

Japan Invents the Future

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Even as Japan becomes a world leader in modernity, two stereotypes continue to interfere with an understanding of that country. First, there is the old canard that the Japanese can only imitate, not originate. Already in 1871, one British observer accused them of a "lack of originality" and nine years later another wrote about Japan having "a civilization without any originality." In 1900, Algernon Bertram Mitford said that "Japan has never originated anything." A few years later, Henry Norman explained that, "in commercial matters the Japanese have exhibited their imitativeness in the most extraordinary degree. Almost everything they have once bought, from beer to bayonets and from straw hats to heavy ordinance, they have since learned to make for themselves." In 1915 Thorstein Veblen held Japanese assimilation of Western ways to be "most superficial" and "has not yet had its effect on the spiritual outlook and sentimental convictions of the people."

Similar charges have been repeated many times since, even by knowledgeable observers. In 1971, Donald Richie wrote that "in film, as in much else, Japan did not invent techniques or even styles; rather it brought those existing to a point of perfection."

The accusation is nonsense. Even the most superficial acquaintance with Japan after 1854 should be enough to recognize that this country has been enormously creative; and this is even truer today. The Japanese explore modernity directly on their own, while Africans and other Asians learn about it through translations. In the rest of the non-Western world, almost all that is new is derivative; in Japan it is mostly original.

Perceptive observers have noted Japanese creativity throughout the twentieth century. Henry Dyer wrote in 1904:

The charge of want of originality on the part of the Japanese is . . . superficial and unfair. . . . In the course of little more than a generation the Japanese have shown that they are not only able to adapt Western science to Japanese conditions, but to advance its borders by original investigation. . . . It is too late in the day to continue to repeat what was a very common saying thirty years ago; namely that the Japanese were very clever imitators but that they had neither originality nor perseverance to accomplish anything great.

A few years later, Ernest Fenollosa observed: "We have belittled the Japanese as a nation of copyists."

The second stereotype holds that, if the Japanese have any originality, it is limited to two areas: technical ingenuity and economic proficiency. Sure, the Japanese can improve what others invent; and, yes, they do work very hard, but foreigners and Japanese too tend to see the country's achievement as narrowly limited to making Sony and Toshiba into household names worldwide.

Such glib generalizations ignore the broad-based and profound cultural transformation that has taken place in Japan. Technical skills are just a small part and economic success is only one of many accomplishments. Dwelling on prowess in these areas alone diminishes the magnitude of the Japanese achievement.

Further, the assumption that fine engineering and a high GNP can exist in isolation is a very dubious one, at best.

The argument matters. If the conventional view is indeed wrong, it means that the Japanese pose a far greater challenge to the world than is widely understood. An imitative country that got lucky has little long-term significance; but a highly creative civilization at the forefront of change has importance for everyone.

Japanese Creativity

The Japanese turned the very act of borrowing into an act of creativity. Prototypes were learned, imitated exactly and with skill, then quickly developed in new and distinctive ways. In the end, the model turned into something new and invariably original. From the great to the humble, what started as Western rapidly took on a clear Japanese cast.

Hiden, the tradition of initiating students into a body of confidential knowledge, is still relied upon for the transmitting of knowledge. Inspired by this legacy, Japanese students devote themselves to serious, long-term study in a Zen way ("a student walks seven feet behind his teacher, lest he step on his master's shadow"). Take driver's education which requires intense efforts in Japan. During the first hour of the course, a student practices the precise way to open a car door (lift the handle gently, pull the door exactly four inches, stop, look in both directions, and open the door the rest of the way). A student can be inducted into these mysteries either by devoting the good part of one day a week for up to six months. Or he can attend one of the country's 150 residential driving schools, where he devotes seventeen to twenty days to intensive instruction on driving.

Baseball is played according to the same rules as in the United States but has evolved into a Japanese institution with a wholly different approach to learning skills. Sadaharu Oh, the slugger with a career total of 868 home runs recounts how he studied at the feet of his master, Tokyo Giants' batting coach Hiroshi Arakawa: "Arakawa-san taught me everything I know. All that I have ever accomplished I owe to him. What is best in me is only what I have been able to draw from his teaching." Appropriately, Oh's autobiography in English carries the subtitle "A Zen Way of Baseball."

Oh also notes that team cooperation has an importance unknown to American players. "In my country it is impossible to play just for oneself. Everyone wants to play that way—but you cannot show it. You play for the team, the country, for others." Loyalty is recip-

rocated by management; former Yomiuri Giants often work for the Yomiuri newspaper, while Nippon Ham Fighters end up selling ham. Appropriately too, Robert Whiting subtitles his study on baseball in Japan, "Baseball Samurai Style."

Exchanging business cards developed from a Western custom but quickly took on a distinct Japanese flavor. Cards are carried more widely (even by high-school students), used in more situations (bar girls give cute cards to their patrons), exchanged more often (one guess has 12 million of them handed out each day), made more elaborately (they can be made of metal or carry photographs, smell aromatically, play music, or be downloaded into a computer), and scrutinized with unique care.

