

# ***THE JAPANESE CONCEPT OF "I"***

Based on

Buddhism, Confucianism and Feudalism

One of the most notable and significant differences between the East and West is the concept of "I". Simply stated, the West has "I" and East does not. A serious question to the ancient Egyptians (in this instance, designating Egypt as West) was "What is Man?" On the temple of Delphi, the ancient Greeks inscribed the words "Know thyself." Many Biblical quotations express the idea of the Dignity of Man, i.e., "We are sons of God, our Heavenly Father," "Our names are written in heaven," "The hairs of our head are numbered," and many other similar words. More recently, there is Descartes' "I think, therefore, I am;" Capitalism's "Free Competition," Democracy's "Dignity of Man"--all express the importance of Man.

In the West there is only one "I" while Japan has numerous "I's" according to social strata. Compared to the independent "I" of the West, Japan has only class "I's." The capitalization of "I" in English seems to be the subconscious emphasis of "I."

The three main sources of Japanese thinking are:

1. **Buddhism--** (which came into Japan at the beginning of the 6th century,) as the foundation of world outlook,
2. **Confucianism--** (adopted by the Japanese in the 5th century), the foundation of social conduct, and
3. **Feudalism--** based on Confucianism and started the end of the 16th century, feudalism was rigidly consolidated during the Tokugawa period, which began in 1603.

These three are very different in nature, **Buddhism being a religion, Confucianism, social ethics, and Feudalism, a political system;** the one common element among them is the **negation of self--or "I"**.

Though these three sources were utilized by rulers of old Japan, it must be remembered that unless the common people--the "ruled"--had potentiality or mental background ready to accept and keep the "non-self" philosophy and "I"-less society, the rulers could never have succeeded in their endeavors.

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Again, some readers may think that Buddhism, Confucianism and Feudalism are things of the past that have nothing to do with modern post-war Japan. However, if they turn their eyes from external affairs to the deep undercurrent which motivates our way of thinking and our actions, they will find that Buddhism, Confucianism and Feudalism are still alive and very strong in our daily lives. They are so completely imbued into our blood that we do not even think of it, unless in reflection.

It is impossible to deal with these three great problems in this short paper, but we shall examine them only from the angle of Negation of Self.

## **BUDDHISM:**



According to Buddhism, Man is "ghost" which appears momentarily on transient and ever mutable relations, then disappears in an instant into Nothingness. "I" is a temporary name given to the floating consciousness evaporated from all types of ever-changing objective conditions, which merely reflect--and often imperfectly--upon the floating consciousness. Both the donor and recipient are imperfect shadows in the gigantic movement of Time and Space. The only reality is the eternal and constant change and motion--from eternity to eternity. All phenomena is vanity; the earth, itself, is only a tiny point that evolves into nothing in the boundless ocean of Time and Space. Thus, why should this tiny "I" be so arrogant, so audacious as to place itself against Eternal Change and claim "Dignity of Man"?

All cares, worries, anger and hatred come from this illusion of Dignity of Man, which must not be damaged in any way. Man's salvation would be to emancipate this "I" from the yoke of illusion and hallucination.

"Hotoke" ( a Japanese word for Buddha) means to "untie" this "I" from the chains of illusions. The Sanskrit work, "Nirvana," a state of enlightenment, means to "blow out" this "I." "Muga" (non-self), "Botsuga" (resignation from "I"), "Gedatsu" (emancipation from carnal desires), Shinshin Datsuraku (falling off of soul and body), "Shukaku-ichinyo" (subject and object are one), "Jita-funi" (you and I are one) --all are the fundamental points of Buddhism.

One catechistic point for meditation in Zen Buddhism reads, "A man stands on a bridge between two mountains (noumena and phenomena). The bridge and mountains run, but the water never runs." This means that a man on a bridge points to the rapids down below and says, "The water is running," but actually, it is not the water which is

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running, but the bridge, the man and the mountains are running. All disappear but Change never changes.

