Peter Ackermann

Japan: Killing Motivation

This paper places the concept of killing into a discussion of what living means. Focusing on Japan, a culture certainly not rooted in occidental traditions and values, living essentially implies the flow of energy linking parts to a whole, and individuals to ⟨ others. For this process to take place smoothly the balance of movements of giving and receiving is indispensable. However, present-day debates in Japan show great concern about the fact that large segments of society are no longer motivated to produce the activity that can conceptually be equated with life and living. In the first half of this paper I discuss mechanisms that urge persons to move, and in the second half reflect on mechanisms that are blocking, stifling, "killing" the motivation to move.
Keywords: Normative values (Japan), Motivation, Communication (Japan), Body, Pressure and response in cultural systems of reference

Preliminary notes:

1) After the earthquake and *tsunami* disaster which brought death und ruin to tens of thousands in Japan it seems irreverent to speak or think of killing, particularly when this word is being used in a more metaphoric sense. Nevertheless, even in the face of the present tragedy I do not consider it out of place to reflect on the deep-lying assumption that lack of motivation, and with it immobility, leads not only metaphorically, but in the end also physically to death. This assumption will, I believe, have a strong and positive impact on how Japan faces the future.

2) The implications of what I am going to argue could well change drastically from what they largely were before the earthquake. Factors that in the last twenty years killed motivation did so particularly in the light of Japan's efforts to maintain its stand against changing economic concepts and realities and the undeniable problems in face-to-face level communication in a globalized world. I do not think it improper even at this tragic moment to take the stance that – together with Japan – we all share a fate in which pressures to join a "globalizing world", and the mechanisms of maintaining social balance and interpersonal trust, are often irreconcilable and can concretely trigger people's wish to put an end to their lives. However, precisely these same factors, which focus more on control, balance and in-group order, and do so sometimes in a very old-fashioned, rigid, ceremonial and ritualized way, could now be seen as efficient in providing the emotional support needed to sustain the wish to live at this moment of disaster and distress.

✳

In 2010, given the task to consider the implications of "killing" in Japan, the first thing that came to mind were not the extensive debates pursued by Japanese and Western scholars alike on suicides in modern Japan or hara-kiri in the feudal age, not *karôshi* (death from overwork) in companies, not war crimes, and also not the pro and contra debates on death penalty regularly presented in the media. My primary association was the simple reference in daily conversation to the fact that persons who do not move, who do not vigorously go about their business, whose eyes and facial expressions do not indicate lively and active adaptation to social contexts, appear dead. It is evident that life is understood as movement, and the effort to maintain movement as life. This is common sense on an everyday level. My interest, therefore, is aimed at the inner tensions a person will feel between complying with the demand to structure activity on the one hand, and succumbing to forces that lead to resignation on the other. What might such forces be, and how do they work to bereave a person of the motivation to vigorously perform the activities that are synonymous with life?

"Motivation" translates into Japanese in several ways. Here I have in mind not *dôki*, which is predominantly a technical term, but *yaru-ki*, an expression used in colloquial speech and containing the important concept of *ki*, energy. *Yaru-ki* could be rendered literally as "the energy that can be physically felt flowing through the body and inducing one to do something" and it is used as in English "to feel like doing (sth)".

The very idea of an exhaustive discussion of what might be "killing" *yaru-ki* in Japan would be presumptuous, as motivation and demotivation depend as much on outer forces as on inner dispositions which cannot be generalized. Rather, I wish here to present a limited number of perspectives based on Japanese language source material. Such material gives insights both into processes shaping present-day Japan and its dealings with the outside world and, on a more general level, into some lesser discussed aspects of what it might mean to acquire trans-cultural communicative competence.

We can say that in Japan the values stressed in all educational contexts – parent-child relationships, school, group activities, company training, manuals for proper social behavior etc. – are characterized by references to the body and exhortations to keep it actively and vigorously moving. Seen in a historical perspective there can be no doubt that the concept of energy (*ki*) forms an internalized frame of reference for all daily activity from massage to maintenance of social relations (cf. Yamada Kôin 1979; Mabuchi/Nanjô 1993, 1997). Anything that is supposed to function is always in a dynamic state and at the same time subject to shaping processes to prevent it from getting out of hand and becoming harmful or injurious. This is still true when a body is apparently immobile such as during reflection or meditation, states in which energy is thought of as vigorously moving through the body.

In the face of this internalized concept of energy it is particularly noteworthy that present-day debates in Japan so heavily focus on demotivation and unwillingness to move. Who or what, according to these debates, is preventing the flow of

movement, and by doing so in effect killing life, which cannot be upheld without movement?

In an ageing society like Japan it is no surprise that activity does not take place as fast and energetically as it did a decade or two ago. Neither is it a surprise that in an affluent society there is such a large offer of different life models that the wish to have children, and thus to be surrounded by youthful activity, may be rejected. Finally, it is also no surprise that exorbitant costs for education play a role in the very low birth rates. Japan's demographic structure therefore certainly contributes to killing flows of energy. However, what is of interest here are less external circumstances than inner conflicts that block – "kill" – bodily action and activity. In this paper I shall first ask how persons in Japan are urged, pushed and pressed to be physically active, and then consider some of the forces that might be hindering the very activity expected.

