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THE THEATRE OF CONSUMPTION: ON COMPARING AMERICAN AND JAPANESE ADVERTISING

Stephen Kline

Industrialization and Cultural Convergence

Recently, Chinese officialdom was faced with the difficult metaphysical problem of determining whether Coca Cola constituted "spiritual pollution". Viewed through the economistic monocle of Western social and marketing theory in which goods are primarily apprehended as dull and lifeless objects of rational contemplation and preferential choice, this concern for the latent cultural properties of the products of Western industrial society remains as enigmatic as a Chinese puzzle box. To societies in the process of modernization, however, the question of the cultural implications of industrialization are very much at the centre of social policy debate. Does modernization necessarily imply the internalization of an 'alien' way of life? Is the consumer society a cultural abnormality or the unalterable destiny of all developing countries?

The predominant view amongst earlier researchers of modernization saw the historical course of international social development as an inevitable march to a Western-like civilization based on the industrial mode of production. The influence of industrialization eventually spreads to all domains of socio-cultural relations, particularly with the enhanced ideological adaptation promoted through modernized communication systems.[1] Based on this view, the current highly interrelated global context is just accelerating socio-technical transfer through an intensification of international market relations. As one research group noted, trade volume was the best predic-

tor of intercultural flows of information.[2] Convergence theory, as it is sometimes more politely called now, holds that under the same conditions of industrial production, all nations will gradually come to resemble modern nations with the same infrastructure, goods, and means of organizing the economy. Cultural and political variation gradually become at most surface markers for different societies in a globalized melting pot, more like regionalized accents than different languages. Modern society was, after all, industrial society. The United States was merely the most advanced traveller down the road to industrialization and not, as some historians claimed, an "ineluctably singular" or historically unique society.[3]

This notion of convergence was itself based on the social theory that saw the industrial mode of production as the central force in the socialization of modern nations; the forms of industrial socialization expanded outward from the workplace technology to shape the family, educational, workplace, and community practices which reinforced and solidified the values and structure of modernized society. This view of socialization processes is often held by both critics who see Western technological (or capitalist) society subjugating the cultures of the developing world and by advocates of modernization who see the industrial society as both historically inevitable and unquestionably desirable.

Under these assumptions, the notion of progress implied a globally homogeneous and highly interdependent industrial order. Convergence, as Herbert Passim[4] argued, seemed to bring with it a "homogenization" of cultural styles and expression. Under the sway of the technosphere, industrial society was to be viewed as a single monolithic and invariant set of social and economic relations. The spread of modern communication technology is merely the final stage in the intensification of the processes by which modernization is enhanced and extended as a way of life in the developing world.[5] Advertising and marketing are the ultimate means by which the developing world is integrated into the social framework of the developed West.[6]

Japanese Modernization: Industrialization as Internationalization

For Japan, the most advanced and conscientious adopter of industrial technology, successful modernization is an undeniable fact of life. For many historians, Japan and has been a perfect laboratory for the study of the complex forces of modernization.[7] Its current situation and involvement in the global exchange of commodities, capital, technology, information, and people makes Japan the perfect locus for the consideration of emergent global social forms identified with the final stages in the development of the high intensity market relations of late industrial society.[8] The

conundrum of Japanese modernization, however, persists in the ambiguous answers it provides to the question of social convergence.

Any major Japanese city leaves the occidental visitor with little doubt that Japan is one of the advanced industrial nations; it remains less clear, as Reishauer remarks, that it is a western nation.[9] To the observer, the familiar details of modern life first emerge in relief, the background alone has an oriental veneer. Many such visitors, brought up on orientalist mythology, feel confused by the seemingly familiar face of Japanese society. They conclude that convergence is inevitable and Japan is well on the road to Westernization. Later, figure and ground invert and socio-cultural differences are noted.[10] The implicit cultural assumptions of modernization theory themselves are called into question, because traditional Japan seems to be both merging with Western elements, while shaping Japanese development.[11]

The Japanese had realized this rather contentious aspect of cultural and technological diffusion from the start. Resistance to Westernization was an important part of the Meiji restoration (1868) and was emboldened in nation-building slogans such as *Wakon yousai*. "Western know-how" and "Japanese Spirit," they said, would guide the process of Japanese development into a modern nation. The process of industrialization would not, the Meiji reformers promised, be one of domination by Western culture, ideas, and social forms. Japan would be careful to assimilate the industrial mode of production into the traditional and continuing national essence of Japanese society. Modernization was possible without Westernization. The adoption of the modern technology and production techniques of advanced industrial countries did not necessarily mean succumbing to Western ways and lifestyles. Even after the Pacific War, care was given to the distinction between the admiration for things American and the dependence on America, and the wholesale emulation of American society.

