

MOOD vs MESSAGE

An Analytical Comparison of
Japanese and American Advertising

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INTRODUCTION

Just Phases They're Going Through

Remember the days when the three little words “Made in Japan” brought a smile to American lips? The days when all those “cute little products” from all those “hardworking little people” were washing up on shore—the miniature, cheap, tinny ones that broke in three days? The days American businessmen today wish they could go back to and do all over again?

That was back in the 1950s and 60s. Uncle Sam was playing John Wayne to the world's often unwilling lady in distress, industry was full of confidence and condescension, and Japanese products as grounds for concern had not yet emerged as a cognitive category. This period might be called Phase One of post-war Japanese-American economic intercourse—before Americans began to see Japanese products as objects of actual competition. Before, that is, they began to take them seriously.

That changed in the seventies. With Japanese cars, cameras, motorcycles and other products taking bigger and bigger bites out of the American pie, U.S. business finally caught on that Nippon, Inc. was no longer a laughing matter and began taking steps to protect its interests. This was Phase Two—the U.S. starting to feel the threat, taking Japanese products seriously.

It wasn't until the mid-eighties, however, that America began taking the Japanese *market* seriously—Phase Three. Once the corporate sector began to appreciate the huge profit potential involved, the race was on. (The Americans weren't the only ones. Companies from around the world descended on Tokyo looking to set up headquarters, pumping up the land prices that inflated the bubble economy.)

It was only then, with their vested interests at stake, that America began to discover just how different things were “over there.” Or, perhaps more accurately, only then did they begin to care.

Fair's Fair and Other Myths

So, at last, the Americans had to face the Japanese on their market as economic equals and compete on their terms. They've been screaming, “Unfair!” ever since.

What do they scream about? Oh, protectionist tariffs and inspection procedures on imports, the impenetrable *keiretsu* pyramid of auto makers to parts makers, the distribution system with its built-in barriers excluding their products from the shelves, the system of middleman after middleman jacking up prices and dulling their competitive edge, just to name a few.

In fact, they scream at just about everything that stands in their way. And the way they tell it, just about everything does. All the more so considering the U.S. has let the Japanese pour products into its market since the end of the war. Now, the Americans demand reciprocity, equal ease of entry, a “level playing field.” After all, fair’s fair, right?

Wrong. Who said “fair” meant anything to the Japanese?

Americans take for granted that an appeal to someone’s sense of fair play will work with others because it works with them. The sentiment is so basic, they assume, it must be universal. In the U.S., after all, “fair” is a characteristic of God, one of the guiding principles of the Constitution, and a moral criterion for action and ethical standard for judgment.

Only it’s not that way for everybody. To the Japanese, for instance, the concept of fair holds little water as the basis for appeal or anything else.

Why not? America is a horizontally structured society based on equality and fairness for all. The Japanese social structure, by contrast, is vertical, positing all relationships as having a “superior” and an “inferior.” Vertical and, until less than 150 years ago, reinforced by a caste system—which, of course, says people are born unequal. (Fairness is based on the premise of equality; no equality, no fairness.) There is no Golden Rule in Japanese morality, no notions of “fair and honest competition between products on an open market” in Japanese economy. (True, fairness and equality are the theory and often not the practice in the U.S., but in Japan they’re not even the theory.)

So what is the criterion, the motivating factor for the Japanese? Not abstract concepts or theories, but practicality—anything that gives you an advantage. That’s the Japanese way, the way it’s always been. Centuries before the term was coined in English, for instance, “industrial espionage” was a corporate fact of life in Japan, business there being the third category, after war and before love, is which all is “fair.”

Invention versus Interpretation

America

Just as different as their business ethics are the Japanese and American approaches to new technology acquisition—or what might be called “progress.” Americans are innovators, inventors; they see intrinsic value in the process of creation itself. The U.S. has given the world more of the most important inventions of the 20th century—the light bulb, automobile, telephone, airplane, atom bomb and computer—than any other single country. And they’re proud of it.

One down side? Americans don't learn well from others. They pride themselves on independence, on self-sufficiency, on needing no one but themselves. Dependence is a sign of weakness; it's to one's shame to "admit defeat"—the inability to do it yourself—by taking from another or building on someone else's breakthrough. The problem is, when it comes to getting your products to market, when a matter of days can mean millions of dollars, the "time efficient" Japanese way of "borrowing" the results of someone else's work to date is far more practical than the American of basically reinventing the technology from square one.

Down side number two: Americans tend to force their way of doing things down other peoples' throats. (The original rationalization of having God on their side devolved into the simple conviction of always being right.) Rather than working within an "unacceptable" system, their answer is to change the system—to their system, of course. American cars, for instance, arrive on Japanese docks with the steering wheels on the left, just like in America. Why doesn't Detroit put them on the right for a country that drives on the left side of the road, like Japanese auto makers put them on the left in America-bound exports? Because Americans expect the Japanese to make the adjustment—in their own country, no less—certainly not the kind of sales policy serious about boosting sales with international consumers.

Japan

Now, what about the Japanese? No one can accuse them of not "learning" from others. They are the original adaptors, the quintessential interpreters of the achievements of their fellow men and countries. (Less flattering epithets abound.) So well do they "incorporate," in fact, that there's precious little in their culture that they can call indigenous. Buddhism is on loan from China, as is their writing system, with most of the rest—science, economics, government—imported from the West after the Meiji Restoration.

The critical consideration to the Japanese, as we've said, is the practical value at the moment, what works here and now, not abstractions like original rights of ownership. Abstractions are not what took Japan from a nation in ruins to world leadership in 40 years—an economic miracle unparalleled in the annals of mankind. And yes, they're proud of that.

The down side is underdeveloped creative ability.¹ Their culture is geared not to innovation, not to forging ahead, but to responding to external stimuli, to “catching up.” The Japanese ideal is harmony, a state of equilibrium, and harmony and equilibrium are static. They have no history, no progress. Progress throws harmony *out* of balance. Inventions, novelty upset equilibrium. When something new comes along they need or can’t ignore, they assimilate it, they “Japanize” it in an attempt to *return* to a state of equilibrium. Which is why the Japanese have traditionally taken no major steps forward until someone else made them first.

¹ Japanese culture evolved along with the patterns of cyclical time, a prevalent feature of agrarian economies. The year-long planting season is the cycle, a new one beginning as the old one ends.

In its pure form, cyclical time contains no history. Cycles generate nothing new; they consist of repeating what went before. In short, nothing “survives” from one to the next. (The objective, indeed, is that nothing survive; cyclical societies perform extensive rituals precisely to expunge the old in order to meet the new.)

What keeps a cycle “moving” from beginning to end—the two points being the same—are the religious rituals performed at crucial steps along the way to ensure a successful harvest. To work, they must be executed faithfully—exactly as they have been for centuries. Care must be taken, in fact, to ensure that nothing is altered, since modification, whether inadvertent or intentional, could render them ineffective. The bottom line? Carbon-copy repetition is the key to survival.

The result? In cyclical cultures, there is nothing good to be said for novelty, improvisation, taking matters into your own hands. On the contrary, it’s disruptive; it displeases the gods, brings disharmony and chaos. Change, or progress, is not part of the program. The emphasis is on renewal, the old becoming new—not novelty, the non-existent coming into existence.

American culture, on the other hand, is built on the assumptions of linear time. Linear implies direction, a progression or “progress.” And, as this implies, linear time does have a history. It consists of events—God’s acts and revelations—along a continuum; the starting point is God’s creation of the Earth and the end point the day when He establishes His Kingdom of Heaven on that Earth, when His wisdom is revealed to man in all its glory.

The more time passes, according to this outlook, the nearer that day becomes and the more knowledge is revealed. The speed of this “progress,” however, is not constant, nor the day when the end point is reached predetermined; it depends on man and his efforts. It’s up to man to seek God’s truth, to reveal God’s wisdom. This process of revelation, the discovery or “uncovering” of Divine knowledge, is the essence of human creation or invention—a leap forward toward the glorious end of time. Here lies the intrinsic value in creativity: it accelerates the flow of time. Which means geniuses will get us to God’s Kingdom sooner.

Advertising: Differences and Dangers

The differences in the two cultures show up clearly in advertising.

Both Japanese and American advertising share the same ultimate objective and process of persuasion. The objective, obviously, is to boost sales, to get consumers to buy your products. There are two steps to the persuasion process: the first getting and holding the audience’s attention, and the second manipulating their values, ideals, wants and fears toward the desired end. Successful execution will result in changing or at least reinforcing the audience’s thinking, getting them on your side and finally, persuading them to do what you want.

And that’s about as far as the similarity goes.

It’s not a question of which is better, of course. If one style of advertising sells products like hotcakes in Japan and its diametric opposite grabs the imaginations and pocketbooks of American consumers, that’s only natural. In cross-cultural advertising, however, differences spell danger. (Especially since the consequences are not as immediate or clear-cut as in other cultural standoffs.) The problems start when you use the wrong approach for either.

Some approaches work in both cultures, but not many. Behind this inability to substitute freely is a fundamental truth, which, considering how quickly people seem to forget it, apparently cannot be repeated enough. That is, language is more than just words. It's also a way of thinking, the representative means of communication of a culture, which, to make an impact, has a style all its own. Even if the product is the same, the respective ways of packaging it for maximum appeal or sales potential are culture-specific. Choosing an inappropriate means of communication can result in total failure to communicate. At best, the audience stops listening, turns off the TV set, turns the page, leaves the website. At worst, they develop a negative perception that may destroy sales opportunities.

Back to Basics

OK, so everyone agrees Japanese and American advertising are different. (Or, at least, pays lip service to the fact.) My goal is to show how deep those differences go by showing where they came from. Why, for instance, are Japanese and American consumers looking for such totally different things in advertising for the same products? And what gave rise to those preferences?

To find out, I'll be looking at Americans and Japanese assumptions about life so basic, they're outside their cultures' jurisdictions of rational scrutiny. An understanding of these sacred cows, in turn, should not only help make their manifestations in reality—in this case, advertising—less “foreign,” but provide the basics for evaluating ad campaigns for the respective cultures.

A final word of caution. I have made blanket statements and used extreme examples in the upcoming pages to illustrate tendencies, and extreme examples, by definition, are rare. The Japanese don't do it this way and the Americans that way with no common ground in between. The boundaries are fuzzy, approaches overlap, exceptions abound. There is mood advertising in the United States and commercials which present very specific messages in Japan. The difference is one of degree.

THE GODS, POSSESSION AND PRAYER

The basic cultural assumptions I'll be discussing lie outside the jurisdiction of rational scrutiny because they originated in the period when the religious and the social were inseparable. They go back to the very beginnings of the cultures—to the Japanese and Christian experiences of the sacred and their expression in communicable form: mythology.

JAPAN

A Fuzzy Pantheon

Japanese gods are not remote from life, but firmly rooted in phenomenal reality—in time and space. There are no gods of “Love” or “Reason” that we find in the Greek pantheon. More than that, however, it is difficult to offer much in the way of a definition; the concept of *kami* is, in typical Japanese fashion, is a very fluid one.

Ubiquity

First of all, they're everywhere. Or, perhaps more correctly, anything. The way the Japanese see it, celestial bodies (the sun, moon and sky), natural forces (the wind, mist and fire), topological features (mountains, rivers and forests), natural objects (rocks and trees), historical figures and more can be—and, in fact, are—gods.

Ambiguity

Second, everything about them is ambiguous. Their origins. Frequently, their sex type. Their hierarchy (Amaterasu is the head, but there is no clear order under her). Their functions (even Amaterasu is an ambiguous combination of sun goddess and earth mother).

This lack of clarity or definition is the key to understanding the Japanese world view and their communication. Clear boundaries presume separation, whereas the Japanese preference for minimal differentiation implies a seamless world where things run together like paint, where there are no straight lines or right angles, where all cats are gray.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity, another pillar of the Japanese Weltanschauung, goes hand in hand with lack of differentiation. There is a place for everything in phenomenal reality; nothing is left out. The Japanese world view sees every living creature, inanimate object and geographical region as an indispensable part of the world as we know it. If the gods disappeared or ceased to exist, for instance, it would no longer be the world as we know it. The same goes for animate and inanimate objects alike. The Japanese need all of them coexisting harmoniously for a healthy, prosperous life on earth. The whole needs the parts as much as the parts need the whole.

Man and the Gods

Entertainment

The Japanese in this inclusive whole enjoy a much closer form of contact with their gods than the Christians. The kami are part of and participate in the same phenomenal reality as rank-in-file Japanese. They visit villages personally. Nor are the Japanese required to worship, love or obey them. What they are required to do is provide entertainment.

The gods live in the mountains, across the sea or under the ground.¹ (This admittedly contradicts the notion of kami as rocks or trees. Fortunately, however, the Japanese do not demand logical consistency from their universe.) The entertainment comes in the form of celebrations held in their honor. These occasions, known as *matsuri*, are sacred times, like Christian Sundays. Only Sundays were never like this.

¹ This was the original notion of divine habitat. Later, many deities came to reside, conveniently enough, in local shrines.

At festival time, the villagers make the preparations and wait for the deity's arrival. It's basically a world of enjoyment and hospitality for the kami to step into, and designed to draw him in by being irresistibly inviting. The villagers spare no efforts on making the festivities everything they can be since there's a lot riding on success.

Belief, Action and Respect

It's important to keep in mind, especially for Christians, that belief plays no part in this process. Villagers don't have to choose which god they believe in, because it isn't a question of belief; they accept the entire pantheon as a matter of course. Each has its proper place in the natural scheme of things; there is room for all. As such, what's important is showing respect, giving each god its due. (Since the *matsuri* is the form that showing this respect takes, and festivals are just as much entertainment for the villagers as they are for the gods, this presents a problem to no one. In most villages, *matsuri* were held on the average of twice a month.)

So the Japanese show their gods respect with festivals. Not with belief, but action. Not even action based on belief, as in the Judao-Christian tradition, but the ritual actions themselves. (Similarly, in Japan, the act of intoning the Buddhist sutras produces merit, regardless of whether the intoning party understands the meaning or not.) You perform the proper rituals at the proper times and that's enough.

Well, not quite. You don't have to believe in what you're doing, but you do have to do it right. If the preparations are sloppy or insufficient, or if, say, only half the village population turns out, it shows lack of respect for the visiting god. Here we see the beginning of Japan's uncompromising insistence on proper form, its emphasis on the external—as an expression of respect on the occasion of receiving the divine.

Divine Intervention

Now, what do the villagers get out of all this? Why go to all that trouble on preparations getting everything just right? Because they want favors from the god—abundant harvests, plentiful offspring, long life, freedom from pestilence and natural disasters. And if they can send him home in a good enough mood, those favors will be granted. If the preparations are not to his liking, on the other hand, he'll turn around and go home mad, and the village can kiss a happy future good-bye.

This never happens, of course. What does happen is that the entire village population turns out to parade the deity through the streets in grand palanquin, offer it sumptuous banquets, saké, music, plays, dancing, contests and other forms of recreation. It's only the most unappreciative god who doesn't go home tickled pink.

In reality, however, what the Japanese villagers wanted from the gods went far beyond favors per se—much like Christian prayer. Festivals were the Japanese means of securing divine intervention, of procuring for humans the power of the gods. The condition for receiving this intervention was the correct observance of religious rituals.

Possession

The major consideration for this discussion are the implications of the method of communication: possession. That is, being occupied by—becoming one with—the divine.

This brings us to shamanism, a practice as old as the Japanese themselves. In fact, shamanism is the core of Japanese folk religion, the oldest set of beliefs on the supernatural to be found on the archipelago.

In this system, communication takes place in the context of the gods revealing themselves through the person of the shaman—taking possession of or occupying his body to speak to the human community. The original role of this communication was divination. Upon request, the gods advised the villagers what crops to plant, which fields to plant in, when to travel and when not to. Or, if people were missing, from what direction to begin their search.

There is also a long history of the souls of the dead inhabiting or “attaching” themselves to individuals and causing trouble in order to get attention and, ultimately, communicate their wants to members of human society, usually their own family.

The point to remember is this: the starting point and goal of Japanese communication, even today, is a state physically impossible in the Christian West—two “entities” occupying the same space in a state of non-differentiation.

Amae

Our final background element is the psychology of *amae*—a particularly Japanese complex of behavioral patterns motivated by the drive to return to the original “oneness” with the mother, the ultimate security. In adult life, it becomes the admission of dependence or subordination in return for—and with the expectation of—protection. Even in maturity, the desire to *amaeru* (the verb) remains quite close to the psychological surface, coloring virtually all behavior and interactions. *Amae* is at the bottom of the desire to belong and, conversely, the fear of being left out—dominating factors in Japanese behavior.

AMERICA

Man and God

Now, what about the United States? First of all, Christianity, the country’s leading religion, and Judaism, its predecessor, are both patriarchal and monotheistic, and their God omniscient, omnipotent and beyond space and time. He is a solitary figure in the sky who created the universe—brought order out of chaos—by giving it laws. All by Himself.

Christians are at a greater distance from their God than their Japanese counterparts. God is “on high,” in Heaven, and makes it a policy not to come down to mingle among his children. Communication is carried out in a “dialogue” with the Deity through prayer.

In looking after His children, God gives them commandments they are obliged to obey. Only God's commandments are no simple guidelines of right and wrong; they're the laws of the universe, absolute and beyond question. They are literally what make the world go round.

Which means, in turn, that going against them can make it stop—a state of affairs which takes not following them beyond “bad” or “socially undesirable.” Disobeying God's word threatens the fundamental order of life as we know it. As such, it's a sin.

Human Nature

Body and Soul

Nor is the Judao-Christian view of humanity an optimistic one. It harbors a basic distrust toward human beings as creatures with inherently evil tendencies. They're disobedient, recalcitrant, in need of discipline. That is, sinful.

The problem is man's body; he's burdened with a willful, self-indulgent one. Left to its own devices, man's body would drive him to fly in the face of all God's commandments and plunge the world into chaos—a proclivity comprehensible only after it is grasped that the flesh is the province of the Devil.

This brings up the dichotomy of body and soul. The macrocosmic struggle between Heaven and Hell is recreated in each individual. (Each one of God's children is a microcosmic universe in him or herself.) To achieve salvation, the soul must overcome the sinful ways of the body. The soul is a “little piece of God in man,” the seat of reason, intellect and will—the weapons in this battle—which must constantly keep watch over the flesh, the Devil's domain.

Divine Intervention

This dichotomy, God and the Devil in each individual, presupposes constant struggle for good to triumph since evil is always lurking, tempting. The triumph of good is assumed, but never without a fight. Man can enlist God's help in this fight by petitioning the Deity for strength through prayer. What's more, man emerges a stronger, better person for the effort.

I said earlier that festivals were the Japanese means of securing divine intervention. Prayer is the Christian counterpart, the means of procuring divine power for human purposes, the secret weapon for obtaining God's help in the fight against Evil.

Belief

This intervention is contingent upon three conditions: belief, love and obedience; you must believe in God, love Him and obey Him for your prayers to be answered. What's more, the first of these conditions, belief, is by far the most important, because love and obedience are based on it.

Belief as the crux of the Judao-Christian tradition makes religion an intensely personal matter, an internal affair. It is a covenant between God and the individual, and the only one who is 100% certain whether he believes or not is the individual himself. He can obey the commandments, participate in the sacraments, but if he doesn't truly believe in his heart of hearts, he's not a true Jew or Christian. (This is why such importance is placed on miracles, why followers ask God to "show them a sign," and why theologians tried for so long to prove the existence of God—so people would believe.) Action without belief is simply "going through the motions" and, in the final analysis, meaningless.

Salvation, Secrets and Sins

On a macrocosmic scale, the triumph of Good over Evil in the universe means that God retains control and order is maintained. In the microcosm, the end result of the victory is eternal salvation of the individual soul.

In the Catholic Church, the original Christian religious organization, confession is an essential part of salvation; man can be forgiven his sins if he voluntarily confesses them before God. (Protestantism made confession a personal matter between God and man, but the importance remains unchanged.)

This might sound contradictory to a Japanese: wouldn't God, if He really was omniscient, already know everything anyway? True, but the emphasis is on man's conscious, voluntary admission and repentance; God knows, of course, but you must acknowledge the mistake of your own accord to be forgiven.

Conversely, one condition for forgiveness and salvation is having no secrets before God. In Japan, secrets and lies are social expedients to neutralize friction, preserve harmony and sustain seamlessness. In the West, secrets become necessary only when God's commandments have been broken—when sins have been committed. Secrets are man's attempts to cover up the work of the Devil.

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Mood versus Message

Now let's look at how these widely divergent backgrounds show up in modern-day advertising East and West. As a starting point, I've chosen a cross-cultural survey conducted to help clarify Japanese and American preferences in advertising. In it, an American survey company presented 30-second food commercials to groups of Japanese and Americans, then tested their reactions.

Their findings? Largely the same in such areas as Interest, Involvement, Brand Recall and Persuasion. In fact, all categories but one were unexpectedly close. That one was Copy Recall. The Japanese scored poorly on remembering exact commercial message content, leading the surveyors to conclude that most Japanese are weak in the areas of listening to and remembering copy points in product explanations.

The question is, "weak" or simply "uninterested?" Because, in fact, Japanese consumers are not *used* to remembering product descriptions. First, the majority of Japanese television commercials give no product message Americans would recognize as one. And second, Japanese consumers wouldn't want to hear it even if they did.

What *do* they want to hear? What *do* they remember? Let's take a look.

JAPAN

Marks of the Trade

Perhaps the best place to start is with some of the trademarks of Japanese commercials that distinguish them from their American counterparts. Some years ago, I had the good fortune to translate an article on this subject by a Senior Creative Director of Dentsu's International Creative Department, Mr. Tamotsu Kishii¹. I'd like to begin with several of Mr. Kishii's insights.

Brief dialogue or narration with minimal explanatory content and indirect over direct forms of expression

The first two trademarks are close enough to include as a set of sorts. That is, the Japanese preference for one, "brief dialogue or narration with minimal explanatory content" and two, "indirect over direct forms of expression." As Americans might rephrase it, Japanese commercials offer very little in the way of verbal content, and what they do contain is unlikely to tell viewers much about anything.