1.   Creating life: Urging the body to be active

1.1   Activity as fast, precise, structured movement

During a stay with a family with two children the frequent use of expressions for fast, precise and structured movement was striking. These expressions were addressed partly to the children and partly to the husband, and they sometimes implied direct and sometimes indirect criticism through negative reference to third persons.

„You are being *daradara* (dragging on, drifting along inefficiently); *guzuguzu* (hesitant, lingering about); *motamota* (slow, taking too much time); *osoi* (laggardly, late, behind schedule)! *uguki ga nibui* (your reflexes are slow, your movements make you look dull); *yôryô ga warui* (you handle things ineptly, clumsily); you are *bukiyô* (handling things awkwardly, lacking the finesse to do something neatly); sitting there *deento* (as if you had roots)! *ugokinasai* (move!); do things *sassa* (briskly!); *dondon* (get on, make progress!); *surasura* (in no time, fast and smoothly)! And take care to observe *tejun* (the correct procedure), *junjo* (the correct sequence of things), *tetsuki* (the way of moving and using your hands), or *ma no torikata* (the adequate length of intervals between your actions)!"

All these expressions were used to drive home the value of fast and precise, technically sophisticated, rhythmically well-structured, and in all aspects adequate bodily movement. Slow and ineffective movement was severely sanctioned.

1.2   Activity spurred by control and scolding

When focusing on motivation we need to reflect on how far it is intrinsic, and how far extrinsic factors can spur it, or lead to demotivation. To gain some insights I asked a group of students to write a short essay on being scolded and what this meant for them. It was impressive to see how several students echoed patterns of

introspection I had encountered in texts written 50 years ago (Ackermann 1992).
To cite one of the essays:

> The most memorable instance where someone showed anger (*ikari*) occurred when I was in the
> second year of senior high school. At that time, when I approached my teacher to discuss my fu-
> ture, he spoke to me in words that took me completely by surprise. He said: 'Your achievements
> at this point are being supplied merely through what you have saved up when you were at junior
> high school. If you continue this way you may not make it into a national university.' There was a
> point in what the teacher said. I was in my second year at senior high school, and the third year
> pupils had just withdrawn from extracurricular club activities (*bukatsu*). Therefore, ambitious as I
> was, I put all my energy into *bukatsu*, while for my studies I just did the necessary minimum. Ac-
> cordingly my marks in the trial examinations were not getting better.
>
> To such a *self* [sic] the words of the teacher had a shock-like impact. But I also sensed anger in
> his words. To a degree I had confidence in my abilities, and although my marks were not rising I
> still was above average. Coming to think of it I now feel ashamed, but at the time I was angry and
> thought, 'Why do I have to be told that!' Hereafter I invested more time in my studies. I felt
> vexed that the teacher needed to go that far. As I went along solving problem after problem I be-
> gan to realize: I was being soft with myself. He was right: My achievements were being supplied
> merely through what I had saved up at junior high school.
>
> If at the time I had not sensed what lay in the teacher's words and just continued as before, I
> would probably not be at this university now. Recalling all this I am filled with shame at *self*'s
> short-sightedness, but at the time I also felt a sense of achievement that I had managed to get this
> far. The teacher's anger, however, gave me motivation (*yaru-ki*) and sparked action. Today I am
> thankful for the teacher's guidance and the action I then took.

I would not hesitate to call this essay a classical example for emotional interaction
in Japanese. It consists on the one hand of an utterance by an elder or guiding per-
son. This utterance we would not by any stretch of imagination refer to as "anger"
as the writer does, though facial expression and tone of voice may have contributed
to such an interpretation. What the elder or guiding person has said then results in
intense feelings of shame and repentance about lacking self-control and in the end
motivates to work harder. Thereby "working harder" is understood primarily in its
physical, bodily sense of spending more hours and more energy learning.

1.3   What is life?

Encountering a foreign culture always requires us to ask what is giving the other
person's life its specific orientation, and what is giving this orientation its legitimacy.
For this it is helpful to study normative materials that provide certain persons with-
in whatever we define as a specific culture with sanctioning power and the author-
ity to request or to prohibit specific types of behavior. The resulting norms easily
(though not necessarily) translate into patterns of interaction defined as acceptable.

As normative we can understand the ethics schoolbook *Kokoro no nôto* (2002)
(Booklet (*nôto*) to form an inner compass (*kokoro*) for life), which spells out guide-
lines for the spiritual development in junior high schools. *Kokoro no nôto* has four
main sections:

A ("Growing through fixing the eyes on *self*"): I see myself reflected in a mirror. I see a body that needs to be *genki* (full of vigour, energy, good spirits); this pertains both to the spiritual and the physical level. However, being *genki* is subject to order in life, and this is brought about through self-control. On this basis effort must be developed; effort is something wonderful, it enables you to achieve goals. Everything lies in my own hands: how I judge things, act, or take on responsibility. My bodily self (*sugata*) moving forward step by step towards a dream and an idea is an encouraging (*tanomoshii*) sight. I make an all-out effort to like myself, but this demands constant self-improvement. I need to improve through fostering my own individual appeal. Again, I see myself in the mirror: My body does not appear *genki*. So I need to reconsider my *kokoro* (my inner compass).

