

# Identity and Social Structure :

## Two Socialization Practices in Japanese Schools<sup>1)</sup>

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In this paper, I am going to make two arguments: First, the concept of “national character” is too abstract. We need to study what is meant by the word at the level of everyday behavior. In order to understand cultural characteristics in actual everyday behavior, the term “identity” is more useful because it implies the process of identification. There are two kinds of identification we have to consider, by self and by others. Identification by self involves learning to behave appropriately in the settings and to feel comfortable doing this. Identification by others is built upon the condition that the person functions well and feels comfortable. Otherwise, others would have difficulty in accepting the person as a full-fledged member of the group. Concern with the identification process leads to a topic of cultural reproduction. How do children learn to behave in a way that is characteristic of the group? Learning of cultural knowledge is a very important issue for the study of cultural/national identity.

The second argument is concerned with social structure. When we attempt to capture cultural characteristics at the level of everyday behavior, social structure becomes an issue in two ways. Social structure is often viewed as rigid and stable. Social structure should be expressed and observable in actual human behavior. It has to penetrate and to be reproduced in each bit of behavior. On the other hand, social structure orients behavior settings in which cultural characteristics are expressed in actual human behavior. For example, it would be very difficult for a Japanese boy to behave properly as a “Japanese child” in an American classroom by himself. He needs not only “Japanese” classmates, but also

a “Japanese” teacher as co-actors. Social structure orients settings that are characteristic of society/culture not only for local reproduction, but also for intergenerational reproduction. Socialization is achieved for the most part when new members participate effectively in the settings (cf. Lave & Wenger 1991).

## **1 From “National Character” to Identity**

The concept of national character is too abstract to explain actual human behavior. As criticisms such as those by Peter Dale (1986) and Dean Barnlund (1989) argue, such concepts often create cultural myths.

There are two major ways of explaining human behavior : internally and externally. Internal explanations assume “the cause” of behavior lies inside the person and refer to biological and psychological concepts such as “disposition” and “attitude.” In contrast, external explanations assume “the cause” of behavior lies outside of the person, circumstances that include spatial and historical factors.<sup>2)</sup>

National character studies emerged from the study of culture and personality and share the assumption that “every culture has a typical personality which is characteristic and distinctive of that culture” (Singer 1961). In short, “a typical personality” of a nation is assumed to exist and is called “national character.” It is one thing to assume “national character” and describe it. It helps convey some sense about the culture and the people. However, it is another thing to try to apply it to everything and explain every bit of actual behavior.

For example, during the World War II Japanese soldiers in Saipan refused to surrender and chose group “suicide” because they were told that they would suffer great harm physically and socially if they became POWs, and not because they were “neurotic-compulsive and aggressive because of harsh and restrictive child-training,” as argued by Gorer (1943) and La Barre (1945) and noted by Kerlinger (1953 : 257). This historically unique incident should not be explained with such abstract terms. It should be examined in the historical context, as Minear (1980)

maintains. Calling the Japanese people “neuro-compulsive” does not much help to understand Japanese culture. It tends to become a “character explanation” and easily leads to prejudice and stereotypification. Without good examples, such an abstract concept is very dangerous. It tends not only to hinder our understanding, but also to facilitate misunderstanding. In short, the concept of “national character” is attractive for the investigation of the relationships between society and individuals, but is also too abstract and difficult to study empirically. What we have to do now is to study actual everyday behavior and see how what is characteristic of a culture is revealed and observable there.

One way to see culture in everyday behavior is by following Goodenough's formulation (1957) that “a [group's] culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.” Instead of the abstract notion of national character, the concept of identity can be a resource for mediating between social structure and behavior. Identity can be conceptualized as a function of face-to-face interaction vis-à-vis the test of relentless challenge. When a person has successfully managed to sustain continuity through the challenges, s/he will feel competent as a member of a cultural setting. Then, to the extent that they interpret signs of appropriate competence, other members of the culture will accept the person as member of the group. Simultaneously, s/he can comfortably anchor her/his identity in the culture. The concept of identity assumes such active engagement under conditions of cognition, motivation and affect (D'Andrade 1984). The concept of national character, in contrast, is an “oversocialized conception of man” (Wrong 1961).

Another way to make the concept susceptible to empirical research is to pursue its formation in individuals through socialization/development. How do children learn what is required to function appropriately in a culture? Japanese children returning to their country after a long absence provide data for the comparative study of the

socialization/development aspects of identity. Currently some 50,000 Japanese children are overseas. About 13,000 students return to Japan each year. Differences observed in their behavior give clues to the content of "Japanese national character." For example, a returnee said to her teacher, "I will not help the girl since I don't like her." The teacher sees the returnee as "selfish." In the "individualistic" society of America, self-expression of the kind embedded in the above remark is encouraged. The returnee learned through acculturation this behavior pattern. In the "group-oriented" society of Japan, self-expression is suppressed, leading to formation of "Japaneseness." Not only the content but also the learning process (socialization) of "Japanese national character" can be studied through the study of returnees.

