

# TYING PEOPLE INTO CIRCLES: JAPAN'S FUTURE IN LIGHT OF ITS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES

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Japan's possible futures, I suggest in this paper, may to a large extent be directed by the everyday models and strategies that Japanese people use to interact with one another, as well as other peoples from around the Asian region and wider world, in the years to come. Communication strategies, and the culturally-specific models of "the universe" and "the person" (inside the universe) on which they are based, lie at the heart of our ability to reach social consensus and meaning—our ability to belong and to contribute to social groups. By creating adhesion, but also serving to exclude those who do not share their patterns, communicative strategies thus both signal and constitute collective social identities, giving the essential interactive life to regions, cultures and nations.

Patterns of social reproduction and change, therefore, can be seen to hinge on whether existing metaphysical models, and communicative strategies linked to these, are seen to be unalterable, or whether new adaptable models, approaches and processes of integration and change are allowed to exist and take place. With this in mind, an enquiry into the relative flexibility or rigidity of Japanese communicative strategies—whether they can adapt to new demands for inclusion and exclusion both domestically and internationally—seems worthwhile in plotting the course of Japan's possible futures.

As I will argue, Japan's communicative strategies are deeply rooted in interpretations on how the universe is ordered, interpretations derived from East Asian traditions. These ideas, spelt out for many hundreds of years in canonic scriptures and instructions for

giving order and sense to life, can be characterized by their setting apart of individual existence from the will of personified God/gods—by not focusing on any personal relationship between God/gods and the individual. Clearly, such views of the universe stand in sharp contrast to, say, ideas fostered in Europe since post-medieval times which place God and the individual in symbiotic relationship to one another. One of the questions I will be posing here, then, is whether contrasts in the metaphysical foundations of communicative models lead to insurmountable difficulties in actual communication between Japan, its East Asian neighbours, and countries beyond.

For communication between Japan and "the West", i.e. the powers that dominated global development from around the 16th century onward, the Japanese have needed to cross communication barriers by whatever means possible, particularly for economic survival and growth. "The West" has, in contrast, comparatively less experience in crossing such barriers in the opposite direction, which, rather unfairly, puts a heavy burden on Japan to seek adequate communicative strategies for global interaction.

However, today changes in the economic and social proximity of countries around the globe are rapidly bringing the Japanese into new networks of communication within East Asia itself. In the light of relatively recent calls to reach a new level and scale of interaction with countries with which it can be said to share basic metaphysical models, I will predict that while Japan may increasingly *seek* to recognize itself as part of a region-wide "Asian" culture, such efforts are fraught with difficulties rooted in vastly differing communicative strategies and interpretations of metaphysical place. This is in contrast to—as I will show in the first part of this paper—relatively predictable and consistent patterns of communicative interaction within Japan itself.

There are many pertinent questions which arise from this enquiry: how will Japan consolidate over a century's worth of efforts at putting *datsu-a nyû-ô* into practice—the movement to "break out of Asia and become part of the West"<sup>1</sup>—with newfound needs to adopt a more regional membership? Will such regional membership make it easier for Japan to communicate within the borders of East Asia, or have respective recent histories set metaphysical worldviews and communicative strategies off in a direction which will

make it difficult for Japan and other Asian countries to genuinely engage with one another for a long time to come? I shall not have the space to fully address these questions here, but I hope to use them to emphasize the vital role played by metaphysical concepts, and the communication strategies to which they give life, in determining the quality of a society's image of itself and thus its relationship to other societies and peoples.

#### **TYING PEOPLE INTO CIRCLES—INTERPERSONAL JAPANESE COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES**

What concepts prepare a person emotionally and shape his/her communication patterns for life and work as an adult? I shall here take a look at normative materials—materials which present the reader with established patterns and models for how to communicate and behave based on the assumption that adhering to them will bring success and happiness. Each year, large quantities of these normative materials are published in Japan to help university graduates find employment and adjust to the demands of "serious" life, i.e. life which is, in the normative Japanese view, behaviour "invested" with a view to being rewarded by income.

