

The Dimensions of the U. S.—Japanese Cultural Conflicts Underlying the Trade Issue

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I. Introduction

Japan has long been ganged up against by the United States on the trade issue. True, America has experienced numerous frustrations and much resentment. The focus of contention was on automobiles in the Great Lake states. Currently attention has been focused upon electronics, telecommunication, pharmaceuticals, forest products, and quite recently, upon semiconductors. Thomas O'Neill, speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives said that 3,500 Americans are losing their jobs daily because of imported goods, calling for positive Japanese action to further open its market for foreign goods.¹⁾ But is it Japan alone that should face criticism? The United States is expected to be \$50 billion in the red in trade with Japan this year.²⁾ Does this suggest that a primary cause of America's trade deficit be the Japanese commercial aggressiveness and unfair trade practices?

Concerning the U. S. deficit, the point at issue, Martin Feldstein, the former chairman of President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers, made relevant comments on this issue:³⁾ "The Treasury has at last acknowledged that the overvalued dollar is the source of the overwhelming U. S. trade deficit. Under growing pressure for protectionist trade legislation, the Reagan administration has reassessed its policy trade

1) The Japan Times, Oct. 11, 1985.

2) ditto.

3) Martin Feldstein and Kathleen Feldstein, "U. S. Deficit and Dishonest Dollar," printed in The Japan Times, Oct. 8, 1985 from the Los Angeles Times.

and the dollar. The result has been the symbolic tough talk from the president about enforcing fair trade, and more important, the Treasury's implication that it is ready to intervene in international currency markets to force the dollar down.

The current huge trade deficit is not due to any fundamental weakness of American industry or to increases in the unfair practices of other nations.....”

Furthermore, Fred Barnes, a senior editor of *The New Republic*, also commented on this crucial subject in the *New York Times*:⁴⁾ “By misperceiving the trade issue, both Democrats and Republicans are flirting with trouble. The Democrats in particular have latched onto protectionism as a red, white and blue issue that appeals to rising nationalistic feelings. They see trade as a macho issue to use against Republicans in the 1986 Congressional elections. But they could wind up talking right past the votes, who are more interested in other issues.”

I shouldn't wonder if Japan is obliged to remain a scapegoat on trade nevertheless? Needless to say, I understand that Japan would court disaster if we Japanese should take the present U. S. anxiety over their increasing trade deficit for just mere emotionalism or hysteria on their part.

Unfortunately, however, the history of diplomatic relations between the U. S. and Japan has already shown that misunderstanding, discrimination, negative stereotyping and prejudice tend to increase when times are tense and there is a conflict over mutually exclusive goals. This is true whether the goals are economic, political, or ideological.⁵⁾

The trouble is that the organized labor unions as well as the politicians of the U. S. would try to attribute a cause of a conflict to the Japanese. The case was true of the issue of the Japanese immigrants in the United during the prewar days, which I'm going to document and discuss later.

4) Fred Barnes, “Who Cares About Trade?” *The New York Times*. Sep. 22, 1985.

5) Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal* (2nd ed., Freeman, 1976); 186-187.

II. Approaches of Politicians and Voters to Protectionism

“Is protectionism really the paramount political cause of the late 1980’s? A lot of politicians in Washington, Democrats and Republicans alike, think so, and they are clamoring for trade barriers. One California Congressman even attacked President Reagan for serving French wine at the White House.”⁶⁾

“But the rush to protectionism is based on two faulty premises. One is that foreign trade is an issue of intense concern to most Americans. It isn’t. The second is that Americans blame foreign imports for domestic economic woes. In truth, they don’t.”

These are quotes from Fred Barnes’ press comments on protectionism titled “Who Cares About Trade,?” and his greatest concern about the issue is whether the public supports trade barriers or opposes them. According to his researches, it has proved that the answer depends on how the question is asked.

For example, a pollster asked people if American should compete by making better products more efficiently rather than turning to tariffs. The result: 93% agreed, opposing tariffs. When he asked them if they backed a tariff on Japanese goods until Japan opens its markets to American goods. The result: 81% agreed, supporting tariffs.

