

The Origin of Japanese Excellent Customer Service

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Abstract

The culture of Japan has faced many changes greatly over the millennia from the country's prehistoric Jōmon period to its modern culture. Japanese culture was influenced by the Asian, European, and Northern America cultures. Japanese inhabitants experienced a long years of isolation from the outside world, especially during the Tokugawa Shogunate period, until the arrival of "The Black Ships" and the Meiji period. Japan is a country with the exclusively excellent customer service¹. There is no other country in the world that can compete with Japan in that. It's necessary to study Japanese culture and history in order to find the roots of almost perfect Japanese customer service. It is essential to learn and explore social, cultural and historical aspects of the country that has created Japanese hospitality or as it called in Japanese "omotenashi".

I Introduction

On the first visit to Japan, every guest of the country is astonished by its high level of customer service that exceeds customer expectations which can be found nowhere in the world. In Japanese the country is called Nippon or Nihon that means "sun origin", the symbol in Japanese is following: 日本 means "Sun-Origin" and that is the reason why the country is usually described as the land of the rising sun. As it was mentioned above, it's necessary to learn historical and cultural aspects of the country. Many marketing studies ignore these aspects, but the background of excellent customer service lies deep in the history of the great county. Many studies that are focused on researching the Japanese style of customer service still cannot explain its origin, moreover, the current style of service is difficult to apply in other

1 Andoh & Ohta, 1997

cultures. The remainder of my article will be consisted of the followings. In chapter 2 I will explain “Wa” (和), which has been the most basic base of the Japanese hospitality, *omotenashi*. In chapter 4 I will describe a relationship between tea ceremony and *omotenashi* on which is a direct base of modern Japanese hospitality. In section 2, chapter 4 I will explain the importance of *kata*. In chapter 5, I will explain the peculiarities of Social class in Japan in the first section, and about *bushido* code which had been a basic mindset of the Japanese people and also *omotenashi* in the second. In chapter 6 sections 1 and 2, I will explain the Japanese cultural characteristics from the both viewpoints of the high- and low-context culture and the Japanese brain structure. Section 3 will talk about the Japan isolation, “*Sakoku*” era which make the Japanese *Wa* culture mature. Finally in chapter 7 I will conclude and define the future direction of my research.

II Uniqueness of Japanese Culture

1 Geographical Reasons

Japan is a chain of Volcano Islands surrounded by sea that are isolated from other countries. Such kind of isolation served as a natural barrier from the enemies. The location of Japan was in its nature the country’s protection. The chain of islands made it difficult to leave the country, thereby the harmony among population was essential for surviving. Japan has faced many natural disasters, due to the origin of the islands, such as earthquakes, volcano eruption, and storms, which result in distractions and many causalities. All that natural disasters made people of Japan work together in order to recover from such ashes. Two of the recent natural disasters in Japan were the earthquake in Kobe of 1994 and in Tohoku of 2011. Nicholas Kristof talked about Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in Kobe 1995 in an article in the New York Times:

The terrible earthquake in Kobe was the worst ever recorded in Japan. The 1995 Kobe earthquake (which killed more than 6,000 people and left 300,000 homeless). At the time of the earthquake I lived in Japan as Tokyo bureau chief for The New York Times. We can learn a lot from watching Japan. At the time of that event, the Japanese were truly noble in their perseverance, stoicism and orderliness. There’s a

common Japanese word, “gaman,” that doesn’t really have an English equivalent, but is something like “toughing it out.” And that’s what the people of Kobe did, with a courage, unity and common purpose that left me awed.

Japan’s orderliness and civility often impressed me during my years living in Japan. Pretty much of the entire port of Kobe was destroyed, with shop windows broken all across the city. I looked all over for a case of looting, or violent jostling over rescue supplies. Finally, I was delighted to find a store owner who told me that he’d been robbed by two men. I asked him if he had been surprised that fellow Japanese would have taken advantage of a natural disaster and turn to crime. He looked surprised and responded “Who said they were Japanese. They were foreigners².