Granting and being granted income is a closed circuit of giving and taking; the successful management of interpersonal relationships, *ningen kankei*, thus becomes the central focus of normative materials instructing young people how to turn into a successful, money-earning adult. The Japan Productivity Center's "Freshman Series" materials argue as follows:

The first thing you need to understand is that a working place is where many different people are present. In contrast to school, you will find people in their teens as well as people in their sixties; in contrast to school comrades, people form vertical relationships; in contrast to school, you need to establish relationships with people you do not find sympathetic; in contrast to school, you must always understand the position of the other party. (Uchida 1990: 2)

Understanding what it means to be part of a network of many people—of many *different* people—is an important condition for success in adult life. Uchida goes on to stress that these many different people do not only have different jobs and tasks, different backgrounds, different experiences in life, but above all also different characters: calm, harmonious, seeking to take an initiative, difficult, considerate, proud, gentle, treacherous, etc. (1990: 3).

The acceptance and integration of such differences rather than the creation of a standard "company personality", is thus the guiding principle both for success as an individual as well as for the thriving of a group or company. A "worst case" is when an individual is not able to relate to others (Uchida 1990: 8). Instructions for uniform *external* signals of communication—for instance, being "cheerful and frank" (*akaruku sotchoku*)—do not imply the absence of differences, but, on the contrary, serve to integrate and channel differences that are taken as the given reality.



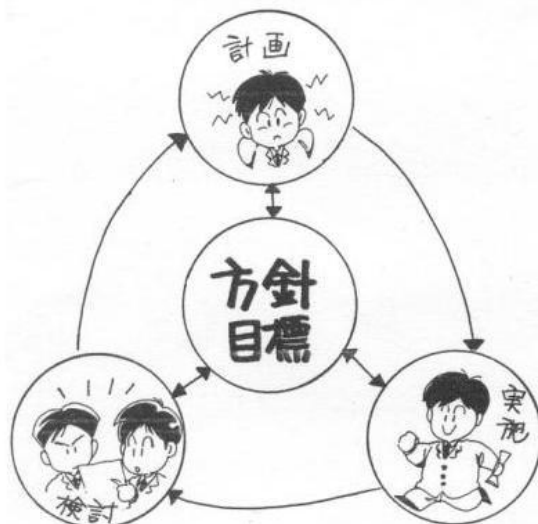
SKSH 2000: 5 Illustration HERE

In an illustration in the Japan Productivity Center's volume on the topic "work" (SKSH 2000: 5), we are shown a young man thinking of his job. He is surrounded by visions of

extremely different types of faces, and is advised to be considerate towards: a rather unkempt looking "same-age colleague" (*dôryô*) with a miserable expression; a neat but stressed looking "elder colleague" (*sempai*); a fat and comfortable "superior" (*jôshi*); a grumpy and almost bald elder "superior" (*jôshi*); and a "Miss A" (*A-ko san*) with rather voluminous hair.

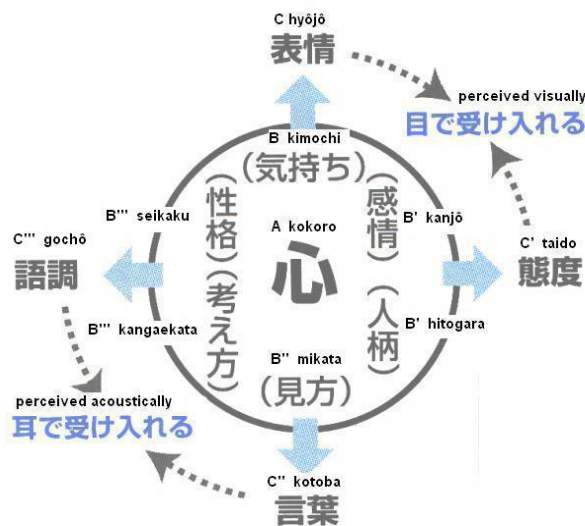
The message seems clear: doing your job means being tied into a circle of ranks and personalities that are never "standard" but contribute, each from a different position, to a common point of reference following clear rules of action and communication.

Illustrations and discussions of circles and ties between persons in the material are ubiquitous. They deal, for instance, with correct ways of, and the correct facial expression for reporting and passing around information; for planning, doing, and checking a task in relation to a given plan (*hôshin*) and target (*mokuhyô*); for the basic structure of communication running around in a circle from "Person A understanding" to "Person B understanding" and back and indicating processes of conveying (*dentatsu*) and reacting (*hannô*); or for the seating arrangements in many different kinds of meetings and conferences (SKSH 1991 and SKSH 2000). The circles are always closed, and a person doing something is never presented as "active", but always as "interactive".



