

## **An unsupported common view: Comparing Japan and the U.S. on individualism/collectivism**

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It has long been believed that the Japanese are more collectivistic than the Americans. To assess the validity of this common view, we reviewed 15 empirical studies that compared these two nations on individualism/collectivism. Surprisingly, 14 studies did not support the common view; the only study that supported it turned out to bear little relevance to the ordinary definition of individualism/collectivism. An examination of the supportive evidence of the common view disclosed that this view had been formed on an unexpectedly flimsy ground. It further turned out that the wide acceptance of the common view may have been the result of the fundamental attribution error, which may have led to an underestimation of situational factors in interpreting the past obviously collectivistic behavior of the Japanese.

It has long been taken for granted that the Japanese are more collectivistic than the Americans. Surprisingly, however, recent empirical studies that directly compared these two nations regarding individualism/collectivism (I/C) lend virtually no support to this common view. This paper first reviews those empirical studies, and then compares them with the empirical bases of the common view in order to evaluate which reflect the reality more accurately. Finally, three alternatives to the common view are discussed in the light of empirical evidence including historical material as well as psychological findings.

### **The common view**

During the period between the opening of Japan in 1854 and the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941, quite a few Western observers noted that the Japanese lacked individuality (e.g., Chamberlain, 1905; Ladd, 1910; Lederer & Lederer-Seidler, 1938). In particular, Percival Lowell, who is known for interpreting the pattern on Mars' surface as canals, devoted a whole volume (Lowell, 1888) to advocating the view that the Japanese were "impersonal." These observers prepared the basis for the common view.

After the Pacific War, Benedict's (1946) influential book, *The chrysanthemum and the sword*, established the view that the Japanese have a collectivistic national character. This book has been interpreted to assert that the alleged collectivistic character of the Japanese

was responsible for their totalitarian political system (see Aoki, 1990; Lummis, 1981). This causal attribution has since dominated the arguments on Japanese politics (e.g., Dore & Ouchi, 1971: see also Saeki, 1996; Vogel, 1979).

Since Benedict (1946), a number of Western observers have been propagating the view that the Japanese are collectivistic (e.g., Abegglen, 1958; Epton, 1963; Gibney, 1985; Rohlen, 1974). According to Reischauer (1988), “a concept widely held in the West” is that “Japan is made up of a uniform race of pliant, obedient robots, meekly conforming to rigid social rules and endlessly repeating the established patterns of their society” (p. 159). *The Economist* even claimed, “there does seem to be a sort of *inbred* collectivism in the Japanese people” (“Consider Japan – I,” 1962, p. 794; emphasis added). This “group model” (Befu, 1980a; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986) of the Japanese has won overwhelming support among the Japanese themselves as well (e.g., Araki, 1973; Kawasaki, 1969; Nakane, 1967, 1970).

The alleged Japanese collectivism has been invoked to explain various social phenomena in Japan. Japanese commentators maintained, for example, that school bullying was a phenomenon peculiar to the collectivistic Japanese culture, which tends to eliminate idiosyncratic individuals (e.g., Ichiki, 1985; Kasai, 1986; Morita, 1997). In a similar vein, Rohlen (in Sanger, 1993) commented as follows: “This is embarrassing for Japan because the country is trying so hard to evolve away from the group-action stereotype, and this is evidence the old ways of Japan are at work” (p. L3). The recent economic success of Japan, too, has been attributed to the alleged Japanese collectivism (e.g., Abegglen, 1958; Itou, 1969; Odaka, 1965; Vogel, 1979).

By contrast, since de Tocqueville (1946/1840) referred to individualism as a marked characteristic of the Americans, it has been taken for granted that they are one of the most individualistic nations (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Dore, 1990; Triandis, 1990, 1995). Most Americans consider individualism a desirable property supporting democracy and freedom (e.g., Riesman, 1954; Waterman, 1981; see also Lukes, 1973).

These characterizations of the two nations resulted in the common view that the Japanese are more collectivistic (or equivalently, less individualistic) than the Americans. Dore (1990) wrote, for example, “And in the degree to which their modern capitalism is based on individualistic assumptions, the Englishmen, or rather Englishmen and Americans, do still rather stand alone, with Japan at the most extremely differentiated opposite pole” (p. 195).

It is worth noting that such an individualistic or collectivistic property has been thought of as an enduring personality-like internal disposition (i.e., “national character”) that underlies a wide variety of overt behaviors of the respective nations. The above cited comment, “inbred collectivism,” by *The Economist* (“Consider Japan – I,” 1962, p. 794) is no exception. In first presenting her vertical society theory which resembles Benedict’s (1946) characterization of the Japanese culture (Lummis, 1981), for example, Nakane (1964) maintained that the alleged collectivistic human relations are inherent in “the blood of the Japanese” (p. 76). Although Nakane (1967) later admitted the biological unity of human beings (p. 186), she still maintained that the alleged collectivistic human relations in Japan are virtually independent of historical changes (p. 165). If the common view is true, accordingly, the overt behaviors of each nation must show a consistent pattern across different situations and historical changes.

## Criticisms of the common view

Recently, the group model of Japan has met with some criticisms (e.g., Befu, 1980a, 1980b, 1987; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986; Sugimoto & Mouer, 1980, 1982), which question its factual grounds as well as its methodology.

As for the factual grounds, Mouer and Sugimoto (1986) cast doubt on the claim that the collectivistic Japanese are cooperative and harmonious among themselves. They have presented a number of sociological and historical data contradicting this claim. During the 1952 to 1960 period, for example, the number of popular disturbances causing human injury or property damage was much larger in Japan than in France. According to Befu (1980a), some 1600 peasant uprisings were recorded during the *Tokugawa* era (1603–1868); an average of 3274 peasant disputes was recorded annually during the 1920 to 1941 period. Furthermore, Yamazaki (1990) points out that the Japanese culture has been developed primarily by non-collectivistic city dwellers. Hirayama (1995) shows that a dominant principle of Japanese social organizations (called *ie*) had an aspect to foster individualistic entrepreneurship as well.

Incidentally, the common view is inaccurate with regard to the school bullying problem as well. Recently, it has turned out that school bullying is a serious problem in Western countries as well ("Advanced measures," 1996; Morita, 1998). In Britain and Norway, for example, suicides were reported as in Japan ("Western wisdom," 1996). According to a survey (Japan Youth Research Institute, 1986), the proportion of junior high school students who had experience of being targets of bullying was 58.1% in the U.S., whereas it was 39.1% in Japan. Therefore, school bullying is hardly peculiar to the "collectivistic" Japanese culture.

As for the methodology, Befu (1980a) and Mouer and Sugimoto (1986) criticize the group model in that it relies not on scientific data but on arbitrarily chosen casual observations such as anecdotes, proverbs, and so on. Sugimoto and Mouer (1982) have demonstrated that if such arbitrary choice of materials is allowed, it is possible to "prove" even the opposite claim that the Japanese are individualistic. They contrasted, for example, a Japanese proverb, "If you make the first move, then you will dominate others (*Sakinzureba hito o seisu*)," to a Western proverb, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Although these criticisms have cast serious doubt on the validity of the common view, they have limitations as well. First, they have provided little direct evidence for the comparison between Japan and the U.S. Second, they are based mainly on those sociological and historical data that have only indirect relation to I/C. Finally, they have difficulty in explaining why the common view has won such overwhelming support by most scholars as well as the public. To evaluate the validity of the common view accurately, therefore, it is indispensable to review psychological studies that directly compared Japan and the U.S. with regard to I/C and to specify the reason for the overwhelming support.

## The criteria for selecting studies

In order to assess the validity of the common view accurately, to be reviewed studies have to satisfy the following two conditions. First, they have to be directly related to the ordinary definition of I/C. Second, they have to compare Japan and the U.S. directly. Necessity of the latter condition is self-evident considering that the common view is exclusively concerned with the comparison of these two countries.

The former condition is needed to decide how to deal with those studies that are usually taken as supportive evidence for the common view, although the relationship between the investigated properties and I/C is not direct but only presumed. They include such studies as Japan–U.S. comparisons on communication (e.g., Gudykunst, Yoon, & Nishida, 1987; Gudykunst *et al.*, 1992), interactional style (e.g., Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990), self-concept (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989), and reward allocation (e.g., Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Mahler, Greenberg, & Hayashi, 1981).

