

# A Systematic View of Japanese Culture

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to create a system to provide information about the Japanese people to Americans doing work with Japan in order to improve cross-cultural communication. This research is based on the perception that a knowledge of a culture can both increase positive relationships with that culture, as well as reduce ethnocentrism. A systematic perspective is applied in order to illustrate precisely how each element within the culture can help or harm a budding intercultural relationship. The research is initially divided into Japanese business knowledge, cultural knowledge, and language knowledge, however, the research is subdivided to the point where individual topics, including collectivism and giving compliments, are discussed. Some topics, such as history, are not included as they are beyond the bounds of beneficially for a new learner of Japanese culture, and thus would likely cause confusion. At the conclusion of this research, an easy-to-navigate website will be created. This website will allow anyone who needs the knowledge to easily access it.

## Materials and Methods

The process started by reading multiple books and articles on Japanese culture in order to determine which attributes can cause the biggest culture shocks for Japanese or Americans when Americans are doing business in Japan. Overall knowledge of Japan was divided into three categories:

1. Japanese Business knowledge
2. Japanese Cultural Knowledge
3. Japanese Language Knowledge.

Japanese Business Knowledge was divided into: 1.1 Business Culture and Practices, 1.2 Japanese Meeting Practices, and 1.3 After Meetings Relationship Building. Japanese Cultural Knowledge was divided into: 2.1 Growing Up/ Cultural Rules, 2.2 General Etiquette, and 2.3 General Tips and Differences. These categories were divided into the final topics used to make the final model. The final topics which were used for creating the model are: 1.1.1 Souvenirs, 1.1.2 Losing Face, 1.1.3 Compliments, 1.1.4 Age Relationships, 1.1.5 Senpai/Kohai relationships, 1.1.6 Working Late, 1.1.7 Sleeping at Desks, 1.1.8 Rengi-Sho, 1.1.9 Everyone Learns All Jobs, 1.1.10 Coddling, 1.2.1 Business Card Exchange, 1.2.2 When to Speak, 1.2.3 Use of Humor, 1.2.4 Manager Composition, 1.2.5 Sleeping Bosses, 1.2.6 Lawyers, 1.3.1 Team Building, 1.3.2 Seating Arrangements, 1.3.3 Pouring Drinks, 1.3.4 Kanpai, 2.1.1 Collectivist, 2.1.2 Uchi/ Soto 2.1.3 Tatamae/Honne, 2.1.4 Children Treatment, 2.2.1 Bowing, 2.2.2 Shoes, 2.2.3 Onsen, 2.2.4 Face Mask, 2.2.5 Nose Blowing, 2.2.6 Taking Pictures, 2.2.7 Eating Etiquette, 2.2.7.1 on Trains, 2.2.7.2 Thanks for Food, 2.2.7.3 Ordering Food, 2.2.7.4 Chopsticks, 2.2.7.5 Eat All the Food, 2.2.7.6 Slurping, 2.2.7.7 Tipping, 2.2.7.9 Japan Only Restaurants, 2.2.8 Trains, 2.3.1 Public Restrooms, 2.3.2 Cash Based, 2.3.3 Taxes, 2.3.4 Grocery Shopping, 2.3.5 Tattoos, 2.3.6 Smoking, 3.1 Compliments, 3.2 Pauses, 3.3 Honorifics, 3.4 Yes/No 3.5 I'm Sorry, and 3.6 Sayonara.

The final topics were then each written about to show their importance of why they should be included in the cultural model. Examples of this is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. All topics then had a systems diagram created to show how they interacted with the system. Examples are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The system elements derived from the meeting include: American Willingness to Learn about Japan, Japanese Willingness to Learn about Americans, Japanese Feeling that Americans are Willing to Try, Ethnocentrism, Level of Positive Interaction, Japanese Level of Comfort, American Level of Comfort, Culture Shock, American Discomfort in Japan, Japanese Discomfort with Americans, and American Ability to Interact with Japanese.

These systems diagrams were combined to create the final systems model.

