Regional development and internationalization of Mexico

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Cultures in Business Conducts of
Mexico and Japan

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Abstract

When we have to deal with international trade, it is necessary to consider the culture as a determinant factor of business relationships. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of cultural variable, for which we approach the phenomenon of economic globalization and its relationship with cultures focusing various theories that present role models to learn some characteristics of an entrepreneurial culture or business culture, including: confidence; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; long-term orientation; and language. The results derived from the survey -based on these theories- applied to Japanese and Mexican businessmen in order to draw some conclusions about the businessmen behavior are presented.

Introduction

In the analysis of the international economic relations at present, in a more holistic scientific view, the study of culture has become a determining factor, as it facilitates the understanding of how human groups act and react and logical thinking (Hofstede, 2000) (Errichielo, 2012). Their inclusion helps achieve successful business relationships as proposed in treaties, conventions and international agreements.

One of these agreements is the Economic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Mexico and Japan. The objective of this study then is to analyze the impact of the cultural variable in some experiences of relations between the two countries in western Mexico. To do this we will start from the presentation of the

phenomenon of economic globalization and its link with the cultures focusing some theories. Subsequently will contrast with the results of the survey conducted by PROMEJ in western Mexico area both Japanese firms and entrepreneurs such as Mexican exporters doing business in Japan, to extract some conclusions.

Globalization and cultures

Globalization and world trade interdependence have created the need to establish links between people with different backgrounds, traditions and customs, so that it becomes essential to know the style, times, moments and especially, beliefs and ways of trading of other cultures. All with the purpose of create a long-term relationship in order to get the best possible levels of profitability.

Castells describes the phenomenon of globalization as "the revolution in information technologies and restructuring of capitalism that have introduced a new form of society, the network society, characterized by a real virtually culture ... constructed by a system of omnipresent communications media ... and the transformation of the material foundations of life, space and time ... Our current reality is listed as a world that is asymmetrically interdependent... a relatively new phenomenon that opens, in fact, a new era in the history of mankind ... Castells (2003:23)"

In this age will be necessary to bring the global to the local to prevent such asymmetries. Build a new strategy that contains the analysis of the technological, economic and especially cultural processes that should form an essential part of the basis of the transformation in management between states and their relationship with their counterparts to establish successful businesses.

In relation to culture, Hofstede (1984) understands it as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another". This mental programming that Hofstede also called "national culture", individuals are learning through the family, school and the organizations in which they operate or interact. Then we can conclude that each person has a shared programming part and an individual part. The shared part is due to the universal and

collective values and individual part will be taken from the region, religion or family influence. Each region, Society or country develops patterns that originate the creation of a "collective or generalized mental programming" (Hofstede G., 1984), which it is akin among the members that integrate. This allows us to note that, in the context of international negotiations as well as in others, has become very important to know the mental programming of the counterparty with whom we wish to trade in order to facilitate negotiations and achieve the desired objectives.

Therefore, to interact with other countries is recommended not only a superficial use of the language, but understanding and exchange of different cultural values. It has been found that there are also called "corporate cultures" which are those that are rooted in the values of the founders and prominent leaders of the corporation; these values have been transformed in practices, rules for all other members of the organization and therefore become common practice required, these also must be known at the time of negotiations with businessmen from other countries (Himmelstern, 2007).

At present with the economic globalization, these kinds of negotiations are in-creasing. As it is known, no country is completely self–sufficient, so it is imperative to implement different strategies to negotiate or partnering with other countries to supply their needs and benefit from the gains of international trade according to the interests of each one. This behavior has led to the global market expansion significantly, forcing organizations to face different cultural environments that are constantly changing depending on the environment where the negotiations are conducted.

Hofstede´s Cultural Model

There are several authors who have specialized in the study of corporate culture, of which some have already been quoted. One of those who have contributed with theoretical analysis and interesting empirical results is the Dutch anthropologist Geert Hofstede. He showed that there are cultural groupings at regional and national level that affect the behavior of societies and organizations, and are very persistent

over time.

