

**Abo, Tetsuo**, Mr, Acad, Management, Japan: *The distinct context of "individualism and collectivism" in Japanese-style management- Its international transferability and social context* [P4]

Tetsuo Abo, Teikyo University, Tokyo

## 1 Introduction

There are many different types of individualism and collectivism in the world. In this paper I take up the Japanese context of "**individualism and collectivism**" observed in Japanese companies and society, both having "bright side" and "dark side", in comparison with western or other societies. When we see the relation between "individualism and collectivism" in Japanese-style management at Japanese companies, here "bright side" should stand out more. As a society its dark side is often stressed more, especially from the western point of view. I will try to mention this point in a way of using a little strange wording, "**me-ism and group-ism**". Then, I will also compare the different aspects of individualism and collectivism in Japanese companies and society.

In Japanese companies for the relation between "individualism and collectivism" formers are almost always following to latter. If we select strictly differentiated words we should say that people in Japanese companies are being **involved in** their company organizations, but not necessarily **participating in** them like in western countries. This difference is very much important in the sense that while in both cases people are working together at a same organization the people in Japan are belonging to a same party ( in "our company") the people in western and many other countries are participating in a same working place from the different parties ( as "us and them" from different stratum or classes ).

This difference in the context of individuals and organization are playing a significant role in the difference in organizing and implementing the management systems of companies, so that with much difference in the levels of efficiency and quality, in Japan and other countries. For example, the different types of demarcation of working systems are the basic precondition for organizing the overall management systems, i.e., flexible and all the members involvement type-demarcation in Japan vs. rigid and individual-based division of labor-type demarcation in the USA. Under the such basic framework there are many distinguished features of the Japanese systems are built up, namely coexistence of cooperation and competition ( or cooperation and division of labor), company union ( vs. industrial union), "voluntary" small group activities with one hundred percent participated workers, open style office, and so on.

It is very interesting to watch what would be happening when these kinds of Japanese style management systems are to be transferred into foreign countries or regions. Is it possible to be introduced or to what extent, and in what performances? In order to show this, I will use the large-scale research results in the main regions of the world on the Japanese "hybrid factories" - the combination between the Japanese and local management elements - carried out by our Japanese Multinational Enterprise Study Group (JMNESG, The web site <http://apps.main.teikyo-u.ac.jp/~jmnesg/index.html> ).

## 2 Japanese Management and Production System in International Context

First, I will clarify some essential features of Japanese management and production system (JMPS) in its international context, and their particular relationship to the context of individual and society in Japan ( For the followings see Abo[2001] ).

1)Core Nature of the System: flexible adaptability based on "**Genba-shugi**" (work-site-orientation) to various kinds of changes in managerial environment

-**all-the team member involved work-site** has authority and responsibility:

**wider demarcation** of job (lower division of labor)

cf) in contrast to **top-down type decision-making system** (at western companies. This also applies the followings)

--These features are more familiar with **collectivism or group-ism based systems**

cf) as against western-type **individualism based ones**.

--very effective on "**evolutional changes**"

cf) in contrast to **break-through type changes**

2) Institutional Background and Methods

a **long-term-oriented organizational method based on combination of competition and cooperation**

b **egalitarian reward systems based on seniority and personal evaluation with small differentiation**

-much more familiar with **collectivism/group-ism**

cf) as against **individualism**

3) Production System and Its Composing Elements:

a. essential feature: **large variety and small lot-type flexible system** supported by **Genba-shugi-led production engineering and multi-functional skills**

--by **group-oriented cooperative involvement** of work-site people

cf) in contrast to **small variety and large lot-type mass production**

--by **individual-oriented division of labor type participation** at work-site people

b. its composing elements at work sites in their international context

I. Human Core: Work Organization & Its Administration; wider and flexible demarcation

-job classification(JC): simplified strata with limited wage differentiation by job

(basis for flexible ways of **cooperative working processes**)

v.( in many western countries) many detailed strata with large wage differentiation by job

(basis for strict ways of **division of labor type working processes**)

-job assignment: to a work team for flexible ways of work (**team work style** job assignment)

v. to an **individual** for planned rigid ways of work

-skills-training: **multi-skills** for adaptation to various changes by **long-term in-house training**

v. specialist type skills for strict **division of labor** by school **training outside company**

