Culture, Identity, Globalization: Theoretical Reflections concerning a New Way of Looking at Japan

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1. Introduction

This paper is based on the point of departure that there is no 'normal' position within a global cultural context, there is no absolute standard and no golden yardstick on the basis of which the validity and the quality of any culture can be measured as opposed to what the following intriguing English nursery rhyme seems to convey:

> The Germans live in Germany; the Romans live in Rome,
> The Turkeys live in Turkey; but the English live at home

We could ask here a number of hermeneutic questions, such as: Which nation invented this nursery rhyme? When was it invented? To what extent is it justified to argue that the English see themselves as the only people living at home? It is the last question that will be the specific focus of my paper, in a metaphorical sense. In other words, the focus will be on the question as to how a particular nation—Japan—sees itself and how it is seen abroad.

My paper asks attention for the necessity to look at Japan from the perspective of the localization—globalization debate. This might lead to the necessity to reinterpret Japan. There are a number of reasons for the necessity of such a reinterpretation. In this paper I shall be primarily concerned with just one reason: a redefinition of an old and a relatively new concept, respectively culture and cultural identity. The redefinition will be undertaken against the background of globalization.

My guiding principle here will be the systemic and constructivist theory of culture with as major proponents Even-Zohar, Luhmann, Maturana and Varela.[1] This theory considers culture as a system consisting of a number of subsystems, such as economic, educational, religious, technological and artistic subsystems. Each subsystem is based on all activities as performed by actors, people active within that subsystem. This means that a systemic approach is interested in all the 'actions', in all the 'activities' as performed by the actors within a particular subsystem.

2. How to recognize a culture when you see one?

Before the anthropological incarnation of the notion, culture meant primarily refinement, civilization. The 19th-century humanist Matthew Arnold, for example, regarded

1 For an extensive bibliography see Tötösy de Zepetnek 1992; for a critical analysis see Sevänen 2001.

culture as a study of perfection, of the inner condition of the mind and spirit. He supposed that culture would bring humans ever closer to 'beauty'. In his eyes culture constituted the best man had thought, said and written. Nowadays this meaning of culture is associated with the finest art, film, music and literature.

Cultural anthropologists have redefined culture such that it is no longer only associated with a select group of well-educated people but with everyone. As Clifford Geertz wrote:

> Culture . . . is not just an adornment of human existence, but . . . an essential prerequisite of it. . . . There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture.[2]

This implies that everyone is *cultured.* Thus culture has become a relatively value-free concept, as opposed to Arnold's value-loaded notion.

In this new, value-free guise, culture has become one of the most popularized anthropological concepts; it is omnipresent. Margaret Mead in a foreword for a book by the renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict pointed out that this usage is of recent coinage.[3] In the 1920s culture was still part of a professional anthropological technical vocabulary. Thirty years later it had penetrated newspaper columns and become common usage. Ruth Benedict contributed greatly to the popularization of the concept of 'culture'. We are justified in asking after the specific meaning of this new concept of 'culture'. After all, many other ideas largely cover Benedict's and Geertz's ideas of culture, such as norm and value-sets, behavioral patterns, rituals and traditions. The organizational psychologist Edgar H. Schein examined this question arguing that the notion of 'culture' differs from the just mentioned concepts in two distinctive ways.[4]

First, he presented the idea of *structural stability* within a community or group. Cultural elements are not only common property but are also stable and 'deep', meaning that they are less conscious, less tangible and less visible. Cultural elements connect with each other into a coherent whole. They show patterns at a deep, invisible level.

Second, culture implies the *collected and shared knowledge* of a group. This knowledge encompasses the group's emotional and cognitive behavioral elements. Schein correctly states:

> If shared knowledge is to develop, there will have to be a history of shared experience, which in its turn presupposes some stability of members in the group.[5]

These starting points for a definition of culture imply a constructivist character of culture. Culture does not consist of a set of innate or ontological characteristics static in nature, despite examples of this idea in many modern publications. On the contrary, culture consists of a great number of 'acts' performed on the basis of a number of more or less conventional schemes. In other words, one is not born a 'Japanese', but through

2 Geertz 1980, p. 12.

3 Mead 1959, p. xi.

4 Schein 1992, pp. 10–11.

5 Ibid., p. 10.

socialization (of which language, education and religion are important components) one gradually becomes acquainted with those conventions belonging to the core of the Japanese cultural identity.

My view on this broader idea of culture has been influenced by Geert Hofstede's conception.[6] I follow his lead because his definition unites three important elements: insight into the determinant value of culture, the importance of cultural relativism and the constructivist character of culture. Hofstede distinguishes two meanings of *culture.* There is *culture 1* as per the above-mentioned Matthew Arnold, who refers to civilization and refinement of the mind, and there is the culture with which I am concerned, *culture 2.* This culture

> is related to much more fundamental human processes than culture 1; it is related to the things that hurt. Culture 2 is always a collective phenomenon because it is at least in part shared by people who live/lived within the same social environment in which this culture was acquired. It is the collective programming of the mind which differentiates the members of a group or category of people from another.[7]

It is important to recognize that culture is acquired and not inherited. Culture's origins lie in social environment, not genes. Hofstede distinguishes culture from human nature based on the distinction that as a human one feels fear, love, joy, grief, etc.—all these are part of human nature—yet the manner in which these feelings are expressed is modified by a particular culture. Culture is, as it were, the mind's software. Culture is also distinguishable from individual personality, for personality consists of a unique set of unshared, mental programs.