Take the reward allocation studies as an illustration. It is often presumed that individualism is related to preference of equity in reward allocation among in-group members, whereas collectivism is related to preference of equality (e.g., Leung & Bond, 1984). However, individualism and collectivism are not defined in terms of the assumed difference in reward allocation preference. The relationship between them is merely presumed and susceptible to empirical disconfirmation. If it is actually disconfirmed, then it will not be justified to use the difference in reward allocation preference to verify the alleged difference in I/C.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the presumption concerning the relationship between reward allocation preference and I/C was originally drawn from the assumption that the Japanese and Chinese are collectivists whereas the Americans are individualists (e.g., Leung & Bond, 1984; Mahler *et al.*, 1981). If the empirical data concerning reward allocation preference are taken as evidence for the very validity of the common view, therefore, the arguments become circular. These are the reasons for setting the first condition, which excludes the above indirectly related studies from the present review.

The first condition also excludes those studies in which extracted factors or dimensions are distinct from the ordinary definition of I/C (e.g., Bond, 1988; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Those studies in which similarity between I/C and extracted factors or dimensions is pointed out but has some room for doubt will be separately reviewed as “marginally related studies.”

In order to judge whether or not a particular study is directly related to I/C, their conceptual definition has to be made explicit. Although two or more definitions are currently available, the most commonly agreed definition has to be employed because it is the one that underlies the common view. Most academic and popular uses of the terms *individualism* and *collectivism* (or *groupism*) agree in assuming that they are located at the opposite ends of a bipolar continuum: Individualism gives priority to an individual and stresses autonomy, whereas collectivism gives priority to an in-group and stresses conformity. This ordinary definition of the concepts is consistent with a definition of individualism quoted by Triandis (1990) from a dictionary of social sciences (Gould & Kolb, 1964, p. 325): “a belief that the individual is an end in himself, and as such ought to realize his ‘self’ and cultivate his own judgment, notwithstanding the weight of pervasive social pressure in the direction of conformity.” This ordinary definition is also consistent with the characterization of these concepts by Triandis and his associates (e.g., Triandis, 1990; Triandis *et al.*, 1986; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985) who emphasize that individualism gives priority to personal goals over goals of an in-group, whereas the converse is true for collectivism.

Recently, some researchers (e.g., Freeman, 1997; Kâğıtçıbaşı, 1987, 1994) suggest that I/C should not be considered as bipolar concepts but should be regarded instead as two separate concepts, where strong individualism and strong collectivism are compatible as well as weak individualism and weak collectivism. Although this separate concepts view may have some validity, it is not adopted in this review for the following two reasons. First, it does not provide a basis to assess the validity of the common view because the common

view was not formed on this modified definition. Second, the separate concepts view has not been widely accepted by researchers who are interested in I/C in various fields of research.

For the same reasons, Triandis *et al.*'s (1988) "multidimensional constructs" view is not adopted, either. They wrote, "the empirical studies suggest that we need to consider individualism and collectivism as multidimensional constructs" (p. 336). This claim is based mainly on the study by Triandis *et al.* (1986) who administered their own I/C questionnaire in nine countries including the U.S. but not Japan, and extracted four factors which were all supposedly related to I/C. As a "principal axes factor analysis" with varimax rotation was applied (p. 262), these four factors are regarded as orthogonal (i.e., having no mutual correlations).

Their multidimensional constructs view is inappropriate to serve as a basis for assessing the validity of the common view because the specifics of their multidimensional constructs are considerably different from the above ordinary definition of I/C, on which the common view was formed. Triandis (1990, p.113) states that cross-cultural data tell us that self-reliance and conformity are not defining attributes of individualism and collectivism, respectively. If this is true, however, it cannot be used as an excuse to modify the definition of I/C arbitrarily into the one that has little in common with the generally realized definition, although it may suggest that the traditional I/C constructs are useless in discriminating among different cultures.

The multidimensional constructs view has other inherent difficulties as well. First, the specifics of those constructs are not consistent across studies. The number and content of extracted factors change considerably depending on the content of employed questionnaires, respondents, methods of analysis, and so on. For instance, Triandis *et al.* (1986) who investigated nine countries found four factors, whereas Triandis *et al.* (1993) who investigated ten countries (with six countries in common) found six factors in an analysis and nine factors in another analysis. Given that the contents of the multidimensional constructs cannot be fixed, it is impossible to use them as a basis for reliable cross-cultural comparisons.

Second, I/C as multidimensional constructs lose their efficacy as analytic tools in scientific investigation. When a culture is described as "collectivistic," for example, it is unclear whether this statement means a high score on the "family integrity" factor or a low score on the "separation from in-groups" factor in Triandis *et al.* (1986). Since these factors do not correlate with each other as pointed out earlier, the meaning of this statement is entirely different depending on which is meant. The factors that have no mutual correlation should be treated as separate concepts. Otherwise, rigorous scientific analysis would be impossible.

Finally, I/C as multidimensional constructs make cross-cultural comparisons arbitrary. Many attempts have been made to order two or more cultures or nations according to their degrees of I/C (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). The common view is an instance of such attempts. If I/C were to be conceived of as multidimensional constructs, however, the ordering would vary considerably depending on how much weight is given to respective factors when reducing the factor scores of those cultures or nations to a unidimensional order. If the weights were determined arbitrarily, the resultant ordering would also be arbitrary. Mathematical weighting cannot be a final settlement because it varies with such arbitrary procedures as the number of questionnaire items related to a particular factor. No reasonable weighting has ever been proposed thus far in the I/C research.

These considerations led us not to adopt the multidimensional constructs view as well as the two separate constructs view. In selecting the studies to be reviewed, we adopted the

aforementioned ordinary definition of I/C, on which the common view was formed. For the reviewed studies as well, their relevance to the ordinary definition will be re-examined when necessary.

## Empirical comparative studies

Among a number of Japan–U.S. comparisons, 11 questionnaire studies and four behavioral studies are directly related to the ordinary definition of I/C. Although two more behavioral studies are also directly related to the ordinary definition, they will be referred to only as supplementary data because they are graduation theses. Six more questionnaire studies will also be referred to as supplementary data because their relevance to the ordinary definition of I/C leaves some room for doubt.

Only one study out of the above relevant 15 supported the common view, whereas the remaining 14 did not. Among these 14 studies, nine reported no clear difference between Japan and the U.S.; the remaining five reported that their Japanese participants were more individualistic than their American counterparts, which is in direct opposition to the common view (see Table 1). The supplementary data (i.e., two behavioral studies and six questionnaire studies) found no substantial difference.

## Questionnaire studies

### Negative studies

*Differences opposite to the common view.* Triandis *et al.* (1993) administered an I/C questionnaire developed by Triandis *et al.* (1986) to college students in ten countries, and extracted six factors related to I/C. If the factor scores are simply summed up for each country after aligning their signs so that positive values indicate individualism, the Japanese students are the most individualistic with 254, whereas the American students are the fifth

**Table 1** The relations of the reviewed empirical studies to the common view

| Relation | Questionnaire study                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Behavioral study                         |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Positive | Hofstede (1980)                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                          |
| Neutral  | Leung & Iwawaki (1988)<br>Triandis <i>et al.</i> (1988)/<br>Asai (1987)<br>Kashima <i>et al.</i> (1995)<br>Yamaguchi <i>et al.</i> (1995)<br>Arikawa & Templer (1998)<br>Stephan <i>et al.</i> (1998)<br>Triandis <i>et al.</i> (1998) | Frager (1970)<br>Williams & Sogon (1984) |
| Negative | Triandis <i>et al.</i> (1993)<br>Carter & Dinnel (1997)<br>Matsumoto <i>et al.</i> (1997)                                                                                                                                              | Yamagishi (1988a)<br>Yamagishi (1988b)   |

with -10. If only four factors that appear to be closely related to the ordinary definition of I/C are used (i.e., "independence," "personal competence," "task versus social emphasis," and "dependence on others versus self-sufficiency"), the Japanese students are still more individualistic with 292 than the American students with 34. Meanwhile, the American students had slightly higher factor scores on three out of the six factors. Therefore, they would look more individualistic than the Japanese students if these three factors were given extremely heavy weights. However, no reasonable basis is found for such extreme weighting.