Department stores began by emulating those in the United States but quickly took on distinctive Japanese elements of culture and entertainment. For example, the stores sponsored major art galleries and for many years had game rooms and hired bands. Vending machines in Japan purvey goods—such as beer and hard liquor—that are nowhere else sold by machine.

**"A student walks seven feet behind
his teacher, lest he step on his
master's shadow."**

The comic strip arrived from the United States in 1923 and quickly transcended its American origins to become a staple of Japanese entertainment and a major force in popular culture. Today, it constitutes over one-quarter of all printed matter in Japan, a statistic that appears less surprising when one sees the telephone-directory-sized volumes produced each week. *Shonen Jump* sells over 2.5 million issues a week and the largest circulation comic of them all, *Champion*, sells over 4 million. Even elite universities sponsor comic clubs where students publish their own comic magazines.

With regard to food, the Japanese package a lunch of sandwich, potato salad, and lemon pie in the Japanese bento style, in a lacquer box subdivided into parts and garnished with green. The Japanese cuisine pays little attention to food being hot or cold; neither does it serve meals in a strict order; as a result, even French food is served in Japan with a certain nonchalance.

Shoes became popular in the 1870s, before any other Western-style clothing. Right from the begin-

ning, the Japanese adapted the form to their own taste. "In early Meiji there was a vogue for squeaky shoes. To produce a happy effect, strips of 'singing leather' could be purchased and inserted into the shoes."

The Japanese made the Christian holidays of Christmas and New Year's their own, and in the process transformed them. For background, two facts must be remembered: less than 1 percent of the Japanese populace is Christian and the Japanese traditionally celebrated Lunar New Year (with the rest of the Chinese cultural world) in late February. Now all has changed. The holiday season begins with "Forget-the-Year" revelries and continues for nearly two weeks. During that time businesses shut down and alcoholic consumption soars. The symbols of Christmas, taken primarily from the United States, are everywhere. But they are not serious. As the *Economist* observes: "This Shinto-Buddhist land has imported piped jingle bells, sparkling trees and yo-ho-hos in the same spirit as it has adopted Mickey Mouse: as pure fun."

The number of Christmas cards received can affect social standing and credit rating.

New Year's is an even more extravagant occasion. Since 1873 it has taken place on 1 January (not late February) and it, not Christmas, is the main time for exchanging gifts and cards. The Japanese have the exchange of cards down to a science; in contrast to the rest of the world, where holiday cards dribble in over a period of weeks, the Japanese post office assures delivery on 1 January, so long as a card is mailed by 28 December. A typical household receives hundreds of cards on that date. Indeed, how many cards one receives and from whom has not just social implications but can affect one's credit rating.

A consumer-finance company, *Honobono Reiku*, says that it gives loans more readily to those who get many *nengajo* (New Year's cards), on the theory that these must be people of substance. After all, said a company official, Katsuhiko Hasegawa, "When your business goes bankrupt, you get fewer cards." *Honobono Reiku* even evaluates the type of card. Those who get handwritten greetings are deemed worthier than those who receive the pre-printed varieties. Senders are judged, too, on a point system of one to five. A card mailed by a former teacher or an expensive restaurant gets a five, but one from a politician is worth only a

one because office-seekers hand out *nengajo* as readily as promises.

The Japanese celebrate the Christmas and New Year's season by listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Gigantic choruses (numbering up to 10,000 participants) rehearse for months in advance and the country's leading orchestras play the symphony over and over again during December. This represents an original Japanese custom, not a Western one, that evolved out of two Western imports, the holidays and the music.

The use of English is startlingly original. Japanese company names, advertising, and decorative uses of the English language are to a native speaker often strange and sometimes incomprehensible. A shirt proclaims "Groovy Question" and a jacket states "Nice Box 317— Lover Come Back to the Mysterious Club." A bag is inscribed with "West Coast Sportsgoods Spirit," a loose-leaf folder has "American Way Pulse of Stationery." The thoughts on a sweatshirt range from the absolutely obscure ("Boom Strap—Articles of Knitting Grew") to the racy ("Mr. Zogs Original Sex Wax—Never Spoils, the Best for Your Stick").

Brand-name goods also carry odd tags. "Pocari Sweat" is a popular drink, "Creap" a coffee lightener, and "Potato" the name of a rock magazine. Despite its name, "Goo Soup" is said to be of delicate taste. Tags on watches sold by the YOU company include the inscription "Sentimental Grafitti Orient." A liquor slogan exhorts: "Be more Scotch and have more wine." Even foreign corporations get into the spirit. On vending machines, Coca-Cola products carry the slogan "I feel Coke," while cans proclaim "I feel Coke & Sound Special."

This inventive use of English—using words purely for effect, disregarding meaning—represents not errors but a wholly distinctive way of using language. English takes on an iconographic purpose, becomes something to be seen, not read, much less taken literally. The Japanese have chosen to play with the language in their own way. Some now call this Japlish or Janglish; less delicately, Basil Hall Chamberlain a century ago called it "English as she is Japped."

Government and Public Office

In government, already in the Meiji period, after a short period of unimaginative imitation, the Japanese evolved the administrative institutions they had copied. Parliamentary democracy received a new twist with a system of a strong bureaucracy and weak politicians, of party factions (*habatsu*), and of strong central and weak local governments.