## Materials and Methods Continued.

Figure 1. Information on Pauses

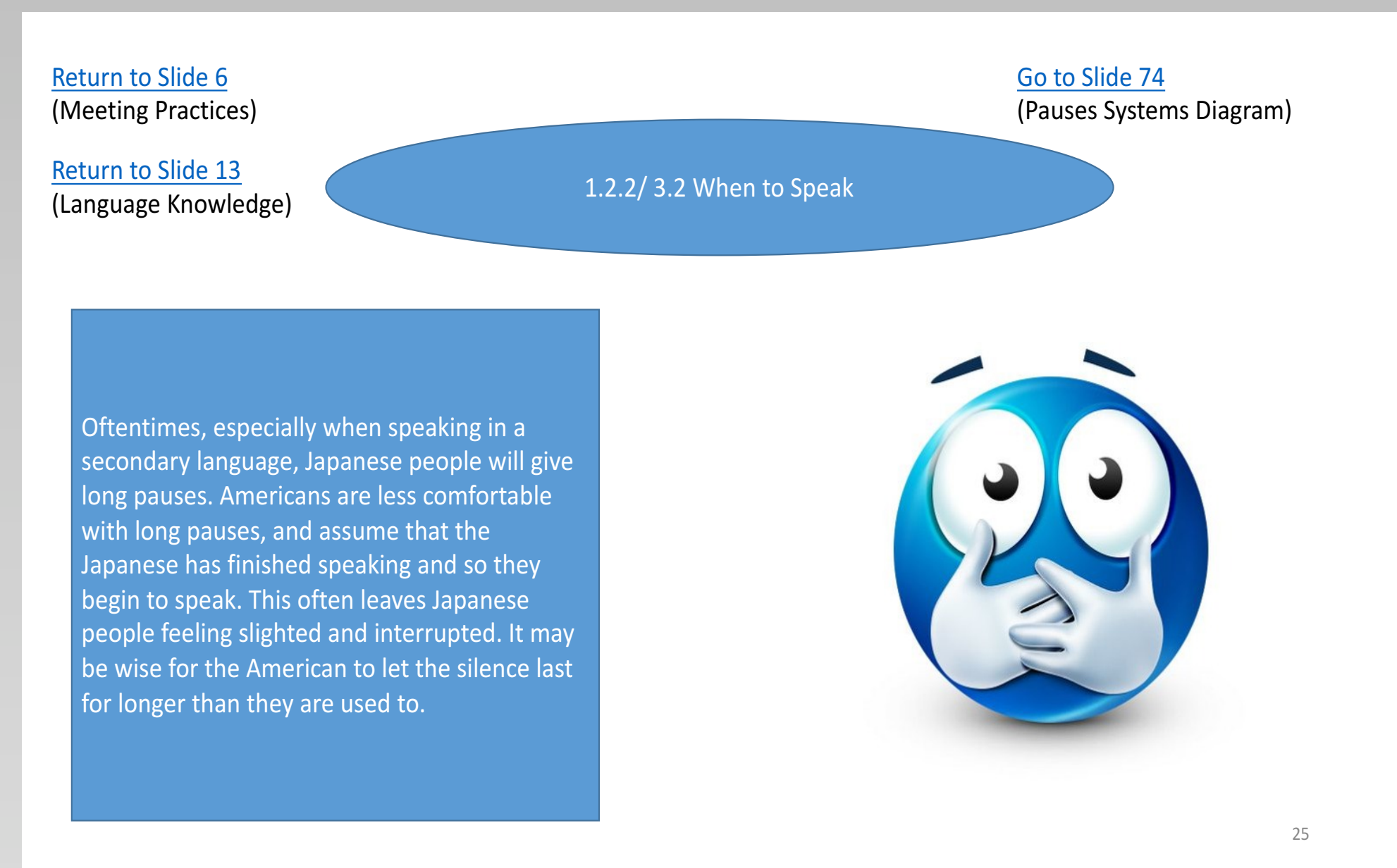