B ("Developing empathy"): I go into the world and meet others. When I encounter someone I do so with respect. Respect is shown through *reigi* (etiquette and courtesy), a universal value among all mankind. Inner feelings must dock into outward form. Isn't it horrible to see younger pupils just mechanically greet the older pupils, and the older pupils not reply to the younger pupils? *Reigi* must be shown following the demands of Time – Place – Occasion. Verbal behavior and inner attitude must not get into disorder, yet situations of meeting require also empathy. Empathy forms the basis of friendship. It also demands understanding the opposite sex, and here each side is full of fixed abstract notions. However, every person has his/her own way of thinking. All opinions of men and women, young and old, and of all different characters need to be brought together.

C ("The meaning of living on this earth"): We reflect upon what a tiny facet mankind is in the hugeness of the universe. However, all life in it is precious and irreplaceable. So what does it mean to be human? Being human leads you to understand that you are weak and have an ugly side in you. Human strength means to overcome these handicaps, which include jealousy, vanity or arrogance. Life itself has three characteristics: it is accidental, finite, and an element in a sequence. Life is receiving and passing on through generations.

D ("Living as a member in, and as an element of, society"): Life is situated in society. There it is supported by all the other people around me, and I myself am supporting others. As a member of a group each individual shines brightly, like musicians in an orchestra. Of course, human beings do not want to feel bound. However, if you think about the balance of rights and duties, you will realize that no society can function without order and rules. Nobody lives alone, and we need to create common spaces in which we feel good (*kimochi ii*). We need to create a society on the basis of emotions of justice and fairness. And we must reflect on the meaning of work: We need to earn, we have to support our lives, we want to fulfill our dreams. At the same time we must not forget that our work is our contribution to society. All work is a profit for society, and through our work someone will be receiving a favor (*onkei*). (Concretely,) we are also members of our family, the place to which we return, even if only for one day. We take pride in our school and our comrades. We continue the school tradition fostered by those who went before us. We ask ourselves, "What can we do to make our school even nicer?" Our daily

lives are rooted in a region. The region has its streets, its traditions and festivals, its nature and its history, and that is where we feel at home (*furusato*). Thus we love our country, its seasons, its natural beauty, its sounds, its colours and its winds. As members of our country we make efforts to become aware of its traditions and pass them on. And as members of international society this love for our country is linked to the love for all countries. Japan is proud of its own culture and tradition within the framework of mutual dependence and cooperation.

Kokoro no nôto outlines a process of identity formation that is based on the interlocking of bodily and emotional levels and educates towards bodily and emotional movement adjusted to a grid-like frame of order. This frame is made up of the people I encounter, of elder and younger people, of ancestors and descendants, of my school, region and country. The process described seeks to motivate activity to shape *self*, and by so doing contribute to society on a local, regional, national and international level.

1.4 Life as the skill to shape the body

Individuals and the media in Japan have been discussing the phenomenon of *kireru* (literally "to snap") with deepest concern. *Kireru* refers to the fact that particularly young people suddenly "explode" and lose any form of self-control, usually with no advance warning and often fatal results. Accordingly, books like Saitô Takashi: *Kodomo wa naze kireru no ka* (Why do children "explode"?) (1999) are bestsellers.

Saitô approaches his subject by measuring the behavior of young people against normative standards understood to have developed logically and organically. He begins his argument with the statement that *kireru* is caused by the body turning cold, in other words, by withdrawing from activity. For Saitô human action is rooted in the unity of thinking and body. For him, therefore, *kireru* reflects a state where one has sunk into dark thoughts and given in to negative feelings. As a consequence the body no longer reacts. Saitô concedes that indeed non-reacting bodies seeing no purpose in making efforts began to appear from the 1970s on (cf. Nishiyama 2000; Ackermann 2006).

The ability to endure, both mentally and physically, has also largely disappeared. It is difficult to understand, says Saitô, why present-day youths who have done something undesirable do not recognize their faults and endure the corresponding blame. Controlling feelings in this sense is physical and mental technique, and techniques can be developed. Saitô sees the principal duty of schools precisely here, that is, to attach human development to the development of concrete techniques that can be perfected.

Anger, says Saitô, when designed as a technical masterpiece, is impressive and consistent. However, in recent times people just "explode". No awareness of *hara* (belly, abdomen) can be felt. Also the levels of reference are mixed up, since to "explode" indicates priority of the private level, which turns *self* into a despot (*tonosama*). Such youths oriented towards the private level live like in a capsule, seal-

ing themselves off in a comfortable world for themselves. However, a cold, sealed-off body cannot function as a multiplier of energy.

Saitô goes on: Nowadays young people speak of themselves as *darui* (feeling heavy like lead) and of the world as *mendôkusai* (a terrible bother). They have no energy to be persistent. But to be persistent and approach a goal in a concentrated manner techniques (*gi*) are necessary, and these require practice (*renshû*). This would lead to joy (*yorokobi*) and the feeling of being "I myself" (*jikkan*).

The traditional Japanese culture of the body (*shintai bunka*), maintains Saitô, has been lost in post-war education. The best proof for this is that effort is no longer understood as a technical concept. Moreover, traditional Japanese culture of the body focuses on the ground, that is, on the feeling of one's body having weight. When this is understood then the energy for life will rise from the *hara* and be coupled to the act of breathing. Bodily rhythm follows a vertical axis, from which the *waza* (techniques, skills) and the *kata* (the strictly shaped basic forms of movement) develop. That way bodily, physical self (*jiko*) becomes joined with the mental sense of self (*jibun*).