Barnes says that contradictory results like these are common on what pollsters call “low salience issues,” about which the public knows and cares little. In a New York Times/CBS News poll in August, 1984, only 9% rated foreign trade their chief concern.

Besides these data, the American people do not blame Japan for the trade imbalance, according to Democratic pollster William R. Hamilton. “What we found was a public more inclined to blame an erosion of American values—the work ethic, a commitment to excellence, a spirit of cooperation—than the Japanese for our trade problems,” said Mr. Hamilton’s associate Gregory S. Shneiders.

6) Fred Barnes, “Who Cares About Trade?” The New York Times, Sep. 22 1985.

Of course, the politicians can't overlook the trade issue. They, Democrats in particular, will make the most and best of it to their political advantage, because voters have been angered by unfair obstacles to American imports overseas. But they don't want tariffs or import quotas imposed on the goods coming into the U.S. because they raise the price of Japanese cars and other major imports.

Despite the political pressure on the part of Democrats, President Reagan can appeal to traditional American values of fairness and accuse Democrats of isolating America and rekindling inflation.

Fred Barnes concluded his article contributed to the New York Times by emphasizing that Democrats might prevail over President Reagan in the short term, if they were given the support of business interests for protectionism, but that there's no evidence that the public is ready to reward them for it at the polls.

As I mentioned before, competition and conflict breed prejudice. When it comes to the conflicts between the dominant group and a minority group, the former would harbor negative feeling toward the latter, trying to exploit it in order to gain some material advantage, politicians will avail themselves of their prejudiced attitudes for their political campaign. Especially the competition and conflict between the dominant ethnic group and the minor one would pose a serious threat to the social stability of the nation of the immigrants, that is, the United States. Thus, it will be reasonable to get the issue into historic perspective in order to investigate the causes of misunderstanding, negative image, stereotypes and the prejudice which underlie the cultural conflicts between the United States and Japan.

III. The Immigration Issue: A Historic Perspective

The latter half of the 19th century saw a lot of Americans taking a hostile attitude toward the Oriental newcomers, demanding that their immigration be restricted or ended altogether. First, the settlers in California expressed alarm over the mass migration of Chinese coolies

who had been brought by the discovery of gold in 1849 and the consequent demand for cheap labour. Their low standards of living, long hours of labour, and traitability were said to constitute a serious menace to native labour. Their exotic appearance and culture—manners, customs, religion, language—as well as their obvious intention to return to China with their savings caused an anti-Chinese movement and racial prejudice. These factors which posed a serious threat to the natives were true of the Japanese immigrants who came to take over the Chinese after they had been excluded by a law in 1882. The prohibition of the Chinese laborers was extended in 1890 and again in 1902 until it became permanent. Thus, the Japanese immigrants, mostly from agrarian society, came to replace the Chinese coolies on the Central Pacific Railroad, but they gradually established themselves as farmers rather than as seasonal labourers.

As Roger Daniels pointed out, the population of the Japanese immigrants at its peak during the 1900's amounted to just 0.21% of the entire population of California, and 0.001% of the total population of the U. S. Though really small in number, they played a pioneer role in founding a Japanese society in the new lands. The U. S. national census of the year 1910 shows that the majority of the Japanese immigrants settled in the West Coast, with a population of over 57,000; some 10,000 in the Mountain States; 2,000 in the East and 80,000 in Hawaii.⁷⁾

The American hostility towards the Japanese who were willing to work longer hours of labour with lower wages culminated in discriminatory legislation and a demand for the prohibition of further Oriental immigration, taken up by the California Workingmen's party in 1900. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 brought about Japanophobia.