I am going to present two incidents I noted while I was observing returnee children at Japanese public schools. These two incidents are concerned with what are said to be very marked characteristics of Japanese culture, the culture of shame and group-orientedness. Since first pointed out by Benedict (1946), considerable literature, in particular, in psychoanalysis and clinical psychology, has been published on this topic of shame versus guilt (e.g. Piers & Singer 1953 ; De Vos 1960 ; Lebra 1971, 1983). However, most of these works were mainly concerned with psychological processes and did not show how "shame" manifests itself in everyday behavior. The same criticism can also apply to the description of "group-orientedness," which was advocated by Nakane (1970).

The following incidents reflect a major concern of my research : the problems that Japanese students who have studied abroad encounter when they reenter Japanese society. My discussion will underscore not only the submissive or passive reception of the school's authority through the person of the teacher, but also the ritualistic aspects of classroom conduct by teacher and student. In general terms, my research tries to show how notions like national character or identity must be documented at the level of everyday social interaction in key socializing experiences if we are to employ such abstract terms.

These data are intensively documented, but they are not extensively examined for the adequacy of their representativeness, as done by Tobin and others (1989). However, I believe we cannot find these practices in the United States in general or Japanese children encounter them while they are staying in the States.

## **2 Classroom Interaction Involving Shame**

I observed a returnee in his class. The following exchange appealed to me because it revealed aspects of expression of the emotion of shame. It was the 8th-grader's history class. The teacher was lecturing on the state of Japan in the 3rd century A.D. When the name of Rakuro County (Lo-lang), a colony of the Han Dynasty of China located in Korea, appeared in the text,<sup>3)</sup> the teacher called on one student and asked what this name meant.

### **Incident 1**

In an 8th-grader's history class at a middle school in Osaka, Japan on May 21, 1991. In the transcripts, I put three lines for each turn. In lines A, I put the Japanese words as uttered. Since the class was in Osaka, people spoke with Osaka accent. Lines B show possible equivalents of Japanese words in English so that word order of the original Japanese is maintained. I put words not uttered such as subjects and objects in parentheses. In lines C, I put English sentences which convey what original Japanese mean. This is called "gloss" by Cicourel (1974). When a turn is filled just with nonverbal behavior such as standing up but remaining silent, I just put C lines. (The following has been reconstructed from my field notes. I did not bring a taperecorder. Generally speaking, it is very difficult to obtain permission to observe a class in Japan except for designated open house days. I was very fortunate that the teachers of this school were sympathetic with my research. Still, I did not want to annoy them by asking for permission to tape-record the class, which I felt would be perceived as unacceptable behavior. Had I been a foreigner, such a view would probably not have emerged as a problem.)

- 01A Teacher : I-san, Rakuro-guntte nan desuka?  
 01B Ms. I, "Rakuro County" what is?  
 01C Ms. I, what is "Rakuro County?"
- 02C Ms. I : (Stands up but says nothing.)
- 03A Teacher : Eh, kinoo yuuta yan. S-san.  
 03B Oh, yesterday (I) told (you), didn't (I)? Ms. S.  
 03C Oh? I told you yesterday, didn't I? How about you, Ms. S?
- 04C Ms. S : (Stands up but also remains silent.)
- 05A Teacher : Kinoo yuuta yan. Nani kiitetan? K-kun, doo desuka?  
 05B Yesterday (I) told (you), didn't (I)? What (were you)  
 listening to? Mr. K, how about (you)?  
 05C I told you yesterday. What were you listening to? Mr. K, how  
 about you?
- 06C Mr. K : (Stands up but says nothing.)
- 07A Teacher : N-san.  
 07B Ms. N.  
 07C How about you, Ms. N?
- 08C Ms. N : (Stands up but also says nothing.)
- 09A Teacher : Wah, wah, wah! Kyookasho no 35 peiji, kinoo koko yondayan.  
 Dareka waku hito imasuka?  
 09B Oh, oh, oh! Textbook's page 35, yesterday here (we) read.  
 Someone who knows exists?  
 09C Oh, oh, oh (showing his surprise)! Page 35 of the textbook,  
 we read it yesterday, didn't we? Is there anyone who knows  
 what it means?
- 10C Class : (No response.)
- 11A Teacher : Akanwa. Konnan dekihihi kattara, penpenya.  
 11B No good. This thing you cannot if, (it's) bang-bang.  
 11C Oh, no. If you don't remember this, I have to spank you.

Finally, the teacher asked one student to read the part which describes "Rakuro County" in the textbook, but I failed to record the teacher's comment after the student finished reading.

As I noted before, these data are not transcribed from a recorded tape but reconstructed from my fieldnotes. The utterances by the

teacher were faithfully recorded at the time, but the responses by the students were not. However, what is clear is that no students responded correctly, both those who were called on or not. The point I want to make here is that the teacher shamed the students for not remembering the term about which he had lectured the previous day. His reactions of surprise to the silence in lines 03, 05, 09, and 11 appear clear. "Rakuro County" must be remembered because it played a crucial role in state formation in Japan. However, one thing to be considered is that this lesson was just before the mid-term examinations. Questions for these examinations come from pre-announced materials. "Rakuro County," for which there was a lecture on the previous day, was not to be asked on the mid-term.

