

# **Cultural Differences in Idealized Impression Management**

## **— A Comparison of Employment Interview Manuals from Japan, Germany and the USA —**

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### **I. Introduction**

Fifty-five interview manuals were used in a content analysis study to examine cultural differences in Impression Management (IM) in Japan, Germany and the USA. In addition, a survey of 53 Japanese interviewers currently working in Tokyo was conducted and the results compared with the idealized notions and advice expressed in the Japanese manuals. This study was financially supported by a ICU-COE Research Grant and published in 2007 as a dissertation.<sup>(1)</sup>

### **II. Content analysis**

The first part of this study compared idealized notions of IM by examining cultural differences reflected in interview manuals from Japan, the USA and Germany. These interview manuals attempted to illustrate proper and effective self-presentation in employment interviews. They contained lists of “dos” and “don’ts” and sometimes rather extensive question and answer dialogues. However, it must be remembered that such manuals have no scientific

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background. An examination of German manuals showed that scientific knowledge was frequently improperly used, complex issues simplified, and stereotypes freely referred to and supported.<sup>(2)</sup> Knowledge was not based on scientific methods or systematic inquiries but often on the generalization of the author's personal experience in the field. Interview manuals are published for commercial interests and sometimes written in an entertaining style.

A cross-cultural comparison of these manuals provides insights into cultural similarities and differences in idealized notions of effective interview behavior and culture in general.

Three groups of literature were compared: Japanese, American, and German interview manuals. These manuals were general and not designed for a specialized occupation or industry. Some of the 46 employment interview and job application manuals were strategically chosen for their high circulation and many years of continued publication while others were 'convenience' samples, examined in libraries or acquired in second hand bookstores. To examine development over time an effort was made to include at least one Japanese manual for each decade since the 1950's. Access to older German and American manuals was limited and not every decade could be covered.

Additionally, nine intercultural manuals were used as secondary materials, because through them promising categories could be located and differences in intercultural adjustments found. However, depending on the knowledge, experience and cultural background of the authors, it was impossible to judge from where and to what degree culture had influenced their recommendations. The Japanese and German intercultural manuals mainly, but not exclusively, addressed the conduct ideals for interviews in the United States of America. Therefore, these manuals had basically the same goal as the American manuals: to educate their readers on how to successfully perform in American (Western) culture interviews.

Job changing manuals are written for job seekers with work experience, in contrast to manuals that address students without work history. Some of the German manuals are geared towards young people without any work experience.

The goal is to be accepted into a three-year vocational apprenticeship, a common system in Germany for most occupations. It must be considered that, depending on the occupation some apprenticeships involve more blue-collar work and applicants for these positions will have more freedom in their appearance and presentation while other sectors, for example a banking apprenticeship, would require business attire and more formal presentation. The authors, however, do not distinguish their recommendations regarding the industry.

Manuals that specialize on interviews do not discuss in detail other aspects of job-hunting. On the other hand, manuals for job-hunting in general cover interviews in only one or a few chapters, often at the end of the manual. To a large extent these manuals cover issues such as company research, resume writing, resignation letter writing and application forms.

Often manuals contain sample dialogues that are accompanied by comments of various lengths. Instead of measuring the exact amount or ratio of the question and answer (Q&A) scripts, the manual was judged to contain a large amount of Q&A scripts if at least half the manual consisted of these scripts.

American manuals were all written for job changers (none were specialized for students without work experience). None contained advice on how to adjust interview behavior to another language or culture.

**Table 1 Description of the 46 general manuals by percentage**

|  | Japanese | German | American |
|--|----------|--------|----------|
| Number of general manuals in group           | 28       | 7      | 11       |
| Job changing manual (vs. for students)       | 44%      | 71%    | 100%     |
| Specializing in interviews (vs. job-hunting) | 56%      | 43%    | 64%      |
| Large amount of Q&A scripts                  | 56%      | 29%    | 36%      |

The text analysis mainly used a thematic approach in which concepts were identified and the occurrence of these concepts comprised the variables under analysis. Through the process of identifying occurrences and systematically searching for their occurrence in all selected manuals the author was switching

back and forth between qualitative and quantitative research.

