BUREAUCRATIC ATTITUDES AND PERSONNEL POLICIES IN JAPAN WHAT CULTURE HAS GOT TO DO WITH IT

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ABSTRACT

Traditional cultures have often been regarded as constituting obstacles to the development of modern administration and economic advancement. In the case of Japan, it has supported the transformation of the social, economic and political fabrics of the state. This paper has concentrated on identifying those cultural practices that shape and determine some bureaucratic attitudes and personnel policies in Japan.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years Japan's civil service has attracted to itself an image bordering on worship (Ezra, 1979; Chalmers, 1982; Christopher, 1983). Of the three major institutional actors - that is the politicians, the businessmen and the bureaucrats in Japan - the bureaucracy has succeeded in cutting a super niche for itself that has rendered other actors subordinate (Druker, 1998: 68 - 80). Even the ongoing reforms may probably not be sufficient to revert this situation. The justification for this overbearing bureaucracy has always been the pivotal role it played in the post war "Japanese Miracle", which saw Japan among the developed world within a short period. Others have attributed its pre-eminence to the failure of the American Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) to dismantle the institution as it did to other major institutions in the post-war reforms it carried out in the country.

Most studies have, however, failed to acknowledge in-depth the role that culture has played and is still playing not only in the behaviour tendencies of the bureaucrats, but also in the choice of personnel policies like recruitment, promotion, career path and inter-ministerial relationship. Although a lot of changes have taken place within the social fabric of Japan at large, "the thinking elite" still use the cultural argument to justify and maintain their uniqueness (Kosaku, 1992). In reality, according to observation by *The Economist*, "the periphery" of Japanese life... has broken free from the old patterns of behaviour (But) the "core" of Japan - the bureaucracy, parliament, big business - still largely operates in the old style (The Economist, 1996: 4). This situation, according to the famous Japanese anthropologist Nakane may continue for another fifty years (The Economist, 1996: 4).

This paper, based on the above premise, intends to examine the cultural background of the Japanese bureaucratic system. This shall be done by first discussing the concept of culture and its relevance to administration. Then a review of certain bureaucratic practices in Japan will be undertaken. Finally, the paper tries to relate practices to certain cultural tenets of the Japanese.

ON CULTURE AND ADMINISTRATION

It was Dowdy who wrote that "the principal factors influencing the growth and nature of a bureaucracy are to be found... in the beliefs values and symbols of the society (its immaterial culture) and its social system" (Dowdy, 1972: ix). In reality, an administrative system cannot be isolated from its environment - social, cultural and political. This has been the contention of many analysts of administration in both developed and developing countries.

Riggs (1961), for example, has shown that an administrative system can only be identified in

its relation with its environment. Crozier (1964) has also argued that environment, especially culture, strongly influences the nature of human relationships within organizations, whether between individuals, between a supervisor and a subordinate, or among groups. Berger, (1957) in his study on Egypt observed that a bureaucratic organization is more or less a reflection of the larger society in which it is implanted. He observed that a "public bureaucracy functions within a particular form of government and a particular kind of society. Differences between bureaucracies can be traced to the differences in the broader political, social and economic spheres they serve" (Berger, 1957: 14). One of the conclusions he arrived at is that officials of that country are not accustomed to dealing with other individuals in an impersonal manner since prevailing cultural rules stress the primacy of particularistic relationships. In the same vein, Lockett (1988) analyzed how culture has contributed to the problems of Chinese management. According, to him, "national and organizational cultures are often seen as important factors in determining the shape of organizations as well as their performance and problems". Also in a work on the relationship between Japan and Australia, Robinson *et. al.* (1981) show how cultural and social factors have mitigated against the development of normal economic relationship between the two countries.

