

**A Study of Japanese TV Commercials
from Socio-cultural Perspectives:
Special Attributes of Nonverbal Features
and Their Effects ***

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I. Introduction

On February 1, 1993, the Japanese public TV station NHK celebrated its 40th anniversary and on August 28 of the same year the commercial TV station NTV in Tokyo also celebrated the same anniversary. To commemorate this occasion, both stations have been airing retrospective specials since this January. The first Japanese TV commercial was for Seiko, the watch company. The commercial was broadcast as a timecast on NTV. ¹ During these forty years, countless TV commercials have been on the air; most of them soon became out of date and forgotten and some of them have been remembered nostalgically as a mirror of times passed.

For the first twenty years, Japanese TV commercials had given the audience the "dream" of a modernized style of living and much new information necessary for achieving it. Consumer goods such as electric appliances, cars, medicines, and western foods - things that help people modernize and simplify daily life - were mainly and most favorably broadcast by the companies (clients) over and over again until the name of the products could be the topic of a small talk over tea. Those commercials were widely broadcast and largely accepted through the new method of advertising, although in many cases the commercials were considered an intermission in the regular programs - a time for going to the bathroom.

For Japanese TV commercials, the decade of the 1970's was the decade of substance and maturity. The role of TV commercials became not only that of informing people of new products but also that of stimulating desire of their purchase by making the audience enjoy the contents and scenes of the commercials. Ultimately they were designed to improve the image of the company by their advertising tactics. The 1980's was the decade of selection and attraction. Through the development of mass media, especially of satellite broadcasting and cable TV, an overwhelming amount of information has been given daily to Japanese through TV commercials. By various kinds of advertising tactics, the companies encouraged us Japanese to purchase their products or services, so that we need to be more discerning in the selection of information necessary for us. TV commercials themselves must attract our attention first of all before trying to inform the audience about the products or services and before trying to persuade us to go to the stores or agencies.

It is safe to say that people and their culture create TV commercials and that through watching and studying TV commercials in a particular country, we can gain insight into the characteristics of the people and the society. These days, the recession and the resulting drop in consumption have had a great effect on the production and the content of TV commercials – even in Japan. The need to cut expenses has made it difficult for clients and advertising agencies to produce attractive commercials at low cost. Extravagance and some other features of the 1970's advertisements seem to have disappeared from the screen. Still, in the circumstances since 1980, thousands of commercials have been broadcast daily from five major commercial TV stations in Tokyo. Since watching TV is one of the most popular pastimes for the Japanese, it is quite sure that a socio-cultural study of Japanese TV commercials gives us a mirror for perceiving the trends, tendencies and characteristics in the Japanese society as well as of the Japanese themselves. Analyzing the commercials from the viewpoint of communication – specifically of nonverbal communication – must give us insight into the foundations of culture and society and help us understand the thinking and behavioral patterns of the Japanese.

II. Research (Analyses and Explanations)

1. Purpose of the Research

Akiyama has been collecting American TV commercials and comparing them with Japanese ones for ten years, and has been analyzing them from both verbal and nonverbal perspectives. By 1988, the research had found twenty particular features of American TV commercials:

- * (1) Aggressive use of language
- * (2) A great amount of words on the TV screen
- (3) Reading the words on the screen (simultaneous use of spoken language and written language)
- (4) Repetition, especially of figures (i. e. numerals)
- (5) Frequent showing of price
- (6) The general purpose of dialogue (information)
- (7) Common use of dramatizations such as "based on a true story".
- * (8) Music – such as jingles, background music, songs – not frequent
- * (9) Frequent use of comparative or challenge ads
- * (10) Frequent use of (seemingly) logical explanations
- * (11) Close relation between the concept of ads and the product or the service (Image and explanation are correlated with the product or the service).
- (12) Variation in the length of commercials: most are 60 seconds or 30 seconds. 15 second-commercials are rather rare.
- * (13) Generally, American commercials (compared to the Japanese ones) have their own internal logic which is original and sensible.
- * (14) There is more consistency between products/ services and image.
- * (15) In relation to Japanese, celebrities including movie stars, singers, etc. are not willing to appear to endorse the product/service.
- * (16) Except in special cases, American commercials use only Americans.
- (17) Use of a toll-free number (1-800-) is frequently seen.
- * (18) Tobacco commercials are prohibited and commercials for alcoholic beverages are very restricted except for beer or wine.
- * (19) Public advertising, medical care and insurance

advertising are abundant.

(20) Video footage rather than films are frequently used.

(Items with an asterisk were given special attention.)

Of course, these features often appear at the same time. Akiyama (1988, 1993) summarized these features into three particular characteristics: First of all, they use language to communicate the name and characteristics of the product in a positive, aggressive manner. Secondly, American TV commercials often take the comparative approach; i.e. the audience is given information which compares effectiveness of the company's product with that of its rivals. Thirdly, American TV commercials often reflect social trends promptly. The non-smoking movement, alcoholism, dieting, drugs, guns, environmental pollution, AIDS, etc. - serious social issues quickly become subjects of public service announcements aired on TV.

Based on this analysis of American TV commercials, the characteristics of Japanese TV commercials should be discovered and some particular points should be raised by paying special attention to the nonverbal features such as facial expressions, gestures (especially emblems) and the visual images of the commercial.

2. Method of Research

Over the past years, Akiyama has collected and analyzed thousands of Japanese TV commercials. In addition, he has since September of 1992 collected commercials which were broadcast during prime time (from 7:00 p.m. through 11:00 p.m.) and has paid special attention to the nonverbal features in them. He has analyzed more than two thousand TV commercials and examined more than two hundred of them from both visual and aural aspects. The source materials were taken from the five major commercial TV stations of Tokyo networks: NTV (Ch.4), TBS (Ch.6), FNS (Ch.8), TVA (Ch.10), and TXN (Ch.12).

