japanese on a one-to-one basis.

The Problem of *Jiko-chû*

One of the things I appreciate most and least about Japanese society is the Japanese sense of togetherness. When I am feeling Japanese the word *most* applies; when I am being made to feel something other than Japanese the word *least* is more appropriate.

In Japan you are free to do what you want, so long as you do not disturb others, and you desist doing what disturbs others when it is brought to your attention. In this regard Japanese society is probably little different than societies the world over. What makes Japanese society different is the way in which disturbing members of a group are dealt with. Few Japanese are willing to bring another's disturbance to his or her attention directly, and would rather feign indifference than report the disturbance to their group leader. The underlying assumptions appears to be: one, if the leader of the group is not disturbed than neither should the group's members; and two, if what you are doing is ignored, than probably you should not be doing it.

With regard to the first assumption reporting to one's group leader can back easily backfire on the disturbed member, if the group leader is him- or herself not disturbed. This is because the one who does the reporting becomes the first source of disturbance to the leader. With regard to the second assumption, indifference can be easily found just about anywhere in Japanese society. One joins a group in part, so as not to be treated indifferently.

As group membership in Japanese society does not come easily, and individual identity is often defined by the group or groups to which one belongs, a show of indifference from other members of one's group is a powerful incentive to stop whatever you are doing and reestablish communication with other members of your group. As obtaining acceptance in a Japanese group is primarily a matter of learning what is and what is not acceptable behavior, most members never need to be told what is correct and incorrect behavior, because everyone knows to follow those who came before them.

Nevertheless, with modernization individual Japanese have become increasingly isolated, and old traditions are breaking down. Younger Japanese and even many older Japanese are aware that group discipline has weakened, and some of these are taking full advantage of the changing times to enhance their own lives at the expense of the group. Japan's social watchdogs have a name for these people; they are called *jiko-chû.*[16]

These *jiko-chû* often seek to justify their actions in the name of modernization, and as a result often hide their recalcitrant deeds under the guise of Western custom. Most of the ever increasing litter in Japanese streets has Western labels. This is of course unfortunate for Japanese residents from Western countries, because Japanese seeking to maintain group discipline tend to blame

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[16] *Jiko-chû* is a self-concerned pest. The word *jiko-chû* can be used in either the singular or plural. (text | the problem of *wabi-sabi*)

jiko-chû behavior on the Western presence as a result. This is, of course, misdirected anger. The Westerner should not be held to blame for Japan's own inability to cope with modernization -- a thoroughly internal social phenomena related to industrialization and commercialization, aspects of the West that most Japanese appreciate and Japanese have worked very hard to make a part of their own society.

The Problem of *Wabi-sabi*

In addition to the *uchi-soto* relationship briefly touched upon elsewhere, there is a complementary term that describes much less the relationships between Japanese, than the individual feelings that result from these relationships. *Wabi-sabi* is part of a mixed set of feelings that form the basis for traditional Japanese character and against which the newly forming *jiko-chû* are a naturally, albeit asocial, modern reaction.

Collective Security
and Individual Freedom Are a Tradeoff
Because individual Japanese identity is largely determined by one's membership in groups, individual Japanese are under constant pressure to suppress many of their personal preferences and feelings. This is not to say that Japanese are particularly unhappy, because their groups are often supportive and thus provide their members with security and a sense of well-being. This is also not to say, however, that group security and comfort are achieved without personal sacrifice.

Already before my arrival in Japan I realized that USAmericans need to spend more time weighing the costs of their personal freedoms against the benefits of collective security. After having lived in Japan for many years now, I can safely say that Japanese need to weigh better the costs of collective security against the benefits of personal freedom, or at least learn to exercise better the freedoms that they already have. In this regard, the two countries have a lot to learn from each other.

More on the Nature of Groups in Japanese Society
There was a time in which individual humans belonged to single groups upon which their entire survival depended. Indeed, barriers to entry and exit were so high that being ostracized from one's group meant almost certain death. Although this is hardly the case in modern society; in a social atmosphere such as Japan's -- in which individual identity is so often determined by the group or groups to which one belongs, rather than one's character, personal achievements, and possessions -- group entry and exit barriers can still be formidable. This is especially true for the Japanese *sarariiman*, whose only sources of income are often what he receives from his employment with his company and the interest that he receives from his postal savings.