"Mujo-kan" is the beginning and the end of Buddhism. It is mutability, finitude, transitoriness; it is more than the exclamation of Heraclitus, "Panta Rehi." Change is the only reality. Nothing else has entity.

How can "I" have its place in this philosophy?

## CONFUCIANISM:

**Confucianism is neither a religion nor a systematic philosophy.** It is political ethics--or ethical politics. It is a gentleman's code of ethics--the code of the ruling class. China at the time of Confucius was in political and social chaos. Confucianism was the stabilizing force of the people. **Its fundamental purpose was to promote peace among men**--between the ruling class and the ruled classes of people--and to establish a peaceful country. If each person does only as he wishes, this would be All against All, and there would be not peace. Consequently, a definite standard for the actions of the people, over and above personal feelings and desires must be established, and which, if adhered to, would eliminate all conflicts. Confucianism, which was the outgrowth of this, spread far and wide.

This standardization, however, was not horizontal, but vertical. It was a triangular organization with the ruler on the top and the people underneath. If one looks up to his superior and follows his instructions, the superior will look upon the subordinate with mercy, and the subordinate will be loyal to his superior. This is expressed in the Five Cardinal Actions of Human Relations, i.e. master vs. retainers, father vs. son, husband vs. wife, the old vs. the young, and the senior vs. junior. If the subordinate is loyal, he will be treated with mercy; if both maintain this attitude, all will run smoothly and be peaceful.

**One must refrain from expressing personal feelings or opinions as it may be wrong or may hurt others.** Peace is more precious and valuable than good opinions. Confucius said, "The people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it." He also said, "He who is not in any particular office has nothing to do with plans for the administration of its duties." This is somewhat similar to the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Confucius also said, "Of all people, women and lower men are the most difficult to behave toward. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve toward them they entertain grudges against you."

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One discloses his low caliber by showing his anger, joy, sorrow, or merriment in trivial matters. **A gentleman does not disclose what is inside him.** How can "rugged individuals" be developed in this atmosphere?

## **FEUDALISM:**

From the beginning of the 12th century to the end of the 16th century Japan was in a "warlike age" and warlords rose and fell, conspirators killed close friends and relatives, the lower class of Samurai of yesterday became the ruler of today. This period was literally an age of wars of All against All.

**Tokugawa Iyeyasu** finally put an end to this chaos and united Japan in 1603. **His foremost act was the stabilization of peace and order in Japan.** Iyeyasu, a brilliant statesman, together with his advisors began to literally infuse Confucianism into the veins of the Japanese people. This was not only encouraged, but also almost forced upon both the Samurai and the common people. This was State Learning and Confucian scholars were in the top positions in both local and national governments. Buddhism was discouraged and there were almost no great priests to appear during the Tokugawa period, which lasted for 264 years. However, countless numbers of Confucian scholars appeared and many valuable books were written. All learning during this period was of Confucianism. As the Nara and Kyoto periods were totally Buddhist, the Tokugawa period was totally Confucian. Even the textbook given to the children of common people was "Rongo," written by Confucius. The sayings of Confucius were quoted by the people in their daily lives, and live accordingly.

**Vertical morality of obedience,** mercy, loyalty, patronization, "Giri" and "Ninjo," Rei (moral protocol), etc. were ingrained into the minds, hearts and souls of the populace, both Samurai and the common people. Each organization throughout Japan was built on and conducted in feudal philosophy. In fact, Japanese feudalism was perhaps the most pure and strict in the history of the world.

This vertical organization exists, and not men. The thought and actions of the people are determined by the structure--not by the men in it. Even morality is structural. (The pre-war patriotism collapsed along with the downfall of the Japanese Empire.) As the structure thinks--so do the people. In unison we went to war; now, in unison we are against war. The structure may be a military clique, a political party or a labor union; whatever it is, it is the holder of "power."

How can "I" develop in this climate?