Viewed from this perspective, culture contains a collection of mental constructions that evolve neither entirely arbitrarily nor predictably. These constructions are dependent on the social reality in which that group moves: the size of the country, the climatological circumstances, the number of inhabitants, the position held by women, the gross national product, the organization of education, etc. The same event may be given entirely different meanings by different groups of people. Thus precisely the same events from the Second World War may arouse proud in one people and hate in another. Reactions to the same or similar events are determined by a culture's ruling conventions.

My system-oriented conception of culture is furthermore based on ideas as employed by Niklas Luhmann.[8] He does not consider culture an immense, unspecified domain, but a whole made up of very distinct, yet interrelated parts. Thus an individual can operate on different levels simultaneously, including national, regional, ethical, religious, or linguistic; gender, generation, socio-economic status and the organization in which one works can also be relevant.

When seen this way discussions of only a *single* aspect of a certain culture exclude many important relations between diverse levels and lead directly to a lopsided, distorted image. There are many books dealing with the Japanese economy, education or manage-

6 Hofstede 1994, p. 5.

7 Ibid.

8 See e.g., Luhmann 1988.

ment system. I believe that separate aspects of Japanese life cannot be discussed without also discussing their relation to Japanese culture as a whole. For example, authors who describe the Japanese management system as a self-contained and coherent whole miss the coherence of the Japanese cultural system.

Can cultures be compared? Obviously they can and we do so daily often without being conscious of it. We are dealing with, for example, intercultural encounters (in reality or via the media) between people of at least two different cultures. Such encounters automatically provoke a positive or negative response because of our dependence upon our own culture. The Japanese habit of removing one's shoes when entering a residence amuses most Westerners, but should it? The reverse is also true: the Western habit of simply keeping one's shoes on when entering a house (usually someone else house!) even after having tromped through mud sends shudders down Japanese spines.

The selection of criteria used for comparison ultimately decide its result. This is so whether one employs common or garden criteria, such as the harmless example of the shoes, or scientific criteria. After exhaustive research, Hofstede identified five criteria useful for classifying cultures: (1) social inequality, including attitudes toward authority; (2) the boundary between individual and group; (3) concepts of manhood and womanhood, and the social implications of gender; (4) methods of dealing with insecurity, linked to aggression control and the expression of emotions; (5) and finally the degree to which planning has a long vs. a short term character.

In sum, defining culture in the sense of mental programming has a number of great advantages over a more ontological definition. One of the advantages is that culture is seen as continually subject to change; there is no such thing as a static culture, since mental programming is an ever changing activity: stimuli are constantly changing and so is the programming. A second advantage is that it becomes clear that culture is acquired and not inherited; it is a mental construction based on socialization and not an ontological characteristic of a community. Another advantage is the acknowledgement that there are no criteria by which one can 'prove' that culture A is 'better' than culture B. The exception here could be a culture that consciously and gravely violates the Declaration of Human Rights; such a nation could then be deemed reprehensible.

3. How to specify a container concept: cultural identity?

Cultural identity as a concept has made it into the newspaper columns of even the most local newspapers in the world. Such a star status of a complicated scholarly concept has lead to the hollowing out of its semantics. Cultural identity can be gainfully employed when two or more cultures come into contact with each other or are compared at a social scientific level. Often-asked question for decades and even centuries "What make Japanese culture so specific?," "How to describe Japaneseness?" or "In what respect can Japan be called an Asian country?" are in fact queries into the cultural identity of Japan (and of the countries with which Japan is being compared). The measure to which Japan possesses distinctive *and* common characteristics with other cultures can only be established on a comparative basis. As the American sociologists Jepperson and Swidler correctly observe:

> The essential strategy to make the invisible visible is naturally comparative research. That's why comparative scientific disciplines must take the lead in this field.[9]

Cultural identity is closely allied to such concepts as ethnicity, nation and nation-state. Adrian Hastings has distinguished these concepts well.[10] Roughly it comes down to ethnicity being related to a group of people with a common cultural identity and a common spoken language. Ethnicity can be seen as the most distinctive element in pre-national communities, yet it can easily live on within an established nation as a strong subdivision with a separate loyalty as can be seen in many member states of the European Union at this particular moment in time in which large groups of immigrants cling to their own cultural identity and language.

A nation must be viewed as a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. A nation consists of one or more ethnicities, has a literature and *culture 1* of its own, and possesses or claims the right to a separate political identity combined with the control of its own territory.

According to Hastings, a nation-state identifies itself in terms of one specific nation, of which the inhabitants are not seen simply as the 'subjects' of the sovereign, but as part of a horizontally-structured community to which the state belongs. Ideally there is equivalence between, on the one hand, the borders and the character of the political constellation and, on the other, a self-conscious cultural community. Naturally this equivalence is only theoretical. Most modern nation-states include population groups which do not belong to the core culture. Nevertheless, Hastings is of the opinion that nearly all modern states naively assume they are nation-states.

Authors who wrestle with the cultural identity of a certain nation or nation-state often refer to certain 'special traits', 'characteristic elements' or 'characteristics' of that nation-state or its inhabitants. These observations are often based on impressions, introspections, myths and classic jokes instead of on factual evidence or empirical research. Of course I do not deny that the thousands of jokes in existence on national and cultural stereotypes can shed light on certain aspects of the cultural identity of a particular community or nation, but in general they are no more than rather trivial indications of cultural identity.

Here we enter the prominent terrain of stereotyping. When it comes to politics it is of the utmost importance to have an adequate, well-balanced insight into the cultural identity of another nation. A badly distorted image hinders sound comprehension and real dialogue with that nation's government and people. All too often political conflict and war can be traced directly back to distorted constructions of the other's cultural identity *as well as* one's own. Of course, these constructions can be deliberately distorted as desired by the inner group.