To a large extent therefore, culture determines the reactions of officials to laid down rules. As Fredrich has rightly pointed out, "...the behaviour of bureaucrats in a particular cultural context is bound to be moulded by the values and beliefs prevalent in that culture" (Fredrich, 1963: 470). However, the term culture is difficult to conceptualize because of the absence of universally accepted integrated theories. This makes, at times, its use in explaining events hazardous. This is why there is the need to delimit our understanding of the term culture, as regards the present work. Culture, according to Smith is

> *the array of formal and informal rules that guide the members of a society in their selection of appropriate behaviour and provides the framework for the construction of ideology. It is the context in which all economic and political behaviour must make sense. While not determinative of behaviour, it does establish the range of choices of action.* (Smith, 1992: 13).

In this definition, culture is not considered as a body of ideas regulating the behaviour of members of a social system. Rather, "members of a society behave in accordance with shared understanding acquired by virtue of shared experience. Culture, then, can be viewed as a learned and shared information pool (Smith, 1992: 13).

One other way of looking at culture is to consider it "as the design principles or fundamental patterns that act as organizers of more derivative social characteristics, such as a particular world outlook, set of policies, or forms of organization (Kumon and Rosovsky, 1992: 6-7). These fundamental patterns can be divided, according to Kumon and Rosovsky, into four main classes, viz, those used for recognition and evaluation, those employed in decision making, those determining the framework for action and interaction, and those providing the principles for information of social systems (organizations) of all types (Kumon and Rosovsky, 1992: 6-7). All the four patterns enumerated above are present in the actual context. However, in a broad sense, culture has to do with everything that determines the *raison d'etre* of particular actions encompassing "definitions of propriety, appropriateness, acceptability, and the right and wrong of things. Beliefs, meanings, understandings, values, prescriptions, and proscription all lie within the cultural realm, as do definitions of social goals and what constitute the common good" (Smith, 1992: 13). In order words, culture "indicates all, human activities such as religion, philosophy, moral standards, laws, politics,

economics, society, history literature and art, such as have been preserved, learned and transmitted in a given community or group over a long period of time (Hirai, 1983: 111). It should be remarked that some important elements of a culture may be imported, as was the case of Buddhism and Confucianism in Japan.

In this paper, we will limit our attention primarily to those cultural features which we believe have influenced, one way or the other, administrative behaviour. These include the religious traditions and the principle for the formation of social system like the principles of vertical organization and groupism. Most of these features are extensively discussed in the work of the renowned Japanese anthropologist Chie Nakane (1970). Although some have argued that the society described by the author is now outlived, there are wide indications that our subject, the bureaucracy, still lives in the former societal setting.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF JAPANESE BUREAUCRACY

The Japanese bureaucracy, despite the recent surge of criticisms, can still be regarded as one of the best in the world. It is no exaggeration, whatever may be its imperfections, which are daily mounting (see Fajonyomi, 1997: 891; The Economist, 1994: 24), that the Japanese bureaucracy successfully led the country to its primal economic position in the world today. On what is the success of his bureaucracy based? What are its most outstanding characteristics?

The preeminent characteristic of the Japanese bureaucracy is its elitism. Apart from its small number (40 public employees per 1,000 inhabitants), it attracts the best and brightest brains in the country. The civil service examination is so tough that less than ten percent of applicants pass. Each ministry seeks to pick the best among the successful candidates. In effect, the selection procedure is highly meritocratic. It means that access is open to everybody with requisite skills and attributes. The aftermath of this recruitment procedure is a crop of highly respected civil servants operating in a world which most Japanese, at times, believe is different from theirs.

