

When North Americans arrive in Japan for the first time, they notice surprising lifestyle differences. For example, Japanese take off their shoes not only before entering homes, but also at the front door of hospitals, temples and many other places.

5 Toilets are equipped with warm, cleaning sprays, and vending machines offer an unbelievable variety of products. North Americans are also surprised at unusual tastes such as green tea ice cream and pickled-plum rice balls. All these new experiences give the visitor to Japan the feeling that they are in a new and
10 sometimes bizarre culture. However, these examples represent only surface experiences of much deeper cultural values.

In most cases, people are not conscious of their own values; instead, they view their culture and behavior as simply acting naturally. For example, when Japanese people meet each other
15 for the first time they tend to bow. North Americans find it natural to shake hands in the same situation. Within the family, Japanese think it is natural to sleep together with their children for several years after the child's birth, partly in order to develop a feeling of dependence. On the other hand, North Americans
20 generally sleep separately from their children soon after birth because they feel the child should develop a sense of independence. By comparing behavior in this way, it is possible to notice some general patterns where the values held by Japanese and North Americans are different. Although the values of the two

societies are different in many ways, it is important to note that there are also many similarities. We will focus only on the differences in this book because this is where misunderstanding can occur.

Perhaps the strongest value difference between Japanese 5 and North Americans involves status relationships. In North America, the idea that all people are created equal has been a basic principle for several centuries and is written in North America's founding documents. Ideas about equality grew partly 10 out of ancient Greece and, later, Renaissance thinking. The experience of Europeans who first came to North America to escape poverty, the law, and seek religious freedom made their dislike of inequality even stronger. Therefore, North America is said to be a horizontal society, which means that people of all 15 ages and positions are thought to be quite equal. Naturally, there is still much inequality in North America. For instance, minorities sometimes have difficulty renting an apartment or getting a job, just because of their skin color. However, people like to think that everyone is equal. On the other hand, in vertical 20 societies, like Japan, older people clearly have higher status than younger people, teachers have higher status than students, and so on. This idea came partly from Confucius in ancient China who thought that a vertical society was needed to maintain order. Later, Japan's *shoguns* made this idea even stronger. Today, 25 although feudalism has ended in Japan, it is still very much a vertical society.

Examples of Japan's vertical society and North America's horizontal society can be seen everywhere. In Japanese courts, judges make the final decisions, but in North American courts, a group of people taken from society, called a jury, often makes 30

the decision. A jury consists of twelve people chosen from the general public, including doctors, business people, housewives and so on. Therefore, instead of one or more high-status judges deciding one's fate, as in Japan, North Americans can choose to
5 have ordinary people judge their guilt or innocence.

Equally important to status relationships is whether a culture is group- or individual-oriented. North Americans are known for their individualism, which may have come with the early settlers who were given land that they had to clear and
10 farm themselves. Early American heroes, such as Daniel Boone, were so individualistic that it is said they would move as soon as they could see smoke from a new neighbor's chimney. Christianity's focus on the individual (Chapter 3) has also encouraged individualism. In contrast, Japanese group orientation is said to
15 have its roots in early agricultural village life where cooperation was needed in order to grow a successful rice crop. In this sense, it may be true that group or individual orientation arises at least partly out of the type of land and climate that people live in.

In present-day society, examples of group orientation in
20 Japan and individual orientation in North America are plentiful. In the workplace, Japanese are known for seldom changing jobs, while North Americans often do so. In Japan, leaving one's group is a very big step, but North Americans, as individuals, seldom imagine they will stay in one job for their entire working
25 lives. People in North America believe that it is natural to change groups to improve oneself. In fact, the average American has nine jobs before the age of 33.

Besides differences in status relationships and group or individual orientation, there are several other contrasting pat-
30 terns in Japanese and North American culture. One of these

patterns is the *process-product* contrast. In Japan, because children learn about group values from an early age, they slowly learn that in order to be good group members, they should behave in the correct way so that they do not break the harmony or stand out in the group. This means that as people grow up, it is often more important to do things with the correct or proper form than to do so in a creative or even better way. In Japan, there is a correct ‘way’ to do almost everything, including bowing, writing kanji, wrapping gifts and so on. In this sense, Japan is a process society. In North America, since people have fewer concerns about group harmony, children learn that they have a right to behave and reach their goals in their own way. This means people grow up to think that the end result, or the product, is more important than the process. When the golfer Tiger Woods first visited Japan, he was asked on TV to describe the perfect golf swing. However, he answered that each person has to develop his or her own perfect swing.

Other patterns that are also worth mentioning here concern risk avoidance and communication context. Japanese are said to make a great effort to avoid risk. Japanese children hear the word *abunai* (dangerous) daily, which is one example showing that Japanese try to avoid risk. North Ameri-



Tiger has his own perfect swing

cans, who worry less about risk, give their children more freedom. As for communication, Japanese is said to be a high-context language. This means Japanese people can communicate many of their ideas without using words, which is similar to
5 people in many other group-oriented cultures. North Americans speak English, which tends to be a low-context language. This means that words are needed to communicate. The idea of *ishin denshin*, or heart-to-heart communication, is quite strange to English speakers. In individual-oriented cultures, communication is lower context due to historical reasons. There has always
10 been more mixing of people in Europe and North America and therefore, high-context communication, typical of group-oriented cultures, is less developed.

In the following chapters, the patterns mentioned here will
15 be further discussed and applied to various aspects of society.