Shaping a body in a way that it does not "explode", according to Saitô, is the direct opposite to the type of shaping we find in military tradition. There no natural posture is trained with a deep-lying centre of weight, and no deep breathing is trained, which would let the body rest in itself. Moreover, in the disastrous American influence of the 1960s *kitaeru* (forging) and *neru* (kneading) of the body are unknown categories, while feeling free and relaxing are emphasized. Post-war education has scorned the fact that the aesthetics of life are rooted in techniques that let rhythm and energy flow through the body and are not acquired with the intension of winning or losing.

So much for Saitô. In the four "stations of observation" I have presented the concept of life could be seen as defined by the flow of energy and movement. In 1.1 a family was introduced in which rebukes sought to shape bodily action in a brisk, precise, and technically sophisticated manner. 1.2 was a pupil's essay in which a slight reprimand set in motion the process of intensifying bodily efforts and perseverance. In 1.3 we looked at an ethics schoolbook, seeking insight into normative concepts of forming personality in Japan. We discovered the interlocking of body and emotion, in other words, of the physical and the mental feeling of *self*. On the basis of being aware of *self* in a concrete natural and social context the shaping of *self* needs to follow patterns of order defined by where *self* stands. Hence the emphasis on becoming aware of the distance between *self* and *other*, i. e. *self* and elder or younger persons, ancestors or descendents, persons in need of help, the school, the region, or the country. In 1.4 finally we picked up a bestseller dealing with the alarming increase of *kireru* ("exploding"). Here again we could see the extent to which life is understood as movement, the lack of which is termed "being cold". Being cold, in turn, leads to withdrawal and in the end to "exploding", a phenomenon that is rooted in purely private motifs. The author, however, will not permit the excuse that this development may be linked to changes in environment and social context since the 1970s. Rather, he sees the normative values of precise, socially

oriented movement as universal, and the teaching of appropriate training techniques as possible.[1] These ideas are interspersed with accusations against post-war education.

Observance of *self* as a moving physical entity, and the shaping of this moving entity in accordance with a clearly defined temporal and local setting, is central in all examples. Feelings of obligation, indebtedness and guilt are expected to support the motivation to move the body, which is at the same time a personal and a social body. Thus we may understand the anxieties many sense in Japan when they see persons who withdraw from social settings or refuse to shape their bodies in accordance with the very principle of life, which is to receive and to pass on. Who, many wonder, is killing the motivation to move, in other words, the flows of energy necessary for personal as well as social life?

2. Killing life: Blocking the energy to be active

Putting blame on inactive pupils, on youths who withdraw, or on the representatives of post-war education, might have been done with the assumption that feelings of guilt will spark increased activity (compare the student's essay in 1.2). Whatever the intentions, it is remarkable how this pattern of arousing emotions of guilt, which may well be rooted in Buddhist teachings on coming to terms with the world through self-awareness, is carried on through generations both in written texts and verbal communication. However, considering the context of the late 20th/ early 21st century, we may ask whether such feelings of guilt do not end up killing rather than rousing motivation. How can accusation and assignment of guilt lead to desired results if there is no clear frame of rules and values into which a person can ruefully return? With this question in mind I shall in the following discuss four areas where the call for the body to be active may no longer be maintaining life the way it has done in earlier times.[2]

2.1 Disintegration of a calculable system of reference

In Japan, killing of motivation is a process I see closely linked to the contradictions a non-occidental society is particularly exposed to in the modern world, because its reference system for proper, correct behavior is blurred by extremely divergent yet competing values. A non-occidental society like Japan – which is an island society

---

1   "Traditional Japanese body culture" is explicitly discussed also in Yatabe (2007). Yatabe discusses on the one hand *hara* and breathing techniques (i. e. East Asian medicine), on the other hand the model role of Buddha statues symbolizing perfect physical and mental equilibrium.

2   My discussion cannot avoid a certain degree of generalization. However, I am picking up debates that have been serious enough for great concern among large segments of Japanese society, voiced personally, in print, and in internet blogs. Important sources apart from interviews and communication have been the day to day debates reflected throughout from around 1995 to 2010 in the major Japanese newspapers as well as weekly magazines, especially *AERA* or *Tôyô Keizai*.

on top of it – will over a long period of time have used its own idiosyncratic means to create a calculable frame in which individual and collective trust can function. In the case of Japan, where no institutionalized church has exerted power and influence and the organization of life has therefore not taken place within a dichotomy between sacred and secular, I would not hesitate to maintain that a metaphysical concept of order which has hitherto worked on a practical level remains unquestioned. Japan's economic success up to the 1990s was clearly based on the concept of universal social and natural order we can still today recognize in normative materials like *Kokoro no nôto*. However, this concept of order, so closely associated with what Japan has considered to be genuinely (but not essentially) Japanese, is not only historical heritage. Rather, it also formed the ideological basis for political and economic calculation in an advanced economy competing for global markets (cf. Matsushita 2009). Here Japan consciously brought to attention among its own population non-occidental values in answer to structures abroad which in the 1960s/70s increasing numbers of its businessmen subjectively experienced as less shaped, less holistic, less efficient.