Indeed, there has been a recent interest in this question as it pertains to Japanese economic development. As the first modernized non-western nation and as a significant challenge to American economic power, Japan's miraculous success as an industrial power had to be explained and understood. In this view, Japan is no longer a mere understudy of modernization; the Japanese economic miracle represents a major contribution to the modernization of the industrial world. Japanese management techniques, quality circles, and employment structures have become the object of American envy, emulation, and adoption. To one commentator, Japan is the example, *par excellence*, of the technological state, surpassing, in its social organization and practice of production, even the United States in its capacity to perfect the cultural logic of industrialization.[12]

Furthermore, the successes of Japanese industrial production are naturally enough spreading to the marketing arena. The U.S.A., which has long dominated the international market for most cultural products and services (including advertising, films, management consulting, toys, and tele-

vision programming etc.) has recently been challenged by this new entrant.[13] How serious the challenge remains to be determined, however, what remains hidden in this debate is the role of cultural relations in the marketplace.

The case of the popular toy "transformers" — the hottest item in the American toy market — provides an indication. Ironically, "transformers" emerged from a tradition of Japanese science fiction television, which is a modification of American-style programmes, not a mere replica. Like western science fiction, these dystopian visions are of a world at constant war, defending itself against alien attacks. Seigel[14] has pointed out, however, that the Japanese science fiction tradition has become extremely popular because it vivifies on the screen a number of essentially Japanese cultural traits, among which are fear of invasion and encroachment from aliens, componentialization, hierarchical social structure, selfless dedication to the group, stoicism in the face of danger, a need to perform at the peak of one's personal capacity, and a Japanese model of group interdependence and decision-making. At the end of each story, when the invaders must once again be defeated, the components of the combat team reassemble into a giant robot warrior that battles with the alien machine. The battle is won through the cooperation and dedication of the team against individualist mechanical gain.

The message of these morality tales cannot be missed. In the American toy market the gobots and autobots indicate other societies' relationship to modern technology, behind which is a message about their relationship to Western ways. The future society portrayed in these science fiction stories is most interesting because it is almost identical to the growing body of social science literature (Japanese and Japanologist) that has attempted to comment on the current phase of Japanese social development[15] wherein the success of the economy is attributed to distinctly Japanese social and personality characteristics.[16] The question of Japanese productivity, management techniques, the employment system, distribution networks, unions, etc., have all been reduced to the issue of the "uniquely" Japanese traits that has enabled Japan to develop so rapidly, to adjust to the industrial mode of production, and to ultimately perfect it. Each has attempted to identify at the core of Japanese culture (including language, emotionality, strategic thinking, social interdependence, groupism, hierarchical social organization, etc.) the basis of Japanese success.

The underlying common theme of this literature (called *Nihonron* — theory of the Japanese by some commentators) is that national character, rooted in a uniquely Japanese set of social relations and values, has resisted foreign domination and provided the base for an alternative, culturally more appropriate and more successful mode of production.[17] Indeed, one time-sequenced study of changing Japanese opinion indicated that it was

attitudes towards personal relations that have changed least over the post war period:

> Summarizing the trend in the opinions of Japanese people today, we could say that new attitudes toward political problems and daily life coexist with a traditional outlook on personal relations ... we could say at the same time that the Japanese national character consists essentially in personal relations because the least changeable things are regarded as of greatest value. Needless to say, terse personal relations form the foundation of all social problems.[18]

Herein lies the limits to the pressures towards cultural convergence exerted by the industrial mode of production and also the inspiration for the particular success of the Japanese version of modernization. The implicit ethnocentric and nationalistic traces in this position have become the major points of concern for critics.[19] Irregardless, the net effect has been to bring cultural issues to the very centre of the analysis of modernization.

Marketing and Cultural Convergence

For the last twenty years, the issue of the cultural effects of markets within the industrialization process has been predominantly focussed on the expansion of its strategic dimension by American advertising firms into the third world arena, and what this means for development.[20] Because the Americans have long dominated the international advertising scene they have been the focus of severe criticism for extending cultural colonialism and helping to perpetuate the dominance of American-controlled multinationals in the international marketplace.[21]

Nakasone's official unfettering of Japanese consumerism leads one to wonder whether the influence of "internationalized" Japanese industrial society will long be confined to the social relations of industrial production, or whether it will spread to distribution, marketing, advertising, and other business practices as well.[22] Dentsu has been the world's largest advertising agency for the last several years, and as yet has not had a large share of non-Japanese billings. Eight Japanese agencies are among the world's top fifty. Nevertheless, as the Japanese gain more experience in their own and Western markets, will the Japanese marketing and advertising style, and practice come to have a similar influence to that of Japanese management and technology? Will the influx of Japanese marketing technology follow in the wake of Japanese goods? Now that the Japanese seem to be poised to challenge American dominance (32 of the world's top fifty advertisers in total global billings), some wonder whether this implies changes to the marketing scene with new sensitivities and approaches. Are the Japanese going to be any better adapted to international marketing[23] aespecially in third world markets (Asia, Africa, South America, and the

Middle East) where American marketing has been subject to severe criticism?