The Japanese police introduced innovations in recruitment and deployment. Administrators were hired from among graduates of the country's leading universities. Already in 1893, long before Western police organizations attracted university graduates, graduates of the Imperial University joined the Tokyo police force. Formal police education began with the national Police Officers Academy, the first such institution in the world, founded in 1885.

Japanese police mixed benevolence and power in distinctly Confucian manner.

Training at the National Police Academy outmatched anything found in the West before the 1920s. Japanese police officers achieved a level of discipline and honesty not found elsewhere. University and specialized education soon led to professionalization, which became so integral to the police that, five years after government funding for the Academy ended in 1904, the police association itself paid for a new Academy—a perhaps unique event in the history of bureaucracy.

The Japanese police portrayed themselves from the start very differently from the Western models. An 1874 regulation for Tokyo officers mixed power and benevolence in a distinctly Confucian manner: "The officer is parent and older brother, the subordinate is child and younger brother." In line with this, police would intrude in matters of no concern to their Western counterparts. Not only would they haul men wearing the topknot off to the barber or would make sure pedestrians walked on the left, they would inspect houses in the fall and spring to insure that the bi-annual house cleaning was done properly.

The deployment of police officers too was based on novel principles. To consolidate the beat system, that was widely used in Europe, they developed small stations for urban and rural needs. In cities, the police worked out of three-man police boxes (*koban*); in rural areas, they were based in one-man residential posts. These small stations gave the police a consistency of dispersion and penetration unmatched in Europe. It took almost exactly a century for *koban* to reach the West, finally making it in 1987, when the first of these more efficient and less expensive versions of the foot patrol were adopted in San Francisco.

A fine example of the relationship between Japan and the West is the postal system, which emerged along similar lines. The Japanese borrowed mostly from the

British system, then the most advanced in the world, and immediately began experimenting. They used new forms of transport (including rickshaws), relied on private companies to deliver much of the mail, advertised for business, offered various services gratis, and established novel organizational forms. The results were impressive. By 1912 a retired British postal official deemed the Japanese system "splendidly organized." By 1976 (almost a century after the Japanese had first imitated the British system), the British government dispatched a committee to study the Japanese postal service, seeking to learn from their organization and use of technology.

The Japanese government also experimented with other important practices. In the field of energy, for example, its sale of coal mines in 1869 was not just "the most extensive non-coerced privatization in economic history," but also one of the earliest; and the decision to leave electrical supply entirely in private hands made Japan nearly unique among industrialized states.

Business and Industry

In business, many of the features characteristic of Japanese management had already emerged in the 1890s, including, as Eleanor Westney has stated, "the emphasis on generalists rather than specialists; a reliance on formal intra-organizational training to provide needed skills and inculcate loyalty toward the organization and a strong personal sense of duty; the standardized, rational structure of bureaus and sections."

Japanese corporations are uniquely involved in the lives of their employees.

From this, the Japanese created a unique business structure, what Murray Sayle has dubbed a system of tribal bureaucratic capitalism. It includes distinctive forms of corporations, such as commercial combines (*the zaibatsu*) and trading companies (*sogo shosha*). The Japanese found new ways of cooperation between corporations and government agencies, such as the Ministry for International Trade and Industry. Japanese corporations are uniquely involved in their employees' lives, sponsoring everything from calisthenics to marriage bureaus—seeing it as the duty of the company to help with this.

Within the factory, the Japanese took the American concept of quality control circles and refined it to the

point where factory inspection was rendered almost unnecessary. This in turn made possible the just-in-time (*kanban*) method of industrial production, with attendant savings in production costs. Innovations in management include *ringisei* (circular discussion system) and *nemawashi* (informal discussion and consultation). Japanese firms pioneered the practice of close relations between management and workers, and assuring lifetime employment in return for in-house labor unions becoming docile. Operating on the principle that "workers, not managers, build cars," workers received ever more responsibilities, while the ranks of managers were thinned out.

Japan's great industrial and commercial success in the 1970s made its business practices the subject of many studies seeking to evince their secret and make it available to the outside world. While the direct application of Japanese methods had only limited success (Sears World Trade, created on the model of a *sogo shosha*, quickly floundered), the example of Japanese firms, their efficiency, and their spirit profoundly reshaped the international face of business. Rivals who had never worked together combined resources to fend off the Japanese challenge.

Many characteristics of Japanese corporations are not tied to Japanese culture, and can be successfully exported. Such features include: variable compensation to employees, enterprise labor unions, greater job security, the *kanban* system of manufacturing, more willingness to search for innovative technology, eliminating dividends to stockholders, closer relations with banks, and greater emphasis on market position than profits. Eleanor Westney, a specialist on Japanese organizations, has predicted: "It seems likely that the growing internationalization of Japanese commerce and industry will eventually make Japan an important exporter of organizational patterns as well as of cars and consumer electronics."

