

Hon. Shoei Utsuda, the Chairman,

Hon. Kimio Kase, the President,

Deans, Members of the academic staff, distinguished invitees,

Graduates who will be receiving Masters' degrees today,

First and foremost, I make this opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations to all graduates who are awarded with the M.A and M.B.A degrees today from the International University of Japan which is a world renowned Graduate School, marking another victorious achievement of their lives.

Secondly, I express my sincere gratitude to the University Senate including the Chairman, Mr. Shoei Utsuda, for providing me an opportunity to deliver the keynote speech at this most prestigious occasion.

As a person who followed higher education in Japan, I am well aware that opportunities to gain international level higher education in English language are quite rare in Japan. Furthermore, graduate schools that offer a high level of international recognition are even rarer. All of you are very fortunate to have been able to receive Masters' level qualifications from a graduate school that is able to hone your wisdom. A large number of Sri Lankans have previously passed out from your university having obtained their post-graduation. They are employed as company owners, managers and administrators in Sri Lanka, Japan and other countries. As you are aware of, there are two Sri Lankan professors also serving this university. Therefore, as the Ambassador for Sri Lankans, I consider this opportunity given to me to address this academic gathering, a tribute to my country, Sri Lanka.

Several decades have lapsed since the commencement of globalization of the world as a result of the advancement of information Technology and its speed and the advancement of transportation and the speed of its expansion. Although it was assumed

that the whole world would become one single village with the introduction of Satellite technology, a completely different atmosphere is being created at the moment. 'The political, economic and cultural precedence which prevailed in the twentieth century are being subjected to challenge and collapse at present. Principles of the eastern world are sprouting up in place of western political ideologies and democracy. Global instability has sprout out from the cultural conflicts which reached their climax and got transformed in to armed conflicts.

As students of international relations or management in such a global environment, I think that you have had the opportunity to focus on theories of personal relations and management adopted in Japan, the country that you are studying in. Perhaps the question as to how a nation that lives on a group of small islands replete not with resources but with natural disasters is able to conquer the world; once in terms of military power and a second time in terms of economic power may have crossed your mind. Perhaps you have studied the unique Japanese management theories and personal relationship theories which paved way to such victories. I believe that Nihon Bunka Ron, or, principles of Japanese culture are consciously or unconsciously rooted deep within the minds of the Japanese people as the basic principles that gave rise to such theories. Culture is everything that is around us. It is not permanent. It is in a state of flux. Japanese culture too is changing rapidly. However, its substance is mature and stable. It does not change so rapidly. For a period of about 9 years, I too had the privilege of immersing myself in the way of life that is built upon these cultural principles and live and learn the Japanese way of life. Now, I will set before you, a few case studies derived from that experience.

A well known international conglomerate cultivates plantains in 4600 hectares of land in my country. They are asking for 1000 more hectares to expand their cultivation. Another Japanese company is requesting land from my country for the cultivation of oil palm which is used to generate electricity in Japan. Further, a Singaporean company is to be given 62,000 acres for the cultivation of sugarcane. Forest land is being cleared

to provide the landless with a single storey house and a compound. With the limitation of forest lands, wild elephants breach villages. Forests in the country has reduced to less than 29% by now. On the contrary, in Japan, 67% of the land remains as forests which are considered sacred. The remaining land is used for agriculture, industries, businesses, sports and entertainment as well as building of houses.

The staple food of the people of my country is rice. With the blessings of the monsoons, we are able to cultivate paddy during three seasons a year. However, the rice that is produced in the country is barely sufficient for our local consumption. Rice is often imported from other countries. Staple food of the people of Japan too is rice. Sake, which is the main alcoholic beverage enjoyed in Japan, is produced from rice. Senbei, the popular variety of crackers too is produced using rice. However, paddy is cultivated only once a year. The yield is sufficient for the production of food and beverages consumed by the 127 million people living in the country.

The Japanese have chosen to live in compact houses built adjacent to each other while letting the forest and mountains be. I too lived in Japan with my family for 7 years in a house that is as big as ten tatami mats. It is a difficult task for someone who is used to living in a house that is as big as 250 tatami mats in his home country. Foreigners who see the large residence of the ambassador shake their heads asking “aren’t the Japanese houses even smaller?” It is difficult for them to understand the level of patience that is required to live in a tiny house. It is impossible to live in such a house unless everything is kept in order and handled in proper order. Cultures that teach you to remove your shoes when entering one’s home or school are very rare in the world. Removal of one’s shoes, depositing them in the appropriate place and retrieving them to put them on, again and again, requires a high level of discipline and technique. I have seen diplomatic officers who do not take their shoes off simply due to the lack of such patience.