SKSH 2000: 37 Illustration HERE

As an illustration in SKSH (2000: 37) shows, circles not only characterize the integration of distinct individuals into social entities, they also serve to illustrate that all activity is cyclic in nature and always a step in a chain of cause and effect. Thus we see, around a point of reference marked "plan and target", a person (with sparks coming from the head) planning something. This person is connected by arrows to another person (running about) doing something. In turn, this person is connected by arrows to two people (one with a strict face, one with raised eyebrows) checking something. And, finally, and importantly, the circle is closed by arrows back to the person planning something.



Kanai Illustration HERE

The same concept of a closed and integrated circle formed around a point of reference to interpersonal relationships or activity finds a somewhat different usage in a description in Kanai (1997: 25) of the "inner" (A) and "outer" (C) person. In the center is the "heart" (A) (*kokoro*). The heart is shown to give rise to a frame of mind (*kimochi*) (B), and on the surface (C) this is visible to others in the form of a person's expression (*hyōjō*). "Heart (A) - frame of mind (B) - expression (C)" begin to move in a circle, arriving first at the constellation where the heart (A) gives rise to feelings (*kanjō*) and these to character (*hitogara*) (B'), visible to others in the form of "attitude as behaviour" (*taido*) (C'). From here the circle moves on to reach the constellation where the heart (A) gives rise to a certain view of things (*mikata*) (B''), this now being audible to others through words

(*kotoba*) (C"). Then the circle moves on to the constellation where the heart (A) gives rise to an entire personality (*seikaku*) with a specific way of thinking (*kangaekata*) (B""), this being perceivable to others through the tone of voice (*gochô*) (C"). From here, the circle is closed by returning—always in a relationship of cause and effect—back to the constellation "Heart (*kokoro*) (A) - frame of mind (*kimochi*) (B) - expression (*hyôjô*) (C)".

Holger Bungsche, citing normative materials from the 1980s in his study "From Freshman to Middle Management", gives numerous other examples of closed circles in popular use in Japan; for instance:

The reason for a company's existence is to make profits, this secures its existence, this helps it grow further, this contributes to social welfare, and this again is the reason for the company's existence (Bungsche 2004: 81).

Being conscious as "one member (*ichi-in*) of an organization" relates an individual to customers, this to goals, this to the effective and efficient use of time, this to effective and efficient teamwork, this to continuous improvement, this to costs, and this finally back to the consciousness as "one member of an organization" (Bungsche 2004: 89).

Prosperity and success in private life is linked to one's assimilation in an organization, this to its functioning, this to its prosperity, this to oneself, this to a well-ordered life, and this back to prosperity and success in private life (Bungsche 2004: 99).

A person's own relationship to the activities that determine life is also illustrated by circles in a variety of normative materials. Thus for Suzuki (1990: 133), the "self" is completely encircled by demands, expectations and information emanating from others. Forming a closed circle around "self" as point of reference are sources of information such as books, TV and videos, schools, seminars and correspondence courses, diversions, travel,

study groups inside and outside the firm, friends, having lunch, pubs, assignments, work, on-the-job-training, or being taught. Even "self-determined training" is graphically *fixed* inside the closed circle.

A male student in a provincial town in Kyûshû in 2004 reflected upon the cyclic understanding of what constitutes life as follows: "If I were a company employee," he said, "I would be pressured to get married, because only then a company can be sure that I will work hard." In other words, if a person is married, his private life is regulated and therefore his attitude towards the working place stable. Conversely, a stable attitude towards the working place needs stability and emotional security in private life, i.e. in married life. There is no open end to this cyclic argument, culminating in the demand for the young man to get married.

How will the present Japanese behavioral and communicative strategies which seek to tie people into circles be able to adapt in the face of other patterns of identity and corresponding "ideal images of the human being" (*ningenzô*) that global flows of information, communication, and exchange bring into circulation? How will these systems react to a world of diverse options in the ordering of these patterns?

One possible scenario is that Japan will generally insist upon maintaining the ties and circles system which it sees as guaranteeing success and efficiency by keeping interpersonal chains of cause and effect in balance. Should this ideal of balance be questioned and/or difficult to maintain, however, Japan could well react by severely tightening the pressure on, and control over, the members of circles for ever more efficiency and productivity. This, I would add, is perhaps already happening, potentially leading to problems in the development of self-determined communicative ability.