Another article in the News Week titled as “Why is there no looting in Japan?” Talked about the Tohoku earthquake disaster: “The chaos and theft that have followed many earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis have been noticeably absent in the wake of Japan’s 8.9-magnitude quake. Instead, people have formed long, orderly lines outside grocery stores, where employees try to fairly distribute limited supplies of food and water.” Gregory Pflugfelder (2011), an expert in Japanese culture at Columbia University said in CNN: “Looting simply does not take place in Japan. I’m not even sure if there’s a word for it that is as clear in its implications as when we hear ‘looting. How has Japan managed to avoid this common after-effect of disaster? Discipline, discipline, discipline: The Japanese are now reaping the fruits of having been taught, and drilled in, discipline and resilience since childhood³. “Allen Choate (2011) also indicated: “The scale of the Tohoku disaster is just beginning to sink in, but it’s already clear that the physical destruction, economic cost, and, most tragic of all, loss of life will be without precedent in Japan’s post-World War II history. One can only admire the self-discipline, orderliness, and patience of the Japanese people in the midst of such a horrendous emergency⁴. “Theses reaction from the Japanese citizens in the critical moment in their life is evidence to show that how Japanese truly care about harmony, and how this effect of harmony was the reason to set their mind for omotenashi. The Japanese word wa means “harmony”. There is a

2 Kristof, 1995

3 Pflugfelder, 2011

4 Choate, 2011

concept that describes the Japanese culture in every aspect of people's lives. De Mente (1997) explained the meaning of wa as follows. "Shintosim" is an animistic belief based on cosmic harmony. It was apparently the influence of Shintoism that led the Japanese to refer to themselves as the people of wa, attesting to a very early commitment by the Japanese to the principle of harmony as the foundation for their society. The first emperor of Japan combined the function of religious and secular leaders, serving as high priests as well as sovereigns. The emperors and their courts were thus as much concerned with forms as with essence, an over-riding principle, adopted from Confucianism, was harmony between heaven and earth, and between rulers and the ruled⁵."

There is another word explaining the meaning of the word harmony in Japanese language. This word is "yamato". In ancient times, Japan, as the land of the rising sun, was called the Yamato clan. The name meant "the among people". The word yamato has also a very close meaning to the Japanese heart.

2 Rice Agriculture

Japanese imported the tradition of rice agriculture from China between 12000 and 300 B.C., which has influenced the Japanese country's social behavior patterns. The survival of each village depended on the mutual concern and cooperation of the farmers, and their neighbors. The harmony was the key factor that effected business, politics, and education very deeply, even in modern Japan.

De Mente (2003, p. 18) said: "Wet-rice farming, in such a limited land area imbued the Japanese with an extraordinary degree of patience, perseverance, diligence, cooperativeness and group dependence because this kind of farming required very elaborate irrigation systems that could not easily be built and maintained or protracted from marauders by single families." This shows that harmony within a group is a key factor in the war of survival. As well De Mente (2003, p. 19) said "in Japan Philosophy, ethics and etiquette and business were based on the fundamental principle that harmony took precedence over all other matters, even though the concept when put into practice, was often at odds with logic and common sense"⁵. The statement above explains the reason why other nationalities cannot understand the philosophy of the country, and often when a concept or management or even

5 De Mente, 1997

services marketing strategy export to other countries it cannot have the same result as it does in Japan. This will be addressed in the future research that will address if it's possible to import the Japanese service marketing way to other countries and different cultures.

Thomas W. Burkman, research professor of Asian studies, the university at Buffalo, said:

“Through the history Japan imported many aspect of its culture, for example, in Japan in ancient times, technology and agriculture were imported from china, than they've been modified to fit the Japanese style of life. The Japanese writing system that is called Kanji was imported from China as well. Between the Jomon Period 12,000 B.C and Yayoi Period 300 B.C, approximately 6000 years ago, as well the rice agriculture was introduced to Japan”⁶.

Burkman' explanation continues.

Rice agriculture itself is a highly sophisticated technology that requires deep knowledge of peculiarities several layers of soil. Soil studies helped the farmers to learn more about their soil so that they were able to continually improve it. The rice agriculture technology requires highly sophisticated way of cooperation. Farmers needed to cooperate with each other. The rice farming was the only way to earn for living. The cooperation helped to get an idea of acting together. (Burkman 2014)

The statement proves the idea that the individual benefit comes only as part of a group benefit. The acting in a homogeneity way can be still seen in the today Japanese culture. The harmony is a key factor in the creation of Japanese excellent customer service that is called omotenashi⁷.