Matsumoto, Weissman, Preston, Brown, and Kupperbusch (1997) administered their own I/C questionnaire to college students in four countries. Toward family members, contrary to expectation, the American students showed significantly higher collectivism than their Japanese counterparts. Toward friends and colleagues, no significant differences were observed. Toward strangers, interestingly, the Japanese students were significantly more collectivistic. In general, collectivists are assumed to be collectivistic only for in-group members, showing less consideration than individualists do for strangers (e.g., Leung & Bond, 1984; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Triandis, 1990). Therefore, the fact that the Japanese students showed a stronger "collectivistic" tendency toward strangers means that they were actually less collectivistic than the American students (Matsumoto, Kudoh, & Takeuchi, 1996; Matsumoto *et al.*, 1997). It follows that the results of this study as a whole are precisely opposite to the common view.

Carter and Dinnel (1997) administered six questionnaires to college students of Japan and the U.S., two of which were directly related to the ordinary definition of I/C: the collectivism scale (Yamaguchi, 1994) and the collectivist values index (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Although the numerical values reflecting collectivism were slightly higher for the American students, the differences were not statistically reliable in ANOVA's. In a discriminant function analysis, however, possessing collectivistic values was predictive of being American. This directly runs counter to the prediction of the common view. Incidentally, having an independent self-construal (Singelis, 1994) was predictive of being Japanese. The independent self-construal is considered to be closely related to individualism (Kitayama, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Accordingly, this finding is congruent with the above finding that the American students were more collectivistic than their Japanese counterparts.

*No substantial difference.* Leung and Iwawaki (1988) selected 21 subscales concerning friends and co-workers from Hui's (1984) collectivism scale, and administered them to college students in three countries. Although the American students ( $M = 3.72$ ) were slightly more collectivistic than the Japanese students ( $M = 3.69$ ), this difference was not statistically reliable.

Triandis *et al.* (1985) administered their own 145-question collectivism scale to American college students. Triandis *et al.* (1988) chose 138 questions and had them answered by Japanese college students and adults to be compared with the above American college students. According to Asai (1987), who reported the same data in more detail, the Japanese sample was significantly more collectivistic in 25 questions, whereas the American sample in 23, with the remaining 91 questions nonsignificant.<sup>2</sup> Hence, both samples were roughly comparable on the whole. More specifically, their questionnaire contained 48 similarity questions (e.g., "How similar are your religious views to those of an average person of your own nationality?"). Triandis *et al.* (1988, p. 333) admit that these questions are inappropriate because they might simply reflect the actual social

differences that exist between the two countries rather than differences in internalized values and attitudes. Their questionnaire also contained conflict resolution questions in which the respondent was supposed to want to do one thing and his/her in-group members were supposed to want him/her to do another. Given the ordinary definition of I/C whose core meaning is whether priority is given to the goal of an individual or to that of an in-group as described previously, these questions are of particular interest. Contrary to the prediction by the common view, the Japanese sample was significantly more individualistic than the American sample in six out of seven such questions with the remaining one nonsignificant.

Kashima *et al.* (1995) compared college students of five countries using four questionnaires including the extended version of Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale (see below). Among the extracted seven factors, the Japanese sample was more individualistic than the American sample on four factors, whereas the converse was true on the other three factors. It may be argued that two factors concerning friendship and one concerning assertiveness have little to do with the ordinary definition of I/C. If these factors are excluded, the Japanese sample was more individualistic on two factors, whereas the American sample was more so on the other two.

Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, and Sugimori (1995) compared college students of three countries using Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale concerning goal conflict (e.g., "I do things in my way regardless of what my group members expect me to do"). The Japanese sample was slightly more collectivistic than the American samples: the mean summed ratings (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 43.62 (7.20) for the Japanese sample, 43.10 (6.37) for the Delaware sample, and 42.35 (6.72) for the Seattle sample. However, no difference was statistically reliable.

Arikawa and Templer (1998) administered Yamaguchi's (1994) collectivism scale to Japanese and American college students. Although the American students were more collectivistic ( $M = 36.5$ ,  $SD = 4.6$ ) than the Japanese students ( $M = 33.1$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ), this difference was not statistically reliable.

Stephan, Stephan, Saito, and Barnett (1998) extracted 29 items from Triandis *et al.*'s (1988) questionnaire and administered them to Japanese and American college students. The Japanese students were significantly more individualistic in two out of their three subscales, whereas the American students were more so in the remaining one.

Triandis, Chen, and Chan (1998) developed a questionnaire which required respondents to choose the best and the next best from four alternatives for each question, which corresponded to horizontal or vertical individualism, horizontal or vertical collectivism, respectively. They cite an unpublished study by Triandis *et al.* (in preparation) who administered this questionnaire to college students in eight countries. The American sample was slightly more collectivistic than the Japanese sample in one of the four alternatives, whereas the converse was true in the other three. However, the differences between them were only 1 to 3% in terms of the proportion of choosing each alternative as the best. Triandis *et al.* (1998) did not report whether these differences were statistically reliable or not. In addition, both samples showed a very similar pattern of results: the proportion who chose the horizontal individualism, for example, was 43% in the American sample and 41% in the Japanese sample, whereas it was 52% in the Netherlands sample and 25% in the Hong Kong sample. Accordingly, these results are best interpreted to indicate that no substantial difference was present between the American and Japanese samples.

### A positive study

The only study that clearly supported the common view is Hofstede (1980) who administered questionnaires concerning “work-related values” to employees of a huge multinational corporation all over the world. This study has been widely cited and stimulated many subsequent comparative studies on I/C. He factor-analyzed the answers to 14 “work goals” questions obtained in 40 countries and extracted two factors, one of which was the *individualism factor*. He formed the *individualism index* from its factor scores and ordered those countries on the basis of the values of this index. The U.S. ranked first (i.e., the most individualistic) with 91, and Japan ranked 22nd with 46. These results are consistent with the common view as far as the relationship between the two nations is concerned. However, this ranking cannot be taken at face value because a close examination discloses two serious validity problems.

*Factor interpretation.* An inspection of the exact wording of the questions that had high loadings on this factor (e.g., “How important is it to you to have good physical working conditions (good ventilation and lighting, adequate work space etc.)?”: see Table 2) reveals that its relation to the ordinary definitions of I/C is very remote at best. What is the relation, for example, between collectivism and “good ventilation and lighting”? The questions with high negative loadings are related to working conditions where one’s ability can be fully actualized. Although a question, “Work with people who cooperate well with one another,” also has a negative loading (−.37), its absolute value is relatively small (cf. −.69 for the above “ventilation” question: see Table 2) and it is also related to the working conditions. The questions with high positive loadings are related to personal satisfaction concerning occupation. In actuality, therefore, Hofstede’s (1980) “individualism factor” appears to be better interpreted as something like “personal satisfaction versus workplace satisfaction in occupation.” This is hardly surprising given that his questionnaires were originally constructed to investigate “work-related values.” Incidentally, Triandis (1990; see also Triandis *et al.*, 1988) reported that this factor had a significant rank correlation only with the “family integrity (good and lasting relationships between parents and children)” factor, which was one of the four factors extracted by Triandis *et al.* (1986) and had little to do with autonomy or conformity.

**Table 2** Hofstede’s (1980) questions having high loadings on his “individualism factor”

| Factor loading | Question                                                                                          |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Negative −.82  | Have training opportunities (to improve your skills or to learn new skills)?                      |
| −.69           | Have good physical working conditions (good ventilation and lighting, adequate work space, etc.)? |
| −.63           | Fully use your skills and abilities on the job?                                                   |
| Positive .86   | Have a job which leaves you sufficient time for your personal or family life?                     |
| .49            | Have considerable freedom to adopt your own approach to the job?                                  |
| .46            | Have challenging work to do – work from which you can get a personal sense of accomplishment?     |

*Note.* All the questions take the form, “How important is it to you to ...” From *Culture’s consequences* (pp. 403–404), by G. Hofstede, 1980, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. Copyright by Geert Hofstede. Reprinted with permission.