Whether on the basis of tradition or out of economic calculation, the Japanese concept of order always revolves around the idea of balance and control between service and return service, performance and return performance, movement and counter-movement. Motivation thus is clearly directed towards activity which will engender counter-activity.[3] As we can see in the ethics textbook *Kokoro no nôto*, this concept of order also underlies Japan's self-image as a member of the international, globalized world. However, in a globalized world such a metaphysical understanding of order may not work, as the kind of reciprocity Japan relies on and sees as natural can only function if the corresponding education of both the giving and the receiving side is compatible. Thus Japan's difficulties in international dealings and the resulting demotivation today are clearly visible.[4]

But also within, Japan has seen the collapse of norms. Authors like Yamada Masahiro (particularly well-known for his book *Kibô kakusa shakai* – freely translatable as "The increasing gap between those who still have hope and those who have lost hope") (2004) point to the frequent use of the expression *mukuwarenai*

---

3 Generosity, a characteristic trait of Japanese thinking, must be viewed separately. It can basically be linked to Buddhism with its concept of doing something to honour ancestors, or to the idea of happiness through not clinging to the material word. These Buddhist elements, however, are no contradiction to the principle that dealings among healthy adult social players must strictly adhere to the rules of reciprocity.

4 Fontes (2005) shows how difficult it can be for western persons even with decades of experience in Japan to interpret what they see as passivity and lack of motivation. To Fontes the reasons for lack of motivation lie in inadequate techniques of English teaching, in Japan's formalism, in rigid interpretations of *mibun* (status) and in fixation on *rieki* (profits expected for favors granted). Fontes appears neither aware of the fact that the Japanese rules, precisely because they emphasize reciprocity, can provide a high degree of emotional security, nor of the fact that demotivation may be caused more than anything else by being forced to adapt to foreign patterns of behavior, including the production of the appropriate sounds and gestures of a foreign language.

("I am not rewarded for my efforts, it's no use making an effort").[5] Indeed, the changes since 1990 have been vast and in many ways devastating. Accordingly, in the Japanese language the word *risutora* ("restructuring") is in everybody's mouth, and it can even be used as a verb ("He was *risutora*-ed"), meaning "He lost his job, he was put on the road" (cf. also Kauffmann 2001). The burst of the economic bubble, deregulation, outsourcing, the toppling of the rigid but reliable ranking system according to seniority and of lifelong employment, performance-oriented ranking and pay, largely abstract norms in place of face-to-face contacts, to mention but a few keywords, have made exactly those values appear obsolete that had formed the backbone of education until around 1995 and had been emotionally cherished as non-occidental and therefore essential for Japan's identity.[6]

The breakdown of the employment system established in the decades in which Japan became an urban, service sector oriented economy, showed the resulting conflict of values in a salient way, as after 1990 for several years running (and since the 2008 again) many companies hardly took on new employees. Thus existing employees could not rise in rank or gain the necessary experience that befitted their seniority in a structure of giving and taking between *sempai* (senior) and *kôhai* (junior). Moreover, when employment did rise, many who had not found jobs in the previous years were too old to fit the requirements of companies.

Thus the call to be motivated, which is invariably also a demand for bodily performance, often appears cynical at a time when no return on invested energy can be promised. Lacking a reliable frame of orientation the social norm of "looking into the mirror" and seeking faults in oneself thus no longer spurs motivation and, as Yamada discusses, can easily result in a fatalistic view of one's society, which is felt to be made up of *kachigumi* (winners) and *makegumi* (loosers).

2.2 Criticism and control

Anyone who has lived and worked in Japan will know that in-group control strongly determines the patterns of daily life (cf. also Foljanty-Jost et al. 2003). However, like all forms of dynamic movement in Japan should do, also processes of controlling follow the principle of reciprocity. As the receiver of a favor I feel obliged to return it in form of a high-quality performance, service or benefit, and I offer a high-quality performance, service or benefit in order to secure a favor. The circle was closed, and there was no escape from it. As I will show presently, verbal and non-verbal communication in Japanese is completely geared to marking the rules of reciprocal obligation, and should I dare to disobey these rules those who had

---

5   I must here draw attention to but cannot go into details of the many pro and contra debates on this
    point that followed Yamada's publication.
6   The number of publications for a general, non-scholarly readership dwelling on related questions
    is huge. Here I shall only mention Jô (2006) and Miura (2006). Jô, who turns out to be propagat-
    ing his activities as consultant, however, blames precisely the seniority and lifelong employment
    systems for demotivation.

granted me favors, e. g. elder and higher ranking persons, would put heavy blame on me. In their eyes I would have shamed them, since my breaching of rules indicates nothing less than their lack of authority to educate and control me. Thus it is they who would have to apologize for any blunder on my part, a situation that would make my sense of guilt insupportable.

