

# **Japan and Modern Globalization**

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**Japanese 305**

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## Introduction

In the modern era countries and companies want to become more globalized in order to reach larger markets and increase trade amongst peers and foreigners alike. By becoming more accessible to other countries and markets, not only can countries increase profitability in trade and tourism, companies can see an increase in profit from new untapped markets, as well discover trendy items and styles from foreign countries to introduce to domestic markets and become the hot new trend at home. Many untapped ideas go unheard or unused because companies find that their field studies say there would be no interest for a foreign trend at home, stating that it might be too foreign for the domestic market. But in order to become a market giant globally, risks must be taken and ideas need to be tested, much like the entrepreneurs of the American Industrial Revolution did. “Despite its distinctive characteristics, the worldwide quest for corporate power and profit of this new era parallels the earlier globalization of industrial capitalism.” (Suarez-Villa, 2012, p. 97). By daring to be the first to try and use ideas from foreign markets, companies themselves can become globalized.

But what does globalized mean? The commonly accepted definition of globalize is “to cover, involve, or affect the entire world” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In order to be able to affect the entire world, a basic understanding of the world is needed. There are multiple cultures, religions, countries, and ethnicity's in the world and they vary greatly from one another. Trying to spread a wide blanket idea or custom on every single one is simply impossible as people hold different beliefs, values, traditions, and customs in every country. What might seem customary and normal for one country would be considered strange and unheard of for another, maybe even offensive. In order to try and best avoid these misunderstandings as best as possible,

it is necessary to become more open-minded and accepting of foreign ways of life, even those that are starkly different from one's own home country. Many countries value high-context communication, such as Japan, and prefer to take subtle approaches to life and interacting with one another, while others, such as America, are low-context society where the citizens are more bold and willingly to directly speak their mind and wants. Because of these differences, what might seem natural to say in America can be misconstrued as offensive and rude to state in Japan and thus it becomes necessary to learn how to deal with these cultural differences. I will discuss how by studying Japanese history, customs and culture in an American setting, one is able to gain a better perspective of a vastly different cultural mindset for tackling challenges in life, an understanding of how a different culture may view a topic based on their history in order to better judge their motives, an open-mind to what might even be a better way of approaching problems from a new cultural stance, and a means of understanding how to become more global and accepting of future cultures outside of both an American and Japanese mindset.

### **History Lesson**

The first and foremost in learning about Japanese culture to become globalized is to know the history. Culture is something shaped over time by the experiences of the country as a whole, and is developed by a large group of people who share common experiences and mindset. Without understanding what caused a group of people to become the way they are, it's impossible to understand their current mindset and culture. Traditions have to start somewhere, and by going through the history pages, one is able to find that starting point and trace its path all the way to the present. By doing so, not only is knowledge acquired about that particular

culture/countries history, but a better perspective of even ones own home can be seen. Gaining an outside looking in view helps to acquire the globalized mindset.

### **Post - WWII Japan**

Because of its major defeat by the US at the end of WW2, Japan needed to go through a period of restructuring and regrowth known as the Showa period. During this time frame not only did Japan rebuild itself from the bottom up, but its bubble economy would go on to become the second greatest economy in the world up until the 1990s. The key to their success was how the government worked together with companies in Japan to create a harmonious circular economy in the country.

Although the surge in prosperity didn't last forever, by looking at this point in time, it is easy to see how the Japanese cultural concepts of harmony and working together with one another can be very advantageous, which is starkly different from the American more individualistic approach to life. While the Japanese government did its best to keep away foreign influences and allow Japanese companies to flourish and rebuild, the American government usually does its best to keep any one group of companies from having a total monopoly. It's not easy to say which idea is better, but this can be an example of how to gain different ideas from other countries to better improve ones own country. In the future other countries will attempt to improve themselves as well and become wealthier, and by studying both the Japanese method of rebirth or other methods, these countries can use their globalized thinking process to become better.

Although the method to which Japan helped build itself was successful for a time, as a modern American college student, seeing the government given so much power and control over

the well being of peoples lives is very concerning, considering the negative image the American government has today. The chance for corruption and deals set up to only profit politicians is very high and because of the American more individualistic idealism, a lot more common. In America, one is taught that achieving ones own success even at the cost of others is the “American Dream”. Everyone is capable of creating their own successful life and is expected to do so without thinking of others too much. This creates a competitive environment where every single advantage should be exploited. In a way the American competitive environment could stand to incorporate some of the Japanese harmony into its culture.