The teacher's reaction shows a rule that if one does not know a key concept or term, one should be shamed and experience shame. The teacher seems to follow this rule in shaming the ignorant students. The students, on the other hand, accepted the accusation. Those called on just remained silent, showing their shame, or, at least, pretending that they were ashamed. Any excuse, if attempted, would not be appropriate. For example, let us consider as an excuse such as "we are studying for the coming mid-term and we ignored what will not be on the mid-term." The teacher might agree, as he acknowledged to me just after the class when I interviewed him about the class, but he would not have liked that "attitude." It is not a desirable attitude, and the students must know that. Excuses such as "your instruction was not clear" or "who cares?" are out of the question. A challenge to the teacher's authority and a lack of eagerness to learn are also considered fundamental attitude problems.

This example is just one case. It is impossible to conclude what these students learn and "internalize" using the inferences from a single incident. To systematically test if the students have learned how to respond to the teacher's shaming and the underlying rules as I extrapolated them above from this single incident is beyond the scope of this paper. However, if this kind of exchange is not so rare in Japanese classrooms and very rare in American classrooms, and we can refer to

something called “culture of shame” in the adult society of Japan, we may well relate this incident to this so-called manifestation of “Japanese national character.” Children learn and are reminded about how to behave in this kind of situation. Those who are not accustomed to this practice, such as returnee children, may feel uncomfortable and find themselves maladapted in these situations.

**Table 1 Conditions Required for Lessons Involving Shame**

- 1 Students have to think it appropriate to be blamed when they do not remember what was lectured on the previous day.
- 2 They also have to conform to the way the teacher shames them for not remembering.
- 3 They have to know how to look “ashamed.”

We can speculate about what cultural mental models are held by students that enable them to react to the teacher’s “humiliation” appropriately. (1) Students have to think it appropriate to be blamed when they do not remember what was lectured on the previous day. (2) They also have to conform to what is expected when the teacher shames them for not remembering. (3) In addition, they have to know how to look “ashamed.” Socialization involving shaming becomes possible when students have these qualifications and then behave appropriately. We can assume that these students had acquired the qualifications prior to this incident. In the future, they should reproduce this practice by responding to the person who reveals one’s ignorance of what “must” be learned.

In the disciplines of sociology and ethnic studies, identity is considered to be established through shared experiences. Cultural/social practices constitute most of these shared experiences. However, what happens has to be “experienced” in a similar way so that it guarantees “shared experiences.” Cognitive patterns and competence unique to culture are needed for this to occur. The notion of national identity must include, therefore, the study of the acquisition of these



cognitive skills if we are to understand how the leaders and key authority figures of everyday life are able to contribute to the reproduction of social structure.

The assumption of the universality of what “must” be learned often elicits shaming when not followed. In Japan people tend to attribute certain types of knowledge to certain categories of people. There are many utterances reflecting this assumption such as “You, as a sixth-grader, should know this.” and “You, as a middle schooler, should be able to read this Chinese character.” The notion of national character or identity in Japan, therefore, should be reflected in a national curriculum that espouses particular beliefs and values, and types of knowledge.

### **3 Conflict Resolution in Homeroom**

The relationship between self and group is often argued to be much different in Japan and the United States. “Individualistic” American society is contrasted with “group-oriented” Japanese society. A procedure for conflict resolution observed in one Japanese second-graders’ class can help clarify what might be meant, at the level of everyday behavior, this alleged difference. It documents well what is meant by the word “group-orientedness.”

What I want to discuss here is a class assembly of the second-graders’. The incident occurred on my fourth visit to the class, ten days after the new school year began. At this school the children remained in the same class for two years, grades 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6, as is often the case with most Japanese elementary schools. Mr. Nakano (pseudonym) had been teaching the class since the first grade. On the day I visited the school, the children had four periods of instruction in the morning. After they had their school lunch, they cleaned the classroom. After that, the children sat at their desks and Mr. Nakano made several announcements. Finally the class assembly to sum up the day was held. This was called *owari no kai* (closing conference). Two girls who were in charge of the day stood in the front and declared the

opening. The rest of children were seated in their seats. Mr. Nakano was at his desk in the front left corner. The class assembly proceeded in a festive, light-hearted atmosphere. The children appeared to know that it was a serious business but that they still have some amount of discretion. While they were partially attentive to what was going on, the children talked a little bit with their neighbors.

After the declaration of the opening of the assembly by the chair girls, “Now we are starting *owari no kai*,” the first 45 seconds was spent on reporting things the children liked on that day. One boy said that he enjoyed the day’s lunch, and one girl said she enjoyed playing the organ during recess. Another girl said something, but it was not recorded on my videotape. Once again, the ritualistic aspects of Japanese culture are revealed by the forms used to create shared and uniform “official” versions of a day’s experiences. Then, Mr. Nakano prompted the chairs to go on, as seen in line 01.

## Incident 2

Conflict resolution in the day-closing class assembly in a 2nd grade class at an elementary school in Osaka on April 18, 1991.