Most themes and topics were binary measurements, the simplest case of nominal measurement. For these themes frequency of occurrence or lengths of the thematic discussion are not considered, only whether the topic was covered or not. However, a few themes, for example eye contact and modesty, were split into several topics, which were defined in ways that also assess valence (positiveness or negativeness) and strengths. Manuals can cover several aspects of a theme. For example, a manual can support direct eye contact and also recommend not staring, or it can advise modesty but also suggest boasting in another chapter. The intercultural manuals were only secondary sources and occurrences in them were not included in the percentages of the three country groups.

Choosing the variables was a subjective process and was based on:

- The researcher's personal experiences, mostly through working as an interviewer in a temporary employment agency between 2000 and 2003, but also through on-going participation in workshops and seminars for interviewers and interviewees.
- Reading various interview manuals and searching for potential differences. These concepts and themes were empirically developed during and after the texts were read rather than prior to reading them.<sup>(3)</sup>
- A series of smaller test studies between 2005 and 2006.

## Findings:

According to the frequency of occurrence in the manuals, the following 21 points were identified as indicators of cultural differences. Although only a few matters (e.g. sitting or apologizing) indicated a strong contrast in the cultural expectations of interviewee behavior, it is also necessary to consider the apparently insignificant differences since these may influence whether an applicant is hired or not. For a few topics the following data are also represented

in the appendix in the form of tables.

Comparison of manuals revealed the following.

1. Interviews are seen as a test:

In the manuals interviews are sometimes compared, portrayed and labeled as a test, sale, fight (also match), performance (also theater play), date (also romance, arranged marriage meeting) and other descriptions. Over one third (36 %) of the Japanese general manuals (as well as 43 % of the German but only 9 % of the American manuals) refer to interviews as a test, especially, the manuals written for students portray interviews as a test (56 %). Nine of the sixteen manuals for students describe interviews as test but only two of the twelve manuals for job-changers does so (17 %). Independent sample t-tests show that the difference is significant ( $t=2.233$ ,  $df=26$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Since no American manuals are written for students without work experience and the sample size of the German manuals is limited this issue could not be adequately compared. However, the German manuals show a similar, even though less extreme, tendency. Two out of the three manuals for students describe interviews as a test and three of the four manuals for job-changers do not.

It seems that in Japanese culture, in contrast to American culture, interviews are not so much seen as a sale or information exchange (which rank first and second in terms of frequency in the American manuals), but rather they are perceived and labeled more as a test which needs to be passed.

2. Equality:

9 % of American and 14 % of Japanese manuals mention equality, defined as statements referring to or implying that the applicants and interviewers are “partners” or have the same rights. These differ significantly from the German manuals, 43 % of which mention equality.

3. Superlatives:

German manuals do not contain “I am the best” statements (in contrast to 15 %

of the Japanese and 28 % of the American manuals). However, they do frequently recommend avoiding modesty (71 %) in contrast to 11 % of Japanese and 46 % of American manuals.

4. Aggressiveness:

Japanese manuals do not contain advice to avoid pushiness, aggressiveness and disruptions in contrast to 17 % of the German and 45 % of the American manuals.

5. Apology:

Recommendations to and examples on how to apologize only appear in the Japanese (14 %) and the American (9 %) manuals. In contrast, 4 % and 46 % respectively discourage apologies. German manuals neither cover this topic, nor do they contain apologies in sample dialogues.

6. Questions:

Japanese manuals do not encourage, support or recommend applicants to ask questions to the degree German and American manuals do. Only 38 % of Japanese manuals recommend that applicants should ask questions, (compared to 71 % of the German and 91 % of the American manuals) and 18 % say "it is ok not to ask questions"; advice which appears in 9 % of American and none of the German manuals. Advice not to ask too many questions only appears in 4 % of the Japanese manuals (compared to 14 % of the German and 18 % of the American manuals).

7. Interrupting:

Not interrupting the interviewer is covered less in the Japanese (11 %) and American manuals (18 %) than in the German ones (57 %).