However, criticism and control today occur less and less in direct personal contact, which in the Japanese understanding of long-term efficiency had received highest priority, even though it was one of the factors leading to long working hours and after-work drinking and talking. Today's far more anonymous forms of control are no less strict than previously, and those held responsible for breaches of conduct by their group's members still fear nothing as much as being put to shame. In a society that is turning to anonymous control the corresponding breakdown of trust is palpable. It can result in the following wording of a reply to a European university's wish to talk to Japanese students in a seminar on intercultural relations:

> You say you would like to have a discussion with Japanese students. However, investigations in which students or members of the university are involved are extremely difficult to carry out. You would have to obtain permission in writing at least six months previously. Moreover, you might have to request permission several times, until all details have been cleared. Your request must then be submitted to a university committee. When you meet the students you will not be able to ask direct questions, as this could lead to problems. We beg you to understand this point. Also, the students are busy job hunting and at the same time completing their graduation theses. However, there are a few students who have formed a circle in which discussions with foreigners are possible. We could meet these students informally, and the group leaders are certainly looking forward to seeing you.

This type of control neither motivates students nor visitors to be active in any way that would demand improvising and seizing chances.

2.3   The complex structure of communication

Precise adaptation of movement to individual constellations which decide the pattern of giving and taking, receiving and passing on – we could also speak of the correct shaping of flows of energy from a point that gives it to a point that receives it – undeniably structures all Japanese communication. Thus handbooks for correct behavior (including speech) are often hundreds of pages thick, and they pertain to all variables of a communicative act: shape of movement, speed and rhythm of movement, organization of movement, posture, degree of liveliness, gaze, emphasis and emotion, exchange of gifts, letters and greetings, seating order, and, of course, language itself. Also, an increasing number of instruction manuals are appearing in an effort to give communication by cell phone and internet its correct order.

On the level of language we need to decide on different registers of formality, and must become competent in the choice of expressions that mark actions, objects, attributes or qualities as belonging to *self* or *self*'s group, or to the person spoken to

or about, always appropriately indicating the constellation in which they stand, for instance, who is indebted to whom, and who must be given respect or humbled.

Quite particularly sensitive areas in communication are references to bodily states of speaker, other and third party. Here – precisely because of their direct impact on the other person's physical sense of *self* – mistakes that would make persons appear inappropriately high or low, or inappropriately giving or receiving something, or approached by expressions that inappropriately mark psychological distance, can easily be taken as a direct offence. Some examples can give an idea of this:

tabemasu (someone eats) – *meshiagarimasu* (a respected person or guest eats);
isogashii (someone is busy) – *o-isogashii* (the respected person spoken to is busy);
kanashii (sad) – *kanashigatte imasu* (I venture to say that somebody is apparently sad);
shitte imasu (someone knows/I know) – *zonjiagemasu* (I know something pertaining to the respected person spoken to) – *zonjiagete orimasu* (I humbly know something pertaining to the respected person spoken to);
aimasu (somebody meets someone) – *o-me ni kakarimasu* (I meet a respected person);
kaimasu (somebody buys) – *kawaremasu* (a respected person buys) – *o-kai-age itadakimasu* (I am humbly aware of the favor that you buy);
mimasu (somebody sees something) – *go-ran ni narimasu* (a respected person sees something) – *haiken shimasu* (I humbly see something);
kimasu (somebody comes) – *irasshaimasu* (a respected person is physically around, comes, goes) – *o-mie ni narimasu* (a senior or teacher comes) – *o-koshi ni narimasu* (a guest or someone I must serve comes) – *o-koshi kudasaimasu* (a guest or someone I must serve does me the favor of coming);
Yamada-san (you/he/she Mr or Mrs Yamada) – *Yamada-sama* (you/he/she respected Mr or Mrs Yamada) – *Yamada* (I Yamada; Mr or Mrs Yamada, member of my own group/company; Yamada, my husband) – *Yamada-kun* (you/he/occasionally she), Yamada, for whom I as senior or elder comrade am responsible).

In addition to the modification of words and sentences an immense number of fixed expressions need to be correctly and immediately placed in order to keep on signaling the complementary relationship between two sides. Examples would be: *o-matase shimashita* (I have kept you waiting), *yoroshiku o-negai itashimasu* (I humbly beg you to favor me/consider my wish), *kon'aida dômo* (last time I saw you I received your favor); *o-sewa ni narimashita* (I/somebody I am responsible for/someone in my family am/is recipient of your favor), *taihen na tokoro môshiwake arimasen* (in this situation of stress/distress I am taking the liberty of approaching you).

In actual communication, these differentiations, indicating where *self* stands in relation to another person, need to be linked to the equivalent non-verbal parameters such as bowing, distance, posture, gaze, smile, vitality, way of walking or run-

ning etc. Finally, activities of longer duration must be correctly performed and shaped according to the requirements of specific constellations, examples being entertaining, accompanying, giving, taking, carrying something for someone, organizing, or gift giving. The latter demands a great amount of time for necessary preparations, is usually costly, and on the part of the receiver requires careful deliberations as to the return gift or favor.[7]

A human being's capacity for situation specific learning is certainly huge. So it is no surprise that good communicators in Japanese develop a stunning virtuosity when it comes to the usage of these many shadings and differentiations, necessary for the correct placement of *self*, other and third person. However, the younger generation often lacks the prerequisites for training this kind of communication. Very much more isolated patterns of living both within the family and in society at large, and therefore also few chances for emotional identification with a wide variety of social constellations, are quite clearly one factor leading to fear of committing blunders and losing face, and a preference to withdraw and evade communication, or to mechanically internalized actions and phrases from manuals, which results – as the Japanese themselves are quick to point out – in strangely emotionless utterances.[8]