*Ecological correlation.* Hofstede (1980) formed a correlation matrix on the basis of a mean rating in each country for each question, and submitted this matrix to the factor analysis. Such an *ecological correlation* based on summary statistics could be very different from the corresponding correlation based on original individual data (see Freedman, Pisani, & Purves, 1978). Robinson (1950), for example, demonstrated that the ecological correlation between skin color and illiteracy was .946 when percentages for nine geographic divisions of the U.S. were used, whereas the corresponding correlation was only .203 when the original individual data were used. Although the ecological correlation tends to be inflated in general, other biases can be introduced depending on the correlation within each region.<sup>3</sup> The validity of a factor analysis based on such biased correlations is highly questionable. Although the ecological correlation may not be inappropriate when summary statistics for regions are meaningful, what researchers are interested in while comparing countries on I/C is behavior of individuals in each country. Therefore, the ecological correlation is obviously inappropriate, and the validity of Hofstede's (1980) individualism index based on ecological correlations is not assured. Later, Hofstede himself (Hofstede, Bond, & Luk, 1993) recognized the drawback of ecological correlation.

These two problems make it difficult to accept Hofstede's (1980) ranking as the one reflecting the degrees of individualism for the listed countries. In spite of frequent references to this study, therefore, its ranking cannot be taken as reliable evidence for the common view.

### ***Marginally related studies***

In addition to the above reviewed studies, five studies that compared Japan and the U.S. inferred relations between their results and I/C. Although their relevance to the ordinary definition of I/C leaves some room for doubt, it cannot be denied altogether. For safety, therefore, they are also reviewed in this separate section.

Smith, Trompenaars, and Dugan (1995) present the results of the Rotter (1966) locus of control scale from the databank provided by Trompenaars (1993) who administered a questionnaire concerning work-related values (including the locus of control scale) to employees of business organizations in 43 countries. On the second factor whose relation to I/C was inferred by the authors, both Japanese and American samples were the most autonomous among the investigated samples with no substantial difference between themselves. However, the relevance of this study to the present review is questionable for the following two reasons. First, only a tenuous relationship is found between the ordinary definition of I/C and the items in the scale (e.g., "There's not much use in trying too hard to please people. If they like you they like you."). Second, the ground for their inference was a significant .70 correlation with Hofstede's (1983) individualism score, of which validity is questionable as pointed out in the preceding subsection.

Smith, Dugan, and Trompenaars (1996) analyzed a different part of Trompenaars' (1993) databank with multidimensional scaling. On the second dimension whose relation to I/C was inferred by the authors, the American sample was slightly more individualistic than the Japanese sample. However, this inference needs qualification because the authors maintained that this dimension should be defined not as I/C but as "varying orientations toward continuity of group membership" (p. 231), and named it "utilitarian involvement – loyal involvement."

Schwartz (1994) conducted a value survey in 38 countries and presented the results of smallest space analysis for the data of schoolteachers. As for three regions whose relations to

I/C were inferred by the author, no substantial difference was found between the Japanese and American samples in "conservatism"; the American sample was slightly more individualistic in "affective autonomy"; and the Japanese sample was clearly more individualistic in "intellectual autonomy." However, the relationship between these results and I/C has to be interpreted cautiously because Schwartz (1990, 1994) himself is critical about the utility of the I/C constructs and presented the above constructs (e.g., "conservatism") as original ones.

Gudykunst *et al.* (1996) found that Japanese and American college students were comparable on individualistic values and that Japanese students rated collectivistic values slightly more important than their American counterparts. The authors did not report whether the latter difference was statistically significant or not. The relevance of this study is not clear because they constructed their questionnaire on the basis of Schwartz and Blisky's (1990) questionnaire, Patai's (1976) Arab values, and so on, instead of ordinary I/C questionnaires. For the reason stated above, we cannot be confident about the relevance of Schwartz's questionnaire to I/C. In this study, items from ordinary I/C questionnaires (e.g., Hui, 1988; Yamaguchi, 1994) were used to assess independent/interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). No substantial difference was found between the two samples with regard to these self-construals.

Gudykunst and Nishida (in press) found that in two surveys Japanese students were significantly more individualistic than their American counterparts on six values, whereas the converse was true on three values. Although their results were thus incompatible with the common view on the whole, caution is needed to interpret them because the authors employed Rokeach's (1973) questionnaire in one survey and Schwartz's (1990) questionnaire in the other instead of ordinary I/C questionnaires.

Finally, Kim's (1994) study is classified into the supplementary data for a different reason. He found that Japanese students were more individualistic than Hawaiian students in in-groups, whereas Japanese students were less individualistic in out-groups. Although these results are in conflict with the common view, more than 70% of Hawaiians are Asian and Polynesian in origin, and the author admitted that they might not be representative of Americans.

## Behavioral studies

Answers to questionnaires may be inconsistent with actual behaviors (e.g., Becker, 1960; Lang & Lazovik, 1963; LaPiere, 1934; Mann, 1959). Markus and Kitayama (1991) criticized Triandis *et al.* (1988) on this ground. Therefore, it is necessary to review those studies that compared actual behaviors of Japanese and Americans. Conformity and cooperation have been studied in experimental settings with these two nations. It goes without saying that these two kinds of behavior are located at the heart of the ordinary definition of I/C. According to Befe (1980a), for example, "In the group model, cooperation and conformity among group members are prime virtues" (p. 30).

## Conformity

It is thus predicted that "collectivistic" Japanese should show a higher conformity rate than "individualistic" Americans did in the Asch-type conformity experiment where a real participant was exposed to confederates who made obviously erroneous answers

unanimously in some trials. Although Inuta (1977) claimed that no empirical study would be needed to confirm this “self-evident” prediction, Frager (1970) actually conducted the conformity experiment in Japan. Surprisingly, contrary to the “self-evident” prediction, the rate of conformity was only 25% for Japanese college students, which was much lower than the 32% reported by Asch (1956) who tested American college students in a comparable condition.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Frager observed *anticonformity* (i.e., erroneous answers when the confederates unanimously made correct answers), which Asch had not reported. Williams and Sogon (1984) reported that the conformity rate was 27% for Japanese college students when the confederates were unfamiliar to the real participants as in Asch’s original study. Incidentally, these findings were replicated in two graduation theses: Sako (1975) under the supervision of Jyuji Misumi and Eshun Hamaguchi reported a conformity rate of 18%,<sup>5</sup> and Shindo (1993) under the supervision of Masaaki Asai reported 20%. The latter observed anticonformity as well (Shindo, personal communication, 1996).

Bond and Smith (1996) have found that the conformity rate has declined over time in the U.S.; the average of the conformity rates observed in eight studies conducted between 1955 and 1990 after Asch’s original work is 25% (Smith & Bond, 1993). Therefore, the conformity rates observed in Japan are best conceived of as roughly comparable to those in the U.S., which still contradicts the prediction by the common view.

Some researchers (e.g., Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Triandis, 1990) conjectured that Frager’s (1970) conformity rate was not higher than Asch’s (1956) because his Japanese confederates were not in-group members. However, the available evidence concerning the in-group/out-group difference is mixed. Matsuda (1985) compared friends and strangers as confederates. Although his results cannot be directly compared to the above conformity rates because his procedure differed from Asch’s standard procedure in critical respects, it is possible to compare the results between friends and strangers within the study. He observed no systematic difference. By contrast, Williams and Sogon (1984) reported that the conformity rate was 51% when their confederates and real participants were from the same sports clubs. This discrepancy between the two studies might have resulted from the difference in the nature of their in-groups: the above clubs were formal university sports clubs (*taiikukai*) in baseball and Japanese fencing (Sogon, personal communication, 1997), which are notorious for their unusually rigid discipline. A valid cross-cultural comparison is impossible until a comparable in-group is tested in the U.S. because it is known that the conformity rate generally tends to be higher for in-group members (Bond & Smith, 1996).