8. Money talk:

German manuals contain more references (57 %) in the form of dialogues or statements to the fact that applicants are interested in compensation, compared to the Japanese (11 %) and American (9 %) manuals. German manuals also most frequently (43 %) advise applicants not to initiate compensation discussion (compared to 36 % of the American and 19 % of the Japanese manuals).

9. On-site visits:

In contrast to American (18 %) and German (14 %) manuals, none of the Japanese manuals propose making an on-site visit to check a company's dress codes.

10. Entering the interview room:

Some recommendations for non-verbal behavior for entering the interview room occur at about the same ratio in all three nations, for example, not to sit before being offered a seat (40 % of the Japanese, 37 % of the American and 29 % of the German manuals). Other behaviors are covered only in the German and American manuals, for example shaking hands (73 % of the American and 57 % of the German manuals). Behavior, which is only covered in Japanese manuals includes bowing, not chatting in the waiting room (36 %), and two knocks before entering the interview room (29 %). Avoiding making a noise with the door is mentioned in 50 % of the Japanese manuals but also in 14 % of the German manuals.

11. Eye contact:

American manuals recommend eye contact most frequently (82 % versus 60 of the Japanese and 57 % of the German manuals). Warnings not to stare can be found in 37 % of the American and 33 % of the Japanese manuals versus 14 % of German interview guides.

Japanese manuals more frequently recommend candidates look at places other than the interviewer's eyes, e.g. the interviewer's nose, mouth or around the chest (30 % versus 14 % of the German and 9 % of the American manuals) and to limit eye contact to the time when they are speaking or answering (44 % versus 18 % of the American and no mention in any of the German manuals). See table 5 in the appendix.

12. Voice volume:

A significant number of Japanese manuals (46 %) explicitly recommends talking in a loud voice compared with 9 % of the American and no mention in the German manuals. 29 % of the Japanese manuals advise applicants not to speak too loudly.

### 13. Sitting:

Sitting prescriptions are more formal and strict in Japanese manuals. For example, crossing legs or arms is not allowed. Almost one third (29 %) of Japanese manuals do not allow applicants to allow their back touch the backrest of chairs. None of the German or American manuals contain such advice. In contrast to the Japanese manuals, sitting is frequently not covered or is described quite differently in several German and American manuals, for example advising the reader to adopt a relaxed and friendly sitting posture. These manuals warn applicants not to appear overly formal, unfriendly, or distant. Two German manuals even mention the word *sovereign*.

### 14. Posture:

Recommendations for a straight posture are more frequently included in the Japanese manuals (68 %) than in the American (36 %) or German (14 %) manuals.

### 15. Gesticulation:

Advice to avoid over-gesticulation is more common in Western than in the Japanese manuals (43 % of the German and 19 % of the American, versus 7 % of the Japanese manuals).

### 16. Other behavior:

Recommendations not to smoke or chew gum before or during the interview are least frequent in the Japanese manuals (19 % versus 57 % of the German and 27 % of the American manuals).

### 17. Memorization:

More Japanese (56 %) than American (36 %) or German (29 %) manuals include extensive answer scripts. From discussions within the texts it also appears that memorization of answers might be of greater concern in Japan. Advice to memorize answers was found in 7 % of the Japanese and 9 % of the American manuals. Interestingly advice not to memorize answers is highest in Japanese manuals (32 %) than in German (29 %) and American (18 %) manuals.

### 18. Honesty:

Some manuals advise applicants to exaggerate their skills and abilities. Other



manuals encourage them to present only what they really can do. Some manuals do not allow lying about one topic (e.g. marital status, age or prior compensation) but leave it open if applicants can lie about another topic or not. Statements as “do not lie about x” were counted as *extended truth*.<sup>(4)</sup> While German manuals most frequently recommend extended truth or allowing applicants to lie (57 %), this is often in connection with illegal questions and a different legal system must be taken into consideration. Japanese manuals offer least encouragement to lie (26 %) and, similar to the German manuals, only as protective IM. On the other hand, 37 % of American manuals encourage extended truths, and include advice to lie with the purpose of enhancing self-presentation and IM, for example with statements such as “don’t exaggerate to the point of disbelief”.