It was only thirteen months after the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth that the U. S. and Japan were brought to the brink of war by segregation of the small number of Japanese children in San Francisco in a single school. These "infernal fools in California," as Roosevelt

7) 細谷千博・本間長世編『日米関係史』摩擦と協調の130年（有斐閣1982）：202-203

called them, aroused violent anti-American feeling in Japan. It is noteworthy that the Board of Education as well as the city administration of San Francisco was under the control of the labour unions in those days. Japanese consul of San Francisco, Ueno made a protest against their policy of exclusion. President Theodore Roosevelt persuaded the mayor and school board to cancel their order. His part of bargain was to conclude the "gentleman's agreement" of 1907, in which the Japanese foreign office promised to discourage further emigration to the United States. That was followed by the Root-Takahira agreement of 1908 in which both countries reaffirmed the Open Door to China and promised to maintain the status quo in the Pacific. Yet, still a small stream of Japanese was flowing into the U.S., giving rise to the enactment of a series of laws 1911 through 1913 on the part of California and other Western states. These laws were designed to prevent Japanese from owning or leasing real estate. In spite of the fact that the Japanese farmers made a great contribution to the rise of American agricultural produce during World War I, the politicians backed up by the labour unions and their conformists put further pressure on the federal government to enact law of exclusion of Japanese to their political advantage.

Congress faced two basic alternatives: selection or exclusion, which was applied not only to the Japanese and the Asians, but also to other newcomers from the East and the South European states.

Agitation came from three disparate groups:⁸⁾

1. Most powerful was organized labour which had long looked upon the immigration of unskilled workers as a major threat.
2. Second were social reformers who had come to the conclusion that there could be no solution of the problems of slums, public health, and the exploitation of the poor as long as illiterate immigrants poured into the great cities.
3. The third were the traditionalists who had been taken in by the

8) Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, William E. Leuchtenburg. *A Concise History of American Republic* (2nd ed., Oxford Univ. Press 1983): 389-390.

doctrines of nordic supremacy and who deplored

Accents of menace alien to our air, Voices that once the Tower
of Babel knew. (by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, "Unguarded Gates")

From the politico-economic point of view, most influential and powerful was organized labour taken sides with by politicians, while the prejudiced attitude on the part of the traditionalists obsessed by racial supremacy over other minor ethnic groups has been at once a matter of no small significance for us all and one of the most important problems for social scientists to tackle.

Thus the roots of anti-Japanese sentiment go as far back as the turn of the century, most West Coast farmers and businessmen had welcomed Japanese immigrants for the same reason that other commercially minded Americans welcomed immigrants generally: they provided cheap labor. Until a federal quota of 1924 curtailed Oriental immigration, thousands of young Japanese men poured into the coastal towns and valleys, worked for years to amass savings, then wrote home for brides and settled down to raise families.⁹⁾ Indeed, Congress went out of its way to ban Japanese immigrants completely in 1924, overriding a "gentleman's agreement" which helped Japanese escape the exclusion of the Orientals by the Act of 1917 and also the enactment of the first quota law of 1921.

In light of the white discrimination in immigration toward the Japanese, Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes said, "Our friends in the Senate have in a few minutes spoiled the work of years and done last injury to our common country."¹⁰⁾

In other words, by its long record of racial prejudice, segregation in schools, prohibition of landholding, and discrimination in immigration, the United States managed to stockpile for itself a formidable arsenal of ill-will among the Japanese people.

The most prevailing image of the Japanese among the Americans on

9) This Fabulous Century 1940-1950 (Time-Life Books, New York 1969): 201-203.

10) Morison, Commager, Leuchtenburg. A Concise History of American Republic: 389-390.

the whole was that the Japanese would never be able to assimilate themselves to the North American way of life, no matter how hard they might try to learn English or dress themselves up after the fashion of the whites, and that the Japanese would remain as they were and remain loyal to the emperor and to their homeland forever.

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II exemplified the American prejudice against Japanese.

Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr. said, "In the light of the comparative toleration extended at least to the religious objector, the most serious victims of of wartime hate and hysteria were the Japanese Americans living along the Pacific coast and in the Hawaiian Islands. Although there was no case of espionage or sabotage by a single Japanese, citizen or noncitizen, all Americans of Japanese descent were evacuated from the Pacific coast, and military government was imposed upon the Hawaiian Islands, where Japanese Americans formed the largest single element in the population. Later, after the close of the war, the Supreme Court declared the army rule of Hawaii to have been illegal invasion of the rights of the inhabitants. But, in the case of the removal of the West Coast Japanese Americans, the Court refused to intervene."¹¹⁾

The American prejudice in favor of the Caucasians and against the Japanese in those days was so extreme that they were convinced that the "yellow peril" could not be such a peril without Caucasian assistance. For example, the U.S. Marines were amazed by the extraordinary proficiency of Japanese artillery on Southern Okinawa. Every road and other vital point was brilliantly targeted. So amazed were the Marines that a surmise became widespread: The Japanese must have German artillery advisers. Similarly, the brilliance of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had caused some American officials to suspect that the planes had been piloted by Germans.¹²⁾

11) Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr. *The Decline of American Liberalism* (Atheneum New York, 1976) : 305-306.

12) George Will, "Americans Keep Forgetting Pearl Harbor," Printed in the *Japan Times*, Apr., 14, 1985 from the *Washington Post*.

These anecdotes based on prejudice are too many to enumerate. Then, what are the causes of negative stereotypes and the prejudice underlying international strife?

III. Image, Stereotype and Prejudice

Image, stereotype and prejudice may be defined as follows.¹³⁾

Image : the composite public impression of a person, organization, or company due to its known procedures, philosophy, values

Stereotype : a set image ; a standardized or typical image or conception held by or applied to members of a certain group

Prejudice : an opinion, judgment, or evaluation, favorable or more often unfavorable, conceived without proof or competent evidence, but based on what seems valid to one's own mind ; a bias against a race, creed, group, or the like ; holding of such feelings ; harm or damage done to one by unreasonable action or judgment of another or others

Causes of Prejudice :¹⁴⁾

Prejudice is determined by a great many factors, and no single cause of prejudice is found.

The major determinants of prejudice are: (1) economic and political competition or conflict, (2) displaced aggression, (3) personality needs, and (4) conformity to existing social norms.

(1) Economic and Political Competition :

If resources are limited, the dominant group might attempt to exploit or derogate a minority group to gain some material advantage. Prejudiced attitudes tend to increase when times are tense and there is a conflict over mutually exclusive goals. This is true whether the goals are economic, political, or ideological.

13) The Lexicon Webster Dictionary (Encyclopedic Edition, 1971).

14) Elliot Aronson, The Social Animal (2nd ed., Freeman, 1976) : 184-196.

(2) Displaced Aggression :

There is a strong tendency for frustrated individual to lash out at the cause of his frustration. When the cause of a person's frustration is either too big or vague for direct retaliation, it may increase the probability his aggressing against a less powerful bystander—even if the bystander had nothing to do with his pain. This is the so-called "Scapegoat" theory of prejudice.

(3) Personality Needs :

There are individual differences in a general tendency to hate, but there are people who are predisposed toward being prejudiced, not because of immediate external influence, but because of the kind of people that they are. They are referred to as "authoritarian personalities" by Theodor Adorno and his associates. Their basic characteristics are: rigid in their beliefs; liable to possess "conventional" values; intolerant of weakness (in themselves as well as in others); highly punitive; suspicious; and they are respectful of authority to an unusual degree.

(4) Conformity to Existing Social Norms :

One of the greatest proportions of prejudiced behavior can be function of slavish conformity to social norms. In one study, it was found that, as Southerners entered the army and came into contact with a less discriminatory set of social norms, they became less prejudiced against blacks. Conformity to a prejudicial norm might simply be due to the unavailability of accurate evidence and preponderance of misleading information, leading people to adopt negative attitudes on the basis of hearsay.

IV. The Importance of Empathy

When the two cultures are very different from each other, just as in the case of the United States and Japan, misunderstanding is more common than understanding between them. Successful communication in cross-cultural communication requires not only a good knowledge of

the other's language and customs, but also of his thought patterns and values or goals. These four are the necessary elements:¹⁵⁾

1. Language
2. Customs, habits, life-styles, etiquette
3. Values, goals, principles
4. Patterns of thinking (emotional or logical)

In addition, one must learn that effective or successful communication is communicating with open ears, open eyes, and open mind, says Jack Seward in his book "How Japanese And Americans Communicate" just to the point. He also pointed out some of the bad habits of Japanese which may cause misunderstanding in dealing with foreigners. The three words—sleep, smile, silence—have been used to describe the Japanese who represent their country. According to his comments on "Japanese-style communication,"²⁴⁾ the first word "sleep" is about Japanese who close their eyes at international conferences and look as if they were sleeping. The second word "smile" is a comment on the Japanese habit of smiling at times when foreigners would not smile at all. The last word in the three-word description is "silence." Too often the Japanese are silent when they should speak up and give their frank opinions.