## CONCLUSION:

It is difficult to determine whether the lack of "I" is the cause of the effect of Buddhism, Confucianism and Feudalism, but in any case, it is the reality. Every Japanese has a sensitive antenna and feels "the trend of time," and acts accordingly.

He does not--and cannot--think for himself, but is always guided by, or haunted by "mood" or "kimochi" which is super "I."

## *PROVERBS AS CAUSE AND EFFECT OF OUR FEELINGS AND ACTIONS*

The proverbs are the plebeian philosophy. It expresses the outlook of the rank and file people on the world and society. The common people cannot theorize things and therefore feel and act according to the spirit of the proverbs. The proverbs have served for thousands of years since the primitive period as "life guides" for the people in general.

Life experiences are varied and complicated and, consequently, so are the proverbs. Many times, proverbs show diametrically opposed ideas, contradicting each other. For instance, a proverb says "Koketsu ni irazunba koji o ezu" (Unless one goes into a tiger's den, he cannot get a baby tiger.) At the same time, a proverb says "Kunshi wa ayauki ni chika yorazu" (A wise man does not go near trouble.) One proverb says "Wataru seken ni oni wa nashi" (After all, people in the world are all good people,) but at the same time another one says "Hito o mitaraba dorobo to omoe" (Think that every person you meet is a thief.) Both of them are partially true and partially untrue, depending upon the time and occasion. But, they are good guidance to the masses.

Some of the proverbs disclose the fundamental disposition of a nation. It would be interesting, therefore, to see from the proverbs one particular side of thinking of the Japanese people leaving many other sides, for the moment.

Often you see trouble in a car or on the street. There are many passersby or passengers around the person who is in trouble. But no one steps up and helps him out, pretending they do not notice the trouble. It appears that the people are very unkind and cowardly; in spite of the fact that these people feel deep sympathy and indignation inside. A great many unionists entertain strong criticism against the union movement administration (especially teachers) but they do not express their feelings or opinions but follow the instructions of the central board and wave red flags. A great many people, including many top leaders, were strongly opposed to the Pearl Harbor attack, but they kept their mouths shut, and were engaged in war.

Let us select a few proverbs that are the cause and effect of the thinking and actions of us, the Japanese people:

1. "Swaranu Kami ni tatari nashi" (**The god whom you do not touch will not retribute.**) Etymologically, "god" is a stronger and, therefore, higher person. It is best

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to leave him alone and let him do whatever he wants to do. We may disagree with him, but it does not pay to stand against him as he is stronger than we, and is apt to retribute.

2. "Naku ko to jito niwa katenu" (**You cannot do anything with a crying child and the manor lord.**) A crying child has no sense, and cries. There is no way we can reason with him. So is the powerful manor lord (our ancient administrative system) who does things whether or not we like them. We cannot reason with him either.

3. "Yabu o tsutsuite hebi o dasu" (**We beat around the bush and a snake runs against us.**) We must leave things alone, though they look suspicious and ominous. If we feel "heroic" and begin to investigate the bush for the purpose of disclosing the secret, the result is that a snake in the bush bites us.

4. "Kiji mo nakazuba utare mai" (**A pheasant will not be shot if it keeps quiet.**) A pheasant quietly hides itself in the bush and is safe, but if it crows, it gets into danger. We are merely common people, why should we stick up our heads and shout.

5. "Koboku wa kaze ni orare yasushi" (**A high tree is apt to be burden.**) It is better to keep a low posture. If we begin to show ourselves, we meet with much opposition and we are broken.

6. "Yanagi ni kazeore nashi" (**A willow tree is not broken by the wind.**) The willow tree moves to and fro according to the wind. We must not resist, but obey. Losing is winning. We lose in order to win.

7. "Deru kugi wa utareru" (**If a nail is sticking out, surely the hammer will hit it hard.**) A nail (the people) should be inside, and should not be sticking out. We must be in the proper position, and should not cross the boarder.

8. "Nagai mono niwa makarero" (**Let the longer one roll up the shorter one.**) We are short in every way and cannot fight against the longer one.

