



Social Concepts in Japan



Class 2



KEIO 150
Design the Future

Quote of the Day



“The virtues, like the Muses, are always seen in groups. A good principle was never found solitary in any breast.”

Buddha

This Lecture



- Japan as collectivistic society
- The concept of *ie*
- Group formation
- Harmony
- Hierarchy – *tateshakai*
- Achievement orientation

Framework



- Nakane (1992) suggests that attribute (*shikaku* 資格) and frame (*ba* 場) constitute group formation.
- Attribute refers to any specific quality of an individual in his/her social context (education, heritage)
- Frame refers to the same position by belonging to a particular organization (e.g. member of Keio University is a frame, whereas student or professor itself is an attribute)
- Attribute and frame often overlap

Framework



- However, Nakane thinks that in some societies either frame or attribute are more important
- In Japan frame is more important.
- Group consciousness depends on immediate social context, membership in a certain organization is most important (institution is more important than actual occupation = e.g. I am from Keio University is more relevant than the fact that I hold a PhD or study a special subject)
- E.g. in India attributes would be more important

The Concept of *ie*



- *ie* is translated as household or family, but its implications go beyond these two concepts
- The *ie* is a social group constructed on the basis of an established frame of reference
- Its relationships within are more important than outside, whereas in other societies other relationships (e.g. sibling relationships) are stronger
- Family is strongly based on a collective group, i.e. members of a household, not on the relationships between individuals (Nakane 1992, p. 13)

The Concept of *ie*



- The concept of *ie* is also to be found in the perception of corporations
- “The enterprise is the people“
- There is an extremely strong relationship between employer and employee, not just a contractual one.
- Employers do not only employ somebody`s labor itself, but the total man (*marugakae* 丸抱え) (Nakane 1992, p. 15)

Group Formation (Nakane 1992)



- Groups formed by the attributes of their members often show a greater homogeneity than groups formed by a similar frame
- To keep the group stronger and more together the frame needs to be strengthened
 - Members should get the feeling of oneness
 - Tie the members to each other via an internal organization

Uchi - Soto



- *uchi* 内 (my house) refers to the place of work, office, school (where one belongs)
- *soto* 外 refers to the outside of the group and to non-members
- Strong emotional connection between an organization and its members

Uchi no kaisha



- The word *kaisha* has strong connotations of “community“
- *Uchi no kaisha* 内の会社 (my company) means more than “the place where I work“
- *Shokuba* 職場 takes precedence over the profession or the kind of work done
- Relationships are vertical and strongly focus on the company or organization members (*gakubatsu* 学閥)
- Spontaneous relationship between similar professions outside one`s company are very rare (De Mente 1994)

Uchi no kaisha



- Japanese enterprises as social groups are family-like and often pervade the private life of their employees
- There are no ties between workers of the same kind (e.g. horizontal craft unions are rare, unions mostly develop within an organization)
- The contrast between people inside and outside the organization is sharpened (Nakane 1992)

Relationships with Other Corporations



- The vertically ranked company system is so strong that gets difficult to do business with another company that the company does not have relations with
- Only after personal ties have been established, transactions are possible

Internal Structure of the Group



- There are different types of relationships within a group
 - Vertical
 - Horizontal
- Their relevance is different according to society
- Nakane argues that for binding members together who are not homogeneous, vertical relationships are better (p.24)

Internal Structure of the Group



- Vertical relationships also establish relationships between individuals of higher and lower status (hierarchical group) and horizontal relationships strengthen relationships between equals (occupational group)
- The hierarchical group has therefore to develop a ranking (group order)
- In Japan the ranking is based on seniority

Relationship Types



- “ Human relationships can be classified into vertical and horizontal hierarchies. The vertical includes relationships between parents and their children, while the horizontal involves classmates or colleagues. In Japanese society vertical rankings of human relationships have developed to a great extent and a seniority system is prevalent in Japan“ (Nakane 1967, p.70-71)