Another feature is the lifetime employment in one ministry. Japanese bureaucrats pass their entire career in one ministry or agency. This is encouraged by the recruitment method which allows individual ministries and agencies to select their personnel from among the lists of successful candidates. Though this practice allows civil servants to acquire expert knowledge of their work, they become too committed to the ministry to the extent of considering other ministries as potential enemies. This provokes extreme sectionalism, which is also another feature of the Japanese bureaucracy. Japanese bureaucrats are known for extreme loyalty to their individual ministry. Bureaucrats have, in attempts to defend the interest of their ministries, acted against the national interests. Many bureaucrats place their ministries' interests above that of the nation. Though this "home turf" mentality is not peculiar to Japan, it is its magnitude that is outrageous. As Koh has rightly pointed out:

> *The propensity of Japanese bureaucrats to engage in territorial disputes is by no means unique. Jurisdictional disputes occur among bureaucratic organizations everywhere. What is nonetheless noteworthy is their frequency and scope in Japan. Their manifestation not merely between but also within organizations does seem to be peculiarly Japanese.* (Koh, 1989 : 262)

In these struggles over jurisdictional boundaries, foreign powers have been used by one ministry to:

> *put pressure on the other ministry or agency over ministerial interest. An example of this is the perennial struggle between Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) over who should have the decisive voice on foreign aid issues* (Orr , *1990)*

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been using the United States pressure as a powerful political weapon in advancing its interest against those of other agencies in the perennial domestic political battles (Pempell?: 303).

Seniority and ranking play a very important role in the functioning of the Japanese bureaucracy. This may be considered as another attribute of the Japanese bureaucracy. Promotion is strictly based on these principles other than on merit. It is a bureaucratic practice that "university graduates who entered in any given year cannot serve under men who entered at the time or later (Craig, 1975: 7-8). As one career officer puts it:

> *We climb the hierarchy with exactly the most speed. The question is which post one is assigned to.... As we climb with the same speed, there is no real competition, although almost all of us, having gone through a very competitive educational system, are competitive in a good sense. That is, everybody is a genuinely hard worker, disliking easy posts. Usually we are intelligent, but, surprisingly, some of us are not so intelligent. Because we are given reasonably responsible and important jobs while in a junior grade, the stupid ones become conspicuous at once. They are not however punished, at least in salary or grade. This kind of promotion continues until we become counsellors. From them on it is luck* (Craig, 1975: 6).

In essence, there is mass promotion for officers until they get to senior ranks, where all other colleagues resign if one of them gets to the post of Administrative Vice-Minister, which is the most senior rank in the administrative hierarchy.

One other feature of the Japanese bureaucracy is groupism. This instils cohesion among the bureaucrats, who place the interest of the group (ministry) above their personal interests. The bureaucrat is so committed he ministry that he religiously dedicates himself to its objectives, maintaining harmonious personal affiliations with other members. This is one of the sources from which Japanese bureaucrats draw their strength.

Closely linked to the above is consensual decision-making. In the decision making process, two terms are frequently used. They are *ringisho* and *nemawashi*. The essential features of ringisho are:

1. The drafting of a plan by middle management. No matter where the plan is initiated, the drafting is always carried out in the name of an organizational unit of middle management (the section, for example) or it administrator.
2. A careful horizontal consideration. Before the ringisho is submitted to higher officials, it is sent around to related organizational units of the same rank, where it is confirmed, with or without amendment. Sometimes, before the plan is drawn up in a formal ringsho the related organizational units of the same rank are called together for previous discussion.
3. A careful vertical consideration. The submitted ringisho receives the authorization of several

people in succession in the hierarchical order.

4. The formality of affixing the seal. After receiving confirmation and authorization in the previous stages, the confirmation or approval of the contents of a ringisho becomes a mere formality.
5. The lack of clarity in authority and responsibility. Because of the vague way in which approval is sought and obtained, it is difficult to draw clear lines of authority and responsibility for certain policies.

Nemawashi is the internal consultation that takes place before final decisions are reached. It is the custom to make attempts at discussing the impending decision with all those that may be affected by it both within and outside the concerned agency, to gather enough backing for the proposed policy. Literally, the term nemawashi refers to "the preparations made in advance of transplanting a large tree: digging a trench around it, cutting the thick lateral roots, and bending the smaller roots circularly around the earth clump that will be moved (Craig, 1975: 22). Though this style of decision making is often criticized as too slow because "each institution has to work out its own labourious internal consensus, and then those institutions whose interests overlap have to sit down together and hammer out a multi-sided compromise (The Economist, July 13, 1996: 4), it has helped in securing commitment of everybody to the measures taken.

