

JOHN C. CONDON

*With Respect to
the Japanese*

FOREWORD BY KOHEI GŌSHI

Founder and Chairman, The Japan Productivity Center



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As author John Condon says, "The U.S. and Japan make an odd couple." Linked tightly by political, economic and technical bonds but locked in fierce competition, they share a mutual fascination with each other's cultures. One thing seems certain; whatever the future holds, this curiously symbiotic relationship will persist for some years to come. The real question is: what will we make of it?

History is replete with examples of countries and cultures that have failed to overcome self-defeating patterns of ethnocentric response and reaction. An alternative, which Condon uses so effectively in this practical guide, lies in the tools of cross-cultural analysis.

The basic principles are simple: see yourself as others see you; look at others as they look at themselves. With this as a starting point, Condon discusses the salient features of Japanese values and behaviors as they affect communication, social and business relations, and management styles. He contrasts that with the values and characteristics of Americans and makes concrete recommendations on how to deal with the Japanese during face to face encounters. He addresses himself to the thousands of Americans who really want to understand the dynamics of relationships between Japanese and Americans but who also want to be as effective as possible in achieving whatever goals they have for their business and personal encounters with the Japanese.

John Condon lived in Japan for ten years, teaching communication at the International Christian University. He developed and conducted seminars for Japanese and American business and government agents and lectured widely on intercultural communication and cross cultural relations. He is co-author of the highly regarded book *Introduction to Intercultural Communication*.



專敬

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Preface

This is one of a series of books—the *InterAct* Series—which explains the interaction between Americans and people from other countries and cultures.

Unexpected difficulties (and opportunities) are encountered when people who have grown up in different cultures live, work and socialize together. Each *InterAct* book describes exactly what is encountered, why, and what to do about it. Readers discover what will embarrass, motivate, irritate and earn the respect of the foreign nationals with whom they are trying to communicate.

In this case—Japan—we are dealing, of course, with a critical trading and political partner. Our countries are linked almost inextricably in generating the economic and technical forces which shape the modern world. At the same time, the

two countries are distant and the cultures are distinct. Experienced business personnel and diplomats in Japan and the U.S. have learned, sometimes through costly mistakes, that the road to success in working together lies, first, in careful study and real understanding of the values, priorities and practices of the other.

Knowing about the other, however, is not enough. Americans who know about Japan, even a lot about Japan, often do not know what happens when a Japanese and an American *come together* to transact business. Nor do they know how to carry this out effectively. In order to do so, and to accomplish their objectives, Americans must also know about their own culture and its strong influence upon them. Then they must know how—and when—to initiate, listen, clarify, persuade and collaborate. They must know, in other words, how to communicate. Cross-cultural communication, once regarded as a subject of interest only to scholars, is now in the headlines and boardrooms every day.

The author of this study, John C. Condon, lived and worked in Japan for ten years (throughout the 1970s). During this time he was a professor of communication at International Christian University. He conducted cross-cultural orientation and training for Japanese and American business organizations and government agencies, and lectured widely on intercultural communication. The influential "Pegasus Seminars," offered regularly by the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan and International House, were developed and directed by Dr. Condon. He is the author of a number of books including the highly respected *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*.

Mr. Kyohei Gōshi, who kindly offered to write the Foreword to this book, is among the most famous and influential Japanese of this century. Along with men like Panasonic's Matsushita and Sony's Morita, Mr. Gōshi is known in his

country as one of Japan's "Twelve Wise Men." He is the person perhaps most responsible for Japan's extraordinary productivity. For the past three decades, he has directed the landmark studies and training programs at the Japan Productivity Center which he founded.

Japanese values, techniques and products are having a great impact on American society. Similarly, what Americans want, how they think and why they behave as they do are of intense interest to the Japanese. Interaction is inevitable. *Successful* interaction, real communication, requires new insights and skills. Business personnel and diplomats must now develop intercultural competence.

We hope this book will enable Americans and Japanese to increase their competence and interact more successfully: as informed competitors or as compatible, productive partners.

George W. Renwick

Editor, *InterAct* Series

Foreword

I am pleased to say a few words at the beginning of Professor Condon's fine book on intercultural relations between Americans and Japanese. His understanding of our two cultures, and how we sometimes misunderstand each other because of our cultural differences, is very helpful. The book not only explains some of the differences in how people of Japan and the United States communicate, it also shows us ways in which we can avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and so cooperate together. In recent years, many articles and books have been written about problems of understanding between Japanese and Americans, but unfortunately very many have been superficial. I am very impressed with Professor Condon's research, perceptiveness and dedication to the improvement of understanding of both cultures, and I fully endorse what he presents here.

Cooperation is the key issue. For nearly thirty years we at the Japan Productivity Center have tried to encourage ways of cooperating among different interests within our own society as well as internationally. We have developed a model of cooperation that includes management, union representation, and a neutral party. In some ways this may be a very Japanese way of doing things. That is, as Professor Condon says in this book, "interpersonal harmony" rather than confrontation or starting from an adversary relationship, is a Japanese value. We have been gratified, therefore, that so many Americans in recent years have come to the Japan Productivity Center to learn from our experience. We have learned much from the Americans, and we believe that Americans may be able to learn something from us. Learning from each other, cooperating, we can each enjoy "a bigger piece of the pie."

Japanese people need to learn more about different cultural values and different ways of doing things. Our history shows us to be both a very special, unique culture, but also a culture that has a long tradition of learning from others. Sometimes in our history we have stressed our uniqueness, and sometimes we have stressed the value of learning from other cultures, East and West. Right now we are at a special time where we have a kind of balance between the two values. I hope it is not too bold to say that America, which has more often stressed its uniqueness and served as a teacher for other countries and cultures, is now much more open to learning from others. At least this is something we sense at the Japan Productivity Center. This is a very special time in this history of Japanese and American relations, as we both want to learn from each other.

