1. Introduction

This article is based on a study of attitudes of Finns towards the Japanese in the context of Finnish-Japanese business communication (Harakka 1994). The interaction between the Finns and the Japanese has increased rapidly during the last few years. However, there is not much research on Finnish-Japanese relationships from a cross-cultural communication point of view. This survey is meant to fill this gap. The managing directors of companies in the area of South and Central Ostrobothnia were chosen as respondents because in their leading position they more often than average Finns, come into contact with the Japanese.

In the first chapter, the background of the study and some general aspects of intercultural communication will be discussed. The second chapter deals with methodological aspects of the research and the material used in the survey. In the third chapter the most important results are described.

2. Background of the research

I chose Finnish-Japanese business communication as the topic of the survey because of my personal experiences as a Sales Promoter in an airline company and many visits to East and Southeast Asia both on business and vacation. These experiences gave me an impression of the communication between Asians and Finns. There are several critical points that may cause problems, not only in the relations between Asians and Finns, but in all cross-cultural contacts.

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1 Jussi Koivisto has adapted a cross-cultural semiotic point of view in his research on Duality and its Manifestations in Japanese Business Management (1993).

2 The area of South and Central Ostrobothnia is situated on the west coast of Finland between the cities of Pori and Oulu.
2.1 Language problems

It is evident that there are language problems in cross-cultural contacts like those between the Finns and the Japanese. Finns seldom speak Japanese and even if they know some words, they do not know the culture well. Japanese people coming to Finland also face problems. Mostly they do not know Finland or understand Finnish. As their mother tongue cannot be used, there has to be an intermediate link, an interpreter or a lingua franca, a language other than Finnish or Japanese.

In most cases, English is used as the lingua franca, which does not make the interaction easier. However, not knowing how to speak a language fluently may serve as a buffer. A competent interpreter who knows both cultures well is able to be of great help by "buffering" a situation. An interpreter can explain cultural differences, leave something out or add useful information when needed. Errors can, on one hand, be explained and forgiven as due to limited language skills and, on the other hand, odd as it may sound, knowing English or any language extremely well may be a cause of severe misunderstanding. The reason for this lies in people’s tendency to think that those who speak some language well also think in the same way and have similar values as the native speakers of the language. Mannari & Befu (1991: 36–37) write that Japanese people’s attitudes to Japanese-Americans who make mistakes in their Japanese are more negative than their attitudes to foreigners who do not speak Japanese fluently. As regards Japanese-Americans, linguistic competence is implicitly assumed to be in their genes. Halliday states that most of the trouble does not lie in the language but in people’s different values and conceptions. These are represented in many ways: in the language people use, in the ways they move, dress, eat, or behave, or in their way of classifying things, in the rules they set up, and in their modes of thought. These are the differences to which people react and by which they feel threatened. (Halliday 1978: 162.)
2.2 Alien status

In addition to the language problems, there is a feeling of being a stranger, which makes people anxious or inattentive, and may even cause an effect called "culture shock". A stranger is often understood, according to Gudykunst & Kim (1992: 19), as an alien, an intruder, foreigner, outsider, newcomer, and immigrant, as well as being a person unknown and different. Applying this idea of alienation, Finns can be seen as strangers in Japan just because they are very different and behave in a way unfamiliar to most of the Japanese. Still they must be dealt with, because they are physically present participating in some given situation. According to Mannari & Befu, all foreigners in Japan – not only Finns visiting for the first time – but even persons who know the Japanese language and culture well, are gaijin and have a permanent alien status,

...no matter how many generations they have lived there, no matter how well they speak the language, and no matter how well they have been adapted to Japanese culture (Mannari & Befu 1991: 33).

Mannari & Befu (1991: 36) emphasize that foreigners are always considered to miss the essential core of Japanese sociolinguistic competence. Every cross-cultural meeting, as Gudykunst & Kim (1992: 20–21) maintain, can therefore be seen as a potential source of a crisis, because if there is much strangeness present in the interaction, people tend to get anxious and antagonistic. Thus in Finnish-Japanese relations a potential basis of misunderstanding exists, even if nobody has any intention of harming anyone and the anxious feelings cannot be seen in overt behaviour.

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3 More about culture shock, see Furnham & Bohner 1986.