## Cooperation

If Japanese were collectivists, they would maintain cooperation even at the sacrifice of their own individual profits. Yamagishi (1988a) compared American and Japanese college students in a setting similar to the prisoner’s dilemma. In his experiment, cooperation in a small group increased its members’ money reward, though the reward decreased when individual members tried to increase their own reward further by acting selfishly. When the selfish behavior was sanctioned, no difference in cooperation was observed between the American and Japanese students. When it was not sanctioned, however, the American students showed a significantly higher level of cooperation than did the Japanese students.

Yamagishi (1988b) compared American and Japanese college students with regard to secession from cooperation as well. In every trial, each participant in a small group was free to choose between his/her own individual record and the group record of performance as a

basis for getting a money reward. When the amount of reward was identical for the two kinds of record, both samples chose the individual record in seven to eight trials out of 20. When the amount of reward for the individual record was reduced to half of that for the group record, however, the American students chose the individual record in only about one trial, whereas the Japanese students still chose it in about eight trials. In this half reward condition, all the participants obtained smaller amounts of reward in the individual record trials than in the group record trials. This suggests that the Japanese students preferred to perform individually even at the cost of a reduced reward.

These results on cooperation run counter to the common view in clearly showing that the Japanese students behaved in a less cooperative manner than the American students.

## Comparing the empirical findings with the evidence of the common view

As a whole, the above reviewed 15 empirical studies have presented unmistakable counter-evidence against the common view. The only study that appeared to support the common view (Hofstede, 1980) turned out to be invalid in its interpretation of the results. Among the remaining 14 studies, the behavioral studies showed essentially the same pattern of results as the questionnaire studies. Therefore, this failure in corroboration cannot be attributed to a particular methodological pitfall. Two graduation theses on conformity (Sako, 1975; Shindo, 1993) and six marginally related questionnaire studies (Gudykunst *et al.*, 1996: Gudykunst & Nishida, in press; Kim, 1994; Schwartz, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 1995, 1996) were in general agreement with the above 14 studies. These consequences lead to the question: Which of the empirical findings and the empirical bases of the common view reflect the reality more accurately? In this section, their relative validity will be examined from the viewpoints of both internal and external validity.

### Internal validity

*Internal validity* refers to "the approximate validity with which we infer that a relationship between two variables is causal or that the absence of a relationship implies the absence of cause" (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 37). In the present case, it is usually reasoned that an alleged cultural difference and its corresponding difference in a psychological process are causally responsible for an observed difference in overt behavior including a verbal report.

As Mouer and Sugimoto (1986) pointed out, the empirical basis of the common view is largely composed of arbitrarily chosen casual observations such as personal experiences, anecdotes, and proverbs. Although they are of some heuristic value in hypothesis generation, they have obvious limitations in verifying the proposed hypothesis, mainly because no systematic attempt is made to partial out confounding factors.

In most casual observations invoked to confirm the common view, samples were not equivalent between the compared countries because they were chosen at will as the occasion demanded. In more than a few cases, authors even reported anecdotes for Japanese samples alone, thus making no actual cross-cultural comparisons. Without equivalent samples, the effect of an unidentified irrelevant factor might well be confounded with that of a hypothesized cultural difference (see Takano, 1989).

In a typical casual observation, the behavior of a Japanese in a certain situation is compared to that of an American in a very different situation. In this case, it is impossible to

judge unambiguously whether the observed behavioral difference should be causally attributed to the alleged cultural difference or the situational difference. More often than not, an actual behavior of a Japanese is compared to an idealized behavior of an American. Obviously, such a comparison allows no valid causal inference.

In formal studies, by contrast, considerable effort is devoted to controlling for confounding factors. A Japanese sample and an American sample are investigated in a comparable setting prepared in a laboratory or a questionnaire. An attempt is also made to extract equivalent samples from the compared populations. With regard to confounding factors, the formal studies are thus undoubtedly far superior to the casual observations underlying the common view.

When casual observations are made or later retrieved, they are vulnerable to a number of well known cognitive biases like preconception (e.g., Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Gilovich, 1983; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979), *misinformation effect* (see Loftus, 1979; Loftus, Feldman, & Dashiell, 1995), *confirmation bias* (Jenkins & Ward, 1965; Skov & Sherman, 1986; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Wason, 1966), and the like. The aforementioned demonstration that the Japanese could be “proved” to be individualistic by arbitrarily choosing casual observations (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1982) strongly suggests that the common view actually suffered from some such cognitive biases. In contrast, scientific procedures in formal studies are designed to minimize the influence of cognitive biases. In this respect as well, therefore, the reviewed empirical studies can be considered to have much higher validity.

### **External validity**

*External validity* refers to “the approximate validity with which we can infer that the presumed causal relationship can be generalized to and across alternate measures of the cause and effect and across different types of persons, settings, and times” (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 37). The common view is typically presented in a highly generalized form. The alleged national character as a cause of observed cultural differences in behavior is generalized to the entire nation without explicit qualification to exclude particular sub-populations. It is also generalized to a wide variety of behaviors and situations without explicit qualification to exclude particular behaviors or situations. More specifically, the alleged collectivistic national character of the Japanese has been identified as a cause of every conspicuous social phenomenon in Japan such as school bullying, the past totalitarian political system, scarcity of creative accomplishments, high motivation of laborers, and so on.

It is important to note that the reviewed empirical studies impose severe restrictions on the generality of the dispositional difference between the two nations alleged by the common view. The fact that virtually no empirical studies succeeded in confirming this alleged dispositional difference indicates clearly that the difference, if any, is not so general as is typically assumed.

*Sample representativeness.* On the one hand, the reviewed empirical studies have obvious limitations in sample representativeness, although their samples are roughly equivalent between the compared countries. Those studies that have direct relevance to the ordinary definition of I/C and are unfavorable for the common view largely employed college students as their samples. Random sampling has never been conducted. Consequently, due caution is needed in any attempt to generalize their results to the entire nations.

However, it is worth noting that more than 40% of the Japanese sample in Triandis *et al.* (1988) were adults who were parents and relatives of the investigated students. The adults and students were significantly different from each other only in their similarity judgment, of which relevance to the alleged difference in I/C is doubted by the researchers themselves, as noted above. This suggests that college students may not be an idiosyncratic sample of the Japanese at least with regard to I/C. The fact that the results of the marginally related studies with adult samples (Schwartz, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 1995, 1996) were roughly comparable to those of the relevant studies with student samples also suggests that college students may not be very different from adults with regard to I/C in both Japan and the U.S. However, currently available evidence is mixed because Matsumoto *et al.* (1996) found in Japan that their student sample was more individualistic than their adult sample.

On the other hand, the empirical basis of the common view has both strengths and weaknesses regarding sample representativeness. Its major strength is that the casual observations are not confined to college students. However, those observations share the lack of random sampling with the formal studies. Moreover, two additional weaknesses have to be noted. First, sample size is too small (i.e., typically no more than one) in a casual observation to make it representative of the whole nation. This forms a sharp contrast to the formal studies in which sample size is typically on a scale of tens or hundreds. Second, the arbitrary selection of casual observations is highly vulnerable to cognitive biases. The confirmation bias, for instance, might have led to selective employment of those nonrepresentative observations that appeared to be consistent with the common view.

Although the limitations of the formal studies concerning sample representativeness warn such a conclusion that they decisively proved that there is no difference in I/C between the Japanese and Americans, it is important to note that the empirical basis of the common view has no better sample representativeness. In particular, it may well have confounded individual specificity with the alleged national character through biased sampling.

*Ecological validity.* The formal studies have limitations in ecological validity as well. Their results were obtained in such artificial situations as questionnaires and laboratories. Therefore, their generalization to natural social situations is not assured.

With respect to ecological validity as well, the empirical basis of the common view has both strengths and weaknesses. Its major strength is that most casual observations were made in natural social situations. Again, however, the arbitrary selection of casual observations leads to a suspicion that those situations may not be representative of the natural social situations in the respective countries. This suspicion is enhanced by the fact that converse casual observations can be easily presented (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1982).