2.4 Fear of the outside world

The complexity and intricacies of interpersonal relationships and their shaping on the levels of verbal and non-verbal communication are considerable. In effect this means that persons who have not been socialized in Japan will either not comply with the communicative rules, or be a burden to those responsible for securing the smooth functioning of a group or institution. Japan is theoretically very much aware of the need to diversify the competences of its workforce and introduce more knowledge about non-Japanese societies, yet the sheer lack of experience in dealing with such diversity severely demotivates persons from outside, both foreign or returnees. For many, fears that diversity would upset the concept of order appears insurmountable in a society where motivation is geared to the calculation of reciprocal gain and therefore dependent on compatible posture and movement (*tachii furumai*) between a giving and a receiving side. It is indeed instructive to note that children of foreign parents and non-Japanese appearance but brought up in a Japa-

---

7 *Dacapo* April 5/2006 gives us insight into what it calls "common sense" with regard to communicative behavior. I have discussed this issue in Ackermann (2007) and pointed out how generalized ideas about adequate polite behavior are interlaced with concrete rules, which makes individual and subjective interpretation and adaptation of the former impossible.

8 Individual groups seek all kinds of ways to get around this problem, but the strategies developed – mainly the outright warning that the rules will be simplified – are only permissible among its members. Publications by Tatsumi Nagisa (2005), for instance, try to give legitimacy to these developments. It is no coincidence that in Japan women are generally more innovative in questioning norms, as the rigid order of gender roles gives them a more marginalized position, from which it is easier to "disrupt" traditions without risking shame and sanctions.

nese context may appear "totally" Japanese if posture and movement are Japanese, a fact that says a lot about the holistic nature of Japanese social identity.

The Japanese fear of non-Japanese behavior is not a matter of lacking will or interest. Of course, there are fears related to persons who cannot read and write the Japanese language. But first and above all the fears pertain to incompetence in movement, behavior and the ability to interpret social constellations. In this connection it must be recalled that Japanese educational institutions train both the technical as well as the social requirements to enter adult society, which ties young Japanese abroad to Japanese schools and easily cuts them off from gaining experience in the local society. Moreover, now that the outlook for young people to find employment in Japan is bleak, it is not at all surprising that the number of students motivated to study abroad is declining (cf. JSPS 4/2009).

Conclusion: Being or not being motivated to live

In Japanese culture life means movement, energy (ki). Movement that speaks of life and energy is orderly, well-shaped, precise and fast. Orderly movement is movement that performs its functions of linking complementary units such as bottom and top, past and future, young and old, the coming and the going. In this sense all communication is movement, and it can take shape in form of a smile or a greeting.

I have emphasized the degree of fear that is felt in Japan when movement of this kind is absent, and when elements that should be part of a complementary figure cut themselves off from the world, turn "cold" and lose their dynamic drive. Conceptually, something that doesn't move is dead. Authors like Saitô, persons responsible for organizations, or materials claiming to be normative, thus present ideal visions of movement. However, nowadays the sense of these visions is not clear to many who see the associated sanctions when movement is absent but no reward when it is performed. This is all the more so given the fact that movement in Japanese usually means vigorous and shaped (i. e. painstakingly trained) activity of body and limbs.

Though basically true in all cultures, the heavy weight of tradition certainly can be felt in Japan, and it cannot be questioned by any one single individual. Thus individuals continue to react in a very sensitive way if they sense little prospect for fair and reciprocal giving and taking – which is what movement is all about. New forms of movement mainly in form of electronic exchange and reciprocity may be developing fast. At the same time, however, fear of the incalculable is drastically affecting the inter-generational relationships, as it often leads to conflict when an ever increasing number of older persons use their authority over a steadily dwindling number of younger persons. Intergenerational friction arising from ambiguous demands can be well observed in schools in the tensions between pupils, younger teachers, head masters and supervisors, or similarly in companies.

As we saw in the ethics schoolbook, the Japanese norms, still well-protected through measures of sanction and reward, demand first and above all looking into the mirror and reflecting upon *self*, mentally and physically. Once *self* is firmly in focus, *self*'s movements and bodily activity need to be shaped in accordance with where *self* stands, that is, what *self* must give and what *self* must take. However, if *yaru-ki* – the motivation – to do so fails, then conceptually, if not also literally, the process of life ceases. In Japanese perspective, forces that stifle *yaru-ki*, therefore, can be said to be killing life.

References

Ackermann, P. (1992): "Who am I?" – Testimonies of silent controversies in Japanese schoolchildren's compositions. In: S. Formanek/S. Linhart (eds.), *Japanese Biographies: Life histories, life cycles, life stages.* Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, S. 43-56.

Ackermann, P. (2006): Parents, children and the body. In: *Revue d'Études Japonaises du CEEJA.* Benkyô-kai n°2. Publications Orientalistes de France, S. 9-20.

Ackermann, P. (2007): Strategies of belonging: the individual assimilation of normative values in Japan. In: P. Ackermann/B. White, Strategies of belonging: Collective construction of narrative continuity. *Diskussionsbeiträge Erlanger Japanstudien* Nr. 14, S. 80-85.