Some ten years ago Ernest Gellner advocated taking the concept of 'cultural identity' seriously.[11] He believes that cultural identity is not a fallacy but a very attractive con-

9 Jepperson and Swidler 1994, p. 368.

10 Hastings 1997.

11 Gellner 1994, p. 45.

ception; its power lies in the structure of modernity. Today many different groups cling to this idea and misuse it for their own purposes. Obviously, those purposes may range from harmless to extremely life threatening. The power of an articulated cultural identity of a group cannot be simply spirited away by showing good will, by preaching an atmosphere of universal brotherhood or by locking up extremists. Gellner pleads for research into the roots of cultural identity's power, for we will have to learn to live with its fruits whether we want to or not.

When writing on cultural identity quite often journalists, but occasionally also social scientists, take as starting points established stereotypes which on close inspection do not go much beyond the level of jokes. Their publications are often based on an ontological and static belief in the specificity of a particular community: the Afrikaner as the harsh racist, the Japanese as the 'company warrior', the American as the super-individualist, the Englishman as the gentleman, the Italian as the unreliable business partner, the Belgian as the dull beer drinker and French fries eater, the German as the arrogant, Mercedes driving, speed demon, etc.

Stereotypes have a longer and stronger life than one might expect; they invariably always outlive 'reality.' In many cases they show a biased and over-generalized image. Moreover, many stereotypes are not completely devoid of truth. They are, however, often either hopelessly out of date or much too general, lacking nuance and strongly distorting the 'real' situation. In certain circumstances (e.g., politics or business) that may lead to an interruption or breakdown in communication and in serious cases even to war.

As concerns the two prevailing approximations of 'cultural identity,' what alternatives are there? One approximation is the old, essentialist approach which leads to hackneyed stereotyping; the other is a more recent, extreme-relativist approximation with post-modern undertones which begins by admitting that there is no point in defining cultural identity because it cannot be defined!

Before answering this question we must first make another distinction. The cultural identity of a specific group or people is only partially decided by their national identity. Cultural identity is a broader concept than national identity. People define their identity not only by virtue of belonging to a certain nation-state, but also include many other elements (gender, age, profession, etc.), and adjust to situational demands.[12] Whether it is justified to conclude on the basis of this argument that nationalism is diminishing, as Hobsbawm supposes, is an entirely different matter, although more than a little wishful thinking seems to be operating here. The struggle between localization and nationalization on the one hand and globalization on the other hand is far from decided. Based on recent political developments in some parts of the world, wars, battles and many interesting political debates concerning sovereignty, however, my prediction is completely different from Hobsbawm's. I return to this at length in the next section.

Often cultural identity is seen as a set of characteristics unique to a particular culture and innate to a specific group of people. The Japanese tradition of *Nihonjinron* typifies this view. Another strong contemporary example of ontological thinking can be found for example in South Africa, where the history of the Great Trek was strongly mythologized

12 Hobsbawm 1990, p. 182.

under the white government until 1994. In fact The Great Trek is not more than merely an episode from Afrikaner history, but it is invested with great mythic power. In a mythology which has lasted decades, Great Trek Afrikaners are portrayed as God's chosen people.

In addition to conceptualizing cultural identity as an ontological phenomenon, there is also a structuralist view in which culture is seen as a collection of related characteristics more or less independent of the people who make that culture.

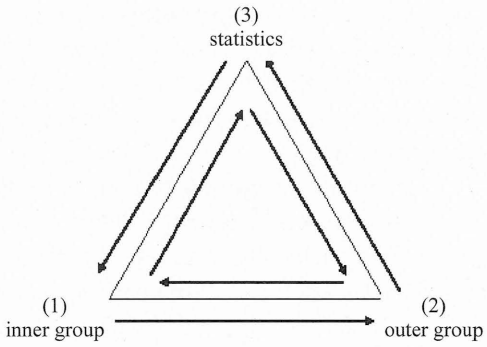

Fig. 1 The cultural identity triangle.

Is there an alternative to ontological and structuralist thinking? The alternative is to conceptualize cultural identity as a *construction*. Within such a constructivist framework cultural identity is formed by three factors: (1) the inner group's *self-image*—the mental programming upon which cultural identity can be constructed, e.g., Japanese identity as constructed and seen by the Japanese themselves; (2) *the outer group's image and view of* the inner group—e.g., the Chinese view of Japan (3) *the statistics*—factual data concerning that nation or population group at a certain moment in history to be found in *Facts and Figures* books, etc.

These three factors are intimately related and connected inextricably in the triangle (Fig.1). *Self-image* is the way in which mental programming has shaped the construction of habits and conventions as well as the institutions of a community. It also deals with how its conventions and institutions are perceived: how a group or nation perceives itself, its structures and institutions, and its place in the world. That perception is based on the mental programming that takes place via these institutions, thus closing the circle. Socialization as a child and adolescent, particularly through education, is an important building block of that mental programming.

As we do not have direct access to how consciousness is programmed, we are dependent on visible indicators. We must observe people behaving and communicating, which we then construct as their visible cultural identity. Behavior and communication must be freely interpreted: institutions (parliament, education, public health, army, system of law, etc.) and their operation within the community are important components of this. Politicians and important voices within a community can steer, suppress or refrain from interfering with this visible cultural identity. It is impossible to speak of cultural identity without examining how opinion leaders define it.

Naturally the creation of a national identity by politicians and others does not necessarily imply that a population accepts this top-down identity. Many former East Block nations in Europe are clear testaments to this. A governmental identity campaign does not 'automatically' transform great cultural diversity in the society into a single, common cultural identity. Institutions such as 'national' sports (in Japan baseball and increasingly also soccer) are in all probability much more contributive to the gradual construction of

a nation-state than an expensive governmental campaign (which ultimately only benefits their publicity agency!). Cultural identity is difficult to construct, since it grows historically. Of course a cultural identity can be stimulated and reinforced, but is counterproductive to realize that via a publicity campaign or by force (a.o. by arresting and punishing critical citizens).