(The first conflict resolution starting at 0 : 45)

- 01A Teacher : Hai, soshitara tsugi ikoo.  
01B Ok, then next let’s go.  
01C Ok. Let’s go to the next agenda.
- 02A Chairs : Iyana koto ya...  
02B Annoying things or...  
02C Any annoying things or...
- 03C Class : (laughter)
- 04A Chairs : Komatta koto ya iyana koto ga arimashitaka?  
04B Troubling things or annoying things were there?  
04C Did you have any troubling things or annoying ones?
- 05A T : Hai!  
05B Yes!  
05C Yes! (in a loud voice, raising his hand)

06A Chairs : T-kun.

07A T : Kyoo kyuushoku n toki ni, N-kun ga, nanimo shitenani noni,  
panchi shitekita.

07B Today in lunch's time, Mr. N, though (I) did nothing (to  
him), punched me.

07C (stands up) Today at lunch time N-kun punched me while I  
did nothing to him.

08A Chairs : N - kun, tatte kudasai.

08B Mr. N, stand up, please.

08C Mr. N, stand up, please.

09C N : (stands up)

10A Chairs : Hontoo desuka?

10B True is (it)?

10C Is it true?

11A N : Hontoo desu.

11B True (it) is.

11C It is true.

12A Chairs : Wake wa?

12B Reason is?

12C Why?

13A N : T-kun ga kande kuru karadesu.

13B Mr. T was trying to bite me, because.

13C Because Mr. T was trying to bite me.

14C Class : (pause for a second, then laughter)

15A M (sitting next to T) : Nante? T-kun ga nante?

15B What? Mr. T (did he say) did what?

15C What? What did he say T-kun was doing? (to her neighbor, T-  
kun)

16A Teacher : Dooshitara iinokana?

16B How to handle is good?

16C What should we do?

17A T : // \_\_\_\_\_ naiwa!

17B // \_\_\_\_\_ not!

17C // \_\_\_\_\_ not! (as if spitting at Mr. N)

- 18A Chairs : Ito omoimasuka?  
 18B (It is) good, do (you) think?  
 18C Do you think it is good?
- 19A T : Waruito omoimasu.  
 19B (It is) bad, (I) think.  
 19C It is bad, I think.
- 20A N : // omoimasu.  
 20B // (I) think.  
 20C // I think.
- 21A Chairs : \_\_\_\_\_node, N-kun, \_\_\_\_, ayamatte kudasai.  
 21B As \_\_\_\_\_, N-kun, \_\_\_\_, apologize (to each other),  
 please.  
 21C As \_\_\_\_\_, N-kun, \_\_\_\_, please apologize to each other.
- 22A N & T : Gomen nasai.  
 22B Excuse me.  
 22C I am sorry. (bowing towards each other)

In this transcript, the two girls who chaired the class are treated as one person. Actually it was more complicated than shown here. Sometimes one girl started an utterance and the other joined. Sometimes both started an utterance in harmony. What chairs should say is well established and this is known from the lines 02-04. The chairs started with the word for annoying things instead of “troubling things.” The chairs noticed that they started with the wrong words and paused in line 02. In line 03 the class noticed it and responded with laughter. The chairs uttered the proper sentence in line 04.

T-kun (*kun* is used for boys with the last name for formal addressing) asked for the floor in line 05 and was given it by the chairs in line 06. He made an accusation of N-kun in line 07. The chairs asked N-kun, the accused, to stand up (in line 08) and inquired if the accusation was true. Confirmation of factual matters is the first concern in this procedure. There was no dispute over factual matters in this case, but the fourth case of the day involved a disputable allegation as we shall see soon.

Responding to the chairs’ inquiry into the reason given in line 12, N-

kun made a counteraccusation arguing that he was defending himself against an assault by T-kun. This counterattack surprised the class, as shown in the pause in line 14. The following laughter might also be reflecting the surprise. M-san, sitting next to T-kun, apparently was not listening to N-kun's counterattack of line 13 and asked her neighbor, T-kun in line 15, what had been said. This line 15 is not a constitutive part of the whole procedure. This utterance did not get the floor nor get a reaction from anybody. Although the other remarks from the floor which did not enter the exchange were unintelligible and not transcribed here, M-san's remark was so loud that it was transcribed in detail to show the extent of the surprise. Noticing that it was a rare situation and had become difficult for the chairs to handle, Mr. Nakano marked his presence by prompting in line 16. Line 17 by T-kun was delivered rapidly and overlapped line 16. Judging from his posture and the way he spoke the utterance, T-kun appeared to be refuting N-kun's counterattack. The chairs went on to ask both to reflect by asking if they thought what they did was appropriate.