That's how he developed the model called the Five Dimensions to identify the cultural patterns of each group. These dimensions are:

1. Power distance: The power distance is the distance between individuals of different hierarchical levels. The highest score suggests that there are signs that some individuals have much more power than others. The low score reflects the view that people have equal rights. It is considered that power and inequality are essential factors in any society, in more or less degrees.

2. Uncertainty avoidance: It refers to the extent in which a society accepts uncertainty and risk. In simple terms, the cultures with the highest score on this scale avoid to take risks. Makes those human beings in a country are comfortable or uncomfortable with structured or unstructured situations respectively.

3. Individualism: This dimension relates directly to the degree in which people prefer to act as individuals rather than being considered as a member of a team.

4. Masculinity: It is defined as the degree in which masculine values are dominant in a society and it is shown inclined to exalt "masculine" values as strength, bravery or courage or also emphasizes wealth, success, material ambition, leaving "feminine" values such as diplomacy aside, aesthetics, prudence, or give value to people, help others, preserve the environment, seek equality.

5. Long-Term Orientation: It is the opposite of short-term orientation. Values associated with long-term orientation dimension are saving and perseverance, the values associated with short-term orientation are respect for tradition and the compliance of social obligations.

In the present study are considered these dimensions and some more contributions from other authors, which were taken as a reference of our cultural analysis and allowed us to make some inferences and descriptions of certain

situations observed by applying some reagents related to the sociocultural scope.[1]

Cultural data of Mexico and Japan

Hofstede conducted a large database with values from IBM employees that were evaluated between 1967 and 1973, whose plants covered in that span more than 70 countries. He used that base for the first time in 40 major countries and after that he extended the analysis to 50 countries and three regions.

His later studies validated the previous results; included studies on commercial airline pilots, students from 23 countries, managers of public administration, consumer grocery "elites" stores in 15 countries and multinational companies in 19 countries, to name a few. The five dimensions of Hofstede can be studied comparatively between two countries focusing cultural and religious paradigms. Hofstede released the results of their work from the year 2001 on its official website, which allows comparison of the rates of the nations that we choose, in this case are Mexico and Japan, as seen in the following graph:

Graph 1

Model of the 5 dimensions of Professor Geert Hofstede
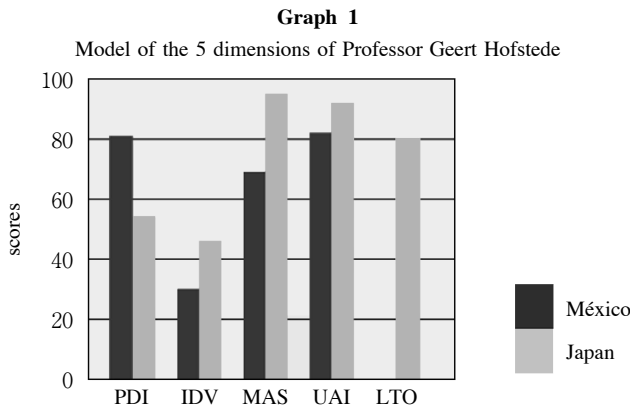
Source: www.geert-hosftede.com (last access: february 27, 2011)

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1) One of the criticisms that have been made to the model and the results of the previous graph, they focus on how the battery questions were structured, since some of the mixtures (as mentioned below) may yield inconsistent results. For example, the reliability that is at stake when the combination of the general orientation of the individual or worker are being made, the job stability and the stress experience itself, integrated into a single index (Coats–Crowson,2005).

According to the graph, Hofstede concludes with the following:

In terms of *power distance* (PDI) points out that Japan maintains a high average level, in other words, maintain respect among subordinates of the company, which is consistent with that culture. While in the case of Mexico is high reflected, indicating a high power and wealth inequality in the society.

For the individualism dimension (IDV), the professor found that Japan exhibits an acceptance and collaboration teamwork, on the other hand Mexico has low individualism, which means that it's a collective society, opposed to the individualist, loyalty is a collectivist culture which encourages strong relationships and the responsibility of the members of the group.

The *masculinity* (MAS), in the case of Japan it shows higher than Mexico, which indicates the dominant position of the man in the society. Concerning Mexico the man rules an important part of the society structure and the power.