Apart from the construction of conventions and institutions and the self-image, the first factor also contains another category: conceptualizations of foreign nations or outer-groups. In a multicultural society the constructed image of the other is strongly determined by the relation of the indigenous inner group with alien population groups. At this point a deformation can take place. The constructions of the inner group are usually not based on knowledge of the country in question. How many Japanese can base their knowledge of even China on a personal visit?

The second factor of the identity triangle is the *outer image*, the image of the other as constructed by the outer group of the inner group: for example the South-Korean image concerning Japan or the image South-Koreans living in Japan have of their new homeland. Important building blocks of these constructions are how foreign media (or those of the outer group) and foreign opinion leaders portray the inner group. Here too, however, the effect of 'ordinary' citizens' travels to the inner-group's country can significantly contribute to that image.

Outer images necessarily reduce and interpret (and thus 'color') the vast number of characteristics of the inner group. For instance, Samuel Huntington constructed his image of contemporary Japan on the basis of just three themes.[13]

> The first theme, "Japan as the isolated nation", refers to the notion that, from the perspective of culture and civilization, Japan has formed a singular nation that does not share a foundation in common with any other country. . . . Huntington's second theme, "non-Westernizing Japan", refers to the idea that although Japan has successfully modernized, in its values, patterns of daily life, personal relationships, and norms of behavior, it has on a fundamental level resisted Westernization . . . . Huntington's third theme refers to the idea that Japan has never undergone a violent political revolution. Huntington views the Meiji revolution as a bloodless revolution. Moreover, interestingly, a similar event was repeated with the American occupation after World War II.[14]

The third factor contributing to cultural identity is *statistics,* factual data found in statistical handbooks, yearbooks, and reports regarding the relevant nation or ethnic group. As soon as these factual data are interpreted and stimulate certain action, the actions themselves no longer belong to the domain of statistics but to the self-image of the inner group. Of the most populous nations in Europe, the Netherlands had one of the highest net immigration figures per thousand inhabitants in 1999: 1.99. This figure can be found in *Pocket. Europe in Figures*, together with thousands of others, and belongs to the statistical dimension. However, the measures taken by the Dutch government since then to lower this figure reflect Dutch political culture and therefore belong to the first factor.

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13 Based on Yamaori Tetsuo's 2006 description of Huntington's position.

14 Yamaori 2006, pp. 3–4.

The three factors of cultural identity are strongly related. A change within any one factor has direct consequences for the composition of both other factors.

The conception of cultural identity as a construction implies that it is a *mental* construction, which varies with person, time and place of construction. That means it is impossible to speak of 'the' cultural identity of a community. In theory there are as many cultural identities within a community as there are places, times and people to construct these identities. This need not keep social scientists from the important task of describing and systemizing these constructions' common traits. Additionally, we are often confronted in reality by one dominant version of national or ethnic cultural identity constructed as such by leading politicians, journalists or academics.

4. Globalization: dominating the world?

A complaint often lodged against the concept of 'cultural identity' is the idea that current trends toward globalization will largely destroy the specifics of most local cultures and thus their cultural identity.[15] This has to do with the old adage that the great big, unknown world is slowly but surely being transformed into a small village in which everyone will know everyone else. Superficially this looks good and this theory has attracted many supporters led by the old guru Marshall McLuhan. Globalization were to bleach the cultural identity of any one community such that cultures look increasingly similar. Divergence were to be replaced by convergence. The globalist says, take main shopping streets, for example. The rapid spread of chain stores all over the world has resulted in central shopping streets and districts all looking alike. Were you to blindfold someone and bring him or her to an unidentified Starbucks coffee shop, I'd give ten-to-one odds he or she would not be able to tell which city he or she were in, my hypothetical globalist would add. My answer would be that cultures are made up of more than chain stores and therefore require a more refined analysis than having someone guess the city they are in.

In any case it cannot be convincingly demonstrated that various cultures are succumbing to uniformity and convergence on account of globalization. That having been said, that they are indeed influenced by globalization is evident. Cultures are not static entities, although they are sometimes seen as such.

The relationship between globalization and an individual culture is complex. The *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) indicated that this is a bilateral processes:

> On the one hand, there is the search for cultural authenticity, the return to origins, the need to preserve minor languages, pride in particularisms, admiration for cultural self-sufficiency and maintenance of national traditions; on the other hand, we find the spread of a uniform world culture, the emergence of

15 The symposia organized by the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in collaboration with other institutions of which most papers are assembled in this volume and two companion volumes, carried in their title the notion of 'globalization'; I shall stick to this concept here, despite the fact that I believe together with Ulf Hannerz (1996) and Koichi Iwabuchi (2006) that 'transnationalism' is a more adequate concept. 'Globalization' has a connotation which is too all-inclusive and exhaustive; hardly ever a particular trend is truly global, that means visible and recognizable everywhere in the world.