III The Meaning of Omotenashi

Omotenashi contains of three main elements, shitsurai, furumai, and shikake. Shitsurai means the physical environment where the service will be delivered. Furumai means the preparation part of the serving, and the host willingness to take responsibility by seeing the needs of the guest. Shikake means the process of the

6 Burkman, 2013

7 Tanikawa, 2009

guest been participating and enjoying the process of the delivered service. These elements were inspired by the structure of the Tea ceremony. Omotenashi has a close meaning to “hospitality”. Omotenashi is a Japanese culture that was created long time ago. According to omotenashi one has to put his heart into delivering the most excellent service and create the unique hospitality. Ichigo Ichie is a Japanese word that means the soul of omotenashi. Saying “Ichigo Ichie” means “I am grateful for the chance of meeting you, and because of this chance I have to do my best for we may never meet again”. Muneyuki Joraku, the marketing researcher answers why omotenashi is important in creating the unique Japanese customer service as follows:

A good customer service attracts good customers. There’s a marketing theory named 8:2, according to that theory 80% of the sales are created by the 20% of the customers. The quality of the service leads to the satisfaction of the customer, and the frequency of their sales visits influences the future of any company. In Japan, the customer satisfaction is the result of omotenashi quality. The culture of omotenashi cannot be found in any manual for there’s no particular technique. Omotenashi is based on a one-to-one relationship, and it differs from situation to situation. Therefore, it is hard to cultivate this concept outside of Japan.

Muneyuki Joraku explanation continues:

It’s about creating a non-dominant relationship between a person, who offers the service and a person, who receives it. This role can do the CEO of the company, possibly a famous star or a housewife. There’s only one simple relationship between host and guest. There is an example of the best Omotenashi when the host satisfies the needs of the guest in advance and offers only the most pleasant service and guests do not expect it. The hosts should not wait for instructions from their guests, the hosts have to foresee their needs. The guests who give their requests directly to the hosts are considered unsophisticated in Japan⁸.

Katsuhito Hattori (2008) explains that omotenashi was created to bring people together and remove the diversity between people. Omotenashi gathers people to eat and drink together. While having a meal, the close relationship is established.

8 Joraku, 2013

Omotenashi helps in creating a team spirit, in making everyone feel equal, no diversity by any criterion. Hattori explains: “In the past when a guest visited someone’s house, this person was considered as a god and was treated as a god. Caring treatment of the guest was thought to bring good fortune to the host house. So the root of excellent customer service lies in the idea of treating customers like gods”⁹. The omotenashi has to start from welcoming guests and then treating them seriously, taking care of them, showing your respect to them. By admitting each other, understanding, in the end Omotenashi helps to provide the equality between the host and the guest⁹.

IV Various Origins of Japanese Omotenashi Mind

1 Tea Ceremony and Omotenashi

The true Japanese omotenashi was delivered by the tea ceremony, that was introduced in the Azuchi-Momoyama era, by a man named Sen-no-rikyu. The tea ceremony is fulfilled with omotenashi culture and kata. Kata means the way of doing things, and the kata helps to perfect the omotenashi by following the special code telling how to deliver the true feeling of the tea ceremony. The ceremony requires a huge amount of training in order to understand how to deliver to the guest the true heart feeling while serving. The tea ceremony is called “chanoyu” in Japanese language. The tea ceremony has the elements that are similar to the elements of omotenashi. The word “chashitsu” means “the place and space where the tea ceremony will take place”. The word “temae” means the series of procedures for making the tea”. The word “chadogu” means “Equipment and tools for the tea ceremony”. The “milieu” means “the host and audience cooperation”. All that elements explain the true similarities between omotenashi and the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony is a way to gather people of all social rankings so that they can simply be together and enjoy the nature while drinking tea.

2 The Importance of Kata

The Japanese almost perfect customer service has to have a unique system to be

9 Hattori, 2008

followed and applied. Kata explains how and what makes such customer service almost perfect, the customer service needed to be delivered in a way that can exceed customer expectations. This proves the idea that the Japanese have special knowledge of doing things. Or in other words, the Japanese have the rules that needed to be followed and this is called kata or shikata. To establish a harmony and maintain it, the Japanese created a pattern or rules for doing things the right way, and thus “kata” or “shikata” was created. Literally it means the way of doing things.