- *tateshakai* 縦社会 – the vertical society
- Superior-subordinate relationships are part of the framework of Japanese society
- This hierarchy shapes attitudes and behavior
- Horizontal relationships in Japan are called *doryo* 同僚 (colleague) and *dôkyusei* 同級生 (classmate)

Vertical Relationships



- Oyabun-Kobun-Relationship
 - *oyabun* 親分 – Boss, master, employer etc.
 - *kobun* 子分 – follower, retainer and employee
 - *oyabun* – *kobun* relationships are
 - long-term arrangements
 - deeply personal
 - incorporating elements of a parent-child relationship

Sempai-Kôhai



- *sempai* 先輩 are seniors in Japanese (people who are older, have more experience, and have held a position for a longer time or graduated earlier)
- *kôhai* 後輩 is the opposite of a sempai, a junior and they are considered inferior to their *sempais* because they lack experience
- The *sempai-kôhai* system is strongly influenced by confucianism, the traditional Japanese family system, and the Japanese former civil law (Davies and Ikeno 2002, p. 188)

● Recognizing the Highest Ranked



His business card will generally be presented by a subordinate. Sometimes he will not even carry a card.



He sits the farthest to the rear.



He drinks his tea first.



He speaks the least.



He speaks last.



No one minds if he nods off.

The Concept of *ie* Again



- In the ideal Japanese household (*ie* 家) opinions of the members should always be held unanimously regardless of the issue
- An expression of contradictory opinion to that of the head can be considered to be disturbing the harmony of group order (Nakane 1992, p. 13)



shûdan shugi



- *shûdan shugi* 集団主義 translates as groupism (however the Japanese word has a more neutral or even positive connotation than the English term) (Befu 2001)
- Has been analyzed widely in family research, arts and of course in a company context
- Groupism and collectivism are ranked lower than individualism (*kojin shugi* 個人主義) in Western eyes

Group Model



- Harmony through cooperation and conformity among group members are prime virtues
- Open conflict and competition are taboo
- Harmonious relationships among group members are emphasized and lead to sanctions of group members who are too competitive or conflict-oriented
- They also lead to ritualized and formal behavior patterns, which tend to reduce, if not totally eliminate, open conflict and embarrassment (Befu 2001, p.22)

Other Ideas About It



- Hamaguchi (1977) argues that the concept of groupism is a concept which strongly pits the individual against the group and places priority on the group (he sees it as a concept deriving from Western culture)
- For him individualism and groupism are contradictory concepts
- Japanese individuals see themselves as to be unified (*ittaiika* 一体化) with the group and so individual members can achieve their own goals

Harmony - *wa*



- *wa* 和 is translated as “peace and harmony”
- Strongly related to Shinto principles (the undifferentiated coexistence of people, nature and the gods)

shikata



- Definition “*shikata* 仕方”
 - “The proper way of doing things, with emphasis on the form and the order of process; combining droplets or the energies of individuals into group activities” (Gannon 2003, p. 40)
 - The concept of *shikata* can also be found in the strong process orientation of Japanese corporations and the high quality of Japanese services

The Dô Spirit of Japan



- *dô* 道 can be translated as the way but also as the way to be followed
- Based on Taoist principles the *dô* 道 spirit strongly influenced traditional Japanese arts and also *bushido* 武士道 (the way of the warrior)
- *kanzen shugi* = the pursuit of the beauty of complete perfection
- Are there problems with the spirit of *dô*?

ganbaru



- In Japan working hard is considered to be good and the ideal is to make an effort seriously (Davies and Ikeno 2001)
- *Ganbaru* 頑張る mentality is said to be based on the rice field cultivation and the possibility to raise one`s social status after the Meiji Restoration.
- What could be the problem with ganbaru?

gaman



- *Gaman* 我慢 is translated as patience, tolerance, endurance
- What is the difference between *gaman* 我慢 and *ganbaru* 頑張る?
- Why is *gaman* 我慢 so important?



- *ganbaru* 頑張る means doing one`s best and hanging on
- According to the Sanshodo Japanese Dictionary
 - To work hard and patiently
 - To insist on having one`s way
 - To occupy one place and never leave



Homework



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