Education

Studies show that Japanese high school graduates have had the equivalent of four more years of schooling than Americans. The great emphasis on high school performance, culminating with the college entrance examination, is then followed by relative relaxation during the university years. Foreigners have long been impressed with the Japanese school system. Henry Dyer, a British engineer, recognized the implications of this achievement in 1904:

Great Britain should not be above learning a few lessons from Japan. . . Other countries, notably

France, Germany, and the United States, and above all Japan, have developed their educational arrangements and applied the results to national affairs in such a way as to affect profoundly economic and social conditions at home and trade abroad.

Indeed, Dyer re-organized the Glasgow and West Scotland Technical College along the lines of the Imperial College of Engineering in Japan, making that college possibly the first Western institution to be influenced by the New Japan. Along similar lines, U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett wrote in 1987 that Americans "should look for principles, emphases and relationships in Japanese education that are compatible with American values, indeed that tend to embody American values. . . to see how we might borrow and adapt them for ourselves."

Japanese educational methods have had other influences too. For example, the Suzuki Method of violin training, which applies traditional Japanese techniques of rote learning in new ways, found a substantial international following.

Science and Technology

Scientific training got off to a quick start in Meiji Japan as eminent European or American specialists traveled to Japan to instruct Japanese students in physics, chemistry, zoology, botany, geology. For other subjects, such as mathematics, the Japanese traveled to Europe.

Japanese achievements became quickly apparent. Shibasaburo Kitazato discovered the antitoxin against tetanus in 1890. The 1892 Diet bill, creating an earthquake investigation committee, made seismology a specialty of Japanese science, which quickly became a world leader in this field. Hantaro Nagaoka, who had the distinction of being the only non-Westerner present at the founding of the International Congress of Physics in Paris in 1900, soon after proposed the Saturnian model of the atom's structure (that is, a massive nucleus surrounded by orbiting electrons), antedating by a decade the work of Ernest Rutherford and Niels Bohr.

Kikunae Ikeda identified monosodium glutamate in 1908. Umetaro Suzuki discovered the first of the vitamins, B-1, in 1910. Kotaro Honda invented K.S. Magnetic Steel in 1916. Kyusaku Ogino demonstrated the connection between ovulation and menstruation in 1923. Hideki Yukawa hypothesized the existence of the meson in atomic nuclei in 1934. Shin-ichiro Tomonaga had a key role during the 1940s in formulating the theory of quantum electrodynamics. Five Japanese

scientists have received Nobel Prizes; the only other non-Western scientists to have won prizes are one Indian and one Pakistani.

Despite these impressive results, the feeling has long existed in Japan and in the West that the Japanese have not done their share of basic research, ignoring it in favor of research aimed at finding commercial applications. Even a Japanese prime minister, Yasuhiro Nakasone, publicly stated that Japan is indebted to the West and "we now need to repay the favor." Spurred on in good part by foreigners (shades of the unequal treaties in the 1880s!), Japanese firms began to establish capabilities in basic research.

According to one estimate, more than thirty major corporations established basic research laboratories between 1982 and 1987. Funds devoted to research increased by an average of 10 percent annually through the 1980s. Looking at 1985 figures, Americans spent \$109 billion on research and development, the Japanese \$34 billion, the Soviets \$3 billion, West Germany \$2 billion, and France and Great Britain each about \$1 billion. (Changed exchange rates would double the size of the Japanese investment within three years.) By 1985, the Japanese spent a larger percentage than Americans of their gross national product on research and development (2.8 percent versus 2.7 percent); because a substantial portion of American funds went for military research, Japan out-spent the United States in civilian research.

The Japanese took out more than half the patents in chemistry and produced most of the amino acids required for bio-technology. A massive particle accelerator, Tristan, costing \$700 million, placed Japan in the forefront of elementary particle research. A December 1988 report of the National Science Foundation in Washington concluded that the Japanese scientific endeavor had achieved "relative parity" with the American level.

American universities and businesses in turn responded to this effort with alacrity. Some 400 scientists began to study Japanese and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offered courses in the language. Indices and summaries of Japanese articles were started, most notably the monthly magazine of the Japanese Technical Information Service, providing 5,000 abstracts in each issue. A congressional subcommittee published a report on the need to stay abreast of Japanese science, and the Commerce Department proposed a joint venture with industry to program computers to translate Japanese into English.

In technology, about 1869, the rickshaw (more properly, *jirikisha*) was invented in Tokyo. It provided

such an efficient and low-cost way to transport goods and people, the vehicle soon became a major export to China, the Malay peninsula, and India.

The Japanese take ideas or inventions from the West and make better use of them. As a result, they are the single most dynamic force in the application of technological advances. A few of the most important examples must suffice, for the list is very long: nylon fueled the synthetic textile industry, transistors and semiconductors spawned the electronics industry, and robotics, which were invented in the United States, have been most heavily applied in Japan.

Although long dependent on technology from abroad, the Japanese now generate much on their own. According to a 1988 report issued by the Japanese Science and Technology Agency, the 490,000 engineers working in Japan outnumber the combined totals of Great Britain, France, West Germany, and Italy. Whereas Japanese inventors received 4 percent of U.S. patents in 1970, they won 19 percent in 1986. By 1985, Japan received, after the United States, the largest flow of income from technological advances used by foreigners.