Japan is well aware both of the necessity to adapt to a changing and globalizing world and to come to terms with what it sees as the communicative deficits of its own people. Accordingly, education for international understanding (*kokusai rikai kyôiku*) is receiving a high level of attention. Here, perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of international understanding follows a cyclic model, again with the "self" tied into an inescapable network of cause and effect. The first step is always "Understanding Self" (*jiko rikai*). From here one moves on to meeting and then "Understanding Someone Else" (*tasha rikai*). However, understanding someone else is not the end of a linear process; completion of the circle is required. Thus "Understanding Someone Else" leads to "Establishing Self" (*jiko kakuritsu*) and "Reforming/Changing Self" (*jiko henkaku*), and this finally to "A New Self" (*arata na jiko*). The process of international understanding is thus thought of as a closed circle from "Self" (*jiko*) back to "Self" (*jiko*) (Tanikawa et al. 1996: 37).

In one concrete example, international understanding adheres to the following cyclic pattern: "You introducing your own culture to the other side," and then "Having the others tell you about their culture" within the frame of "a heartwarming gathering" (*kokoro atatamaru shûkai*). "In the process it is important that you—being Japanese—present a positive picture of your own culture" (*nihon no yosa wo shôkai suru*) (Tanikawa et al. (1996: 34)). International understanding thus is not perceived to be a dialectic matching of differences, but the establishment of a locked circle of individuals continuously "renewing" themselves. In this circle the other culture with all its idiosyncrasies is firmly tied into a relationship with Japan's own culture, but with the expectation that one's own efforts will be appreciated and repaid within a predictable pattern of exchange.

This structure of expectations in the concept of "education for international understanding" does hold some risks. For one thing, the materials cited assume, and educate towards, the reliable functioning of communication along the lines set out in Japan's own normative materials. Beyond that they emphasize portraying yourself in a rosy light. Together this leaves Japanese trainees at a loss as to what to do should the opposite side question the efforts and positive achievements of a (Japanese) "self", and/or show no interest in pursuing circle-oriented aims. In such attempts, Japan assumes a ceremony in which everyone takes a place in a circle, when the other side may see no circle and have no idea what place to take in one.

The potential for friction exists most in interaction with individuals who hail from cultural backgrounds that do not offer, or emphasize, cyclical, contextual, models of existence. However, what can be said of communication with cultures with which Japan shares a common historical heritage?

#### **EAST ASIAN CONCEPTS OF ORDER**

Confucianism is commonly thought of as responsible for shaping the configuration of interpersonal relationships and thus communication in East Asia in general, and in Japan in particular. It is true that normative materials used in Japan well into the mid 20th century to foster "proper" behavior echoed Confucian moral precepts or were themselves passages from the Confucian Classics.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, school books from the first half of the 20th century make unmistakably clear that at the time Shintoism—which we today tend to associate with ceremonies and rituals related to life, growth and purity—conveyed the basic Confucian concepts in the form of "The correct Way of Sincerity" (*makoto no seidô*). This "Correct Way", as it had been outlined in the Confucian Classics, was defined in Japan as the Way of the Gods (*kami no michi,shintô*), and it was understood to bind all living things into relationships of loyalty and piety, with the emperor—allegedly related to the sun goddess and therefore the representative of the heavenly sphere—as the central point of reference.

This Confucianism, which entered the lives of those generations that built up Japan as a modern, industrial nation largely in the form of Shinto,<sup>3</sup> regards everything between heaven and earth as complementary. In this closed circle a human being does not stand outside the laws of cause and effect; also, he or she is under no obligation towards a transcendent "creator", who might personally give an individual a mission or promise a reward. There is thus no legitimization for anyone to disengage from the law of the universe, which is a closed circle of giving and taking in a context of eternal change.

It is open to some doubt, however, whether Confucianism, including the "Shintoized"

Confucianism just described, was quite as decisive as is often assumed in shaping everyday Japanese life. Rather, much goes to suggest that human activity and relationships were structured to a high degree by the tradition of thinking in terms of good or bad fortune (*kichi* and *kyô*). Many people in Japan, we can say, do not see themselves as passive victims of fate, but believe that they can do a lot to bring about *kichi* and protect themselves from *kyô*. This concern, I maintain, decisively shapes the structure of Japanese communicative behaviour. But does it too point to a cyclic world view of interdependency?

What, we should ask at this point, can a person concretely undertake to do so as not to become a passive victim of fate? This question draws our attention to tables outlining the laws of the universe. Such tables—in the form of closed circles (!)—are ubiquitous in Japan and form the major content of the books and pamphlets sold at temples and shrines.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, they are related to the contents of the *Yi Jing* (The Book of Changes), which in turn is one of the Confucian Classics, and in essence they derive from that body of fundamental information on the principles of the universe known as *Onmyô* (or *Inyô*) *Gogyô* ([The theory of] Yin and Yang and the Five Elements).