Admission of their faults by both boys in line 19 and 20 may appear strange to some Americans. The person to blame should be whoever attacked first. Defense against violence should constitute a fundamental human right. An initial attack and defense must be distinguished. A thorough investigation of who hit first might have taken place in an American classroom in contrast to the implications of line 18. In this classroom, however, the typical Japanese logic of *kenka ryooseibai* dominated. *Kenka ryooseibai* means that both parties are equally to blame for the quarrel. It epitomizes the notion that harmony and order surpass the rights of individuals. Whatever the reason, quarrels are intolerable and should be immediately stopped by blaming both parties for their occurrence. Please note that the justification the chairs gave to the two boys, ordering them to apologize to each other in line 21, is inaudible. But the smooth flow of lines 18 through 22 seems to show that this is a well-established structure of exchange. In particular, that N-kun caught the sentence T-kun initiated and the chorus utterance in line

20 points to that.

This case of conflict and its resolution well epitomizes “the Japanese style.” Confirmation of factual matters is done by exploring whether or not there was any undesirable incident as well as the identification of who was involved, as in lines 10 and 11. However, the inquiry into how that happened appears casual. Even though the reason was asked, as in line 12, a further investigation of which party initiated the conflict was not seen to imply that the victim was not innocent at all. The logic of *kenka ryooseibai* was triggered, and both parties were forced to apologize, as the conclusion of this case.

From observing this exchange, what can we say about the kinds of rules and values children learn? Also, when do they begin to learn these cultural practices? Or, when does the formation of national character or identity begin?

**Table 2 Lessons Inferred from the Conflict Resolution**

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Lesson 1 | Do not make use of violence even for your self-defense. If you are accused of self-defense or exertion of physical force, you must end up apologizing because you will not get approval for any kind of physical force.             |
| Lesson 2 | Uttering the word <i>gomennasai</i> (I'm sorry) is the magic word of conflict resolution. Even though you have a “legitimate” reason for your act, you have to utter this word, thereby showing your regret and expressing apology. |
| Lesson 3 | Harmony and order surpasses individual rights. If you are not innocent victims completely free from any fault, you have to share part of responsibility and “apologize.” You cannot be exempted with a claim of self-defense.       |

Lesson 1. Do not make use of violence even for your self-defense. If you are accused of self-defense or exertion of physical force, you must end up apologizing because you will not get approval for any kind of physical force.

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for your act, you have to utter this word, thereby showing your regret and expressing apology.

Note the reaction of the American media to the “apology” by the Japanese woman figure skater, Midori Ito. This apology shows the difference between Japanese and American forms of interaction. In 1992 Winter Olympics at Albertvill, France, Ito was in fourth place after the original program. Since her top rival, Kristy Yamaguchi, was in first, Ito’s chance of winning the gold-medal became very slim. Even if in the free program Ito would finish in first place over Yamaguchi, she would not win the gold if Yamaguchi scored second. The day after the short program, Ito “apologized” to the people of Japan for not meeting the expectation of winning the gold.<sup>4)</sup>

Lesson 3. In addition to these two lessons, children should learn the corollary that harmony and order surpasses individual rights. If you are not innocent victims completely free from any fault, you have to share part of responsibility and “apologize.” You cannot be exempted with a claim of self-defense.

Placing harmony and order over individual rights seems to make individuals dependent and oriented toward the group in question. Conduct of each member is judged in the light of contextual order. One cannot transcend this order by adhering to an abstract code such as “self-defense,” which would guarantee the legitimacy of her/his conduct.

Experiencing these exchanges, the children learn how to resolve conflicts. Mr. Nakano told me after the class that he had implemented this style of procedure ten days ago, as the second grade began. It is of interest that children of age seven could learn this complicated procedure so quickly. The fact that the children learned it quickly seems to suggest the prevalence and significance of this procedure in Japanese society. It can be assumed that they had encountered similar exchanges at home when they quarrelled with their siblings or at preschools when they had conflicts with classmates. In Japanese culture, the first attacker is sought after and accused, but the counterattacker is not without blame. S/he would have to “apologize” or receive negative reactions and

sanctions from the teacher and the class.

On this day there were six alleged conflicts. All of them were handled among the children, with only a few instructions from Mr. Nakano. He told me that Y-san transferred from Hiroshima in January and had many quarrels with other girls, including K-san, a student who had resided in Canada for eight months. Mr. Nakano called Y-san spoiled and “*jiko chuushinteki* (ego-centric).” Fed up with many reports of complaints brought to him, Mr. Nakano decided to make children work on conflicts for and among themselves. His role is different from that of one who imposes his own rules. He did not keep his eyes on all the children all of the time. He did not observe all the emerging conflicts and stop them at their inception. He witnessed some of them and ordered them to be stopped on the spot. But some eluded his attention. The class size, forty, is one factor. But the reasons involve more than the class size. Japanese teachers believe in the power of the group. Japanese children should not harm others. They should learn how to handle small conflicts themselves. Too much intervention would deprive children of opportunities for learning this crucial skill in the cooperative conduct of group life.

A working definition of Japanese identity, therefore, means that one can function in (almost) all public contexts and encounters in Japan. Mr. Nakano's classroom management is very similar to what Tobin and others observed at a nursery in Kyoto. The teachers at the nursery “are careful not to isolate a disruptive child from the group by singling him out for punishment or censure or excluding him from a group activity. Similarly, whenever, possible, they avoid direct confrontations with children” (Tobin *et al.* 1989 : 22-23). They observed Fukui-sensei, a teacher, deal with Hiroki, a difficult child. “[Fukui-sensei] scrupulously avoided confronting or censuring Hiroki even when he was most provocative. ... Fukui-sensei encouraged the other children in the class to take responsibility for helping Hiroki correct his behavior” (1989 : 23).



