# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

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Prior to the Meiji Restoration, the Tokugawa shoguns placed severe restrictions on contact between Japanese and *gaijin* (foreigners). Japanese who left Japan were forbidden from returning under penalty of death. There were, however, many contacts between Japanese and the outside world before Commodore Perry "opened" Japan to outside contact in 1853. Frequently ships sailing off the coast of Japan were caught in storms and many were carried across the Pacific to North America. Japanese on these ships had contact with people in the United States, including prominent people such as Abraham Lincoln (Plummer, 1992). Many of these encounters were plagued by misunderstandings.

When Commodore Perry arrived in Japan, his sailors found the Japanese to be "the most polite people on earth" (cited in Dulles, 1965). Perry himself, however, reported that he was frustrated by the "lies" he was told and the "evasive" Japanese style of communication (Dulles, 1965). Dulles concluded that the opposing perceptions of Japanese courtesy and hypocrisy "helped set a pattern of American thinking about Japanese that has persisted for a century" (pp. 68-69). Virtually all accounts of the early contact indicate that cultural misunderstandings began with the first contact between people from Japan and the United States.

Current relations between Japan and the United States are complicated. In the United States, for example, there was only a handful of

people involved in making U.S. policy toward Japan two decades ago. Today, however, there are at least three different groups concerned with U.S. policy (Friedman, 1992). First, there are those concerned mainly with issues of national security (i.e., State Department, Pentagon, National Security Council). Second, there are those whose main interest is in protecting production of U.S. goods and their sales around the world (i.e., Office of United States Trade Representative, Commerce Department). Third, there is the group concerned with overall U.S. trade policy (i.e., Office of Management and the Budget, Council of Economic Advisers). Friedman (1992) argues that one of the major problems confronting U.S. policy toward Japan is that each of these groups sees Japan differently. The situation in Japan may be more coordinated, but there are diverse views of the United States among the prime minister, the Diet, and the Foreign Ministry.

While the relations between Japan and the United States are complicated, people in the two countries tend to have positive views of the other country. A recent *New York Times*, CBS News, and Tokyo Broadcasting System poll (conducted in November 1991; see Wiseman, 1991, for results), for example, indicates that 77 percent of the people in the United States "say their feelings toward Japan are generally friendly," and 65 percent of the people in Japan hold a similar sentiment toward the United States.[1] Relations between the countries in recent years, however, have been strained. Many politicians in the United States have engaged in "Japan bashing" and Japanese politicians have criticized workers in the United States (e.g., Yoshio Sakurauchi's comments in January 1992). The main reason for the strain in Japan-United States relations appears to stem from the trade imbalance (e.g., see Friedman & LeBard's, 1991, *The Coming War with Japan*). Numerous fictitious books have been published in the United States in recent years on the theme of an economic war between the United States and Japan (see Reich, 1992, for an overview of these books).[2]

Clyde Prestowitz, President of the Economic Strategy Institute, argues that one reason for the difficulty in dealing with the frictions between Japan and the United States is that people assume a close alliance between nations is possible only if they are similar (cited in Chira, 1991). Prestowitz believes that it is the insistence on similarity between the two countries when none exists that is making it difficult to deal with the frictions between the two countries. In order to improve relations between the United States and Japan, citizens of the two countries must better understand each other (Luttwak, 1991; Miyoshi, 1991). Reischauer (1971) points out that

> We in this country [the United States] have been very slow in becoming aware of the importance of Japan and the need for greater understanding of what Japanese feel and think in their relations with us. The Japanese too have been obtuse in their perceptions of American attitudes. On both sides we have let this thinness of understanding develop into a frightening crisis of confidence in each other. It is high time that we set seriously about trying to understand what the other is thinking. (p. v)

The need for understanding is even greater today (1992). A recent *Time* (10 February 1992) poll[3] indicates that only 13 percent of the people in the United States think they know "a lot" about Japan and its people (42 percent think they know "some things") (Murrow, 1992); only 5 percent of the people in Japan think they know "a lot" about the United States and its people (42 percent think they know "some things") (Hillenbrand, 1992).

Even though North Americans and Japanese do not think they know a lot about each other, they hold complex stereotypes about each other. The *Time* (10 February 1992) poll revealed that North Americans think that Japanese are competitive (94%), crafty (69%), devoted to fair play (35%), friendly (59%), hardworking (94%), lazy (4%), poorly educated (12%), prejudiced (53%), and violent (19%) (Murrow, 1992). The Japanese, in contrast, view people in the United States as competitive (50%), crafty (13%), devoted to fair play (43%), friendly (64%), hardworking (15%), lazy (21%), poorly educated (21%), prejudiced (41%), and violent (23%) (Hillenbrand, 1992). People in Japan admire the freedom of expression (89%), the variety of life-styles (86%), the treatment of women (68%), and the leisure time available to workers (88%) in the United States (Hillenbrand, 1992). North Americans, on the other hand, admire Japanese industriousness (88%) and educational institutions (71%) (Murrow, 1992).