The discipline of existing within a compact space is seen in Noh and Kabuki as well as the performances of the Geishas and Maikos. They are able to depict dramatic scenes and dancing, all within a very compact space. Not only the art of Bonsai, the flower vases, decorations, memorabilia, wallet, note books and even the pet dog is small in size to fit compact spaces.

Ukio-e techniques are far more elaborate than the Western paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci and Michael Angelo or the Ajantha paintings of India. The lines of Ukio-e paintings dig deep into human conduct, way of life and nature. The ability to appreciate intricacy of things is not limited to Japanese paintings. The same can be observed in Noh and Kabuki performances, Haiku and Tanka poems and arts such as Ikebana, Bonsai as well as the tea ceremony. There is enough evidence to support the claim that carpenters and architects with the most intricate skill are the Japanese. It is not the Japanese who invented the printing press, railway, motor car, electricity, television, fan, computer or physics. The Japanese did not create the violin, piano, opera, social dancing, football, baseball or skating. However, they were able to take these to the next level and surpass the West. State of the art rice cookers, commodes or washlets with the most advanced functions which are available in the market today are examples for this. You unwrap the gifts you receive in order to see what is inside. Wrapping gifts is a Western practice. However, in Japan, gift wrapping is an extremely intricate art. When a single point that is pasted together is undone, the package opens up, like the petals of a flower, bringing more joy to the receiver of the gift.

The crafting of two coastguard patrol vessels which are to be gifted to Sri Lanka under JICA assistance commenced recently. I too participated in the event that marked the commencement of vessel building. The construction work started with making offerings to the deities. The gods were invited to a temporary shrine built in the shipyard and offerings were made to them. Commencement of work was marked symbolically by starting the welding work right in front of the deities. It was said that

these rituals are carried out to ensure that shipbuilding is carried out without any problem or hindrance. It was further mentioned that a similar ritual is practiced at the time of launching the vessels to ensure their smooth sailing.

The fact that, spirits of the dead live or roam around in buildings, is commonly acknowledged in Japan. This can even cause ups and downs in real estate prices. Television programmes which discuss such phenomena are available even now.

Leaves and flowers of trees are not plucked. Rivers, waterfalls, mountains and trees are believed to have spirits. Even man-made things receive spirit status with the passing of time. Hence, all animate and inanimate objects are treated with appreciation and respect. It is enshrined in all day-to-day activities such as eating, drinking, giving and receiving. It is because of this sense of gratitude that restaurants in the city are always filled to maximum capacity. Gratitude is expressed in every joyous or sombre event of life from weddings to funerals. Although the West has shunned insects as creatures that blight human lifestyle, people of Japan try to live in harmony with them. Although ethics and spiritual life is not directly connected with religion, it is maintained as a part of the cultural life. A nation which is not so flexible would find it very difficult to follow local Shinto traditions during birth and other auspicious events, follow Catholic Christian traditions for marriage ceremonies and follow Buddhist traditions in matters connected to death. We, of the Indian region, are used to eating curry on a daily basis. We are pleasantly surprised by the fact that most Japanese people eat rice and curry at least twice a week. Their flexible menu is complete with not only rice and curry but also spaghetti, pizza, hamburgers and ramen enjoyed in different parts of the world.

I have often noticed people waiting patiently in line for hours simply to purchase a single piece of delicious cake made in a small shop in Shinjuku. They are quite apt at waiting patiently for any period of time in front of a restaurant for a vacant seat. Those from the West do not hesitate to sit on the floor anywhere, even if it is an airport or a

railway station. But the Japanese would not sit down in public unless a seat is available. Their discipline teaches them to sit, stand, walk, eat, talk or engage in any other activity without posing a hindrance to others.

Not even the Westerners wear the Western attire with impeccable style and cleanliness like the Japanese.

Yet, they do not use English. My daughter who is a graduate of the Melbourne University of Australia visited me recently. She wanted to read a book and went to the Central Library of Tokyo which is the largest public library in Tokyo and has over a million books. She told me that only two shelves contain books written in English and it appeared that no one has touched them in years. Books written in English are hard to come by, even in a bookshop. It is quite interesting to note that even the books that teach English are written in Japanese! Notices advertising English classes can often be observed in the Tokyo Subway. Even the word “English” is not written in English in these notices prepared in Japanese.

Mr. Chairman, Deans, Lecturers, distinguished guests and graduates,

I would like to turn my speech to a different direction now. From the beginning of the 17th century to mid 19th century, Japan was ‘Sakoku’ or an isolated kingdom. Although international relations were completely disrupted, people were prevented from following Christianity and massacres took place during this period, Japanese culture including the local language and literature flourished during this period. Local economy, crafts and local resources were developed, matured. During the peaceful rule of the Tokugawa era, Japanese folk culture and consciousness evolved and matured with a unique identity.

