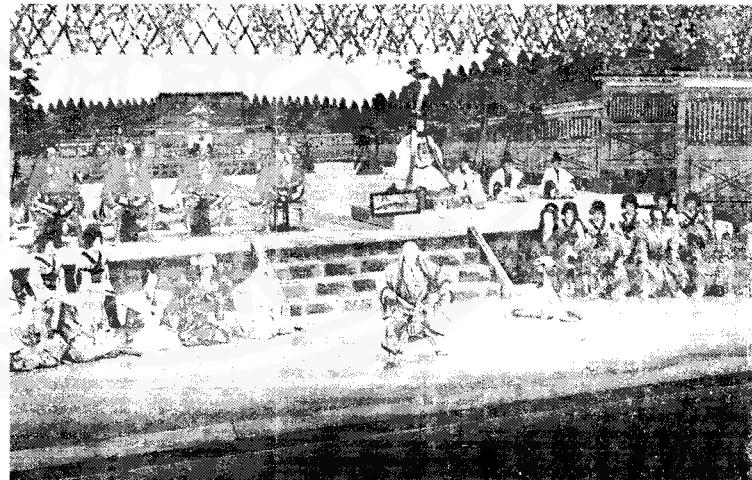


# Japan Facing the Challenges : Cultural Exchange, Internationalization and Beyond

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**The sharp increase in Japanese economic influence and its globalization has finally forced Japanese leaders to move their thinking from the policy guideline of cultural exchange to internationalization. This new guideline covers both the cultural and the economic dimensions. Cultural exchange will be further given high priority and promoted to enable the Japanese to be exposed more to other cultures. Economically, foreign commodities from the advanced countries, NIC's and developing countries will have a comparatively easier access to Japanese markets. Internationalization policy has enriched Japanese people's culture and consumption. The Japan Foundation and the Ministry of Education have been preoccupied with the task of promoting the cultural exchange while MITI and other agencies have worked towards the opening of Japanese markets. Now every body in Japan often talks about internationalization. An interesting question to be raised is how cultural friction and economic friction are related to each other in Japan's relations with the outside world.**

A Japanese senior economist Mr. Nagasada Miyawaki, Executive Director of Japan Economic Research Institute discussed the problem of the relationship between economic friction and cultural difference. He asked, “.....*If economic friction does indeed stem from cultural difference, and if there can be no solving the former without removing the latter ....., there can be no fundamental solution.....*”<sup>1</sup> Professor Kenichiro Hirano of the University of Tokyo suggested that we should strictly distinguish cultural matters from legal, political and economic matters in international friction and conflict. He pointed out that “*Recently it appears that often in cases of international complications, both sides claim that matters are cultural, that is to say, particular to their own cultures, simply to avoid unfavorable solutions.*”<sup>2</sup> With these conceptual suggestions in mind, let us move our discussion to some problems of the internationalization of Japan.

Efforts by Japanese government and leaders in the internationalization of Japan have been highly evaluated in Thailand and elsewhere. Economically, Thai commodities have been penetrating more into Japanese markets. Boneless chicken which Thailand is a major exporter was reduced from the 14% tariff rate to 12%. Thai jewelry and agro - industrial products became aggressive in entering the Japanese markets. On the other hand, Thai - Japanese cultural relations

have been much appreciated in both Thailand and Japan. Their historical relations dated back as far as 600 years ago. In 1987, the peoples in the two countries celebrated the centenial of the opening of diplomatic relations in the modern era.

Despite the above celebrated efforts, we must be aware that the overpresence of Japanese business in Thailand is very conspicuous to any foreign visitors. The streets are flooded with Japanese cars and the houses of Thai families are filled with Japanese electric appliances. The new wave of Japanese investment in Thailand following the yen appreciation in 1985 intensified the problem of overpresence. The number of Japanese project applications for investment promotion privileges from Thai government has jumped from 30 in 1986 to 54 in 1987 and to 140 during the first nine months of 1988. With this backdrop, is internationalization an adequate policy guideline for Japan ?