- **Examples: Group 1**

These tendencies can be traced to one of the most distinctive features of Japanese literature, theater and the arts: in Kishii's words, "a format which gives the audience more room for individual interpretation than the 'unmistakable' messages of the West." Take *haiku* poetry, for instance. Rather than spelling things out in laborious detail or descriptions of epic proportions, the terse haiku poets prefer to produce an effect or mood by "pointing" at it—to convey a scene and invite associations by what is *not* said. The haiku verse below, one of Japan's most famous, is just such a slice of reality.

The old pond
In jumps a frog
The sound of the water

In theater, the *noh* drama is thought to have no appeal unless the audience joins its feelings with the player's in two facets of the production. First, in vicariously participating in the world of illusion, which is portrayed but not displayed on the stage. And second, in capturing the player's emotional intensity, which is veiled by the *noh* mask.

The objective these and other Japanese art forms have in common is audience involvement *via* that individual interpretation. Haiku poets and *noh* actors get their audiences involved by "making them a part" of the poem or play, by setting a stage for them to walk onto. The keys to success in *noh*, for instance, are, one, a situation which invites spectators to put themselves in the actors' places—identification—by giving them the latitude to draw on their own associations and, two, the actors' skill in breaking down the lines of demarcation between the audience—the real world—and the world they create.

Priority on company trust rather than product quality

Kishii's third trademark of Japanese commercials is their "priority on company trust rather than product quality." When buying a product, he goes on to say, the Japanese place great importance on the size and reputation of the company that makes it. In general, they believe that if the firm is large and has a good record, if they can trust it, they can also trust its products. As a result, it is far more effective for advertisers to focus on the company's image than to offer detailed explanations of the many wonderful things its products can do.

One look at Japanese commercials, however, will reveal nothing to establish grounds for consumer trust. What's more, Kishii's "focusing on its image" is also somewhat misleading, at least to Americans' interpretation of the word "image." You won't hear, for instance, about a company's record or its contributions to science, the environment or worthy causes.

What will you hear, then? Let's take a look.

- **Examples: Group 2.**

OK, so what did you just see and hear? Lots of "mood-inducing" visuals and copy which had no relationship to the product or the company.

So where *is* the message? And how do Japanese commercials get their audience involved? The answer lies, once again, in Japan's psychological security blanket, the group, and its "social glue," *amae*.

Consumer vs. Advertiser

Picture a Japanese television viewer in front of his set watching commercials. It might look like an innocent enough affair to the casual observer, but behind the scenes there's a complex subliminal power struggle going on. The combatants? Consumer versus advertiser. And the stakes? The consumer's hard-earned yen.

That's not to say it's your average battle for king of the hill. Far from it. In reality, the two "opponents" need each other. To appreciate what's really going on, it is necessary to understand those needs. Let's start with the consumer.

Round One: Advantage, Advertiser

Earlier we touched on the desire of the helpless, dependent infant to *amaeru* to the mother, to merge with her into an indistinguishable "oneness." In adulthood, the viewer as "isolated" individual carries the remnants of this project in the desire to establish an affiliation with objects he sees as offering security, in this case the sponsor, a large corporation. (The Japanese look at large corporations as an extensive network of human relations, not the cold, impersonal and depersonalizing monoliths perceived in the West.)

How can he establish this affiliation? By buying its products, of course. This is the link, the key to putting himself on more "intimate" terms with or closing the gap between himself and the company. He might actually *need* a new car or television, or he might want to go his neighbor one better, but his purchase goes deeper than mere utility or vanity. He wants what those products symbolize. That is, he's buying the company. He's buying security.

Round One goes to the advertiser. It has the advantage since it is responding to a psychological need already present in the consumer. The consumer "needs" the advertiser. He is psychologically vulnerable, "predisposed" to buy. Commercials sell products by manipulating this need. Without it, advertising would go nowhere.

Round Two: Advantage, Consumer

Now let's move on to Round Two. Here, it is the consumer who holds the upper hand. As we said earlier, the infant needs love and security. At the same time, he is able to *demand*—and get!—them, helpless or not. The infant exercises a very real control over the mother's behavior with his wants, needs and moods. Why? Because she, in turn, has a "vested" interest in him, and is only too willing to serve as the instrument of his gratification.

In similar fashion, the Japanese viewer holds a very real power over the advertiser, who needs him to stay in business. True, the consumer is predisposed to buy. *His* advantage is, he has a choice. The advertiser has to give the consumer what he wants or he won't buy its products.

So the consumer's wants become demands. He wants warmth, acceptance, security, not the "cold," calculating, cut-and-dried attitude of American advertisers who just want his money. He wants to know the advertiser cares about him. Not the tens of millions of viewers like him watching TV around the country—*him*. Only this time, he's not asking.

That's Entertainment?

How do advertisers show the consumer they care? They give him the adult form of what gave him pleasure as an infant. What ancient villagers gave the gods who came to their festivals. That is, they entertain him.

Like Japanese theater and festivals before them, advertisers present a world for the viewer to step into, making it as attractive or impressive as possible to get his attention and draw him in. The goal is to close the gap between viewer and sponsor, to blur the distinction by inviting—luring—him into the TV set where they will merge, become one.

The means? Direct, sensory-triggered or emotionally-oriented responses. Laughter, sympathy, surprise, wonder—they're all effective means of getting the audience involved. The commercials present visual situations designed to elicit these "gut" reactions, which will soon be connected with the manufacturer. (To the Japanese, emotion is a more direct and immediate form of communication than words, and therefore more easily retained in memory.) The goal of the commercial is resonance with an experience the viewer has either had or wants to have, with the product as magical connection between the viewer and the inviting world.

- **Examples: Group 3.**

Forms of Invitation

The scenes or “worlds” Japanese commercials invite the viewer into fall into one of two general categories, differing in the criteria for viewer involvement.

Category One: Enticement (unfamiliar)

The primary feature of my first category of Japanese commercials is this: they do not aim at communicating a *single* emotion. They do not contain a definite “sensory message” which people either get or they don’t. Since everyone has his own experiences and associations, therefore his own interpretations and reactions, the goal is a scene the entire audience can relate to, each in his or her own way—much like a Rorschach test.

This is the secret of entertainment, Japanese-style: to offer something for everyone. To make sure *no one is left out*. In short, the scenes are purposely vague or non-specific to offer an inclusive range of interpretations. Commercials ingratiate themselves with as wide an audience as possible, the smiling hopefuls in television’s mammoth corporate popularity contest.

In terms of means and ends, this category presents a scene unfamiliar yet attractive to the viewer—and thereby designed to “entice” him in. By and large, commercials for automobiles, lingerie, black tea and other Western products follow this pattern. The message is, “We have such a fascinating world. There’s so much waiting for you here. Won’t you join us?” This category makes rich use of special effects and takes advantage of Japanese *akogare*, the longing for something the individual doesn’t or can’t have and which is accentuated, especially that directed towards the West, by centuries of isolation.

• Examples: Group 4.

Category Two: Identification (familiar)

The scenes in our second category promote identification to convince the consumer that he and the company are already part of the same group. Here the world presented is one the viewer is familiar and comfortable with. “We’re just like you,” the subliminal message goes, “so why not be a part of our group?” This strategy is designed to manipulate the Japanese drive to achieve *ittaikan*, or sense of “oneness.” Products for this kind of commercial include household goods, pharmaceuticals and traditional Japanese food products.

• Examples: Group 5.

Casting

Here I'd like to bring up another representative difference between Japanese and American commercials related to the categories above: casting. Kishii mentions "the use of Japanese celebrities in the role of close acquaintances of the consumer," as one device advertisers rely on to create a bond of intimacy with the viewing audience.

Category One

At the same time, I must also point out a problem: that while this aspect of Japanese commercials has an important part to play in our second category, it offers little insight into the first. Kishii makes no mention of a very obvious and significant feature of Japanese advertising in general: the disproportionately high use of Caucasians, both models and celebrities alike. That is, foreigners.

What's so "disproportionate" about it? Here's the arithmetic. There are [__] million white foreigners living in Japan, or [__]% of the total population. When we look at a breakdown of the models appearing in [__] Japanese television commercials aired during the months of June and July, 1995, however, we find [__]% were Caucasian.

- **Examples: Group 6. No blacks**

"Foreign" is the key concept in explaining this lopsided percentage. After all, what better ingredient than foreigners in creating the "strange yet wonderful" worlds of our first category? They and the physical backgrounds are the means advertisers use to manipulate Japanese *akogare* directed at the West. Japanese commercials present scenes from lifestyles unattainable in Japan—and often, in the real world—which consumers can "be a part" of by purchasing the product.

Category Two

Our second category is where Kishii's point makes sense. Here, the objective is to reinforce the consumer's sense of identity with the product. Predictably, this is done with familiar scenes and faces—Japanese faces. Kishii puts it as follows:

"In Japan, the overwhelming majority of all show business celebrities appear in television commercials. More than the actual money involved, their primary motivation is to boost their popularity with Japanese viewers. Consequently, they appear almost exclusively in the role of everyday people who use the product, rather than as a "salesman" for the company that makes it. Viewers feel themselves to be on familiar terms with these celebrities, and are therefore left with a favorable impression of both company and product."

Stars are cast in everyday roles to make it easier for viewers to feel closer to them—to identify with them as “one of their own.” (The driving project of Japanese society is to reduce separation, and celebrities are far too distant in real life.) Average consumers do harbor feelings of *akogare* directed at show business and other prominent personalities, but the primary purchase motivation is identification.

Of course, not all Japanese commercials use celebrities to sell their products. Those cast with “unknown” models rely almost exclusively on the situation they present, and stake their effectiveness on identification from shared experience.

- **Examples: Group 7**

Short and Sweet

Our next trademark of Japanese commercials is common knowledge to the American ad industry. Still, it should be mentioned. That is, the overwhelming majority of Japanese commercials last only fifteen seconds.

There’s a very clear reason, too, for this brevity.

“...[the] objective is not to explain the unique features or outstanding quality of the product, but to indelibly imprint the product name on the viewer’s mind. The most important consideration is to make this one commercial stand out among the thousands of others that continually vie for viewers’ attention.¹

With this objective, yes, 15 seconds *are* more effective and economical than 30. Effective because Japanese consumers don’t want to hear chest-beating or “if A, then B” anyway. They want *me no tanoshimeru tokoro*, “places where the eyes can enjoy themselves,” and 15 seconds is enough time for that. (In truth, there are only 12.5 seconds for the “meat” of the commercial—for reasons given in the following section.)

And economical because Japanese TV stations allot commercial time in 15-second slots. If 15 seconds is all the time there is, run your spot. If you have 30 seconds to work with, run it twice. (In recent years, advertisers are showing minimally different versions back-to-back instead of carbon copies.)

Fortunately for advertisers, repetition like this isn’t a problem in Japan. The Japanese are used to repetition and routine. Their religious festivals, as we’ve seen, are based on repeating the same rituals time after time, year after year. In traditional Japanese society, young apprentices learned their trades not by receiving verbal instruction from their masters, but by watching and copying. And today, it takes Japanese school children the first [___] years of their education to master the mandatory 1,850 general-use Chinese characters—writing them over and over and over until they get it right.

No two ways about it. In Japan, the 15-second commercial is here to stay.

- **Examples: Group 8 (the “two-in-one” commercial)**

The Corporate Signature

But no matter which category they fall into, who stars in them or how long they last, many Japanese commercials end with a shot of the corporate logomark, with a remarkably high percentage of these accompanied by a voice signature. The majority of these, in turn, are presented not in a natural human voice, but a high-pitched, lyrically arranged, chorus-accompanied or other stylized format. Some dispense with voice altogether and end in chimes.

- **Examples here?**

Images in Sound

We said the objective of 15-second commercials was to “indelibly imprint the product name on the viewer’s mind.” These signatures are the devices that make the connection, that cement the association between the viewer’s reactions to the commercial and the presenting manufacturer.

In America, tag lines fulfill much the same function. They differentiate your company or products from others by clarifying what you do and how well you do it, preferably, better than anybody—the two basics of corporate identity—in succinct, easy-to-remember form. Three classics fulfilling both requirements, for instance, are Goodyear’s “The Best Tire in the World,” Budweiser’s “The King of Beers” and Wheaties’ “Breakfast of Champions.”

So, why sound in Japan? More specifically, why stylized voices or chimes? Because the Japanese remember the perceptual better than the conceptual, the sensory—visual, aural, etc.—better than the verbal. (I’ll take a look at the Japanese preference for visual means of communication versus the American commitment to the verbal in detail later.) These voice signatures help make the connection stick. What’s more, by combining graphics *and* sound, they involve two senses—for a truly multi-media logo. And the stylized versions are even *more* memorable.

It’s not that Japanese corporations don’t use tag lines. Hitachi, one of the world’s leading hi-tech manufacturers, combines “To nature” *with* a “Hitachi” voice signature. Kanebo’s “For Beautiful Human Life,” a perennial butt of jokes among foreigners, is featured in voice over as well as graphics. Most, however, including Sony, graphically, at least, present the name alone.

Japanese tag lines are ornamental. They decorate, not differentiate. While the American objective is to make the company easier to remember by differentiating it from the rest, making it stand out, giving consumers a *reason* to remember, the Japanese is getting the consumer to remember the corporation or the product, period. And for this, sound is more immediate, thus more effective. It's not words Japanese viewers remember. It's sound—the voice.

Mechanically, these endings last 2.5 seconds, or one-sixth the length of the entire commercial—leaving only 12.5 seconds for the “message.” What's more, they are produced by “CI specialist” production houses—not the agencies who make the commercials—and then tacked onto that company's entire range of television spots. How does it work in practice? Let's take a look.

The Masculine Voice

Sony is famous for trend-setting hardware like the Walkman and Handycam video camera. To represent this state-of-the-art image in sound, their commercials end with a man stating, very matter-of-factly, that, “It's a Sony.”

As we said, Sony does not use a tag line, perhaps due to the ponderous number of its overseas markets. Whereas tag lines would require translation into each language to whose speakers Sony sells its products, its current straightforward voice signature is recognizable everywhere.

Like Sony, Ricoh Copiers uses a single male non-stylized signature for its “Yes, Ricoh.” Commercials for both Sapporo Beer and Mizuno Sports, on the other hand, feature a male chorus almost singing the company names in a very high pitch.

• **Examples: Group 9 (tag lines for Ricoh, Sapporo, Mizuno)**

The Feminine Voice

For years, National has been known to housewives as a maker of household electrical appliances, an image their lilting female sign-off aims to reinforce with consumers. Unicharm Air Wick Air Freshener and other manufacturers also feature female signatures.

Kid's Stuff

Hitachi got its start in motors and jumbo computers—not exactly the type of products Japanese housewives are on a first-name basis with. The company's way of softening this "hard" image is to end their commercials with a child's voice—for whatever reason, a *foreign* child's voice. You'll also hear children signing off in commercials for Fujitsu Computers and Art Nature, a manufacturer of hair pieces and artificial "replenishing" techniques.

Chimes, Bells and Whistles

Perhaps to convey a light, fresh, "cooling" image for their products, Kirin Beer, Ajinomoto Food Products and Morinaga Chocolate have chosen to end their commercial messages with chimes.

A Cannes of Worms

If you're still having trouble with this "reasoning," you're not alone. In fact, you share the opinion of so distinguished a group as the judges at the Cannes Commercial Film Festival. (The judges change yearly; their opinions do not.)

Japanese ad agencies are major contributors to the annual competition, but have won few awards over the years, and one thing that doesn't score points with Western judges are—that's right—these seemingly irrelevant endings. In their eyes, at any rate, such corporate signatures in general undermine a commercial's effectiveness, their lack of relevance to the "message" distancing viewers from the impact created during the first 12.5 seconds. Western advertisers suggest omitting them from competition entries. The commercials themselves certainly don't need them, the argument goes, and they'd probably win more awards.

A Question of Identity

Japanese sponsors, however, refuse. First, they maintain that without a corporate closing, viewers would often not know who was presenting the commercial. (Which, as we've seen, is true.) And second, the sponsors would feel naked without them; after all, they are the company. Or at least an integral part of its Corporate Identity.

The popularity of voice signatures is actually a relatively recent phenomenon, their number suddenly skyrocketing in the mid-1980s with Japan's ballooning bubble economy and the accompanying CI boom (a stroke of marketing genius cooked up by ad agencies to tap into the vast profits their sponsors were raking in). Japan, as we've said, is a land of fads, and the CI boom was the corporate hula hoop of the eighties. Once the trend got started, everybody wanted one, and all the more so since this was business. Fundamental to its impact was the very Japanese fear of being "left out" or carrying the stigma of "behind the times." So now, they felt they needed one to keep up.

Which brings up an interesting point. That is, if the purpose of establishing an identity is, as we've seen, to differentiate yourself from others, just what does that mean in a country where the object is not to stand out, where "a nail that sticks out gets hammered down." I'll get to this when I discuss corporate identity in greater detail in the next chapter.

AMERICA

Japanese commercials present a "sensory" experience of sights and sounds to get the viewer involved with the company or manufacturer. The goal of American advertisers, on the other hand, is to interest their audience in the product, to convince them it's the best there is, to stress what it can do for them.

Here I'm going to go ahead and assume three similarities between American consumers and their Japanese counterparts. First, that Americans, too, are saddled with the psychological need to buy—the difference being that theirs is product-oriented. Second, a roughly equivalent power struggle between advertiser and consumer. And third, the consumer's advantage in terms of purchase prerogative. To complete the picture, let's look at what motivates the American consumer.

Identity

One of the most important elements of American advertising is "identity," the basic concept being what makes you what you are and different from the next guy. There's consumer identity, corporate identity, there's even brand identity, all based on knowing and/or letting others know "who or what you are."

American Identity

Identity, like most trends we're discussing, goes back to religion. In the ancient Western world, people derived their identity from which god they believed in. This belief was a unifying factor in defining not only membership, but the allies and enemies of the tribe. (Tribes with different gods warred, while those with a common deity coexisted.)

This identity was not dependent on or affected by physical locale. Hunters and gatherers were nomadic; they retained their identity wherever their search for food took them. If a member became separated from his tribe, he retained his membership rights as long as he remained loyal to the tribal god (loyalty which could get him enslaved, imprisoned or killed by believers of other gods). The only way to lose his identity was to join or "defect to" another tribe. That is, to accept another god.

Japanese Identity

Japanese identity, on the other hand, derives from physical locale. It is dependent upon one's area of residence, which, due to the limited extent of movement within agrarian cultures, usually means his place of birth. Each locale has an identity which includes everything—animate and inanimate, tangible and intangible (gods, the weather, etc.)—within its physical boundaries. Individuals are a *part* of that inclusive identity; they do not carry identities of their own. If they leave, they give it up—like walking out of a building—since it remains with the district. (At the same time, the district loses a very small part of its identity, too.) If they move to a new place, they adopt its ways—that is, assume its identity.

The Consumer as Individual

The individual is born in the process of separation, of establishing distance between himself and others; one can be an individual only if there is an "other" (the original "others," of course, being the parents). The individual defines himself in terms of the other, uses the other as a basis for comparison.

Comparison implies and gives rise to competition. The individual defines himself, establishes his own identity, by being *better* than others (first the originals, then the rest)—the "other" furnishing him with a standard to surpass. The drive to more clearly define his identity necessitates establishing his superiority over others—and, in the process, increasing the distance between them.

From this drive, in turn, comes the pursuit of excellence—the drive that, in America, motivates the individual to strive for the top and encourage his or her children to “be the best” from the day they’re born. To be “different” in the positive sense. Psychologically speaking, the individual is *driven* to become the best, because that’s the position which affords him his most clearly defined sense of self—his identity. And knowing who he is is essential to an individual’s security.

The individual’s drive to establish his identity gives rise to an ongoing “network” of power struggles with other individuals. This process is openly encouraged in “upwardly mobile” America as the driving force on the road to progress. (It is discouraged in “upwardly docile” Japan, where competition is between groups.) American individualism is social Darwinism—survival of the fittest—with capitalism the economic corollary.

Examples: Group 10

Consumer vs. Advertiser

Now, let’s get back to the individual as consumer and bring up the two types of consumption: necessary or functional and unnecessary or conspicuous. The motivation behind unnecessary consumption (and most functional consumption, too), which advertising capitalizes on and must perpetuate in order to survive, lies in the parameters of this power struggle.

Money Is Power

To discuss power, we must first examine what it resides in. What is the criteria, the “currency” of power in the United States? Quite literally, money. Success is a euphemism for power and, to an American, more than any one thing, power means money. The bottom line of the American Dream is riches. Everything translates into money—even people. Americans measure people by how much money they’ve got, how much they’re *worth*.

Getting back to power, money is what gives you power over people. They want it, and they’ll do anything you say to get it. In common parlance, “money talks.” (In reality, it not only talks, but gets its point across.) Money is power and power is security.

Things Make the Man

So money is the “middle term” between power and people. The point to keep in mind? Money is a *thing*.

In Japan, there is no middle term; power over others is direct and immediate. To a Japanese, success means influence, that is, how many people you have under you in your organization. *That's* Japanese security.

Next question. How do Americans express power or success? With things. They show people how much they have, how important they are, how much they're worth, with their possessions—the floodlights of conspicuous consumption. In polite language, Americans consider enjoying a lifestyle commensurate with one's earning capabilities as only natural. In more vulgar terms, "If you got it, flaunt it." To Americans, it's as much a part of their way of life as apple pie and Mom.

The truth is, however, Americans don't simply own or use their possessions, they form relationships with them. They get "attached" to them, see them as "extensions" of themselves. They "express themselves" with them. More accurately, they *define* themselves in terms of the inanimate objects they own; they build their identities—who they are—with things, like building blocks. The more well-defined they are, the more secure they feel. Just as "clothes make the man," so do his home, his car and the rest of his estate. When Americans say they think "objectively," they mean it.

• **Examples: Group 9.5 B**

The Japanese reaction would go something like this: "Things?! You've got to be kidding. Relationships, by definition, are with *living* things, not armchairs or lawn mowers. The right people, one's network of human relations, *that's* the key to happiness and security. In Japan, you are defined by your group, not your Toyota."