3. Results of the Research - Particular features

Based on the analysis and categorization of the American TV commercials in his paper of 1988, the author pointed out the particular features of Japanese TV commercials as follows.

- (1) Smiling to express happiness and satisfaction by using the product or service (including the Japanese masked smiling of abashment and embarrassment).
- (2) Close-ups of women, especially those of actresses, singing idols, movie stars, and TV talents, frequently appear instead of information about the contents and effectiveness of the product.
- (3) Gestures (emblems which are originally Japanese or Americans, or both) often appear as effective means of communication. Proximity is also used for expressing close relationships.
- (4) "Soft sell" approaches as opposed to "hard sell" approaches commonly appear.
- (5) Inconsistency between the visual image and the product or the service
- (6) More frequent appearance of TV personalities
- (7) Using trained animals, beauties, children (the basic ABC's).
- (8) Frequent appearance of foreigners, especially Caucasians
- (9) Use of music to improve the image (almost always used)
- (10) Frequent use of concepts in which tradition and modernity combine together to produce a beautiful contrast
- (11) The use of foreign languages, especially English (Sometimes the English used is ungrammatical or is used carelessly.)
- (12) Frequent use of puns (Humor sometimes appears)
- (13) The concept of "family" is often a central concept of the advertising.
- (14) Public service announcements are rare.
- (15) Comparative or challenge ads are rare.
- (16) Advertising of alcoholic beverages and tobacco is often broadcast; the former is very common, the latter somewhat restricted.
- (17) Frequent appearance of mini-dramas or stories in commercials
- (18) Insurance companies, security companies, and banks are allowed to make TV commercials; however, adequate information is not offered. (Another example of a "soft sell" rather than a "hard sell" approach.
- (19) Except for the discount stores, supermarkets, and junk foods, indication of prices is rare.
- (20) Shortening of the time of commercial broadcasting; 15 or 30 seconds is common. (Because of the rise in costs, one or two companies by themselves cannot afford to buy commercial time during a program in prime time.)

If we categorize these twenty features again, we can gain the following five specific characteristics in Japanese TV commercials:

- (I) Language plays only a subsidiary role in communication. In other words, language is only one strand in the communication network. (O'Donnell & Todd: 1980) This feature includes the above mentioned features from (1) to (10).
- (II) Commercial producers, clients, and the audience prefer the soft sell approach very much. Means of nonverbal communication are positively used and displayed on TV screens. This feature specifically includes the above mentioned features from (1) to (6). Items (13), (15), (16), (17), (18), and (19) are also included.
- (III) The Japanese ethical system - which values "harmony" and "modesty" - basically frowns upon comparative or challenge ads, although lately the circumstances are changing to some extent.
- (IV) TV advertising does not quickly reflect social trends or problems.
- (V) The commercials frequently employ foreigners and foreign languages (including nonsensical or ungrammatical English) which often appear for the purpose of adding to an exotic mood or improving the image. Items (8) and (11) mentioned above are related.

These five features are here analyzed in detail and explained with some suitable examples. Simultaneous appearance of these features should be kept in mind.

(I) Language plays only a subsidiary role in communication. Nonverbal communication is very important.

[A] Facial Expressions in the Japanese TV Commercial

According to Ekman and Friesen (1976, 1982) and somewhat expanded by Leathers (1979), we have ten basic facial expressions indicating emotions and states of mind:

1. Anger
2. Bewilderment
3. Contempt
4. Determination
5. Disgust

6. Fear
7. Happiness
8. Interest
9. Sadness
10. Surprise.

In commercials, the task of the commercial makers is to attract attention, to arouse interest, to stimulate desire, to create conviction, and to get action (Vestergard & Schröder:1985). In order to achieve these five goals, normally, the most appropriate expressions for appealing to the audience are, of course, "Happiness," "Interest," "Determination," and "Surprise," in that order.² Of course, these expressions may be based on another expression, that of "Confidence." The most common facial expression, "Happiness," both in the Japanese and American commercials, would be expressed by the smile of the persons on the screen or of the endorsers, although the Japanese commercials use smiles more frequently and the smiles are bigger.

Instead of describing the effectiveness or advantage of using the product, Japanese TV commercials usually emphasize the happiness as shown by the smiling expression of the person, most often in the case of actresses or female TV personalities. They may also emphasize the happy family life that might result from using the product or the service. For example, the content of the commercial for JR Tookai (Japan Railway of Tookai) is as follows:

(Ex.1) Client: JR Tookai (60 seconds)

(From start to finish an English song plays.)

Visual: A baby boy is waiting for his father to come home. The scene of the Super Express "Mozomi" is inserted four times in changing scenes. During the presentation there are thirteen scenes in which appear a boy, a family, high school girls, businessmen, an elderly person, and so on (all of whom are smiling). Then the narration follows as "Hito wa motto taisetsu na hito no soba ga ii." (It's much better to be with the beloved person more.)

Visual: Kyuju-san nen san gatsu Mozomi ichi-jikan ippon e. (Super Express "Mozomi." From March, 1993, Mozomi will be available every hour.)

Audio: Father is sitting on the seat. (Voice of the telephone: "Moshi moshi, Mozomi de kareru." ("Hello, I'll be back by Mozomi."))