Hidden behind this impending confrontation between marketing giants, however, is the more general issue of how the expansion of international marketing and advertising influences the processes of modernization. The theory of convergence had predicted increasing cultural homogeneity based on the commonality of the mode of production (technology) and the diffusion of products that were at the centre of modern life. The Japanese theorists of "internalization", on the other hand, argued that the same technology may be adapted to different sets of social relations of production based on fundamental differences in socio-cultural form, implying that Western forms of industrial society would not dominate in perpetuum. Both approaches however were premised on the notion of the mode of production as the central domain of socialization and an ultimate vision of a fairly homogeneous global order.

Recent social theory has questioned this assumption, asserting that it may be the marketplace rather than the workplace that is the central organizing agency of socialization in the comtemporary phase of industrialization.[24] This approach puts new emphasis on the cultural significance of commodity exchange, most especially with regard to the meaning and use of products. The marketplace is viewed as an historically expanding cultural zone, ultimately concentrating and refracting the central dimensions of social meaning for the consumer culture in its modern phase. Commercial media and advertising provide focus to the system of communication which crystallizes the broader patterns of values, social relations, and satisfactions appropriate to the consumer society.

By implication, both the modern media (the culture industries) and international marketing become of central importance both as a force for commercializing media, and as a cultural discourse in its own right: international advertising tends to be viewed as the central locus of cultural domination and as a significant new force for social homogenization. As the McBride Commission stated:

> Advertising must be counted as one of the more important forces in our present world. It is becoming a factor to be reckoned with on the international level, since those few countries providing the major part of advertising in the world can have a strong commercial/cultural impact on the large majority of other countries. American advertising stamps its imprint all over the world and continues to increase steadily.[25]

These concerns have also brought international marketing and advertising practice to the centre of the theory of Japanese modernization and modernism.

Nevertheless, the implied shift from a production — to consumption-oriented analysis only intensifies the debate about convergence. On one

hand, it is argued that the adoption of the standardized communication practices of the West, based on the globally accepted media technologies (print, radio, television, film, and now computers), has provided a major impetus for universalization in the cultural sphere of Japanese society. Under this logic, whatever cultural resistance to homogenization existed within the social sphere of the industrial workplace in Japan, will be gradually eroded and overcome by the more intense media-based socialization process. Anticipating increasing pressures towards Westernization, especially among the young in Japan,[26] observers have noted that the Japanese are among the most intensive users of media, particularly television (perhaps the most active users of media in the world). Moreover, there is an active and very modern commercial media system with a large number of world-class agencies in Japan with an increasing number of Japanese-American co-ventures. Based on these observations, some conclude that Japan, although lagging somewhat behind in consumerization, is becoming increasingly subject to Western cultural influence.

On the other hand, following the logic of the "marketing concept" itself, it can be argued that the practice of modern advertising demands that product design and communication practice be increasingly adjusted to cultural predilections, which will thus accentuate cultural specificity.[27] This adjustment occurs through highly directed consumer research in an increasingly segmented market, and harmonizes the non-product content (values, characterizations, arguments) with those prevalent within the media and culture. Consequentially, it is possible to argue that to the degree such culturally rooted differences (in preferences, utility, satisfaction, etc.) exist, we must expect limits to the convergence exerted through the media.[28] Increasingly because of marketing communications then, the market may come to emphasize the socially specific dimensions of goods and by way of consequence, the producers will be forced to accommodate consumer dispositions indigenous to the developing market.[29]

Another anecdote may help to explain the dimensions of this dispute. Entering a Japanese bank is rather like entering a bank in any modern country with the single exception that they tend to have more automatic tellers — a sign of hyper-modernization and the most advanced computer communications some will say. This is not the whole story though, for on punching the code into the familiar banking terminal one is reminded that the machine is undoubtedly Japanese. The account code animates on the screen an image of a woman who effects a deep bow and politely requests further information. When the transaction is done, the figure bows again and the machine delivers the money. In Japan, this supposedly neutral and universal technology seems to be wearing a cultural mask. The technological form has been reappropriated by Japanese culture on behalf of the Japanese consumer.