De Mente states that “the Kata is a concept that has more than just the process of doing something, it is the cooperation of the physical and spiritual laws of the whole university, it refers to the rule how things supposed to be done”. De Mente explained the idea of maintaining the harmony in the society¹⁰. From 1870 until just after World War Two in 1945, the Japanese quality of a product was considered to be very poor. The reason for that was quite vivid. The foreign importers were only interested in getting quick profits. The Japanese were good at copying products, but that situation had changed after 1950, once the Japanese took control in their hands of their production and they could establish their own sales networks, by following their traditions and Kata. The Japanese surprised the world within 10 years by their superior quality of their goods¹¹. De Mente stated: “I believe Japan’s aesthetic concepts of Shibui and Wabi and Sabi should be incorporated into all cultures. “Sabi” refers to the kind of beauty of all things that comes with their natural aging. “Wabi” refers to the emotional appreciation that reflects the essence, including the ephemeral quality of life. “Shibui” denotes beauty that results when an object, natural or men-made, clearly reveals its essence through perfection of simplicity and subdued tone”¹⁰. This can explain how the Japanese could recover from such tragedy they had from the loss of the war, and the effect of the nuclear attacks, they could rise again and show the world and surprise it with their philosophy the Japanese way of doing things¹². The kata based culture has a long history of kata. Arts, crafts and their lifestyle that created the highest possible level of quality of any product or service they have provide, and until this day it is visible to the eye. De Mente said: “One of the aspects of the quality obsession of the Japanese is that it covers the

10 De Mente, 2003

11 Erffmeyer & Keillor & Thorne,1999

12 Chandra, 2009

whole product, including areas that are not ordinarily seen, the bottom, inside, and so on. Many western products have failed the Japanese test for quality because they were not fully finished or detailed”¹⁰.

De Mente keeps saying:

The kata is based on learning by first observing and listening to general comments and hints. Then generally beginning to do simplest and most obvious things, thereafter it will be naturally build up skills by absorbing the knowledge and direction, it will become like a step by step improvement until total mastery is achieved. This will create an inhabitation unconsciously to the work. What matter most is how to do a thing in the right way. Any foreigner who visits Japan immediately notices how most products are packed in a delicate and unique way, as it must be wrapped and tied in the right way. Paying attention to every detail is needed for the product to be served in the right way.

On some concept of kata called Shigoto kata, De Mente points as follows:

This concept includes the state of mind of all the members of the group concerned their attitudes about the company, they work for. The responsibility, as well as, how they behave in their personal relations within the group and toward outsiders, the concept covers what they say and how they say it, it requires them to take pride in their group and company, to go about their work in a warm, sincere, trusting and positive manner and to be gracious and Hospitable to the clients and other visitors, this will create a work environment in that the contribution of each member transcends the goals of just getting the work done, so the work environment well make employees feel the need to satisfy the customers as the company becomes the part of them¹⁰.

There is a relationship between kata and the 5S of Japanese quality improvement which means seiri-seiton-seiso-seiketsu-shitsuke. The meaning of word “(seiri) is to clear out and classify by clearing items no longer required and needed, and tagging items that may be required and storing away from workplace. The word “seiton” means to configure a specific place for specific items, a place for everything and everything in its place. The word “seiso” means to clean and check the work area daily by identify cleaning zones, establish cleaning routines, each shift don’t finish until the worker clean the place for the next shift to start in clean area. The word “seiketsu” means the conformity by consolidate the previous 3S-3C by standardizing

the new process and use of Visual management as gaudiness to perform these steps. The word “shitsuke” means a custom and practice by monitor the process adherence, and continually validate the process¹³.

A very important notice is that many practices in Japan are often denoted by “do”, a philosophical term for a way of doing things (kata)” and “jyutsu”, techniques such as kendo (philosophical) and kenjyutsu (technique-Japanese fencing) which intend to train the body and mind through discipline. This is how Japanese management uses the 5S¹⁴. It is not just a tool or a technique, it is a philosophy that is a practice as well, which the western management is not realizing, as they only refer to the 5S as problem solving tool, and that is a point of differentiation, and thus the outcome of the 5S will not be same. That is same in the case of omotenashi. Omotenashi has also both the philosophical and the technical aspects. This is very important when one understand the concept omotenashi and 5S.