But we still have not established a psychological need to buy. But it's there, all right, a side effect of the human appetite for power. Just as that appetite knows no limits, so the American drive for material acquisition is insatiable. Homo Americanus is not the detached, rational decision maker he makes himself out to be. Without knowing it, the consumer is addicted to consumption—a Jones advertising is only too happy to feed.

Convince Me If You Can

Now, once again, let's get back to advertising. With the focus on products, consumer thinking goes something like this: "You've got something to sell? So *tell* us about it. Show us how great it is. Convince us we can't live without it."

American consumers want to be convinced and, as far as they're concerned, it's up to the advertiser to convince them. And that means facts, figures and features they can use to make up their minds. Contrary to Japanese consumers, even if they don't like the manufacturer, if the product is good, they'll buy it. To Americans, the thing's the thing.

• **Examples: Group 11**

Decisions, Decisions

But product superiority is not the only factor at work in the American consumer's demand for facts. He also wants to decide for himself. He sees the decision-making process as expressing himself as an individual and *essential* to that individuality. And knowing he's an individual, in turn, makes him feel secure, gives him a solid sense of identity. That's why he wants product information—to help him make the best choice, the "smart" choice. It's also why he sees visual or textual elements unrelated to the decision process—"for effect"—as a distraction. Often, an irritating one.

Brand Loyalty

In ancient times, as we've seen, members of the tribes of the West derived their identity from the god they believed in. Today, the vast majority of Americans—those not born into families like the Kennedys—are responsible for creating their own.

Identity is the individual's answer to the question "Who am I?" It is defined primarily by his actions—vocation, code of behavior—and his possessions. The important factor for this discussion is, identity demands consistency in both over time.

Brand loyalty is an expression of this consistency in terms of possessions. Nike Air Jordans or Old Spice after shave, for instance, originally purchased by the consumer out of personal preference or for practical reasons, over time come to symbolize or become a "part" of him in his own mind. Many men in the 1950s swore by their make of automobile, billing themselves as "Ford men" or GM or Chrysler men. They took pride, felt secure in this constancy of purchase.

Today, however, establishing an identity is a far more complex and difficult project. There are more people to differentiate oneself from, and market fragmentation has thrust on consumers more choices than ever. In short, people must do more to become individuals. (Greater difficulty means more failures, or "identity crises.")

One effect is, brand loyalty is becoming progressively harder for manufacturers to sustain. The burgeoning spectrum of choices by definition comes into more frequent conflict with a constant, emotionally invested one. (Consistency tends to disregard products offering best value for the money.)

At the same time, most Americans' identity includes a self-image with the common sense to make the "smart choice," to recognize the best value for the money. These best-value products often change with dizzying speed, which makes product information more important than ever. And which is why consumers hear lines like, "That's why more smart shoppers choose . . ." with monotonous frequency.

The fact remains, however, that, all things being equal, American consumers tend to remain loyal to the product they feel the greatest “image affinity” to. (If choices become too complex and confusing, one might see future trends showing a reversion to brand loyalty—by default.)

• **Examples: Group 12**

Japan

Loyalty advertising is more developed in the U.S. In Japan, after all, in many cases the choices are made for you. You still derive your identity from the group, which means you do and think—for all outward appearances, at least—what the group think does and thinks. In this sense, you *are* defined by your Toyota if you work for Toyota Motors, Inc. (Your choice of automobile is the most obvious decision made for you; you buy a Toyota or else.)

That’s not all. When individual decisions *are* permitted, the Japanese frequently choose products new and different from the ones they’ve used to date for novelty’s sake and that alone. New means renewal, a new beginning, to the Japanese, as in the beginning of the rice planting cycle. (The Japanese sense of time is more cyclical than that of the Christians, which is linear.) In Japan, new is good in and of itself.

We’ve seen how the Japanese tire quickly of things, making the country fertile ground for fads. We’ve also seen how, in buying a company’s products, Japanese consumers derive security from “plugging into” that organization’s network of human relationships. By buying different ones—by *avoiding* consistency—they can plug into more of them.

Nor is behavioral consistency stressed in Japan. The Japanese moral code is based not on unbending rules of conduct, but rather situational ethics dictated by the particular time, place and occasion. There are no “universals”; consistency over time is not socially reinforced. Behavior, including consumer behavior, is determined by factors which change constantly, and therefore require “flexible” response capabilities. The Japanese can espouse one course of action one minute and another the next, and never feel the rub. The same goes for product choice.

The Call to Action

American commercials are painstakingly crafted to convince viewers that their products or services are the best there is. But convincing is only the first step. Once they’re sold, the important part is bringing them to the logical—“if product A is best, then...”—conclusion. To induce them to action, that is, to buy.

In addition to reasons why, American commercials bombard their audiences with the exhortation to act and act quickly. “Buy now!” “Call immediately!” “Visit today and see for yourself!” A constant stream of *do it, do it, do it*.

One way to get Americans moving, as ad men know, is to make the purchasing process easy. Which is why so many product and service ads end with an 800 phone number to call for more information or order from the comfort and convenience of your easy chair.

In many cases, easier means cheaper. This it’s-so-easy-to-own! approach—of the “Buy now, pay later!”, “No money down!” school—is most pronounced in automobile and furniture advertising, with almost every car commercial in America promising attractive rebates and low-cost financing, something you find but rarely in Japan.

American commercials also tempt. They offer incentives. Free gifts. Buy one, get one free. No wonder Americans are hooked on the idea of getting something for nothing.

They use scare tactics, too, veiled threats like, “Act now, while the supply lasts,” “This offer is good for a limited time only,” or “Don’t miss this golden opportunity.” Message: you’ll be left out if you don’t. “You can’t afford *not* to!” Message: you’ll pay for your mistake. “You owe it to yourself and your family.” Message: your loved ones will suffer if you don’t.

The bottom line? Buy, or you’re a fool, you’ll regret it, your life will be worse and so on.

• **Examples: Group 13**

Casting

That said, now let’s turn our attention to what distinguishes U.S. commercial casting from the Japanese trends we looked at earlier.

Americans for America

First, in America, the people you see pitching products between programs are Americans. Caucasians are the overwhelming favorites in terms of percentages, but white or not, chances are they’re home grown. In a country which bills itself as “the world’s greatest melting pot,” foreigners have great significance but no “special value” in America. And no wonder. To Americans, “foreign” is a question of citizenship. To the Japanese, it’s a state of mind.

• **Examples: Group 14**

Stars Belong in the Sky

Difference number two is the use of celebrities. In the United States, you'll see few famous personalities and fewer if any major movie stars in TV commercials. Sports figures, yes. Comedians, yes. Musicians, too. But *big* names as a rule avoid such appearances—unless, perhaps, it's for a worthy cause—because they tend to lower their images in their public's eyes.

One reason? Fans will think they're desperate for work, which, of course, goes against their image—their identity—as stars. After all, they've paid their dues. They can afford to be selective—and that's exactly how their fans want and expect them to be. Stars are distant, glowing objects far from the plebeian rabble, thus the name. Another factor is that both stars and spectators see commercials, with their “ulterior motive” of sales, as lacking in “artistic integrity” or, at the very least, qualitatively different from *real* acting.

• **Examples: Group 15**

This last point underscores a fundamental difference in attitude East and West. In Japan, as we've seen, commercials bolster a celebrity's popularity by keeping him or her in the public eye. (The frequency of such appearances is, in fact, quite an accurate barometer of that popularity.) At bottom is the way Japanese viewers look at commercials and regular network programming alike—as entertainment.

The Pause That Depresses

What are television commercials to American viewers? Necessary evils to be endured? Yes. Intrusions on their enjoyment of television? That, too. Even outright irritations? Sure. But entertainment? No way.

• **Example: Group 16**

Television advertisers today no longer enjoy the relatively captive audiences they did until the advent of remote control. Viewers' feelings, however, remain unchanged, many lunging for their units to shut them up or change channels the second they hear the words, “And now, a word from our sponsor.”

Relevance

JAPAN

Another conspicuous feature of Japanese television commercials is that, many times, it's impossible to tell not only what brand of product, but even what *kind* of product they're trying to sell until the very end. And sometimes, even then. So non-specific are visual and copy content that, prior to introducing the manufacturer, many commercials might well be used with equal effectiveness to sell aspirin, tractors or life insurance. An American begins to get the mind-boggling impression that "one size fits all."

Which is understandable, since nowhere in Japanese advertising does it say that the visual or the copy or anything else you find in a commercial has to have anything to do with the product. As long as it's helping create a mood, elicit emotion or provide entertainment—making the commercial memorable—it's doing the job. (Some sponsors "solve" this "problem" by presenting the company name in the upper left hand corner of the opening cuts.)

- **Examples: Group 17**

And that's *product* ads. Their corporate counterparts go one step further into impenetrability. The "software" or commercial content goes beyond "vague" to "abstract." And the hardware or special effects are often thrown together in outrageous "image salad" assaults or visual screaming—at least from an American's point of view—as advertisers vie for viewers' attention by bludgeoning a lasting impression into their memory banks.

- **Examples: Group 18**

Music

As verbal and visual content, so musical content. In Japanese commercials, the music featured is usually unrelated to the product. Writing a jingle especially for a commercial is not uncommon, but only the melody; lyrics consisting of more than the product name constitute a small minority indeed. Most tunes are taken from popular favorites or standard melodies that enhance the general mood (not to mention cutting costs and eliminating composition time.)

One place this lack of relevance frequently shows up is in the bottom right hand corner of the commercial—in the form of musical credits. With extraneous elements unobjectionable to sponsors, talent managers take advantage of this opportunity to provide their performers with some very valuable "free advertising."

If musical content is not relevant, however, volume certainly is. Japanese commercials boost music mix levels higher than their American counterparts, often to the point where it competes with the dialogue or narration (Not only in commercials, either; Japanese TV weather forecasts and other regular programs also frequently feature “background” music at the expense of understandability.)

Now let’s look at some examples of commercials where relevance is not relevant.

- **Examples: Group 19**

AMERICA

Viewer Relevance

Before discussing the relevance of the product to commercial content, I’d like to look at an even more basic aspect of relevance in America. That is, the relevance of the television commercial to the viewer himself.

We have seen that, to the Japanese, commercials are entertainment. And that, to Americans, they’re *intrusions* on that entertainment. So why endure them in the first place? Some masochistic wish to be miserable?

Just the opposite, in fact. The average American sits through commercials for what might be in it for him or her. Now that you’ve got my attention, the thinking goes, what can you do for me?

American commercials answer this challenge by showing or inferring a connection to one of the four things Americans find most interesting: sex, health, money and themselves.¹ Or, more specifically, how they can get more of the first three.

That’s only the beginning. How do Americans want these three quality-of-life enhancers? Cheaper, faster, easier and better. Or better yet, cheapest, fastest, easiest and best. Americans are looking to acquire the most sex, health and money for the least effort, time and cash.

Product Relevance

So Americans are message-oriented because they focus on the product—what it can do for them. Which defines the goal of a commercial as making it as desirable to the consumer as possible, showing just how much it can do.

What does that mean to an American ad agency? For one thing, making it clear from the outset just what it is they’re hawking. American audiences don’t like to play guessing games. They want to know what they’re watching—what they can get out of it—and find it frustrating to be kept in the dark.

Once that's out of the way, the next task is tailoring the visual, copy and music to best show off the product. The copy is, of course, original, but even if the visual is stock footage and the jingle taken from a popular song instead of specially commissioned, both are painstakingly selected for impact in terms of relevance. Each element has a definite function, which the agency must explain in writing in the creative rationale. What's more, each should ideally complement not only the product, but the others as well. Everything has a reason, a purpose, a *meaning*.

So relevance is packaging, how the pieces fit together in relation to each other, the carefully thought out form of presentation calculated by the agency as most likely to induce the consumer to buy. The way Americans see it, there's no *time* for anything else.

- **Examples: Group 20 and 21**

Music

Returning to our comparison of music, American commercials feature tunes written exclusively for them, modified to fit their themes or chosen so that the musical message complements the products in a specific and readily understandable way. Matching the "mood" of a song to that of the commercial is not done, except in the case of instrumental pieces.

In fact, the practice of commissioning songs for commercials is so prevalent that, every so often, a jingle will go on to achieve commercial success in its own right. Perhaps the best example is the Coca Cola jingle "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing in Perfect Harmony," which made it to Number 7 on the US pop charts (Number One in England) in 1971.

- **Examples: Group 22**

Other Forms of Relevance

Major events or television shows often prompt advertisers to take relevance one step further. Some commercials, for instance, are produced exclusively for single or sometimes multiple airing during a particular program or time slot, like Super Bowl telecasts. These commercials can be shown only once. The question now becomes, are they really worth it?

On the other side of the world, the Japanese make commercials for special seasons or occasions like Valentine's Day, but not for individual programs or events. They are too "practical" to make a commercial with air play limited to a two-hour time slot.

Verification

JAPAN

There are two reasons Japanese commercials are unfettered by the rigorous demands of verification.

First, they make no claims which need to be verified. When claims *are* made, they rarely go beyond straightforward product features, which are not really claims at all. Finally, there is no logical progression intended to convince and leading to an inescapable conclusion. Who needs proof?

Second, unlike the Christians, the Japanese harbor no innate distrust of human nature and, by extension, large organizations. Buyers don't beware. Consumers are not convinced, like many Americans, that manufacturers would sell them the Brooklyn Bridge if they thought they could get away with it. For better or worse, the Japanese harbor no deep-seated distrust of big companies. As we've seen, the bigger they are, the more they trust them.

- **Examples: Group 24**

AMERICA

As we said, Americans expect you to make bold statements. At the same time, they also expect you to support them. You can't just mention high quality or say, "It works," and expect Americans, at least, to believe you. They want the facts. How does it work? Why does it work? How does it stack up against the competition? What's in it for me? Inquiring minds want to know.

In God We Trust. All Others Pay Cash.

Vague Suspicions

Going hand in hand with the demand for verification is the aversion to vague expressions. Americans associate roundabout turns of phrases and unverified claims with deception. Nor does a well-established company name prove anything; Americans know what big companies are capable of. (For whatever reasons, this suspicious character shows up clearest in Missouri, the "Show Me" State, but the rest of the country is not far behind.) Which is why American advertisers have to *prove* what they're claiming—or at least provide a convincing illusion.

The Business of Distrust

We touched earlier on the roots of those suspicions: individuals looking out for No. 1, capitalism as the survival of the economic fittest, etc. American business, and by extension advertising, is still built on distrust. The particularly American twist is that here, it's out in the open, on the table, taken for granted. More, in fact, it's *equated* with business. Trust is for family and friends. In business—whenever money is involved—the only thing you can believe is a signed contract. (If the number of lawyers is any indication, there must be less trust in the United States than any place on Earth.)

- **Examples: Group 25**

Corporate Alienation

That distrust is perhaps most conspicuous in the case of an individual versus or dealing with large corporations. The average American harbors at best ambivalence, at worst a combination of fear, suspicion and malice against the giants of industry. (The same goes for government, but our discussion here concerns the private sector.) Unlike the Japanese, who see corporate behemoths as security symbols, Americans dislike them because they're too impersonal and powerful—and consequently, only too ready, willing and able to step on the “little guy” as long as they can get away with it.

- **Examples: Group 26 (companies doing good things to offset bad images)**

Let the Buyer Beware

In consumer services and advertising, this exploitation survives today in the slogan “Let the buyer beware,” standard consumer common sense. It wasn't, in fact, until the advent of Ralph Nader in the sixties and other consumer protection groups since then that industry has finally begun taking responsibility for its practices and products. (Mandatory product ingredient displays on package or label are one example.) And even then, not voluntarily. As one insightful comment on American advertising warns, “The large print giveth, and the small print taketh away.”

Proof Makes Positive

The way to overcome suspicion and distrust, of course, is with proof. Not claims, not opinions, but cold, hard facts—the nuts and bolts holding together your superstructure of arguments. Without them, everything falls apart.

Facts certainly don't lend themselves to all product categories, of course. They're out of place, for instance, in ads for products like perfume, cigarettes—unless it's how low they are in tar and nicotine—and designer clothes. Products, that is, in the world of lifestyle advertising, where design or status and not utility is the deciding purchase factor. In general, the more form takes precedence over function, the more “unnecessary” the product (a heretical thing for the advertising industry to say), the less necessary facts become, and the more pertinent the appeal to the senses and the ego.

Examples: Group 27

Oldsmobile Achieva

This ad for the Oldsmobile Achieva shows just how far Americans will go to convince potential customers that their car is the one to buy—in this case, 100,000 miles. The headline lays down the claim that, “The Oldsmobile Achieva redefines quality by outperforming Accord and Camry in a 100,000-mile real world test.” And Oldsmobile is betting readers will give the company an opportunity to back it up. (Note the discreet “Consumer experience may vary,” disclaimer in small type at bottom).

The “Don't believe us? Here's proof!” strategy is not unusual when it comes to convincing Americans, but the scale of the proof in this case certainly is. The Olds folks obviously went to great expense—the independent testing agency, drivers, cameramen, writers, designers and others—to take on a project of this size. Which is exactly the message they wanted to convey: they wouldn't have gone to these lengths unless they were mighty sure they had a product that couldn't lose.

As the ad shows, there's a folder and video for readers interested enough to make a phone call. The folder contains fifty pages of comparisons—mileage, repairs and other incidentals that build up over the course of three months and 100,000 miles of driving. And the thirty-minute video shows test highlights along the way, all neatly packaged in story form to emphasize the size, impartial methodology and—most important of all—validity of the test results.

• **Examples: Group 28**

Expert Opinions

One way of “verifying” claims is with testimonials from experts and users. Experts are preferable, of course, from the standpoint of verification. Their credentials are indirect proof they know what they're talking about, but there's more to it than that. The “knowledgeable authority” is an American icon, one Americans look up to for guidance.

In terms of the actual ability to verify claims, experts lie somewhere between users and facts. They carry the expertise of their profession, but as people inspire more warmth and, therefore, trust than simple “cold” statistics alone. Even without facts to back them up, Americans tend to believe someone with “credentials.” (Doctors’ patients, for instance, feel safer when they see degrees on practitioners’ walls—for whatever reason, a practice rare in Japan.)

Authorities see greatest use in advertising in the field of health: doctors, dentists, nutritionists, hygienists, pharmacists and just about anyone else with a degree. Almost every headache, cold or sleep remedy claims to be the one recommended by the most somethings, whether it’s doctors, pharmacists, hospitals or other medical experts or facilities. Other authorities who frequently find their way onto TV screens across America are chemists (for laundry detergents), auto mechanics and athletes.

- **Examples: Group 29**

Users

Testimonials from users, on the other hand, rely almost exclusively on viewer identification. Users tell about a single case, their own experience, and viewers to make the leap from, “It worked for her,” to “It can work for me, too!”

There are several variations on this theme. One is the straightforward testimonial, in which a single person or group tells how satisfying their experiences with the product have been. Another is the persuasion scenario, in which one user convinces the other of the product’s superiority, an approach often seen in advertising breakfast cereals and laundry detergents. A third is the performance test, in which one user watches his product X tested against another user’s product Y.

In Category Two of Japanese commercials, it is the *familiarity* of the scene and also of the celebrity’s face that invites the viewer in. In American counterparts, it is the credibility of the user—is he or she believable?—that makes the difference.

- **Examples: Group 30**

Go to the Source

Many commercials featuring an authority to pitch a product will present his or her name, title and institution in an unobtrusive corner of the screen. Because although most viewers will assume the commercial’s veracity or not care, there’s always the possibility that some inquiring mind will want to check and see for himself that the person featured really is who he claims to be.

The same guideline applies to ads—or any piece of presentation material intended to convince—presenting results of other people’s work as evidence; it should include the source, a footnote, something. Even more so with quotes, testimonials or endorsements from authorities, where the words mean little without the name behind them. The general rule of thumb is enough information for the reader to verify the source for himself if he chooses to. 99 out of 100 won’t, of course, but just knowing they *can* makes them feel more secure. Without substantiation of some kind, on the other hand, or at least its *illusion*, an ad lacks credibility.

That said, readers might take a minute to see if they can remember where I violated this rule. The infraction comes on page __, at the beginning of the section on television commercials. Readers are presented with the findings of a cross-cultural advertising experiment conducted by an “American survey company”—only without footnotes or other substantiating evidence of any kind. This is asking them to “take it on faith,” an egregious procedural taboo and something Americans are not likely to do. In my own defense, the information was not available; the reference came from Kishii’s article, which failed to supply details of any kind.

• **Examples: Group 31**

Confrontation

JAPAN

The Japanese make a fine art of avoiding confrontation. As any Westerner who’s done business with them knows, they’ve developed an encyclopedic array of frustratingly circuitous ways to decline or refuse—the bottom line of confrontation—without ever saying the “n” word.

After what’s been said so far, it shouldn’t be too hard to understand why. Confrontation is divisive. And in a society in which human relationships and group unity are the ultimate priorities, anything which threatens those bonds is taboo.

Problem? What Problem?

One of the favorite Japanese defense mechanisms for “dealing” with a problem is to ignore it. For one thing, if you don’t admit it’s a problem, you’re spared the further unpleasantness of the solution. For another, the Buddhist teachings of the transience of the physical world assure you it will go away by itself in time.

In advertising, “mood” orientation is obviously not geared to strong product claims, much less picking a fight with someone else’s. And true to form, Japanese advertisers scrupulously refrain from any hint of comparison or innuendo that, “Mine is better.” Even in product ads, the copy presents its strong points as if it was the only one of its kind on the market.

This is how advertisers avoid showdowns with their competitors: they simply act as if they don’t have any.

- **Examples: Group 32**

The Appeal of Pull

That’s not the only *reason*, however. There’s another element at work here, one we mentioned in contrasting American versus Japanese commercials—“pull.”

The Japanese prefer to attract people, to pull them to their periphery, with a strong “presence.” The consummate example, of course, would be the pull of enlightened religious teachers. (Not one traditional Japanese religion, native or imported, makes a policy of actively seeking converts.) The same, however, applies to accomplished tea ceremony or martial arts *sensei* and other leaders at the top of their own mini-hierarchies. What’s more, the degree of presence attributable to the person at the apex of such a social pyramid is judged by the number of people under him or her.