This is not to say that everybody cares much about the contents of the booklets and tables on sale at shrines and temples. However, these materials spell out, for whoever wishes to take note, a pattern and orientation of life which without doubt almost everyone in Japan has internalized on some level, and as such makes up a large part of Japan's cultural heritage. Indeed, according to Honda (1978: 5) the *Yi Jing* itself can be described as explaining *uchû wo ugokashite iru michi* (the Way that moves the universe), *hito no ikiru michi* (the Way of human life), and *tenka kokka wo osameru michi* (the Way of political order).

Peering into another of Japan's possible futures, it is noteworthy that younger generations are consciously seeking information on old heritage, and quite particularly the heritage that patterned the lives of the "common" people in their search of good fortune. Accordingly, the Edo period—17th to mid 19th centuries, the time before "Shintoized" Confucianism and State Shinto—is at long last receiving attention, as are details of the *Onmyô Gogyô* teachings. Thus, as the "Shintoized" Confucianism of the 19th and 20th

centuries, which accounted for much that made the Japanese think of themselves as unique, fades into the past, Japan's young generation opens up to "East Asian heritage" in a relatively relaxed way.

Two questions need to be pursued from here: First, in what way does the *Onmyō Gogyō* system concretely account for a world view that ties everything and everyone into a cyclic flow of energy? Second, is this very central element of Japan's East Asian heritage capable of bridging the existing rift between Japan and its East Asian neighbours?

According to Seda (2003: 195), *Onmyō Gogyō* as it developed in Japan integrated "anything and everything" (*nandemo*) that would serve individuals and society to foretell the future, choose a path to good fortune, and prevent misfortune. Though originally in the hands of court officials, who used it to make political and strategic decisions and uphold the authority of those in power, it had spread throughout all levels of the population by around 1200. An important aspect of its success was not only that it promised good fortune, but especially also good health and longevity.

The basic idea is simple: The universe is made up of five elements (*gogyō*)<sup>5</sup> arranged cyclically, bringing each other forth in a never-ending chain of cause and effect. Everything in the universe can be attributed to these five elements, while the energy (*ki*) to keep the cycle in motion and regulate growth and decay is generated through the position of two complementary genders, one "receiving" (*yin*, Jap. *in* or *on*), and one "giving" (*yang*, Jap. *yō*). The bi-polarity of flowing energy, working to keep all things constantly changing, is the mechanism that brings forth everything. In particular, the *Onmyō Gogyō* idea gives a clear structure to time and space, which can always be defined by the relative positions of a "receiving" and a "giving" point within the circle of change. By mapping the constellation of elements in the circle, man feels he can do a lot to foretell the future, prevent misfortune, and secure happiness.

In short, whatever occurs does so within a coordinate system that ties together every individual point and relates it to another point in the system. This idea is so basic that it

underlies all specific teachings brought to Japan, be they Buddhism,<sup>6</sup> Daoism or Confucianism.<sup>7</sup>

It may be noted that this idea of tying things into one overall organism, which will only function if its individual elements are integrated in a complementary fashion according to a pre-defined, non-negotiable, standard, can also be seen in all sorts of modern Japanese concepts of efficiency, one example being the amazing seriousness with which questions of correct matching of blood types (*ketsueki-gata*) are discussed (Nomi 2004).

Thus, as I have tried to demonstrate, "Tying people into circles" is a firm part of East Asian heritage and the reflection of a concept of how to guarantee, maintain, and most efficiently put to use energy, vitality, good fortune, as well as the myriad constellations that arise when elements (persons) possessing each a distinct individuality enter into complementary relationships. Given this fundamental shared take on the metaphysical, communicative and behavioral foundations of life, can we predict that Japan will seek out and find a new sense of regional place at least in a wider East Asian network of exchange, following the concepts common to all East Asian cultures that share the transmission of the *Yi Jing* and the *Onmyô Gogyô*?