V Social Structure

1 Social Class

By knowing that kata exists in Japan, it is possible to understand that Japanese follow a manual of rules and steps to achieve their excellent customer service, and the fact it was in their culture hundreds of years ago it can explain their perfection on performing it and keep following using it for many generation. But can such a thing as a kata be utilized and implemented in the country? To be able to answer such a question first we need to know how the Japanese social class structure in the feudal time was in Japan.

Davies and Ikeno (2002) explain about Japanese social structure, that it was consisted of 4 classes (shi: “samurai” / no: “farmers” / ko: “artisten” / sho: “merchants”) each class has it vertical rank system, the top highest class was the warrior class that was called the samurai who follow a pattern and code called “bushido code”. After it, comes the farmers who engage in agriculture and being part of the group was essential for their survival and growth that helped strengthen harmony and

13 Sugiyama, 1989

14 Gapp & Fisher & Kaoru, 2008

homogeneity of Japanese culture. After that comes the artisans who make craft and art. Finally in the bottom of the social rank was the merchant, the tradesmen who do not create or produce anything and just sell product. Those who were in the higher social rank had a generally superior power over the inferiors, and by that an extreme politeness and care in service often is the basis of survival for those in the visible bottom rank “merchant”, these merchant had to follow a precisely prescribed kata¹⁵. De Mente said that these kata was a standard set by the Samurai, the warrior top class of the social structure, these samurai’s are self-defense group that maintain public order since the Heian period, formal minded they set a kata for the entire country, and they were in charge of enforcing them, these samurais are armed warriors who are authorized to use their sword to enforce the rules and politeness, thus the servile attitude for the common people specially merchant “sellers” become second nature, and because of that an extreme propensity for politeness and service was ingrained in the Japanese over a period of more than thousand years as an integral part of their social and political system and an important factor in molding the Japanese mind¹⁶.

Customers treated as god in Japan, this could be a way for the merchant to survive from the samurai wrath in the past. And until this day the customer is treated as a god in the Japanese service, compare to the world that customer can only achieve a king position in treatment. This shows how the extreme kata of politeness that was enforced in the past by the samurai still until this day keep continuing.

2 Samurai and the Bushido Code

A further analyzing of the Japanese highest social rank, the samurais can give more understanding of how the kata is utilized in Japan. As said before, these warriors used to follow a code of bushido.

Inazo Nitobe, a high educated English spoken figure of Japan, who was a teacher in the university as well had a high role in politics views in Japan in the time and some inputs in the colonization of the Ainu people the area known as Hokkaido now. Nitobe explained that the word Bu-shi-do itself means the way the noble warriors

15 Davies & Ikeno, 2002

16 De Mente, 1997

fight¹⁷. Nitobe said: "Bushido is the code of moral principles that the warrior samurai class were required and instructed to follow and be observed acted with, it is not a written code, it is handed down from mouth to mouth or coming from the pen of some well-known warrior. Privileges and great responsibilities were given to these warriors. Soon the need of a common standard of behavior was required. The warriors were always on a belligerent footing and usually they belonged to different social classes"¹⁷. This pattern of behavior has similar meaning to kata, a way of doing things that was growing of decades and centuries of military career.

Nitobe keeps explaining bushido as follows:

Several sources were the reason behind the Bushido creation in Japan, religion and Confucius teachings had a major effect, religion part was the Buddhism, it was a religion that imported from China, that it had a direct effect on these warriors to have a sense of calm trust in fate, and submission to the inevitable in sight of danger or calamity, despise of life and friendliness with death. These warriors created a Zen out of that Buddhism that represents human effort to reach through meditation zone of thought beyond the range of verbal expression, it put oneself in a harmony, and that directs us back to how harmony is extremely important in Japanese principles and view of things until this day. The strictly ethical doctrine of the Confucius teaching was the most prolific source of bushido, it created a kata as for the moral relation between master and servant, father and son, husband and wife, old and young brothers, and between friends¹⁷.