-reward systems: person-centered wage and promotion systems based on **seniority and personal evaluation with small differentiation; limited competition** among company people with different ages (See Abo[2005]).

v. job-centered wage and promotion systems based on social qualification ladders (and **personal evaluation with wider differentiation** for white collar people)

-team leader: **internally promoted leader** at work site (genba) with **both functions of control of workers and technical processes**

v. mostly externally promoted first-line supervisor with **a single function of control of workers** (human resource management)

II. Material Core: Production Control:

-quality control(QC): **all-the-member involved and process checking-oriented methods**

v. **specialist involved and post process-out going inspection** relied methods

-maintenance & operation management: **all-the-member involved methods by internally trained people**

v. **externally trained specialists (technicians and engineers) –led processes**

III. Sub-Core: Procurement System

-procurement methods: **long-term direct transaction** between assemblers and suppliers (“**internal market” transaction between firms**)

v. **short-term indirect (arms length) transaction** between assemblers and suppliers (“**external market” transaction between firms**)

IV. Sub-System: Group Consciousness or Team Sense

-small group activities: **all-the worker involvement “voluntarily” in QC circle activities**

v. no counterpart for western companies

-information sharing: **company wide active information sharing and communication** at open style office, various meetings at work site, etc.

v. only for manager level people

-sense of unity: **all-the-employees have more or less sentiment of “our company”** supported by various socialization events such as morning meeting, open office, company uniform

v. no special practices

V. Human Conditions: Labor Relations

-employment policy: (informal) **life time (long-term) employment** from new school graduates to

retirement age based on seniority system (“**no-layoff**” policy)

v. on-demand employment through external labor market, **using layoff policy** (US)

-labor union: **company union** having **internal company organization and interests** ( not much social perspectives)

v. **industrial union** having **cross-company organization and interests** (much broader social perspectives)

In the above I have shown the main essential features of JMPS in terms of its distinct natures of Japanese-type collectivism or group-ism, in comparison with western-type individualism, by emphasizing specific key words using Gothic style. So far as we take up these features as the aspects of management and production systems most of them can be evaluated to have a kind of competitive advantages compared to western types.

#### 4) A Typology by “Architecture” theory

Needless to say, for the efficiency and quality it depends on industry and region that these systems are applied.

As a typology of production systems by industry the “architecture” theory developed by Professor Takahiro Fujimoto et al. is very useful. “Architecture” here, according to Fujimoto, means a designing idea and method of engineering products or production processes. There are two basic methods of “architecture” ,i.e. “integral” and “modular” (See Figure 1). This idea of “architecture”, as a result, has much similarity to that of JMNESG’s research and analytical framework, “hybrid model”, that was developed by comparing American type mass production model with Japanese type small-lot flexible production model(Fujimoto[2007]).

“Integral”, “suriawase” in Japanese, is a type of designing and engineering technologies by comparing and adjusting carefully details in a complicated manner in manufacturing and combining parts and components of products. This “integral type” can be said as Japanese type and seen in the products and processes such as automobile, motor cycle, light/./small-type consumer electronics, and game soft ware, for which Japanese companies have competitive advantage as collectivism type-cooperative ways of working, mentioned above, must be more effective. “Modular”, “kumiawase” in Japanese, on the other hand, is an American type of technologies all the parts and components for which are already developed and designed, and produced just by simply connecting them, whole the processes are on individualism-based division of labor style of working. Typical examples for these products are among mainframe computer, lego (closed) and personal computer, inter-net products, bicycle (open), and so on.

Figure 1 Basic Types of Architecture

	<b>Integral</b>	<b>Modular</b>
<b>Closed</b>	<i>Closed / Integral type</i> automobile motor cycle 'light/thin/short/small'-type consumer electronics game software, etc.	<b>Closed / Modular type</b> main frame computer machine tool lego, etc.
<b>Open</b>		<i>Open / Modular type</i> personal computer & its systems inter-net products bicycle some financial products, etc.