4 The word gaijin means a lot more to the Japanese than the word a foreigner does to us. Kodansha Encyclopedia writes: "There are pejorative terms in the Japanese language to designate ethnic minorities in Japan, regardless of their nationality, whether Japanese or foreign. Most of these are avoided in mainstream mass media, although they are widely used in peripheral media and in private conversations. The word gaijin ("outsider") is not necessarily regarded as a disparaging term by the many ethnic majority Japanese who use it, often in reference to Japanese minorities as well as foreigners; many people so labelled, however, find the term exclusionary and thus offensive." (Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan 1983/2: 314). See also Wilkinson 1990: 31–32; Christopher 1991: 170–190.

5 It is very typical of the Asians that, in order to preserve harmony, negative feelings are hidden and saying "no" is most carefully avoided. This happens in situations where Westerners might use explicit expressions of unhappiness or frustration. Christopher (1991: 172–173) states: "Because of their distaste for confrontation and their ingrained horror of openly embarrassing anyone, Japanese in general find it difficult to respond to any proposition, however outrageous, with an unqualified 'no'.”
Mere language skills are not the only skills needed to ensure that people are fully competent in cross-cultural communication. Much more is needed in Japan and in any foreign culture. Misunderstanding may be caused by the fact that people do not express themselves only by means of words or silence, but there is an entire universe of behaviour which is mostly taken for granted without the interlocutors being consciously aware of it, and sometimes it functions in juxtaposition with words, as Hall (1990: xii) points out.

2.3 Modes of non-verbal communication

Social competence means knowing how to avoid a mismatch and how to act in practical situations. Visitors should know the rules of etiquette and protocol, they should be aware of the correct level of formality, informality, and openness. They should know how to use the correct forms of address and the suitable ways of showing politeness. They should, moreover, know the right forms of expressing both positive and negative feelings, as well as modes of non-verbal communication that differ from one culture to another⁶.

The "proper" distance between communication partners varies from one culture to another. Arabs are used to very short physical distance between discussing persons while Englishmen, Finns and Japanese keep longer distance from their partners⁷. The accepted length and direction of eye contact⁸ is crucial for a stranger to know, as well as the accepted ways of touching, especially the opposite sex and children (cf. Salo-Lee 1996: 58–71). E.g. in Japan, for a person of lower social status it is usually not ”suitable” to make eye-contact with someone who is of higher social status.

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⁶ More about differences of non-verbal communication see e.g. in Hall 1989; 1990a; 1990b; 1993; Morris 1994.
⁷ For more details, see e.g. Hall 1990b.
⁸ In Finland it is quite normal for children to be advised by parents that they have to make direct eye-contact with other persons. We are told: "An honest person looks others straight in the face.” At the beginning of the 80’s I moved to Istanbul for a year. Very soon I learned that in Turkey it was considered vulgar for a woman to make eye-contact with men. Looking a man accidentally in the eye on the street caused unwanted suggestions wherever I went. This led men following me on the street, at the university, and in museums, sometimes even offering me money. After a while I learned to look “through” and was left alone.
2.4 Taboos

Intercultural competence involves sensitivity to tacit messages. People of every culture attach to their symbols (words, rituals, etiquette etc.) hidden and often heavily loaded meanings that are not easily discovered by strangers. Because these meanings are not revealed in words they have to be understood from the context. They are hidden under the surface of normal behaviour like icebergs under the water, and are usually not discussed. Either they are taken for granted, which means that no discussion is needed. They may also be ambiguous, so that people are unable to discuss them. Or they may be so embarrassing, frightening, and painful that they are not to be mentioned. Only violations of set barriers bring this kind of meanings into the open. What makes things more complicated is the fact that most of the symbolic meanings are based on the history and tradition of a certain culture. As Schröder (1996: 3) points out:

Für die Entwicklung interkultureller Kompetenz ergibt sich hinsichtlich der Kulturspezifik von Tabus, daß die Lernenden grundsätzlich nicht nur wissen sollten, worüber und wie man in der anderen Kultur kommuniziert, sie sollten vielmehr auch wissen worüber man nicht kommuniziert, schweigt bzw. nur in einer ganz bestimmten Art und Weise spricht. Fehlt eine solche Sensibilität im Umgang mit Tabus, so ist die Kommunikation grundsätzlich gefährdet, da es sich bei Tabus um 'Latenzbereiche' einer Kultur handelt.