### **Japanese Business Culture**

#### **Employment**

One thing that stands out as starkly different from the American way of life is Japan’s business culture. Japan during the Showa period established a culture of lifetime employment and loyalty to one’s company. Employees are hired young and trained within the company for various positions. Promotions and pay raise are based a seniority system that is also starkly different and foreign to the American mind. The way one acts and addresses ones superiors is far more respectful even. In exchange for a more strict hierarchical system, employees are given lifetime employment and their lives are effectively taken care of by their employers. This system of give and take does not exist in America at all, which favors companies seeking specialists for their field and hiring them based on their prior qualifications. Employees aren’t expected to spend most of their lives with one company, but rather move around from company to company based on pay and what that company might have to offer. Recently though Japanese companies have started to change as well. “That is, the concept of long-term employment per se is not

disappearing, but rather it is being restructured to serve new goals that have less to do with steady training of loyal generalists, and much more with competing through specialization.” (Schaede, 2012, p.175) In a sense Japan is adopting a more western style of employment in order to better compete in today’s global market.

When studying the two different styles of employment, one can see both positives and negatives for either or, and neither is perfect. With the Japanese style of employment, job security become more certain and allows for an easier time in life planning as employees can become more comfortable in knowing what to expect. Employees can better plan their lives for marriage, home and family, as well as have a deeper understanding of how their company works and bond well with coworkers who they will see for years on end. But many people would also say the chance to stifle creativity is very high and employees will have less incentive to go the extra mile in their work and truly improve upon their company. While employees could create many new ideas and projects for the company, in the end their seniority and pay are still tied to age and time at the company itself. The Western style of employment on the other hand rewards creativity and the strive to become the best. Companies seek out those who stand above others and try to gather a group of elite to gain an edge over competitors. Payment and promotions are more closely tied to individual merit and ability. But because of this competitive market, loyalty to ones company and coworkers is much lower, and the sense of bonding isn’t as strong. Many people can feel uncomfortable and mistrustful of others in such an environment. In a globalized world market, aspects from both forms of employment are needed though. Because of the need to cater to as many people as possible, it’s necessary to know when applying the different styles for different people. Many people will prefer to a more comfortable straight line employment

seen in the Japanese style as it offers security that they desire in their lives. While others are naturally competitive and would much prefer working hard to stay ahead of others. It's often closely tied to whatever culture the person grew up in, and is thus another reason to become more open minded and accepting of foreign cultures in order to become more unified as a world. Often, I myself find the western style competitiveness to be far too draining and tiring. The need to stay ahead of others rather than working with them and becoming better together is not something I am comfortable with, so I find the Japanese structured employment to be appealing in a way. I am comfortable with aging through the company rather than charging on ahead and if possible I would like to see American companies take on this style more.

### **Business Meetings**

The way business is done is not all too different from other countries as well. While in America it's commonly accepted to begin business meetings and talks with discussion of agreements and money right away, the Japanese way has these discussions delayed until near the end of the meeting. First a rapport must be established with the other party in order to gauge their trustworthiness and not appear too eager for just the money. Even where one sits during the meeting is carefully judged and considered. The biggest part of business deals isn't the money itself, but the relationship between the two companies. A strong bond will in turn bring about prolonged future profits rather than instant exchange for smaller rewards. This is very similar to what I have seen in trade in Middle-Eastern markets as well. For sales to be made, the merchant and the buyer come together to haggle and barter, and once a deal is made they drink tea and eat together directly after, often times provided by the merchant themselves. This creates a feeling of goodwill between each other and can often lead to future deals as well. The Western style of



doing business, often has these rapport built over time after many different dealings have been struck instead. If two businesses come together often enough then a sense of trust is built over time rather than established first before money is exchanged. It all comes back to the phrase “time is money” and the need to do business to gain money first before bonds. Again, I as an American citizen often find the American way of doing business concerning and a little untrustworthy. When going to buy something such as a new computer, it’s often times very hard to trust salesmen and clerks who usher me to a product right away and it makes buying products difficult. I would much prefer to time to understand the salesclerk on a basic level at the bare minimum in order to ensure that I know they’re showing me a product best suited to my needs. The Eastern style of building rapport helps to put the heart at ease more before money is exchanged. While it is important to keep in mind the western way of cutting out excess pleasantries that do nothing other than waste time, taking time to smooth things over is also important. An open-minded person will be able to find a balance between the two and apply a proper style no matter where they are in the world.