#### **WILL JAPAN FIND A NEW PLACE IN A WIDER EAST ASIAN NETWORK OF COMMUNICATION?**

The question is not a simple one to address. For one thing, East Asian heritage in Japan has for geographical reasons consisted mainly of book knowledge, possibilities for direct interpersonal communication on Japanese soil having been very limited. Thus "East Asian" concepts of universal order found distinctly Japanese forms of interpretation, legitimization and institutionalization. Furthermore, we cannot speak of a scenario in which "Japan finds its way back to East Asia", as this "East Asia" has not been a static entity. East Asia is not something to which one can return, and today represents far more than the "essence of East Asian cultural heritage".

I have not the space for a comprehensive discussion on all aspects and areas of this far-reaching topic. I shall therefore only outline a few of the problems Japan must face with respect to mainland China, the power that is changing the balance of communicative networks in East Asia most significantly.<sup>8</sup>

There are an increasing number of books in Japanese written by Chinese authors seeking to explain to a Japanese readership how they see Japan in comparison to their own, Chinese background. One noteworthy expression that keeps coming up in materials by Chinese authors from the People's Republic is *kenkoku irai* ("since the founding of our state, in 1949") (e.g. Ri 2004). This suggests that for these authors, what was before the "founding of the state" (*kenkoku*) apparently belongs to another world and is hardly seen as relevant to modern reality.<sup>9</sup> We may understand this view as reflecting values that have been implanted through education in the People's Republic of China. As we know, all nation states take education to be largely the formation of good national citizens, so we can assume that Chinese thinking is far more geared to the reality of the People's Republic as a nation than to East Asian cultural heritage.<sup>10</sup> Seen from this angle, there may be an almost unbridgeable gap between China and Japan, because seen as national projects these two countries have almost nothing in common.

Authors like Amako Satoshi are therefore quick to point to the high degree of distrust between the Chinese and Japanese, which they see as having taken on drastic dimensions because for decades no open flow of information and no relaxed personal exchange were allowed (Amako 2003: 18f). Amako remains rather unspecific, however, about what it might mean that a) Chinese knowledge of Japan is still not developed enough to prevent large segments of Chinese society to continue seeing Japan as a kind of "devil", and that b) since the 1990s China's teachers' manuals have called for a strengthening of patriotic education which outlines the "brutality of Japanese imperialism" in greater detail than before.<sup>11</sup>

On a more optimistic note, the enormous increase of internet access and cell phones in recent years, coupled with more freedom to travel and more money to spend by China's

young generation, may now be creating higher levels of trust through the possibility for direct interpersonal communication (Amako 2003: 150f). Amako therefore pursues the vision that what nations say about each other might someday no longer be relevant, as profit-oriented give-and-take becomes a new, integrating force (Amako 2003: 213f). Let me add that we should also not overlook the potential of "generation-specific values", which don't have much to do with East Asian heritage, and are globally shared and exchanged mainly by young people across cultures and nations (see White, 2004).

It is noteworthy that Amako envisages a Chinese-Japanese relationship eventually settling into a pattern of being "tied". In this scenario China needs Japan for its know-how and experience as much as Japan needs China for its market and for economic development (Amako 2003: 127f). In the eyes of Amako, therefore, Japan's possible future could be determined by increased private communication and the perspective of common gain (on a person-to-person basis or on the level of NGOs), working to integrate China and Japan in the long run.

Nevertheless, Amako is not alone warning that the differences in communicative style and the particular norms for "tying people into frameworks" in Japan remain as formidable barriers. The many differences on this level between China and Japan cannot be fully discussed here.<sup>12</sup> Two aspects, however, that can decisively influence communicative behaviour and may account for much that today separates Japan from China, should be touched upon in more detail. Both are receiving emphasis from Chinese authors and have much to do with the perception of "self" as tied into a circle, on the one hand by ritual, and on the other by Buddhist notions.

According to Ri Keihô, formalized body movement and bowing (*o-jigi*), and formalized use of expressions to accompany activity, are particularly astonishing for Chinese in Japan (Ri 2004: 16 f, 93 f). For Ri, in other words, the Japanese "self" fits itself into a circle of persons and activities in a programmed, formalized manner.

As for Buddhist notions, they are arguably one of the strongest emotional forces

intentionally structuring mental and physical activity that relates an individual to his/her context. For Ri (2004: 59 f), already the external appearance of a Japanese town is "foreign" on account of its many temples, shrines, or little Jizô figures. "The Chinese are deeply puzzled," she says, "that a technologically advanced country like Japan should be so peculiarly superstitious, believing in gods that don't exist" (Ri 2004: 60). In the highly subjective view taken by Ri (2004: 63), Chinese have been trained never to fear metaphysical dimensions and to see the individual as holding all power in his/her own hands. Accordingly, Ri also notes that the Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) in Japanese households are strange to her, as are rituals for the deceased (Ri 2004: 185).