Improving understanding between people in the United States and Japan requires that cultural similarities and differences be recognized, and that negative stereotypes become more positive. Kitamura (1971) pointed out that "we have come to a stage in our [U.S.-Japan] relations in which we need hard understanding based on recognition and appreciation of differences rather than easy understanding based on similarities" (p. 37). Cultural similarities and differences are created and manifested through communication. It is impossible to improve relations between Japan and the United States without understanding how communication patterns are similar and different in the two cul-

tures. This is the first volume to summarize the state of our knowledge regarding communication in Japan and the United States. To place the volume in context, I briefly overview the approaches to cross-cultural research used to study communication in Japan and the United States.

## Cross-Cultural Research on Communication in Japan and the United States

The discipline of communication has existed for a relatively short period of time in the United States. In this short period, extensive research has been conducted on various aspects of communication. There is comprehensive research, for example, on interpersonal, mass, and organizational communication, to name only three areas. The vast majority of this research, however, has been limited to studying how Euro Americans communicate in the United States.

Recently, interest has increased in how communication varies across cultures. There appear to be several reasons for the increase of interest in cross-cultural variations among communication researchers. First, a specialized area of research focusing on the study of communication and culture has developed in the last twenty years. A large portion of the research conducted by scholars interested in international and intercultural communication involves comparisons of communication in different cultures. The researchers also study communication between members of different cultures.

Second, several theorists have included culture as one of the major components in their frameworks. Cronen, Chen, and Pearce (1988), for example, see "intercultural communication and comparative patterns of communication" (p. 67) as central to understanding communication in their "coordinated management of meaning" framework. Numerous researchers using this framework, therefore, have compared communication in different cultures. To illustrate, Nakanishi and Johnson (1993) examined the influence of self-disclosure on conversational logics (a central construct in the coordinated management of meaning framework) in Japan and the United States.

Third, some researchers have recognized that if they do not test their theories and/or hypotheses in other cultures, their generalizations are severely limited. Gudykunst, Yang, and Nishida (1985), for example, extended Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory of initial interactions to developed relationships (e.g., friendships, dating relationships). They argued that if the theory was not tested in other cul-

tures, the theory would have a restricted range. Their research, however, indicates that the theory generalizes to Japan and Korea.

Fourth, there has been an increase in the number of international students studying communication in the United States. Many of these students have conducted research comparing communication in their home culture with communication in the United States. This work appears to have stimulated interest in cross-cultural research by the faculty supervising the international students' work.

Fifth, the discipline of communication has began to develop systematically in other countries and professional associations focusing on communication are being formed in other countries.[4] The Communication Association of Japan, for example, has been formed in the last decade. It holds an annual conference at which research on Japanese communication is presented. Much of this research involves explicit comparisons with communication in the United States.

The combination of these factors has led to an increase in the cross-cultural communication research conducted in the last two decades. Of the cross-cultural communication studies conducted to date, by far the largest percentage compare communication in Japan and the United States. There appear to be at least four major reasons for the amount of research conducted in these two countries. First, there appear to be more Japanese Ph.D.s trained in communication in the United States than Ph.D.s from any other country. Second, there is extensive anthropological research on Japan that has examined some aspect of communication to provide a foundation for cross-cultural comparisons. Third, Japan's culture is very different from the culture in the United States and it is more accessible than other cultures which are very different (in part because the Ph.D.s trained in the United States are potential collaborators). Fourth, several conferences have been devoted specifically to discussing communication in Japan and the United States. The conference organized by John Condon and Mitsuko Saito held at International Christian University in Tokyo in 1974, for example, brought together scholars interested in communication in Japan and the United States and stimulated collaborative research by scholars who met at the conference. More recently, communication scholars from Japan and the United States met at California State University, Fullerton in 1992 for a conference attended by approximately 400 people.

There are several different types of research used to compare communication in Japan and the United States. Kohn (1989), for example, isolates four types of cross-cultural research: (1) studies where culture is the object of study, (2) studies where culture is the context of study,

(3) studies where culture is the unit of analysis, and (4) studies that are transcultural.[5] Each of these types of studies have different goals.