### **Table 3 The Other Complaints of the Day**

(In the order of original complaints made. Complaint #3 was ignored when it was made and handled after #6.)

- #2 Since it was raining today, we could not play outside and I hated that.
- #3 When I opened a window since it was hot, TB-kun and M-kun told me not to open and shut the window. I hated that.
- #4 In recess TC-kun and N-kun ran about in the classroom.
- #5 When I was having lunch, O-kun [hit] me though I did nothing to him.
- #6 While I was reading a novel in recess, the time ran out and I could not finish it. I was disappointed.

Following the above first case, there were five complaints raised on this day (Table 3). There was another accusation of physical attack (Complaint #5), and it was treated in the same way. One accusation of running about (*abareru*) in the classroom (Complaint #4) is interesting since it contained a false accusation. A boy said that N-kun and TC-kun were running about in the classroom during recess. However, TC-kun actually did not do so. It seems that the class had not encountered a false accusation. The chair girls did not know how to handle the case. Mr. Nakano instructed the chairs to find a witness. One boy testified that TC-kun was peacefully playing with him at recess. Then, Mr. Nakano told the chairs to acquit TC-kun.

In handling this case, Mr. Nakano's presence was highlighted because the case involved a new procedure, a false accusation and finding a witness. The festive atmosphere prior to Mr. Nakano's intervention suddenly turned into a serious mood. Children stopped making voluntary comments on the case and remained silent. They kept their eyes on Mr. Nakano. I have shown this videotape to those who know American classrooms well and shown a video which is made to introduce Japanese elementary school life to a foreign audience to American school teachers in San Diego. Both times, I have received a similar response of surprise that the classroom atmosphere is so light-hearted. The stereotyped image of the Japanese school, very serious and regimented, is not found. Tobin and others (1989) noticed the similar

“perception gap” about Japanese nursery schools among American nursery teachers.

The class assembly proceeded in the festive, light-hearted atmosphere. The chair girls, for example, appeared to be having good time up in front. They jumped as they spoke. They looked very cute in the way they jumped up and down and the way they talked. Although this is a ritual, no one seemed to be anxious. This conveys the fact that the teacher who is sitting over in the left corner is still in control but not exercising his authority in a way that would insure that everybody is totally quiet, that the girls are following the ritual in a very symbolic way. But instead, they are following the ritual in this light-hearted, festive manner. But at the same time everybody knows that it is serious, that you cannot get up and make fun of it. You cannot ignore the girls because the teacher is sitting there. And everybody knows that you have a certain amount of discretion. That means in this instance that people are talking a little bit. There is still some noise going on. But at the same time nobody feels like this is a very, serious ritual. Here they have a situation where a double atmosphere prevails. Nobody is going to try and disrupt this ritual. On the other hand, no one is taking it so seriously that they are totally quiet. On the contrary, there is a combination of the two attitudes, perspectives, and modes of behavior. People are saying things that are relevant and that they know are permissible. They are not saying things that are not permissible. This scenario makes for a good contrast with American classrooms. In American classrooms when you have something like this, someone will be making a joke. Someone will be making fun. And the teacher has to say, “Keep quiet, Billy. Stop doing that or I’ll send you out of the room.” Then they stop. But someone always intervenes in this way. And the class will laugh. And the people in front will have difficulty carrying out the ritual.

This festive atmosphere turned very serious when the teacher intervened. The class became quieter, and everybody became much more attentive. The discussion became much more formal. When the

teacher came into the picture and then made his suggestion, the whole classroom became subdued. When the teacher spoke, his authority became very clear, and the children became much more careful about how they spoke. The children know when they have some discretion and when not. They accept the authority of the teacher. Or, at least, they know how to pretend to accept the teacher's authority. It is a subtle thing but very important to be a "good citizen" of Japanese classrooms.

The attitude K-san showed toward Mr. Nakano is interesting. Prior to the assembly, Mr. Nakano talked about the school excursion coming soon. In the time span of 3 minutes 15 seconds, K-san interrupted 10 times. There were just two interruptions initiated by the other children. Six of the ten were things like "yes" and "no," and most of them remained unanswered. However, the remaining four were responded to by the teacher. This seems to show that K-san had a little different attitude toward the teacher's authority. I think it is partially attributable to her eight month's residence in Canada.