Examples include: Junichi Nishizawa's many basic electronic devices, such as optical fibers and the PIN diode, a forerunner of the semiconductor. In June 1985, a missile tracking guidance system developed by Toshiba became the first Japanese military technology to be used by the U.S. government.

According to a study that traced citations to prior inventions (as a way of tracing influence), starting already in 1976, scientific innovation in Japan outpaced that in the United States. The report held that Japanese patents were "at the leading edge of modern developments in technology." The American Electronics Association opened an office in Tokyo in 1984. The impression of Japanese imitativeness remains, however, and in good part because of this, foreign firms have adopted little Japanese technology.

The Arts

In the arts, Japanese literature touched almost every important nineteenth-century French writer. Almost to an individual, they showed interest in Japan or China and appreciated the arts of East Asia. More broadly yet, according to Kenneth Rexroth, "the forms of Japanese poetry, of the *Noh* drama, and even of the Japanese language itself, happen to parallel the development of poetry in the West from Baudelaire to Rimbaud, to Mallarmé, to Apollinaire, to the Surrealists."

But of all the writers swayed by Japan, two stand out by virtue of their stature and the depth of Japanese influence on them: Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Wil-

liam Butler Yeats (1865-1939). At the most elevated level, *Noh* theater profoundly influenced Pound's *Cantos* and Yeats' *Plays for Dancers*. What Pound called the "super-position," or the addition of a reference to nature—"The apparition of these faces in a crowd,/Petals on a wet, black bough"—came to pervade his own writing and had a wide influence on subsequent English and American poetry. Pound introduced Yeats to Japanese writing in 1911, inducing Yeats henceforth to rely on the super-position as well as techniques derived from *noh*.

European theater in the nineteenth century turned to Japanese forms for new elements.

Other English-speaking writers looked to Japan for inspiration, among them Conrad Aiken, Richard Aldington, T. S. Eliot, John Gould Fletcher, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Archibald MacLeish, I. A. Richards, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. American poets of the beat generation very clearly showed the impress of Japanese verse. Paul Goodman wrote five plays modeled on the *noh* form of drama. The American poet Kenneth Rexroth holds that "classic Japanese and Chinese poetry are today [1973] as influential on American poetry as English or French of any period, and close to determinative for those born since 1940." Earl Miner concludes that "over the long period of four centuries Japan and its culture have become increasingly important to our writers and have assumed the role, to use the phrase of Ezra Pound, of 'a live tradition' which has modified, refreshed, and helped shape much of the finest modern English and American literature."

Other Japanese forms also affected Western poetry. The *haiku* verse form (of seventeen-syllable poems) provided the central inspiration for the imagist school in France and England, and through it affected much of modern European poetry, especially that written by such Frenchmen as José-Maria de Heredia and Paul Louis Couchoud. Woodblock prints inspired Oscar Wilde to adapt coloristic images to his verse "studies" and "impressions."

The European theater of the nineteenth century turned to Japanese forms for elements of abstraction, stylization, and self-consciousness. *Noh*, with its bare stage, abstract symbolism, and austere music had perhaps the most profound impact on Western theater.

Under its impact, highly elaborate scenes gave way to simple and nominal gestures. The revolving stage, patterned after kabuki theater, was introduced in Germany in 1896. *Kabuki* affected Bertold Brecht and continues to exert an influence on Western writers.

The *shimpa* (or *shimpageki*, "new school") theater which came into being under the impact of the West broke down the many restrictions of *noh* and *kabuki*. Eventually, Japanese directors brought their methods directly to Western audiences. Thus, the avant-garde director, Tadashi Suzuki staged *The Tale of Lear*, his adaption of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in several American playhouses during a 1988 tour. Relying entirely on American actors, Suzuki gave the whole production a Japanese quality. Characters on the stage hardly moved; instead, they relied on gestures and voices. Men played female roles. According to one reviewer, Joe Brown of *The Washington Post*, the result was a powerful new interpretation:

Their glittering, piercing glares reveal more about character than dozens of "natural" gestures and mannerisms, and their hybrid of English words and Japanese vocalization techniques results in a Shakespeare the likes of which you've never heard, filled with harsh, guttural barks, rapidly whispered outbursts and slowly broken sentences.

Sergei M. Eisenstein, the Russian director and film theorist, held *kabuki* in the highest regard and argued that the sound film "can and must learn its fundamentals from the Japanese." Eisenstein brought Japanese theatrical methods to bear on films, to wide and lasting effect.

Kabuki enjoyed a second wave of influence in cinema in the 1950s through the film *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa. Like many Japanese directors, Kurosawa relied on stylized forms of acting, staging, and display, then blended these with psychological complexity and intellectual seriousness to achieve an ambiguous and exotic spectacle. *Rashomon* and other Japanese historical costume pictures strongly affected European and American art films.