Nitobe describes clearly in the bushido book as follows:

"Politeness is a poor virtue. If it is actuated only by fear of offending good taste, whereas it should be the outward manifestation of sympathetic regard for the feelings of others. It also implies a due regard for the fitness of things, therefore, due respect to social positions. For these later express no plutocratic distinctions, but were originally distinction for actual merit, in its highest form, politeness almost approaches love"¹⁷ what can be understood from that, is in politeness itself, heart was a key factor, to be able to behave in such manner. That was learned between generations through the code of bushido, doing and acting the correct manners.

It will bring all the parts of a person's body into perfect order and create the

17 Nitobe, 1899

harmony that its environment expresses the mastery of spirit over the flash. The clearest example of that is “chanoyu” the tea ceremony, from that we see that Japan make the simplest thing into an art and it will become a spiritual culture that will carry on to the next generation, and from this tea ceremony, everyone who will attend it will understand the meaning of Japanese hospitality, and how it is carried on.

In Japan there was a time when service was provided without asking for money in return. It was part of the social structure of the society, that each individual is part of in-group that their benefit is prioritized. That created harmony within the society, and made the service be delivered with a heart as service, without expecting a return. Nitobe said: “Paying for every sort of service was not common among the bushido supporters. It believed in service that can be rendered only without money and without price, silver or gold was not to be repaid for some services. Not because there was no value to it, it is actually because it was invaluable”¹⁷. Again a strong key element that was implement into the Japanese society that was carried around for many generation. That make them believe putting one heart into doing the service, and not accepting a return is something normal and as a virtue, compare to other cultures.

It even went far that bushido itself became free from anything that has to do with money, as money was considering a root of evil. Another fact that explain that some services that was provided in such culture were not expecting a reward or paying back for it. It was pure heart hospitality, a road to create excellent service and until this day if you deal with any Japanese service provider, they never wait for you to pay a tip, or even ask for it. And when a customer sometimes wants to pay a tip for the employee for his nice hospitality, the employee strongly refuse it, and consider it as impolite behavior, such ethics and ideas was built and implemented in the Japanese culture and become part of it, the corruption of money was out of it. In Nitobe final word of his bushido book, he said: “The samurai were not only the flower of the nation, but its root as well, they kept themselves socially aloof from the populace, they set the moral standards for them and guided them by their example”¹⁷.

This concludes how a nation was driven by the unconscious and irresistible power. Bushido has been moving the nation and individuals. The extreme politeness in dealing with others, and the strong power the samurai had, that only result in the merchant who in the lowest class of the social structure to extreme polite and try

their best to satisfy their customers. This is what created the mindset of “omotenashi” the Japanese hospitality¹⁸. Davies, Ikeno (2002) said: “after the Meiji period (1868 to 1912) ended the spirit of bushido vanished, yet a small characteristics of bushido can be still found in the martial and aesthetic arts, that follow creation forms (kata). And it’s practiced repeatedly until practitioners master the form, and this was as well done in the Japanese companies and hospitality services, that gave the guidelines to follow the wa “harmony philosophy” and Do “the technique and the way of things”, that lead to katasized omotenashi “Japanese hospitality”, and since the Japanese society is homogenate they tend to follow the form and be similar that spread the way of omotenashi”¹⁵. This homogeneity culture helped spread the kata widely around Japan, Japan society has a unique homogeneity culture that mean that the Japanese people have similarity in their attitudes and behavior. According to De Mente (2003), Japanese are homogeneity culture that helped spread the way of kata easily. The kata shows that there is only one correct way to perform each of the steps. Deviations were not allowed, everyone is conditioned to follow the same etiquette and the way of doing things in their personal behavior, and the same form and process in their particular work. So the overall behavior of the Japanese became homogenized to a degree seldom seen in other societies. In Japanese companies, employees are required to follow the rules and behavior of the company kata. Being unique is something not accepted and it will result to be casted away and treated as outside of the group. What matters is how the employee does the work according to the company kata and not the result of the employee work¹⁰.