Two other complaints raised on this day were concerned with something regrettable, for which no one was to blame such as "Since it was raining today, we could not play outside and I hated that (*iyadatta*)" (Complaint #2) and "While I was reading a novel in recess, the time ran out and I could not finish it. I was disappointed" (Complaint #6). The chairs did not react to these two. The former elicited some agreeing voices from the floor, and the latter was greeted by Mr. Nakano's remark, "Really? Well, but there was nothing to be done." The last case (Complaint #3) was ambiguous. One girl complained that two boys shut the window she opened. When this complaint was made, it was just ignored. The chairs did not react to it, and quickly several children raised their hands from the floor. Perhaps it was ignored because the girl's presentational style was not clear, or because the class did not think the claim should be handled in the same way as other physical conflicts. With this case, the assembly came to an end. The closing remark revealed the spirit explicitly, "From now on, (you all) be friendly, please (*Korekara, nakayoku shite kudasai*)!"

What other role does this day closing assembly play? In addition to the valuable lessons it gave as extrapolated above, it also functions to create shared and uniform “official” versions of the day’s experiences. The children learn about the meaning of what they have lived through on this day in the assembly. At the same time they learn how to reach the “official” interpretation. They are provided with cultural schemas which help them interpret experiences and are essentially forced to use them. The assembly also helps cool the “marks” out, using Goffman’s term (1952). A child who holds a grudge expresses her/himself in the assembly and is collectively consoled by the procedure. Now s/he can go home peacefully and come back to the class comfortably on the following day.

In the above example, we have produced some documentation and anchorage for the abstract remark by Rohlen (1989 : 17) when he says “everyday order itself stems from sources of group involvement, rather than primarily from legal norms or individual market behavior.” The notion of “group involvement” requires empirical confirmation at the level of everyday behavior. To illustrate my thesis, I have provided a few brief examples of how we might operationalize the abstract notion of national character or identity.

#### **4 Rituals in Japanese Classrooms**

The above example signifies the importance of ritual in Japanese classrooms. In addition to this ritualistic handling of conflicts, Japanese classrooms are filled with many rituals. Bowing to the teacher takes place at least twice a day at elementary school, at the beginning and the end of the day. In middle and high schools, bowing occurs as many as 12 times a day, at the beginning and conclusion of each period. There are as many as six periods in one day. Rituals to begin and end a meal are carried out at most elementary schools. Children utter “*itadakimasu* (I will (humbly) eat)” and “*gochisoosama deshita* (I appreciate what I just had)” in chorus. School events and ceremonies constitute another rich

area of rituals. Each school term has an opening and closing ceremony in addition to an annual entrance ceremony for new students and a commencement. There is also a school assembly every week. On these occasions, children bow to the principal at the beginning and the end of his speech. Sometimes they sing the school song and the national anthem. Field day is another big annual event full of rituals. What is to be noted is that about thirty days of a year's instruction (240 days) are spent on these events and ceremonies, and their practices.<sup>5)</sup>

In addition to these "rituals," there are many other routines in Japanese classrooms. Children in Mr. Nakano's class copied what he put on the blackboard on their correspondence notebooks and received a stamp from the teacher, which indicates the child copied it accurately. They take the notebooks home, show them to their mothers, and also have them signed. They reported if they had brought the necessities to school on that day to the teacher, and got a sticker if they had no *wasuremono* (a thing left), or they had brought everything needed.

These many routines and rituals fill the school life of Japanese children. Order and harmony in the classroom and school are maintained with and through them. Ritual also works to socialize children. Ritual provides an occasion for learning by repetitive, highly scripted, value-laden practice. It is a very strong tool of socialization. Since deviations from rituals are so visible, it is easy to see if a ritual is implemented properly. On the other hand, it takes much time to implement rituals. Children have to go through many "practice" sessions to learn a ritual thoroughly. In this sense, Japanese classrooms and their abundant rituals perhaps present newcomers, including returnees, some problem of apprehension and accommodation. Newcomers have to master in a much shorter time what others have learned in a substantial time. In Mr. Nakano's opinion, it took K-san, the returnee in this class, a couple of months to get used to the rituals in his class although she had spent the first month of the school with her classmates before she left for Canada in May 1990.

These two examples are designed to show what I think is the heart of the national character problem. My hypothesis is that if such a thing as national character exists, there must be a way of showing its effects at the level of day-to-day interaction. This would not mean that you can do this in every classroom around the world. But in Japan, it turns out, the force of the culture is so strong that any kind of ritualistic interaction must reveal this national character. I do not know if this would be true of other cultures, but in Japan it seems to be very pronounced. So, whenever I go in Japan, to a classroom, a market, a drugstore, a department store, a doctor, or, a bank, I should find similar kinds of ritualistic practices. The assumption is that Japanese society could not function if there was not uniformity.

Another important thesis, which is unfortunately not spelled out thoroughly, is that the cultural part is essential for learning. To behave appropriately in Japanese classrooms, which includes the ability to produce the ritualistic behavior described earlier, learning and its practices must start early. It has to start in a uniform way because if the child arrives the school and the child is not able to do that, the child will have continual problems. My argument about social structure follows. There is high consistency in these ritually scripted behaviors among different settings of society, home, school, and workplace, which enables a smooth transition to occur from one setting to another. Social structure as evidenced in daily behavior provides a core framework through which consistency is articulated across the different settings in a society.