CULTURAL FOUNDATION OF BUREAUCRATIC BEHAVIOUR

Religious Traditions

The role and influence of bureaucrats in Japan are strongly linked to the religious traditions of the Japanese. These traditions enshrined in the major religions of the country determine how officials behave and how the citizens relate to them. One interesting thing about the three major religions in Japan, that is, the Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism, is their interrelationship, especially on their emphasis on the loyalty that members of a group owe to their leaders. Robert Bellah described this relationship in the following lines:

> *The practical ethics of both Buddhist and Shinto sects were largely of Confucian origin: and at least the latter were strongly influenced by neo-Confucian metaphysics which in turn, of course, had been the product in part of strong Buddhist and Taoist influence... Confucianism and Shinto had borrowed Buddhist metaphysics and psychology; Buddhism and Shinto had borrowed much of Confucian ethics; and Confucianism and Buddhism had been rather thoroughly Japanized* (Bellah, 1957: 55-59)

Nevertheless, each of the religions has it peculiarities. Among the religions, it is the influence of Confucianism that is easily discerned not only in the conduct of officials but also among the Japanese in general. Confucianism covers a very wide range of issues. These, according to Wen Xia Ren, range "from philosophy to ethics, political theory, economic theory, and education. Confucian values include benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge and trust, but the core of Confucian thought in its role as philosophy is the concept of benevolence. In the same way, Confucianism's system of ethics and morality includes the values of filial piety, loyalty, veneration, and wise courage, but their core is likewise 'benevolence' (Wen, 1995: 13).

Of all these concepts, two or three are more relevant to this study. They are the concepts of loyalty (*chu)*, filial piety (*ko*) and veneration (*kanson minpi)*. These ideas were widely taught during the Tokugawa period and they eventually found their ways into the ethics and values of modern Japan. The Confucian virtue of loyalty evolved into the ethic of the warrior class called Bushido. According to Kawakemi Tasuke, "Bushido which had originally developed from practical necessities of warriors, came to be popularized by Confucian moral ideas not only as the morality of

the warrior class but as the cornerstone of national morals (Bellah, 1957: 40). The essence of Bushido (the way of the Samurai) is illustrated in the following passage cited from Hagakure:

> *Whenever we may be, deep in mountain recesses or buried under the ground, any time or anywhere, our duty is to guard the interest of our Lord... This is the backbone of our faith, unchanging and eternally true. Never in my life have I placed mine own thoughts above those of the Lord and master. Nor will I do otherwise in all the days of my life even when I die I will return to life seven times to guard my lord's house* (Bellah, 1957: 91).

This eternal loyalty and lifetime commitment as vowed by the samurai to their lord is different from what operated between a mandarin and his lord in ancient China. While in China, the relationship only began when a person passed his examinations and thus became a mandarin, in Japan the bond between the lord and the retainer "was a hereditary bond committing the entire household of the retainer to serve the household of the lord". In addition, while a mandarin could cut the link between himself and his lord by resigning his post and returning to his ancestral home, in Japan the bond was practically indissoluble. The loyalty a samurai owed his lord held good not only for his own lifetime but for his descendants as well.

The ethics of loyalty is inculcated in the child right from childhood through instructions in filial piety. Filial piety is born out of parent-child relationship. It was the belief that he who is ungrateful to his parents cannot know how to serve a master properly, not to talk of being loyal to him. In essence, as it is demonstrated in the following citation, filial piety and loyalty complement each other.