Another feature of Japanese society is their belonging to a collectivism social pattern. It is a reflection of the Japanese culture from its languages and geographic region and historical periods. It defines their beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles and values of those who live in a specified geographic region¹⁹. In Edo era bushido teaching became not an exclusive to the samurai statues only to learn, it became popular between the common Japanese as well, that an education system called the terakoya education system, was taught in the large cities as well small and mid-sized cities all over Japan, the school educated the basic moral and scientific knowledge which made the samurai’s bushido education. After Maiji ara, Japan could catch-up

18 Becker, 2001

19 Bayo-Moriones, 2009

rapidly to the advanced countries because of this terakoya education system.

VI Reasons that Helped Omotenashi to be Maintained in Japan

1 Japanese Collectivism Norm

To understand more about how harmony and kata could be effective in Japan, it is needed to know the norm of the Japanese society. Collectivism itself means “a group of individuals about whose welfare a person is concerned, with whom that person wants to cooperate without demanding equitable returns²⁰. Separation from whom leads to anxiety, these groups are called “Ingroups”. They are usually characterized by similarities among the members and individuals, and have the sense of common fate, the views, and needs. Goals of the “ingroups” are always emphasized more than the self-interests. The emphasis is on behavior influenced by social norms and duties rather than by personal advantage or pleasure”²⁰.

Common beliefs are shared within the “ingroups”. There is willingness to cooperate with the in group member. The collectivists have a unique attribute that all collectivists have to carry out their obligations and perform what is specified as “ingroup” norms²¹. The collectivists simply enjoyed doing their duties, even if those duties require sacrifice. And this can be seen as feature in the behavior of Japanese employees in the current time that result in success in their teamwork. This will give a lead that the Japanese social pattern itself required the individual to care about others more than themselves. It created an acceptance to sacrifice you, in favor for others. The key point that it helped enabling the idea to give without expecting a return, it removed the calculation of the cost of giving extra to others. To offer customer more than what they pay for is actually a culture within the Japanese since ancient times. By having such a collectivism pattern within the Japanese society, it had to be maintained by establishing harmony within the people. Because they are a collectivism culture, they tend to be a high context culture as well. Jianeng Wang²², referring to Edward. H. Hall’s framework of

20 Triandis, 1995

21 McManus, 1994

22 Wang, 2008 (also see Sato&Parry, 2013)

High/Low Context Culture²³ said as follows:

A high-context communication or message is the information that is either in the physical context or internalized in the person. Very little of this information is coded, explicated or transmitted as a part of the message. A low-context communication has the opposite meaning; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

According to Cardon, “In high context cultures, communication is a form of the art that is unique and cohesive and thus displays sophistication, nuance, and cultural identity. In low context cultures, communication is primarily a task oriented. High context cultures appreciate slow, indirect messages whereas low context cultures insist on fast, direct messages. High context cultures extensively use informal information networks whereas low context cultures prefer formal information networks”²⁴.

Because the nature of the Japanese highest context society, they have something called, “kuki-wo-yomu”, that means reading the atmosphere. Reading the atmosphere is important for a high context culture as words take less place in such culture. The tea ceremony participant has to read the atmosphere to enjoy the omotenashi, by being collective and high context culture and able to read the atmosphere, without saying words, omotenashi was delivered in such culture smoothly and could be maintained.

2 The Japanese Brain

The Japanese way is always different from the rest of the world, any non-Japanese person whoever dealt with Japanese companies or lived in Japan, will immediately notice that Japan is different than the rest of the world. The Japanese way is always different. This raise an interesting acceptance of an interesting theoretical study done by Tsunoda²⁵ regarding the Japanese behavior. The theory can clarify the reasons why the way and action of Japanese are totally different from the world, and why any business dealing with Japanese company or personal could be very difficult and cannot be understood by other countries and nationalities. Tsunoda

23 Hall, 1976

24 Cardon, 2008

25 Tsunoda, 1985

explains that the functional is different between the verbal and nonverbal brains. The right and left side of brain characteristics are popularly described as nonverbal vs. verbal, spatial vs. temporal, synthetic vs. analytic, and intuitive vs. rational.

The brain has cerebral hemispheres that are divided into a right hemisphere and left hemisphere. Each hemisphere appears to be specialized for some behaviors.