#### 19. Language instructions:

Japanese manuals cover language instruction in terms of politeness and sentence endings in 44 % of manuals in contrast to 9 % of the American and none of the German manuals. Only the Japanese intercultural manuals cover some aspects of politeness in the English language (such as the use of “would” versus “will”) in contrast to the German intercultural manuals, which only focus on properly addressing the interlocutor. Another difference in language instruction is the advice to finish sentences, which is included in 56 % of the Japanese manuals but only 9 % of the American and none of the German manuals.

Advice not to speak too quickly appears most frequently in the Japanese manuals (33 % versus 14 % of German and 9 % of American manuals).

#### 20. Intercultural adjustments:

Advice to adjust to a mainly American style manifests itself in encouraging exaggeration in both German and Japanese intercultural manuals. Different recommendations were found for adjusting facial expressions to the Anglo-American style. Smiling is stressed for German speakers while Japanese are advised to show their emotions.

#### 21. Changes in time:

Developments over time within the 28 Japanese general manuals can be found in the topics of advice not to stare, not to chat in the waiting room, to knock twice, and not to make a sound with the door.

#### IV. Survey of recruitment professionals:

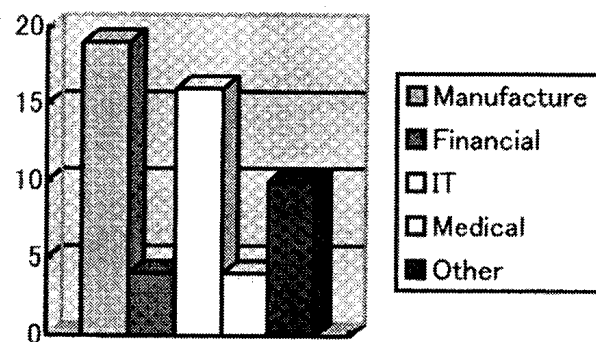
Most of the interview manual authors have recruiting experience or some other company insights. However, in order to verify that the values, knowledge and principles they meant to communicate reflect the views of practicing recruiters, are still current, and in as far as they reflect actual behavior of applicants, a separate independent survey was conducted.

A Japanese interviewer organization (Professional Recruiter's Club) was contacted and, after the research purpose was explained, cooperation for a survey was granted. The Professional Recruiter's Club, founded by Yoshinobu Suzuki in 2001, consists of 90 in-house recruiting professionals. Recruiters from human resource-related industries (e.g. employee introduction services, head-hunting, and temporary employment services) are not eligible for membership.

Between October 22nd and November 6<sup>th</sup> 2006, 53 interviewers answered the survey. All respondents in this questionnaire are engaged in hiring new graduates.

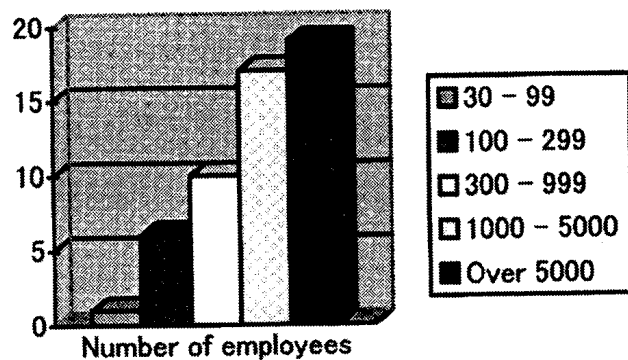
**Table 2 Represented Industries**

|             | Percentage |
|-------------|------------|
| Manufacture | 35.8 (19)  |
| Financial   | 17.5 ( 4)  |
| IT          | 30.2 (16)  |
| Medical     | 7.5 ( 4)   |
| Other       | 18.9 (10)  |
| Total       | 100 (53)   |