The above dilemma is the central problem of comparative research into the development of the globalized consumer marketplace. How are we to

assess whether the dramatic increase in marketing communications of the last century, and particularly international marketing communication over the postwar period, has contributed to cultural homogenization or diversity? There is little enough interest in the development of a broad and critical history of advertising and marketing, let alone comparative cultural analysis. Yet the criticism will not go away; the dimensions of the problem will expand in tandem with the development of the 'socialist marketplace' and the growing interdependence of the global economy. In a sense, it is the cultural corollary of the tariff and protectionism issue. The New World Information Order debate will be increasingly heard in social theory circles.

The Case of Japan

Japan, the first industrialized non-Western nation to experience the high intensity consumer marketplace on a widespread basis, is again a natural laboratory. How have marketing theory, methods, and approaches come to Japan? Do indigenous Japanese firms practice marketing and advertising in the same way as the American multinationals? Is there now a internationalized marketing practice? Has the systematization and formalization of marketing theory and education contributed to uniformity in the images of society, and does the meaning of products perpetuate Western values and lifestyles? Is there uniformity of method, approach, and style of marketing communication in Japan and the United States? Or do the more contemporary consumer research-oriented approaches enhance the ability of advertising strategists to respond to cultural variety? Does the new communication technology (especially satellites) imply broad changes in the ability of marketeers to orient to specific cultures, or leave these societies more open to cultural colonialism?

The available historical evidence is limited. In asking these questions one must rely on casual sources of information, until more thorough comparative historical work can be done. Most of the useful historical work done in Japan has not been translated; however, one basic fact that limits the conclusion of simplistic convergence remains: American advertising agencies retain a comparatively small share of the world's second largest advertising marketplace in part, it seems, because the Japanese agencies insist that Western marketing approaches just don't work in the Japanese market primarily because of cultural difference.[30]

Despite their historical presence in Japan and the undoubted adaptation by Japanese companies and agencies to American marketing theory, methods, and approaches — differences persist. One observer suggests that Japan has a lower proportion of retail and a higher percentage of industrial advertising in its mix.[31] Moreover, television accounts for a higher percentage of advertising expenditure (35%) than in the US.[32] One knowledgeable observer has remarked on the different spending allocations of the Japanese consumer for luxury goods and Japanese advertising

firms accept competing accounts.[33] Hakuhodo's detailed consumer lifestyle research[34] reflects many differences in values, preferences, and culturally specific consumption practices (i.e., gift giving, food sharing) which are crucial to efforts by foreign as well as Japanese companies who market consumer goods there. Kobayashi[35] also identified a number of features which distinguish Japanese from American advertising design, including: the use of information, the hard sell, the absence of comparative ads, and the orientation to the elite as opposed to the everyday, practical use of goods.

In making these contemporary comparisons, it must be pointed out that television advertising in Japan is itself not new. Commercial advertising on television in Japan began in 1952 and surpassed newspapers as a source of total advertising revenue in the mid 1970s. Early examples from the Dentsu archives reveals efforts that would have hardly been recognizable as ads to the American audience of the time. Many were animations or shadow puppets with a highly staged and clearly Japanese orientation. Although the idea of television advertising was no doubt borrowed from the USA at the time, the forms and messages were themselves rather different in spite of a widespread emulation of American business practice based on the supposed admiration that was accorded the victorious enemy.

Although often more condensed (given the availability of the fifteen second format), contemporary television advertising in Japan is much more recognizable in its current internationalized form, which in part obviously reflects the rather uniform cultural features of television itself, attributed by convergence theorists as central to the dynamics of homogenization. Programme form and general television style remain very much a common element of American and Japanese broadcasting.[36] Japanese media practitioners and particularly advertising personnel seem alert to foreign arts styles and trends giving a familiar (to the visitor) flavor to many of the scenes, locations, music characterizations; about 50% of Japanese ads have at least one foreign element. Foreign advertisers sometimes retain non-Japanese agencies and Japanese agencies have themselves tried approaches proven in the American market (for example the in-store consumer testimonial). Japanese advertising therefore reflects many of the characteristics that would be expected of convergence theory. The commonality of the television technology and of the basic forms of television production gives a tone of familiarity to the act of watching television. The symbolic grammar of the commercial media seems to be an important common dimension which makes advertising understandable even when the language is different.