As regards the fourth dimension *uncertainty avoidance* (UAI), the results showed that Japan retains a high affinity and commitment that Japanese workers acquire who join the workforce of a company, which they conceived as their lifetime job. For this case Mexico shows its lowest rate which means that society is less tolerant to it. So the objective of this society is to control everything in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected.

The fifth dimension is the amount of the long-term orientation (LTO), it is high manifested in the Japanese and reflects the importance assigned to employment, savings and perseverance. Hofstede measured this dimension only in Eastern countries such as Japan, which does not appear in the case of Mexico.

Japan being a group of islands off the European powers has developed, in part, isolationism which has helped to consolidate their own culture. This factor is important because it led to fully differentiate the foreign elements to their culture and develop a strong sense of self identity. In Japan the concept of teamwork is to learn self-defense from childhood under the phrase "surrounded by seas and enemies, we must depend on each other".

The homogeneity of its people and their lack of breeding of its individuals with neighboring countries, create a sense of belonging, cultural uniformity, loyalty and

duty to the nation, which are not of recent origin (Samovar & Porter, 2001). It was learned from feudalism, like the values, discipline, sacrifice, besides adopting a high degree of conformity exemplified in their dress and finally the absence of the sense of individualism; their sense of belonging within the society makes them adopt a lifestyle with many obligations (Samovar & Porter, 2001).

The education was used to influence the thinking of individuals putting the emperor as supreme authority and as a figure of national unity, ideas of Confucianism as family unity and ideas of Rousseau and Darwin were instilled (Martinez, 2006).

Another factor of great impact on Japanese culture was undoubtedly the Second World War, which in the end led to the American occupation. The occupation was friendly, pacifist and benevolent; the United States presence would lead to one of the most amazing political, industrial and commercial achievements of contemporary world (Toledo & Tanaka, 1991).

This number of transcendental changes allowed the country in less than half a century to become a regional and world power. Their story explains how the country was understanding and assimilating the Western culture to be settled as the second or third world economy, have various commercial treaties and become a member of the United Nations Organization.

According to Errichiello the first two great features of Japanese culture in business are:

1. *Orientation to follow the hierarchy*. They take seriously the chain of command and orders, so respect their respective boss, seek guidance and discipline and accept the decisions of their superiors unquestioningly.

2. *Importance of collectivism versus individualism*. They act cooperatively, consider loyalty as a priority, find the identity in association with a particular group and put its needs above their own; they conform to social norms, value the harmony of the team; decisions are made involving all members and often consultations are made with the same level colleagues to communicate and report (Errichielo, 2011).

In the other hand in México, specifically the part that concerns the conduct of economic policy and development, according to Yeidckol Polevnsky, former president of the National Chamber of the Transformation Industry (Canacintra), if a lesson departs from more than 15 years of intensive export development of the Mexican economy, it is the only automatic control of market forces is not enough to ensure the use of these opportunities (Polevnsky Y., 2003). This can be interpreted as a reflection of the lack of hierarchy, lack of social norms and put the country benefits before the individual or the political party that governs Mexico.

Another feature identified in the Japanese culture in the early stages of incorporation of business enterprises process in Mexico has been the effort to minimize the risk of doing business in a country that is not our own, used from basic risk management practices, to more complex solutions designed for their specific needs and strategies reporting systems to prevent frauds (Errichielo, 2011).

This caution of possible risk scenarios has led to the Japanese in Mexico, adopt the following strategies:

1. They prefer to collect additional information for decision-making
2. Carefully face the changes
3. They strive to develop guidelines and regulations
4. Give more importance on historical information and past experiences.
5. They use proven methodologies and techniques for the solution of the problems
6. Avoid last-minute changes in their strategies
7. They plan on scenarios of short, medium and long term

On the other hand, in contrast with Japanese culture, in Mexico during the consolidation business stage, it plays an important role attitude toward relationship building for business. This is another big difference from Japanese culture, because its approach is focused on achieving objectives and not strictly on building local relationships (Errichielo, 2011).