#### **NOTES**

- 1 ) Originally presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting held at Pittsburgh, on August 22, 1992. I would like to thank Dr. Aaron Cicourel and Ray McDermott for their advice and editorial help, and those people who kindly shared their lives with me. The research was partially supported by the dissertation grants from the University of California, San Diego.
- 2 ) Some writers view "culture" as external and "personality" as internalized

in order to make the distinction between the two. See, D'Andrade's treatment (1990) of Spiro's "false dichotomy" thesis (1951).

- 3 ) According to Rodzinski (1979 : 63), Wu-ti (Emperor Wu) of the Han Empire (140-87 B.C.) "extended Chinese rule to North Korea, which was penetrated in 109 B.C. Large colonies of Chinese settlers were also established here and one of these, Lo-lang (on the site of the present P'yongyang), became a prosperous and large city. It lasted to 313 A.D. as an important center for the spreading of Chinese culture, and has been the source of numerous fascinating archaeological discoveries, which provide an excellent picture of the art and life of Han times. It is also from these colonies in North Korea that Chinese culture spread not only to the rest of Korea itself but also, undoubtedly, to Japan."
- 4 ) Since Ito was "the gold-medal favorite," the Japanese people's expectation was very high. No Japanese women had won a gold-medal in the Winter Olympics before, nor any medals at all until one won a bronze-medal in 1,500-meter speed-skating race on February 12, just eight days before Ito fell on the combination jump in the original program. Reflecting the high expectation, Japanese newsmedia covered Ito Olympic progress both intensively and extensively. The level of coverage was so high that it itself made news for the foreign media. Ito on TV looked very nervous when she went up to the rink to begin her original program. Apparently she was under exceptional pressure not only from the demands of the immediate occasion, but also from the high expectations of the Japanese people and media. Perhaps this media coverage affected her performance. She could not land the easier jump, a triple Lutz, which she had never before missed in competition. The best jump, a triple Axel, which would have made her performance rated first, or second at worst, if cleanly executed, was not even tried.

It is not known to me exactly what Ito said in the news conference during this "apology." It is certain, however, that she expressed her sorry for not meeting the Japanese people's expectation and support. She was not "apologizing" for engaging in some illegal behavior. She might have regretted changing her plan at the last minute to replace the hardest jump with an easier one, which might have confused her and destroyed her rhythm, leading to the faulty landing with the easier jump. Whatever the reason, Ito did not meet the expectations and felt she should express her emotion. This fact of expressing apparently relieved her. When she went up on the rink for her free program on the following day, she looked relaxed and confident on TV. She landed the hardest jump and finished in close second in this program, which earned her a silver-medal. Perhaps her

revelation of her sorrow relaxed her and let her perform to her full capacity. The magic word *gomen nasai* not only resolves interactional conflicts, but also perhaps can relieve the individual's mind of burdens.

Borkin and Reinhart (1978) analyzed the use and effect of two English phrases, *excuse me* and *I'm sorry*. They define *excuse me* as "a formula to remedy a past or immediately forthcoming breach of etiquette or other minor offense on the part of the speaker" and *I'm sorry* as "an expression of dismay or regret at an unpleasantness suffered by the speaker and/or the addressee." The Japanese phrase, *gomen nasai*, literally means "Please forgive (me)." A dictionary says in extension it is used to show apology (*shazai*), or mark a visit (*hoomon*) and a leaving (*jikyo*) (Shimmura 1969). It seems that the consideration to the addressee has developed to constitute an "etiquette" and the use of *gomen nasai* reflects this.

- 5 ) Number of days of instruction per year is often mentioned to explain the "superior" achievement of Japanese children to American. In this discussion, we should note that 180 days occur for American school as compared to 240 days in Japan. But the Japanese national curriculum is designed to be completed in 35 weeks, which means, 6 (days) times 35 makes 210. The extra 30 days are spent on extra-curricular activities such as ceremonies and events. (This note refers to the situation at public elementary schools when there was class every Saturday. After it was changed so that the second Saturdays were off every month in 1992, no class is held on Saturday since April, 2002.)

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# **Identity and Social Structure :**

## **Two Socialization Practices in Japanese Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

One perspective on the notion of society is to claim that it is sustained by numerous organized fragments of interaction. National character studies assume that “every culture has a typical personality which is characteristic and distinctive of that culture” (Singer 1961). The concept of “national character” is attractive for the investigation of the relationships between society and individuals, but is also too abstract and difficult to study empirically. One way to see culture in everyday behavior is by following Goodenough’s formulation (1957) that “a [group’s] culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.” Instead of national character, the concept of identity can be a resource for mediating between social structure and behavior. Identity can be conceptualized as a function of face-to-face interaction vis-à-vis the test of relentless challenge. When a person has successfully managed to sustain continuity through the challenges, s/he will feel competent as a member of a cultural setting. I propose to pursue the formation of identity in individuals by examining aspects of socialization/development. Can a notion like “national character” be inferred from the behavior of children? Japanese children returning to their country after a long absence provide data for the comparative study of the socialization/development aspects of identity and how this notion becomes a mirror for understanding social structure at the level of everyday life.

**KEY WORDS :** national character, socialization ritual, shame, conflict resolution