Thus, in cross-cultural communication we find it really difficult to successfully communicate, and so it is of great importance for us to identify values and to understand why people value things differently from what they value. In other words, we must empathize with others who live in situations and cultures which are different from our own. If we can extend sensitivity to different people in different cultures, we can help ourselves become more empathic.

V. Conclusion

In his article on "The U. S.—Japanese Business Communication and Mutual Understanding," Charles Yang suggests that we should perceive

15) Jack Seward, *How Japanese and Americans Communicate* (New Currents International, 1970): 10-11, 33-35.

just as the Americans do when we communicate with them while we should perceive just as the Japanese do when we communicate with the Japanese. Since we communicate with each other on the basis of different perception base, we are liable to misunderstand unless we have the identical perception base.

A Comparative Table of the Difference of Perception Base
between the U. S. and Japan¹⁶⁾

| Perception base (Japan) | Perception base (U. S.) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Organic | Systems |
| Vertical | Horizontal |
| Dualism | Unitarianism |
| Formalism | Pragmatism |
| Honor and Obligation | Contract |

It is clear that the perception base, as Dr. Yang describes it, between the Japanese and the Americans is basically so different that it appears to be really difficult for us to bridge the gap. We may wonder if the Japanese will be able to be internationally minded on the basis of multi-perception base.

But the Japanese have been adept at adopting large portions of the American mode of life, quite contrary to the biased image harbored by the whites that nothing would enable the Japanese to be assimilated into the North American culture. The best-known example of this is the learning and use of the English language. It is an absolute necessity here in Japan. You will come across a lot of institutes of foreign languages and English conversation schools, where quite a few native speakers of English, mostly Caucasians, teach high school graduates who are mainly young girls. These Americans make them very happy and look pretty complacent. Many businessmen, young and old, rush to the English teaching institutes after their tiresome work on the packed commuter trains, but a long, dull trip on a crowded Tokyo commuter train can be

16) Charles Yang「日米ビジネス・コミュニケーションと相互理解」, 徳川宗賢編『日米のコミュニケーション』南雲堂 (1985): 143-146.

turned into a real adventure by reading the messages on bags carried by fellow passengers. The Japanese are enthusiastic pro-baseball fans. The food that you receive once you succeed in ordering will leave you wondering if it is Japanese or Western. There will be a number of Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets as well as MacDonald's Restaurants in the big cities. They seem to combine, with remarkable equanimity, trips to Tokyo Disneyland with traditional Japanese cultures. Youngsters go to discos or jazz clubs at night, and study flower arrangement and tea ceremony to be a good Japanese wife. Thus some aspects of Japanese daily life appear to be more American.

Some Americans might look down upon these phenomena as mere apish mimicry. They may insist that it is the Japanese who are more prejudiced. That may be, but at least the Japanese would tend to be prejudiced in favor of the Western cultures.

Hopefully it would not be very long before the U.S. trade deficit with Japan is reduced, because the ingenious Americans would experience resentment to see these happy Japanese young men looking as if they had nothing to do with the problematic issue.

LDP's vice president Susumu Nikaido is paying a visit to Washington in an effort to alleviate the unfair trade imbalance between the U.S. and Japan.

These are very difficult times indeed for these allies. Nevertheless, we must always be reminded of the importance of empathy¹⁷⁾ by which I mean mental entrance into the feeling or spirit of another person or thing; appreciative perception or understanding. It will help us get rid of misunderstanding, negative stereotypes and the prejudice underlying our crisis, and prevent us from thinking that our way is the only one.

Thus, it may safely be said that a little understanding of other cultures will go a long, long way.

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