Now let’s turn the situation around. In Japanese advertising, screaming from a soap box about products features will *lose*, not gain you, credibility. If what you’re selling was really that hot, the thinking goes, if you’re so convinced of its superiority, you wouldn’t have to scream—people would come to you. Which is why hype like “The biggest! The best! The latest! The greatest!” one, undermines your position: it betrays a *lack* of quality or confidence in them. And two, exposes why you have to crow about them in the first place: because no one will come if you don’t.

AMERICA

We’ve found the American way on the opposite end of the spectrum in every case we’ve looked at so far, and this one is no exception. Americans are big advocates of getting everything “out in the open.” We’ve looked at the religious origins of cultural norms like “honesty is good, secrecy bad.” In similar fashion, a direct approach is seen as a sign of genuineness, an indirect or circuitous one as devious and untrustworthy.

Confrontation Is Good

The same goes for problem solving. What advice would a person faced with a dilemma get from an American as the quickest, most effective way to a solution? “Face it head on. Running away won’t solve anything.”

To which the Japanese would object that there’s bound to be conflict. Americans, in turn, would assure them there’s no need for worry. After all, confrontation is good.

We’ve looked at the dichotomy between good and evil in the Judao-Christian tradition. We’ve seen that Christians are brought up with conflict in their souls, that that battle—confronting the Devil and casting him out—is necessary for good to emerge victorious, and that the end product is a “better human being” for the experience. We’ve also seen competition as the bottom line in turning out better products in a capitalist market economy—individuals working for their own ends against others and, in the end, building a better mousetrap.

Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis

It’s a short jump from products to ideas. Americans see individuals voicing opposing opinions as a gateway to greater understanding. And, on a larger scale, confrontation in general as the first step in a creative process via which new and higher truths are known, as foreshadowed by Hegel, the 18th century German philosopher, in his dialectical process of “thesis, antithesis and synthesis.” The process itself is a kind of intellectual “manifest destiny” by which, one day, all shall be known—God’s Truth revealed in its entirety. Metaphorically speaking, confrontation is the heat in a chemical reaction where one and one make three.

Confrontation as Verification

Confrontation is also seen by Americans as a means of verification. In ancient tribal warfare, the winning side meant the stronger god—and the stronger god was the *true* god. In today’s TV performance tests as well, victory is proof of superiority. Whether cola A tastes better, or shirt B is whiter, these direct confrontations continue to show high effectiveness in convincing consumers that the “winning” product is, in fact, better. In short, truth is the victor and vice versa.

Honesty Is the Best Policy

Now let's get back to problem solving. In America, competition with rival manufacturers falls under this heading. The fact that not all consumers are buying *your* product is the problem and confrontation is the means to the solution. By openly comparing their products to those of the competition, manufacturers are taking what American consumers see as the straightforward, "honest" approach. They're showing the public they have "nothing to hide," saying loud and clear their products are the best that money can buy. Even when there are no explicit comparisons, commercials and print ads alike are loaded with superlatives like "the biggest, the fastest, the one most doctors recommend" and so on. It's all for the common good, of course: that the best product may prevail.

On the sofa side of the screen, that's exactly what American consumers are looking for. They like to hear manufacturers brimming with confidence. They expect to be informed of a product's advantages over the competition—because they're the ones who benefit in the end. The way they see it, who doesn't want the best product for his money?

- **Examples: Group 33**

PRINT ADS

Verbal Presentation Sequence

Now let's turn our attention from the television screen to the printed page. The move, of course, eliminates the elements of movement and sound from our discussion—while adding new dimensions. The fundamental objectives, however, remain. A message, by definition, is meant to be intellectually understood; a mood, to be physically felt or “experienced.” The question for both approaches is how to do it most effectively.

JAPAN

In this section, I'd like to focus on how Japanese ads are ordered. Or, more aptly, *not* ordered. I've mentioned the emphasis on sensory immediacy in Japanese television commercials. In their writing, as well, the focus is on images or portrayals of things which exist in reality—verbal bursts instantly “visible” to the mind's eye. The consummate example, once again, would be haiku. Japanese poets deal with subjects from everyday life, things which come to mind quickly and easily. Their primary objective is not to make readers think but to *feel*, each in his own way.

The emphasis, in any case, is not on concepts but percepts, whether real or fantastic. And percepts require no logical presentation sequence for successful transmission or appreciation—another reason creating natural English copy out of a Japanese ad involves a process of demolition and rebuilding from the ground up, usually requiring additional information.

Kishotenketsu

That's not to say, of course, there's no order in Japanese writing. Teenagers learn the ins and outs of a four-step structure called *kishotenketsu* in high school composition class as the manner of written presentation most apropos for the Japanese.

English writing is structured to prove a point or convince, to present the writer's position with the intention of changing the reader's mind, to make the reader's thoughts the same as the writer's through intellectual conquest. The objective of *kishotenketsu*, on the other hand, is to reconcile, to mediate, to show how different quantities *can* coexist harmoniously within the same reality.

The first character, *ki*, means to “give rise to” or make a start. (It's advised to introduce the subject in this section, though there's nothing that says you *have* to—once again, no blanket rule.)

Sho indicates development or explication. The writer expands on the subject matter brought forward in *ki* with further thoughts, details, analogies or examples.

Ten brings a change of direction. It introduces new or different information and, sometimes though not necessarily, material which conflicts with the subject matter of *ki* and *sho*.

The fourth and final character, *ketsu*, presents the reader with “a format which ties together the first three segments.” It reconciles them, plays the role of mediator by harmoniously incorporating them in the same reality.

In short, the *kishotenketsu* structure is an inclusive one. That is, a method of encompassing similar, different *and* contradictory elements—elements in total, partial or no agreement—and working them into the same physical reality. It has nothing to prove, no point to make. Its interest is to make things fit together, not to pick them apart.

Example 1: Letter

At least, that’s how the literal meaning of *kishotenketsu* translates. It’s not always that way in reality—or so it would look to the logic-steeped Westerner—as a very simple example will reveal.

Dear Taro,
 Long time, no see. How are you and the family?
 Everyone here is fine.
 Regarding the matter I spoke to you about last month, I
 have discussed the details with several other attorneys, but
 the project does not appear feasible in its present form.
 In any case, I’ll keep you informed. Give my best to
 your wife and children, and I wish you the very best of
 luck.

Sincerely,

Hanako

In this case, “Long time, no see. How are you and the family?” is the *ki*, “Everyone here is fine,” is *sho*, the second paragraph is *ten* and the third is *ketsu*. There would seem to be no mediation or reconciliation, but as we said, the *kishotenketsu* structure is an inclusive one. (This type of letter, written to say hello or communicate information, in practice coincides with the greeting, subject and closing format of English letter writing.)

Example 2: Print Ad

In advertising as well, textbook examples are the exception, not the rule. In general, however, the product or company acts as the mediating agent, the element containing or uniting the other elements of the ad. And, at the same time, the sponsor and reader.

The body copy below is from an ad I'll be looking at in more detail on page [__]. The visual shows a Toyota Carina parked on a knoll overlooking what appears to be a river; seated inside are a man and woman. The headline reads, "Carina on a hill," with the sub-head, "Even now, I give him his birthday present in the car." The copy reads:

I gave him his present at the same place I always do, a hill overlooking the ocean. The gleam in his eyes as he untied the ribbon looked the same as it did around the time we first met. Through this little ceremony, I felt sure things hadn't changed even though time had passed. Then we looking out at the horizon, talked about the cat that used to live on the college campus, and wondered what had become of him. As we talked, his hands, wearing the peccary gloves with the tag still on them, happily tapped the top of the steering wheel in time to the South American rhythm coming from the FM station on the radio.

In Japanese, the kishotenketsu breakdown is as follows:

Ki:	I gave him his present at the same place I always do, a hill overlooking the ocean.
Sho:	The gleam in his eyes as he untied the ribbon looked the same as it did around the time we first met. Through this little ceremony, I felt sure things hadn't changed even though time had passed.
Ten:	Then we looked out at the horizon, talked about the cat that used to live on the college campus, and wondered what had become of him.
Ketsu:	As we talked, his hands, wearing the peccary gloves with the tag still on them, happily tapped the top of the steering wheel in time to the South American rhythm coming from the FM station on the radio.

Commercials

The above copy is from a print ad, but from the vantage point of kishotenketsu, it's no coincidence that the product or corporate logo comes at the end of most television commercials. Or that this is the place where memory retention is the strongest. But whether it comes at the end or not, the product or company in print ads is the unifying agent, the element which makes it possible for the others to coexist.

Different Modes of Understanding and Communication

The emerging picture gives a more in-depth look at the implications of mood versus message. These two types of advertising represent different "modes" of understanding and communication. And, as we've seen, means of achieving them.

Japanese Communication: Communion, Not Comprehension

In Japan, the objective of communication is *communion*, to enter into an indistinguishable fusion with the "other." To abolish lines of demarcation, as Zen puts it, "like a raindrop falling into the ocean."

In social interactions, the goal is to create a bond through shared experience. It requires physical proximity within a common space and is achieved with tangible means: eating and drinking the same things, engaging in the same activities, “breathing the same air,” as the Japanese are so fond of saying. Communication is a function of having these bonding experiences, feelings and/or perceptions in common.

In advertising, that goal is limited to perceptions, feelings and emotions, even though the interpretation of those perceptions does not have to be the same for both parties. The result is a more direct and inclusive, if less precise, brand of communication than its Western counterpart.

The means to success with this brand, once again, is to create a situation, to “prepare a world” the audience may step into—to offer the setting in which advertiser and consumer may come together. There is no mental processing of incoming sensory information. Success or failure has little to do with order or logic.

What’s So Great About Getting It?

Not only are the American and Japanese definitions of communication different, so are the attitudes toward it and values attached to it. And from what’s been said so far, it’s no wonder the Japanese do not place the high valuation on intellectual comprehension that Americans do.

For one thing, the Japanese are more accepting of things they do not understand. They don’t get upset like Americans, for instance, if something doesn’t fit together or make perfect sense. Americans firmly believe there’s a “rational explanation” for everything *and* that it’s their job to find it. Most Japanese, on the other hand, would agree that there’s so much in the world that makes so little sense. Why not just accept it and get on with your life?

Why are the Japanese more tolerant of life’s little peculiarities? For one thing, their religions—folk, Shinto and Buddhism—preach acquiescence and resignation to the dictates of destiny. The way things are is the way it is, and there’s nothing you can do about it. The caste system in effect up to the Meiji Restoration is ample proof that, to the Japanese, people are not born equal even in theory. (Christians, on the other hand, believe that all souls are equal before God. Consequently, there must be some explanation for inequality—God must have had a reason to make things that way.)

Second, the once cavernous gap between the Japanese upper and lower classes in both education *and* weaponry effectively reinforced this acquiescence and resignation in the common citizenry. In matters they didn't understand, they assumed there was something *they* hadn't grasped—a reaction reinforced by the ruling classes in the purposeful use of language commoners had no way of knowing. In cases in which the common folk did understand but did not agree, they knew the Draconian penalties for questioning the authority of the powers that were.

That's not all. In particular, there's also the aversion of the Japanese to admitting that they don't know or understand something. In Japan, *baka yaro!* or "you foolish fellow!" is the strongest insult in the language—fighting words which, in reality, mask the most deep-seated fear of the culture: rejection by the group, in this case by being laughed at or held up to public ridicule. (Americans carry a similar fear of sexual impotence, as reflected in "fuck you," the strongest insult in English.) No wonder the average Japanese is not about to volunteer that he or she "doesn't get it."

Five Categories of Japanese Ads

When we look at Japanese print ads, we find they contain more copy and, in general, communicate more information than their TV commercial counterparts. (Which, as we've seen, is frequently saying very little indeed.) I see five basic categories, three of which I'll look at in this section and two in the next.

Category 1: The Set Stage

Our first category features the mood-over-message approach we saw in television commercials. The emphasis is on creating a world for the reader to step into, not belaboring the message of "buy now while the supply lasts!" Like product relevance, logical order is not a priority; the copy is free to go where it will in setting the stage. It invites associations via scenes and images—a format designed to elicit a wide range of interpretations and, thereby, connect with a large or "inclusive" audience.

Example 1: Toyota Carina

For our first example, let's return to the Toyota Carina we looked at earlier for an excellent example of how this approach works. From the copy, the reader learns that the woman has just given the man a birthday present. That she repeats this "little ceremony" on the same spot—and in a car—every year. That the look in the man's eyes as he unties the ribbon is the same as when they first met. That they gaze out at the

horizon and talk about a cat that had once lived on their college campus. That the man is wearing his birthday present, a pair of gloves, as he taps his fingers in time to the FM music on the radio.

In fact, the reader learns quite a bit about the couple, but nothing of the car. The sub-head and body copy make no mention of the Carina or, for that matter, automobiles in general. Without the visual and headline (“Carina on a hill”), readers could only guess at the product. And while the ad *does* offer specific information about the engine, it is relegated to clearly secondary status by physical segregation from the body copy.

One by one, the sentences construct a scene and create a mood. There is no “therefore,” no conclusion. That is, the ad does not coerce the reader, does not direct, lead, speak to or otherwise attempt to influence. Instead, it leaves him free to make of it what he will. For instance, the couple in the car could be husband and wife. But they could, just as easily, be two former college lovers now both unhappily married to different partners and meeting for a secret tryst. If so, are they on their way to a love hotel? Or, possibly, on their way back *from* one? Similarly, there is no reference to how much time has passed since college, the one clear reference. The couple could be in their early twenties or late sixties. (A close look at the visual will reveal the couple is middle aged, but the copy gives no clues.) The possibilities are endless. Suffice it to say that, if the reader has ever been on a date in a car, chances are this ad will bring back memories.

Example 2: Pacific Hotel

Our next ad, for the Pacific Hotel, is even *more* open-ended, as is clear from this translation of the headline and body copy.

With what do you supplement the insufficient power of words?

Words do not have the power to reach a closed heart. I sometimes think that if you’d open your heart, words would reach it. Therefore, I believe I’d like to have the kind of conversation that would open both our hearts. And, in the moment our hearts open, I want to throw warm words [into yours]. Let’s eat somewhere together. Let’s have something to drink, just the two of us. Let’s find out what we can give to each other. If we can talk to each other with open hearts, our voices will reach [the other’s heart]. The words will get through. The place where people can open their hearts is a place where those hearts can rest.

Here, the rainy day visual sets a gloomy stage as the copy invites associations from almost anyone who has ever experienced frustration in attempting to communicate with another person and wanted or attempted to resolve the problem. The copy implies a romantic involvement between the two “participants” (the words might be the protagonist’s thoughts or part of an actual conversation with another person who is present) but doesn’t say so; the participants could be relatives, friends, in fact, almost anyone.

What’s more, it’s only the last sentence which introduces the theme of a physical location as important to the process of communication. The natural conclusion would be the Hotel Pacific, although the reader is left to make that connection him or herself. The hotel offers hope of meaningful communication, the key to opening “closed hearts,” that is, *the mediating factor*. (In the West, the mediating factor is the intellect, ideas, Truth. In Japan, it’s a person or object in physical reality.)

That’s not all. In the Carina ad, the reader is outside the situation looking in. In this one, he’s inside looking out. The act of reading the ad in and of itself draws him into the scene, making him a participant.

Example 3: Toyota Curren

Our final ad sample is another Toyota effort, this time for the Curren. Whereas our first two gave the reader a scenario to enter into, this one offers *total* freedom of interpretation. The headline quite matter-of-factly states that, “The car is Curren.” There is no body copy. The visual shows a young man washing a Curren. He could be a gas station attendant washing a customer’s car, but the scene gives the impression—to the author, anyway—that the young man owns this Curren, is quite attached to it and takes very good care of it. There is no guiding here; the ad simply presents the product and its name, and lets the reader make of it what he or she will.

Category Two: The Two-Step “Sandwich”

Now, let’s move on to our second category. This one features a more even blend of mood and message, a format frequently seen in product ads. It employs a two-step progression beginning with a sketch of how things stand on the market or comparison with something—which varies in length from approximately 50% to 90% of the total body copy.

This approach differs from that of our first category in that the body copy mentions the product by name. In cases where the “introduction” makes up 90% of body length, the copy waits until near the end to “throw in” the product, as if in passing, and lets it go at that. Nonetheless, the reader *does* know from the body copy what the ad is about.

In short, the criterion of differentiation between our first two categories is product relevance, with ad contents of the second featuring more than those of the first.

Even when product features *are* mentioned, however, there’s no clear connection with or transition from the preceding market overview—no “*that’s* why you need this so badly”—or exhortation aimed at the reader to “rush right out and buy it” or “act now, while the offer lasts!” “It has these properties,” says the copy, then—and this is the important part—leaves it up to him to make the connection.

Example 1: Nissai Bank

Our first representative of this category is from the Nissai Bank, this one featuring its Warishin High-Interest Fund. Except few readers would guess that from the first four paragraphs, which read like a zoology textbook. As you can see below, this is the 90% variety, waiting to the very end to tell the reader what the ad is all about—the connection being “Big Return.”

Come back when you’ve gotten big.

The Red Sea Turtle

To the jumbo red sea turtle, commonly found in warm ocean waters, the coastline south of Japan’s Tokyo Metropolitan area is an important egg laying site. Unfortunately, the number of places where female red sea turtles can lay their eggs is growing smaller year in, year out. Between May and July, the females dig holes in the sand and deposit about 120 eggs. After two months, the baby turtles, 6-7 cm at birth, crawl out of their sandy nest and scamper for the open sea. Several years later, after they’ve grown to a length of one meter, some will return to lay their eggs.

What becomes big and comes back is the Warishin Fund of the Nissai Bank. It offers the ease and convenience of being able to start at ¥10,000.

In conclusion, note the physical separation of the final paragraph from the body of the ad. That is, physical, and not conceptual separation—like indenting a new paragraph—is the method of choice to indicate a change of subject matter.

Example 2: Brighton Hotel

This approach of juxtaposing two entirely different subjects with only the most tenuous connection is a common one in Japanese print advertising. The greater percentage of “sandwich” ads, however, probably more closely resemble this one for the Brighton Hotel, which spends only the first half of the body copy before getting around to the hotel itself. Nor does the jump the reader is asked to make constitute quite as large a thematic gap—from hotels in general to the Brighton in particular.

Saved by a hotel.

When you go on trips, especially business trips, it goes without saying just how important the time you spend at a hotel is. You relax at a hotel. You wind down at a hotel. You laugh at a hotel. You get your self back at a hotel.

In the summer of 1993, the Brighton Hotel will at long last open its doors in Urayasu. The experience of encountering a variety of guests at the Kyoto Brighton Hotel—how has it trained us, how has it made us grow? We look forward to serving you.

Category 3: Relevance From the Start

My third category of print ad is the closest Japanese variety to the message-oriented American style. These ads don’t wait until the end or even halfway through the copy to mention to product. Most have information to convey. Sometimes the name appears in the first sentence.

That’s certainly not to say, of course, that this category is pushy. There’s no pressure to buy. The copy might give the name or product features early on, but it’s still low on hype. Ads that do give product features simply state the case and leave it up to the reader to make up his or her mind.

Example 1: Dunlop Duralumin Golf Clubs

The product name does not appear in the headline of our first example, for Dunlop Duralumin Golf Clubs, but is mentioned in the sub-head. From there, the body copy dives straight into the benefits and differences of the two drivers featured—no frills, no moods or stage settings. There’s no conclusion, but the body copy does position the closing “now on sale” directly above the product shots, thus inferring via proximity that the reader should run right out and snap up several.

Now, you can enjoy distance that goes beyond power.

**If you want to make flight extreme,
Duralumin. DDH Super 240 Forged.**

240 cc head realizes a sense of security when you set your stance and one of the world's largest sweet areas. You can obtain super flight which flies big and which doesn't curve. In addition to "Loft 12°" which is appropriate for regular golfers, the new "Loft 11°" which is aimed at power hitters by stopping drives from rising is now on sale.

What's Japanese about this ad is the marginal relevance between visual and copy content. Why, for instance, does the visual feature a Caucasian when the target audience is Japanese? (There's also the real-life size of the face, but that's a different discussion: see page __.) Could it be because most top golfers are still white, and so invites the reader to identify with a champion? Perhaps. And why the murderous look? Because, boy are you gonna blast that ball the next time you tee off with a Loft 11° or Loft 12°? Who knows? Whatever the answers—if, in fact, there are any—with no conclusion and a multi-interpretational visual, this ad is still non-specific enough to be appreciated by the Japanese golfing public at large.

Example 2: Mylura Contraceptive Film

Our second ad, for Mylura Contraceptive Film, is also all business and no nonsense—an odd "twist" for the mood-oriented Japanese in advertising a product that almost *screams* for romantic, intimate treatment. The headline matter-of-factly informs readers that Mylura is the contraceptive for women who take birth control into their own hands, while the visual features a model with an expression that reinforces the message, "I'm in control, here."

Americans might see the detached woman in the visual as a sex therapy counselor or call girl greeting a client, but *not* a romantically involved woman welcoming her paramour content in the security that they can make love without the "formality" of a condom or the fear of conception. Note, once again, that the model is Caucasian, perhaps because traditional Japanese female role expectations frown on such aggressive, confrontational, out-and-out declarations of independence—sexual or otherwise. Western women, on the other hand, are seen as more assertive and sexually active.

I am controlling by myself.

Mylura, the contraceptive film that women use.

Contraception Born for Women

Mylura is a contraception method that women can use themselves. By stopping the activity of sperm inside the vagina and obstructing its progress toward the uterus, it prevents the union of sperm and ovum. And as long as sperm and ovum don't come together, you won't get pregnant.

Contraception That's Easy for Women to Use.

Mylura uses an speedy, 3-step format. Just (1) fold the thin, soft film into a square, (2) place it on the tip of your index finger and (3) insert into the deepest part of the vagina at the entrance to the uterus. In 5-7 minutes the film dissolves, and demonstrates contraceptive effectiveness.