Nonetheless, underlying these similarities are some important differences, like, for example, the automatic teller. The observation process reported below used content analysis in a very preliminary way to discern more precisely and sensitively differences in the emphasis of content and form of Japanese and American advertising. The analysis was undertaken of 60

prime time national television advertising campaigns broadcast on national networks in each country. The coding protocol was based on one developed for the historical study of magazine advertising and adapted to television. It was then expanded to accommodate features unique to Japanese advertising. The dimensions of judgement that were included in the protocol were:

1) Roles
2) Relations
3) Personal Types/Lifestyles
4) Emotional Tone
5) Activities
6) Values
7) Persuasive Appeals
8) Narration
9) Style

Coding was done by myself with the assistance of four bilingual Japanese university students. Only significant differences will be emphasized in this account.

Major differences were indeed noted in the approaches of Japanese and American advertising, even if on the surface they both appear modern. In terms of persuasive appeals, the American television ads were judged higher in terms of rational appeal, "worry" and typical person testimonial. The Japanese ads were particularly high in the known person testimonial: there were twice as many funny-popular stars in these testimonials as opposed to the status-respected group. These general differences in approach were also reflected in the stylistic categories, with 32% of the American ads rating judgement of "demonstration of product characteristics" as compared to 5% of Japanese ads. On the other hand, 38% of Japanese ads had humour as a basic element as opposed to 8% in American advertising. Our general impression of Japanese advertisements was that of a very light and bemused approach as opposed to the rather heavy-handed rationality of American ads. The Japanese ads did not seem to reflect the American concern for communicating a unique selling proposition.

Values also differed. Practicality (usefulness, effectiveness) was a primary value in 25% of the American ads but only in 12% of Japan's. Contrary to much of the Nihonron theory, Americans valued work in 12% of ads (0% in Japan) and convenience (5%) while Japanese valued leisure (7%) beauty (7%), sensuality (5%), and health more. The basic consumerist, rather than industrialist, values seem to be the basis of Japanese advertising. The Japanese also value traditionalism, whereas the Americans value modernism, although this was apparent more frequently in secondary valuations.

This pattern was further revealed in an analysis of roles, social relations, and emotional tone of ads. Thirty-three percent of Japanese ads contained happiness and excitement as the basic emotional content, and the experience of sensual pleasure occurred in 12%. Eight percent of American ads had each of these characteristics, whereas 22% were rated as having "pride, sense of success, achievement" as their primary emotional content. Other emotional references were rather similar.

In terms of social relations, it was noted that 33% of Japanese ads involved no social reactions, as opposed to 20% of American ads. American ads favored romance, family, friendship, and official, including work, relationships; the Japanese favored the parent-child dyad and independence. There was a very significant difference in the depiction of these social scenes as contexts of product use. The American ads tend to depict the product used in a typical social context, but the Japanese ads have the social relations between the characters as a symbolic illustration or field upon which the product's qualities (or frequently a visual joke) is to be interpreted. This is why in many Japanese ads human characterization appears as a symbol or image of the product's characteristics rather than the context of appropriate use.

This tendency is also reflected in the role categories that appear in the ads. Extended families, friends, couples, and bosses/workmates occur in American ads more, while fathers, children, and performance related roles (media) are favored in Japanese advertising. A breakdown of the "non-naturalized" roles (parasocial interactions as defined by Horton and Wohl[37]) reveals the obsessive interest of Japanese advertising in people enacting media-based roles. Japanese advertising uses models, artists, television personalities (including singers, actors), and comedians most in its advertising. These characterizations account for up to 44% of advertising portrayals. Of parasocial roles, American advertising concentrates on the announcer and sports personalities. Although characters talk directly to the audience about 20% of the time in both countries, a little skit or performance occurs in 17% of Japanese ads. The testimonials obviously work on different premises in Japan and America.

Personal prototypes also differ although this judgement was very difficult to make and seems especially culturally loaded. The judgments were based on the appearance and state of dress of the characters and their mannerisms (i.e. posture, bowing, mouth hiding, etc). In both countries, about 18% of characterizations emphasize the healthy/sporting dimension. Japanese ads however, seem to stress traditional or old fashioned types (13%), cute-young (nowii) 15%, and attractive-sexual (12%), although these types were almost all non-Japanese). American ads emphasize "everyman" types (27%) and the authorative announcer (12%).

The extent to which Japanese television and commercials in particular depict foreigners has been noticed by other researchers and seems to mirror a tendency common to many rapidly developing countries.[38]

Nonetheless, whether the presence of foreigners in advertising reflects the introjection of Western ways and cultural convergence remains difficult to determine. In fact, Japan probably has a lower proportion of foreign TV productions than many developing countries and many of the foreigners who appear in ads are not typical foreigners but well known star performers. Moreover, there is some attitudinal evidence that reveals that respect for foreigners has declined since the war[39] as their appearance in advertising increases.