The promotion of cultural exchange is indeed a good thing. Encouraging people to learn, understand and experience other cultures will contribute to the enrichment of one's life and perhaps a more peaceful world. But cultural friction and cultural conflict, in my view, may not be the serious danger in Japan's relations with her Asian neighbors. Basicly, cultures of various Asian countries have a long history of adjustment and flexibility and are receptive to



change. Japanese culture shares several similar roots with her Asian neighbors. Buddhism and Confucianism are different from mono - theist Christianity. Shintoism by its original nature is a religion of peace which "worships as gods the sun, the moon, stars, mountains, rivers, plants, animals and other forms of nature....."<sup>3</sup> Unlike, the Christians, the Japanese have not fought a single religious war both domestically and in her history of foreign relations. Both the Japanese and the Asian peoples share a tolerant culture and reject liberal individualism.

It is my view that the basic problem of Japan's relations with her Asian neighbors lies in the economic and political aspects, not cultural. Japan's economic expansion into other Asian countries has been very aggressive and dominating. Trade frictions and conflicts are thus the main concerns. To suggest Japanese business firms to slow down their aggressive economic activities is perhaps difficult and not realistic. But it is fair to suggest that since the fundamental problem of Japanese - Asian relations is economic, the Japanese business firms overseas must be primarily responsible for the consequences.

While appreciating the contributions of cultural exchange, I do not think that increasing the government budget and expanding the personnel in Japanese cultural activity will be effective in response to the need of the times. On the

contrary, the Japanese business firms overseas are expected to participate in the development of local education, conservation of local culture, support of local public health programs, and in the solution of problems created by their economic activities such as pollution, the loss of land, the adjustment to a new industrial life, etc.

It may be over - demanding to expect the Japanese businessmen doing their works in various localities in foreign countries to personally involve themselves in local development affairs. Most of them do not live with their children. But it is more than appropriate to say that part of the profits made should be returned to the communities where their factories and offices are located. That profit should go to the education of the children, the medical care of the patients and the construction of new schools, hospitals, sports and recreation facilities.

Far from assuming these responsibilities and realizing their new roles, it is regrettable to find that most of Japanese investors overseas view these responsibilities as the burdens of the government of Thailand and the community residents themselves. It is even more regrettable to hear that, apart from lacking this awareness, Japanese business firms stick to the old concept of continuing to return part of their profit to the Japanese politicians and political factions in the ruling party. They have no time, no interest and no awareness of their responsibility to the localities. After working very hard during the daytime, they go to restaurants or bars after the working hours. They hardly realize that sending their firms' employee to be trained in Japan is only a small contribution to the betterment of the community. A recent Keidanren's survey report revealed that human exchanges such as sending and accepting trainees or students is the most popular measure.<sup>4</sup> They hardly go beyond that role.

From the above discussion we may em-

phasize that it is not cultural conflicts that make up the core problem of Japanese relations with the Asian neighbors. Japan Foundation, JICA, Mombusho, Gaimusho will not be in the future as important actors as the Japanese business firms themselves. They are to develop linkage with the community and return part of their profits to the community.<sup>5</sup>

If there are any serious international conflicts of cultural dimension, it is this problem which is an extremely important issue facing

Japan today. Several efforts in cultural exchange will not be fully appreciated so long as the business firms do not realize their new roles.

What lies beyond internationalization of Japan is the "localization" of those Japanese businessmen doing their business activities in various localities in many countries of the world.

Whether there will emerge a Japanese leader to announce this new policy guideline is a test of the far - sightedness and courage of the Japanese political community.