In the first type of cross-cultural study culture is the object of study. The researcher's primary interest is learning more about the specific cultures being examined. This approach is basically descriptive in nature, and is used widely in anthropology and area studies. Communication researchers, however, have conducted extensive descriptive research on communication that contributes to our understanding of the cultures in Japan and the United States. Barnlund's (1975, 1989) research is an example of this line of work. He has conducted large-scale surveys designed to describe communication patterns in Japan and the United States. Research describing communication in Japan and the United States implicitly provides information on the two cultures. The descriptive research presented in this volume, therefore, should be useful to area studies experts interested in Japan.

When culture is treated as the context of the study, researchers are interested in understanding how different aspects of cultures influence communication. Investigators, for example, can study how dimensions of cultural variability (e.g., individualism-collectivism; in individualistic cultures the focus is on the individual, while the emphasis is on the group in collectivistic cultures; this dimension is discussed in detail in the next chapter) influence communication in Japan and the United States. To illustrate, Gudykunst, Nishida, and Schmidt (1989) were interested in explaining how culture influences communication in ingroup and outgroup relationships. They compared communication in Japan and the United States. As predicted, they discovered that there are greater differences in ingroup-outgroup communication in Japan (collectivistic culture) than in the United States (individualistic culture). By comparing the results from Japan and the United States they drew conclusions about the influence of individualism-collectivism on ingroup-outgroup communication. To draw definitive conclusions, however, data from at least one additional individualistic culture and data from at least one additional collectivistic culture are needed (Gudykunst, Gao, Schmidt, Nishida, Bond, Leung, Wang, & Barraclough, 1992, added Hong Kong and Australia and the patterns were consistent).

Researchers using the culture as context approach might also be interested in testing the extent to which theories and/or hypotheses generalize across cultures. The goal of social science research ultimately is to develop theories that generalize across time and space.[6] Testing theories or hypotheses developed in one culture in another culture, is

one way to extend their generalizability.[7] To illustrate, researchers might conduct research in the United States that supports the hypothesis that there is a positive association between gathering personal information about strangers and reducing uncertainty about strangers' behavior. If they are interested in generalizing their hypothesis, they might collect data in Japan to see if the hypothesis holds in a different culture (i.e., cross-cultural generalizability). The present volume, therefore, will be useful to communication researchers because it demonstrates how communication varies across cultures.

Kohn (1989) points out that often it is difficult to distinguish between studies that treat culture as the object of study and studies that treat culture as a context. Classifying a study depends on the investigator's intent. Research conducted for one purpose, however, can be useful to investigators interested in the other function of cross-cultural research. The research presented in this volume designed to treat culture (Japan and the United States) as a context for studying communication, for example, should be of interest to area studies experts whose main interest in Japan and the United States is as objects of study.

The third type of cross-cultural research focuses on culture as the unit of analysis. Kohn (1989) points out that "what distinguishes research that treats nation [or culture] as the unit of analysis is its primary concern with understanding how social institutions and processes are systematically related to variations in national [or cultural] characteristics" (p. 22). The most widely cited work in this area is Hofstede's (1980) work on deriving dimensions of cultural variability (discussed in detail in the next chapter). Research using culture as the level of analysis requires that data from large numbers of cultures be available for analysis.

The final type of cross-cultural research is what Kohn (1989) calls "transnational" or what I will call transcultural. This type of research treats cultures or nations as parts of larger international systems. This strategy for cross-cultural research often is used in international relations and diplomacy. The primary examples of this type of research in communication focus on the transmission of mass media messages across national borders.

The preceding discussion suggests that there are many types of cross-cultural research on communication in Japan and the United States. The types of cross-cultural research conducted often are aimed at different goals (e.g., learning about a culture, testing the generalizability of hypotheses). The most important reason for conducting cross-cultural research, however, was not addressed; namely, improving rela-

tions between Japanese and North Americans requires that we understand how communication patterns are similar and different in the two cultures. If members of the two cultures do not understand how communication is similar and different in Japan and the United States, they will not be able to accurately interpret each others' communication. If the research presented in this volume contributes to better understanding between the people of the United states and Japan it will have accomplished one of its major purposes.

## Overview of the Volume

As indicated earlier, the goal of this volume is to summarize the current state of knowledge regarding similarities and differences in communication in Japan and the United States. The authors of the various chapters, therefore, present broad overviews of communication in particular areas. Overlap in the material covered across the chapters was unavoidable. Where overlap exists, however, it tends to be presented from the perspective of different disciplines (e.g., anthropology, communication, psychology, sociolinguistics).