## Alternatives to the common view

With regard to internal validity, the reviewed formal studies are obviously superior to the casual observations supporting the common view. This means that the common view does not hold at least in some (actually, many) cases such as those investigated by the formal studies. With regard to external validity, relative strength of the formal studies and the empirical basis of the common view depends on what criterion is used. Given that the examination of validity dismissed neither the formal studies nor the empirical basis of the common view, it is necessary to find out the most reasonable way to reconcile these conflicting data. In particular, it is important to examine whether the overwhelming support

for the common view can be taken as its undeniable evidence or should be interpreted otherwise, because this overwhelming support appears to be the largest source of credibility for the common view. The preceding studies suggest two hypotheses; we propose one more.

### ***Student specificity hypothesis***

The fact that the samples employed by the formal studies are largely confined to college students may suggest a hypothesis of student specificity that Japanese college students are as individualistic as American college students, whereas Japanese adults are more collectivistic than American adults. This collectivistic tendency of Japanese adults, if any, may be a result of socialization in Japanese society. Although this hypothesis intends a minimum modification to the common view, the modification is a critical one: this hypothesis assumes that individualistic or collectivistic attitudes and behavior can be easily changed by social environments, whereas the common view typically assumes that individualism or collectivism is an enduring national character.

In agreement with this hypothesis, Matsumoto *et al.* (1996) found in Japan that their student sample was more individualistic than their adult sample. In addition, Yamaguchi (1994) reported that his collectivism score was positively correlated with Japanese respondents' age (mean age = 43). However, some empirical data are inconsistent with this hypothesis. More than 40% of Triandis *et al.*'s (1988/Asai, 1987) Japanese sample were adults, whereas their American sample was composed solely of college students. Nevertheless, their Japanese sample was as individualistic as their American sample. In addition, three marginally related studies that compared adults between Japan and the U.S. (Schwartz, 1994; Smith *et al.*, 1995, 1996) found no substantial difference. If Japanese adults are not more collectivistic than American adults and students, the fact that adults are more collectivistic than college students in Japan cannot be taken as supportive evidence for the student specificity hypothesis. Note, however, that currently available empirical evidence is not sufficient to draw any decisive conclusion on this point.

### ***Dispositional change hypothesis***

On the basis of Matsumoto *et al.*'s (1996) finding that their Japanese adults were more collectivistic than their Japanese college students, they suggested a recent dispositional change in Japan. Many other researchers have also noted that Japanese younger generations have become increasingly more individualistic (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Hamaguchi, 1980). This dispositional change hypothesis differs from the above student specificity hypothesis in assuming that Japanese college students remain individualistic in spite of their later socialization. Although the formerly cited findings suggesting that Japanese adults may not be more collectivistic than American adults and students appear to contradict the dispositional change hypothesis, this contradiction may disappear if the dispositional change is assumed to have already started when the current adults were youngsters. To resolve the contradiction, it is necessary to assume that the change had started in the 1960s at the latest, because the earliest empirical study (Frager, 1970) was conducted in the late 1960s. For this modification to work, moreover, an account has to be provided for the reason why the common view has been supported to date.

This dispositional change hypothesis is consistent with some historical considerations as well. Triandis (1990) conjectures that major determinants of the transition from collectivism to individualism are affluence and cultural complexity. When the common view was

established, Japan was a poor country. At the outbreak of the Pacific War, Japanese GNP (gross national product) per capita is estimated to have been only about one-seventh of that of the U.S. (Morimoto, 1985). Japan was also a relatively simple agricultural society; for example, its city population was 34% in 1950, whereas the corresponding figure was 64% in the U.S. During the high economic growth, however, Japan has changed into an affluent complex society. Its GNP per capita was roughly comparable to that of the U.S. through the 1980s and 1990s; its city population was 77% in 1990, for example, which is comparable to 75% in the U.S. Thus it is not surprising if Japanese national character has changed drastically from collectivistic to individualistic during the high economic growth which started in about 1955 and ended in 1973.

This dispositional change hypothesis is consistent with the findings of the reviewed empirical studies because most of them were conducted after the end of this high economic growth. It is also consistent with the overwhelming support for the common view because it was established when the Japanese are supposed to have actually possessed the collectivistic disposition. However, the dispositional change hypothesis is in conflict with the previously cited individualistic behaviors of the Japanese that were observed before the Pacific War or even the *Meiji* Revolution (Befu, 1980a). Currently available empirical evidence is not specific enough to allow a reliable judgment about the validity of this hypothesis.

### ***Situational change hypothesis***

We propose a third hypothesis, which assumes that the contradiction between the empirical findings and the alleged evidence of the common view can be explained solely in terms of historical situations for the Japanese. The overwhelming support for the common view is explained as a consequence of misinterpreting the universal response of the Japanese to their historical situations due to the *fundamental attribution error* and other cognitive biases.

*The past situational difference.* If it is true that casual observations can be listed equally often for Japanese individualism as for Japanese collectivism, then casual observations cannot be taken as evidence to confirm the common view. However, what really makes people confident in the common view may be a somewhat different kind of observation, namely, the past obviously collectivistic behavior of the Japanese (see below). To evaluate the validity of the common view, therefore, it is indispensable to judge whether or not this obviously collectivistic behavior necessarily implies Japanese collectivistic national character.

During the period between the formation of the *Meiji* government in 1868 and the defeat in the Pacific War in 1945, the Japanese were acting in an obviously collectivistic manner mainly in the political and military domains (i.e., "Japanese militarism"). It was in this period that Western observers established the common view. During the period between the defeat in the Pacific War and the end of the high growth of the Japanese economy in 1973, the Japanese were still acting in an obviously collectivistic manner but mainly in the economic domain this time (e.g., "Japan Inc."). It was in this period that the common view won overwhelming support. These collectivistic behaviors were much more impressive than individual episodes that contradicted the common view because those behaviors were clearly visible for all the Western observers of Japan as well as the Japanese people, and strongly affected the lives of all the Japanese as well as those of some Western observers especially during the Pacific War. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to assume that these obviously collectivistic behaviors provided a major impetus to convince both Western observers and

the Japanese themselves that the common view is true. However, the alleged collectivistic national character is not an inevitable implication of these obviously collectivistic behaviors of the Japanese. They can also be interpreted as consequences of historical situations which the Japanese had to cope with.

Innumerable historical instances attest that threats from the outside typically elicit attempts to enhance solidarity inside a group by suppressing the individualistic behavior of its members. This tendency is observed universally and not confined to particular cultures. When threatened by communism, for example, even the Americans, who are usually supposed to be the most individualistic people, responded by “red-hunting” and McCarthyism. In this period, collectivism was manifest among Americans as well. Although the political purge did not last for long, it does not necessarily mean that the Americans had an individualistic national character, for the outside threat was not very potent, as attested by the fact that the military power of the communist nations never exceeded that of the U.S.

By contrast, the Japanese had to defend themselves for a much longer period against outside threats that were much more potent than Japan. When Japan was forced to open itself to Western countries by Commodore M.C. Perry’s gunboat diplomacy in 1854, it faced the overwhelming military power of the Western imperialism. Japan overthrew the dispersed power system in its feudalism to centralize the nation so that it could avoid colonization by the Western great powers. The newly formed *Meiji* government utilized education, civil law, police power, and so on in order to establish tight control over the nation. This attempt culminated before the Pacific War when Japan had to confront the U.S. whose GNP (gross national product) is estimated to have been 13 times as much as that of Japan (Morimoto, 1985). Bearing in mind that the threats from the overwhelming Western powers lasted for over 90 years until the end of the Pacific War, it is not at all surprising that the overt behavioral pattern of the Japanese was collectivistic on the whole during this period.

After the defeat in the Pacific War until the end of the high growth of the Japanese economy, Japan was threatened by Western enterprises which were equipped with larger capital and much more advanced technology. Thus solidarity was still needed but mainly in the economic domain. Noguchi (1995; Sakakibara & Noguchi, 1977) noted that the collectivistic aspects of so-called “Japanese management” (e.g., the lifetime employment system, enterprise unions, etc.) were established during the war in China and the Pacific Ocean. Under the threat of Western enterprises, this wartime economic system was maintained after the war as well.