**Table 3 Number of employees**

|             | Percentage |
|-------------|------------|
| Under 29    | 0 (0)      |
| 30 - 99     | 1.9 (1)    |
| 100 - 299   | 11.3 (6)   |
| 300 - 999   | 18.9 (10)  |
| 1000 - 4999 | 32.1 (17)  |
| Over 5000   | 35.8 (19)  |
| Total       | 100 (53)   |



Based on the findings of the comparison of interview manuals, an online questionnaire was developed. Variables that had a substantially different percentage of occurrences or that were absent in one of the manual groups were selected. Definitions of words such as modesty and boasting were not provided but for most questions specific behavior was described. The questionnaire contained three parts: 1) demographic questions, 2) questions about the frequency of occurrence and the interviewer's evaluation of applicants' behavior and 3) the degree of the interviewers' agreement or disagreement to five interview concept statements. Almost all questions consisted of Likert-type questions on a 1 to 5 scale.

Interviewers were asked about the frequency and the interviewer's evaluation of 32 applicants' (student job seekers) behaviors in interviews. The frequency (almost always to almost never) and evaluation (very bad to very good) were both measured on a 1 to 5 scale.<sup>(5)</sup> The last part of the questionnaire elicited agreement or disagreement with five interview concept statements.

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation for the 32 student applicant behaviors (for frequency, 1 = almost never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = almost always; for evaluation, 1 = very bad, 2 = bad 3 = neutral, 4 = good, 5 = very good).

**Table 4 Applicant behavior**

|   | Frequency |       | Evaluation |       |
|---|-----------|-------|------------|-------|
|   | Mean      | SD    | Mean       | SD    |
| Chats in the waiting room                 | 2.70      | 1.186 | .08        | .675  |
| Smokes, chews gum                         | 1.17      | .470  | 1.58       | .663  |
| Wears casual clothing                     | 1.17      | .470  | 2.34       | .732  |
| Knocks twice before entering              | 3.94      | 1.262 | 3.40       | .716  |
| Knocks only once (or three times)         | 2.25      | 1.125 | 3.15       | .568  |
| Does not close the door silently          | 1.83      | .935  | 2.25       | .585  |
| Unusually loud voice.                     | 2.81      | .622  | 3.21       | .743  |
| Sits without being offered a seat         | 2.02      | .796  | 2.23       | .577  |
| Uses the backrest of the chair            | 2.08      | .874  | 2.21       | .631  |
| Uses the armrests of chair                | 3.42      | 2.089 | 3.30       | 1.739 |
| Crosses legs or arms                      | 1.45      | .722  | 1.87       | .590  |
| Straight posture                          | 3.94      | .770  | 3.98       | .635  |
| Natural posture                           | 2.28      | .717  | 3.15       | .632  |
| Maintains eye contact                     | 3.96      | .479  | 4.34       | .517  |
| Maintains eye contact only while speaking | 2.85      | .841  | 2.96       | .733  |
| Does not maintain eye contact             | 1.96      | .759  | 1.57       | .500  |
| Stares at the interviewer                 | 1.96      | .619  | 2.34       | .553  |
| Asks no question                          | 2.91      | .966  | 2.15       | .690  |
| Asks only one question                    | 3.04      | 1.037 | 3.06       | .602  |
| Asks several questions                    | 3.00      | 1.038 | 3.79       | .661  |
| Asks many questions                       | 2.32      | 1.034 | 3.25       | .731  |
| Asks early about pay and benefits         | 1.75      | .757  | 2.47       | .541  |
| Interrupts interviewer                    | 1.55      | .667  | 1.96       | .517  |
| Speaks fast                               | 2.66      | .586  | 2.53       | .541  |
| Gesticulates a lot                        | 2.77      | .609  | 3.28       | .568  |
| Shows pushiness (aggressiveness)          | 1.91      | .687  | 2.45       | .637  |
| Does not clearly finish sentences         | 2.70      | .799  | 1.85       | .411  |
| Reading interview manuals                 | 3.32      | .803  | 2.34       | .758  |
| Memorized questions and answers           | 3.02      | .820  | 1.96       | .759  |
| Boasts about accomplishments              | 2.64      | .736  | 3.19       | .652  |
| Is modest about accomplishments           | 2.74      | .711  | 2.92       | .474  |
| Apologizes                                | 2.17      | .849  | 2.77       | .423  |