Dacapo April 5, 2006: Shakaijin no dai-jôshiki – shinnyû shain no kiso jôshiki – OL, salaryman no shin-jôshiki (The great common sense of adult members of society – Basic common sense for new employees – New common sense for office ladies and office staff).

Enomoto Aki (2009): *Otaku no koto ga omoshiroi hodo wakaru hon* (A book to understand "otaku" [people with obsessive interests, particularly *anime*, *manga*, video games] in a really enjoyable way). Tokyo: Chûkei shuppan.

Foljanty-Jost, G./Metzler, M./Metzler, A./Erbe, A. (2003): *Kommunizieren, Kontrollieren, Korrigieren. Gewaltprävention an japanischen Mittelschulen.* Frankfurt/M. etc.: Peter Lang.

Fontes, L. (2005): *Nihon de wa oshiete kurenai jinsei de taisetsu na koto. Supein shinpu no kyôiku-ron* (Important things in life that are not taught in Japan. A Spanish priest's view of education). Tokyo: PHP Kenkyûjo.

Formanek, S./Linhart, S. (1992): *Japanese Biographies: Life histories, life cycles, life stages.* Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Jô Shigeyuki (2006): *Wakamono wa naze 3nen de yameru no ka? Nenkô joretsu ga ubau nihon no mirai* (Why do young persons give up their job after 3 years? The seniority system is depriving Japan of a future). Tokyo: Kôbunsha.

JSPS (4/2009): Deutsche Gesellschaft der Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Stipendiaten, Rundschreiben 04/2009

Kauffmann, C. (2001): Risutora. Japans Weg in die globale Gesellschaft. In: *Schriftenreihe der Universität Regensburg*, Bd. 27, S. 9-26.

Kokoro no nôto (Booklet (*nôto*) to form an inner compass (*kokoro*) for life) (2002) (ed. by Monbu kagaku-shô/Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Tokyo: Akatsuki kyôiku tosho.

Mabuchi Satoshi/Nanjô Megumi (1993): *Hairiyasui mise, ureru mise – Zukai Akushon hanbaijutsu* (Shops that people like to enter – shops that sell. The art of selling by means of action). Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbunsha.

Mabuchi Satoshi/Nanjô Megumi (1997): *Zoku Hairiyasui mise, ureru mise – Zukai Akushon hanbaijutsu.* (Continuation – Shops that people like to enter – shops that sell. The art of selling by means of action). Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbunsha.

Mathews, G. (1996): *What makes life worth living? How Japanese and Americans make sense of their worlds.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mathews, G. (2004): Seeking a career, finding a job. How young people enter and resist the Japanese world of work. In: G. Mathews/B. White (eds.), *Japan's changing generations*. London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, p. 121-136.

Mathews, G./White, B. (2004): *Japan's changing generations*. London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Matsushita Kônosuke (2009): *Matsushita Kônosuke no tetsugaku. Ikani iki, ikani sakaeruka* (The philosophy of Matsushita Kônosuke. How to live, how to prosper). Tokyo: PHP bunko.

McVeigh, B. (2002): *Japanese higher education as myth*. Armonk etc.: M. E. Sharpe.

Miura Atsushi (2006): *Nanmin sedai. Dankai junia karyû-ka hakusho* (The refugee generation. White paper to show how the children of the baby-boom generation are dropping out of middle-class living standards). Tokyo: Seikatsujin shinsho, NHK.

Nishiyama Akira (2000): *Shônen sabaibaru nôto, kazoku no naka de 'ikinuku' tame ni* (Notes of survival (strategies) of young people – how to 'live through' (the difficulties) in one's family). Tokyo: Shûeisha shinsho.

Poole, G. (2010): *The Japanese professor. An Ethnography of a university faculty*. Rotterdam etc.: Sense Publishers.

Saitô Takashi (1999): *Kodomotachi wa naze kireru no ka* (Why do children "explode"?). Tokyo: Chikuma shobô (Reprint 2005).

Tatsumi Nagisa (2005): *Nihonjin no Shin sahô. Shinpuru de, shitsurei no nai otsukiai.* (New rules of etiquette for Japanese. Simpler, but not impolite ways of social interaction). Tokyo: Gentôsha.

Yamada Kôin/Shirota Fumihiko/Hayashi Kôji (1979): *Tôyô igaku. Kiso-hen.* (Eastern Medicine. Basics). Tokyo: Gakushû kenkyûsha.

Yamada Masahiro (2004): *Kibô kakusa shakai. 'Makegumi' no zetsubôkan ga nihon wo hikisaku* (The increasing gap between those who still have hope and those who have lost hope. The losers who have lost hope will tear Japan apart). Tokyo: Chikuma shobô.

Yatabe Hidemasa (2007): *Utsukushii nihon no shintai* (The beauty of the body in Japan). Tokyo: Chikuma shinsho.

Newspapers and magazines: Aera (Asahi Shinbun Weekly); Shûkan Tôyô Keizai (Weekly Toyo Keizai); Asahi Shinbun (1995 through 2010): Topics: Employment and job hunting; reduction of employees; the "employment ice-age"; the generation that grew up in the employment ice-age after the burst of the economic bubble; not having *senpai* or *kôhai*.