These considerations of the historical situation for Japan suggest that the past obviously collectivistic behavior of the Japanese can be explained as a universal response to outside threats. The collectivistic national character alleged by the common view is not indispensable. During the period between the *Meiji* Revolution and the end of Japan’s high economic growth, most situations for the Japanese required collectivistic behavior. If individual Japanese people adjusted their behaviors to those common critical situations, the Japanese as a whole must have appeared to possess a tendency to behave collectively. Nevertheless, it is still possible that they did not have a collectivistic disposition. As Harris (1993) noted, for example, those who behaved collectivistically in public life which required collectivistic behavior might at the same time have behaved individualistically in domestic life which did not require collectivistic behavior.

In contrast to Japan, the U.S. was already one of the Western great powers in the nineteenth century. Because the U.S. was geographically isolated from the other great

powers, their military forces were not serious threats to her. The U.S. could even afford to cut down her military force on a large scale after the Civil War. In the twentieth century, the U.S. has been the strongest country in both military and economic domains. For nearly 200 years, therefore, the U.S. had no need for tight control over its nation except for a few brief occasions like McCarthyism, and thus the Americans could afford to behave in a relatively individualistic manner when compared with other nations.

The situation has drastically changed for Japan with respect to the outside threats, first after the defeat in the Pacific War and then after the high economic growth. As a result of the defeat in the Pacific War, Japan was forced to stay under the umbrella of American military power, and had no need (or no ability) to defend itself against the communist nations. Thus the tight control over the nation became unnecessary. Japan had no conscription, for example, while American youngsters were enlisted and trained to be sent to Korea or Vietnam. In this respect, therefore, the situation for the Japanese was more favorable for individualistic behavior than that for the Americans. After the high economic growth was accomplished, a serious threat virtually disappeared in the economic domain as well.

Thus, in Japan, the number of situations that require collectivistic behaviors drastically decreased after the end of the Pacific War and then as a result of the high economic growth. If the number of such situations decreases, the number of observed collectivistic behaviors must also decrease. This apparent change in behavior could occur in the total absence of dispositional change. Therefore, the oft-mentioned behavioral change of the Japanese can be explained solely in terms of the situational change without assuming the dispositional change. If the Japanese had no collectivistic disposition to begin with, it is not surprising that the empirical studies did not detect it.

In the field of personality research, the person-situation (or cross-situational consistency) controversy continued for over 20 years as to whether the primary determinant of human behavior is an internal disposition or an external situation (e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974; Bem & Funder, 1978; Bowers, 1973; Epstein, 1979, 1980; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Mischel, 1968, 1973, 1979, 1984). This controversy revealed that the weight of an internal disposition had been largely overestimated by psychologists as well as by laypeople, and that an external situation has a much stronger impact on human behavior than commonly assumed.

It is not surprising that human behavior flexibly changes with situations because behaviors adaptive to different situations are essential for survival. Countless behaviorist studies on learning have shown that generalization across different situations is limited and that living creatures could discriminate even among only subtly different situations if necessary (see, e.g., Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Chance, 1999). Humans are known to have acquired the highest ability of learning in general.

Thus the situational change hypothesis is consistent with the basic findings about human nature in the person-situation controversy and other areas of psychology. It is also consistent with the historical facts including the past obviously collectivistic behavior of the Japanese, the reviewed empirical findings that failed to find the expected difference in I/C between the Japanese and the Americans, as well as the oft-mentioned change in the behavioral pattern of the Japanese.

*Cognitive biases.* The common view has been referred to as a self-evident fact by numerous researchers, journalists, commentators, and so on. Undoubtedly, this overwhelming support is one of the major sources of credibility of the common view. Is this overwhelming support compatible with the situational change hypothesis? The answer is yes, because it can be

explained in terms of well-known cognitive biases without assuming the alleged collectivistic national character of the Japanese.

A cognitive bias that seems to have played the most critical role is the fundamental attribution error (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross, 1977; or *correspondence bias*: see Gilbert & Malone, 1995). This bias leads people to attribute the cause of another person's behavior erroneously to his/her internal disposition when its true primary cause is an external situation. The fundamental attribution error is very potent and hard to eliminate (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).<sup>6</sup> There is no reasonable basis to assume that both Western and Japanese observers of the above obviously collectivistic behaviors of the Japanese were exceptions to this bias. Therefore, it is very likely that the cause of this obviously collectivistic behavior was erroneously attributed to their alleged collectivistic national character due to this bias, though its true primary cause might have been the historical situation as discussed above. The overwhelming support for the common view can be explained as a consequence of this biased causal attribution.

Other cognitive biases may have been responsible for the underestimation of individuality of the Japanese by Western observers. The *out-group homogeneity effect* (e.g., Judd & Park, 1988; Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989; Park & Rothbart, 1982), for example, may have led Western observers to overestimate the homogeneity of the Japanese who were out-group members for them.

Faces of different races are generally harder to discriminate than those of observers' own race (e.g., Anthony, Cooper, & Mullen, 1992; Teitelbaum & Geiselman, 1997). The Japanese belonged to a different race for virtually all the Western observers. If Japanese faces looked similar to one another, as frequently claimed by Western observers, this might well have resulted in underestimation of the individuality of the Japanese.

It is likely that the effects of these cognitive biases were enhanced by limitation in information. It is well known that Benedict (1946) had no experience of fieldwork in Japan. When Lowell (1888) completed *The soul of the Far East*, his experience in Japan and the Japanese language was less than one year (see Miyazaki, 1995). If he had possessed more information about Japanese people and a higher ability in the Japanese language, he would never have written, "Our youth has now reached the flowering season of life, that brief May time when the whole world takes on the rose-tint, and when by all dramatic laws he ought to fall in love. He does nothing of the kind. Sad to say, he is a stranger to the feeling. Love, as we understand the word, is a thing unknown to the Far East" (p. 52). Harris (1993) conjectured that Westerners incorrectly perceived the Japanese as self-effacing conformists because they had no opportunity to observe ego-assertion in Japanese private life.

Once the common view was formed, it could be reinforced by the *confirmation bias* (Jenkins & Ward, 1965; Skov & Sherman, 1986; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Wason, 1966), which led people to seek out positive evidence selectively. In criticizing Benedict's (1946) *The chrysanthemum and the sword*, in fact, Watsuji (1950) stated, "We could easily present the same amount of counterevidence that would make such a conclusion impossible. It seems that this author spent little effort to search for such counterevidence carefully" (p. 23).

Thus the overwhelming support for the common view can be reasonably explained in terms of cognitive biases. It follows that the overwhelming support cannot be taken as evidence to prove the validity of the common view.

## Concluding remarks

### *Validity of the common view*

This paper has attempted to evaluate the validity of the common view that the Japanese are more collectivistic than the Americans in the light of the empirical findings obtained in the formal studies. It turned out that virtually no empirical studies lent support to this common view. Although it is premature to conclude that there is no difference whatsoever in national character between the Japanese and the Americans because the reviewed empirical studies have limitations mainly as to their external validity, these studies undoubtedly serve as strong counter-evidence against the sweeping generalization claimed by the common view. In particular, the empirical studies have made sure that Japanese college students should be exempted from the sweeping generalization. Some situations may also have to be exempted. As for adults as well, it is likely that today there is no substantial difference between Japan and the U.S. This further suggests that the alleged national character, if any, may not be so enduring as to survive historical and social changes.

It also turned out that the common view was based on unexpectedly fragile grounds. First, it relied heavily on casual observations, of which validity is highly questionable. Second, converse casual observations can be easily presented, as Sugimoto and Mauer (1982) actually did. Third, some historical events (e.g., peasant uprisings: see Befu, 1980a) are in clear contradiction with the common view. Fourth, the past obviously collectivistic behavior of the Japanese can be explained in terms of the historical situations that surrounded Japan for long. Finally, the overwhelming support for the common view can be explained by a combination of well-known cognitive biases such as the fundamental attribution error.

### *Alternative accounts*

In order to explain the reviewed empirical findings and the evidence of the common view in a consistent way, three alternative hypotheses were formed and examined. Among these three, both the student specificity and dispositional change hypotheses met contradictory empirical data, respectively. However, currently available empirical evidence is not sufficient to evaluate their validity accurately. At present, the situational change hypothesis does not obviously contradict any empirical evidence.