My own comparison confirmed that representation of foreigners is an important aspect in Japanese ads. Whereas 90% of American ads occur in distinctively American settings with 80% containing only Caucasians, only 52% of Japanese ads are clearly set in Japan, with 67% of the characters being Japanese only. One remains circumspect about whether this is confirmation of convergence. These doubts were accentuated not only by the frequent occurrence of Western performing stars, but also by the way Western women models are used in Japanese advertising. Whereas Japanese women (both traditional and modern) appear demure and in decorous state of attire, foreign women are invariably exposing some part of their anatomy. It appears that their foreignness is less important than the fact that they conjure and symbolize for the Japanese a legitimate expression of sensual and erotic attachments. This is interesting because romantic social relations occur in about 15% of the American ads and in less than 3% of the Japanese's. The representation of foreigners in Japanese advertising may have less to do with respect for Western lifestyles than the peculiar and circuitous way that the Japanese have for referring to sensual matters.[40]

All advertising can be criticized for fictionalizing contemporary life and providing a more optimistic vision of the world than seems appropriate. Advertising is, after all, what McLuhan termed the "good news" about modern society. Advertisers feel no compunction to reflect the world as it is. In many senses advertising always reflects "another world" — a more idealized one in which the promise of the future infuses the present. In summary, we might say of the field of American advertising that the everyday world of idealized consumption reverberates between reasoned or demonstrated exhortations to purchases and a romanticized vision of everyday life. In Japanese advertising the idealized world of goods is symbolically marked by three quite different dimensions: by a foreign world which appears exotic and sensual, a domestic world in which traditional Japanese ways are maintained, and a third entertainment world in which media personalities 'play' out the enjoyments of the world of goods.

It should not be surprising that in none of these worlds of Japanese advertising do we find representation of the groupish, emotional, and social-relationships of the folk culture of Nihonron writings. Nor do we find the high-intensity, work ethic oriented rationalistic technoculture of some of its critics. We do find the traditional dichotomy of Japanese and Western ways; in Japanese advertising we see a world that is entertaining and fun.

Humour and silliness are rampant. Carefree, consumerist lifestyles and values hold sway; a world populated by some foreign and many famous Japanese performers provides the basic "social" dimension of this imagery. Whereas American advertising provides the expected picture of bourgeois consumerism; the Japanese seems to be fleshed out in the image of an other more joyous, even hysterical world. Kobayashi comments on the contrast:

> Japanese commercials, on the other hand, look like a variety of ploys and tricks which are exhibited to a princess who has been fed up with all that has appeared in fairy tales and brought to her by those men who contrive with speculative mind to win her favour. No on knows what may prove to be effective.[41]

Discussion and Interpretation

How are we to make sense of these major differences in emphasis, image, tone, style, and human characterizations represented in Japanese and American advertising. Certainly in the extensive representation of other societies' values and relationships to goods, and the remarkably high occurrence of stars and celebrities in Japanese advertising. That these differences exist are important to recognize. In order to interpret them, we must leave the narrow analytic frame of content analysis to understand the whole cultural system of signs.

As Raymond Williams[42] noted: "A main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms. Advertising is the most visible expression of just this combination." This is true of Western advertising although it is often forgotten because the traditional social forms themselves have been undergoing a constant process of change. In Canada, for example, as Leiss et al.[43] argue, the study of advertising has revealed a process of social transformation from a rudimentary industrialism to a segmented consumer society through several stages; the historical course of this social transformation has involved a shift in the cultural frames for understanding the meaning of goods and their use. Within these frames, the image of the "traditional" occasionally marks certain products with qualities of craftsman-like production or pastoral quietude, but there is little sense that the traditional world has been preserved. Apart from these nostalgic associations to a mythologized history, the world depicted in contemporary advertising appears less concerned with the opposition of the modern and the traditional, than with being modern. Western advertising constantly reminds us that history is to be transcended and is therefore not a problem within the cultural frame.

In Japanese advertising, however, the modern and traditional worlds seem at first to stand side by side in a state of co-existence; the modern one westernized in its form and structure, and the traditional one preserving the sanctity of "pure Japanese." The system as a whole thus reflects the fulfillment of the Meiji ambition to acquire the benefits of moderniza-

tion without a loss of cultural identity. The traditional/modern and Japanese/Western distinctions provide the basic categories for the cultural frame of Japanese advertising as it does for many other areas of Japanese life. Within this matrix goods are sorted and symbolized; kimonos, rice, restaurants, inns, and sake are generally linked to the traditional. These are not objective assignments but, as Befu[44] explains, essentially subjective or semiotic oppositions. For example, the same commodity "rice" can be designated gohan when served with Japanese cuisine and raisu when served with Western fare. Likewise cars, many foods and drink, communication technologies, clothes cosmetics, and leisure products seem to belong to the westernized world, irrespective of where they were manufactured. The system of advertising therefore articulates on another level the basic opposition between the traditional-Japanese and the modern-westernized way of life.