Up until recently there was virtually no secondary labor market for many Japanese, which meant that leaving one's current place of employment meant almost certain unemployment. Because Japanese society places an important premium on the individual's ability to pay his own way, having to leave one's

company, either voluntarily or by force, was a brutal fate. Unlike in Europe, for example, where being unemployed for a long period is often perceived as an extended paid or partially paid vacation, in Japanese society it was more akin to falling into a social abyss.

One's place of work is perhaps an extreme example to highlight the overall importance of group membership; nevertheless, it does illustrate the degree to which one must sometimes sacrifice one's self and personal desires for membership in one's group. In any case, no matter one's individual source of income or the nature of one's friends, Japanese are forever being reminded about the importance of their group -- in the family, at school, at their place of work, and during many of their leisure activities often spent in the company of others in formally organized groups or schools.

Koromogae[17]

Nearly all Japanese school children wear uniforms. Not only are they required to wear these, but what part of them can and cannot be worn are dictated neither by the weather nor personal taste, but by pre-established dates that occur at the same time every year. So important is this custom that it is often carried into the workplace long after a Japanese has left school. The *nezumi* (mouse) gray suits that suddenly appear on the train platforms, streets, and local pubs around Tôkyô every spring are simply an adult extension of this school-yard tradition.

Women's dress is often more codified. Whereas men are usually permitted to choose the color and style of their suits and ties within well-established written or unwritten codified limits, women are often compelled to wear prescribed uniforms. Mind you, dress codes are just one blatant example of a long list of written and unwritten codes that determine individual behavior and appearance in Japan. A list far too long to go into here, but a list with one overriding purpose -- group identity and maintenance.

Groups vs Vigilantes

People from more individualistic societies are prone to view such codes with horror reminiscent of the *Jugendtruppe* (highly disciplined youth groups) in national socialist Germany during the late 30's and early 40's. Those who have lived in Japan for some length of time and have come to appreciate Japan's spirit of togetherness view the entire affair quite differently. Japanese groups rarely behave as gangs of vigilantes or social marauders. In fact, one's membership in a group often insures one's sense of social responsibility toward society at large. No one in the group wants other members of his group to be the cause of social disturbance, because that disturbance can be observed and reported, and eventually reflect on one's group. Whereupon the entire group suffers from the embarrassment caused by only a few individuals. Indeed, it is those individuals who drift away from the group, who become suspect in Japanese society -- not those with group membership.

Yes, there are those groups, such as the Japanese *yakuza* (Japanese organized crime similar to the Italian mafia), to which every foreigner quickly points so as

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[17] The Japanese characters for *koromogae* arises from the noun *koromo* (a formal gown) and the verb *kaeru* which means to substitute or change.

to remind his fellow country men and women that all is not a social bed of roses in Japan.[18] Nevertheless, the *yakuza* are born of different cause, and this is easily verifiable by a comparison of Southern Italian and Japanese societies. Where are the uniformed school children, salary men, and office ladies in Southern Italy? Are they as prevalent in Italy as they are in Japan?

Indeed, what is probably most disturbing to foreigners about the sense of team spirit and group maintenance in Japan is that it is often leads to their exclusion.

So what does all of this have to do with *wabi-sabi*, you are probably asking?

Wabi-sabi sono mono[19]
Wabi-sabi is a feeling of melancholy which overcomes the individual when he becomes physically or mentally separated from his group. It is a feeling of helplessness or longing to be with others, and an inability to truly participate as a result. This feeling can be caused by a variety of factors. Perhaps the individual no longer feels that his contribution to the group is adequately recognized. Or, perhaps there is a personal matter that the individual is reluctant to discuss before the entire group, and he has no close friend within the group to whom he may confide his secrets.

Because of Japan's growing generation gap recourse to one's parents is not always possible; moreover, small nuclear families can make it difficult to establish close relationships with one's own siblings. Thus, by the time the individual reaches adulthood and enters the work force, feelings of social alienation and isolation on the part Japanese individuals can be profound. As a result, the individual does not participate in group activities or participates only minimally or mechanically in them when complete withdrawal is no longer possible. The psychosomatic illnesses that can result from such behavior are many. Nevertheless, submissive behavior is often preferred to the *jiko-chû* behavior of overly aggressive individuals, who care little about anyone but themselves and their immediate friends.