It is said that Mexican culture is extensive, rich, colorful, multi-faceted and

unmistakable, which reflects the different periods of the history of the country. However, to understand, respect and tolerate we must know the different cultural elements that compose it, since it is difficult to understand how a western country located at the south of the United States is in the economic backwardness, at lag in social development and religious characteristics marked as part of this culture product of centuries of interaction with Spain and then the rest of the world.

The conquest and its dynamics were crucial to the formation of Mexican culture. The assimilation of the conquest by the natives was a complicated phenomenon because the indigenous culture, especially the Aztec was very complex. Had a very intricate educational system for the class to which they belonged and the knowledge that they could access. The governing classes had knowledge of civil engineering, mathematics and astronomy. The priests were those who controlled and rigorously educated youth, and as in Christian monasteries sexual relations were banned (Montaner, 2001).

A clear unrest was felt with a conquest and a hardly justifiable colonization and there was an unexplainable resentment among an indigenous population that had ripped out their gods, had imposed other customs and brutally forced to work. Instead the colonists had the support provided by the crown (Montaner, 2001).

Mexican values shaping have as a cornerstone the Catholic religion and family customs. The rigid ethical code imposed by the Catholic religion has resulted in a double standard, according to this, society tolerates inside social phenomena and is the censor at the outside on issues such as domestic violence, corruption and alcoholism. However, the family and religion have had positive aspects in shaping Mexican values; for example it has been shown that society in Mexico tends to be united and solidarity in collective tragedies such as hurricanes and earthquakes, when Mexicans send food, form rescue teams or help financially. These values may have its origins in the works of mercy instilled by the Catholic Church.

In international relations, culture is important in the negotiations, although this concept has been affected over time. Hosftede understands culture as a collective mental programming that distinguishes one human group from another.

To Hofstede this factor is important and was the first to study the five

dimensions of values. For this, as already noted, he applied a survey to several IBM companies and some variables applied found results concerning the values of each of the dimensions. It is self-evident that as a result of this study there will be some disagreements with the theory. Hofstede's model, as we have seen is based on five dimensions.

The field study that took place in the western area of Mexico aimed to contrast the following dimensions of Hofstede: power distance, aversion to uncertainty and long–term orientation. Besides other important dimensions that enriched the analysis of distinctive cultures, such as trust, language and knowledge of the foreign culture. To do this several questions were applied to different companies both Mexican exporters to Japan and Japanese who have invested in the region.

Cultural implications for trade relations between Mexico and Japan in western Mexico

The universe was constituted by one hundred and thirty two Mexican companies exporting to Japan, of which forty nine companies were surveyed and the Japanese side, of sixty eight investment companies located in western Mexico were surveyed fifty. With this sample we obtained some interesting results for our analysis.

The results of applying the survey based on the hypothetical model indicated that includes the following topics are presented, which includes the following subjects: Confidence; secondly, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term Orientation; third, Language and Cultural, and finally Power Distance.

Confidence and its importance in Japanese companies

First, the field study done on trust, which is one of the vital elements in business management or business development, particularly for Japanese investors in Mexico is analyzed. These elements, according to the arguments of Hofstede (2000), have entrenched the concept of teamwork and confidence in his compatriots.

One of the important values within the role of culture is the confidence that assumes a very important role in the negotiations and contracts (see **Graph 2**). This aspect is considered by cultural diplomacy, which, as mentioned by Said Siddiqui (2006), "refers to the role (and importance) played by cultural factors in international relations"

It is verified and previously noted in this analysis as regards to Japan team spirit that is learned from childhood (Benedict 2003; Mackintosh, 2011), so the Japanese have achieved a better overall development. This team spirit is part of the cultural homogeneity of its people that characterizes and reflects them even in countries far from theirs[2].