The social norms thus determine what is important to say and do in a community. Still more, in the Japanese context especially, the norms determine what is not said and not done.

People usually have tacit knowledge about what in their own culture is funny, normal, right, fair play, i.e. what belongs to the normal "order of things". They also seem to know quite clearly what should be avoided, what is impolite, unsuitable, "dirty" etc. A member of one culture cannot know e.g. the taboos of the other culture without someone to instruct him/her about them. And anyone who even humorously talks about tabooed topics, or does something that is taboo, may be considered uncivilised, vulgar, rude, stupid, and most certainly misbehaving. (For more details, see Harakka 1996: 80, 82–84.)

2.5 Stereotypes

People have ideas not only about their own culture, but about foreign cultures as well. Lippman (1936) called such ideas or "pictures in people’s heads" stereotypes. Stereotypes
are images\(^9\) of what members of one’s own or some other group look like, how they behave, or what is ”typical” of them. These ideas may have been adopted from school, the media, friends, laws, or even from etiquette books. Some of them are correct, some only raw overgeneralizations.

Stereotypes are, on one hand, a cause of cultural mismatches. They are dangerous, because they affect people’s behaviour. Visitors easily base their attitudes on stereotypic ideas of what they think is ”the correct way” of functioning. They make mistakes and feel anxious – as well as cause frustration in others. On the other hand, stereotypes belong to people’s normal way of categorising, and cultures are, more or less, ”units”\(^10\) where members tend to behave according to ”the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede 1991: 260). There are similar patterns in the behaviour of the group members. Thus, stereotypes may not only be negative, but also useful. Stereotypes may even help people to choose the correct mode of ”external” behaviour in unfamiliar situations, as Salo-Lee (1996: 17–18) points out.

If strangers are unable to understand the core of the symbolic meanings of a foreign culture, knowing the etiquette may be of great help. Many books written about international manners and ”good” behaviour give practical advice on how to avoid collisions in international relations. The danger of books of this kind lies, however, in the descriptions of ”typical” features of foreign cultures. These descriptions should be understood as stereotypic and, thus, as relative.

2.6 Some features of Finnish and Japanese ways of behaving

According to Lewis (1995: 277–278) Finnish ”programming of the mind” consists of a mixture of values that are partly based on the Lutheran religion and Protestant working ethic, partly on Eastern ambiguity, patience, silence, and fear of losing face. ’Face’ is a concept that is very difficult to define and the Eastern and Western notions are not quite similar. Brown and Lewinson have studied the concept trying to find some universals


\(^10\) See e.g. Benedict 1951.
concerning how people use language in order to save their own and the others’ ’face’.
According to them ’Face’ is:

the public self-image that every member [of a community] wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:

a) negative face, the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition

b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or ’personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants. (Brown and Lewinson 1994: 61)

Rusanen has discovered that a Finn avoids conflicts and disputes by keeping silent\(^{11}\), and that indirectness in conflict situations belongs to Finnish rules of politeness. Moreover, Finns are afraid of standing out from the rest, and a certain kind of unassertiveness is typical of Finnish communication. (Rusanen 1993: 70–71) Salo-Lee points out that there are many aspects of negative politeness\(^{12}\) in Finland. In Finnish culture it is considered polite to leave a person alone. Indirectness, hanging back, vagueness, self-irony, and the difficulty of saying ”no” belong to the Finnish way of behaving (Salo-Lee 1993: 84) as well as to the Japanese. On the other hand, Finns are known for their straightforwardness and honesty.

The Japanese are known to be very formal and hierarchic. They are said to be ”the most polite nation on earth” (see e.g. Tobin 1991: 1), which is also coded in the Japanese language. Kennedy & Yaginuma (1991: 26) claim that no nation has a more carefully worked-out system of etiquette than Japan. In Japan everyone knows her/his place in society, and boundaries are drawn between ”inside and outside”. Japanese etiquette [and language – T.H.] ritualises duties and defines relationships most clearly. People are held together by a network of promises and obligations. In this kind of stable society people must have social virtues like restraint, patience, modesty, and thoughtfulness. This includes the endeavour not to cause anyone embarrassment (ibid. 1991: 30–31) or loss of face. The Finns and the Japanese seem partly to share similar values \(^{13}\).