Contraception That Considers Women's Bodies.

Mylura is a pharmaceutical product available at drug stores. Considering the delicate female body, it places great importance on the vagina's natural cleansing action. Because it uses water-soluble ingredients that dissolve easily, there's no special cleanup afterwards.

The body copy certainly injects no mood into the discussion. The problem is, it is clinical without being convincing—to an American audience, at least. The first block explains how Mylura works, inferring fail-safe, problem-free protection women can use with confidence—although the copy mentions no active ingredients by name and, in the final sentence, talks to readers as if they were fifth graders. The second block focuses on ease of and speedy readiness for use. Finally, the third infers once again that Mylura is safe for women because it “considers the delicate female body”—just how is another story—and convenient because there is no special post-coital “cleanup.”

The final analysis? No mood, but not much nitty gritty, either.

Example 3: Bridgestone Regno ER50 Tires

Our last example, for Bridgestone Regno ER50 Tires, is product related from start to finish, and also ends with “now on sale” next to a product shot. This one, however, goes one step further and announces to the reader that “we want you to try it.” What's more, the last line of the copy, a kind of “post sub-head,” is functionally close to an English conclusion. (Close, but not the real thing. First, it is physically separated from the body copy by the use of different fonts and point sizes. And second, it lacks a “therefore” or other conceptual connection to the features/argument presented above.)

The new Regno—we want you to test them especially on imported cars.

Listen. Regno quietness and toughness. Listen to the new Regno.

Are you satisfied with your car's tires? There's a tire we'd really like to you try. Bridgestone's new Regno ER50. It's heightened the quietness it's already famous for, and furthermore, realizes high driving performance with a powerful feeling of rigidity. This ride was born from new "Donuts" base technology which combines three revolutionary technologies. (1) Automatic evolution design method, which is changing tire production. (2) Beads with improved roundness, which are changing tire roundness. And (3) long consecutive chain carbon, which is changing tire rubber. What's more, thanks to vibration-absorbing rubber, road noise decreases. It gives you the actual feeling of the deep, rich ride that's appropriate for high-performance saloons.

New great balance Regno ER50 now on sale.

This ad is closer to the American approach than those presented so far. The first three sentences could serve as an introduction. As implied above, the last line could be fine-tuned into a conclusion of sorts. And the technology in between is a natural body.

So why is it still Japanese? For one thing, there are no paragraphs, no divisions, no lines of demarcation showing where one idea or section ends and the next begins. It is, as the eye can verify, a whole in which the parts fit together almost indistinguishably—without seams, boundaries or borders—just the way the Japanese like it.

The Appeal of Pull: Part Two

I can still hear American ad people thinking, "But why leave things to chance? Just to be on the safe side, why not throw in a little hook to get them moving?" Maybe something innocuous like, "Doesn't your family deserve the best?"

Believe it: push is counterproductive. If the ad "stinks of strong-arm," as the saying goes, the Japanese turn off. They don't like to "give in" to other people's arguments; they *do* like to maintain the illusion that they're making the choice themselves. (This sounds like a contradiction in reference to the Japanese, with their "tendency" to look alike, to have what everyone else has and do what everyone else does. But then, contradictions exist only for those who follow a system of logic.)

No Strings on Love

For one thing, the Japanese are *used* to having it that way from the day they're born. In bringing up little ones, a Japanese mother doesn't say "no," offer ultimatums of "you do this *or else*" or assert her authority in order to force them to bend their wills to hers. This approach by definition contains the threat of the withdrawal or denial of love, or its continuance on the condition of obedience—*conditional* love.

Japanese maternal love is unconditional; there's never the threat of it being taken away. When mom wants junior to do something and he doesn't, she finds a way to divert his attention with something that he likes to do and suits her purposes as well. In short, she doesn't stop, but *channels* his momentum in the direction she wants him to go. Rules, on the other hand—the "no"—are imposed by the impersonal, external force called "society."

What's Wrong with Human Nature?

This unconditional approach is a natural outgrowth of the Japanese outlook on human nature. That is, the basic goodness of man and the desirability of letting that nature emerge naturally, the way it wants to go. And conversely, that forcing things on children will pervert the fundamental purity of the life force and leave them with twisted, unsociable personalities. Therefore, the parents' job is to create the conditions in which kids can fulfill their potential. The process is similar to that of raising miniature *bonsai* trees, in which the gardener selectively prunes and attaches wires in the interests of guiding their growth to its most aesthetically pleasing form. (This, too, sounds suspiciously contradictory in today's rising tide of "education mamas" and *juku* or private "cram classes.")

The Pull of the Gods

The perceived efficacy of this approach goes back to earliest Japanese recorded history. In one myth from the *Kojiki*, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu hid herself away in cave and blocked the entrance because a cantankerous god had ravished the rice paddies she was cultivating. The other gods, thrown into darkness, begged her to come out, but to no avail. They were desperate until they hit upon the idea of a party to *lure* her out.

Thanks to this artful strategy, Japan enjoys the sun's benefits today. Once the "festivities" commenced, the other deities sounded like they were having such a good time, Amaterasu became curious, opened the entrance to the cave and peeked out. Whereupon the other gods promptly escorted her back outside to resume her daily duties. The bottom line? To get people on your side in Japan, pull.

Which Side Are You On? (Cold Conclusions)

Americans must keep in mind, of course, that Japanese advertisers are only giving their audience what they want. And Japanese audiences don't *like* logically irrefutable orders or being "led by the nose" to an "inescapable" conclusion.

For one thing, it's restricting. It leaves no room for other possibilities, no room for variables or "play." Being forced to follow a logical order, "spelling things out in black and white," takes away the important consumer prerogative of coming to his own conclusions. Not having everything revealed, on the other hand, not only gives him "something more" to look forward to, it lets him supply his own interpretation of what that something might be.

Clarity Invites Conflict...

That's not all. A logical order—a clear message—invites conflict and separation. Conflict because it contains an implicit challenge to prove it wrong (a challenge Americans take great pleasure in and spend inordinate amounts of time on). And separation because, at the same time, it also solicits agreement. In short, drawing a clear line creates two sides: yes and no, pro and con.

...and Understanding Means Somebody Gets Left Out

And that's for those who *do* understand the message. The bottom line of logical progressions and messages in general is that they presume an "in" group and an "out" group: those who get it and those who don't. Messages, by definition, imply exclusivity. Someone is bound to get left out in the "cold."

So it's no wonder that the Japanese, whose worst nightmare is being thrown out of the group, who want to come together, not be torn apart, avoid logical progressions in favor of ambiguities. Being forced to follow a logical progression confronts them with the unpleasant possibility of looking like a fool if, after following it, they don't understand. And in Japanese society, where togetherness is the primary drive, fools are one of three types of people excluded from the fold by reason of being detrimental to society. (The other two are troublemakers and swindlers.) Ambiguities, on the other hand, let them maintain the illusion of harmony and togetherness—even when those two desiderata are not, in fact, present.

AMERICA

Rules, Regulations and Resolution

The way the Christians tell it, God brought order out of chaos by making rules for the universe. He also made rules for human society, which, if you want to go to Heaven and live there “happily ever after,” you start by following.

Why are rules necessary in the first place? Because earth is the Devil’s playground and rules, as God’s will made manifest, are one of man’s two most powerful weapons from the Supreme Commander in the never-ending battle to secure the triumph of good over evil, order over chaos. His second weapon is God’s divine strength, which He puts at man’s disposal to “borrow” through prayer in times of weakness, doubt or temptation. God’s rules show man what to do and His power gives him the strength to do it. Together, they’re enough to defeat any sinister plot the Devil may devise.

That doesn’t mean for a minute, however, that man can breathe easy. The Devil is constantly hatching new schemes to throw the world into chaos, and man’s intellect is no match for the wiles of Satan. Which means he must be ever vigilant, must never let down his guard. That is, he must always follow the rules.

The bottom line is, follow God’s rules and order will be maintained. Break them, on the other hand, and the universe, not to mention your soul, is in danger of literally going to Hell. In short, salvation is predicated on order. Turning the equation around, order is a prerequisite for salvation. Which, in turn, means that order is intrinsically good. Why? It shows that God’s power is still at man’s disposal if need be—visible proof the Old Man in the Sky is still alive and well.

In writing as well, rules are the foundation and the building blocks of order. Break them and communication breaks down, plunging the world—or an essay—into a chaos of misunderstanding, a sentiment echoed by 17th century scholar Robert Burton: “The Devil is the author of confusion.” Here, too, understanding is predicated upon order, with rules the means to the desired end. If what you want to say makes sense in the first place, following the rules is the most effective way of getting your message across.

Chaos or Resolution

From the reader’s standpoint, receiving that message loud and clear leaves him with a sense of satisfaction, of *resolution*. And what is resolution if not the triumph of Good over Evil, the resolution or solving once again of the problems of chaos. Threats to understanding have been dealt with. Things are in their proper place. Which, in turn, reinforces the Jew or Christian’s fundamental religio-cultural value system and belief that “everything’s all right” in the universe.

And which is why, in America, advertising follows the rules. Because *a sense of resolution sticks in Americans' memories*, like happy endings in books and movies. Resolution means the removal of obstacles to order. Its absence, on the other hand—ambiguity, loose ends, things left hanging in mid-air—is unpleasant and something Americans would rather not think about. They dislike a lack of resolution; it frustrates them because they feel it *should* be there. On an unconscious level, it threatens their accepted world view, with the resulting feelings of insecurity and existential Angst. The result? They're more likely to forget.

The Nuts and Bolts

OK, so what *are* the rules? The common denominator in any logical format designed to convince—advertisements, essays and scientific papers alike—is a clear-cut introduction and conclusion with a well-ordered body of arguments and evidence in between. The point trying to be made should be apparent from the start. What's more, there must be a coherent, rational connection or smooth flow from one section to the next.

In advertising, the introduction sets the tone for the ad and arouses reader interest in the product to induce him to read on. The conclusion is designed to make what has been said stick in the reader's mind, frequently employing a play on words to provide a sense of resolution, giving a telephone number to call, or both. And, in the end, to encourage the reader to act—the consumer to consume.

It's the body's job to do the actual convincing. This is the arena to unfold arguments and present proofs, each strategically positioned in a logically connected flow of thought and with its own role to play in accomplishing the objective. It's also the place to include analogies, examples or other concrete aids to understanding. Too, the body offers the widest range of structural variations, the choice of most effective or convincing approach usually hinging on the particulars of the ad and the message it is trying to convey.

Feature List

Perhaps the most common approach in advertising is a straightforward statement of product features. Our first sample ad, for the Ford Escort GT, is a representative of this style.

FOR THOSE WHO'D RATHER MAKE DUST THAN COLLECT IT.

Somewhere between your first music video and your millionth game show, it hit you: the view from the sofa is as about exciting as static cling. That's when you decided a little fun was in order. And that's where the 1993 Ford Escort GT comes into play.

Under the hood, this Escort GT sports a 16-valve, 127-horse dual overhead cam engine. While outside, bold new wheels and a new rear spoiler make this GT look great even when it's just sitting there. Which, of course, doesn't happen very often.

The 1993 Ford Escort GT. For those who'd rather get around than sit around.

Three paragraphs: introduction, body and conclusion. The first expands the theme introduced in the headline: getting out and having fun versus sitting home and having none. The second drives home to owners just what about the Escort GT will help them have that fun and look good, too. And the third combines the two themes in the "logical" conclusion: this is the ideal car to get out and have more fun in.

- **Examples: Group 34**

Problem—Solution

Next comes the problem-solution approach, frequently employed in plugging "breakthrough" products. The basic message is, "Up to now, it couldn't be done. Now, thanks to the new ••••, it's a cinch!" Our second ad, for Christian Dior's Capture for Hands, adheres to this format in communicating product benefits. Like the Escort ad above, this one, too, conveniently allots one paragraph for each step in the progression—introduction, problem, solution and conclusion.

HELP IS AT HAND

Now, one dab of cream from Christian Dior can make light years of difference in the way hands look and feel.

Hands have always been the most vulnerable part of the body. Constantly exposed to sun, water and detergents, this delicate skin is subjected to unremitting attack. The most dangerous culprit of all is the sun—its powerful rays beat down on exposed hands and generate an overabundance of melanin. Unable to cope with this barrage of aggressors, hands are the first part of the body to show unsightly dark spots.

Christian Dior's Capture for Hands is the first product to address this problem through patented liposome technology. A special combination of liposomes goes directly to work to minimize the appearance of dark spots and improve skin texture.

With continued regular use, Capture will restore a feeling of suppleness, a look of smooth, even perfection. Hands will become more beautiful with each passing day.

- **Examples: Group 35**

Them or Us

A third common strategy is direct comparison, the them-or-us approach. This is a typically American method of dealing with the competition, consumers around the States being only too familiar with lines like, “You’ve heard the claims of those ‘other’ cold remedies. Now, look at what Contac can do for you.” Naming names is, of course, also standard operating procedure, as in, “For years, Hertz has been America’s No. 1 choice in rent-a-cars. Now, there’s a new standard of quality at your service. Introducing...”

Et Cetera

There are other types of order, of course: chronological order, order of importance, order of magnitude and more. But whatever the particular choice, the body should follow one—or, in some cases, more than one. In essays or scientific papers, the author commonly outlines his methodology in the introduction. But whatever the writer is trying to say or do, it should be readily apparent to readers at every step of the way.

Relevance

We found little relevance between product and visual and verbal content in the previous section on commercials. It is also, predictably enough, lacking in print ads, as we’ll see below.

Example 1: Mei Gui Hua Hair Restorative

The Laurel-and-Hardy-esque visual of our first example, for Mei Gui Hua hair restorative lotion, is effective in catching the reader’s eye. Only once his eyes are caught, he gets little of what an American might naturally have anticipated.

The first thing he focuses on is Skinny at right. His hair is standing on end, so a Western reader might expect something like, “Mei Gui Hua will put so much hair on your head so fast, you’ll be astounded.” From there his line of sight moves to Fats on the left, who looks more annoyed than surprised. The contrast might lead the reader to believe that this product works for all kinds of people.

Only that’s not justified, either. The only relevance the visual has to the headline—which reads, “What and where is Mei Gui Hua?”—is the cone shape of Skinny at right. Nor does the sub-head live up to logical expectations with its, “Look, the penetration to the scalp’s horny layer. Show yourself, benefits of rugosa rose extract! This is it! The new aggressive strategy to growing hair. Odorless, and now on sale.”

The body copy goes on to divulge that Mei Gui Hua was ten years in the making and contains Chinese herbal ingredients, then goes on to give four hair restoring functions it stimulates.

In short, there's nothing at all in the copy related to the visual. The initial impact, however, will hopefully propel the reader through the body copy or at least stick with him next time he stops by his neighborhood drug store.

Example 2: Mazda New Sentia

Our second example, for the Mazda New Sentia, is even more striking than the first, the visual promising equally flamboyant copy. What would an American expect? Perhaps something about a zebra. Or possibly the announcement of a daring new model change, as in: "The 1994 Mazda New Sentia is changing its stripes."

Wrong on both counts. What *does* the reader get? A very prosaic, "Top model," as the headline. Then, in the sub-head: "Before you get in. Before you accelerate. More than anything else, [it] wanted to be a deluxe model that excites the visual sensation. The New Sentia is born." It does touch on visual impact, but not stripes.

The body copy goes on to talk about beauty, about luxury, about quality. About the first thing that jumps out and grabs the eyes. About the elegant, flowing curves. About how the New Sentia is a moving forum of self-expression that doesn't get buried in the confusion of city streets. And so on. Which is all fine and good, except the reader can hardly see the curves—or much of anything else—for the stripes (assuming the New Sentia does not come as presented in the ad).

Guidelines for Inspiration vs. Guidelines for Action

Now I'd like to look at how lack of relevance shows up in other areas of advertising. As examples, I've chosen two sets of corporate guidelines, one Japanese and one American.

Dentsu: 10 Demonic Commandments

The introduction to Dentsu's 10 Working Guidelines in the 1993 Dentsu Data Book reads as follows:

Dentsu's "10 Working Guidelines" were originally written by Hideo Yoshida, the fourth president of Dentsu, to serve as an inspiration for company employees. These guidelines provide employees with a strong framework for their day-to-day endeavors.

The direct translation of the Japanese, however, is not working guidelines but “Demonic Commandments”—far more in keeping with Yoshida’s exhortation to employees to “become demons of advertising.” Here are Yoshida’s 10 steps to demonhood.

1. Work is something you create on your own, not something that is assigned to you.
2. Take an active role in your work, not a passive one.
3. Address yourself to “big work.” Small work makes you small.
4. Aim for difficult assignments. Progress lies in accomplishing difficult work.
5. Once you start a job, don’t let it go. Even if it kills you, don’t let it go. Until you’ve completed your objective...
6. Drag the people in your periphery around with you. In the long run, the difference between dragging and being dragged is as large as that between Heaven and Earth.
7. Have a plan. If you have a plan, patience and ingenuity, correct efforts and aspirations will be born.
8. Have confidence in yourself. If you don’t have confidence in yourself, your work will lack impact, tenacity and depth.
9. Your head should be going at full speed at all times. Pay attention in all directions. You must never have an unguarded moment. That’s what service is.
10. Don’t shy away from confrontation. Confrontation is the mother of progress. It is fertilizer for aggressiveness. If you don’t, you will become weak and indecisive.

The Dentsu Data Book calls these 10 advisory passages “guidelines.” The question is, exactly what do they provide guidance to? It would be difficult to imagine a Dentsu employee applying these general, attitude-oriented categories to specific job assignments. So much so, in fact, that Americans would deny that they were guidelines to anything at all, since they have no meaning and could be for any industry in the world, not just advertising.

What they lack, however, is not meaning but relevance—the inability to apply them to concrete situations, to act as a guide from the general to the specific. They do have meaning in the sense that they serve a *purpose*—a purpose the Data Book provides: “inspiration.” Dentsu’s 10 Demonic Commandments point to the ideal working environment as seen by Hideo Yoshida.

In Japan, official policy which has little or no relationship to what goes on in reality is called *tatemaie* (literally, “putting up [something noble or pleasant] in front [of something that is not]). Its counterpart is *honme* (literally, “true sound”), or what you put something noble or pleasant up in front of. The closest equivalent to *tatemaie* in English would be “diplomacy.”

Yoshida’s Commandments are quixotic—*tatemaie*—from one to ten. You won’t find them or anything like them in practice at Dentsu or any other Japanese ad agency. What you will find, in most cases, is just the opposite; in their real-life, everyday office affairs, employees can’t *afford* to pay attention to them if they want to survive in the “hierarchy of harmony.”

Their function, then? Ornamental, like the Emperor. They are reserved for formal, ceremonial, diplomatic occasions—like pamphlets or explaining the “Dentsu spirit” to visitors. They point you in a direction but don’t harp on the details. They leave room for the real exigencies of the moment or individual interpretation. Their goal is to inspire an outlook—to *create a mood*.

America

The way the Japanese see things, rules could never hope to cover all the possibilities that can arise in reality, thereby rendering blanket edicts meaningless and ineffective. To Americans, it’s just the opposite; you need rules precisely because reality is so unpredictable—and why they must translate into action.

So, how are American guidelines different? Relevance to the specific situation at hand. In this they resemble another, older set of guidelines: the original Ten Commandments. Take “Thou shalt not steal.” The wicked flesh is tempted with the desire and the opportunity, but the good soul clings to the commandment and decides your ultimate course of action (in a best-case scenario, of course). Guidelines are more flexible than commandments, laws or rules; they are situational and exceptions are presumed to exist. Nonetheless, to get where you want to go, they should be followed.

The following six guidelines for creating a commercial were presented in a talk to Dentsu given by the president of _____ Advertising, a San Francisco-based agency.

Six Guidelines

The difference, obviously enough, is that these guidelines can and should be applied to the concrete phases of the creative process—that’s what they were devised for. Following them, creative teams can turn out better advertising and, after the fact, they can be used as criteria for judgment and criticism. (Sure enough, the president illustrated each guideline with one or more commercials.)

Visual Presentation Sequence

In television commercials, viewers’ eyes are forced to follow the visual sequence presented by the commercial itself. The visual and audio components of television make it a far more captivating medium—more effective at catching and holding the consumer’s attention—than print. In magazine or newspaper ads, on the other hand, readers’ eyes are free to roam. There’s only the ad to hold them.

JAPAN

Fourth Category of Print Ads: No Clear Visual Progression

In this section, I'd like to look at my fourth and fifth categories of Japanese print ads. The first three were based upon content. These last two, however, are contingent upon factors like layout and design.

The criterion for category number four is the inability to read the copy in one continuous visual path. Instead, the reader is forced to jump back and forth over the page to digest it in its entirety. Few, if any, cohesive design or layout elements hold it together or indicate physical direction or visual progression.

Japanese copy, as we have pointed out, gives freedom of individual interpretation; it does not lead the reader to any inescapable logical conclusions. In like manner, the layout of ads in this category offer similar freedom to the eyes—the freedom to wander. In its extreme version, the layout offers no clear beginning or end. (In English, the layout in combination with the copy leads to the end point—the corporate logo or telephone number.)

Ads in this category are often laid out with features contained in discreet, independent sections or “copy packages”; readers can pick and choose whichever ones strike their fancy without having to read the entire ad from beginning to end. There are, moreover, many gradations and types of arrangement—from no order or cohesion to independent sections arranged in a clearly recognizable visual presentation sequence and leading to “logically” placed body copy.

Example 1: Honda Super Dio

My first example of this approach is this Honda Super Dio ad featuring Matt Dillon. Messages demand the reader's attention in both Japanese and English from around the page. They are, as far as I can see, unconnected; no overriding design or copy concept holds them together.

More specifically, from the upper left-hand corner, the ad exhorts the reader to “Come ride with us” in English. Then, in the upper right-hand corner, a vertical headline in Japanese tells him that, “There is a way. There are no rules.” From there he must return to the left and a progression of shrinking red arrows, leading through a picture of the Super Dio in the middle to...well, just where they lead is not clear. They point off the page—past, not at, a special Dio Bag which customers get free when they buy the bike.