Regarding the question made by Japanese companies on the subject, it is important to note that among the options presented to them which are considered most relevant are the ability and the experience. 40 companies were selected for this. The second place corresponds to the teamwork capacity, communication the third and fourth, loyalty (see **Graph 2**)
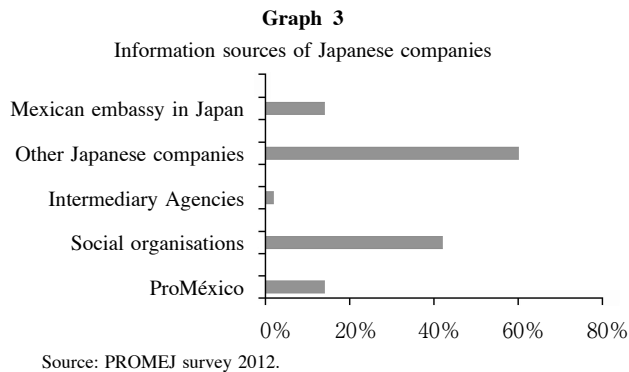
Graph 2

Japanese companies: characteristics for personnel selection
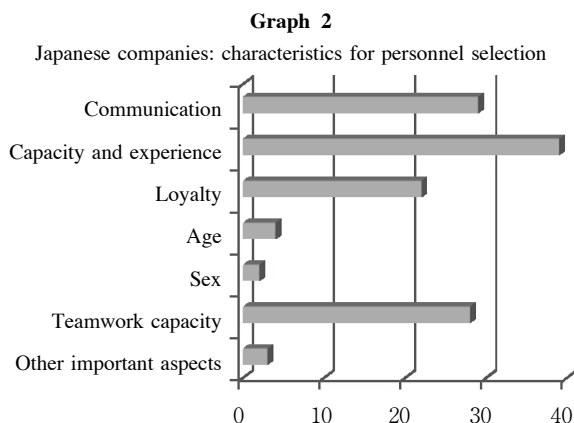
Source: PROMEJ survey 2012.

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2) This is an important factor from a cultural point of view because the Japanese can fully differentiate the foreign elements to their culture and they developed a strong sense of identity and awareness of the presence of others. This allowed to have more responses from the database of the contained universe of Investing Japanese companies established in Mexico and that such responses of the companies that did participate were complete and had quality, namely fully completed the questionnaire and showed great commitment and interest by making it.

About the issue of trust between members of the Japanese society established in Mexico, the results of the survey shows that there is a high degree of fellowship which is associated with team spirit, as 60 percent answered within the options provided, that the best information is provided for investment by Japanese companies installed in Mexico, for their experience (see **Graph 3**).

The existence of Japanese companies in the country where the Japanese decide to invest is the most important factor for the experience and recommendations that could be received. Second, is the enterprise information of social agencies, 21 companies consider it as another source for information.

The information on which they rely to plan their investments is by maintaining communication between the same entrepreneurs, who have a certain age in our country or on the other hand, the information provided by the contracted enterprise

Graph 3

Information sources of Japanese companies

Source: PROMEJ survey 2012.

Graph 4

Relations of Japanese companies with the state or municipality
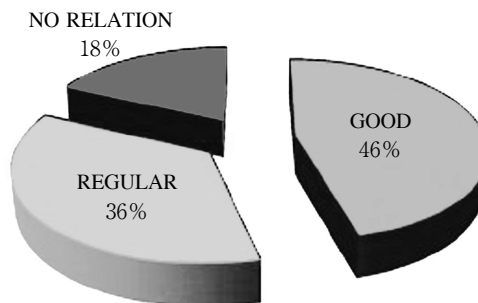
Source: Survey PROMEJ 2012

social agencies. As shown in **Graph 3**, it is important to note that the information provided by the Mexican government authorities or any other information are not very relevant.

Notwithstanding the above, 46 percent of respondents say that they have a good relationship with state governments, as shown in **Graph 4**.

Uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation

Global and/or circumstances that prevail in alien cultures and even new businesses led to some uncertainty. To start a business safely, stakeholders (promoters) with a medium or long term vision, should avoid this uncertainty. In general, it is claimed that when a greater incentive exist with entrepreneurship the avoidance to uncertainty decreases, knowing as often as they want, entrepreneurs can start new businesses.

Japanese companies accept the risks and uncertainties of Mexico taking into account the opinions of their countrymen because they allocate a reinvestment percentage in production and planning long-term scenarios, as well as expert opinion to offer a product of quality. This certainly is part of Japanese culture since it strengthened its capacity to globalize.