> supranational myths and the adoption of similar lifestyles in widely different settings. Modern technological societies have generated a transnational, composite, mass culture with its own language whose linguistic imprint is already universally evident.[16]

This paradox between localization and globalization can be found in various forms across the globe in many different ways. Philip Schlesinger described this paradox in the EU (then the EC) as follows:

> On the one hand, the difficult search for a transcendent unity by the EC—one which must recognise component differences—throws the nation-state into question from above, arguably contributing to crises of national identity. The political and economic developments in the integration process, however, are out of phase with the cultural: what European identity *might be* still remains an open question. On the other hand, the ethno-nationalist awakenings in the former communist bloc and current developments within Western Europe—whether neo-nationalist separatisms or racist nationalisms—tend to affirm the principle of the nation-state as a locus of identity and of political control.[17]

It is worthwhile to recognize the ultimate paradox of the first decade of the twenty-first century: the conflict between native 'inner culture' and community on one side and the global 'outer culture' of an assembly of nations and cultures. Many of such inner cultures find the outer culture artificial and forced upon them. This is exactly the situation in which many member states of the European Union find themselves at this moment on account of "eurocratic" decisions, such as the introduction of the euro in January 2002 or the considerable expansion of the European Union with ten new member states in May 2004. These are far reaching decisions which are made and carried out by, in fact, a small number of people: 'Eurocrats' in Brussels. It's no wonder that in general these kinds of 'outer culture' measures illicit very little support across most 'inner cultures' of the EU.

This paradox between inner and outer culture takes many forms: localization versus globalization, polarization versus homogenization, "small is beautiful" versus needed expansion, individual responsibility versus efficient centralization, divergence versus convergence. The semantics of these oppositions naturally differ, but they can all be traced back to the inner-outer antithesis. This list of oppositions is hardly exhaustive; more such oppositions could easily be added, such as one that has become famous: Benjamin Barber's recent contrast between two antipodes 'Jihad' and 'McWorld'.[18] The Jihad trend, named of course after the Islamic fundamentalist movement, represents extreme localization: the balkanization of nation states such that cultures, peoples and regions are set against one another. This movement rejects international dependence, integrated markets, modernity and modern globalized technological development.

In contrast is McWorld, which presents a picture of a perfect future. It is a busy picture, Barber tells us, which demands fast, driven economic, technological and ecological

16 OECD 1989, p. 16.

17 Schlesinger 1994, p. 325.

18 Barber 2000, p. 21.

powers, and integration and uniformity and which hypnotizes people everywhere with fast music, fast computers and fast food—the three M's of MTV, Macintosh and McDonalds.[19] They compress nations into a single great homogenized, globalized theme park, a single McWorld held together with communication, information, entertainment and commerce. Jihad is engaged in a bloody politics of identity while McWorld aims at economic profit without spilling blood. It becomes clear that Barber's is a relatively negative image of the future in which localization and globalization go hand in hand and strongly influence each other. But is this negativity actually warranted? Are things as grim as Barber claims? Before answering this question it is necessary to describe the semantics of globalization.

Globalization is of importance to almost any academic discipline: from Economics to Religious Studies, from Social Psychology to Japanese Studies. Each discipline deals with and has conducted research into this concept. The result is that there are dozens of descriptions of globalization most of which strongly bear the mark of the scientific field from which they came.

The concept of globalization is better served, however, with as discipline-free a definition as possible such that the concept is not sent off in one particular disciplinary direction from the start. Such a definition is supplied by Arjun Appadurai who puts forward that the complexity of today's world economy can no longer be adequately represented in simplistic models of center-periphery, surplus-deficit or consumer-producer.[20] Instead he proposes an elementary model consisting of five trends or flows which jointly and mutually model the concept of globalization.

First we have *ethnoscapes,* composed of large groups of people in transit: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and foreign workers. The second category is made up of *technoscapes* which represents the relocation of machinery and businesses caused by the expansion of (multi-)nationals and governmental agencies. The third category consists of *financescapes* which are the fast flows of money on the currency markets. Fourth are *mediascapes,* streams of images and information produced and spread through newspapers, weeklies, magazines, television and film. Finally, *ideoscapes* are made up of ideological concepts associated with existing elements of a world vision based on the Western Enlightenment such as democracy, freedom, well-being, human rights, etc.

The use of the suffix *-scape* certainly carries with it the feel of jargon, but is nonetheless functional. The justification for its use lies in the belief that we are not discussing phenomena which are 'objective', 'fixed' or 'static', but that they—like a land*scape*—can change based on the perspective from which a landscape is seen. The five terms are constructions which can change in accordance with their historic, linguistic and political situation. These changes can be caused by various actors, such as nation-states, non-governmental organizations, multinationals and—we should not forget—individuals.

It is tempting to speculate which will be the dominant stream in the short term: localization or globalization, divergence or convergence, Jihad or McWorld? Probably a more important item concerns the discussion of whether this obligatory and oft-posed question is correctly formulated. Does such a question do justice to the actual situation?

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19 Ibid., p. 31.

20 Appadurai 1990, p. 296 ff.

5. Localization: dominating globalization?

The Japanese economist and consultant Kenichi Ohmae 大前研一 is one of the most well-known defenders of the (in his eyes) increasingly dominant role of globalization. His 1995 book, *The End of the Nation State*, became an academic bestseller—on a 'global' scale.[21] Ohmae proclaimed that the nation-state had seen it's finest hour and had lost its role as a meaningful actor in a modern, borderless, globalized economy. His arguments turn around his observation that nation states have become little more than "bit actors"; their role has been taken over by multinational corporations.

Ohmae makes a number of telling observations, but his argumentation is not completely convincing. On the one hand he generalizes certain situations from his own country, Japan, which cannot be generalized. His point of view regarding the nation state is that they have become rather inefficient engines of wealth distribution instead of real global powers. Here he bases himself too much on the situation—in the time of writing in the mid 1990's—in Japan. The 1990s were years known in Japan as the "lost decade". The stagnant economy at that time indeed ensured that the government's role would be limited to the distribution of wealth. Additionally, this was executed badly via large-scale public works resulting in roads leading nowhere and the construction of bridges with no attaching roadways. In most other wealthy nations this form of unbalanced distribution of wealth (principally to construction firms) hardly does not exist or exists to a far lesser extent.