Narration: "Nippon wo yasumoo." (Take a rest, Japan) JR Tookai

During this commercial many smiles by various people of various ages and of various regions appear on the screen one after another. Although the language spoken and written is very limited, the commercial hopes to fascinate the audience with these smiles. The verbal message the client would like to transfer is just the underlined sentence above; however, this commercial is providing the audience with abundant images of service and a progressive humanitarian aspect of the company's public service. However, the copy of the commercial "Nippon wo yasumoo" (Take a rest, Japan) is very ambiguous grammatically and semantically. It sounds funny because, if businessmen usually use the train, they should do much more work a day. In commercials for life insurance companies, for detergents, and for medicines, especially for colds and stomach aches, women (often actresses or singers) smiling confidently will appear as endorsers. Here is one for a life insurance company:

(Ex. 2) Client: Daiichi Seimei (Daiichi Life Insurance Com.) (30 seconds)

(From start to finish, the song by Mr. Kazumasa Oda "My home town..." is heard.) Visual: A young man is running, waving his hand and smiling. Narration: "Korekara da ne." ("From now on." i.e. for the future) Visual: Egao de susume. (Go ahead with a smile; smile as you move along.) Young men and young women appear one after another. More than 20 of them appear with big smiles, waving their hands. Then, a popular Japanese singer-song-writer, Kazumasa Oda, appears with a little smile and is waving his hand. Narration: "Shakai ni deta ra jibun no hoken. Passport Go-sen Dai-ichi Seimei." (When you go into the society, your own insurance. Passport Go-sen Dai-ichi Seimei.)

Visual: Passport 5000 25-bai gata de shin-tojo Dai-ichi Seimei ("Debut as the type of 25 times," which is not easily translated, but means something to the effect that one's initial investment will multiply twenty-five times).

Since this insurance policy is targeted at the youth, especially the ones graduating from college, many young men and young women appear one after another, all of whom, as in Example 1, are wearing big smiles and appealing the audience. The twenty-first person who appears on the screen is Mr. Oda, a singer who has sold a million records. He is the most popular among Japanese young women for his melodious "love songs" sung with his own lyrics. It is quite common for celebrities and TV personalities to endorse

products and services with their words or songs. Perhaps because of the lack of "talk shows" in Japan, media personalities, prospective stars, singers, and actresses consider TV commercials a means of gaining exposure for themselves as well as endorsing the product or service in Japan.³ Songs and music played as theme music in TV commercials or in TV dramas often become big hits in Japan because record and movie companies often join with some particular companies and try to increase the profits of each.

Smiling and obvious satisfaction also appear in every kind of beer and *sake* commercial in Japan where there is no prohibition against showing someone drinking them on screen. The commercials are usually broadcast at night; however, they are often seen during the day on weekends. In some commercials, the endorsers say "Umai!" (Great Taste!) after drinking up, or often say "Biiru wo nomoo" (Let's drink beer) with a smile. Some commercials often show, however, an angry or sad face. They contain much humor or a touch of pathos. For example, here is a commercial for a food company in which a boy's face changes variously.

(Ex. 3) Client: Nagatani-en (30 seconds)

Visual: A mother, finishes preparing rice balls for her husband and his friends, takes them to the living room and passes by her five-year-old son.
Boy: "Otona no omusubi da." ("Ah, Rice Balls for the Adults.") Mother: "Nokotta ra ne." ("If there are any leftovers...") Visual: The boy has an uneasy look on his face. In the living room, the father and his sports friends are all in the same uniforms waiting, then picking up the rice balls, and some of them say... Friend: "Oishi-so" ("Looks tasty.") Father: "Sa, enryo shinai de. Otona no omusubi desu yo." ("Okay, help yourself. They're Rice Balls for the Adults.") Visual: The boy's face turns from an uneasy look into a smile. Father and his friends are picking up and eating the rice balls. Friend: "Nama nori da!" ("It has raw seaweed in it!") Friend: "Hon-mono no beni-zake!" ("Real red salmon!") Visual: The boy continues smiling. Friend: "Umai naa." ("Really tasty, isn't it.") (Background music starts.) Mother: "Dozo mou hitotsu." ("One more ball, please.") Visual: There remains only one rice ball on the plate. The boy's face turns into anger and sadness.

Boy's Voice: "Boku wa kyo hodo hayaku otona ni naritai to omotta koto wa nakatta." ("Today is the first time I've wanted to be a grown-up. Maybe it's never happened before.")

Visual: The last rice ball is picked up by a friend and the boy pulls the man's sleeve.

Narration: "Nagatani-en. Otona no omusubi." (Repeat: see above)

Visual: The packages of the food with the name of "Nagatani-en".

Of course, the audience knows quickly that the boy is a trained actor so that he could show the facial expressions tactically. Still, his emotional change, especially expectation turned into grief, brings us sympathy as well as humor. This short story surely attracts the audience's attention. The concept of the commercial is almost perfectly consistent with the product itself. Besides, the boy's expression of words is also witty or humorous although what he says sounds a little mature for his age. This is one of the best commercials for foods; TV viewers enjoy watching it again. (Most food commercials are junk.)

[B] Emblems (Gestures) in the Japanese TV Commercials (Including Proximity)

A generation ago, a couple holding or hugging each other in a public place was considered very "indecent," "immoral." However, nowadays in Japan, a public display of affection is becoming common among young people. It is certainly true that there remains some hesitation or shyness among them; however, expressing their emotions directly is becoming more frequent, especially among younger generations called "Imadoki no wakamono" (Youngsters of today) in Japanese. Currently, then, many TV commercials show many embraces and hugs, even kisses by the youth.⁴

The first example is a typical and the most popular commercial which is broadcast every year during the Christmas season. The client is JR Toikai which brings geographically separated couples together on Christmas Eve. The inserted song "Hitori bocchi no Kurisumasu" (Lonely Christmas) by Mr. Tatsuro Yamashita coincides well with the content of the commercial.