It is important to recognize that:

"One of the distinguishing features of corporate governance in Japan is the determining influence of human resources in the definition of organizational structures. As well as the adopted strategies promotes in first place the long-term interests of the members of the company, also the structures primarily reflect the central role of human resources in the integration of its activities" (Lopes dos Reis, 2007: 158–159).

Regarding the issue of uncertainty avoidance and/or long-term orientation we see the distribution of resources obtained by Japanese companies for ongoing business management, as this reflects its long-term orientation. Japanese managers do consider important, because most of the respondents replied that goes to production equipment, followed by buildings, property and subsequently trained

manpower, it was reinvestment to apply during 2012.

Regarding the extent of the business culture of Mexican exporters and Japanese investors in planning medium and long term, the sample gave as a result that seventy two and seventy eight percent of Japanese firms and Mexican exporters respectively, do plan in short, medium and long term as shown in **Table 1**. In this sense, it can be said that both Mexican and Japanese companies have a considerably wider vision for business management abroad.

Table 1

Scenario planning long and medium term (percentages)

	JAPANESE COMPANIES	MEXICAN COMPANIES
Yes	72%	78%
No	20%	14%
No answer	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%

Source: survey PROMEJ 2012

Culture and Language

When a company starts to foreign markets and hire staff of different nationalities, the company faces the suitable handling of the alien culture. Both exporters and investors are in this situation. Then focuses the use of the language in international business starting from the behavior of the companies interested in the Mexico-Japan relation.

Regarding the question raised about hiring some professional advice to learn the cultural patterns of the country concerned, 100 percent of the sample, both Japanese and Mexican companies, most of them answered that they do not consider them (40 and 55 percent respectively). At the same time another part of the sample answered that somehow already have that knowledge so the 36 percent of Japanese and 22 percent of Mexican exporters is justified, as shown in **Table 2**.

It can be seen that the behavior of opinions tends to be similar in both cases and that the companies concerned recognize the importance of understanding the

cultural patterns of the country in which they relate. In particular, in reference to Mexican exporters, a stronger trend in Japanese companies that are in Mexico as investors can be observed, who have relatively more time in the country.

Another barrier within the business culture is the language. According to the survey PROMEJ 2012, the order given from Mexican exporting companies in their responses regarding the language to do business with Japanese was as follows: English language is used by fifty nine percent, thereafter the Japanese fourteen percent and ten percent Spanish. It was queried about the languages mainly used within businesses by Japanese companies, where the Japanese is the number one with 74 percent. Interestingly, English as second language with sixty-six percent and
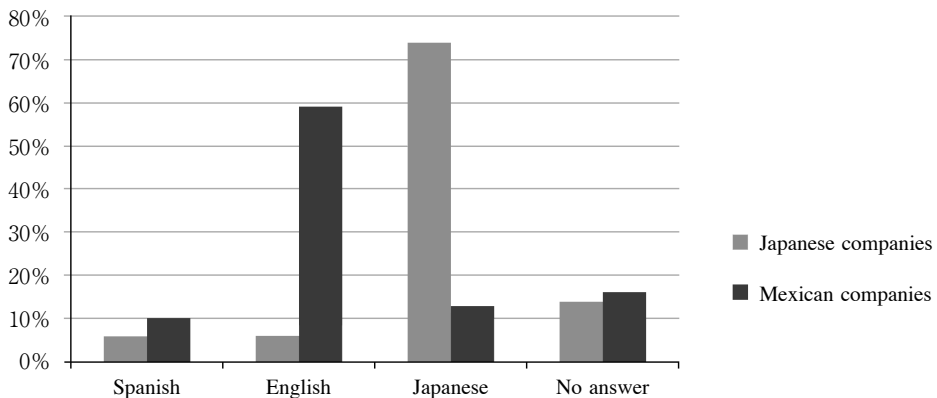
Table 2

Professional consultancy for cultural patterns of the country (percentages)

	JAPANESE COMPANIES	MEXICAN COMPANIES
Yes	18%	16%
No	40%	55%
Already knows	36%	22%
There was no answer	6%	6%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Survey PROMEJ 2012

Graph 5

Use of language in order to do business

Source: PROMEJ survey 2012

Spanish is used as third language with sixty-two percent.