9. "Mono iyeba kuchibiru samushi akino kaze" (**The autumnal wind is chilly and if we open our mouth, the lips catch cold.**) The time and tide are not for us. The cold wind is blowing. We may want to say something that is right and which should be said, but we had better keep our mouths shut in order not to catch cold and suffer.

10. "Tofu ni kasugai, nuka ni kugi" (**You cannot fasten cakes of bean curd with clamps, neither can you drive a nail into a rice bran.**) Once in a while a courageous man stands up and tries to do something with the undesirable condition. But he finds it impossible to alter anything in the group or the organization. All that he does is to

fasten cakes of bean curd with clamps, and drive a nail into the rice bran. He might as well give it up.

If things are in such a condition what can we do? There are many things with which we cannot agree and which go on defiantly.

11. "Kusai mono ni wa futa o shiro" (**Cover the ill-smelling thing with a cover.**) The ill smelling thing is awful. But we know we cannot get rid of it. All that we can do about it is to put a cover on it and forget it. A young man with high ideals becomes disappointed and indignant with the way of things in the office. He is fresh from college and is powerless. All that he can do and should do is to close his eyes, putting a cover on them and forget.

12. "Ishibashi o tataite wataru" (**Before you cross over a strong stone bridge, you had better strike it to make sure that it is safe.**) Whatever we do, we must make absolutely sure that it does not do any harm. Things are so complicated, and we may meet with some serious trouble very unexpectedly. Even if it looks safe, we had better check it first.

13. "Sanju rokkei niguru ni shikazu" (**The best among the 36 fighting tactics is to run away.**) There are many ways of meeting with troubles, but the best one is to run away without doing anything.

The above-mentioned proverbs are extremely common and everybody knows them and recites them. The minute one stands against a problem his mind surely goes back to them and he acts accordingly.

The main guiding posts of life in olden times were proverbs. Even the so-called superstitions are valuable lessons handed down from our ancestors from generation to generation. The accumulation of our long and rich experiences has been formed into these popular proverbs. At the same time we may say that our experiences, mostly bitter experiences, have created these proverbs warning the people against their aptitude to commit serious mistakes.

## ***WORKING WITH INDOCHINESE***

The information provided is meant to serve as a guide or framework for the professional working with Indochinese. This information is by its nature generalized and should be treated as such. Each client will differ in background and level of acculturation.

### **I. Customs**

#### **A. Family**

1. To outward appearance the father is the head of the household.
2. The mother, however, controls the purse strings and has a great deal of input into decision-making.
3. Family relationships are strong and extend beyond the nuclear family.
4. Discipline is strict and administered both by parents and older siblings. Older siblings and relatives often act as "parents" in cases when true parents are not available.
5. Decision making is the parent's job.

#### **B. Hospitality**

1. Greeting and partings should always include each person present and always begin with the eldest person present.
2. During home visits, you can usually expect to be offered something to drink (coke, orange juice etc.) In order to show respect for the household, the beverage should be accepted.
3. It is not unusual to be presented gifts by the family with whom you are working.

#### **C. Social Interactions**

1. Avoid jumping into the subject matter immediately. Pleasantries and inquiries will open many doors down the road.

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2. The Indochinese have a natural reserve and are hesitant to open up with persons outside of their family.
3. Females are frequently accompanied by a male family member. This is especially true in the case of young women. It may facilitate creating the initial relationship if the "protector" is allowed to be present initially.
4. The Indochinese often talk around the subject matter.
5. The sense of punctuality is much different between the Indochinese and American cultures. The Indochinese are often late for appointments, however, this is not normally a rejection or insult.
6. Younger persons are taught not to have eye-to-eye contact with an older person when talking to them. This is not necessarily a form of evasion.
7. The Indochinese will avoid contradicting you and will therefore agree with you on most subjects, at least verbally.
8. The smile is the covering of all feelings. It does not indicate agreement.
9. Males should avoid any behavior that can be interpreted as flirtation with female clients.