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respect, there cannot be long lasting communication nor true cooperation. We in our work at the Japan Productivity Center stress the importance of respect in increasing cooperation and thus increasing productivity. Respect is just as important in international and intercultural relations. It may be difficult to teach a person to respect another, unless we can help people to see things from the other's point of view. I hope that this book will help us increase our respect for the other by better understanding each other and by avoiding some of the common misunderstandings that often occur when people from Japan and the United States try to work together.

Kohei Gōshi

Founder and Chairman

The Japan Productivity Center
Tokyo

Introduction

Travel writers call almost any foreign country a "land of contrasts," but only Japan is so often called, by writers of all kinds, a "land of contradictions." *Time* magazine featured a cover story on Japan which explained to readers that "the Japanese have built their entire culture on contradictions." The cover itself reinforced that impression with a picture styled after an Edo era kabuki poster showing the hero in a defiant pose. This eighteenth century gentleman, however, carried in addition to his *bangasa* (paper umbrella), a pocket calculator, camera, digital watch, golf clubs, car keys and other modern day Japanese products that have helped to make SONY and Honda seem as American as pizza pie.

Even expatriate Americans long resident in Tokyo will tell newcomers, "If you plan to write about Japan, do so in the

first four years. After that you'll know that whatever you say about Japan, the opposite can also be said." Such talk about contradictions may, however, only be a contemporary version of the "inscrutable" cliché Westerners used to apply to Asians generally. Such labeling does nothing to advance the understanding of another culture.

Contradictions exist in every society, but they are much more likely to be perceived from a distance than from within the culture. They are even more likely to reflect the outsider's expectations of what is consistent and what is contradictory, based on his own cultural background.

Americans, for example, are told by advertisers that new products are better than old ones. Given the American faith in technology and progress, it does not take much to persuade them. "Old" soon becomes "old fashioned" which becomes "obsolete." The ball point pen came to replace the fountain pen, and the xeroxing process seems to be doing away with carbon paper. These changes are expected. Americans are therefore surprised when they see in a modern Japanese bank or business office, employees using the *soroban* (abacus) as well as modern calculators. Another one of those Japanese contradictions? No, a Japanese will explain, for some things the *soroban* is just handier than a calculator. Each has its place. The same is true of those pens: in Japan the ball point pen has not exactly replaced the fountain pen any more than the fountain pen replaced the brush and *sumi* ink. Each has its place and continues to be used appropriately in Japan.

The American way of thinking resembles the logic of the sciences, where a new theory may replace the old. The Japanese way, in this case, is more like the logic of the arts: one may enjoy Bartok *and* Bach. Thus the Japanese "still" use chopsticks, "still" write Chinese characters, "still" want Shinto priests to consecrate the land for every new construction, including the new Tokyo Disneyland. The Americans still say "still."

American misunderstanding of Japan is partly the result of a lack of information and interest. Indeed Americans in general are much more "insular" in their knowledge of other places and peoples than are the Japanese. Harvard sociologist, Nathan Glazer, who has been monitoring reports and features about Japan for years, documents this. Even in the *New York Times*, the amount of information published during the years of Japan's greatest economic impact actually decreased. In 1972, the *Times* index showed a scant 2.6% of space devoted to Japan; six years later the percentage was only half of that.

As the 1980's began, however, there was a dramatic increase of interest in Japan. Book stores in America have whole sections devoted to books about Japan and about Japanese management in particular. William Ouchi's *Theory Z* even made the best seller list in 1982. Television specials on "how the Japanese get things done" have attracted large audiences. Seminars on QC's (quality circles) or Japanese management techniques or how to deal with the Japanese can now be found in large cities and college towns all over the United States. More and more Americans are sampling *sushi* and enjoying what they find, and learning to use *tofu* and other Japanese (albeit originally Chinese) food products.

The reasons for this surge of interest in Japan are perhaps more complex than they might appear. The economic success of the Japanese, which was related to effective marketing of quality products that were in demand in the States, was, of course, a major reason. But it was not just the SONY TV's and tape recorders, the Hondas, Datsuns, Toyotas and other vehicles, or the cameras and musical instruments. The Japanese in the United States, from Yoko Ono to Seiji Ozawa, seemed themselves to be "quality products."

The end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties was not the first time Americans and Westerners took an interest in things Japanese; there were much earlier periods

when Japan seemed fascinating and inspired works like *Madam Butterfly* and *The Mikado*. What was different this time was that thousands of Americans were meeting and working face-to-face with Japanese on matters of mutual interest on a daily basis.

Another reason lies with the Japanese themselves. Most Japanese seem to regard their culture as one that is extremely difficult for anyone but a Japanese to understand, and certainly not one into which an outsider could ever fit completely. In contrast to Americans, who believe that anyone could, and probably would if given half a chance, become an American, the Japanese find it hard to accept that anyone could become Japanese. This is reflected in everything from stringent government immigration policies to words of praise for the foreigner who can use chop sticks or sit for more than a few minutes on a *zabuton*. The newcomer is delighted by such compliments, but when the compliments continue after twenty years, the outsider knows that they carry an additional message.

In working with people from other cultures we stand a much better chance of understanding and learning to get along with them if we assume that each comes from a "land of consistency" rather than of contrasts and contradictions. And so it is with the Japanese. From generation to generation and from one area of activity to another the Japanese, with impressive consistency, behave very much like Japanese. Just as Americans behave like Americans.

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