Other Japanese filmmakers gained international influence. Nagisa Oshima, a member of the New Wave of the 1960s, mixed wry irony with powerful sexuality and radical politics. Among his best known films are *Boy* and *In the Realm of the Senses*. The films of Kenji Mizoguchi are known for their sheer beauty and their physical and psychological portrayals. His main theme was the social condition of women; major films in-

clude *Ugetsu*, *The Life of Oharu*, and *Sansho the Bailiff*. Yasujiro Ozu crafted quiet, slow-moving stories about family drama. Ishiro Honda's science-fiction films, including *Godzilla*, gained a cult following in the West.

In painting, the story of the arrival of the first *ukiyo-e* (color woodblock prints) in Paris in 1856 is shrouded in legend, but their discovery by the painter Félix Bracquemond led to *japonisme*, a vogue for Japanese art that lasted from 1865 to 1895. Vincent van Gogh owned two hundred Japanese prints and briefly dealt in them commercially. He would have visited Japan had his money held out. A store devoted to Japanese art first opened in Paris in 1875; that same year, the East India House (precursor of the present Liberty's) opened in London and specialized in Japanese artifacts.

Japonisme might have had a limited effect had it not attracted the attention of outstanding artists and critics, including Théophile and Judith Gautier, Edmonde and Jules de Goncourt, José Maria de Heredia, and Henri de Regnier. Through them, *ukiyo-e* altered European conventions of color, perspective, empty space, symmetry, form, composition, and subject matter. In particular, these artists came to understand the appeal of irregularity and to appreciate the Japanese sensibility for the evanescence of nature. Japanese art greatly inspired the Impressionist movement in France, which caused perhaps the most profound change in the aesthetic of modern Europe.

Artists directly affected by the wood blocks included Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas, Théodore Duret, Paul Gauguin, van Gogh, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch, Pierre Renoir, and, above all, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Toulouse-Lautrec derived his subject matter directly from Japanese models; his posters of the Parisian demi-monde, for example, resembled Kitagawa Utamaro's courtesans of Tokyo's pleasure quarters. Further, he imitated the Japanese in the heavy use of shadowless pure colors, and other elements of design, and in his printmaking technique. James Abbott McNeill Whistler popularized Japanese styles in the United States. Impressionists did not shy from crediting Japan. Duret called the Japanese "the first and finest impressionists," while van Gogh dubbed Japanese art "true religion."

Later, the extreme abstraction of Vasili Kandinski clearly showed the inspiration of traditional Japanese aesthetics. More recent painters such as Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, and Robert Rauschenberg also show the clear impress of Japanese art. Japanese calligraphy and the "modulated line" had great impact on artists such as Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages, both

of whom gave a central place to ideograph-style elements. Japanese artists have had some success and influence in Western-style painting. The leading figure here was Tsuguji Fujita (1886-1968), who gained a considerable reputation in France. He assimilated so thoroughly to French ways that he was late in life baptized a Catholic; he died shortly after decorating the Chapel of Our Lady of Peace in Reims. If not entirely successful in their accomplishments, Japanese artists were unique in their unremitting effort to assimilate the techniques of Western painting.

In design, the Japanese example encouraged Westerners to apply aesthetic considerations to the small things in life. The sensibility of the tea ceremony or wrapping a package in a store represents an integration of design and attention to detail traditionally unfamiliar in the West. Japanese handicrafts offered Westerners a new simplicity and aesthetic. This approach came to fruition early in this century in the work of Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus school of design in Germany. It has since been widely imitated and almost universally accepted.

Japonisme attracted the most outstanding French artists and critics.

Japanese stylists influenced the West at two different times. First, the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, which celebrated individual work and authentic materials, drew in a general way on Japanese artisanship and style. The movement flourished in the 1880s and 1890s, then spread to Europe and North America. At the start of the twentieth century, *Art Nouveau* (*Jugendstil*) incorporated significant stylistic elements deriving from Japanese paintings and ornaments. *Art Nouveau* abandoned the European practice of using only gems and precious metals in fine jewelry, and took up some of the materials associated with Japanese crafts; it also incorporated nature themes that owed much to Japanese art.

The "Japanese design revolution," a movement with many practitioners but with little in common, had wide international influence, especially in architecture, fashion, and graphics. The stylists shared an emphasis on making the most of materials, be it wood or plastic, silk or concrete; and on emphasizing extreme cleanness of design and great attention to detail.

In architecture, the restrained, monochromatic aesthetic known as *shibui* deeply influenced twentieth-

century architecture and interior design. Elements deriving from Japan included: simplicity of form, exposed materials, wide use of wood, the post and lintel construction (closely tying interior spaces to exterior appearance), the fluid use of inside and outside spaces, rooms with multiple uses (such as one-room combinations of living-rooms and dining-rooms), floor-to-ceiling windows, varied textures and fabrics, and light furnishings. Japanese ideas had a particularly strong impact on American architecture starting in about 1905 and culminating in the post-Second World War period. Frank Lloyd Wright, in particular, transmitted many Japanese effects to American architects.

If the early Japanese influence on Western building was stylistic, a second, more directly architectural influence began in the 1970s. Until the Meiji period, Japan had no architects, only master carpenters. Until the mid-1960s, architects usually worked for construction companies. After a century of copying from the West, Japanese builders found their own style, which turned out quite differently from what the student of *shibui* might have expected.