(Ex. 4) Client: JR Toikai (30 seconds)

(All through the commercial, the song "Lonely Christmas" plays.)

Visual: Black-and-white pictures. Close-up of a woman's face. She shows a "V" sign and says "cheese." The sound of a shutter is heard. She is hurrying to the station holding a present for her boyfriend. She smiles and says "cheese" again. A bullet train "Shinkansen" appears. Closing her

compact, she looks for him on the platform. The train has just arrived. She tries and tries to find him. But she can't. Far away on the platform, however, she sees his figure. Tears come to her eyes and she smiles and says "cheese" again in a feeble voice. Waving his hand, he approaches her. Close-up of her face with tears of joy. They hold each other.

Narration: "Aenakatta jikan wo konya torimodoshitai no desu."
(Tonight they want to make up the lost time.)

Visual: A Christmas card with a picture in which she is showing V sign.

Narration: Christmas Express.

Visual: A train with red tail lights is leaving. The words of "X'mas eXpress JR Tookai" is shown.

Narration: JR Tookai.

Of course, the closeness of the couple on the platform at night is very romantic since it reminds the viewers of some scenes in the movies. The changing face of the woman, from a smile into uneasiness and then into tears of happiness with a smile in the last scene is very impressive. Among the Japanese younger generations, showing the victory sign which means a light touch of happiness is very popular these days. We see this gesture when they are taking pictures or being in the focus of a TV camera. Even singing idols or TV talents show the same gesture.

As already mentioned in the characteristics of Japanese TV commercials, health insurance companies sell their services using a "soft sell" approach. The next example depicts a man's transfer to another office. An important scene is his departure by train, a scene in which the saleswomen of the insurance company join to say farewell. During the commercial, very typical Japanese gestures appear here and there.

(Ex. 5) Client: Sumitomo Health Insurance Company (30 seconds)

(With a song by Megumi Shiina throughout the commercial.)

Visual: In the station the saleswomen are rushing to the platform of the bullet train "Shinkansen." One of them is holding a bouquet in her arm.

Narration (Woman's voice) "Konnichiwa. Sumitomo Seimei desu."
("How are you? We are from Sumitomo Health Insurance.")

Woman A: "San-pun mae desu, Senpai." ("We only have three minutes left, my senior." ["Senpai" is an address term for elders in the same office or school in Japanese.]

Woman B: "Wakatte ru, wakatte ru." ("I know. I know.")

Visual: On the platform, the colleagues are doing "banzai" and the man who will be transferred is bowing deeply. The women run up the stairs, then reach the platform. One of the colleagues says loudly "Oh, kita kita." ("Ah, here they come.")

Woman A: Facing the man standing at the door of the train, "Sumimasen. Iro iro arigato gozaimashita." ("I'm sorry. Thank you very much for various things.") She hands the bouquet to the man. She continues to say, "Honto ni osewa ni narimashita. Doozo ogenkide." ("I owe a lot of things to you. Please take care of yourself.")

Visual: The door is closing. The man bows to the women who are wearing full smiles.

(The music is becoming louder. "See you again, Anata kara...") The Shinkansen train is leaving the platform. The men are clapping their hands. Woman B is tapping Woman A on her shoulder and puts her hand on it. Close-up of the women's faces.

Narration (Woman's voice) "Kokoro wo komete itsumademo." ("Forever with our heartfelt thanks.")

Visual: The two women's smiling faces. Words: "Egao no tenshi de aritai. Sumitomo Seimei no seirusu redii." ("We want to keep being angels full of smiles. Salesladies of Sumitomo Health Insurance.")

Narration: "Egao no tenshi de aritai."

Visual: Words: "Raku raku jinsei. Naisu midoru no hoken. Hatsubaichu." ("Easy life. Health insurance for the nice middle-aged person is now on sale.") The man is bowing. Words: "Anshin. Kyoo kara ashita e. Sumitomo Seimei. (Security. From today to tomorrow. Sumitomo Health Insurance Company.)

This kind of scene is often seen in March, the season of transference and graduation in Japan. Most of the time, "banzai" is done as a group to the person leaving. Deep bowing by the person responding to the "banzai" could be seen and as the shouts are heard. The actions are a kind of ritual of a departure and a new start. The commercial is well done and does a good job of depicting the scene of leaving. In addition, the saleswomen are expressing their kindness and consideration with their words, their facial expressions and their bowing gestures in the scene. This commercial is one designed to improve the image of the company and of the women working for it.

Some of the gestures shown in the TV commercials are derived from ones of the West, particularly of the United States. The next commercial

shows clearly the influence of western culture. The client is "Sumitomo VISA Card" which sells the image of westernization of the Japanese.

(Ex. 6) Client: Sumitomo VISA Card (15 seconds)

(Throughout the commercial light music plays)

Visual: A woman in her twenties wearing a bathing suit puts down an oxygen tank from her back and shrugs her shoulders.

Her Voice: "Shunookeru wa katta kedo..." ("I bought a snorkel, but...")

Visual: Words: "Ribo barai" ("Revolving payment")

Narration: "Sumitomo biza kaado no ribo barai nara kono toori." ("If it is by a revolving payment with Sumitomo VISA Card, it goes this way.")

Visual: She is now wearing scuba diving equipment.

Narration: "Kore wa benri na bunkatsu-barai." ("This is a very convenient installment payment.") "Ribo-barai nara Sumitomo biza kaado." ("If it's a revolving payment, Sumitomo VISA Card is very recommended.")