Repeatedly, authors like Ri point out that "China is a Confucian culture" and a "Confucian world" (*jukyô bunka, jukyô sekai*), and although many Chinese appear to be aware that China, like Japan, understood itself as spiritually rooted in the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism (Ri 2004: 50), they see only the Confucian tradition as able to create a social adhesion relevant for understanding modern China. By "Confucian tradition", however, Ri clearly does not imply notions of strict decorum and ritual that regulate the exchange between two complementary individual units in a closed circle. Rather, she is speaking about loyal and affectionate feelings that have grown inside a family unit and can be extended into the public dimension, where they eclipse abstract and "inhuman" logic and law (Ri 2004: 90).

In contrast to this, the individual in Japan appears far more guided by stern observations of "self" in the tradition of Buddhist practice (*shugyô*), which includes the notion of hardship as a way to enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, "tying others", as well as "being tied into a circle", is emotionally sustained by the idea of training and being trained by "pain and suffering" (*ku*)<sup>14</sup> and the need to bear this *ku* with responsibility (*sekinin*) and diligence (*kinben*). Seen from China, Ri does not identify herself with this attitude of "being diligent to the end of one's life" (*shôgai kinben*) and sees this as "typically Japanese" (Ri 2004: 79).

In Japan, a concept of order that will guarantee success and good fortune, and the belief that this order can be maintained through carefully establishing correct formal

relationships within a circle of taking and giving, has made observation of the necessary rules and prescriptions seem fairly natural. Given still tangible traditions of Buddhist thinking, "correct formal relationships within a circle" can also be extended to "non-visible forces" (*me ni mienai chikara*) such as Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, *kami* ("gods"), or to deceased family members or charismatic persons that will all help secure success and good fortune.<sup>15</sup>

Buddhism is an important element of socialization in Japan. Many stories in children's books, for instance, tell of heroic priests and monks who learnt to accept reality as it is (*ari no mama*) as a kind of Buddhist training.<sup>16</sup> This is described as the basis for decisive but calm and peaceful action. Widespread are also Buddhist materials for guidance in life. One example, Akane (1989: 156), speaks of accepting the facts of reality and seeking inner development through establishing "human relationships of respect (*sonkei*) and trust (*shinrai*), and, within these, receiving and giving the highest thinkable degree of devotion to one's task" (*tsukusu, tsukusareru*).

## CONCLUSION

What, then, can be expected in Japan's possible futures with respect to its global integration into diverse networks of communication? As I have argued, very fundamental differences exist between Japanese assumptions about "the universe", "the person" (inside the universe), and the concomitant communicative strategies on the one hand, and the assumptions of individuals with cultural backgrounds that do not offer, or emphasize, cyclical, contextual models of existence on the other. However, also East Asian values seem unlikely to form a solid basis for communicative exchange. This will be an upsetting realization for those—especially in Japan itself—who count upon "common Asian values" for being able to proceed with cultural, political or economic plans. Moreover, also onlookers from the West, who often care little about the differences between Asian countries they perceive to be simply "Confucian" or "Buddhist", might feel upset if they realize that their overly simplistic ideas about "East Asian heritage" will probably not close the gap between China and Japan.

For Japan itself, illusions about East Asia might be difficult to overcome. The distance to Western concepts of communication may have been underestimated on the basis of the (false) assumption that communication anywhere in the world can be understood as a flow of energy within a locked circle of complementary units. Yet even in the wider East Asian region itself the effort—and the suffering—invested in creating and maintaining closed flows of energy within circles of complementary units is unlikely to find the recognition and reward it seeks, as the accompanying Buddhist values are probably not shared by most of the other East Asian peoples today.

If Amako's visions for Japan's future are realized, though, Japan will try to do just that: "invest all energy and all the suffering it possibly can" (*tsukusu*) to uphold order, virtue and decorum (Amako 2003: 210), to put to the best use the awareness that people need to help each other (Amako 2003: 214), and to become an appealing, fascinating country once again (*'miriyoku aru kuni nihon' no saisei*) (Amako 2003: 217).

This could work out internally in Japan, thanks to the powerful mechanisms—no doubt rooted in East Asian values—of tying people into circles, and doing so with a high potential to integrate differences of rank and disposition, as described in the first half of this paper. But it may not be a successful strategy if persons from other countries, even if they have common cultural roots in the same East Asian values, are to be tied into the circles too.