The volume is divided into four parts. This chapter and the following chapter constitute part I—introductory material. In the next chapter, William Gudykunst and Patricia San Antonio review the major approaches used to study communication in Japan and the United States. They begin with a review of anthropological research on Japan, focusing on studies that contribute to our understanding of communication. Next, they discuss a line of research conducted in Japan known as *nihonjinron* (discussions of the Japanese). These two lines of research tend to treat culture as the object of study. Gudykunst and San Antonio also review research designed to treat culture as the context of study. They conclude with a discussion of the issue of equivalence (e.g., equivalence of meaning for concepts) in comparing communication in Japan and the United States.

Part II contains three chapters. The purpose of these chapters is to place the study of communication in Japan and the United States in context. The chapters in part II, therefore, focus on issues of culture and self, culture and language, and ethnicity and communication.

Takie Sugiyama Lebra discusses culture, self, and communication. She argues that understanding differences in self contruals is necessary to understand differences in communication in Japan and the United States.[8] She contends that the Japanese self is "socially contex-

tualized, embedded, or situated." The self in the United States, in contrast, is viewed as "socially independent and internally consistent." Lebra examines the consequences for communication of these different self construals, focusing on the consequences for communication in Japan. She demonstrates how the self construal influences conversational features such as fragmentation, interruption, and the role of the listener.

Lebra also links self-conceptions to empathy and self-presentations. She argues, for example, that there is a paradox regarding self-presentations in Japan and the United States: "the [North] American self is so closed that it can afford to open up in communication, whereas the Japanese self, so exposed and subject to involuntary leakage, must be wrapped up." She goes on to point out that the more individuals unwrap within a boundary, the more wrapped they must be with outsiders. In discussing these subtle paradoxes regarding the self in Japan and the United States, Lebra responds to criticism of the *nihonjinron* approach to the study of Japanese society. Her position clearly suggests we must try to understand cultural differences *and* basic values shared in common when we study communication in Japan and the United States.

Kaoru Akasu and Kojiro Asao examine the sociolinguistic factors that influence communication in Japan and the United States. They discuss seven dimensions that influence the choices individuals make in selecting the linguistic expressions they use: (1) properties of the speaker such as sex, age, status; (2) the sense of relationship (e.g., belonging) the individuals have with their partners; (3) the relative power or social standing of the individuals communicating; (4) the roles that the individuals perform when they communicate; (5) the type of message being exchanged; (6) the degree to which the communicators invade each others' territory; and (7) context and interdependence. Akasu and Aasao's discussion of context and interdependence compliments Lebra's discussion of the self. They link several Japanese sociolinguistic patterns (e.g., the use of ambiguity and indirectness) to an interdependent conceptualization of the self.

In concluding, Akasu and Asao argue that there is a need for a general framework that will allow researchers to compare the influence of language on communication. They also suggest that while there are cross-cultural comparisons of Japanese and English, there is a need for research on language usage in Japanese-North American interaction. They contend that the two forms of research are complimentary, not different.

Harry Kitano focuses on Japanese American values and communication patterns. He does not focus on cross-cultural comparisons per se, but rather on how Japanese Americans are similar to and different from Japanese in Japan and Euro Americans in the United States. Kitano discusses the influence of acculturation and generation on Japanese American attitudes and communication. He concludes that Japanese Americans maintain some characteristics of Japanese in Japan and, at the same time, have assimilated the values of the mainstream culture in the United States.

Part III contains three chapters. The focus of these chapters is on comparing communication in Japan and the United States in different contexts. Specifically, the interpersonal and intergroup, organizational, and mass mediated contexts are examined.

William Gudykunst and Tsukasa Nishida summarize cross-cultural research on communication in interpersonal and intergroup relationships in Japan and the United States. They isolate similarities and differences in communication in initial interactions and developing relations, as well as communication in ingroup-outgroup and same-opposite sex relationships. They conclude, for example, that one of the major differences in communication in Japan and the United States involves how people communicate with members of their ingroups and outgroups. Since Japan is a collectivistic culture and people use mainly an interdependent self construal which is based on ingroup membership, there is a large difference in ingroup and outgroup communication. North Americans, in contrast, come from an individualistic culture and mainly use an independent self construal which is *not* influenced highly by ingroup memberships, and, therefore, there is not as large a difference (as in Japan) in ingroup and outgroup communication.