Visual: Sumitomo VISA Card. In small letters "Goriyoo wa muri naku keikaku-teki ni." ("Please use it prudently and in a well-planned manner.")

Today, the gesture of shrugging one's shoulders is understandable and popular among younger generations in Japan. TV personalities often perform it jokingly. Among other western gestures which are popular even among the Japanese are pointing to one's chest with one's forefinger, thumb, or hand meaning "It's me," crossing one's forearms in front of one's chest, then sweeping them downward and away to both sides, indicating a strong "No," and "waving one's index finger from side to side in front of the chest," expressing the same meaning, etc. (Akiyama: 1991 a, b)

(II) Commercial producers, clients and the audience prefer a "soft sell" approach to a "hard sell" approach.

To depict this second characteristic in Japanese TV commercials, here are examples suitable for explaining it in detail. The main features of these commercials using the "soft sell" approach include heavy dependence on the images or the scenery, on the inserted song, or on the endorser, rather than on the words spoken or written in it. The first two commercials are of companies from cosmetics and coffee, the last are representing banks, health insurance companies, and a securities firm, all of which deal with money.

(Ex. 7) Client: Ion Cosmetic Company (30 seconds)
(An English song plays throughout the commercial)

Visual: One of the most popular women singers in Japan, Judy Ong from Taiwan, is standing by the Clock Tower in Sapporo and wearing a blue suit. Then, she is walking with a smile on her face. The scene changes to her driving a red sports car. Then, there is a close-up of her face. She is standing by the car near the Otaru canal. Then, she is driving in the street. The picture is a close-up of her face from the right side and then it changes into a busy street. Again, she is walking and smiling, wearing a grey suit with a scarf and a bag in her arm. The scene changes again. The overhead camera shot follows a car crossing on a big bridge. She appears again in a yellow suit with a hat. The background behind her includes a mountain, the sea, and a city which may be in Kagoshima. She smiles. A former scene is back. She is getting out of the red car. She is in the grey suit.

Narration: (Man's voice) "Utsukushi-ku ikite hoshii." ("We would like you to live beautifully.")

Visual: Bottles of the cosmetics appear with the phrase "Utsukushi-ku ikite hoshii." (Once again the same phrase)

Narration: "Ion Kesho-hin" ("Ion Cosmetics")

Visual: She smiles again in the grey suit, looking back. "Utsukushi-ku ikite hoshii." "Ion Kesho-hin."

This commercial lasts 30 seconds. Not until the last 5 seconds is the name of the client seen or heard. Until the last scene, the audience would not know what company the commercial is for. Although they are attracted by the beauty of the woman and by the scenery, they wonder if the commercial is for a suit, for a car, or for something else. This commercial uses very limited words and abundant, beautiful scenery. This is one of the typical Japanese "soft sell" TV commercials. Foreign movie stars, singers and models frequently appear in Japanese commercials.

The next commercial is for a coffee company. Its concept is the combination of a Japanese tradition and a modern activity of drinking coffee. [Kabuki is a traditional Japanese form of dance.]

(Ex. 8) Client: NesCafé Japan (30 seconds)

Visual: A Kabuki actor Yasosuke Bando is standing in front of a castle. On the screen "Kabuki yakusha Bando Yasosuke wa shitte iru." ("Kabuki actor Bando Yasosuke knows it.") appears on the left side.

Narration: "Bando Yasosuke wa shitte iru." (The same phrase)

Visual: Bottles of NesCafé Gold Blend. Yasosuke Bando is walking and then entering the castle.

Narration: "Yori-michi mo mata joohitsu." ("Making a side trip is high quality, too")

Visual: Over a map he is talking with a historian or the owner of the castle. When he climbs up the stairs, he finds a doll which resembles an armored warrior. The doll's face and his face appear alternately. Then, the scene changes into his dancing on the stage, practicing a Kabuki lesson. The words "Gold Blend" appear. The music starts. In a beautiful Japanese garden a Japanese woman in a kimono is bringing a tray of cups of coffee. Then, she hands the cups to the men.

Narration: "Utsukushii aji ga aru." ("There's a beautiful taste.")

Visual: Yasosuke Bando drinks the coffee. The words "Joohitsu wo shiru hi to no..." ("For the person who knows high quality...") appear.

Narration: "Joohitsu wo shiru hito no NesCafé Gold Blend."

Visual: Bottles of "Gold Blend."

In Japanese commercials, celebrities like Bando often play the role of endorsers. The scenery including Kabuki, a castle, a Japanese garden, a beautiful woman in a kimono is traditional and the coffee served by the woman represents the modern life. The two elements are combined and harmonized in the commercial. These types of combinations of tradition and modern life are often used to advertise products such as foods, drinks, electric appliances, and the most advanced computers. In this commercial the word "joohitsu" is applicable to the taste of coffee as well as to the personal taste of Yasosuke Bando.

From this point on, this paper focuses on the advertising of companies dealing with money. It takes the approach of the "soft sell." The following is typical advertising for Japanese banks or a credit union, which were allowed to begin making TV commercials only a couple of years ago. Of course, Japanese people have a very keen interest in money, especially in the interest rates or the rates of exchange. However, with a mood of recession hovering over Japan and with the low interest on all saving accounts, there is no advantage for the banks to appeal to the viewer through direct methods. Moreover, Japanese people do not like to talk about their interest in money

frankly because they are afraid of being called "shusendo" (A slave of money). Therefore, generally the Japanese banks are very reserved in selling their savings accounts or loans.

(Ex. 9) Client: Shinyo-kinko (15 seconds)

(Throughout the commercial a Japanese song plays)

Visual: In a rugby stadium, a young woman is standing by a pole holding a kettle. At the bottom right of the scene are the words "SHINKIN BANK" in English. They are very small. The phrase "ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE." in English is inserted on the screen.