Some anthropologists suggest that the tension between modern and traditional ways need not be resolved. Umesao,[45] for example, has argued that Japanese civilization has long contained elements of traditional and foreign cultures (i.e. Chinese and Korean before Western); modern Japanese society is essentially bi-codal in containing both elements in parallel coexistence. Wakon Yousai was preceded by Wakon Kansai (Japanese spirit Chinese know-how). Japanese civilization therefore was rather unique in having an already established cultural pattern for preserving its own identity while assimilating foreign ideas, technologies, and life patterns.

The invasion of foreign elements into the inner sanctum of private Japanese lifestyles, however, has left other observers wondering whether the predominant pattern isn't one of progressive intrusion and domination by Western social forms with the concommitant erosion of traditional Japanese life.[46] Although Japan is fully modernized in the mode of production, it is only in the early stages of the modernization of consumption. Since production was geared towards export in Japan until the early 1970s, when the Japanese market and consumption were opened, many compare the Japanese consumer market to that of the late 1950s America. Japan, they claim, is only beginning to experience the high-intensity consumer market and will have consumer society values and attitudes towards products shortly.[47] In the meantime, Japan's advertising might be characteristic of the early stages of intensive consumerization.

Japan may be behind the West in developing the high-intensity consumer culture, but is it necessarily travelling in the same direction? Befu, who accepts Umesao's historical argument about parallel culture, argues that Western elements are increasingly penetrating from the public domain into the private and more personalized inner regions of Japanese civilization, westernizing what were traditionally Japanese aspects of behaviour and belief.[48] The behaviors that Befu refers to revolve around the central daily products and life practices — food, clothes, houses, appliances, etc. — the regions we would most expect from a progressive consumerization. Be-

fu's comments then, lead directly back to the debate about the role of advertising and marketing in shaping contemporary Japanese society, for it is precisely in the private daily interactions with everyday products that marketing is expected to have its impact.

Therefore, in the purview of advertising, the sorting of product meanings within the cultural matrix have almost nothing to do with the mode of production. In their attachment to foreign imagery, certain products are marked irrespective of where or how they are produced. For example, Japanese-made cars are consistently advertised in foreign contexts, as are many other Japanese manufactured durables.[49] In Japanese advertising the car is a foreign good; symbolically it exists in a world separate from the domains of Japanese life defined by the processes and relationships of production.

On the other hand, traditional Japanese goods or cultural activities (i.e., kimono, inns, Japanese restaurants, sake, even though produced with modern technology) mix with restaurants' foreign style cuisine (including McDonalds) and several other products which are advertised predominantly within traditional Japanese representations. In these ads, the importance of family roles and bonds, historical and mythological references, the home, and traditional Japanese values and behaviour patterns (i.e., women in Kimono, formality, dedication, strong emotional bonds) are suffused into the social relations of consumption.

These two distinctive worlds — the traditional/private Japanese and the modern/public Western — do coexist in Japanese advertising. Notably, they also exist as prominent dimensions of the lifestyle (psychographic matrix) identified by market researchers.[50] As Kawatake[51] points out, these lifestyle groups are related to preferences for foreign or traditional elements in advertising. Such lifestyle segments, however, account for less than forty percent of the population, and these opposed worlds account for an even lesser percentage of the advertising imagery. The rest consists of a world in which modern and traditional mixes with foreign and Japanese, a "middle" kingdom in which the categories merge and overlap. It is the exciting terrain between oppositions where, as Edmond Leach[52] pointed out, the most interesting things happen. It is a world where Japanese and modern are not categories in opposition. Here, I believe, we find the central discourse on modernization and what it means.

The intermediate world in Japanese advertising is not peopled by traditional types who represent longstanding characteristics of Japanese civilization, or foreign characters that resonate with the promise and sophistication of the "other" modern world; it is populated primarily by well-known Japanese stars from the world of arts, sports, and entertainment. In many cases, these are the young entertainers of the world of music and film. Unlike the American ads, the Japanese ones seldom revolve around typical scenes where typical (but unknown) people engage in the rituals of modern lifestyles. In the middle kingdom, foreigners and for-

eign elements (music styles, clothes etc.) can mingle and interact with Japanese. It is the image of a 'convergent' civilization of an internationalized (but not dominated) modern Japan.