Next, the reader must make his way back to the right—to a three-story horizontal English *and* Japanese copy block communicating the following messages: “Dreams are on the road” in Japanese (for some reason, in a type of parentheses), “Sweet dreams” in English and “New Super Dio Now on Sale” in both Japanese *and* English. There is no body copy as such; features appears in bullets below the bottom headline. Finally, the gray area along the bottom edge of the page advertises two booklets offering information on motorcycle laws, tips for safe operation and, no doubt, numerous platitudes of encouragement.

Example 2: Suntory Whisky

Our second ad, for Suntory Reserve whisky, forces readers to literally “go with the flow” streaming up to the horse’s buttocks. But there’s another flow, this one leading—with the help of arrows—down towards a mini-race from left to right. The copy, in short, goes in two totally different directions.

Before leading into the copy as such, the headline asks the reader, “Won’t you join [us] in a glass?” The underlined characters read, “Reserve Cup,” followed by, “is coming.” The English dates act as a sub-head; they do not lead into the body copy, which reads as follows:

The whole thing started with a statement by Mr. Takenaka: ‘In my next life, I want to be a horse.’ Mr. Takenaka, who has no malicious intentions, talks about dreams with an eye like that of a horse. It was at that instant that I, Motoki, whose heart was touched by his single-heartedness, hit upon the idea of the Suntory Cup—as a diversion from the real world in which ‘I want to become a horse, but I cannot.’ So at least I want to let horses enjoy themselves to their heart’s content.

To reach the following copy block, the reader must make the leap over the jockey to the front of the horse. Once that hurdle has been cleared, he can read on:

Now then, the big race, veiled in mystery, whose outcome no one can read, is about to begin. This time, there are six horses running. Atarimetio, the quintessential thoroughbred, that pure-blooded racehorse with such great expectations. Om Rice Shower, about whom we’ve heard retirement rumors, but who’s still got a lot of races left in him. Pistachio, a regular mating season on hooves. And others. Why not place your bets on this season’s biggest mystery? But first, to start things off on the right foot, a glass of Suntory Reserve. By the time the ice melts in your scotch-and-water, all the mysteries will have been solved. There, for some reason, whisky.

That’s the first “flow” of copy. The second begins from the same place as the first, but leads downward, with arrows, to a blurb announcing, “Now, Suntory Reserve comes with a pari-mutuel ticket attached,” onward through a racing scenario to gifts which can be won by participants.

That's *still* not all. There's a third "section" beginning from the upper left-hand corner in small letters and running along half the circumference of the ad. It says:

<The story so far> The "Friends of Reserve Club," which I, Masahiro Motoki, began because I wanted to make new friends, caught on and become quite popular. Just before its 1st anniversary, however, four of the members, not including me, became engaged. It was on the way home from their magnificent double-wedding. Overcome by my loneliness, I stopped into a bar called 'Eats and Drinks' and Mr. Takenaka was sitting there. Mr. Takenaka, not knowing that I was the President of the "Friends of Reserve Club," enthusiastically recommended I join the Friends of Reserve Club he was forming. Which is why, this year too, I'm having a good time eating and drinking delicious things.

So, three discreet segments, all related but able to stand alone—only semi-dependent on the others.

To most Americans, this ad's labyrinthine layout makes reading it in its entirety—which is what they see ads as being for—an exercise in exhaustion. Japanese consumers, however, who don't see them that way, do not have to read each section or "flow" of the ad to understand or appreciate it.

Matters of Degree

Next, I'd like to present five ads which form a series of sorts illustrating the spectrum from little, if any, cohesion in the visual presentation sequence to an almost American approach. All make use of independent copy packages, some exclusively, others not.

Example 1: Toyota vans and station wagons

In our first ad, for Toyota wagons and vans, the visual elements are placed—logically speaking, at least—at complete random. What makes it a peerless representative of this category are the short copy packages and the eye's freedom to roam exactly where it pleases; there is no progression, no pattern, no nothing to tell it where to go next.

With the possible exception, that is, of the two headlines at the opposite corners of the page, hinting at an order from upper left to lower right. The upper left-hand corner reads, "There are lots of reasons to make you want to choose wagons," and the lower right-hand corner follows with, "There aren't many reasons why you wouldn't want to choose wagons." The captions under the cartoons read: You caught something big. You had sextuplets. You want to take your pet for a walk. Your grandchild will love you for it. You like to take everything with you on vacations. You move a lot. You're the little league manager. And so on.

Example 2: Sony VHS Video—TV

There's a *little* more visual order in our next ad for Sony's two-in-one TV-VTR—but only because there are numbers to go with the features. The progression starts from the lower left and moves up the page—to the author's eye, at least—at random.

Example 3: Fujitsu "Marty" CD-ROM player

The third ad, for Fujitsu's "Marty" CD-ROM player, features five copy segments, but the general flow of the ad moves from top to bottom.

Example 4: Honda CR-X del Sol

The fourth, for Honda's CR-X del Sol sports car, has a definite clockwise order. Thanks, in part, to numbers, once again, but this time not thanks to them alone. (Without numbers, Americans would read this progression either 1-2-4-3 or in the order they appear in the ad.) The headline is placed in the upper left-hand corner and the body copy in the lower right, with four numbered copy blocks in between. The un-American twist is, the fourth block does not lead into the copy, but requires the reader to jump back across the page to his right to read it.

Example 5: Honda Clio Domani

Compare this to our fifth and final ad of this series, for Honda Clio Domani—one whose layout, with the right copy, could be adapted to work for the American market. The twelve copy blocks lead in a smooth flow from left to right and top to bottom, forming as they do almost a headline in themselves. From there, the next step is down and left—which leads to the "sub"-headline, copy and logomark.

Fifth Category of Print Ads: Copy Overkill

Now we come to our fifth and final category of print ad—one which, on the surface, goes against much of what we've said about Japanese advertising so far.

What *have* we said? One, that copy in Japanese television ads is sparse. And two, that the Japanese have "weak" copy recall and give higher priority to "experiencing" an ad than worrying about the "fine print."

The question now becomes, why are many of their print ads crammed so full of details? Not all, of course, but a great many more than one would expect in a country which bills its ads as featuring "brief dialogue or narration with minimal explanatory content" and "indirect over direct forms of expression."

The ads in my fifth category are characterized by a bewildering bulk of copy in an even more confusing maze of headlines, sub-heads and visual aids—Q & A, maps, tables, photos, diagrams and more. There's often so much information, that it's impossible to read it all without *serious* effort—even more so than in the fourth category. At first glance, in fact, it's hard to believe the same cultural Gestalt could be behind the two styles.

Example 1: Tua Slimming Belt

The three ads I have chosen as illustrations are directed at women with weight, skin and body hair problems. The first, for the Tua slimming belt, begins with the headline, "Fed up with harsh, demanding diets?! [Introducing] the easy way to lose weight you've been hearing about!" and a screamer in green proclaiming, "Wow! [I can't believe] This kind of thing existed?!" The purple sub-head follows with details:

Easy! Simple! Immediate efficacy! Developed in Italy, the home of esthetics, Tua is slim care that breaks with all conventional dieting common sense. By wearing it just 15 minutes a day, you can shape up just lying around—the easy way.

From there, the individual copy blocks go on to (1) explain how Tua works; (2) show the product itself; (3) list who it's recommended for; (4) introduce the originator; (5) present in table form how many kilograms and centimeters users can expect to take off their weight, waist, thighs and hips; (6) give the cost on both cash-in-full and installment plans; (7) detail the belt's advantages over conventional diet programs requiring physical exertion; and, of course, (8) tell readers how to order. Finally, the picture at bottom right lets them know the Tua is cordless, so they can diet the easy way any time, anywhere!

Examples 2 and 3: Estheen Skin Beautifier and Jaws Epine Gold Depilatory Gel

The second ad, for the Estheen skin beautifier, packs even more information into the same amount of space. And the third, for Jaws Epine Gold depilatory gel, crams in even more still.

It would take untold pages to include the copy appearing in these ads in its entirety. Happily, this is not necessary, since just looking at them should be enough to convince most that a start-to-finish read is no easy endeavor.

The fact is, some women plagued by obesity, bad skin or unsightly body hair might actually wade through each section and study every graph and illustration. I believe, however, most consumers with these worries do not *need* to be convinced, but will instead cut to the chase and order.

Kindness, Japanese style

The official rationale of advertisers in including such an encyclopedic array of details in their ads is “consideration” or “kindness” for readers. The underlying premise, however, is that, even if interested, they will become “discouraged” and not pursue the product to the purchase stage if they must use their own initiative to find out the price, where it’s sold and other pertinent data. They must, therefore, be given everything they need to purchase the product. (The psychology is similar to that of Japanese retail shop owners who leave their doors open in hot and cold weather alike to remove every “obstacle” that could possibly discourage potential customers from entering. A closed door means separation, being “shut out,” and, according to some proprietors, is enough to turn buyers away.)

Manifest versus Mystique

There’s only one common denominator I can offer to reconcile this apparent contradiction. Which is, the Japanese think that once you know everything there is to know about someone or something, he, she or it becomes uninteresting. (Another interesting contrast to Americans, who believe you can, say, truly love or fully appreciate another person only once you know everything there is to know about him or her.)

I can hear American readers saying, “Wait a minute. These ads certainly give readers everything they could ever want to know and more, so why aren’t they uninteresting?” The observation is certainly a valid one on the surface, but there’s more to it than that.

The tendency for interest to decrease as familiarity increases shows up in the Japanese as traits already mentioned: a personality characterized by intense, short-term engrossment, and, in marketing, as a voracious appetite for fads and booms. As any Japanese manufacturer will tell you, consumers tire of products with disconcerting speed and flock to anything new with similar enthusiasm. (It is a classical chicken-and-egg problem of which came first, consumer desire or manufacturer policy.) The end result is a never-ending supply of “latest” models in industries from motorcycles to soft drinks.

That's not all. The Japanese go to great pains to avoid revealing themselves. In people and products alike, "what you see is what you get" holds little fascination for them. On the contrary, it is what is *not* revealed or held back that gives animate and inanimate objects alike their allure. Japanese women, for instance, work hard at maintaining their "feminine mystique." They've learned that stinginess with their secrets with men—not to "bare all" even with a husband—is the best way to keep them intrigued and hungry for more.

Resolution, Japanese Style

This brings us back to the question of resolution—this time, Japanese-style. In Japan, when something is "resolved," it's over and, with nothing remaining to warrant its retention in memory, forgotten. Resolution means finality. And finality, in a society where interpersonal bonds form the glue that holds it together, is undesirable to the point of being dangerous. The Japanese see resolution as a negative force leading to separation, social disintegration and, yes, chaos.

We find the roots of this mindset in the Buddhist tenet that human curiosity and interest are as fleeting as everything else in the physical world—momentary blips on the sine curve of life. Emotions, like everything else, come in an unending progression of cycles. Sadness follows happiness, and so on, for eternity (eternity being a cycle too big for man to comprehend). The Japanese find themselves in a constant state of non-resolution.

If the natural progression of things is an endless series of ups and downs, the logical conclusion would appear to be that, to maintain that interest or emotion, there must be something, some goal or external stimulus, to keep it from waning. In romantic love, the prescription is not to fulfill it. Once consummated, the passion fades. (The Japanese outlook has little to do with sexual purity or pollution. A closer analogy would be hunger, which passes once satisfied.)

Bringing our discussion back to advertising, we can say that if the objective is to maintain interest, then the appropriate Japanese response would be to hold something back. To give people something to look forward to or wonder about after the story's over—the ploy of the clever Queen who kept her King's curiosity whetted and her neck intact in 1001 Arabian Nights. Create the impression that it's *not* over. In short, don't resolve things one way or the other.

Pubic Goes Public

This same psychology shows up in the controversy over pubic hair. For years, Japanese sleaze merchants tried to slip frontal nudity past the censors—testing them like children goading parents to see how far they could go. And in typical Japanese fashion, when the level of exposure could no longer be ignored, the censors would crack down.

Now, finally, in the medium of print at least, it looks like sleaze has won the day. Every publisher in Japan is on the “hair nude” bandwagon in the mad “me-too!” rush not to be left behind. Pubic hair is everywhere. Thighs are creeping open. Japan is caught up in a national crotch watch.

Ironically, this current state of affairs presents Japanese men with something of a dilemma of their own doing. They want to look, but at the same time, they don’t. Because then there’s nothing more to see, no mystery left.

They all look, of course, but not without a twinge of sorrow. After all, the mystery is gone and, with it, much of the thrill. Men’s most grandiose fantasy is no longer a fantasy, but a stark reality on a printed page. What’s left to fantasize about?

It gets worse. What made pubic hair so intriguing—what made them want to look—in the first place was that the Mound of Venus was too “powerful” to be unveiled. Now that it’s right there staring back at them in living color, there’s the accompanying letdown that, in the final analysis, it wasn’t potent enough to be kept under wraps after all. In short, it wasn’t as powerful as they’d imagined.

Lack of Resolution

It’s *lack* of resolution that sticks in Japanese minds. This is an easily recognizable trademark of Japanese literature and movies, where happy endings were once almost nonexistent. Instead, audiences are presented with denouements that would leave Americans grinding their teeth. (Things are changing today, thanks to Hollywood formulas and the Western media Blitzkrieg.)

I believe the same principle holds true in Japanese advertising, that a lack of resolution is one effective way to hold consumers’ attention. Here, however, this is achieved making them believe *there’s more to something than meets the eye*.

But what about the vast gap between television and print ads we mentioned? If a common psychology is at work in both, then the two media must go about giving consumers the impression of “something more” in completely different ways.

Let's look back briefly at the "unfamiliar yet inviting" scenes of our first category of TV commercials. Here, the short and vague or irrelevant copy and visual point to "another world" where "something more" is waiting. The commercial tempts the viewer to a world that hints at things to look forward to, a world that promises new and exciting discoveries. (The second category, which works through identification, does not apply, because the viewer knows already everything about that world.)

The print ads in our fifth category do not tempt. They "overwhelm." How? By filling the page with enough copy to virtually guarantee they won't be read in their entirety.

Our first three print ad categories are characterized by differences in copy content. The fourth and fifth, however, take physical layout as their distinguishing criterion. In the fifth category, the visual components or "hardware" of an ad are more important than the copy content or "software" in conveying an impression. The copy is utilized primarily as a design element, to add "flavor," not to communicate meaning.

This sounds strange to message-oriented Westerners. Even the copy in the pure mood ads of our first category—"Carina on a Hill," for instance—relies on the inherent meaning of words to create a scene or impression in the reader's imagination. Here, however, the text could be replaced with dummy copy and still do its job.

The next question becomes, just what *is* that job?

The unwieldy volume of copy works with the "random" layout of visual elements to make the ad difficult to read. This is the point: *the copy is not meant to be read*—not, at least, from beginning to end. If readers see a screamer that particularly interests them—"Voted Best Car of the Year!" for instance—they're welcome to read the accompanying blurb, of course. The words and sentences do make sense, but that's not their main purpose.

That purpose is to help discourage actual reading of the copy in the interest of creating an overall impression of "something more." If consumers don't or can't finish reading an advertisement, there's a higher probability that it will remain in their memories. They come away with the impression that, "There must be a lot to this company, product or service. After all, get a load of how much they have to say!" Just by looking at it.

• **Examples: Group 36**

Form versus Content

Japanese designers have an admirable set of tools for this job in the Japanese writing system. Chinese characters, after all, are as much art as communication. They began as pictures, and even today retain an inherent aesthetic component in addition to meaning. (Calligraphy is a discipline and an art in itself, regardless of the meaning of the characters themselves.) What's more, these characters can be aligned vertically or horizontally with no change in ease of comprehension.

It's not only the characters, of course. The importance of form holds as valid for spoken as written Japanese. ("It's not what you say, but how you say it," was never truer.) It is essential that convention be followed, for instance, in addressing a superior—honorifics and verb conjugations expressing appropriate deference (not to mention body language). The same applies, of course, to other social situations, for which there is a prescribed linguistic form according to the type of interaction. Even in instances such as greetings—"It's hot today, isn't it?" for example—the words act as a vehicle to reinforce the sense of togetherness of the parties involved by giving them something to agree on (form), not to convey a message or communication information (content).

Why? Because form sends a message, too. Namely, that the participants are dutifully following the socially stipulated behavioral regimen cum hierarchy. That they are doing their part to preserve the seamless harmony of the conglomerate of values and beliefs called "Japan."

Third Category of Television Commercials: "Screamers"

Now I'd like to return briefly to television to introduce our third category of commercial: the TV counterpart of the print ad just described. This is one category Kishii neglects to mention, though it's hard to understand how he could have missed it.

First of all, these commercials are *loud*. They scream for viewers' attention, spitting out products and prices at twice normal speed. Like a hawker at a side show, they try to cram as much information into 15 seconds as will possibly fit—a far cry from the inscrutable studies in understatement Kishii posits as representatively Japanese.

The message is the same as in our fifth category of print ads: “There’re so many wonderful things to say, we can’t fit them all in! You’ll have to see for yourself” The commercial gives the prospective customer something to look forward to in order to stimulate and maintain his interest, and leaves plenty of room for individual interpretation in terms of just what that might be. This category is used extensively by “all-and-everything” discount stores featuring electrical and electronic products for home and office.

- **Examples: Group 37**

Print Ads: Common Visual Features

In this last section, I’d like to look at some visual features common throughout the categories of Japanese print ads I have presented in this section—except the fifth.

We mentioned earlier that Japanese advertising emphasizes percepts over concepts, the sensory over the verbal. The emphasis is on catching the eye, not the intellect, on making an impression, not convincing. This is the common element. The four approaches below are among the ways the Japanese go about achieving that goal.

Visual Kidnapping

We also said earlier that many Japanese television commercials and print ads alike present a world for the viewer to step into, making it as attractive or impressive as possible to get his attention and draw him in. With that in mind, my first two examples might be more appropriately described as *dragging* the reader in. In the first, for Lark, he is almost physically sucked into the swirling vortex of the staircase and plunged toward the figure at the bottom; a conscious act of volition is required to tear his eyes away.

The second example adds a hypnotic element to disorientation and eye strain. The purpose of the visual according to the headline is to help diagnose astigmatism: if some lines appear thicker than others, then you need OptimaToric soft contact lenses. But the first thing the reader sees is the concentric circles, which grabs his attention and does not let it go easily.

Brightly colored background

My next series of examples—for Kenwood Stereo components, Panasonic VTR and Cabin Super Mild cigarettes—use brightly colored backgrounds to grab the reader’s attention. There is, as far as I can see, no reason for the respective green, orange and red except as a hook to gaff the casual reader passing by.

Loud, brightly colored text

My third example combines attention-demanding colored lettering with the copy packages we looked at earlier. There is nothing complicated about the ad itself. It shows the product and presents its four main features in blocks which boldly announce, “Compact, space, saving design!” “New, improved paper!” “Frontal paper loading and controls!” “And optional hand scanner can be used for copies and faxes!” The choice of color has nothing to do with the product or the headline—“The new IllusTalk is a well thought-out fax, even down to copies.” It has *everything* to do with getting itself noticed.

Life-size faces

Finally, take a look at this spread for Gatsby Facial Water and Facial Scrub. The faces are life-size and fill the entire page; the reader suddenly finds himself confronted with a pair of young men staring back at him from inside the magazine. This strategy is one David Ogilvy warns against as what *not* to do in American advertising. And while it is not something you see every day, it is very Japanese. The effect? Surprise. The consequence? Memory retention. The mission? Accomplished.

AMERICA

American advertisements have a point to make, a message to communicate about a product or, in corporate advertising, about a company. They’re meant to be read *and* understood in full.

Catchy, Fun and Easy

The first step is catching the reader’s attention. They accomplish this with a headline and visual designed to titillate his interest, to seduce him into going on to the copy and not turning the page.

The second step is holding that attention to the end of the ad by making the copy interesting, enjoyable and easy to read. Leo Burnett laid down an important set of guidelines when he said, “Make it simple. Make it memorable. Make it inviting to look at. Make it fun to read.” (Fun, of course, is part of easy.) This section focuses on the “easy to read” part.

Stay on the Path

One important factor in this seduction is a “path” for the eyes to follow as they move over the page—a smooth, continuous, step-by-step flow from top to bottom and left to right. Just as the copy should be easy to understand in terms of content, the design should be easy to follow in terms of the physical layout—a natural progression of spatial proximity from the headline and visual through the sub-head and body copy to the closing logomark. The eyes should glide over this path as if it were an imaginary line drawn without lifting pen from page.

If the flow of copy is not easily recognizable, if there are messages demanding his attention from all over the page, an American reader won’t take the time to search for it. He’ll become confused, frustrated or irritated—or all of the above—and turn the page.

The bottom line? American agencies make ads fun and easy for the same reason pharmaceutical manufacturers make medicine sweet. Because no matter how good it is for you, it can’t work—have any effect—if it doesn’t get into your system.

Room for Variation

That’s not to say, however, there’s no room for variation. In fact, that’s precisely what an American designer’s job is all about: creating original layouts to make the ad more visually appealing and, consequently, more enjoyable and easy to read. Designers use English copy and tools like typeface, point size, fonts, color, physical interaction with the visual and other techniques to achieve this objective.

First and foremost, however, comes the layout’s role in conveying the copy message. The layout is a vehicle for the message. It complements the copy, works with it, not against it, makes it more “readable.” Design elements only work within a framework of clarity and comprehension.

Example 1: Häagen-Daz Ice Cream

I have chosen five examples to illustrate how this works—and doesn’t work—in practice. For openers is this ad for Häagen-Daz ice cream. Like the previous ad for the Sharp UX-7 fax, it too features bright colors in the “headline.” The difference is one of relevance. The orange does grab the reader’s attention, but there is a reason why it’s orange—it’s the same color as the package—and not, say, green. Since it’s used in the context of the ad, it works *with* the other elements, rather than on its own.