### **Cultural Hybridization**

In the modern world, thanks to technology access to information on other cultures is now more readily available than ever before. The Internet and its many different websites have become “Cultural Hybridization” zones, where people from different parts of the world can interact with one another and share their beliefs and cultural practices with others on the opposite side of the globe. Because access to others is so widespread the different cultures around the world are started to become more homogeneous in certain aspects, while maintaining cultural boundaries still. From music and entertainment, to cultural practices, foods, martial arts and etc,

the sharing amongst the worlds population has reached an all time high and continues to grow with each passing moment.

### **Too much sharing?**

Websites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social networking websites are on the forefront of these hybridization zones and the epicenter of where most sharing is done. People post their daily lives and practices with others and in turn learn more from other people as well. By interacting with Japanese natives through these websites, it has become all the more easier to understand Japanese culture and gain an appreciation for different cultures. But what many scholars and politicians have stated repeatedly is that while sharing may be at an all time high, but that doesn't necessarily make it a good thing. Many people feel reject foreign customs and media. Others are concerned with what stereotypes can and will be formed by the large amount of access that is available and how these stereotypes can affect their respective countries. If too many people begin to believe in negative stereotypes of a particular culture or country, negative images are perpetuated of those cultures people will begin to naturally reject them before gaining a baser understanding of them. For instance the Otaku culture in Japan. Although the Otaku culture can contribute to many of the cool contemporary ideas in modern day Japan, because of the negative stereotypes people may have of Otaku themselves or their fandoms, ideas and Otaku culture can go underrepresented and misconstrued. It takes an open mind to accept the differences between people and find the good that everyone can contribute. I myself for instance was disturbed by the ideas of what Otaku culture was before actually learning about Otaku culture. Although they may seem overly obsessive to the point of creepiness, the lengths

they go to for their hobbies can be admirable in their own right, and the creative things they construct and share with the rest of the world can be enjoyable.

### **Points of sharing**

The main stages of sharing such as YouTube are great epicenters for encountering new and exciting things. YouTube is where I was able to discover a multitude of Japanese television and comedy shows that I'd never heard of prior to be exposed there, and I likely would have never heard of them if not for these Cultural Hybridization zones. American media is a dominating force in the global market, with American culture being shared worldwide and being one of the most dominant if not the most dominant culture of the modern era. But just because American culture is the largest force right now doesn't mean there aren't others that are equally entertaining and interesting. Learning about Japanese comedy shows and variety shows through Cultural Hybridization zones has helped me to learn that there's so much more to experience and see and that's important to move away from ones own cultural home and experience more. By keeping an open mind, one will be able to find things they find enjoyable, maybe even more so than their home culture, as well as share what they know with others. Encountering others and sharing is the very basis of Globalization, and by doing so, new and interesting things can be created all the time.

### **Conclusion**

By studying Japanese history, customs and culture I have gained a better view of how to approach vastly different cultural mindsets and have been given the tools for tackling life's challenges in new and interesting ways. It has helped me gain an understanding of how different cultures will view subjects based on their history with the subject as well as to better

understand their motives, and an open-mind to what might even be a better way of approaching problems from a new cultural stance, and a means of understanding how to become more global and accepting of future cultures outside of both an American and Japanese mindset. Studying Japanese economy both in the past and present presents itself as an example for other countries to follow. Learning about Japanese business practice and culture showed me a different view outside of American business practice that I have come to appreciate more than my home culture. It even led me to examine what other aspects of American society that I don't like and wish to improve upon using other cultures as a basis. Coming to a cultural hybridization zone specifically for Japanese culture also has helped me to learn more about a foreign culture and find comedy and entertainment that I enjoy more than some aspects of my own culture. Learning about Japanese culture has only been a positive aspect in my life and I feel that if others did so to, not only will they gain a new refreshing outlook on life both inwardly and outwardly, but they will also become able to accept other cultures as a whole no matter where they come from.

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