Figure 3. Systems Diagram of Souvenirs

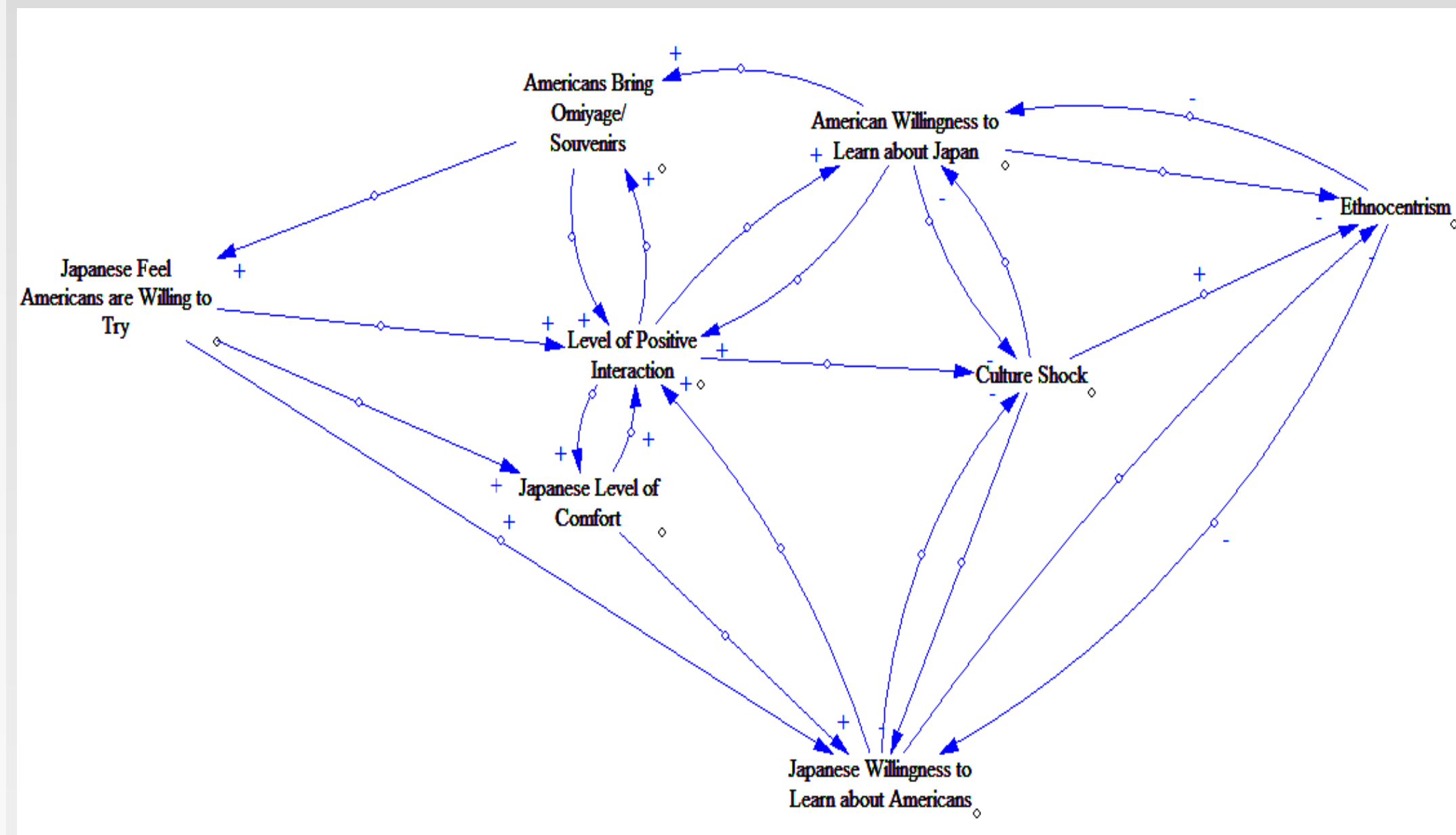


Figure 2. Information