Source:  
Fujimoto[2001],  
Fujimoto[2007]  
in Abo[2007]

I also believe  
that against the

above differences in “architecture” by industry there should be differences in socio-cultural and organizational differences by regions, in other words, on the background of geography as well as history ( Abo[2004] ). So that it becomes interesting to show the extent to which the Japanese production systems

are transferred by Japanese companies to various regions in the world. The extents in transferring of the Japanese systems would reveal, in a sense, the degrees of affinity or familiarity for Japanese style collectivism in a specific society.

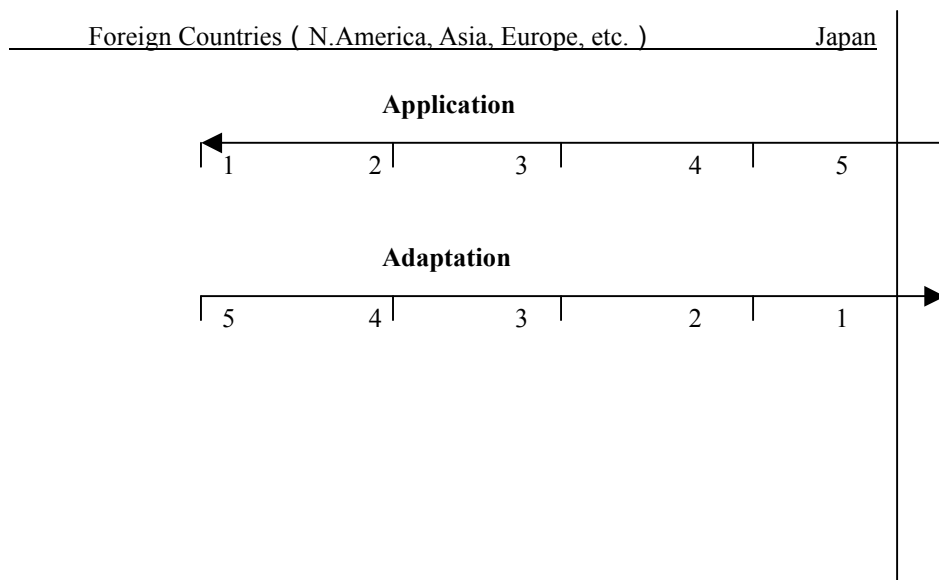
### 3 Diffusion of the Japanese "Hybrid Factories" in Major Regions in the World

We, JMNESG, has been doing research on the transferability of the Japanese management and production system into various countries in the world from North and south America, East asia, West and central-eastern Europe, and possibly Africa. Now, in that sense, I will try to show from our research results the notable points of the degrees of transfer of main elements of the Japanese production systems to each regions. The higher the degree of such transfer, first of all, the closer to Japan the affinity in the socio-cultural environment in specific region is. That would mean that the bright sides of the JMS were transferred to that extent. Yet it is not easy to reveal whether such a degree of transfer of the systems means the existence of the Japanese type group-ism, "dark side?", in the local region.

1) "Application-Adaptation (A-A)" Evaluation of Japanese production systems at local plants  
 -evaluation model: "Application-Adaptation (A-A)" Evaluation ("hybrid") model-  
 5points evaluation system

We have set up the research and evaluation model, the "application-adaptation (hybrid) evaluation model" and the "five-point grading system", in order to investigate the management and production systems of major Japanese manufacturers with comparative advantage such as automakers and electric and electronics machinery makers, compare the situation of mother factories in Japan with those of subsidiaries' factories abroad, and then, measure and evaluate the degree of overseas transfer of Japanese systems. For this purpose, an ideal model for the composition of JMPS (See Figure 3) has been developed based on the results of our surveys on Japanese parent factories. The introduction and transplanting of each factor item constituting the Japanese system into an overseas factory is referred to as "application," whereas any modification made to an original factor in accordance with the local management environment is called "adaptation." The "five-point grading system" is designed to quantitatively show the results of the application-adaptation evaluation. For instance, if an overseas factory is found to have implemented a certain factor of the Japanese system 100 percent, an application ratio score of "5" (meaning zero modification, and consequently, the adaptation ratio score of "1") will be given to that factory, while an application score of "1" (meaning 100 percent modification into the local system, and consequently, an adaptation score of "5") will be given if no transfer of Japanese factors has been made (See Figure 2). Any scores referred to hereinafter represent application scores unless otherwise specified. (For more details see Abo[ 1994], chs 1 and 2, Itagaki[ 1997],ch 1, and Kumon & Abo[2004], ch 1).