Considering the results of the manual comparison, the interviewers' survey showed the following remarkable results:

- Most interviewers consider interviews a sale, test or date, but less a theater performance.
- The majority of interviewers felt that they feel that the applicants are equal with themselves.
- Aggressiveness is evaluated negatively but only slightly.
- Boasting is evaluated slightly higher than modesty.
- Contrary to 18 % of the Japanese manuals, asking questions is important. Asking several is best.
- Applicants seldom ask a lot of questions.
- Ten percent of interviewers reported that they are sometimes interrupted (creates a negative evaluation).
- Casual clothing is not very bad, especially for the IT industry. Most of the 16 IT industry interviewers gave neutral evaluations and one interviewer even evaluated it positively.
- Chatting in the waiting room is a difference in the manuals that was not sustained by the interviewers. It did not matter to them.
- Knocking twice or not does not influence the evaluation of applicants. Even if two knocks were rated slightly higher than one or three knocks (and the number of applicants knocking twice is higher than the number of applicants knocking once or three times), the number of knocks did not matter much to the interviewers.
- Making a sound when closing the door or sitting down without being offered a seat is perceived badly and seldom occurs.
- Maintaining eye contact is evaluated very highly (number one) and not maintaining eye contact received the lowest evaluation in this survey, including staring.
- Limited eye contact (eye contact only when speaking) is perceived neutrally.
- A loud voice is evaluated slightly better than neutral.
- Using the back and armrest of chairs is negatively evaluated.
- A straight posture is evaluated very highly, but a natural posture is also

fairly evaluated, above neutral.

- Gesticulating a lot is evaluated slightly positively.
- Reading interview manuals and memorizing answers is perceived negatively.
- Speaking fast is a negative point but sometimes observed.
- Finishing sentences is very important.
- Smaller companies see negative behavior (improper sitting, no eye-contact) more often and positively evaluated behavior (straight posture, maintaining eye contact) less often and vice versa.

## **V. Discussion:**

The nature of the data of the textual analysis of the manuals and the survey differ in many aspects. The interview manuals were written advice. Even if the content was not influenced by commercial interest, there is no guarantee that the manuals accurately reflect idealized notions of self-presentation as typical interviewers might see them. Most authors and publishing organizations have not conducted systematic research. Some authors merely give anecdotes about their own experiences and viewpoints. Manuals also contain more stereotypes than scientific knowledge. However, some authors might be able to see interviewers more objectively than the interviewers themselves.

The degree to which applicants and interviewers actually perform in interviews according to the depicted IM norms in this type of literature may not be directly inferred from these materials.<sup>(6)</sup> A cross-cultural comparison of idealized IM norms is still valuable but no strong claims about real behavior can be made. However, the interviewer survey confirms many, if not most, of the idealized notions from the Japanese manuals.

Absence of a topic in manuals does not necessarily mean that a certain behavior is not considered important or valued; in fact, it might indicate just the opposite: if a certain behavior is common sense, taken for granted, known and followed by everybody, there is no need to include it in the manual. For example, Japanese manuals might not advise readers not to bring plastic or paper bags to

the interview (as two of the seven German manuals did) because it is common sense and observed by everybody.

Another issue to consider is the time delay. Even the most current manuals in this study were already one to two years old by the time they were published. Several manuals were published annually but only changed the year on the cover. These manuals purported to contain current information, but were in fact old. Culture is constantly changing and gaps between the Japanese manuals and survey can be explained by changes in time.

While interviewers present current practice they might answer in the way they perceive themselves evaluating applicants. There is no guarantee that the frequencies and evaluations provided by them are accurate. The responses might just show what the interviewers think is a desirable evaluation or the way they feel responses represent the politically correct way.

However, the close correspondence of recommended IM in the manuals and the evaluation of behavior in the survey show that the findings have validity and can be generalized to a high degree.

## **VI. Results:**

Two major findings of this study were the high degree of formality and ritualization and the variety of changes in Japanese society.