There's also the pyramid effect gained by the increasing font sizes, which lead to the product at bottom. The eyes go first to "PASSION" at the bottom, then back to the top. The first line is small and comparatively difficult to read, making the reader look closer almost out of curiosity. Once he begins, it's difficult to stop. The pyramid lends movement and direction to the copy flow which keeps the reader reading. What's more, very few will stop reading because the copy says to. Just the opposite—they'll continue for that very reason.

Example 2: Suzuki Sidekick JX

Our second example also uses no headline in the conventional sense, this time employing the funnel effect to "persuade" the reader to continue to the desired point—the end. An action shot of the Suzuki Sidekick JX is incorporated at right—so the reader passes it as he's reading—with the copy leading to a product shot at bottom.

Example 3: Honda Accord SE Coupe

Some approaches at bending the rules work, as my third choice illustrates. Instead of the visual progression going from left to right, the first thing the eye fixes on is the Honda Accord SE Coupe on the right-hand side of the spread. It then proceeds to the headline below, "It makes quite an impression." From there, the reader notices the impression of the Accord at left.

This is the crux of the whole ad: "making an impression." The copy itself is basically filler—*long* filler—and on the other side of the page (in story form recounting the incidents of how the Accord did actually make an impression on one family). But the visual and play on words are designed to stimulate the reader's interest and curiosity enough to make him go ahead and plow through it.

Example 4: Mazda MX-6 LS Sports Coupe

Our fourth ad is an example of what not to do. Perhaps the copy is intended to form traffic lanes. If so, it's not readily apparent. The eye goes to the car first, and from there to the headline. The headline is effective, but the reader must go from bottom to top to read it, then do the same once again to get to the end of the copy. In short, he must commute up and down the page twice to get from start to finish—a tiring trip many Americans are not prepared to make. Not, at any rate, *without a clear reason*.

Example 5: Lexus ES 300

Our fifth and final example, for the Lexus ES 300, does present a clear reason for its unorthodox layout—and, therefore, works. In and of itself, the ascending and staggered headline as a whole is more difficult to read than the previous Mazda effort. But the reader quickly realizes that the fading step-like format represents the progression of pothole vibrations—diffused until they fade away to almost nothing—and so is more inclined to go along for the ride.

Conclusion

The bottom line? You have to know and be able to follow the rules before you can play with them. Successfully, at any rate.

EXCEPTIONS

Now, after all that, let's look at some exceptions. (What fun would rules be without them?) Some "gray," areas, too.

I said before few things worked in both cultures. Here are a couple that do.

- **Examples: Group 38**

Now let's move on to some gradations which span the gap from one style to the other.

TV Commercials

- **Examples: Group 39 (Ex. to Group 1)**

Lengthy dialogue/explanatory content, even if some dialogue is more decorative than function, more for mood than meaning

- **Examples: Group 40 (Ex. to Group 2)**

Non-entertaining. Presents Japanese company's social contributions to viewers in a dry, serious, straightforward manner

- **Examples: Group 41 (Ex. to Group 6)**

Foreigners cast in Japanese settings

- **Examples: Group 42 (Ex. to Group 7)**

Japanese celebrities cast as salesmen. Increases distance between them and viewing audience.

- **Examples: Group 43 (Ex. to Group 17)**

Relevance (includes many examples from Groups 38 and 39). But interpretations of relevance can vary from culture to culture.

- **Examples: Group 44 (Ex. to Group 19)**

Jingles written expressly for specific Japanese commercials

- **Examples: Group 45 (Ex. to Groups 20-23)**

Little relevance in American commercials. Mood over message.

- **Examples: Group 46 (Ex. to Group 24)**

Japanese verification

Print Ads

JAPAN

Example 1: Volkswagen

Our first exception is this ad for Volkswagen. (The fact that it is a Western, if not American, company might or might not have made a difference.) The visual presents a theme whose connection with automobiles—safety—is clear enough to be appreciated in almost any industrialized culture.

The eyes tell the brain to expect an ad about how Volkswagen goes about not breaking these eggs. The headline doesn't disappoint; it says, "Volkswagen doesn't talk about safety with image." (We spoke earlier of the English and Japanese meanings of the word "image"; the Japanese version means "non-specific" and "mood-oriented.")

The body copy goes on to develop this theme. The first sub-head and block tells about the history of the traditional Japanese straw container pictured and the wisdom of the people who developed it. The second sub-head reads, "To carry is to protect," with the body copy going into detail. And the third leads into the meat of the matter—how Volkswagen protects passengers better than other models.

In the visual, progress from one element to another is clear and logical—from left to right and top to bottom without lifting the eyes from the page. Many American readers might well find this ad persuasive. The question is, did the Japanese?

Example 2: Japan Railways

Our second exception, for Japan Railways, is an exception only in the visual sense. (There is a wealth of ads of this kind, including the first two examples in our first category of print ads—the set stage.) The layout is clean, the eyes having to make only one jump—from visual at left to headline at right—for a complete read.

The rest is very Japanese, inviting the reader into an intriguing, almost surreal world by means of wonder. Namely, why is the engineer—or could it be the conductor?—standing on the beach staring out at the ocean? And where, by the way, is his train? (He is, after all, in his work uniform.) Did he leave his passengers down the track and hop off for a quick break, now looking longingly out at somewhere he'd rather be? Or, in a worst-case scenario, did he derail his train and is about to take responsibility for the blunder by committing suicide?

The headline, "Toward [the] Japan that lies beyond," only adds to the mystery, apparently contradicting the slogan at bottom left, "Bound for the Heartland, Japan." If the heartland was the focus of this ad, shouldn't he be looking in and not out?

Toward [the] Japan that lies beyond

It appeared as if snow was falling from bottom to top. The waves breaking on the reef become turn to foam, and dance in wind blowing against the cliff. 40° north latitude. Ojika Peninsula. The vast slope extending to the ocean is covered with wild grass, and at 2:00 p.m. the shadows are already growing long. Water droplets falling from the valley freeze on the branches of the trees like a silver frost. The cliff made me remember the movie, “The Lion’s Daughter.” The landscape of this peninsula is very similar to that of Ireland. Akita Station Master, Tetsuhiro Endo. “I was born in the Kitaura district of the city of Ojika. Where I’m standing now is a place I used to come often as a child. The ocean and the lighthouse are the same today as they were then. From Akita to Ojika is approximately one hour by train. People who visit say the scenery is more than they imagined.” Most employees of JR East Japan grew up drinking the water of [Japan’s] heartland from the time they were born. And in no time at all, those specialists of that land have become professionals. They don’t say very much, but they have the desire to guide people and the knowledge. There is a JR East Japan route heading to places that lie beyond. What is aimed for is land where people never lose their hearts. And land where your heart, which has begun to be forgotten in your daily routine, can come back to life refreshed. By “Yamabiko” Northeast Bullet Train to Morioka. And to the Japan that lies beyond. JR East Japan, that will take you to Japan’s heartland.

In the end, we find that the charm of the heartland is the point of this ad, despite the sea-struck visual. The message is this: The people who work for JR East Japan work on trains that run through the rural locales they grew up in, so they’re better qualified to take you there. They’re more committed. They offer better service because they’re proud of their homeland—identity defined by physical locale. (Since JR East Japan service does not include guided tours, why they are qualified to give better service is unclear.) Another selling point of rural JR East Japan destinations is that they are places “where people never lose their hearts”—a turn of phrase open to individual interpretation if there ever was one.

Example 3: Idemitsu U-Card Credit Card

Our final exception, for the Idemitsu Motion credit card, is almost downright American. The headline reads, “Happiness comes to those who pay,” the clear implication being “with the Idemitsu U-Card.” (The headline is a takeoff on the old Japanese proverb, “Happiness comes to those who laugh.”) It’s clear from the visual that the moral of the story is, “you’re happy with it, and sorry without it.” And the body goes into graphic detail in explaining why.

Happiness comes to those who pay [with the Idemitsu U-Card].

You've scraped together all the loose change you had in your car, and you're still one yen short. Then, after you give the attendant a ¥10,000 note and are carefully counting your change, you spill it and coins jingle all over the floor and down the seat backs. Here you go again, life taking an unexpected direction from small things. But with Idemitsu U-Card, you can take of payment that takes an average of 50 seconds with cash in just 15 seconds. Why not start off on the right foot with Idemitsu.

- You get premiums, too.
- It's convenient because you can use it for oil and other purchases, too.
- And you can use it at MacDonald's, too, to fill up your food tank as well as your gas tank.
- Accepted at 4,500 Idemitsu service stations throughout Japan.

The Idemitsu U-Card. Smart and Speedy.

In fact, you could say this ad avoids the lingering "mysteries" of the many other Japanese ads we've looked at. That is, if someone could just explain why the kid on the right is hanging onto the roof of the car.

AMERICA

If some of the Japanese exceptions we've looked at might work on the American market, what about American exceptions on the Japanese? Who knows? If no logical progression or conclusions, no relevance, no why our product is better, no buy now and no clear message with plenty of room for individual interpretation are the criteria, the ads below would do just fine.

Example 1: United Colors of Benetton

Coincidentally enough, the three exceptions we'll look at are ads for Italian clothing manufacturers well-established and well-advertised on the American market. The first two, for the United Colors of Benetton, are reminiscent of a style popularized in Japan by Parco Department Store, the first advertiser to air purposely incomprehensible commercials in order to draw attention. Parco was Japan's original mood maker; their success kicked off the ball that has been rolling in all shapes, sizes and degrees since 19__.

Benetton's reputation gives it the luxury of an ad campaign that tells readers nothing about the company or the kind of products it makes. Since many consumers are familiar with the name, the unorthodox approach draws attention on the American market, including this excerpt from an article in Print Magazine's 1992 Awards Annual.

The most recent group of print ads for the Benetton clothing conglomerate, featuring seven full-bleed news photos of various world tragedies (from a dying AIDS patient with his family to an Indian couple caught in a catastrophic flood) tagged with the “United Colors of Benetton” logo, are only the latest offerings in a long series of controversial advertising campaigns from the Italian company. Oliviero Toscani, creative director of Benetton’s advertising since 1984, has always claimed good faith on the part of the clothing chain, insisting in interviews that “Benetton is only trying to create an awareness of issues.” The current campaign has received a lot of press, and with it, a fair amount of critical attention.

Unlike Parco, however, Benetton’s motivation does not stop with exposure alone. What’s more, the company sees itself as something of a trend setter, as Toscani told the New York Times:

“We are a little bit in advance of everyone, not by what we say, but by using advertising as communication. I have found out that advertising is the richest and most powerful medium existing today, so I feel responsible to do more than say, ‘Our sweater is pretty.’”

(Is Toscani implying that conventional advertising—saying, in fact, that, “Our sweater is pretty”—is not communication? The difference he emphasizes is one of content—between commercial, profit-oriented and non-commercial, “socially responsible” subject matter.)

To answer a question at the beginning of this section, this campaign would probably fare poorly in Japan. Japanese advertising is entertainment, and chances are readers would not be easily enticed into the world these ads present. Americans, on the other hand, more receptive than the Japanese to causes and buzzwords like “awareness of issues,” might justify the lack of message under the guise of “social responsibility.” No doubt, however, positive reactions among U.S. consumers would have been greater had the ads mentioned just what Benetton was doing to help the situation and urged readers to do the same.

Whatever the motivation, however, two things are certain. One, these ads are not the stuff conventional advertising is made of. And two, they do make an impression.

Example 2: Moschino

Our second exception, for Moschino, is more bewildering, if less “socially responsible.” (The closest thing to a theme I can find is humor.) It starts out with a mysterious place name, “Serenella, Boston.” Is that where company headquarters are located? We never find out. And what about the message(s) of the four boxes? No clues about that, either. Nor is there any apparent visual order, even though eyes do come to rest at the company name at bottom. Wouldn’t this kind of ad, making no sense and offering no startling visual, be quickly forgotten by Americans? Obviously somebody didn’t think so.

Stepping Over the Line

Let me return to Japan for our final exception, which falls into a different category altogether. The commercials and advertisements up to now either follow or don’t follow categories I have established. The ad below, however, not only violates conscience and good taste, it comes extremely close to violating the law. It appeared in a general interest men’s magazine called *Shukan Hoseki* or “Weekly Jewel,” a periodical offering little to distinguish it from others in its genre.

The brown headline in the black strip at top reads “Liquid Guarana,” the sub-head above telling of its legions of satisfied users. The vertical orange headline below is where the sleaze starts: “The ultimate weapon for female seduction [and it fits right] in your pocket! Guarana is your ace in the hole.” The crimson copy immediately to the right goes into detail: “100% guarana extract! It’s tasteless and odorless, for big success whether you drink it or rub it [on the skin]!!”

The body copy should be enshrined in advertising’s Hall of Shame.

Guarana, a product of South America, has many loyal users around the world who have achieved success. It’s so effective, in fact, that everybody’s talking about it in Europe and North America because there are so many who abuse it. This is a liquid which uses 100% of the guarana fruit and which others cannot imitate. All you do is put a few drops into coffee, beer or other beverage, and it enhances your feelings and sharpens your sensations. It’s a liquid so there’s absolutely no need to dissolve it!! “I finally talked her into it. Now I’m going to do it!” Before you do, in order to enjoy guarana’s wetness-producing effectiveness 100%, rub a little on your partner’s sex organs for double the effectiveness!! With guarana’s wetness-producing effectiveness that [satisfied users] around the world confirm, starting today you can have your way with the opposite sex...

Then, if *that’s* not bad enough, the final sentence, set off from the text by concentric circles, adds a word of caution: “Do not use in malevolent ways.” As if the user endorsement below is not just that.

Here's actual proof!! Testimony from a satisfied user:

"I weigh 264 pounds, so when I used to go drinking, women paid no attention to me at all. I thought it was useless. Then I heard about Guarana from a friend. I bought a bottle. That night, I went to one of my regular drinking hangouts and slipped a few drops into the drink of one of the girls who worked there. She had never shown the least interest in me up to then, but in 20 minutes she started fidgeting and pretty soon I couldn't keep her off me. After that, it was home free all. Now I have a steady girlfriend, but I still take Guarana with me everywhere I go. I do it as much as I want to."

It's truly unfortunate that ads like this can find their way into print. It would be one thing to advertise this Spanish Fly clone as a wonder potion "to put the passion back in your marriage." (Men would start using it on other, unsuspecting women soon enough.) But glorifying this kind of sexual deception is unconscionable. If this doesn't qualify as material capable of inciting a sex crime, what does?

You don't see trash like this often in the Japanese mass media, which qualifies it as an exception. But with exceptions like this, isn't it about time to invoke the rules?

VISUAL VERSUS VERBAL COMMUNICATION

JAPAN

We've seen that the Japanese prefer visual to verbal means of communication. Now I'd like to go one step further to show that that "preference" originates in distrust of the spoken word itself—as seen in the negative attitudes toward smooth talkers and, to a lesser degree, talk in general.

Intuitive Communication

In Japan, the most desirable form of communication is intuitive, that is, non-verbal transmission based on a bond of common mutual experience. The prototype is a child's relationship with his mother. (This type of communication is one of the primary features of *amae*.) There is no need for words because everything is understood as if by telepathy.

This bond, by virtue of its very nature, is impossible to duplicate in other relationships. Nonetheless, the Japanese see it as the ideal to be strived for. It can be achieved to a greater or lesser degree by non-relatives in hierarchical relationships, such as husbands and wives, and *oyabun* and *kobun*.

The bonding mechanism involved is called "skinship," indicating direct physical contact or proximity—literally in the case of mother and child, and more figuratively for acquaintances—in the sense of "togetherness" or sharing the same space. The point is, the physical component is a must in forming relationships of this type.

Visual Communication

Next comes visual communication. This type is also non-verbal, of course, but differs from the intuitive variety in that it requires some "active" participation on the parts of the communicating parties. It, too, requires skinship, and is used to communicate what cannot be transmitted intuitively in the context of close hierarchical relationships.

Here, eye movements, facial expressions and body language are the keys to transmitting thoughts and emotion. Not surprisingly, these elements are given great import in Japanese dramatic arts to convey what characters are thinking or feeling. Visual communication is valued over verbal means as more immediate and direct than words and, by extension, "warmer" and more "human."

Verbal Communication

Communication using non-verbal means of expression is possible in a uniform, homogeneous society with shared collective experiences—the greater the uniformity of experience, the higher its probability of accuracy. Conversely, the more varied the respective experiences of the communicating parties, the more imperfect the communication and the greater the need for a “self-contained” system, a means independent of experience or shared notions. Like Japanese television commercials, visual communication allows for a great deal of individual interpretation. In a heterogeneous society, that equals room for error.

This brings us to verbal communication. Words are an indispensable form of communication in any culture, no matter how primitive or homogeneous, because the social circle in which visual means work is limited.

The Japanese see words, and particularly oral speech, as the least desirable means precisely for this reason. The necessity for words in and of itself shows the lack of common experiences, that is, closeness or intimacy. In short, the variety and volume of verbal interaction necessary for communication between two people is a measure of the distance separating them. And in a society where the goal is “oneness,” it naturally follows that, the less distance, the better.

That’s not to say the Japanese ignore this distance, as they do so many other distasteful areas of social life.¹ Just the opposite. The language concretizes the “degrees” of distance into tiny increments with a dauntingly complex system of formal and honorific speech patterns. There are informal patterns for relatives, friends and “inferiors,” and formal ones for business dealings, strangers and “superiors.” In arguments, many Japanese switch to the polite form to interject distance between themselves and their antagonist.

¹ See Confrontation, page [___].

That’s not all. As distance and therefore formality increases, so does linguistic complexity and with it the amount of attention which must be paid to the interaction. Which means that the prolonged use of extremely formal or polite patterns is literally exhausting, which any living Japanese can attest to.

At the greatest distance and most enervating extreme stands the Emperor, with whom one needed—until 1945, at least—*an entirely different language* to hold a conversation. This, too, however, is understandable in context; up to that time, he was a god.

Bridging the Gap

Grammatically Speaking

Even in verbal conversation, however, the goal is to decrease the distance between oneself and one's partner in communication. One popular approach is the use of pronouns in place of nouns. Pronoun reference is frequently ambiguous, especially in sentences with no clearly stated subject, and distance can be reduced or at least blurred by ambiguity, as we saw earlier. The Japanese use of pronouns assumes the listener can infer what the speaker is referring to, or at least hopes he can.

The best example I know of to illustrate this trait in its extreme form is a rather humorous example from personal experience. During the period I worked at Dentsu, I was talking to one of the female Japanese coordinators one day when an art director from down the hall entered the room. We had just been discussing him, in fact; rumor had it that he was romantically involved with another one of the female coordinators in our section. No sooner had I told my colleague that I couldn't place him than in he walked, whereupon she nodded in his direction and whispered, "*Aré wa aré no aré.*" "Aré" being the pronoun for "that" in English, the sentence to an uninitiated listener would have translated as, "That is the that of that." I, on the other hand, having just been briefed, understood its true meaning: "That's so-and-so's new boyfriend."

Above, we mentioned sentences with no clearly stated subject. This is quite a common occurrence—in written *and* spoken Japanese—for two reasons. One, Japanese grammar does not require a subject to make a complete sentence. And two, the Japanese are in no hurry to put one in. Speakers want listeners to understand without having to spell it out—understanding implying the listener's familiarity with the situation, and familiarity implying proximity of speaker and listener.

Nor does Japanese make a clear distinction between singular and plural. *Onna*, for instance, can mean "woman" or "women" depending on the context. You *can* use numbers or add suffixes to nouns, for instance, if you simply must indicate plurality—but you frequently end up making the sentence unnatural in the process. There are also plural endings for first, second and third person pronouns to change "I" to "we" and so forth, but their actual use in conversation is infrequent. (First and second singular pronouns are used with high frequency, but in order to clarify position in the me-and-you pecking order. There is a rich vocabulary of "I" and "you," each signifying a different degree of politeness, or superiority or inferiority, or both.)

Here's another example. The word *uchi* can mean "my house (the physical structure I live in)," "my family (the members who live in that house as a collective group)," or "I (as a representative of that group)," depending on the context. Here we see that distinctions between not only singular and plural, but even animate and inanimate, often become blurred. (The smallest unit of Japanese identity is precisely this *uchi* or family group. The individual members have no permanent identities, one factor in the lack of priority on the singular-plural distinction.)

Another common strategy in bridging the speaker-listener gap is leaving sentences unfinished or things unsaid. If the listener understands the speaker's train of thought without him having to finish it, it shows greater proximity. A speaker leaving things unsaid is expressing this desire by giving his listener the chance. Conversely, explaining things to the "bitter end" is often construed as rude or "making a fool" of the listener by implying he can't understand on his own.

• **Examples: Group 47**

The Eyes Have It

We've touched on the Japanese aversion to revealing themselves—another clue to their high valuation of intuitive and visual communication. After all, the eyes offer a more direct, private and silent means of conveying thoughts and feelings. Averting them, customary among Japanese women, is an effective way of keeping emotions to oneself—a practical solution in a world not built for privacy.

In Japanese advertising, the goal of reducing the distance between sponsor and viewer dictates the emphasis on visual means to entertain audiences. Many commercials resort to shocking, contradictory or absurd images as the sensory means to get their audiences involved. Still, it's all perfectly proper as "mood" advertising. The Japanese feel words, rational explanations and step-by-step proofs to be a "cold" means of expressing oneself, whereas audiences, as we said, are looking for "warmth."

Barriers and Sincerity

The point to remember is this: warmth is a function of directness. Directer is warmer; the more circuitous the route of transmission, the colder. Which is, as we've said, the reason the Japanese prefer visual communication. Words are barriers to or buffers watering down real communication between people. The fewer "obstacles," the better.

Here's an example from personal experience. It began when I was asked by an ad agency to translate a speech on recent trends in Japanese advertising for one of its account executives to give to an overseas company affiliate in San Francisco. Like most Americans, I assumed the AE's English was, if not fluent, then at least competent.

In reality, it was anything *but*. Only I didn't know that until I had finished the speech and we met for our first coaching session, and the discovery was a painful one. His pronunciation was barely recognizable, plus it took him two to three times longer to read each sentence than it had taken me. With him at the podium, the speech I wrote to last fifteen minutes would balloon to thirty to forty-five of gargling sounds. The audience would understand little or nothing even if they listened very hard, which is something American audiences are not willing to do. I envisioned a hall full of businessmen and women squirming with boredom or worse—a disaster in the making.