**Figure 2 Concept of Application-Adaptation Evaluation Method**



2) A-A Evaluation by 6 Groups and 23 Items: Four Region Comparison

a. A-A evaluations on the four region averages of 23 items

Figure shows an overall summary of A-A evaluation of 23 items in four main regions in the world. The noticeable points regarding the transfer situation in four region averages of 23 items are as follows.

Figure 3 Application ratios of the Japanese production system in 4 regions

	N.A(01)	N.A(89)	W.E.	E.A.	C.E.E	4 region av.
I Work Organization and Administration	3.2	2.9	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.2
1.Job classification 4.1	3.7	3.6	4.7	4.1	4.0	
2.Multi-functional skills	3.0	2.6	3	2.7	2.8	2.8
3.Education and training	3.7	2.9	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.3
4.Wage system	2.3	2.4	2.8	3.5	2.9	2.8
5.Promotion	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.2
6.Supervisor	3.2	2.9	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1
□ Production Control	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.3
7.Equipment	3.9	4.3	3.6	3.7	3.9	3.9
8.Maintenance	3.1	2.6	2.9	3.2	2.8	2.9
9.Quality control	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.3
10.Process management	3.5	3.0	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.3
□ Procurement	2.6	3.0	2.7	3.2	2.7	2.8
11.Local content	1.8	2.7	2.4	3.0	2.6	2.5
12.Suppliers	2.9	3.9	2.8	3.7	2.8	3.2
13.Methods	3.1	2.5	2.8	3.0	2.7	2.8
□ Team Sense	3.3	3.2	2.9	3.3	2.9	3.1
14.Small group	2.6	2.5	2.6	3.0	2.2	2.6
15.Information sharing	3.6	3.6	3.1	3.4	3.2	3.4
16.Sense of unity	3.7	3.5	3.1	3.5	3.2	3.4
□ Labor Relations 3.7	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.4	
17.Hiring policy	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.3
18.Long-term employment	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.3
19.Harmonious labor relations 4.2	4.4	3.8	3.6	3.8	4.0	
20.Grievance	3.7	3.3	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.3
□ Parent Subsidiary Relations 2.8	3.6	2.9	2.6	2.9	3.0	
21.Ratio of Japanese	2.1	3.7	2.6	1.5	1.9	2.4
22.Delegation of power	3.1	3.6	3.1	2.9	3.1	3.2
23.Position of local managers	3.1	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.6	3.3
Average of 23 Items	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.1	3.2

1) From the database of JMNESG (research years)

2) N.A.: North America(US and Canada, 1989, 2000-1), W.E.: Western Europe(UK, 1997, Continental West Europe, 1998), E.A: East Asia( Korea/Taiwan,1992, South East Asia, 1993, China, 2002), C.E.E: Central and Eastern Europe(Hungary, Czech, Poland and Slovakia, 2003)