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan was once again made open to the world. As you know, the Meiji Restoration is identified as a process of political, economic and cultural reform. Some consider these reforms to be a cultural revolution. Local culture and the arts were completely rejected during this period. Instead, Western culture was appreciated. Erwin Von Baelz, a German doctor teaching in Japan during this period has noted the views of the scholars of the era in his diary of 1877. It says “Everything in our past is completely barbaric We have no history, for our history is just about to begin”. In his book, *The Western World and Japan*, G.B. Samson states that classical artists such as Kano Hogai and Hashimoto Gaho had to starve because their paintings declined in value. Kuwabara Takeo has stated in his book ‘*Japan and Western Civilization*’ that the Meiji emperor ordered his people to follow Western culture on the premise that the Japanese culture had to be westernized in order to fully absorb the modernization offered by the Western nations. Meiji leaders were of the opinion that politics, education, technology and science, economy and the military needed modernization.

Six main principles can be identified behind this modernisation plan:

(1) Democracy in Politics (2) Capitalism in Economy (3) Shift from handicrafts and/or premodern manufacturing systems to factory production, accompanied by advances in Science, Technology and Mechanization (4) Mass Education (5) Creation of a national military force (6) liberation of the popular consciousness from a communal frame and growth of individualism.

Japan which opened up to the world with Meiji restorations became an industrial nation within a period less than 50 years and remained so till the Second World War. This was the first and the last war in which Japan was defeated. After the reforms that took place at the end of the war, Japan opened her doors to the world a second time. Once Japan became the second most powerful economy of the world, its doors were opened to the world for the third time.

Although the Meiji restoration subjected the Japanese culture to complete Westernization, its core remains the same. 250 years of peace which nurtured and grounded the Japanese culture would have contributed heavily to this. Although 05 of the Meiji restoration principles could be realised successfully, the sixth principle, which promoted individualism in place of the communal frame, could not be achieved in Japan.

Most Western, Middle Eastern or Indian religious beliefs are monotheistic. The unique religious beliefs in Japan, however, are polytheistic. It is believed that ‘Yaoyorosu’, a myriad of deities exists. A single all-powerful being that directs the individual does not exist. Instead, deities exist everywhere; in all natural physical things as well as places unseen. As a result of this belief in polytheism, individualism which was desired through Meiji restorations could not be achieved. The Japanese believe that their lives are aided by many different natural, physical, animate and inanimate forces. Hence, concepts such as gratitude, tolerance, respect and responsibility are ingrained in their cultural consciousness as pointed out by Osamu Nakyama, Shujiro Mizuno and Kazunobu Horiuchi in Happiness and Virtue.

I have attempted here, to summarize some comparative facts that would be useful in identifying ‘uniqueness of Japan’ in international relations and international management. I would like to quote Peter N. Dale who has produced a summary of the cultural differences between the West and Japan in his book titled The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness:

West

Rights(Kenri)

Rational (Goriteki)

Contract (Keiyaku)

Guilt (Tsumi)

Intolerant (Fukanyo)

Logic (Ronri)

Materialistic (Bushitsuteki)

Rupture (Dansetsu)

Open (Hiraketa)

Private (Shiteki)

Real Intention (Honne)

Transverse Society (Yoko Shakai)

Generally (Odsappa)

Talkative (Oshaberi)

Equalism (Byodoshugi)

Japan

Obligation and human feeling (Giri to Ninjo)

Emotional (Kanjoteki)

Kintract (Keiyaku)

Shame (Haji)

Tolerant (Kanyo)

Ambivalence (Aimai)

Spiritual (Seishinteki)

Harmony (Wa)

Closed (Heisateki)

Public (Koteki)

Principle (Tatema)

Longitudinal Society (Tate Shakai)

Fine (Komakai)

Silence (Chinmoku)

Class-conscious (kaikyusei)

Peter N. Dale argues that there is no uniqueness in Japanese culture and claims that many characteristics of the Japanese culture were a part of the Western Feudal society before its decline.

Here is my question to you: the feudal society of Japan started declining in 1868 and Japan is now a fully pledged member of the capitalist society. How is it possible that characteristics of the old society still remain in Japan, in perfect harmony with the modern society? Here, I wind up my speech, leaving you to engage in further research to find solutions to this question.

Thank you for your patience while listening to my lengthy speech.

Prof. Dammika Ganganath Disanayake

Ambassador

Embassy of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Tokyo.