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\(^{13}\) Cf. e.g. Mouer & Sugimoto 1986: 2–3; cf. Broms & Gahmberg 1987: 415.
3. Attitudes of Finns towards the Japanese

In the chapters above I have restricted myself to some Finnish and Japanese ways of behaving as well as to a few critical aspects of cross-cultural communication. Difficulties may be caused for instance by feelings of strangeness, limited (or too fluent) language skills, limited cultural knowledge, different values, different modes of non-verbal communication, symbolic meanings that are not fully understood, as well as by stereotypic attitudes. How these facts have affected Finnish-Japanese business-relations will be discussed in the next few pages.

During the last 20 years the contacts between Finnish and Japanese people have become more frequent. Today, there are several companies in the area of South and Central Ostrobothnia doing business with the Japanese. People in different positions come in contact with the Japanese more or less often. The way the importance and care of international relations are understood in a company, as well as the amount of knowledge of intercultural communication, have great impact on the success or failure of a firm. At least in smaller firms, it is the managing director or the owner who is the key person drawing up the outlines for the company’s international relations and having the widest knowledge of the business. For this reason managing directors were chosen as respondents to the survey. Acting as a control group, 14 students filled in the same questionnaire during a course on Foreign Trade at the Commercial College of Suupohja.

3.1 The questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent out to 173 persons, who were chosen by random sampling from a database of industrial enterprises. The companies represented several lines of export and had contacts in Japan. The total number of answers from managers amounted to 74.

The questionnaire consisted of five parts. In the first part, background information was asked for, i.e. gender, education, age, position, number of visits to Japan, and length of stay there. Secondly, the respondents were asked to select the most suitable alternative from full agreement (5) to total disagreement (1) on a five-point Likert-type scale with positive and negative statements concerning the Japanese. The statements were arranged according to the subject:
1) statements referring to the concept of 'face',
2) statements regarding negotiations with the Japanese,
3) statements regarding the Japanese as persons and business partners,
4) statements regarding attitudes to languages.

The fourth group of statements gave information on the respondents’ attitudes to the learning of Japanese, and on the ways in which Finnish business people wanted to communicate in Japan. In the third and fourth parts of the questionnaire, the respondents were given 20 positive and negative attributes describing the Japanese, of which the respondents were asked to choose five. They could also add their own attributes in case they considered the questionnaire too limited.

Even though my results cannot be considered statistically adequate because of the limited number of respondents, they give some indication of the Finnish views, and serve as a guideline to show the bent of Finns’ attitudes to Japan and the Japanese.

3.2 Background information of the respondents

The total number of respondents (88) was divided into three groups according to the respondents’ profession and visits to Japan:

   a) managers who had been in Japan at least once (25 persons),
   b) managers who had not been in Japan (49 persons),
   c) students (14 persons).

The typical respondent was a male aged 41–50 with a college-level education, who had never visited Japan. All in all, 25 managers had visited Japan at least once, 17 of them had stayed in Japan from one week to one month, seven managers had been in Japan only a couple of days. One of the respondents had visited Japan more than 10 times and lived there for more than a year. None of the students had visited Japan. In the group of students, 10 persons were female, and 4 male, their ages varying between 21 and 50.

3.3 Statements

The Finnish contradiction between respect for harmony and telling the truth gave me occasion to learn more about the respondents’ attitudes to the question of face. This is
extremely important in business where losing face may cause embarrassment, pain, termination of contacts, and even loss of business agreements.

a) 'Face'

The results showed that almost 64 % of all respondents agreed with the first statement: "Harmony is more important than truth in Japan", and over 82 % with the second: "In Japan no-one should lose face". However, 58 % of the respondents in my research also seemed to think that "Even the Japanese should learn to express their ideas clearly". Most of the respondents (86 %) considered friendly but formal behaviour to be the best way of functioning for a long time after their first meeting with the Japanese.

![Figure 1. Statements concerning 'Face'](image)

1) Harmony is more important than truth in Japan.
2) In Japan no one should lose face.
3) Even the Japanese should learn to express their ideas clearly.
4) Even a long time after getting acquainted with the Japanese it is best to behave in a friendly and formal manner.
5) The Japanese fulfil their obligations even if they would not like to do so.