Narration: (Woman's voice) "Shinkin wa isshoo-kenmei na hito wo miruto, isshoo-kenkei ni nari masu." ("When the credit union of Japan sees a person working very hard, it will work hard enough to help him do his best.")

Visual: During the narration, the viewer sees a fish market, young women, a farm market, and youth in the street by turns. In all of the scenes, people engaged in their work are smiling cheerfully. Again, the stadium appears. This time the young woman has six men in suits behind her.

Narration: (Man's voice) "Minna no tame ni, hitori no tame ni." ("One for all, all for one.") "Shinyoo-kinko."

Visual: "SHINKIN BANK" in English. "Shinyoo-kinko. Zenkoku 8,200 tenpo." ("Credit Union in Japan. 8,200 branches throughout Japan.")

This commercial is also taking a "soft-sell" approach. The message of everyone helping everyone, as in a rugby game, to achieve victory is emphasized over and over again in words and through the scenes. The young woman must be assisting the team as well as the credit union. The words and scenes used in the commercial are very warm-hearted. They work effectively to improve the image of the credit union. The commercial seems to be transmitting the youthfulness of the people and the union.

The commercials discussed and explained above are typical ones of the "soft sell" approach. By understanding the "soft sell" commercials, something about the mentality of the Japanese can be understood: "Harmony," "Modesty," "Beauty," "Politeness," and "Indirectness," and other related features, which are also concerned with the following.

(III) The Japanese ethical system - which values "Harmony" and "Modesty" - basically does not prefer comparisons or challenge ads.

In 1987 the Fair Trade Commission of Japan ("Kosei-torihiki Iinkai") announced publicly that comparative or challenge advertising will be permissible in any media if it conforms to the following four guidelines:

- (1) the content of advertising should be proven objectively.
- (2) the figures and the facts should be cited correctly.
- (3) the method of comparison should be fair.
- (4) the advertising should not be one of defamation or abuse.

Even with the relaxation of standards, such commercials are still very rare in TV advertising. The only example of such an ad is one which took issue with a rival company and was given a great amount of attention by the public. In 1991, Pepsi released this TV commercial, one in which M. C. Hammer was drinking Pepsi. As it had already been broadcast in the United States the previous year, the same commercial (dubbed into Japanese) was broadcast from some commercial TV stations in Tokyo. Soon after the broadcast, the rival company Coca Cola sued, claiming to the Fair Trade Commission that the commercial defamed the Coca Cola company. While the Commission did not reach a clear conclusion, the broadcast of the commercial was still withheld by these TV stations on their own judgment. One or two months later, the commercial started being broadcast again in a slightly different version. When Coke was being poured into Hammer's cup, the name of Coke on the can was blurred and the superimposed words and the narration in which had said "Coke" was changed into "other one."

Pepsi made a big campaign in the main newspapers against the suit and the self-censorship by the TV stations. Pepsi said, "We're very sorry not to show you the commercial on TV." Pepsi revived the scenes of the commercial in pictures and words in the papers. In addition, Pepsi expressed a desire to present the videos of comparative and/or challenge ads of Pepsi against Coke. Then, more than eighty thousand application letters for getting the video came to Pepsi. This story appeared in 1991. In February of 1993 the Japanese computer giant NEC broadcast their first comparative ad on TV in which it compared precisely and minutely their product with one of IBM's. Recently, because of the importation of American computers and the participation of American computer companies and their ads in the Japanese market, comparative advertising has become a kind of "fad" in Japan. However, main-stream commercials still shy away from showing such aggression.

Historically speaking, in the Japanese commercial world, "similar," "semi," or "pseudo-" comparative or challenge advertising was already being

broadcast in 1976. There was a commercial in which a popular comedian spoke the words, "Kochira ga nijuumai. De, kochira ga niyuuyon mai. Dochira go toku ka yooku gangae te miyou." ("This one contains enough film for 20 pictures. And, this contains enough for 24 pictures. So, let us consider deeply."). At the end of the commercial, he intentionally dropped the 20 pictures one with a comical motion. Another commercial was broadcast at the same time. In this one, two cars are standing side by side. The narration "Tonari no kuruma ga chiisaku miemasu." ("The car on one side looks smaller.") is heard. The former commercial was for Sakura Film against Fuji Film, and the latter one was for NISSAN against TOYOTA.

While there have been a few examples until recently, it is still quite safe to assert that Japanese industry and the mass media do not want to broadcast comparative or challenge ads because industry and the mass media place much value in harmony and coexistence with their rivals. The tactic the companies are taking is comparing their new products with their former ones or with an unidentified product. Otherwise, the word "dake" (only) is used very emphatically as in "kore dake desu" (...only this product/service that has ...). There is an Japanese old saying, "Hangan-biiki" ("Sympathy for the weak") which can also be seen in sports. Additionally, there is an Japanese old anecdote, "Teki ni shio wo okuru," in which a samurai warrior sends salt, surely a daily necessity, to his enemy even in war time.

These old sayings and anecdotes have contributed to an atmosphere of "coping with each other in hard times" and of helping each other in ordinary life. These two concepts are the basic ones of "harmony" and "coexistence and coprosperity."⁵ This ethical system and this mentality in the Japanese industrial structure are keeping the comparative or challenge ads from being popular. However, the people themselves are welcoming this kind of advertising because this kind can give them the information on alternatives as well providing some humor which is surely necessary for the Japanese. The trend toward this kind of advertising is changing little by little because of the growing influence of the computer hard-ware companies engaged in the international trade crisis. The trend seems to be changing specially in response to the criticism of unbalanced trade practices and to the recession damaging the Japanese economy now. We should pay attention more to the trends in Japanese commercials.