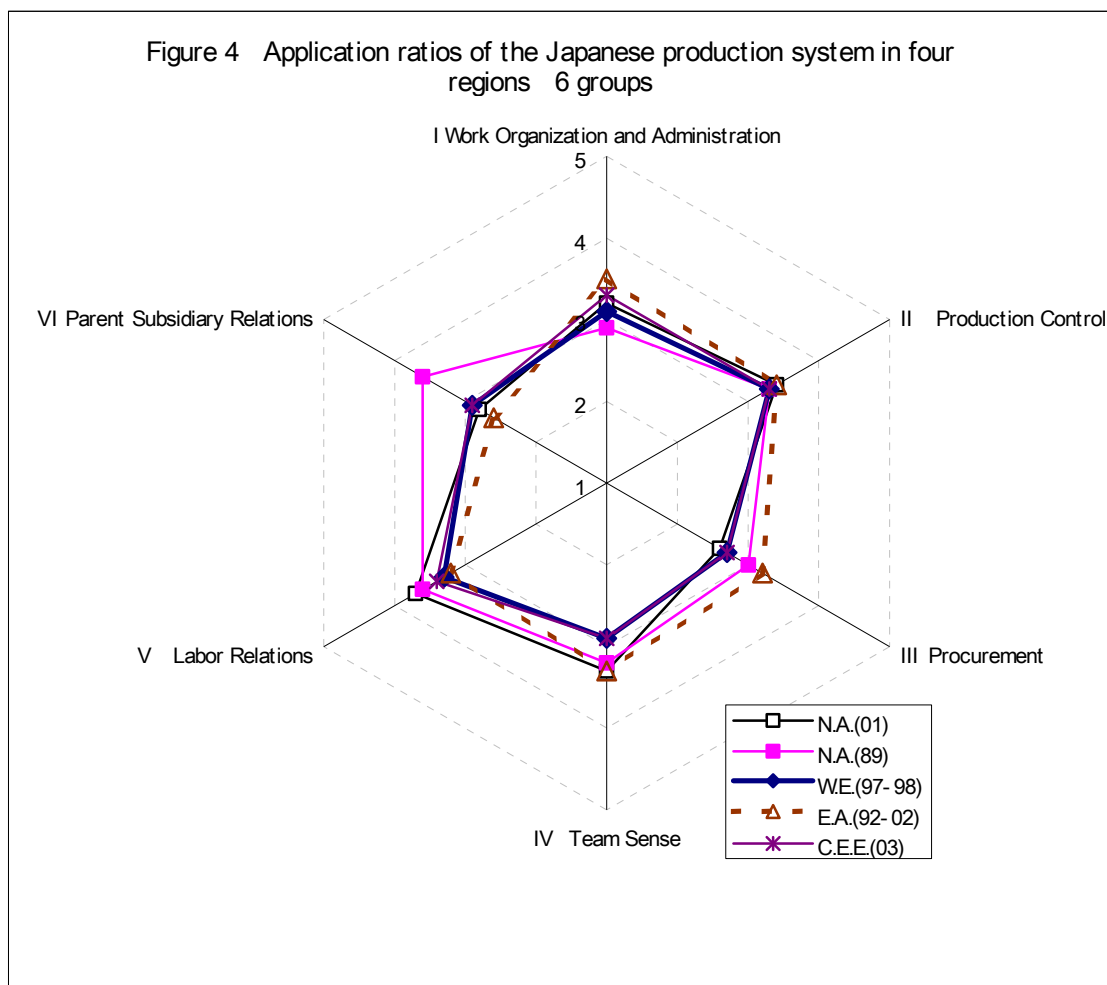
-Total average for all the regions: '3.2'

This shows that a little more than half of the primary elements of JMPS were transferred to the main areas

in the world. Surprisingly enough, there is not much difference in the average scores, 3.1~3.3, from region to region. Therefore, the affinity in the foreign regions to JPS is roughly at least half, though it is not easy to judge whether this is too low or too high. Also we should take into account the influence of strategies of Japanese companies on the scores. Any way Japanese companies have been able to find to a considerable extent some area abroad familiar to their management and production activities. However, the degree depends on element of JMPS.

-Difference in 23 elements: considerable difference from item to item

Among the highest are 1.Job classification(4.0) and 19.Harmonious labor relation(4.0). Since the former is, as described earlier, a basic precondition for **flexible ways of cooperative working processes**, Japanese companies must have stressed this element. Yet, in many cases, the following key items after this did not necessarily respond to this: among the lowest items are 2.Multi-functional skills(2.8), 4.Wage system(2.8) in the human-related core system group, I Work Organization and Administration, as well as 8.Maintenance(2.9), an essential material core, **all-the-member involved methods by internally trained people**, 13.Procurement Methods(2.8), an indispensable sub-core in a way of **long-term direct transaction between assemblers and suppliers**, 14.Small group(2.6), a sub-system for **all-the worker involvement activities**. Then, the highest 19. Harmonious labor relation came in order to cover these low groups of items by paying attention much on labor relations. I do not mention to other items in this paper. In short, it is important to point out, from the above, that there are several core elements that are strongly influenced by Japanese style collectivism, i.e. group-ism, so that they are not easy to be transferred abroad. However, as a whole, a considerable number of Japanese firms, led by “integral type” industry such as automobile and electronics, have been transferring somehow the meaningful parts of their competitive advantages, JMPS, even to the regions where “individualism” is dominant, partly overcoming difficulties by various strategic judgments according to market situations. So that it to some extent depends on difference in regional environment, though hereafter I will mention to that a little.