There was also great unanimity of opinion concerning the statement referring to Japanese feelings of responsibility and duty. I consider this not only to show the respondents’ image of the Japanese, but also their own attitudes to given promises and accepted obligations. Of all the respondents 80 % considered the Japanese very dutiful people, who fulfil their obligations even when they must force themselves to do so. The managers who had visited
Japan at least once were more realistic and disagreed more (12 %) than students (0 %) or managers who had never been to Japan (2 %).

b) Negotiations

According to Hawrysh & Zaichkowsky (1990: 46), lengthy periods of silence in a conversation in an American context mean that something is wrong. To Japanese silence is part of their conversational style. This is an advantage to the Japanese in their negotiations with Americans\textsuperscript{14}, who may feel uncomfortable with silent periods. Americans’ reaction is either to fill the gaps with conversation and persuasive appeals, or to get angry and break off the meeting, thus weakening their position. (Hawrysh & Zaichkowsky 1990: 46; DeMente 1993: 121) To Finns, silence is often comfortable, and they do not feel restless during silent periods in the conversation. Thus, the same advantage that the Japanese have could be expected to pertain to Finns as well if we should like to use our partiality for silence purposefully as a negotiation strategy.

As can be seen from the results (Figure 2), evasions and long silences during negotiations did not disturb the respondents of my survey too much. They did not consider the Japanese style of negotiation too slow either. They seemed, as a matter of fact, to have a very positive view of the Japanese as negotiators. All in all, 83 % of all respondents agreed with the statement: "The Japanese are skilful negotiators". Maybe it is easier for Finns to handle Asian reserve than e.g. for Americans, who, as DeMente (1993: 120) points out, have a tendency to fill the silent moments by talking. Because listening is easier for a Finn than talking\textsuperscript{15}, we would expect this style of communication to serve as a positive factor in Finnish-Japanese relations.

\textsuperscript{14} More about negotiating with the Japanese in e.g. DeMente 1993: 119–125.

\textsuperscript{15} See e.g. Rusanen 1993: 58.
1) The Japanese evade the issue without getting to the point.
2) The Japanese keep too long silences during negotiations.
3) The Japanese proceed too slowly.
4) The Japanese are skilful negotiators.
5) The Japanese use dubious means to get better results in negotiations.

**Figure 2.** Statements regarding negotiations with Japanese

**Figure 3.** Opinions deviating on the statement: "The Japanese would use dubious means in negotiations to get better results"

Concerning the statement: "The Japanese use dubious means to get better results in negotiations", the opinions of the three groups vary (Figure 3). Students and those of the managers who had visited Japan seemed mostly to disagree with the statement, while managers who had never been to Japan expressed the most negative opinions.
c) The Japanese as persons

The following statements (Figure 4) show the respondents’ opinions of the Japanese as persons and business partners. The image of the Japanese seemed to be positive and the members of all three groups appreciated the Japanese. The statement "The Japanese are sensitive and warm" was agreed on by about 40 % of all respondents; 34 % were neutral, and 26 % disagreed.

1) The Japanese are sensitive and warm.
2) The Japanese do not care about persons who are not useful to them.
4) The Japanese treat their partners with justice.
5) The behaviour of the Japanese is aesthetic and sophisticated.

**Figure 4. Opinions of the Japanese as persons**

The respondents did not consider the Japanese very calculating either, because only 19 % of the respondents agreed with the statement: "The Japanese do not care about people who are not useful to them". The respondents also considered the Japanese to be honest and just. Of all respondents 66 % agreed with the statement: "The Japanese act honestly" and 68 % with "The Japanese treat their partners with justice". The Japanese were also seen as sophisticated and aesthetic by 76 % of all respondents.


*d) Communicating with the Japanese*

The following group of statements was intended to give information about knowledge of the Japanese language and about attitudes to communication with the Japanese.

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1) It is easy to get along with the Japanese.
2) It is difficult to understand the Japanese, even if they speak English, because their ways of thinking differ so much from ours.
3) I would rather speak Japanese than English with the Japanese.
4) I prefer/would prefer using an interpreter instead of speaking English with the Japanese.
5) The Japanese way of doing business is an ideal to realize when developing my own company.