Gudykunst and Nishida also examine the encoding and decoding of messages (e.g., communicative style, predisposition toward verbal behavior, recognition and expression of emotions). The vast majority of the research discussed is consistent with the position Lebra and Akasu and Asao present in their chapters. Gudykunst and Nishida present a summary of research on communication in intercultural relationships between Japanese and North Americans. They conclude by outlining research issues that need to be addressed in future studies of interpersonal and intergroup communication.

Lea P. Stewart focuses on communication in an organizational context. She discusses alternative explanations for differences in Japanese and North American organizations (i.e., culture vs. structure). Stewart isolates differences in superior-subordinate relationships,

including leadership, upward communication, downward communication, horizontal communication, and decision-making.

Stewart concludes by examining the shortcomings of current research comparing organizational communication in Japan and the United States and providing suggestions for future research. She argues, for example, that most research to date is descriptive. Stewart goes on to point out that cross-cultural researchers in the area tend to use cultural variables without clear conceptualization (including addressing issues of conceptual equivalence) and operationalization. One area where Stewart suggests future research is on the issue of convergence and divergence of organizational practices in Japan and the United States and how these practices are manifested in Japanese-North American operations.

Youichi Ito examines issues in mass communication in Japan and the United States. Ito begins by summarizing the major theoretical models of media influence. He argues that the "bipolar" models (i.e., models that focus on the sender/message and the receiving individual/society) do not adequately explain mass media effects in Japan. Ito suggests a "tripolar" model that incorporates mass media, government policies, and public attitudes to explain mass media effects in Japan. He outlines the mutual influences among these three factors. Ito argues that the mass media (especially newspapers) often serve as "opposition parties" in editorials discussing government policy in that the mass media locate "defects and mistakes" in government policy. Given that the general public frequently supports the government, there also often is disagreement between the media and general public. Ito argues that when one of the three (media, government, general public) disagrees, there is pressure for it come into compliance and join the consensus. He explains this process using the concept *kuuki*, the dominant air or atmosphere.

In order to illustrate his model, Ito applies the tripolar model to recent case studies. The two case studies involve the revision of the Japanese tax laws and Japan's response to the Gulf War. These case studies clearly indicate that "Western" theories cannot adequately explain mass media effects in Japan. While Ito does not focus on cultural differences, the cultural factors that influence mass media effects are reflected in the bipolar and tripolar models he presents.

The final part (IV) contains one chapter. In the final chapter, William Gudykunst, Ruth Guzley, and Hiroshi Ota suggest future directions for the study of communication in Japan and the United States. They begin by summarizing the major trends to emerge across

the chapters. As should be clear from the preceding overviews of the chapters, there are numerous themes that are consistent across communication contexts (e.g., the influence of independent and interdependent self construals). Next, they examine critical methodological issues that need to be taken into consideration in studying communication in Japan and the United States. To illustrate, Gudykunst, Guzley, and Ota discuss issues of emic versus etic approaches, as well as the need to establish conceptual, functional, and measurement equivalence. They conclude by suggesting specific areas where additional research is needed. These suggestions provide a "blueprint" for future cross-cultural and intercultural studies of communication in Japan and the United States.

## NOTES

1. A Gallup Poll conducted during the same time period, however, indicated that only 48 percent of the United States population hold a "favorable" attitude toward the Japanese. The differences may be due to wording of the questions. There also is rising "scorn" for the United States in Japan (see Helm, 1991). The figures have remained relatively constant over the years (see United States-Japan Advisory Commission, 1984, for figures in the 1970s and 1980s).

2. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1992) argues that "Japan bashing" has triggered violence and bigotry toward Asian Americans in the United States. Improving relations between Japan and the United States, therefore, could have positive consequences for interethnic relations within the United States.

3. The poll was conducted in late January 1992 by Infoplan/Yankelovich International for *Time*.

4. Until recently, communication was not a separate discipline in most countries. Generally, interpersonal communication was studied in social psychology or human relations, while mass communication was studied in sociology. This is still true today, even in the United States (e.g., many sociology departments offer courses on mass communication and some offer courses on interpersonal communication).

5. Kohn uses the term nation. I have substituted culture for nation.

6. Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992) include temporal comparisons as part of comparative research when they extend Kohn (1989) types. I do not find their argument convincing. There are major differences between comparing data from three cultures and comparing data across three time periods. I, there-

fore, do not include temporal comparisons here. Temporal comparisons, however, must be made to establish generality of theories and hypotheses.

7. There are, of course, methodological issues which must be taken into consideration. Some of these issues are discussed in the second chapter and some are addressed in the final chapter.

8. For an alternative, but compatible, discussion of the self in Japan and the United States, see Markus and Kitayama (1991).

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