### **Formality and Ritualization:**

This study confirmed that Japanese interviews contain relatively strong formalization and ritualization. Ritualization was especially strong in a variety of non-verbal behaviors but the issue of memorization of answers shows that formulas and rituals also involve verbal communication.

The structural tightness in Japanese culture results in low tolerance for deviation from standard or “proper” behavior.<sup>(7)</sup> A structurally tight society has strong reciprocal role expectations and individuality is less valued. Tight protocols might change the way IM strategies are formed and executed because actors will focus more on the appropriateness of their behavior according to the

social roles of the actors and less on personal characteristics.

This study showed that employment interviews are seen and perceived as a test. Knowing and performing the formalities and rituals are an important part of this test, especially for job-seeking new graduates.

#### Changes in Japanese society:

Comparison of the Japanese manuals with the survey yielded several differences. For example, Japanese manuals contained more expressions of modesty than German or American manuals. However, in the last few years this tendency has become less noticeable. Furthermore, bragging is now actually rated slightly better than modesty in the survey, and advice not to chat in the waiting room and to knock twice seems to be outdated. Recommendations for these two behaviors increased in the Japanese manuals over the years but the survey shows that in reality they have become less important.

### **VII. Limitations and further research:**

Comparison of the three countries was based on content analysis of depicted notions of idealized IM. These idealized notions were valuable for comparison but must not be confused with the actual behavior of applicants. Data for actual behavior, interviewers' attitudes and evaluation of certain behavior was confirmed only in Japan with a separate study. Obviously, data from American and German interviewers would greatly enhance the findings and should be incorporated in future studies.

The present text analysis mainly used a thematic approach in which concepts were identified and the occurrences of these concepts comprised the variables under analysis. Besides new topics and themes, analyzing not only the occurrence in binary measurements but also the frequency, amount and strength of occurrence, would yield additional information. However, a researcher would have to tackle many additional problems. Would one sentence saying "Definitely do not X" carry more weight than several pages of "Better not to X"? and, if yes, by how much? For finer graded comparison the researcher would have to be



concerned with translation and interpretation issues. Backtranslations and multiple coders might also be needed.

Comparing interview manuals for differences in Impression Management is a fruitful method for comparative culture studies. Many other topics could be examined and used as variables.

### **VIII. Practical implications for intercultural interviews**

The purpose of this study was finding cultural differences in IM but it also produced, as a by-product, the following findings, which might be relevant for human resource departments and also for applicants facing intercultural interviews.<sup>(8)</sup>

It should be kept in mind that applicants in intercultural interviews might change their IM according to their perception of the interviewer. Interviewers with culture specific knowledge might suspect and take these adjustments into account. Such interviewers might change their usual evaluation of self-presentation. Adjusting to the right degree might not only require culture specific knowledge but also to ability to correctly judge to what degree the interlocutor is adjusting.

#### **Advice to non-Japanese applying in Japan**

- Be aware that interviews are seen as a test and conducted in a formal atmosphere. Being serious is better than using humor (no need to frequently smile).
- Reading materials other than the company brochure might be perceived as inappropriate.
- Display a superior posture, including a straight back.
- Close the door without emitting a sound.
- Sit in a formal and un-relaxed position (not touching the back or arm support).
- It is okay to use your hands for gesturing. Interviewers evaluate this

behavior positively.

- Direct, sustained eye contact is perceived as positive.
- Japanese interviewers might have a higher tolerance to limited eye contact.
- Talk loudly.
- Do not try to control the flow of the interview (avoid pushiness).
- Do not interrupt.
- There is no need to show humility (It is perceived only neutrally).
- Boastful comments about your accomplishments are in average perceived neutrally.
- Asking no questions might be negative. Asking several is best.
- Do not bring up the topic of compensation.
- Use complete sentences.

#### Advice to Japanese companies interviewing non-Japanese

- Understand that non-Japanese applicants will be unaware of a variety of verbal and non-verbal behavior points (e.g. formal versus comfortable sitting), which might be common sense in Japan. For example, a seemingly rude sitting posture does not necessarily mean that the candidate has a bad attitude.
- Be aware that non-Japanese (from the data of this study, especially Germans) might lie to questions, which are perceived as illegal or inappropriate. Others (from the data of this study, especially Americans) might exaggerate in order to appear more qualified.
- Try conducting the interview as equals. Non-Japanese applicants might expect this more than Japanese.