Confucian culture offered an attractive alternative to Western rationalism.

The 1964 Olympiad and the expositions of 1967 and 1970 served as show pieces for independent Japanese architects. Kenzo Tange was the pioneer who built the 1964 Olympic stadiums and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office. Taniguchi Yoshihiro, also a modernist, is best known for the National Museum of Modern Art. Arata Isozaki, the "father of the Japanese New Wave," emerged as the most prominent of its proponents. Important buildings of his in the West include museums in Nice, Cairo, Los Angeles, and Brooklyn (New York), the American Pavillion at the Venice Biennale, a stadium in Barcelona, and the Palladium discothèque in New York. Charles Jencks, an American critic noted: "Isozaki has taken the style of the West one step further." By carrying Western concepts to their logical conclusion, Japanese architects introduced new elements. Reyner Banham explains that "it is the marginal minor differences in the thinkable and the customary that ultimately make Japanese architecture a provokingly alien enclave within the body of the world's architecture."

The Japanese participated in the definition of Post-Modernism. Reyner Banham argues that it could not

be otherwise. Who but the Japanese could so playfully adopt bits of the Western architectural tradition to create a wholly new style? "Insofar as Post-Modernism involved the breach of modernism's ingrained and unthinking taboos on historical references, it could hardly be under any influence but Japanese."

In fashion, what is sometimes called the "New Japan Style" became a major new force in fashion in 1981. It relied on experimentation with materials, wrapped and draped forms, stark black-and-white designs, and large masses of cloth. It represented a move toward unconventional designs, an absence of color, and novel shapes loosely based on traditional Japanese clothing. Hanae Mori was best known for her evening wear, Issey Miyake for his oversized adaptations of traditional Japanese worker's clothes. Yohji Yamamoto elaborated on Western clothing with bold lines, striking colors, and loose, flowing garments; the whimsical results produced a distinctive hybrid effect.

Rei Kawakubo of *Comme des Garçons* was the most unconventional of the major designers, the one most dedicated to experimenting at the outer limits of the possible. Kawakubo turned clothing inside out, exposing seams; added holes for third arms and second necks; used only four monochromatic colors (black, navy, charcoal, and white); avoided decoration; and moulded the clothes to the body in a highly characteristic manner. Her sparse stores emulated modern art museums. As one admirer, Leonard Koren, noted, "If self-enlightenment were possible in the context of a clothes boutique, surely it would happen in this one."

In the Meiji period, Japanese and Western clothing—*wafuku* and *yofuku*—had been utterly distinct. Women wore either kimonos or dresses. Men wore kimonos, or they wore suits, ties, hats, and shoes. But then two things happened: Western clothing evolved in new ways, and Japanese designers participated in that evolution. The old lines of distinction became blurred beyond recognition. Fashion offers an example of an area in which the tension between Japanese and Western ways has been nearly resolved and has created a new synthesis.

Philosophy and Religion.

The most profound Western interest in Japan was in philosophy. European rationalists of the eighteenth century, looking outside Europe for confirmation of their belief that civilization did not require religious foundations, found in China and Japan what they were looking for. Confucian cultures offered an alternative to Westerners discontent with their society. Geographic remoteness and cultural dissimilarity also en-

hanced the usefulness of the Confucian countries as proof in many arguments. The specific East Asian virtue has changed many times—secularism, aesthetics, lotus-land, purity of revolutionary spirit, or management style—but the underlying quest remained the same.

Zen Buddhism enjoyed several vogues in the West, particularly as interpreted by Daisetsu T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. What was dubbed “Zen for Westerners” had a major influence on American college students and existentialist thinkers. Zen crystalized an interest in alternatives to Western religion in the 1960s, especially in the United States.

Gastronomy

In addition to the standard fare of Japanese cuisine—sushi, sashimi, miso, soy sauce, teriyaki, tofu—much of which found a favorable reception in the West, the mix of styles has had a broad influence. The lightness and delicacy of nouvelle cuisine, along with its emphasis on fresh ingredients and spare, stylized presentation, showed an unmistakably Japanese touch. Faddish restaurants in the United States prepare pizza with *wasabi* (a horseradish normally eaten with sushi), health food stores sell sea weed, and dried noodle soups (*ramen*) could be found on market shelves in many countries. Tofu found a niche, and even became the basis of an ice cream-like desert. Coriander and shiitake mushrooms found followers among the gastronomically ambitious. It is probably only a matter of time before bento boxes (portable lunches packed in small wooden cases) turn up outside Japan, and other new influences will quickly follow.

The Japanese modified Western foods in a way that found favor back in the places of origin. Japanese hardly ate beef before the Meiji period, but when they adopted it and applied their techniques of food preparation, they produced several new dishes (including sukiyaki and teriyaki) which then spread internationally. More recently, Asahi Breweries developed a new yeast to produce a “dry” beer, with 10 percent more alcohol and less sugar. It quickly took on in the United States, where major producers turned out their own versions of dry beer.