(IV) TV advertising does not quickly reflect social trends or problems.

Compared with American TV public service announcements, Japanese public service advertising is very limited in number and is very reserved in its contents. Moreover, it is rare that these advertisements occur prominently during prime time. There are also the same kinds of problems ranging all the way from illegal parking, alcoholism, drugs, drunk-driving, environmental pollution, littering, and, more recently, to the serious problem of AIDS. Additionally, a non-smoking movement is also spreading. Still, while the Japanese have these problems and trends, the amount of public-service advertising in Japan is very limited. And the content of them, if they do appear on the air, is very modest and reserved. For example, the advertisements about illegal parking, river pollution, and littering are relatively often seen on Japanese TV, however, they are not presented in a serious manner. For example, in 1992, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government started a campaign against AIDS by using many celebrities and, at the same time, public TV commercials against AIDS started broadcasting with the support of the government. This time their content was rather direct, however, they represented only regional ads and the TV viewers cannot often see them during prime time.

Commercials of alcoholic beverages are frequently broadcast on Japanese TV, although most of them are broadcast at night on weekdays and during the day on weekends. Specifically beer commercials are targeted at youth and middle aged people. During the scenes of drinking beer, the drinkers' faces full of happiness and satisfaction appear every time. In the street, there is an abundance of vending machines selling alcoholic beverages. (Japanese people often say that they are keeping the rules of drinking which are dictated by their ethical system, a version of the Confucian ethical system; however, there are quite a few people who talk loudly that what is needed in Japan is a stricter set of regulations concerning the selling of alcohol and the broadcasting of commercials in order to keep the youth from alcoholism.) For TV commercials of beer or sake, words of warning follow them on the screen, "Beeru (Sake) wa hatachi ni natte kara." ("Drinking beer (sake) is [allowed] when and after twenty years of age"). But these words of warning are generally in very small letters.

Commercials for tobacco products are broadcast late at night, corresponding with the spread of the non-smoking movement in Japan. However, the number of ads is very large and their content is almost always ones in which foreigners appear amid beautiful scenery and enjoy smoking. The ads appear with some English words like "Speak Lark." Most of the advertisements take the "soft sell" approach and at the end of the

commercials very small letters which are difficult for the viewers to read appear on the screen. They have the same phrases; "Miseinen no kitsuen wa kinjirarete imasu. Anata no kenkoo wo sokonau osore ga arimasu node suisugi ni chuui shimashoo." ("Smoking by people under twenty is prohibited [by law]. Since there is a possibility of losing your health, please take good care not to smoke too much.") The same phrases appearing in magazines and newspapers may seem less effective and more ridiculous, however, they represent concessions for the tobacco companies. As seems to be the case with alcoholic beverages, there are many who say that the Japanese need some regulations for prohibiting to children the sales of tobacco from vending machines in the street, and for restricting the advertising on TV which can be easily seen by children at home. As mentioned above, social problems are not so quickly reflected on Japanese TV.

(V) The commercials employ foreigners frequently and foreign languages - including nonsensical English or ungrammatical English - often appear.

"The Japanese have acquired the biggest names in Hollywood to sell almost everything under the rising sun."⁶ Foreigners well-known or unknown frequently appear in Japanese commercials. For example, Arnold Schwarzenegger appears for a drinking vitamin of Takeda Medical company, Charlie Scheen for Tokyo Gas Company, Frank Sinatra for All Nippon Airlines, Sylvester Stallone for Marudai Food Company, Eddie Murphy for TOYOTA, Madonna for Mitsubishi Electric Company, and others for many other products. In Japanese commercials celebrities from the fields of movies or sports are almost necessary to sell the product or service. "They need not talk in the commercials (but) their appearance is enough for the viewers" is a phrase which well depicts the situation in Japan.⁷ At the same time, however, these stars or celebrities are said to be using their commercials to promote their movies or songs as TV programs since there are few "talks shows" on TV in which they can sell their names and there are a relatively few of these celebrities in Japan. In such circumstances, the Japanese can "meet" the Hollywood stars through commercials easily and before the release of their movies. Of course, unknown foreigners (in most cases Caucasians) are often used in Japanese commercials. The age, gender, figure, and nationality vary and the commercials in which the foreigners appear are almost always "soft sell" ones. Currently, most of the commercials for tobacco use this approach

by using foreigners. The Japanese think to themselves that they want something foreign or exotic in luxury products such as whisky, cars, jewelry, cosmetics, and tobacco and now foreigners are contributing much to every kind of product or service.

Furthermore, foreign languages, specifically English or French, often appear in the commercials. In some commercials, foreigners speak English or French and the audience can understand the meaning of them with the help of superimposed words in Japanese. Now the coffee named "Georgia," a product of the Coca Cola Company is advertised by the cast of "Twin Peaks." The content of the commercial is just like a scene of the TV drama and it has Chapter I to Chapter IV in each of which someone from the cast is drinking the canned coffee. The commercial also has subtitles.

The Japanese like to use the English language and English-like words. Almost all TV commercials have words or catch phrases from English. Additionally, there are many nonsensical names for products such as "Pocari Sweat" for a soft drink, "Mouth Pet" for a mouthwashing liquid, "Creap" for a powdered coffee creamer, "Milky" for a candy, "Cream Sand Biscuit" "Summer Lotion Fresh", "Calpis" for a condensed sour milk, "Pet Sugar" sugar for coffee, "Charmy Green" for a kitchen detergent, and many more

There are many such words or catch phrases which appear frequently, such as "living type," "for simple life," "new life now," "for beautiful human life," "power up," "fight, ippatsu!," "driving elegance," "live [laiv] new," which are rather difficult for native speakers to understand. The copy writer creates them intentionally or by their own mistake for the purpose of improving the image, in Japanese it is said "image up." The companies dealing with cosmetics, electric appliances, soft drinks, medicine, cars, and wigs, and so on deliberately use these phrases. The Japanese often quote them, even in their daily conversations, not knowing that they are "Japanese English."