## Footnotes

1. Nagasada Miyawaki, "Internationalization and Cultural Friction (Part I) : Basic Awareness," *Business Japan*, Dec. 1988, p. 42.
2. Kenichiro Hirano, "International Cultural Conflicts : Causes and Remedies," *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Fall/Winter 1988, p. 162.
3. Nagasada Miyawaki, "Internationalization and Cultural Friction (Part IV) : General Report," *Business Japan*, March 1989, p. 30.
4. "Present Situation and Task for the Promotion of International Cultural Exchange and Measures to be Taken by Keidanren : A Keidanren Survey," *Keidanren Review*, December 1988, p. 9.
5. See more discussion on this point in Prasert Chittiwatanapong, "Japan's Cultural Foreign Policy," *Thammasat University Journal*, August, 1989.

# Appendix

## Comparison of Overseas Public Relations and Cultural Activity Budgets and Personnel in Major Industrialized Countries

July 20, 1987

Overseas Public Relations Division  
First Cultural Affairs Division

By country	Name of Organ	Annual Budget ( FY 1986 )	Personnel ( FY 1986 )	Remarks
Japan	Foreign Ministry International Press Overseas Public Relations Division Cultural Exchange Division		205 ( of whom, 153 overseas )	
	Japan Foundation		132	of which ¥ 3.24 billion subsidized by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.
	NHK Overseas Broadcasting Service		500	Posts and Telecommunications ( ¥ 1.24 billion )
	Total	¥ 17.3 billion	837	
U.S.A.	United States Information Agency ( USIA )	\$837 million ( ¥ 174.933 billion )	5,615 ( of whom, 1,097 overseas )	Of which, the " Voice of America " budget amounts to \$ 278 million ( ¥ 58.12 billion )
	Total	¥ 174.933 billion	5,615	
Britain	British Council	£ 259.90 million ( ¥ 77.710 billion )	4,402 ( of whom, 1,624 overseas )	Of which, £ 77.40 million ( ¥ 23.143 billion ) subsidized by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.
	Central Office of Information	£ 23 million ( ¥ 6.87 billion )	450	Budgeted by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and British Overseas Trade Board only ( Total budget for the Central Office of Information )
	BBC overseas Broadcasting Service	£ 95 million ( ¥ 28.45 billion )	3,435	£ 75 million ( ¥ 21.229 billion ) Budgeted in fully by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.
	Total	¥ 112.992 billion	8,287	

By country	Name of Organ	Annual Budget ( FY 1986 )	Personnel ( FY 1986 )	Remarks
West Germany	Goethe - Institute	227 million mark ( ¥ 18.160 billion )	3,500 ( of whom, 2,600 overseas )	Of which, 196 million marks ( ¥ 15.680 billion ) subsidized by Auswärtiges Amt for overseas public relations service only
	Inter Nationes	49.30 million marks ( ¥ 3.944 million )	158	Of which, 29.64 million marks ( ¥ 2.371 billion ) subsidized by Auswärtiges Amt.
	Deutsche Welle	272 million marks ( ¥ 21.76 billion )	1,441	Of which, 265 million marks ( ¥ 21.2 billion ) budgeted by Bundesministerium des Innern
	Total	¥ 50.344 billion	5,781	
France	Relations Culturelles, Scientifique et Techniques, Ministère des Affaires	3.248 billion francs ( ¥ 84.448 billion )	902 ( of whom, 402 overseas )	
	Information et Presse, Ministère des Affaires	57 million francs ( ¥ 1.482 billion )	55	
	Radio France Internationale	335 million francs ( ¥ 8.710 billion )	450	Revenue from such sources only as listening fees and advertising
	Total	¥ 94.640 billion	1,407	

**Note :** 1) The Japanese currency is based on the official FY 1986 conversion rates set by disbursing official ( US\$ = ¥ 209, £ 1 = ¥ 299, DM 1 = ¥ 80, French 1 franc = ¥ 26 ).  
 2) Legally prescribed number of personnel in the case of Japan's Foreign Ministry 2<sup>nd</sup> Japan Foundation.  
 ( This report is an English translation of " Internationalization and Cultural Friction " published by the Japan Economic Research Institute in December 1987. )

**Source :** Nagasada Miyawaki, " Internationalization and Cultural Friction ( Part I ) : Basic Awareness, " *Business Japan*, Jan. 1989, p. 36.

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