On the other hand, Ohmae fails to see his own nation clearly when he proposes that the nation-state is a nostalgic fiction. If this is not the case anywhere, then it is certainly not the case in the region of Asia of which Japan is part. He cannot possibly mean that the Japanese do not care what happens in their own country. Of all industrialized nations Japan's cultural identity is one of the strongest. Ohmae's is a somewhat biased, economic book which pays little attention to cultural determinants relevant to globalization, which play at least as important a role as economic factors.

Another oft-mentioned example used to confirm the supremacy of globalization is 'Americanization.' Many social scientists and journalists go so far as to suggest that these two terms are synonymous. The term 'Americanization' indicates the spread of American culture (or what counts as such) to every corner of the globe: Hollywood films, soap operas, bestsellers, cars and food.

There are just two problems when substituting Americanization for globalization, which indicate that localization may strongly resist globalization. One could question the degree to which the above mentioned Americanization elements really represent U.S. culture. It is certainly conceivable and even probable that during the production of such elements parts of the value system and artistic norms from the non-American 'periphery' are deliberately incorporated in order to actively promote the worldwide sales from the beginning: the influence of the local on the global.

Furthermore, it is worth considering that the reception and perception of these so-called American products is undoubtedly not globalized—that is to say, it is divergent and dependent upon location, the specificity and mental programming of the receiving cul-

21 Ohmae 1995.

ture. Important conventions which determine mental programming ensure that the reception and perception of American media products vary from culture to culture: the global transformed by the local.

Localization is not only considered to be influencing or transforming globalization; localization is regarded by a number of scholars and intellectuals to be the dominating paradigm instead of globalization. Ralf Dahrendorf is one of the most well known advocates of localization domination, that is, that the nation-state remains even into the twenty-first century the source of identification *par excellence.* He has observed that the nation state will remain the context for individual citizen rights and the front line of international relations. This is also true in and for Europe. Here and there the nation state is undermined, but it essentially remains untouched by recent developments. The nation state is still the space in which people experience feelings of belonging. Nothing better than the heterogeneous nation state has been yet discovered.[22]

The nation state is also one of the most successful and popular inventions not of the nineteenth century, as is often maintained, but of the second half of the twentieth century. Fig. 2 clarifies this:

time frame	states established	states fallen
1816–1876	24	15
1876–1916	12	1
1916–1945	16	7
1945–1973	81	1

Fig. 2 States established and fallen, 1816–1973.[23]

The European Union will never be prepared to take over the identity functions of its member states, as some American journalists would have it. M. Rainer Lepsius has correctly pointed out that the EU is not going to result in a European nation; it is and will remain a regime working with other regimes.[24] In other words, it is naive to suppose that a European people with a single identity will develop anytime soon. Of course the national identities of member states will become less closed and because of this cultural (in addition to economic and politics) bonds naturally will be formed with the European Union as a new frame of reference. This is already more than one can expect based on current opinions of EU member populations on the EU project. A dangerously large discrepancy has developed between what eurocrats want (and thus decide) and what European citizens want. Closure of this democratic gap might well turn out to be more important than the introduction of the euro or the enormous expansion of the European Union in May 2004 with ten new member states.

Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* argues for a divergent, localized standpoint which resists and dominates globalization. An academic bestseller since 9/11, it is, as befits a bestseller, somewhat rich in sound bites and simplifications.[25] The book

22 Dahrendorf 1994, p. 760.

23 Based on Krasner and Thompson 1989, p. 207.

24 Lepsius 1999, p. 213.

25 Huntington 1997.

has been severely criticized by many different parties based on many different perspectives. Yet in the midst of all of these—in some cases more than justified—critiques, the value of Huntington's book lies in his emphasis on the primacy of culture. The determinative factor in the twenty-first century is not the economy or technology, but the cultural programming of people who express themselves in various cultures and civilizations. If one wants to combat terrorism then one must address the mental programming of the group. This is much more effective than the deployment of large police and military forces. Naturally mental reprogramming is a more complicated process than simply sending army units and firing rockets, but in the long run mental reprogramming is much more adequate. The immaterial damage caused by hard power does not disappear when bombed houses are rebuilt; it demands a recovery period of two or three generations. The primacy of culture is also visible here: soft power always wins over hard power in the long run.

6. Interpreting contemporary Japan: hybridity

In fact, localization and globalization are two sides of the same coin. On the one side we can observe that localization continues to play a strong role. Think of hard or soft forms of nationalism each of which are visible in many places from Canada to India, from the former Eastern Block nations to Iraq, from Japan to Israel. Nationalism, has made a strong comeback, as Radhakrishnan suggests, but in fact it obviously never disappeared.[26] Helmut Dubiel also indicates recent tendencies of German nationalism which take form as faked praise for the motherland, the instrumentalization of national resentments in election campaigns, or the slogan 'Germany for Germans'.[27] Technocrats and economists have a strong tendency to continually underestimate localized, divergent tendencies. Politicians both over and underestimate them depending on the political discourse in question. Both over and underestimation contain potentially fatal dangers. Steering an opportunistic course is possibly even more fatal.

On the other side, we see now the strong influence of the five cultural 'flows' explained in section 4: the transfer of people, technology, finances, media and ideas. Of course globalization remains an extremely strong tendency whose power will doubtless grow. In the coming years, however, localizing tendencies will be in a position to adopt and adapt many global trends, Japan certainly leading the pack. Globalization will certainly increase in extensity and intensity, but in a number of countries with a strong local culture, such as Japan, globalizing flows will be localized in equal or stronger measure.