That this force for resolving the tension between traditional and foreign identities emerges from the world of arts and entertainment, that is from the cultural industries, may not be atypical in itself of Japanese society.[53] That it has been powerfully amplified by the extensive development of and fascination with the modern media of communication also seems to be the case. This not only occurs in advertising but is typical of many of the arts, for example the acclaim given to a Japanese version of Oedipus or the founding of cultural centres. Befu[54] argues that the distinction between traditional and Western cultural styles have themselves become deeply interwoven in the celebration of many Japanese occasions and rituals, for example Beethoven, and New Year's, and Ishige,[55] makes a similar example of the public consumption of food. Between the traditional world of *bunraku* and *enka* and the westernized arena of jazz, Mozart, rock, and Shakespeare a very large domain of modern Japanese style and performance exists. For example, wasai (homegrown) pops and pops *kayokyoku* that mingle traditional Japanese and Western forms are popular. In advertising this intermediate style also appears in association with a large range of goods that are both contemporary and Japanese. These particular dimensions should not be overlooked.

In terms of Umesao's "syntax of culture," advertising, like *wasai* pops seems to reflect syncretic rather than coexistent grammars. In wasai pops television shows, young (nowii) performers act out their songs sprinkled with English words, dressed in extreme and exaggerated versions of Western clothes, performing their gyrations in controlled and stylized movements only faintly reminiscent of Western style pop performance. The audience for this music exists with the audience for very modern and classical Western music and the traditionally popular *karaoke* styles.[56] In these performances, Western content and references have been reappropriated by Japanese style and form. In advertising and marketing studies the same seems to be true. As Ishige states in his discussion of the historical antecedents of this type of assimilation: "In the realm of daily life as well, the same sort of trend is seen in the acceptance of Western civilization, the various elements having been reorganized within the Japanese context."[57] Advertising, like other types of popular culture, seems to indicate that the syncretic mode which assimilates alien meanings into the home context through the mechanism of style is of crucial importance.

That the syntax of culture redoubles a pattern established in language is not surprising. The Japanese assimilated the Chinese ideographic writing system (*Kanji*) by combining it with a more indigenous phonetic system called *Hiragana*. More recently confronted with having to incorporate new phonetic foreign words — the Japanese have developed the use of *Katakana*. Some foreign words are written only in the foreign language

("sexy", "pop", etc.). *Katakana* is a considerable part of contemporary Japanese language usage, where foreign ideas (including technical terms) although japanized, remain marked as different from traditional Japanese concepts. They are no longer foreign nor are they part of traditional Japanese language. *Katakana* represents a middle kingdom of language — the naturalized foreign word. These usage conventions obviously permeate television advertising (as well as magazines, product labeling, and product design, etc.). For example, an ad for a car writes "Sexy Sprinter" across the screen in Roman letters. On the other hand, the ad for coffee uses the *katakana* form (pronounced *koo-hee*) reflecting the greater degree of assimilation of this product into the Japanese daily life.

Like the *katakana* words, the products of the "middle kingdom" are neither traditionally Japanese nor clearly foreign. Their design and use reflects a combination of elements of both. It is true of the school uniforms based on Western designs but modified to Japanese custom, of the western-style clothes in general, of beverages, ice-creams, and indeed to a goodly part of the menu of many restaurants, other than traditional fish and rice. In many cases the customization extends beyond the central domains of food, clothes, and shelter to the wide variety of goods that comprise modern life. Like the banking machine, the Japanese market demands alterations in the design, meaning, and use of the products. The Japanese have far greater acquaintance with and attachment to the appropriated aspects of foreign cultures than with things foreign. This possibly explains why they both like to travel abroad and have trouble adjusting when they do.[58] It also reflects the basic difference between the foreign and international components of Japanese life; when talking about internationalization the Japanese refer to policy adjusted to Japanese interests and cultural preferences.

In summary then, though we have wandered far away from the original issue of cultural convergence and modernization in Japan, we may return to this terrain for the final word. This analysis of advertising as communication has focussed on factors other than the economic workings of a marketplace. From this point of view, there is little to say about whether advertising has modernized the economy, and a lot more to say about whether it contributes to the modernization of the culture. If Japan is in any way a typical case, then we may say that the dilemma of advanced industrialization necessarily involves a debate between traditional and Western images of life. Advertising itself is an important part of the discourse on modernization; it takes up the themes of this dialogue about convergence and assimilation, and in some important and striking ways it helps to formulate in concrete symbols a sense of their resolution. In much of modern Japanese advertising the past is interpolated with the modern western present and a new vision of a unified modern world supplants the older schismatic one.

STEPHEN KLINE

Environmental Studies
York University

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