However, these three hypotheses are not mutually exclusive. Behavioral change due to situational change is fully compatible with either the student specificity or the dispositional change. It is possible, for example, that part of the oft-mentioned behavioral change of the Japanese is a result of the decrease in the number of situations that require collectivistic behaviors, whereas the remaining part is a result of the dispositional change.

For another instance, the situational change hypothesis may be combined with the dispositional change hypothesis to resolve the contradiction between the latter hypothesis and the historical evidence of Japanese individualism before the Pacific War such as frequent peasant uprisings in the *Tokugawa* era (Befu, 1980a). The alleged collectivistic disposition might have been overridden by a more direct universal response to a situation when the power of the situation was very potent as in famines.

Given the reviewed empirical findings as well as the historical/sociological evidence and casual observations suggesting Japanese individualism, however, it is unlikely that the disposition, if any, is such a highly generalized one as assumed by the common view.

Although it is not improbable that future studies may find some cases in which the difference predicted by the common view between Japan and the U.S. is confirmed, it is likely that the difference is confined to only a relatively small number of specific situations. For a hypothetical illustration, consider morning assembly, which is performed in some (in fact, not all) Japanese corporations and has been referred to as a symbol of Japanese collectivism in many journalistic reports. The number of employees who positively value morning assembly may be found to be larger in Japanese corporations than in American ones. Contrary to the typical presumption, however, this difference, if any, may not be generalized to blind obedience to superiors, for example. In agreement with this conjecture, Johnson and Ouchi (1974) found that Japanese employees are not as obedient as usually assumed, quoting the following words of an American manager in a Japanese corporation: "Americans will disagree with their boss rarely but violently; the Japanese disagree often but politely" (p. 63).

It is worth noting that cultural disposition, if any, may be situation specific (e.g., Kâgıtçibasi, 1994; Matsumoto *et al.*, 1996). Culture has been developed primarily as a means of adaptation to environments (Harris, 1977, 1979). Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect that a culturally fostered disposition is also situation specific if such a disposition is present at all.

### ***Implications for cross-cultural research***

The full confidence in the common view led researchers to interpret many differences between Japan and the U.S. in terms of I/C. This confidence made those interpretations as well as the very existence of those differences appear plausible. Triandis (1990), for example, related to I/C the supposed cultural differences in child-rearing practice, attitudes toward an in-group and an out-group, conflict resolution, social perception, and so on. Since the validity of the common view is now questioned, however, the interpretations of these cultural differences in terms of I/C also have to be questioned. It is conceivable that other more reasonable interpretations may emerge. In addition, more rigorous empirical tests may reveal that the very existence of those cultural differences is questionable, as in the case of reward allocation (see note 1).

Although the present review confined itself to the comparison between Japan and the U.S. on I/C, its findings and analyses have some implications for cross-cultural studies in general. First, it demonstrated that a widely believed cross-cultural difference was based on unexpectedly flimsy grounds. In the course of reviewing the literature, we found that not a few authors ignored or de-emphasized the parts of their own data that were incompatible with the common view. These observations suggest that other seemingly well-established cross-cultural differences may have to be submitted to more rigorous empirical examination.

Second, stereotypic characterizations of cultures have a strong tendency to assume that an observed difference in behavior should have been caused by a difference between stable dispositions peculiar to respective cultures. The present review suggests that the presence of a dispositional difference cannot be presupposed on an a priori ground, and that the possibility of an account in terms of a situational difference has to be pursued. Furthermore, the possibility that a disposition, if any, may be situation specific also has to be considered.

Third, cognitive biases have to be taken into account when the validity of a stereotypic characterization of cultures is evaluated. In particular, an alternative explanation in terms of the fundamental attribution error is worth considering.

Finally, some stereotypic characterizations tend to employ the assumed dispositional difference as a final rationale of explanation. Whether intended or not, this leads to the implication that peoples belonging to different cultures are different kinds of creatures (Takano, 1998). Such an implication could serve as a source of discrimination and hostility. If a dispositional difference were demonstrated, the investigation should not stop there but should proceed to identify its cause(s). Then, it might turn out that the dispositional difference is a consequence of adaptations to different ecological or historical situations. A desirable strategy in cross-cultural research is not the one that makes discrimination and hostility unavoidable.

### ***Implications for Markus and Kitayama's hypothesis***

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed a hypothesis that independent self-construal is dominant in cultures originating in Europe, whereas interdependent self-construal is dominant in the other cultures. As Kitayama (1998) admitted, these self-construals are "analogous concepts" (p. 68) to individualism and collectivism. The independent and interdependent self-construals may be seen as psychological processes underlying individualism and collectivism, respectively. Their factual judgments rely heavily on the comparisons between Japan and the U.S. that are alleged to support the common view. Since the validity of the common view is now questioned, therefore, the validity of their hypothesis has also to be questioned. Although Kitayama (1999) maintains that the validity of the common view is demonstrated by the empirical data that were not reviewed by Takano and Osaka (1997), those data are all indirect evidence that has no direct relevance to the ordinary definition of I/C. Given that the direct evidence reviewed in this paper lends no support to the common view, it will be unjustifiable to support the common view with indirect evidence alone (Takano, 1999). For instance, if Chinese in Hong Kong prefer equality in reward allocation more than Americans, will this prove the common view that the Japanese are more collectivistic than the Americans, when no reliable difference is found between Japanese and Americans in their preference for equality (see note 1) and in their collectivistic attitudes and behaviors? This paper strongly suggests that the empirical basis of Markus and Kitayama's hypothesis has to be submitted to more careful reassessment.

### **Acknowledgments**

This paper is based on our own paper formerly published in Japanese (Takano & Osaka, 1997). Although the two papers have substantial overlap, this paper reflects recent developments: Five studies have been added to the review of the empirical studies that have direct relevance to the ordinary definition of individualism/collectivism, four studies have been added to the review of the marginally related studies, and the theoretical discussion has been reorganized and further elaborated. The authors are grateful to those who may send us their future published or conference papers related to the present topic.

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## Notes

1. In fact, the expected difference in reward allocation preference has not been confirmed between Japan and the U.S. (Takano, 1999), although as the evidence that proves the validity of the common view, Kitayama (1999) refers to Leung and Bond (1984) who found the predicted difference in reward allocation preference between Chinese students in Hong Kong and American students. Mahler *et al.* (1981), who compared Japanese and American students, obtained mixed results in which the predicted difference between the two countries was statistically significant for only one of the two stories given to their participants. Later, Leung and Iwawaki (1988) found no significant difference among their samples from Japan, the U.S., and Korea. Kim, Park, and Suzuki (1990) found that both Japanese and American participants showed stronger preference for equity than did their Korean participants. Thus, on the whole, the empirical data about the direct comparison between Japan and the U.S. are not favorable for the prediction by the common view; and the significant difference obtained by Mahler *et al.* (1981) for one of the two stories may be attributed to the peculiarity of that particular story.
2. Although Triandis *et al.* (1988) reported that the total number of questions given to both samples was 138, Asai (1987) compared them on 139 questions. In the Japanese sample, moreover, the number of college students was 138 and that of adults was 118 according to Asai (1987), whereas the corresponding numbers are 150 and 106, respectively, according to Triandis *et al.* (1988).
3. We thank Tomokazu Haebara (University of Tokyo) for his analysis of this statistical property of ecological correlation.
4. Although Matsuda (1985) presumed that Frager's (1970) true conformity rate should be 50%, he admitted that this presumption was erroneous (personal communication, 1997).
5. Although Bond and Smith (1996) listed "Sako (1979, cited in Williams and Sogon, 1984)" (p. 135), no such study exists. This error seems to have been made by Williams and Sogon (1984) in their inaccurate citation of Sako (1975).
6. It has been confirmed that the Japanese are also vulnerable to correspondence bias (Masuda, 1996; Toyama, 1990). Although Kitayama and Masuda (1997) claim that the Japanese can be released from the correspondence bias more easily than the Americans, the currently available evidence is mixed. Toyama (1990) and Masuda (1996) found that the bias disappeared when their participants were led to attend to situational factors. However, Toyama (1998, 1999) observed that the bias persisted even when situational factors were stressed.

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