In other societies in which individual expression is encouraged, rather than suppressed, individuals are more outward going, and the constraints imposed by one's group less demanding. In such societies the individual can more easily find new friends outside of the established social circles in which he participates. The idea, that an individual could talk about anything to just about anyone whom he does not know, rarely occurs among Japanese. This quality of Japanese society makes life particularly difficult for troubled Japanese and newcomers to Japanese society. Important exceptions to this rule may be Japan's *izakaya* (Japanese pub or tavern), temples, churches, and shrines.

Wabi-sabi and Foreign Alienation
Although newcomers to Japan could easily follow the crowd, they are probably

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[18] The term *yakuza* is more often rendered in *katakana* than in *hiragana*. The *katakana* rendering is probably used to emphasize the sometimes very asocial character of these gangs activities.
[19] The expression *sono mono* that follows the expression wabi-sabi in the title of this section conveys the idea of something being what it truly is. It is used as a form of emphasis and means in this context something like "and now to the point of".

not eager to do so, because they do not know where it is going and what to expect when they get there. It is one thing to adventure about on your own, it is quite another to follow a group of others with whose language and customs you have little familiarity. Thus, active participation on the part of foreigners in Japanese groups is largely limited by a foreigner's ability to speak Japanese and the linguistic aptitudes of his group's English speaking members. Even foreigners who are far advanced in the Japanese language are likely to miss out on carefully nuanced jokes that depend on intimate knowledge of Japanese culture that foreigners who have not grown up in Japanese society are unlikely to understand. For less experienced neophytes directives from the group's core have to be explained individually.

Due to their probable outward going nature and "*gaijin* status" foreigners are likely to make friends within a Japanese group far more rapidly than might a Japanese newcomer. As with Japanese, however, the scope of these friendships does not readily extend beyond the groups in which they are cultivated. As a result the group or groups in which foreigners participate, and the friendships that they make within these groups are likely insufficient to overcome important feelings of alienation and loneliness to which foreigners are susceptible in Japanese groups and society at large.

Japanese and foreigners who seek contact with Japanese outside of their groups often fail, because Japanese tend to eschew close interpersonal ties that do not depend on the group for their maintenance. Indeed, close friendships can easily become troublesome, if they are not carefully cultivated. Cultivating them can be very time consuming. In contrast, friendships cultivated within a group allow individuals to be close with others, but never so close that other members of the group are not involved. In this sense the group offers the Japanese interpersonal freedoms that those not familiar with Japanese groups and society in general are likely to ignore.

Of course, this interpersonal freedom within one's group depends on the fluidity of the group, and one's ability to associate freely in it. Some groups are by their very nature more fluid than others. Also, one's ability to associate freely within a group largely depends on one's personality and interpersonal skills -- to say nothing of one's desire to participate in group activities.

Certainly, what I describe here is not terribly different from elsewhere in the modern world. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are a common feature of industrially advanced societies the world over. Simply, there is something missing in Japanese society that can be found in other societies with which I am very familiar: the desire or ability to do things on one's own in public and the ability to interact with strangers -- the key ingredients to solving the problem of *wabi-sabi*.

Whereas many Japanese may be content with feelings of *wabi-sabi*, because they feel other Japanese are feeling the same, it is unlikely that most foreigners will sense these same feelings of hidden collective empathy. Simply, in the mind of many foreigners, especially those coming from the West, it probably makes little sense to allow damaging barriers to communication to persist, when they can easily be overcome by simply reaching out. So, what a surprise is in store for the naïve foreigner who believes, "If only I could

overcome the language barrier, the communication problem would largely disappear, and I could easily find acceptance in my group and Japanese society at large".

Indeed, the Japanese, who could really benefit from the foreigner's pent up desire to communicate, are either shut-up in their dwellings reading *manga* (Japanese cartoon books) while listening to CDs through stereophonic headsets, or they are out-and-about with their friends wandering aimlessly around in that one area of Japanese society where most everyone is both welcome and free, so long as they have the ability to pay -- Japan's consumer markets. So what makes Japanese society so very different, you might ask again, from other places in the modern world?

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