Athletics

Mutual influences between Japan and the West in athletics are unique. While many non-Western countries took up soccer, the Japanese learned a great number of sports, including baseball, golf, tennis, volleyball, and skiing. As with more serious pursuits, so too with sports; when the Japanese adopt an activity,

they do so with determined thoroughness. In 1896, after years of Japanese opportuning, Americans living in Yokohama agreed to a Japanese-American baseball game. Although expecting to overwhelm the Japanese high school students, the American businessmen and sailors lost by a score of 29-4. They then dropped the subsequent two games by equally lopsided scores (32-9, 22-6). Coming at a moment of acute self-doubt among Japanese, the effect of these victories was electric. As the students’ president said, “This great victory is more than a victory for our school; it is a victory for the Japanese people.”

Confucian cultures provided an alternative for Westerns who were discontent with their society.

Equally noteworthy, the Japanese (and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese and Koreans) alone spread their athletics to the West. Judo, jujitsu, karate, and other martial arts became widely practiced. FBI and Secret Service agents in the United States studied aikido, a technique for evading and disarming attackers. Judo became an Olympic sport in 1964, the only event of non-Western provenience. (Interestingly, Soviets, not Japanese, won the greatest number of medals in judo.) A relay running race called *ekiden* was invented in Japan in 1917 and first performed outside the country in 1988, when a major contest was staged in New York City.

A Japanese team first went to the Olympic games in 1912. Japan’s athletes have won a total of 237 medals, far more than any other non-Western state.

Popular Culture

Some Japanese products have become widespread, including paper lanterns, bonsai (dwarf) plants (and more rarely, bonkai, or tray scenes, which replicate whole landscapes in miniature), hot tubs, kite-flying, the game of go, and futons. Practices, including communal bathing, origami, and the tea ceremony (*cha no yu*), have found devotees in the West. Careful arrangement and appreciation of natural forms exemplified by flower arrangement (*ikebana*) and rock gardens offer an alternative to traditional Western perceptions of nature.

Japanese popular culture is also beginning to spread abroad. Getting lost and finding one’s way out of large, wood-panelled mazes can be pursued in several coun-

tries. Transformers (the children's toy) and Nintendo video games are extremely popular; can Japanese-style comic books be far behind?

Loan words in English from Japanese stand out for their references to significant, even admirable cultural features. They include: banzai, bonsai, futon, geisha, go, haiku, hibachi, judo, jujitsu, hara-kiri, kabuki, kamikaze, kimono, mikado, noh, origami, ramen, rickshaw, sake, samurai, soy, sukiyaki, sumo, sushi, tatami, tempura, teriyaki, tofu, tsunami, tycoon, zen. Just as "China" came to mean porcelain, so "Japan" after 1688 referred to lacquerware, porcelain, and silk. The slang expression "just a skosh" comes from the Japanese word *sukoshi* (a little).

The Japanese have even created words in English that have gained currency, such as the just-in-time factory system and OA (office automation).

Outlook for the Future

Already by the 1920s, the Japanese had caught up with the West in some areas, including scientific research and artistic experimentation, and were exerting their influence abroad. Today, the Japanese are ahead in a wide variety of institutional, scholarly, and artistic fields. This is probably just a foretaste of what is to come. In good part, the size, affluence, and modernity of Japan propels Japanese culture outward; but so too does Japanese deep appreciation of things Western.

Two points are worth noting. First, the teacher was learning from the pupil within less than a century. Second, although the West could have profited from the Japanese experience already in the late nineteenth century, hardly anyone thought of doing so then. Instead, Japanese and Westerners alike saw Japanese innovations as mere compensation for Japan's backward condition.

Some observers feel that Japanese culture holds the key to the future. One contrast that keeps coming to mind is with France. The French architect Richard Bliath, who lives in Tokyo, observed that Tokyo "is the only city with an architecture of the here-and-now. The past does not exist, much less the future. Paris is still imbued with the spirit of 1789, whereas here there is constant construction and demolition." According to Jay Specter, a New York interior designer: "The future belongs to the Japanese. When I am in France, I am fascinated by the culture, by the decoration, the furniture, the art. But I can't help feel that a great deal of it belongs to yesterday. Japan, to me, looks like tomorrow." For him, "a simple approach to elegance, a beautifully edited point of view . . . in many ways looks

like a view into the twenty-first century." Bernard Portelli, a French coiffeur who redid his Washington salon along Japanese lines agrees: "French style—it's over. There's nothing new, nothing in food, nothing in clothes. They're following the Japanese; that's all they can do." This sentiment is not new: decades ago, Frank Lloyd Wright is said to have told an aspiring architect he met on a ship going to Rome, "Sir, you're headed in the wrong direction."

In all areas of culture—not just business, science, and technology—the Japanese have an eclectic, unfettered approach which, combined with the prosperity of the country and the cosmopolitanism of the populace, permits explorations that others admire and imitate. As Herbert Passin put it, "Japanese no longer simply copy the modes of the outside world; they now participate actively in the development of international styles." Japanese scientists are fettered by a rigid system, but artists are free to follow their interests, unrestricted by conventions. Having mastered Western forms no less well than their own, the Japanese are now free to experiment. The tension between Japanese and Western models has already proven to be a fertile one; it also promises to be deeply influential in the future.

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