on Collectivist Culture

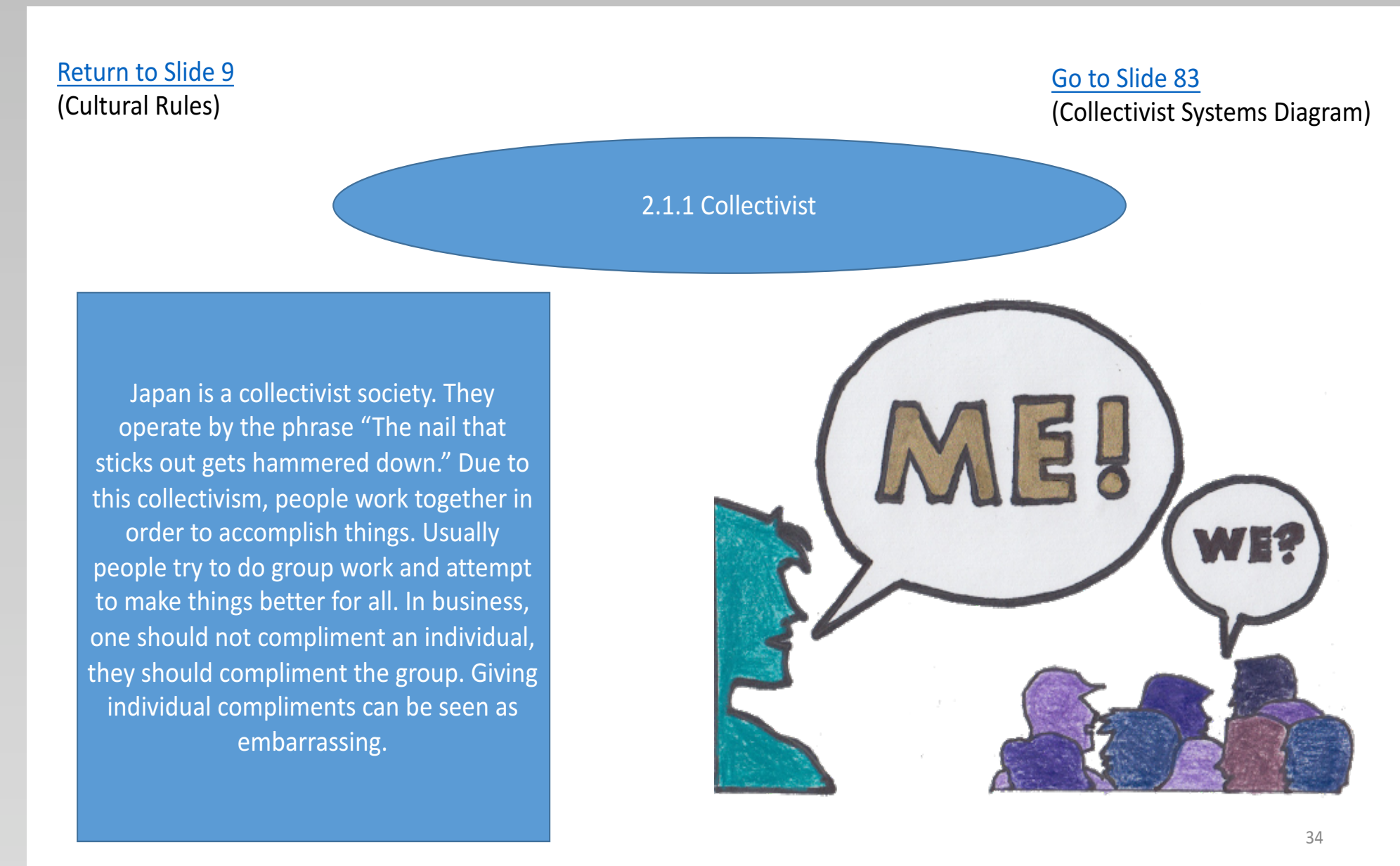
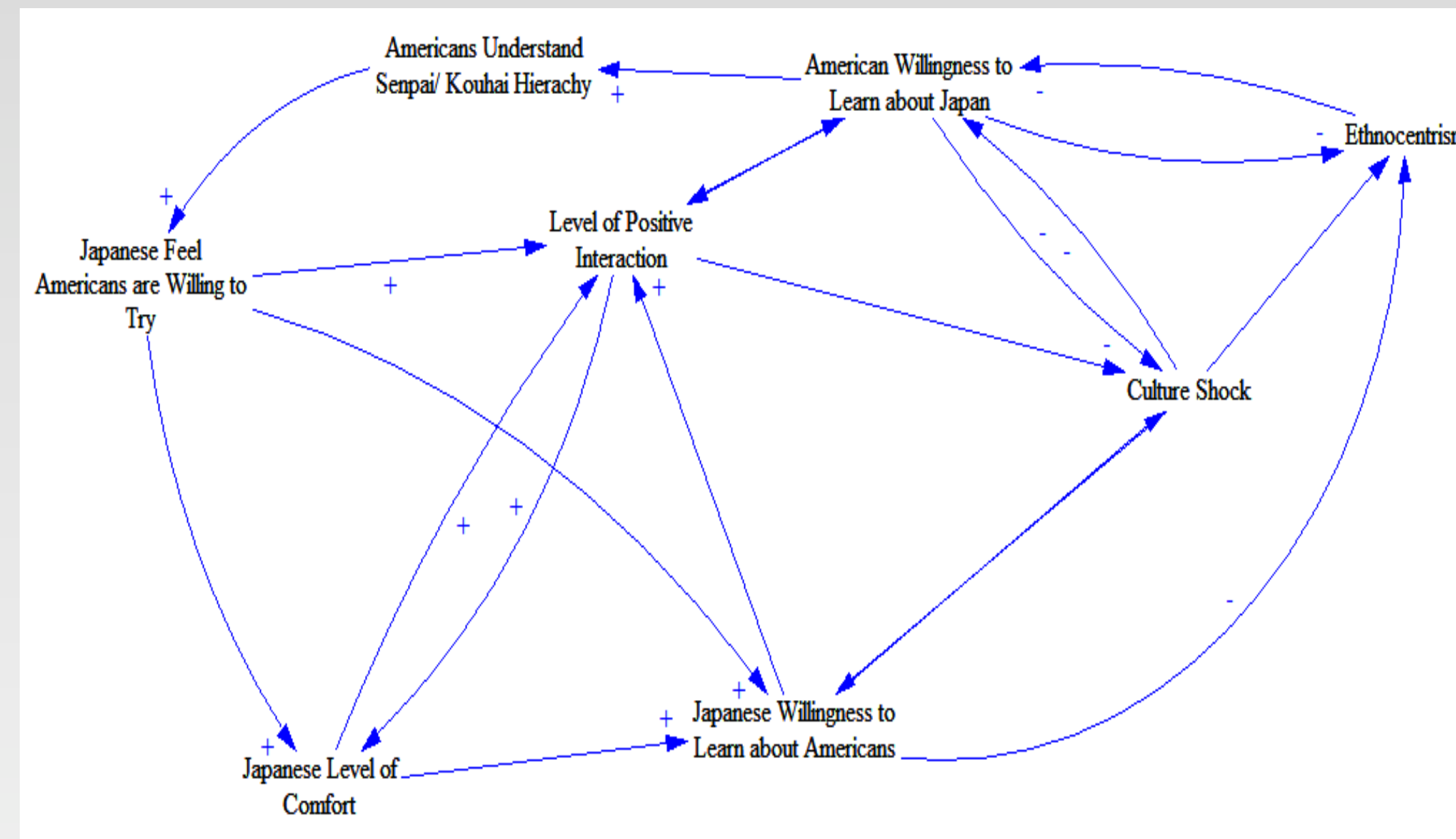