#### Advice to German and American companies interviewing Japanese applicants

- Japanese applicants might expect a certain level of formality on the company side. The interviewer and company might lose credibility with

an overly informal approach to interviewing.

## VIX. Appendix

**Table 5 Eye contact**

|                             | Japanese | German | American |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| Direct eye contact          | 60%      | 57%    | 82%      |
| Don't stare                 | 33%      | 14%    | 37%      |
| Eye contact while answering | 44%      | 0%     | 18%      |
| Look at nose, tie etc.      | 30%      | 14%    | 9%       |

**Table 6 Non-verbal behavior: entering the interview room**

|                                   | Japanese | German | American |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| No chatting in the waiting room   | 36%      | 0%     | 0%       |
| Knocks twice                      | 29%      | 0%     | 0%       |
| No noise with door                | 50%      | 14%    | 0%       |
| Handshake                         | 0%       | 57%    | 73%      |
| No sitting before invited         | 39%      | 29%    | 46%      |
| Do not touch the chair's backrest | 29%      | 0%     | 0%       |

**Table 7 Sitting**

|                                  | Japanese | German | American |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| Not sitting before invited       | 39%      | 29%    | 46%      |
| Don't touch the chair's backrest | 29%      | 0%     | 0%       |

**Table 8 Posture**

|                  | Japanese | German | American |
|------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| Straight posture | 68%      | 14%    | 36%      |

**Table 9 Q&A scripts and memorization**

|                             | Japanese | German | American |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| Large amount of Q&A scripts | 56%      | 29%    | 36%      |
| Do not memorize Q&A scripts | 32%      | 29%    | 18%      |
| Do memorize Q&A scripts     | 7%       | 0%     | 9%       |

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## Notes

- (1) Goetz, Richard Elliot, 2007
- (2) Schilling, 2001
- (3) For an application with a similar methodology see Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997, p. 171ff
- (4) This term is used in one of the German intercultural manuals.
- (5) Only one behavior, - applicant uses the chair's armrest -, included a special answer option (armrest not present) Over one third (21 interviewers) chose this answer and only the

answers of the 32 respondents whose company chairs had armrests were used for the analysis of this behavior.

- (6) Mechling (1975) pointed out similar dynamics in regard to historical analysis of American childrearing literature. In this case, Mechling claimed that evidence on observed maternal behavior was quite the opposite of that recommended in the official childrearing literature. Furthermore, Mechling argues that the manuals neither cause nor reflect childrearing behavior. Mechling concludes: "The historian can take the manuals as evidence of the internal states (beliefs, values, attitudes) of the authors of the manuals and, to whatever extent there appears to be a sharing or at least complementarity of these internal states across several authors, the historian can generalize further about some sector of the belief system of the historical American society." (p. 56)
- (7) Keeley, 2001, p. 31
- (8) Thompson (2000) points out various issues related to intercultural employment interviews and her advice will be modified and expanded here with the data found in this study.

**Cultural Differences in Idealized Impression Management**  
**— A Comparison of Employment Interview Manuals from**  
**Japan, Germany and the USA —**

〈Summary〉

Richard Goetz

The purpose of this study was to find cultural differences in IM between Japan, Germany and America in the field of employment interviews by using interview manuals as a data source. Fifty-five interview manuals were used in a content analysis study. In addition, a survey of 53 Japanese interviewers currently working in Tokyo was conducted and the results compared with the idealized notions and advice expressed in the Japanese manuals.

Two major findings of this study were a high degree of formality and ritualization and a variety of changes in Japanese society. Results might be valuable for applicants and also for human resource personnel to more fairly and accurately evaluate applicants. The findings could also be useful in numerous settings outside of selection interviews and, therefore, contribute to the body of knowledge in other disciplines, for example, the field of intercultural communication.