Table 1 Differences of Function between Left and Right Hemisphere of Brain

Nonverbal left hemisphere	Verbal right hemisphere
-Liaison to consciousness	-No such liaison
-Verbal	-Almost nonverbal
-Linguistic description	-Musical
-Ideational(Conceptual similarities)	-Pictorial/pattern sense(Visual similarities)
-analysis over time	-Synthesis over time
-Analysis of detail	-Holistic- images
-Arithmetical and computer like	-Geometric an spatial ¹¹

(Source: J. C. Eccles (1973), *The Understanding of the Brain*, McGraw-Hill, p. 21)

Then Tsunoda explains that the language has a strong effect on how the brain is used that made the uniqueness of thinking and creating a culture that differs from others. He said that the languages spoken in the world are divided into only two groups, Japanese and Polynesian language that has a large share of vowel sounds on one hand, and the remaining languages on the other. From his various experiments, he found a major difference between Japanese-speaking people and those who speak other languages. It is in the dominance pattern for vowel sounds, the Japanese brain automatically process vowel sounds as verbal sounds in the linguistic hemisphere, but the non-Japanese brain handles vowel sounds as nonverbal sounds. The categorization of all sounds into verbal or nonverbal sounds has a particular importance in human auditory perception. His test results have proved that the auditory dominance patterns of Japanese and western nations suggest that the Japanese brain handles emotional functions, logical processes, and perceptual affinity with nature in the left hemisphere²⁶. The right hemisphere specializes processing of harmonic and mechanical sounds. The left brain specializes in the processing of linguistic and logical functions in the western brain, while all other

26 Tsunoda, 1985 (see also Fisher & Kobayasi & Kaoru, 2008)

auditory information and functions are handled in the right brain. Thus, the Japanese brain houses the logical and emotional functions in the same verbal hemisphere, which may account for the Japanese tradition of affinity between logic and emotion.

The unity or coexistence of the mind and emotion is said to characterize Japanese behavior, arts, history and life. Japanese people have given great importance to the human life in total harmony with nature, which explain the strong ideal of how Japanese people strongly emphasize on harmony and act with the group to achieve this harmony as nature does. These general Japanese characteristics appear to be in agreement with the result that Japanese behavior is unique to every other culture and nationality in the world and that shows that the Japanese perception of seeing things is unique. On the other hand, the test result showed that the non-Japanese verbal brain is highly specialized in logical functions, and there is no room for emotional elements to enter this sphere. That explains one fact of how hard is to export the Japanese service marketing to other countries, because the element called *omotenashi* could be beyond logic for companies of non-Japanese verbal brain to understand such a concept.

3 Japan Isolation “Sakoku”

Finally what helped protract the Japanese culture and the kata to survive from the long past. Japan by the order of the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu was closed and isolated from the rest of the world. This action was in order to protect it from other culture invasions and harm influence from the west. This gave Japan stability and internal solidarity, and it also helped protecting the kata of Japan and to keep carrying it on with many generations and reduce many threats that could disturb the harmony of the society²⁷.

Hogan²⁸ explained as follows:

Sakoku, the -closed country- policy (1640 to 1854) has left its mark on contemporary national imagining. The strict limits on contacts with the outside world, with few expectations, Japanese subjects were forbidden to travel or live abroad, in some cases under penalty of death; virtually all westerners were

27 Perrin, 2008

28 Hogan, 2011

expelled from Japan; and most trade with the west was prohibited²⁹. Japan developed a unique culture and racially and linguistically homogenous population during this period of isolation.

VII Conclusion

In this article the author explain the characteristics, origin and formation of Japanese hospitality, omotenashi. In fact Omotenashi is quite different from services and even from the hospitality. Usually service means a transaction object. Service is provided by paying the price. Hospitality is a voluntary care for someone. There is no transaction relationship. But both the service and hospitality have a common nature. Both are a one-way relationship.

On the contrary, omotenashi is voluntary and two-way relationship. In this paper the author could not clarify this omotenashi's two-way relationship nature. Because being explained in this paper, omotenshi's direct ancestor is a tea ceremony, the next explanation of the author on omotenashi should direct toward phenomenon of original application of tea ceremonies omotenashi in business field now in common of Japanese service industry. The author is going to analyze the case of Kitcho, Japanese luxury cuisine restaurant which first introduced the tea ceremony style in their restaurant business.

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29 Beasley, 2000

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