It is impossible to say in general which tendency, globalization or localization, is dominant for this is largely dependent upon place and time. It is evident that in the few nations which have surrounded themselves with a wall, such as North Korea, localization remains the dominant trend. On the other hand, Japan evidences a mixture of strongly globalized and strongly localized conventions. This mixture is so strong that a third term seems necessary in order to justly interpret modern Japanese cultural identity: hybridity.

A hybrid situation consists of elements of one culture being transformed into another where they are adapted and combined with existing cultural practices. In other

26 Radhakrishnan 1992, p. 83.

27 Dubiel 1994, p. 760.

words, hybridization is often a blend of globalized and local conventions, thus causing a paradoxical situation for the foreigner: a McDonalds located next to a temple; Starbucks and the traditional tea ceremony; a handshake and a bow. These examples are rather superficial forms of hybridity. More important forms imply the adaptation of behavioral and organizational models, such as the reforms undertaken in the university system of the United Kingdom serving as an example for the 'Big Bang' concerning the restructuring of the Japanese university system on April 1, 2004. [28] Hybridity consequently implies that neither globalization nor localization have primacy, but that we have a hybrid of both which is subject to continuous change. Sometimes a globalizing flow takes precedent over a local convention as well as the other way around.

Strong cultures can 'manage' globalization allowing some global flows to enter their cultures and others not; and the global flows that are admitted will be changed and adapted to the existing strong national conventions. Japan is such a strong culture. 'Managed globalization' has been the hallmark of Japan's cultural identity since the Meiji era.

The implications of managed globalization can be seen in many domains of the Japanese society. Let us take an example in the area of Japan's business environment. What is the current global situation in that area with respect to Japan? Grimes and Schaede give the following succint survey:

> Internationally, Japan's trade prowess, increasing manufacturing presence around the world, and economic leadership in Asia have made the country an integral member of multilateral organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Japan is increasingly expected to uphold the norms of free trade and economic openness as articulated in a variety of international treaties, and to assume a geopolitical role commensurate with its global economic position.[29]

The global conventions in this respect are free trade and openness, which is obviously not the same as saying that every WTO member sticks to that principle for 100%. But what are the Japanese practices at home?

> Domestically, Japan has been challenged by the need to transform an industrial structure that has proven unfit to ensure growth across most sectors in the new economy of the twenty-first century, a situation reminiscent of the early 1970's. Having built their economic success on high quality manufacturing, many Japanese manufacturing firms are still among the world leaders, whether in cars, office machinery, or consumer electronics. Yet with the decline of some of the former flagship industries, no new sectors have stepped up to allow for a transfer of employment and technical skills into industries with high growth potential. Low mobility of labor and capital have made such adjustment even more difficult. As a result, many declining industries continue to receive protection, at a time when there has been an obvious need to support growth in both currently successful industries and the emerging new economy sectors.[30]

28 Goodman 2005, p. 4.

29 Grimes and Schaede, p. 243.

30 Ibid., pp. 243–244.

That means that the local conventions are restricted protection based on specific economic sectors and based on specific economic policies. To overstate the clash between global and local conventions a bit one could say it concerns the struggle between openness and closeness, where openness is the dominant global convention (or at least the global discourse) to which closeness is subjected to.

In this case the Japanese political-economic system opted for a solution which could be called "permeable insulation" as opposed to the complete insulation during the two and a half centuries preceding the Meiji era. "Insulation" implies that, in many areas, government and corporate policies continue to have at their core an attempt to shield companies from full competition and the rigor of market forces. The insulation is permeable in the sense that it is not absolute, but allows for differentiation by industry, institutions or issue areas. Permeable insulation means allowing entry and market competition for foreign companies in areas where that is the best approach for existing Japanese, relative strong companies, while protection will be installed in less competitive sectors. As Grimes and Schaede mention:

> Permeable insulation is Japan's attempt to manage the process of [economic] globalization by differentiating its speed and reach by political issue-area and economic sector.[31]

This condensed and rather superficial outlook on Japan's current economic context is meant as an example, as a case. It is one element out of the contemporary cultural system that is subjected to the struggle between localization and globalization. The same adaptation process (managed globalization) can be seen in almost all major areas of Japanese society. Obviously, pace, quality and intensity of this process might be different according to the specificity of the sector.

Obviously, this same process of managed globalization is also visible in most other cultures. But the representation of this paradox seems to be much more manifest in Japan than anywhere else in the world. It is evident that the globalization-localization paradox is not unknown to Japan since the Meiji era. But the intensity of this paradox in the first decade of the new millennium is unprecedented. More than ever before the concept of hybridity seems to be adequate to describe Japan's changing cultural identity. Cultural hybridity means the co-existence *and* blending of (parts out of) several cultural systems, reflecting both adaptation and resistance. In Japan at this particular moment in times it means the blending presence of mainly Japanese, Asian, American and some European cultural systems and conventions[32].

7. Conclusion

We must finally consider the way cultural identity against the background of increasing globalization and regionalization can open up another way of looking at Japan. If cultural identity is interpreted in an essentialist sense (i.e. without taking heed of Japan's own outer image and statistics), then such an attitude can have disastrous consequences,

31 Ibid., p. 4..

32 A recent book highlighting the hybrid character of contemporary Japan is Segers 2008.

particularly when taken by leading politicians and governmental figures. Countless examples from many nations bear witness to the implications of a biased, overrated own cultural identity—often narrowed to an extreme nationalist identity without taken into consideration neither statistics nor the outside perception—expressed as repression domestically and feelings of superiority with respect to foreigners.