#### D. Professionalism

1. You will be respected by the nature of your position, however you are restricted to maintaining that position. The Indochinese do not dichotomize professional and personal lives.
2. Quiet, calm demeanor are the most effective attributes. Raising your voice or showing anger lowers your stature in their eyes.

## II. Counseling Hints

1. De-emphasize set length sessions. Emphasis should be placed on meeting objectives.
2. You should keep the schedules you establish. Be on time, even if they are not.

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3. Be patient! Remember that these clients need social chit chat and that they are usually working in a second language.
4. Speak slowly and clearly. Use simple vocabulary and short sentences.
5. Avoid negative questions, i.e. don't like your coffee?
6. Listen to the entire response to your questions, since the typical response will begin with yes, even if the response is no. For example, "*Yes, I have no bananas.*"
7. Make certain that agreements and expectations are clearly understood by both parties. Have your clients paraphrase the agreement not just acknowledge the agreement.
8. Prescriptive techniques often work more effectively. Authority is expected to be directive in nature.
9. Indochinese often do not know how to explain their feelings about situations.
10. Include the decision-makers of the household in any agreements. Allow them privacy to discuss decisional or choice situations.

## ***HELPFUL HINTS -- INDONESIA***

ISLAM PRIMARY RELIGION - UNIFYING  
FACTOR FOR THIS REGION OF OVER  
300 ETHNIC AND TRIBAL GROUPS - 400  
LANGUAGES

SIX MAJOR ISLANDS - 13,000 SMALLER ISLANDS

TREMENDOUS DIVERSITY IN CULTURE

ANIMISM PREVALENT AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY

OVER 70% LIVE IN RURAL AREAS

INDONESIAN MEMBER OF COMMUNITY FIRST -- INDIVIDUAL SECOND  
VERY GROUP ORIENTED

INDONESIAN CONFORMS TO NORMS OF VILLAGE AT ALL TIMES – EVEN IN  
CITIES

BEING AN INDIVIDUAL MAKES PERSON "MAKU" OR ASHAMED

WORST THING IS SHAMING SOMEONE

IF YOU HAVE SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT - USE THIRD PERSON  
AS INTERMEDIARY

DON'T BE LOUD OR AGGRESSIVE

THEIR RELIGION IMPACTS ON ALL FACETS OF THEIR SOCIAL LIFE

DON'T PAY TOO MANY COMPLIMENTS

EACH PERSON HAS HIS POSITION - RECOGNIZE HIS POSITION  
MAINTAIN DIGNITY OF YOUR OFFICE OR POSITION

INDONESIAN WOMEN ENJOY GREAT RESPECT AND FREEDOM IN TERMS  
OF THE ASIAN ENVIRONMENT.



## ***HELPFUL HINTS -- JAPAN***

STRONG CONFUCIAN-BUDDHIST INFLUENCE

--TRADITION - TIME HONORED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

HIGHLY DEVELOPED SYSTEM OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

--SUBTLE SIGNS OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT

--COMPLEX RULES OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

--ACKNOWLEDGE

DOMINATION/SUBMISSIVENESS

RESPECT FOR RELIGION VERY IMPORTANT

--BORN SHINTO -- DIE BUDDHIST

--MAY BE CHRISTIAN BUT ACKNOWLEDGE BUDDHA

PATIENCE VERY VALUED

HARMONY IN SOCIAL SETTING VERY VALUED

CONFRONTATION AVOIDED

REVERENCE TOWARDS ELDERS, EXPERIENCE, AUTHORITY.