I thus foresee a continuation of Japan's tendency to fall back onto itself. As I have tried to show, Japan is—and also perceives itself to be—internally strong and integrating enough to achieve outstanding goals, yet at the same time the country's global voice will remain weak, and those who deal with Japan will continue to have to invest considerable efforts to become tied into a comfortable relationship.

However, those in Japan who have not much to gain from "investing energy and suffering" to tie and become tied into circles, and who have little to rely upon besides just their own individual skills and potentials—for instance ambitious career women, or persons with multi-faceted cultural experience and competent in the use of code-switching techniques

—will in the course of time form an elite of winners. What may need to happen is: An all-out effort to increase the size of this elite.

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## NOTES



<sup>1</sup> The basis for this concept was provided by the Iwakura Mission to the U.S. and Europe 1871-1873 and a publication by Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1885. However, it was not until after Japan's victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 that the idea of *datsu-a nyû-ô* began to carry weight.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. de Bary 1989; Li 1986, Dore 1984. Note should also be taken of the efforts during the Edo period (1603-1867) to translate the Neo-Confucian discourse into terms that could be understood by "common" people, and the transmission of Confucian values through vernacular literature; c.f. for instance Sawada 1993.

<sup>3</sup> The internationally known expression Shinto is used here; Jap. *shintô*.

<sup>4</sup> The most important source—though probably not the one people resort to today—describing the laws of the universe is the Book of Changes (Chinese: *Yi Jing*, in Japanese usually: *Shûeki*). The Book of Changes deals with the rules derived from the myriad changes taking place in the universe (Li 1986: 67) and was frequently cited in Japanese school books until the mid 20th century.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, fire, earth, metal, water; wood giving birth to fire, fire to earth, earth to metal, metal to water, water to wood etc.

<sup>6</sup> The most important Buddhist teaching shaping the concept of an overall one-ness of all things, internally structured by elements arranged in a network of cause and effect and "brought to life" by bi-polar, complementary energies, is presumably Esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyô*), which played an outstanding role in the context of healing and the maintenance of health, life and good functioning of things.

<sup>7</sup> Particularly the "priesthood" that took on the task of exorcizing evil spirits, purifying geographical locations, and providing protection against misfortune made full use of the *Onmyô Gogyô* teachings, which guaranteed the highest probability that their rituals would be effective. In this sense we can speak of *Onmyô Gogyô* as the basis for dealing with "gods and spirits", i.e. of historical Shinto.

<sup>8</sup> Taiwan and Hong Kong must in so far be included in what is meant by "China" here as they have passed through a comparable history of disruption and discontinuity and have also been decisively shaped by a refugee population.

<sup>9</sup> A specific emphasis on the effects of "Japan's imperialist past" cannot be seen as entirely independent from the values of post-1949 China.

<sup>10</sup> Of course the same fact holds good for Japan, but here we must look to the 1870s and 1880s to find an equally severe cut with the past, which was in quality of quite a different nature to China's in 1949.

<sup>11</sup> [www.yomiuri.co.jp](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp), May 5, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> To a certain extent very specifically Japanese verbal as well as non-verbal behaviour might be seen as having been shaped by the traditional Japanese house and the influence of a Japanese *tatami* room on posture, comportment, taking off shoes and a concomitant sense of inside and outside.

<sup>13</sup> Here it is not possible to pursue the question why these Buddhist notions appear relatively strong in Japan. The fact should not be ignored, though, that persons of high social standing throughout the Edo period and ever since have tended to emphasize the Confucian values of duty in complementary constellations, and frowned upon Buddhism, especially in its popular forms. However, it is just the force of the popular forms of Buddhism that needs to be considered here. We should take note of the high degree to which Buddhist notions have been used to shape business and industry in Japan, reflecting the popular Buddhist values passed down in the often rural communities from where the founders and leaders of many of Japan's major companies hail.

<sup>14</sup> *ku* is not the word popularly used to indicate "suffering, hardship", but it is implied in expressions like *kurushii* (difficult, strenuous, trying, painful) or *kurô* (hardship, worry, trouble), both containing the character for *ku*.

<sup>15</sup> An illustration showing the inclusion of deceased family members in a hand-drawn chart can be found in Caillet 1991: 303.

<sup>16</sup> For example: Yamamoto 1958-1972.