I advised the AE to do what I'm sure any American businessman would have under the circumstances. That is, to read the speech in Japanese and get a native American to read my translation in English. It would carry much more impact that way, and precisely because his audience would *not* understand the Japanese. What they would understand, however, was that he was speaking with fluency and authority.

He ignored my advice and muddled through the speech himself. Worse, he returned to Japan glowing at his "triumph" and thanking me for having made it all possible. "The audience clapped," he said. "Everyone came up and told me how well I did."

Did he really think Americans have no diplomacy? That they would tell a visiting business associate he had effectively wasted the last 45 minutes of their time? They would have felt uncomfortable, on the other hand, telling him how much they had gotten out of his speech, because they couldn't have understood more than a fraction of what he was saying. The sad part is, he was naive enough to take them at face value. I didn't have the heart to tell him what they were really thinking; he wouldn't have believed me anyway.

My client tried to make a good impression on the audience by "doing his best," then counting on their "good will" for acceptance. To him, his relationship with his listeners was of paramount importance. Which is why he saw reading the speech in a language they did not understand—Japanese—as "cold" and "insensitive to their feelings." It would have put an *extra* wall between him and his audience, thus showing his "lack of sincerity" toward them. Instead, he chose what the Japanese describe as the "warm" way, the "wet" way, the "human" way.

Unfortunately, in American business, it was not the smart or right way. My client's listeners might have applauded his *effort* or seen his performance as endearing, but not as a professional or "businesslike" way of doing things. To an American audience, the speech naturally takes precedence; *that's* what they came to hear, not him. And what did they get out of it? At best, next to nothing.

Shut Up and Do It

Getting back to eloquence, the Japanese see it as a sign of trickery and insincerity—much the same as Americans view vague, equivocal expressions. As before, they put emphasis instead on presence, as in the “thunderous silence” of zen masters. The desirability of non-verbal interaction is coupled with the moral belief that silence is a sign of honesty, diligence and trustworthiness. Silence implies intense inner activity, whereas verbiage signifies just the opposite. It is also the mark of the masculine course, as the proverb, “Don’t talk, do it!” makes clear. The person with a “skilled mouth” (*kuchi ga umai*) is discredited for this reason. Words are for *non*-essential matters.

Actually, more than non-essential. From a social perspective, silence, as the trademark of the honest, hardworking man or woman, is the ideal environment for fostering group unity and harmony—the mode of oneness. The mouth, on the other hand, is recognized as “the root of all evil.” And words, as what comes out of it, are the vehicles of the three human frailties which can disrupt those social ideals. Frailties like idle palaver or nonsense, the province of the fool. Arguments or disharmony, instigated by the troublemaker. And deception, the work of the swindler.

- Refer to this when it is first introduced.

Even when trickery is not at issue, this prejudice remains. Fluent speakers, for instance, evoke little empathy with Japanese audiences; verbally clumsy people are thought to be more sincere, just as a halting manner of delivery is considered “warmer,” and therefore more believable.

One example would be the Emperor’s speech, a halting oratorical style characterized by short phrases followed by a pause. Even Japanese announcers regularly break their flow of speech by extending the vowel sounds at the end of words to insert a break in their commentaries. (This is quite easy to do, since all Japanese words end in vowel sounds.)

Give It a Rest

This phenomenon is referred to in Japanese as *ma o toru*, or “taking a pause,” an important mechanism and barometer of an actor’s skill in the performing arts and comedy. It is also found with high frequency in everyday Japanese conversation, which could, in general, be seen as a “pendular” or alternating series of verbal bursts followed by silence.

- Examples: Group 48

Gimme a Break

Ma is a break. First, it gives the listener the chance to acknowledge the speaker with short grunts or affirmative words like “*hai*” or “*so, nee.*” This acknowledgement, however, has less to do with indicating agreement with the content of what was said than with reestablishing support for the speaker himself. That is, the constant reaffirmation of the relationship.

Reaction Time

Second, it gives the listener time to “digest” what the speaker has said. This, too, has little to do with intellectual comprehension of meaning per se. In Japanese, words are concrete means of producing new physical conditions; they are linked with definite images which bring about reactions or emotions from past associations. *Ma* gives the listener time to verify his own reactions, “feel the feelings,” or experience the emotions the speaker’s words have aroused in him.

This is extremely difficult for Westerners to understand—the author included—precisely because it has nothing to do with understanding. In English, there is an abstract meaning assigned to each word, and these symbols are arranged in the order which most clearly conveys the concept to be communicated. The Japanese, on the other hand, attach emotive content—a physical component—to words in their language.

Although I have but little grasp of the Japanese way of relating to words, experience has taught me that many have pronounced aversions to certain nouns, verbs, adjectives and so on. One client, for instance, absolutely refused to allow the use of the adjective “superior” because it conjured up unpleasant associations from a previous project. Other clients had no reason at all for their dislikes.

Separation and Unification

Third, *ma* gives both speaker and listener the opportunity for unification as an interval of silence and stillness in which to experience identity in the same time and space. With movement and sound or speech come separation as the unavoidable recognition of the speaker-listener dichotomy, while their absence allows the two to return to a state of union or non-differentiation.

• **Examples: Group 49**

In Japanese television commercials, the *ma* comes at the end in the form of the logomark and voice signature mentioned earlier. It is a concrete sensory—visual and audio—component for the viewer to focus his attention on. It gives the emotions aroused in the consumer by the commercial both time to “sink in” and a tangible object in physical reality to become attached to. In terms of structure of progression, it functions as the *ketsu* element—from *kishotenketsu*—which “ties together” the elements of the commercial.

AMERICA

Talk, Talk, Talk

Once again, Americans are just the opposite. They are very verbal (often, far *too* verbal). Words are their most basic tools of communication. In the words of Leo Burnett, “The grist for our mill is still words. Words as they put the sock and soul into the expression of ideas.”

The preoccupation with words goes back to the Bible. The Gospel According to John begins, “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” To the Jews, the Law was God’s Word and, as such, they placed ultimate priority on it. It was absolute; there was no compromise or “bending” it to fit the situation. The way the Jews see it, no Law, no God.

Bringing the discussion down to earth, we find that human communication, like human love, is modelled on the relationship between man and God. And words are the means of communication between God and man—via the medium of prayer.

As we’ve seen, prayer is the act of petitioning the Deity in the interests of seeking His intervention—in the form of requesting to borrow His power—in times of need or temptation, in times when human power is insufficient. “God, give me strength,” is perhaps the most common example. That is, prayer is the means to invoking God’s power, a magical pipeline to connect oneself—to “tap in”—to His omnipotence.

There are conditions for the loan, of course. To receive such awesome power, the petitioner is obliged to present a request with a clear message and smooth delivery. Clarity is understandably important; why does the supplicant want God’s power? The Old Man can’t very well go around dispensing it to anyone and everyone without knowing its intended use.

As for delivery, hesitation implies a guilty conscience, trying to cover up having broken God’s commandments. A smooth, straightforward presentation, on the other hand, shows Him the petitioner has no secrets, that he has nothing to hide, that he has done nothing wrong.

Strong Language

There are also important implications for human society. As the keys capable of calling Him or “getting His attention”—opening this universe of power—words were believed to contain divine or magical power of their own.

This belief was the motive force behind the proscription in ancient times against uttering of the name of God in non-sacred contexts. His name was to be spoken—God was to be called—on sacred occasions only, and not for worldly or personal affairs. Using God’s name—power—in secular contexts or for personal gain was considered “in vain,” or “for the sake of vanity.”

One such context was the swearing of oaths, which originally meant making a promise with God as a witness. “I swear to God,” and “May God damn me if I break my word,” were frequently used phrases, for instance, to show good faith or honest intentions.

God’s name could also be invoked in the context of “cursing,” using words or “spells” with the intent of bringing harm to one’s enemies—“God damn you,” and, “To Hell with you,” being two popular usages. (Today, interestingly enough, “swearing,” “cursing” and “profanity” imply not just secular but socially unacceptable or “dirty” language.)

The power of words shows up in the Western concept of charisma. Adept speakers are able to “cast spells” over their audience, to influence them do things they would not on their own. (The similarity between “spell” and “spelling” is no coincidence, either, but beyond the scope of this piece.) Perhaps the clearest example from recent history, unfortunately, is Adolph Hitler.

Even today, words contain enough significance to be used as substitutes or as symbols for human beings. “I give you my word,” for instance, means, “I promise.” The promising party offers his “word” instead of himself.

- **Examples: Group 50**

This Is Creation, Pass It On

Another important use of words in Judaism was transmission of the story of creation and other religious traditions from generation to generation. This was the province of the ancient Jewish tribe leaders—chosen by God to speak through them—prior to the separation of religious and social duties and power hierarchies. They were the priests, lawgivers and storytellers all rolled into one.

In contrast, the Japanese lack a tradition of storytelling, although they most certainly do possess a revered and developed means of passing down their creation myth and religious traditions. This is the role of sacred or festival dances, which convey the “information” via its movements. The point to remember? The information is received through the eyes—visually, not verbally.

- **Examples: Group 51**

You Are What You Say (and How You Say It, Too)

Much like they offer their “word” instead of themselves, Americans use words the way they use things—to define themselves. Their identities, who they are, are based on their possessions and their beliefs—originally, which God they believed in. And from beliefs come actions and words, their concrete expressions in reality. They represent themselves with objects, concepts, deeds and words, symbolically putting these in place of themselves. That is, they “become” what they own, believe, do and say—a trait Leo Burnett summed once up in a statement intended to inspire: “...we become what we do (or fail to do), and character is simply the sum of our performances.” Americans surround themselves with words as they do with things—to define themselves as individuals. The more they “accumulate,” the more well defined they become.

What’s more, ability with words is a mark of social status. In American society, words and their skillful use—a large vocabulary and eloquent presentation—are a sign of intelligence, education and culture. Which is evident, of course, from a look at the professions whose practitioners depend on their facility with words to convince others for their livelihoods: politicians, lawyers, clergymen, diplomats and scholars. (And, on a more plebeian level, salesmen.)

Remaining silent, on the other hand, means having nothing to say. No opinions, no thoughts. That is, no words. Or, in the words of Pericles, “The thinking human being, not able to express himself, stands at the same level as those who cannot think.”

We looked at Japanese news broadcast personnel. Now, what about American newscasters? First and foremost, they are trained to speak in a smooth, pleasing flow; saying, “Uh,” or “Err,” on camera is an unpardonable taboo. In other professions as well, a clumsy speaker—someone who has trouble expressing himself, someone with poor vocabulary or communications skills—is considered lacking in not only leadership qualities but education.

Eloquence is an important if not essential element in convincing Americans of anything. Persuasive spoken English should flow in a smooth, unbroken line, much like the Christian concept of time. Eloquence is the mark of the accomplished. Hesitation, on the other hand, implies the speaker doesn't know what he's talking about, isn't convinced himself or has something to hide. When it comes to changing Americans' minds, he who hesitates is sunk.

CONCLUSIONS

Misconceptions, Frustration and Desire

In conclusion, I'd like to recount my reasons for beginning this project in the first place. The first is frustration. The second, desire.

First, Kishii's article left me hanging—with no sense of resolution. As I translated his Japanese manuscript, I found myself intrigued by and, on the whole, agreeing with his observations. In the end, however, there was no explanation, no attempt to go below the surface; he presented one category, gave examples, then moved on to the next. I was frustrated; I wanted to know *why*. (In Kishii's defense, he was limited by time and therefore space since the article was also intended to serve as the basis of an hour-long presentation with a number of commercials, which whittled away most of his talk time.)

So I began to look at Japanese and American styles of advertising. Not the latest trends, or whether the two styles are moving closer together, or how foreign companies can crack the Japanese market, but advertising as a form of communication, and communication as an expression of culture.

My God's Better Than Your God

It wasn't long before I came upon the fallacy of the popular Western conception cum snub that, "The Japanese have no religion"—the old Judao-Christian sin of pride raising its ugly head in bogus theories of superiority, this time portraying the Japanese as Godless and, the implication being, economic animals because they, the Christians, feel their concept of the Deity is more highly-developed. (Worse, they've even got the Japanese saying it.)

As before, Japanese festivals and Christian Sundays are holy days observed in the interests of procuring divine power. The difference is one of format; festivals are raucous and Sundays are solemn—non-festive festivals. Except most Americans, blinded by their Christian preconceptions about what religion is and *should* be, can't see it.

...and My Advertising and My Standard of Truth and My...

The same goes for advertising and communication. How many times have I heard Americans knocking Japanese commercials—and television in general—as "the worst garbage" they've ever seen. Or bitching about how the Japanese are congenital liars.

Japanese advertising and television aren't for everyone, true, but who's to say they're garbage? Their aims are different from their American counterparts and consequently, so are their formats. What could be more natural?

The same is true of untruths. In Japan an *uso* is a measure of expedience for defusing potentially disruptive situations—and the mark of a socially adept person. In America, on the other hand, a lie is an attempt to conceal the breaking of God’s commandments—and the mark of an evil one.

Understanding Is Power

In all honesty, I must admit to having passively ascribed to the notion of the religionless Japanese, simply because I had never seen evidence to the contrary. Once I realized my error, I began to think that the type of format that led me to see my mistake—juxtaposing Japanese and American advertising and communication styles and related cultural background one by one, back to back—might offer a clearer shot at understanding.

Understanding what? That one, both cultures emanate from the same desires, drives and fears. And two, what’s different are the ways of dealing with them. The difference, that is, is one not of essence, but methodology.

I thought that if Japanese and Americans could appreciate this distinction, they could hopefully stop imposing their own advertising, communications and value judgments on them. The key, as I saw it, was greater understanding and, based on that understanding, respect. And, based on that respect, acceptance.

Wrong Once

I was wrong. Well, half wrong. Putting emphasis on understanding betrays a typically Western intellectual bias. For Americans, the key to accepting novelty is understanding. Analysis—breaking things down into their component parts. Finding reasons why or a known category to shove the unknown quantity into. The ability to explain it. In short, intellectual or logical conquest in the interests of removing the threat.

Logic vs Skinship

Not for the Japanese. They’re *skinship*-oriented. With them, “If A, then B. And if B, then C,” falls on deaf ears. They change as a result of physical contact, which is why you hear the phrase “*nareru made*,” or “until [the subject] gets used to [a new situation]” with such high frequency. For the Japanese, the key to accepting novelty is *familiarity*—growing accustomed to new people or conditions through repeated physical contact. Until, that is, they’re no longer new.

OK, so logic doesn't appeal to the Japanese. Still, this line of reasoning, I would like to believe, might have value for Americans. Today there is more American interest in Japan—if primarily economic—than ever before. For the first time in history, the West is taking Japan seriously. Western manufacturers are moving wholesale into the Japanese market and realizing that, even if they don't understand Japanese advertising, they have to respect it as a valid communication form of its own.

"Have to" because they recognize from experience the American way doesn't get results. But how many American advertising executives in Japan have a working understanding of what makes Japanese advertising work? Or how many American-based advertisers impose their own home-grown notions of what sells on the cross-cultural creative process? Probably not enough and too many, respectively.

I would like to believe, once again, that this piece can shed some new light on dark places. Or, just possibly that providing a rational explanation of why the Japanese are "irrational," might induce some American sponsor somewhere to let some Japanese ad person do his job—just like I wish someone would convince the Japanese to let me do mine.

Won't Somebody Listen?

Which brings me to my second reason: the desire for greater credibility within the Japanese advertising community. Not money or name value, just the simple pleasure of having the people I work for listen to what I say. (After all, it *is* for their own good.) I constantly find myself at loggerheads with clients to get them to OK things that are just common sense to American designers and copywriters. Even then, most don't.

So I began believing I could boost my credibility by building a case for "irreconcilable differences." If I can present a body of evidence so convincing they can't argue with it, I thought, they'll *have* to listen.

Wrong Again

That's right, wrong again. For the same reasons, only *all* wrong this time—since the target here was the Japanese. Many will likely dismiss my reasoning as "argumentative," "long-winded" or just plain "boring"—anything but a cogent premise to change their minds or their ways. How, then, to persuade the Japanese that there's another way of doing things? Short of economic sanctions, I honestly have no idea. (My arguments would seem to validate the U.S. government's policy of *pressuring* the Japanese into accepting their conditions. After all, you can't reason with them.)

The Pursuit of Excellence vs. the Flight from Controversy

When I tell Americans stories of how the Japanese refuse to do things the American way on the American market, they respond with questions like, “Why do they go out of their way to make themselves look bad? Don’t they want to put out the best advertising possible?”

My answer is a definite, “Not necessarily.” Which brings up an interesting paradox. It would be one thing if the Japanese were indifferent to international public opinion—but they’re not. They’re very interested in how the world perceives them and, as we’ve seen, hyper-sensitive to being laughed at. So the question becomes curiouser and curiouser: why do they ask to be the butt of jokes by insisting on doing things *their* way?

Harmony in the Hierarchy

The reasons lie first, in the fact that the primary consideration is not the final product. Products are things—dead matter. And what good can something dead do you? The ultimate objective is harmony within the creative group or between the creative group and client. People, living things—*that’s* where Japanese bread is buttered.

Harmony, here, it must be remembered, has nothing to do personal friendship or feeling good about each other, but a professional working relationship. It means not violating the limits of the hierarchy—working within the rules of the power structure. Which, in turn, means strict observance of who’s on top and appropriate behavior codes—superiority being determined by direction of cash flow, of course. You can hate the client’s guts, but no open dissension, please. Agencies don’t “talk back” to clients and sub-contractors don’t talk back to agencies.

Don’t Rock the Boat 1

Here’s a case in point. When I was at Dentsu, I discovered a terrible grammatical mistake in a Toshiba ad scheduled for release throughout Southeast Asia. I notified the appropriate Dentsu coordinator who, in turn, notified Toshiba. Who, in turn, ordered the ad to be run as was.

Why? Because there was a multi-level hierarchy of red tape artists the ad had traversed without incident. It had been okayed, the case closed. Reopening it now would mean running it through that same gauntlet all over again, and *that* would precipitate disharmony in the unwieldy chain of command. People would lose credibility, since it would involve admitting to having overlooked the mistake the first go-round. Levels below would take heat from levels above.

That was the internal hierarchy rationale. As far as the Dentsu account people were concerned, correcting the mistake on their own initiative was never an option. That would have violated their relationship with Toshiba, and might have cost them that particular account. Toshiba was willing to forgive Dentsu a mistake, but not a deliberate infraction of hierarchical procedure.

Don't Rock the Boat 2

"Communications Excellence," the former Dentsu motto/tag line is another example. It was coined by President Gohei Kogure himself and, as such, a sacred cow with veto immunity. The foreign copywriters hrumphed and muttered—the world's largest ad agency with a tag line that makes a mockery of its creative ability?—but were informed it was not their place to question executive decisions. And none of the Japanese staff was about to breach policy and inform The Man his effort was of less than Clio quality.

Practicality

So that's one reason the Japanese list of corporate priorities does not begin with product quality: better the product suffer than the hierarchy. Another is practicality.

The Japanese are moved to action not by concepts but by physical realities—changing conditions, social or environmental necessity. They are slow to institute policy changes without a setback. (The paramount example would be their "restructuring" after World War II, which involved a wholesale rejection of their own culture—because it obviously didn't work.)

In products and manufacturing, the criterion for action is what the market needs, what will sell. They keep close tabs on trends, changes in patterns of consumption and what these might indicate. But they don't initiate. They adapt.

The long and short of it is, Japanese business practices are not dictated by the pursuit of excellence. The Japanese will swear up and down that business as usual means quality first, but it just ain't so. The pursuit of excellence—to be the best *just for the sake of being the best*—is a philosophy, a conceptual desire, a state of mind. It allows no compromise in quality, and compromise is the heart and soul of social harmony. It is also a psychological compulsion, as we have seen, born from the need of the Western individual to define himself.

But one thing is certain: the Japanese will never make a Rolls Royce.

This is sure to get Japanese backs up. "We make *excellent* products! Look at our sales figures!"

OK, OK. So the Japanese make great products. That still doesn't change the fact that that level of quality came in response to a market need—American products were far superior in the 50s and 60s. The Japanese rose to the occasion—admittedly a miraculous achievement—because there was a standard to match. They *had* to make products solid enough quality-wise to compete with American goods, or they would not have sold. Or, conversely, if American quality standards had been lower, Japanese products wouldn't be what they are today. The bottom line? Japanese quality is no better than it has to be.

Look at the air pollution controls on Japanese trucks. Japanese drivers and pedestrians suck down tons of carbon monoxide and carcinogens year in, year out—because there *are* no controls. The vehicles they ship to America, on the other hand, belch no clouds of black smoke since controls there are required by law.

Getting back to Rolls Royces, or at least luxury cars, this sector of the Japanese auto market is one domestic manufacturers have only recently moved into. Why? Because after decades of deferring first to Cadillacs and Lincolns, then to Mercedes and BMWs, they finally realized they could compete.

That realization came from changing patterns of consumption. For years, the Japanese who could afford luxury vehicles flocked to the foreign models, which carried more status. That changed with the sudden affluence and subsequent spending frenzies of the bubble economy. Today, major Japanese auto makers feature new, deluxe top-of-the-line models aimed at snatching their share of the lucrative luxury car market from the dominant European models.

In a nutshell, from motion pictures to can openers, Americans feel a superior product justifies dissension generated in the process of making it. In Japan, on the other hand, no product is important enough to sacrifice group viability to.

There's another consideration, too. What is the pursuit of excellence if not the drive to stand out, to be *outstanding*? Not a politically correct philosophy to espouse in Japan, where "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down."

The Bottom Line

I set out to show some of the basic differences between Japanese and American advertising in the interests of convincing both sides that their approach doesn't work for the other. I hope I have done that.

In any case, that's the theory. The application? I doubt many will listen, but I'm going to say it anyway. *Leave Japanese advertising to the Japanese and American advertising to the Americans.* In other areas, too, for God's sake, show a little more respect for different folks' strokes.