Figure 4. Systems Diagram of Senpai/Kouhai Relationships



## Results

As shown in Figure 5, our final systems diagram positive arrows show that one item increases another while negative arrows show that one item reduces another. Looking at American Ability to Interact with Japanese, we see that it increases American Willingness to Learn about Japan and reduces American Discomfort in Japan.

Our final diagram lacks the topics. By reading the notes from the information sections, like Figure 1 or Figure 2 or any other Japanese cultural phenomenon, we can see how the action could effect relationships. Viewing figure 2, we can read that compliments increase Japanese discomfort. Using our model, we see that this discomfort increases Culture Shock and reduces American Ability to interact with Japanese. Whereas in Figure 1, having knowledge that you should lengthen the acceptable pause rate to accommodate the Japanese can increase Japanese Level of Comfort which in turn increases the Level of Positive Interaction.

Some topics do have interactions as well which are not shown in the systems diagram. As an example, everyone wearing facemasks in Japan, and being embarrassed by individual compliments is caused in part by it being a collectivist culture.

## Conclusions

An understanding of various American and Japanese interactions can improve relations and should reduce culture shock. A system to improve cross-cultural communication was created to provide information about the Japanese people to Americans doing work associated with Japan. The figures and diagrams emphasize the key idea that a more-informed knowledge of a specific culture can increase positivity with said culture, as well as reduce lingering ethnocentrism. A systematic perspective was applied to relate each element within the culture and show how it can influence new intercultural relationship.

This research can be used to help reduce the overall culture shock and improve intercultural interactions in both business and personal matters. The research does not include certain topics such as history of Japan, Japanese religions, gender roles, and differences within the generations, such as negative feelings toward American's in Japanese individuals alive during World War 2. These aspects could have an effect on the model. However, the overall diagram for interacting with Japan, as well as the cultural information points, should remain intact. Future research could include how all of the topics interact with each other and effect the system. A website with all of the topics information and their systems diagrams is being created.

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