III. Conclusion

According to a recent report of NTV, a total amount of about three hours of commercials is broadcast from each TV station daily and about 6300 new commercials are released every year on TV. The report says that TV commercials amounted to approximately \$17,000,000,000 from industries in Japan in 1992. And from \$20,000 to \$2,500,000 are necessary to make one commercial, even in the current recession in Japan Producing a fifteen to thirty second commercial, the producer and the staff normally spend a day

and sometimes a few days or more than a week indoors or outdoors in Japan or in foreign countries. The industry of making commercials requires hard work. As Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) stated, in industrial countries like Japan and the United States, where a stability of life, mass production, media development, and free competition necessary for producing commercials have already been established, the industry of commercial making is truly supporting the country's whole growth of other industries.

This paper has analyzed and discussed general aspects of Japanese TV commercials based on the author's analyses of Japanese and American TV commercials from socio-cultural viewpoints, especially from that of the nonverbal features of Japanese commercials. The analysis changes constantly, because every year and every moment trends in the commercial business world are changing, and most of all, the society and people's awareness and interest are changing. There are many more aspects yet to be identified and analyzed in the study of commercials.

One of the most popular young commercial producers in Japan, Mr. Sato, says definitely that a "commercial is a rhythm," and "Simplified repetition is much better than beautiful scenery in commercials." He is the person attracting attention most recently in this business and he has been producing some of the recent commercials that have been the biggest hits.⁸ His comment is a critical one in producing TV commercials, however, his products as well as his comment seem to be conspicuous and novel only among other abundant commercials, most of which are following the tactics of nonverbal communication and that of "soft sell."; the findings of this paper. In other words, they are still making the core of Japanese commercials; language is subsidiary means of communication. Instead of language spoken and/or written, nonverbal features as facial expressions, gestures including emblems, the beautiful scenery as well as women who are Japanese or foreigners have been playing very important roles in Japanese TV commercials. And, by using these features, the "soft sell" approach has been staying in the mainstream of the current TV commercials. TV advertising does not always reflect social trends or problems quickly in Japan, however, the approach must be attributable to the characteristic of Japanese people which has been cultivated and evaluated in their long history and its society and culture.

This research was, mentioned above repeatedly, describing general aspects of the Japanese commercials. The author is willing to continue the survey of Japanese TV commercials more from the viewpoint of nonverbal communication, and, more than that, he is willing to compare them with

ones of other countries not only the United States but Asian countries and European countries. From the research of the TV commercial which surely reflects the social and cultural movements and the people's thinking patterns and attitudes, some clues of mutual better understanding and better relationship must be gained. It is sure to contribute for much better cross-cultural communication which is the purpose of this international conference.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at "The 4th International Conference on Cross-Cultural Communication: East and West" in San Antonio, Texas, in March, 1993.

Notes

1. At the very moment of the broadcast of the timecast on NTV, a clock appeared on the screen which showed the wrong time; the film prepared had been set with the wrong side up. The era of Japanese TV commercials debuted with a serious technical mistake.
2. Among these facial expressions, "happiness," expressed by a big smile (in most of the cases, intentionally) is sure to set a comfortable mood. In Japan, almost all TV commercials use these "happy smiles" - shown by actresses, women singers, and media personalities. In one of the commercials for a kitchen detergent, for example, a young couple and an older couple wearing twin sweaters with a heart symbol on them wear big smiles and dance to the music together. They seem to be as happy as happy can be. The commercial shows no explanation for the effect of the product except the repetition of the phrase in a tune, "We are moved to singing and dancing hand in hand when we use it." At the end of the commercial, the phrase "Te-hada wo itawaru Charmy Green," ("Charmy Green takes good care of your hand's skin,") appears in tune.
3. A special summer edition of the "INSIDE EDITION" broadcast on NHK BS-I in August 1991 reported this fact ironically.
4. In a display must be incredible for the older Japanese, a series of commercials for a candy company show a young couple hugging and kissing passionately. In a 1992 commercial of a famous cosmetics company, a woman expressed the phrase "Nee, chuu shite." ("Please, give me a kiss.") which became a hot topic because a woman asking for a kiss in such a direct way, in a public place (TV commercials are, in a

sense, included in public places) was supposed to be contrary to the notion of decent behavior. As shocking as this scene may be, however, Mr. Amano who is the editor of a magazine "Kookoku Hihyoo" (Critique of Advertising) notes that such displays are reflections of women's rising status and their positiveness in Japan.

5. According to a best seller writer Isaya Bendasan, the basic concepts of "Harmony" and "Coexistence" originated from the Japanese culture of farming in which the people had to cooperate each other during the limited time of rice planting and its harvest. He referred to the phenomena of "helping each other in doing the same thing" by the phrase "The Time of Revelation, the Advantage of Land, and Harmony of the People." (*Nihon-jin to Yudaya-jin* "The Japanese and the Jews, Kadokawa Books, 1971)
6. A special summer edition of the "INSIDE EDITION" broadcast on NHK BS-1 in August 1991.
7. A special summer edition of the "INSIDE EDITION" broadcast on NHK BS-1 in August 1991.
8. "Super TV" broadcast on NTV in November 1992.

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