Source: from Figure 3

-Difference in four regions:

Figure shows a regional distribution of the application ratios for 6 groups. The main features are as follows.

-The most ideal figure of hexagon, 6 group, judging from JMPS point of view, is that of East asia, showing, on one hand, higher scores for the Group I Work organization and administration (GI), GII Production control and GIV Team sense, which are directly or indirectly human related essential parts of JMPS, and on the other hand, lower score for GVI Parent subsidiary relations, which means lower commitment, such as lower ratio of Japanese expatriates, from the Japanese parent sides. Almost all the above scores are revealing the existence of affinity or familiarity in East asian region to the Japanese systems (High score for GIII Procurement simply shows that Japanese subsidiaries in East asia are procuring material and parts mostly from Japanese suppliers in Japan and local markets). Needless to say, there are various differences in the situations of individualism and collectivism or me-ism and group-ism in these Asian countries from China, Thailand, and Philippines to Korea. Though I do not enter so far this point in this paper, still there should be some significant differences between East asian region and others, judging from the above figures.

-The most distant figures from that of JMPS are those of Western and Central-eastern Europe. These two hexagons are the smallest (3.1) and similar in their sizes and shapes. The difference in the background of Western Europe from Japan would be not only individualism but also collectivism as compared with group-ism. It is not easy for Japanese firms to adapt to European type industrial unions organized basically on collectivism (trans-company organizations), which are compared with Japanese type company unions on group-ism (inside a company organization). On the other hand, it is interesting to see the fact that there are some common places between Japanese and European systems, called

“functional equivalent”. “Functional equivalent” is used in a way that Japanese firms adapt at the formal level of Europe but to apply Japanese practices on the functional level. For example, the European regulation for long-term employment can be used for Japanese style in-house education-training system, the works councils can be functioned as the labor-management consultation system in Japan, and so forth (See Kumon&Abo[2004],ch1 and so on).

-the dramatically change in the US, 1989-2001

The shapes of hexagons in the US changed remarkably between 1989 and 2001. From the very contrastive shape to East asian, i.e. typically lower GI and extremely higher GVI, in 1989 closed to that of much similar to Asian type, i.e. a little higher G1 and comparable level of GVI to other regions in 2001. In this case, I believe that the strategic decision and activities by Japanese companies, in terms of sizable and continuous investments, to gain the merit of large-scale market in the US must have surpassed the difficult with hurdle of less affinity.

#### 4 “Me-ism and group-ism”: a dark side of Individualism and collectivism in Japanese society

As a society the dark side of the Japanese style collectivism is often stressed more, especially from the western point of view. I will try just to mention this point using a little strange wording, “**me-ism and group-ism**”. This is another aspect of individualism and collectivism in Japanese society. I use here a word group-ism instead of collectivism as the former should be more suitable in Japanese context than the latter. In my definition, while collectivism would be a notion for western people in the sense that it means an association of people (Gesellschaft) and its actions that is purposely organized and functioned, typically like labor union and political party, group-ism is an idea for the cooperative consciousness and activities of a group of people who gather together within a community (Gemeinschaft) spontaneously or on other purposes, like village (rural society), school, sports team, and company.

Nowadays there have been increasingly reported the news about “ijime” or bullying in classrooms at schools and, as the results, almost every day’s news about suicides and murders by bullied children, becoming among the big social problems in Japan. Bullying or group victimizations are not limited only in schools but, traditionally there were often “murahachibu”(village ostracism or victimization), and there have been various bullies and victimizations against minorities in Japanese societies such as companies and public organizations. As a main reason for “ijime” in Japanese society its characteristic nature of homogeneous-inward looking people in isolated small islands in the far east, which is just the same socio-cultural background for the Japanese style management system, mentioned above, must be pointed out. In such an environment a logic of excluding out heterogeneous elements, minority people in Japan, would be easy to work.