However, if the political establishment and the government view cultural identity as a construction and strive after a balance of self-image, outer image and statistics, then cultural identity can develop into social harmony and economic prosperity at home and into a strong and respected position abroad.. *Hard power* is exchanged for *soft power*, which consists not of militarism or economic achievement but of values believed and maintained. A balanced proportion of self-image, outer image and statistics strongly stimulate the transition to *soft power.*[33]

When analyzing the central concepts of this paper, culture, identity and globalization, one is consistently confronted with the opposition 'The West versus the Rest'. Implicit in these analyses are a Western point of departure, a Western yard-stick, and the assessment of non-Western cultures on the basis of Western standards. Employment of the cultural identity triangle (see Fig. 1) can be helpful in deconstructing this opposition, since the triangle pays equal attention to inside and outside constructions and perceptions on the basis of which a center—periphery opposition is untenable.

The opposition 'Western versus non-Western' is in fact often the implied and consequently invisible basis upon which many definitions are given to the major concepts dealt with in this paper. When theories touching on these terms are formulated in the West—and I estimate this to be a rather large majority of all publications—then at the very least there is a perceptible undercurrent which takes the West (usually the U.S.) as the center and 'everyone else' as peripheral. Localizing trends take place in the periphery, globalizing trends in contrast in the center (e.g., the Neweconomy, successful TV programs and films, influential media, new trends in lifestyle, product branding, etc.). The center commands and the periphery is obedient. Is it really all that simple and mechanistic?

The real picture is much more complex. Obviously, there appear to be also non-Western centers, such as Japan. In addition, what a center is in one domain, may be a periphery in another. When interpreting contemporary Japan from a cultural perspective many Western observers still exclusively focus on the 'old' Japan as a receiver and transformer of Western 'global' trends, being in the periphery, strongly influenced and culturally occupied by the American center.[34] The reality, however, is much different: Japan has increasingly been active as a sender, acting as a 'center' on its own. Since a number of years Japan has exported cultural flows which are being received and actively transformed by a 'periphery': other regions such as East and South Asia, Europe, and North America: from car design to karaoke, from food to manga, from tv-series to play stations. Focusing on the United States as the sole center of globalizing trends has become

33 For the concepts of hard and soft power, see Nye 2002.

34 The term 'culturally occupied' was coined by Yamada Shōichi in a presentation he gave during a Research Meeting at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies on November 24, 2006.

an anachronism.[35] With the weakening of American soft power cultural decentering is likely to proceed.

In order to avoid one-dimensional cultural imperialism a more sophisticated, regional model must replace the simplistic center-periphery model. Sinclair et al. present an alternative to the standard vision of the U.S. at the center dominating the periphery of most the remaining nations in the world.[36] Instead they propose a view of the world divided into a number of regions each of which has its own, internal dynamic as well as its specific ties to the other regions. Although these regions are based primarily on geographic realities, they are also defined by mutual cultural, linguistic and historic ties which transcend geographic space. A dynamic regional picture of the world such as this can be helpful in the formulation of a nuanced analysis of the complex and multidirectional streams of economic, cultural and political products. In this way a one-dimensional model (center-periphery) can be replaced by a multidimensional model that more accurately represents the real situation. This gives Japan an excellent opportunity to develop itself further not only and primarily as an economic power house, but also as an influential and respected source of cultural power.

Post-colonial questions are also handled more adequately when one emphasizes the importance of regional perspectives. Postcolonial identity originates in many cases from two opposing tendencies: identification with as well as rejection of colonial conventions and institutions. This can be seen, for example, in South Africa where a number of 'colonial' institutions (such as the Parliament, the law and the educational system) were kept after 1994, but where simultaneously a strong opposition existed and exists against the mental programming of those who were in power during the apartheid years before 1994. From a regional perspective such a situation is not seen as a case on its own, but rather as a characteristic of postcolonial identity in general with similar developments in other regions as well.

Looking now at the contemporary world—or at a part of it such as a region, a nation state or an ethnic group—implies witnessing a complicated and continually changing mix of globalizing, localizing and hybridizing tendencies. The cultural factor, the mental programming of a certain group, is thereby the driving force: this factor determines the mix and also the changing of the programming itself. This 'cultural turn' has made problems related to culture, cultural identity and globalization *the* issues at least for the next ten to fifteen years and probably for much longer. Until further notice, the cultural turn is center stage, also in East Asia.

What I have tried to do in this paper is to demonstrate that the English nursery rhyme below is one of the single worst forms of cultural absolutism:

> *The Germans live in Germany, the Romans live in Rome,*
> *The Turkeys live in Turkey, but the English live at home.*

It is somewhat disturbing to realize that many English children are sung to sleep with this song. More settling is the knowledge that it was principally used at the end of the nine-

35 Examples of the way in which Japan acts as a global center exporting, importing and transforming flows in the domain of popular culture can be found in Allen and Sakamoto 2006 and in Segers 2008.

36 Sinclair et al. 2000, p. 301.

teenth century and is no longer much heard.

A hundred years after the invention of this nursery rhyme is has become clear that every person views the world from the window of his own cultural house. Everyone also might pretend that anyone from another cultural house is different, but that their own cultural house is 'normal'. Unfortunately there is no 'normal' situation in matters of culture. Japanese culture is as 'normal' or 'abnormal' as American or any other culture is. This might be a disturbing message, as disturbing, as Galileo's seventeenth-century claim that the earth was not the center of the universe. But in fact it entails an interesting scholarly challenge: to reinterpret and reinvent cultures thought of to be deviant peripheries but in fact are important and influential centers in their own right. Japan is a clear example in this respect.[37]

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37 For observations in this paragraph I am indebted to Hofstede 1994, p. 235.

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