**Figure 5.** Opinions about communication with the Japanese

The results (in Figure 5 only total percentages) showed that of those managers who had visited Japan most (76 %) agreed with the statement: 
*"It is easy to get along with the Japanese"*. Managers who had visited Japan also agreed more (52 % of them) than the other managers (43 %) with the statement: *"It is difficult to understand the Japanese, even if they speak English, because their ways of thinking differ so much from ours"*. The purpose of the statement *I would rather speak Japanese than English with the Japanese* was to give information about the respondents’ attitudes to learning the Japanese language. Most respondents, however, 56 % of all, preferred to use English in their discussions, 27 %
would have liked to speak Japanese, 15% were neutral, and 2% did not answer. When asked if they preferred an interpreter, 33% agreed, 55% would use English, 10% were neutral, and 2% did not answer. Almost half (46%) of all the respondents considered the Japanese way of doing business an ideal model for their company.

The differences between the managers’ and the students’ attitudes to speaking English or using an interpreter may be explained by comparing the level of their education and working experience. The managers were on the average older and had a lower level of education, they were more experienced in business, and more willing to use interpreters. The communicative competence of the students was better. More probably, however, the results show that the managers have more experience of difficulties and potential dangers of misunderstanding in interaction with the Japanese. They may have known, that a good interpreter is able to be of great help, serving as a mediator as well as a buffer against errors in interaction.

f) Difficulties and strengths of interaction

When asked about the most difficult and the easiest aspect of interaction with the Japanese, the managers saw most difficulties in understanding the Japanese culture, language and ways of thinking. Also etiquette formed a barrier. The lowest barriers for the managers to overcome were questions of religion, the Japanese attitude to foreigners, as well as differences in the style of communication and negotiation. The students considered the style of negotiation most difficult, but they expected some harm from the differences in working morale. According to the students it would be easiest to cope with the communication style, ways of thinking, religion, and the Japanese attitude to foreigners.

The attributes chosen by the respondents to describe the Japanese (Figure 6) were almost all positive. The Japanese were considered enterprising, skilful, brave, quick, as well as displaying initiative. None of the respondents considered the Japanese repudiating or unresponsive. In the open part of the questionnaire, the following attributes were ascribed to the Japanese: ”The Japanese attitudes to Finns and Finland are positive”. ”The Japanese can be taken at their word.” Single attributes given were: systematic, resolute, curious, honest, polite, meticulous, efficient, hardworking, reserved, withdrawn, dominant, and unpredictable.
Figure 6. Qualities attributed to the Japanese.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to survey the attitudes and potential stereotypes of Finnish business persons towards the Japanese. The hypothesis that the Finns have positive attitudes towards the Japanese was verified. The Finns seemed to have a fairly good understanding of Japanese ways of thinking and behaviour.

Because it is impossible to sum up the characteristics of a nation of 125 million people in a few attributes, we may say that the Finns’ images of the Japanese were stereotypical, but they were not negative. Wilkinson writes that Westerners until recently regarded Japanese with indifference; sometimes with scorn and sometimes with fear, but seldom with respect. Japanese images of Europe and the USA, on the other hand, have mostly been more positive and closer to reality than European and US images of Japan [...] (Ibid. 1990: 32)

However, the faith in the warmth, honesty and justness of the Japanese, as well as the
images of them as skilled negotiators may be exaggerated and perhaps cause unpleasant surprises in real interaction. Here, I believe, lies the risk a stereotyping Finn is prone to.

The Finns and the Japanese have certain similarities in their ways of communicating, which perhaps facilitates their interaction. Of course differences can be discovered as well, and even the Swedish tend to compare themselves with the Japanese, finding similarities in their ways of behaviour. We must be extremely careful not to build a new stereotype of similarity.

What Finns need is more information about the basics of cross-cultural communication. This means understanding how much the values and norms of each culture affect people’s behaviour and feelings. The symbolic meanings of a people’s own culture are deeply rooted in their minds. We tend to use our own cultural categorisations as a yardstick of the interaction with people coming from other cultures. That is why people should learn rid themselves of ethnocentricity, i.e. learn not to judge a foreign culture on the basis of their own culture – not even in a positive sense. We Finns should also learn to know when to go straight to the point and when to be circumspect. The knowledge of the sensitive topics, as well as the practical ways of avoiding them or of discussing them if they are not to be avoided is important for the development of mutual contacts. We should also learn more about the Japanese language, about the Japanese history and etiquette. What we already have is an unbiased readiness to meet the Japanese in a positive way. What we also share with the Japanese is the mutual love of nature, hot baths, raw fish, Sibelius and spirits.
References