English is considered as the main language (with fifty nine percent) in the conduct of business by the Mexican companies to communicate with the Japanese.

Power distance

The application system of the questionnaire allowed us to perform fifty interviews with forty nine Mexican and Japanese companies that export to Japan, situation that gave us a wider view of how cultures have managed to assimilate the opposing nation. On the one hand, Hofstede (2000) refers that is observed a medium to high level for Japan and high for Mexico, this is, a clearly defined respect among subordinates of the company, which is in keeping with the hierarchical sense of respect for their culture.

These sayings could be verified empirically through observation, not by reactives, to conduct interviews, where it was observed that subordinates received instructions from his immediate boss to serve us, but with prior knowledge and permission of the boss. On the other hand we want to refine our assessment since it is only a description of events about what happened in the field.

It should be remembered in this regard that Errichiello and Sano point out that the first two great features of Japanese business culture are:

1. *Guidance to be followed in the hierarchy.* They take seriously the chain of command and orders, such that respect their respective heads, seek guidance and discipline and accept the decisions of their superiors without revolt.

2. *Importance of collectivism versus individualism.* Act cooperatively, considered loyalty as a priority, identify with a particular group and put their needs above their own, conform to social norms, value harmony of the team, decisions are made involving all members and often consultations are made with the same level colleagues to communicate and report (Errichiello & Sano, 2012).

On the same subject, other authors such as Ruth Benedict (2005), established the hierarchization as an important feature of Japanese and Japan and so, during the World War II the Japanese military considered that Japan was the only hierarchical nation at all levels and aware that everyone should take its own place. Therefore, their faith and trust in the hierarchy is one of their innate attitudes, (Mackintosh, 2011).

Conclusions

The conclusions we have elaborated have to be taken positively (*cum granu salis*) considering the limitations of the application of the survey, either since a geographical point of view (a geographical area of Mexico), and either since the limiting reactives of the survey and eventually as observing attitudes. Nevertheless, we believe that may be enriching in some way in the study of the importance of cultural variables in the sphere of international economic relations and as a starting point for further research.

- *Confidence*. In our study we found that Japanese managers based in Mexico, in fact showed confidence and team spirit during the uprising in the survey by their countrymen. This confirms the theory of Hofstede that are supportive and share information for decision making. On the other hand, one of the obstacles to carry out the implementation of the survey was the distrust of Mexican companies on their participation in the survey that they were invited by their countrymen. On the other hand, in the invited Japanese companies only a few of them did not respond. This could indicate a slightly lower team spirit in Mexican companies.

- *Uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation*. It is important to note that Japanese companies showed (**Graph 3**) that they accept the risks and uncertainties due to the orientation of their countrymen and experience what it entails making decision to reinvest in production equipment. In the same way, Mexican exporting companies also showed that plan in short, medium and long term and we obtain an answer of seventy-eight percent

(**Table 1**).

- *Language*. Regarding the survey results on languages successfully used between companies in a matter of business between the two countries, Mexico and Japan, the following was obtained: English language is the most widely used in Mexican companies and in the Japanese case is its own language (**Graph 5**). Therefore, we can conclude that a major obstacle to establishing business is definitely the language as it promotes awareness of mental programming, as well as their cultural values and even its corporate culture, which will improve the trade exchange.

- *Power distance and hierarchization*. Hofstede (2000), Benedict (2005) and Errichielo y Sano (2011), as we have seen, consider hierarchization as one of the characteristic elements of the Japanese culture. Hofstede (2000) finds that a medium to high level it is still being observed.

  Has to be noted that in the present study this dimension was applied only as an empirical observation and it was found that power distance or hierarchization applies to both nations, Japan and Mexico. As it was observed in Hofstede's model (**Graph 1**), indicator considers this higher in Mexico than in Japan.

In summary about the international business, the parties shall meet the mental map of the counterparty to understand their level of confidence in negotiating culture, acceptance of advice from experts in cultural patterns and in quality, know how to respect hierarchies if necessary, and their orientations in the short or long-term and, of course, the language of the counterparty.

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