PUBLIC DISPLAY OF AFFECTION IS TO BE AVOIDED

LOUD, BOISTEROUS LANGUAGE IS TO BE AVOIDED

GIFTS A GOOD IDEA WHEN VISITING JAPANESE HOME

WHEN PRESENTED GIFT, DON'T OPEN IMMEDIATELY--WAIT UNTIL LATER

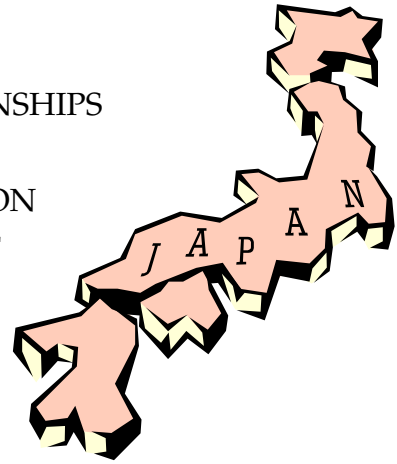
MEN LEAD -- TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER WOMEN

THANK YOU SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN TIMELY MANNER

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS SHOULD BE REPAID IN A TIMELY MANNER

LAVISH PRAISE SHOULD BE AVOIDED--ESPECIALLY FOR AN INDIVIDUAL

IN FRONT OF HIS/HER GROUP



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## ***HELPFUL HINTS -- SOUTH KOREA***



STRONG CONFUCIAN INFLUENCE

--FAMILY THE CORNERSTONE OF KOREAN SOCIETY

--FATHER IS DOMINANT

HIGHLY DEVELOPED SYSTEM OF SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

--DESIGNED TO PROTECT HONOR AND POSITION OF INDIVIDUAL

FATALISTIC

PROPER SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ALL IMPORTANT

KIBUN -- FACE, SENSE OF SELF-DIGNITY, FEELING

KEEPING KIBUN - MOST IMPORTANT

MORE IMPORTANT TO "FEEL RIGHT" THAN TO "BE RIGHT"

FLATTERY IMPORTANT

IMPATIENCE CONSIDERED A MAJOR SIN

ELDERS MUST ALWAYS BE HONORED

RETIREMENT AT 61 YEARS

CEREMONY IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT

WIFE IS A PRIVATE MATTER. HUSBAND REPRESENTS FAMILY

HAVING SONS IS IMPORTANT

WIVES GENERALLY DON'T ATTEND SOCIALS

WOMEN HAVE THEIR OWN SOCIAL LIFE

PRINCIPLE ROLE OF WOMEN IS PROCREATION AND FAMILY

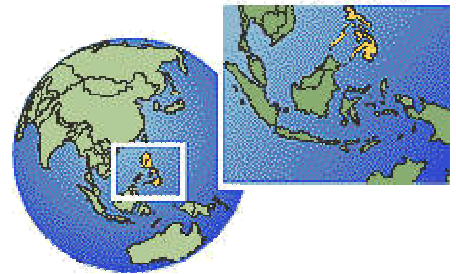
PRIVACY ESSENTIAL PART OF KOREAN LIFE

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## ***HELPFUL HINTS -- PHILIPPINES***

### FILIPINO UNIQUE

- SEA/GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION
- ETHNIC MALAY
- PROLONGED SPANISH COLONIAL INFLUENCE



### BEWARE EXTERNAL APPEARANCES

- WESTERN CLOTHES
- GOOD ENGLISH
- STRONG AFFINITY TOWARDS US LIFESTYLES

### VALUES SMOOTH INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

DON'T JOKE ABOUT PERSONAL MATTERS--EASILY OFFENDED

"HIYA" OR LOSS OF FACE OR INSULT MAY BE INSURMOUNTABLE

USE OF GO-BETWEENS TO AVOID CONFRONTATION

VALUE CONFORMITY -- SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

DON'T BE RUGGED INDIVIDUALIST -- NOT APPRECIATED

RICH LANGUAGE -- STRONG VERBAL PLAY

LOOK FOR CUEING -- INDIRECT EXPRESSION OF WANT-DESIRES

VERY LIMITED BODY LANGUAGE DISPLAY

INHIBITED AS A GENERAL OBSERVATION--CAN GET VERY EMOTIONAL

BEING FIRM AND SYMPATHETIC FOSTERS UNDERSTANDING

KEEP IN MIND--INFORMALITY INVITES INTIMACY