And in recent Japanese society once some minority people are excluded out there are many factors that drive them into the wall: Fundamentally there would be a fact that direct human ties to support them have become weaker and thinner in schools, families, companies and other groups in Japan. Among the reasons the most significant should be the swelling in influence of mass media such as news papers, TVs and IT and its soft wares such as internets, game soft wares, and so on, resulting direct human relations broken into pieces.

In my understanding me-ism is another side of the coin, group-ism. As was pointed out earlier, group-ism in Japan is not functions seen in associations consciously organized so that itself is a spontaneous product having narrow and inward-looking inclination. Group itself holds very much strong insider-orientation. Insider-outsider consciousness here is particularly clear. Therefore, as an individual, once put outside the group, each person’s mind and perspective is not much socialized and does not have any mutual perspective and considerations on outside people. Each individual is so eager in thinking and acting by his or her own interests that I call this “me-ism”.

One of the good examples for that can be seen in the way for Japanese people to choose their residences. Majority of Japanese families own “my home”. The average ratio of my home to total residence in Japan is over 70%, comparable to that of the US, and much higher than 30% level in Germany. Moreover, in Japan people hold fast to detached houses than European style collective houses even in the tiny islands, compared with the huge land in the US. The public land policies by government have been easily following to such aspiration of Japanese people instead of introducing regulations to facilitate collective type houses like in European countries. As an impressive result from the above we see a new tall “pencil building”, i.e. a very thin building like pencil, in the midtown Tokyo, on the same narrow space of the land where one old small one-story house was existed. This shows how strongly Japanese people are clinging to the right of private ownership.



## 6. Concluding Remarks

I will try to conclude the several points taken up above.

There are three dimensions that I have discussed and analyzed on the international and domestic contexts of “individualism and collectivism” from the view point of “bright side” and “dark side” in Japanese companies and society: 1) general aspect on international comparison of “individualism and collectivism”, 2) socio-cultural aspect on international comparison of the relationship between “individualism and group-ism”, and 3) social aspect on “group-ism and me-ism” in Japanese society.

1) First of all, I should make it clear that the notion and relation of western type individualism and collectivism is not understood in the same context of Japanese type me-ism and group-ism. So when we discuss about the JMPS on the level of western notion collectivism should be considered as its social background vis-à-vis individualism which is typically the background of American style management system. Yet I believe that way would not be sufficient to treat properly that topic.

2) Particularly when we take up the performances and social effects of Japanese company it would be better to discuss mainly on group-ism, which is a spontaneous product of the socio-cultural environment, i.e. homogeneous-inward looking people and society. For Japanese companies and Japanese style management group-ism is very much favorable to implement their flexible and cooperative systems and activities that are managed in a way of “Genba-shugi”(all-the-member involved work site-orientation) . In this sense, group-ism can be seen as “bright side”, not only because of high performance, in terms of efficiency and quality, but also because of equality-oriented reward systems for almost of all the employees. Of course, we can not overlook the other “dark sides” that are included in this aspect such as still remaining big differences in reward systems between male and female, and full timers and part-timers.

I have checked, in the above, the extent to which the JMPS and its each element could be transferred to the main regions in the world, based on our JMNESG’s research results. This would show, in a sense, the degree of the potential that the JMPS can be spread out, so that the group-ism, the Japanese version of collectivism, can be found out, in each region or country, with some reservation of the influence from strategic responses by the Japanese companies.

3) When we talk about this topics in the relation to Japanese society this group-ism includes me-ism as its counterpart and should be considered as an important background of “ijime” and “me-ism”, both of which are the serious “dark sides” in the level of Japanese society.

Now that, how can we evaluate these complicated relationship of the contexts between “bright sides” and “dark sides” which take their forms against the backdrop of me-ism and group-ism? How and which parts of the Japanese management systems should Japan transfer to foreign countries? So that how about the introduction of these Japanese systems from the viewpoint of foreign countries? “Bright sides”, superiority of the JMPS, would be OK for industrial and economic development of recipient countries, but together with their “dark sides”, especially at the level of society? Then, is the average application score ‘3.2’, a little higher than the half Japanese element, somehow adequate?

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