

Chapter 80

A Perspective of Cross– Cultural Psychological Studies for Global Business

Hiroshi Yama
Osaka City University, Japan

ABSTRACT

Some may still have a stereotypical image that Japanese employees work like a robot, and achieved the industrial development even though they are not logical thinkers. This chapter is against this based on the latest cross-cultural studies. The conclusions are as follows. (1) Even if Japanese appears to be illogical in the sense that they are less likely to do rule-based thinking, this does not mean that they are less intelligent. (2) Easterners are more likely to do dialectical thinking. (3) Easterners' naïve dialecticism is strongly associated with cultural tradition, and it is plausible that it has been developed in a high-context culture. (4) Japanese people may have a collectivist culture, and it is not an undeveloped culture comparing with an individualist culture as shown in the case of 'nemawashi'. Finally, it is proposed that the distinction between Westerners' low-context culture and Easterners' high-context culture provide important implications for globalizing business and that the notions of global mindset and 'glocal' are important for international business.

INTRODUCTION

Culturally stereotypical images of contemporary Easterners are still influenced by the impressions which had been shaped in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. These are summarized by Said (1978). His term “Orientalism” refers to a general Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies that regard these societies as inferior to Western societies. This, which is called

“the phantom in the 19th century”, still revives in the cases of international or globalizing business (e.g., Westwood, 2006). Even today, although some Asian countries have economically and industrially developed, many people believe that this development is due to Western patronization, and thus this cannot be a counterexample to their belief that Easterners are inferior. The phantom in the 19th century comes particularly when people have a cultural conflict in international business.

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In this chapter, the case of Japan is discussed. How do people find the reasons for the industrial development of Japan after the Meiji Restoration¹ in 1860s and after the Asia-Pacific War? Those who believe that European people are the most intelligent in the world wonder why the development was possible for the Japanese, and they may think of many kinds of reasons for it. These reasons can be grouped into two categories. The first is that Japanese people, without high intelligence and creativity, imitated many kinds of Western cultural systems and scientific technology. This imitation may have brought about the industrial development. The second is that these industrial developments have been supported by Japanese collectivism, which is explained in the next section. Thus people's stereotypical image is that Japanese employees pursue the maximum profit for their company (their collective in this case) with an organization like an army without rational thinking. This belief is not only shared by some Westerners but by some Japanese, and it causes concern and anxiety among the Japanese about the future.

Actually, both Japanese and Westerners have a concern if the Japanese are not logical thinkers. An example, which is shown in the book of Nisbett (2003), is called the Japanese-Australian sugar contract case in the 1970s. Japanese trading companies contracted with an Australian sugar refiner to provide them with sugar over a period of six years at the price of £ 229 per ton. But shortly after the contract was signed, the value of sugar on the world market dropped to around £ 160 very suddenly. The Japanese asked for a renegotiation of the contract on the grounds that circumstances had changed. But to the Australians, the agreement was binding, regardless of circumstances, and they refused to consider any changes. These very different outlooks regularly produce international misunderstandings.

In this chapter it is discussed how the image above has been shaped in people's minds, and it is also discussed if Japanese (and Easterners) are

really illogical or not, if Japanese has a collectivist culture or not, and how the cultural differences (if they exist) are explained, and some implications are given for the globalization of business.

THE PHANTOM IN THE 19th CENTURY

How has the stereotypical image of Japanese employees been shaped in people's minds? As Said (1978) summarized as the term of "Orientalism", Westerners stereotypical images have been shaped through the history of their hegemony over Eastern peoples. In the case of Japanese, two kinds of people's belief above are as follows. The first is the folk belief that Japanese people can never be more intelligent or creative than Westerners. What are the rationales for this belief? The biggest one is the phantom of white supremacy and social Darwinism in the 19th century. The notion of natural selection proposed by Charles R. Darwin gave a scientific ground to the doctrine of white supremacy, although he did not intend to argue this. Social Darwinism is a general name given to various theories which apply biological concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest to the social sciences. According to this approach, Western civilization and culture are the most developed through natural selection and survival of the fittest. This assertion was enforced by the historical facts that many Asian and African countries were colonies of Western powers in the 19th century. To make matters worse, social Darwinism was used to justify the imperialism and colonialism of Western powers, and engendered a belief that Westerners were the most intelligent and created the most advanced culture and civilization, although the original advocates did not intend to do so.

The second is the belief that Japan has a collectivist culture. This may not be a false belief, because this hypothesis is supported by many social psychologists (e.g., Triandis, 1995). They

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