> *And a samurai who possesses this spirit [filial piety] when he enters the service of a lord will thoroughly understand the Way of Loyalty and will show it not only when his master is prosperous but also if he meets adversity, and will never leave his side when his hundred horsemen are reduce to ten and the ten to one, but will defend him to the last, regarding his life as nothing in carrying out a warrior's fealty... There is a saying for the ancients, "Look for a loyal retainer among the filial," and it is quite unreasonable to think that if a man is unfilial to his parents he can at the same time be loyal to his master* (Bellah, 1957: 93-94).

These two Confucian concepts, loyalty (chu) and filial piety (ko), may provide explanations for why loyalty is such an important word in Japan (The Economist, 1996: 21), but more specifically the high level of loyalty of modern bureaucrats to their superiors. This type of loyalty is a feature of most Japanese organizations. It also helps to explain to some extent the high level of commitment that Japanese have to their work, as demonstrated in several hours of unpaid voluntary overtime, and the lack of distinction between official and private life (Miyamoto, 1994). It is very rare for the Japanese to leave office as long as there is something to do. Civil servants work late most of the time.; it is not unusual, especially during the preparation of their ministries' annual budgets, for them to pass the night in the office. Perhaps an area where this loyalty is best evident is in the principle of life employment within single organization. Once employed, bureaucrats pass their entire career in the same ministry. This ministry is considered as an extension of one's family. As

Kiefer has pointed out:

> *When a man's occupation directly involves his family ... there is little problem of conflicting loyalties, but if he is a member of a bureaucratic organization, his employer must have some guarantee of his personal commitment to his job; otherwise, a bureaucracy cannot function. The response to this problem in Japan has been to make use of concepts of loyalty learned in the family; that is, one in which the individual normally commits himself to a job for life... The paradox of the Japanese bureaucratic system is that it makes more demands on members' loyalty ... thus placing the bureaucratic employee in a double mind, because family loyalty must be extended to the bureaucratic setting without undermining the family itself. Undermining familism would mean undermining the fabric of bureaucracy.* (Kiefer, 1994 :350)

The Confucian concept of *kanson mimpi* which literally means the 'officials were honoured, but the people despised' may also explain the "strong respect, bordering on worship, of the government (Yamamoto, 1995: 1). Dowdy writing about this during the Tokugawa period remarked that, "The impregnation of Confucian ethic was strong enough for a minor authority figure like village headman to be treated deferentially even if he was disliked (Dowdy, 1972: 168). This tradition continued during he Meiji government. According to Kashimoto Koichi, "Under the Meiji government the deeply ingrained tendency to subordinate the common people to the member of officialdom survived intact. Like the policies of the *bakuhan* system, the task of modernization was left to the *okami* - literally, "those above". The okami of the feudal era, the sumurai, were simply replaced by the bureaucrats, and the ordinary people easily transferred the formula for survival in the feudal times - "yield to the powerful" - to the context of modern government (Kishimoto, 1988: 3). The ordinary people regard officials as separate breeds. This relationship is aptly described by Craig when he wrote that:

> *The attitude of the local bureaucracy toward its civilian clientele is perhaps the more serious problem. When a Japanese is going to the district office for a copy of his birth registration certificate or to the local tax office, he goes in some degree as a suppliant.* (Craig, 1975 : 10)

PRINCIPLE OF VERTICAL ORGANIZATION

The principle of vertical organization (*tate*) has been used to describe the social structure in Japan. A closer understanding of the working of this structure will no doubt provide a solid base for the appreciation of the personnel structure of the Japanese bureaucracy. According to Nakane, "the most characteristic feature of Japanese social organization arises from the single bond in social relationships: an individual or a group has always one single distinctive relation to the other (Nakane, 1970). The relationship referred to here is based on a strict hierarchical structure. No matter the circumstances, the Japanese hardly relate to each other on equal basis. There is always the tendency to place self in the hierarchical order based principally on seniority. And as Nakane pointed out, "The ranking order which produces delicate differentiations between members of a group develops firm personal links between superior and subordinate. Such relationships form the core of the system of a group organization." The relationship between a superior and a subordinate

is expressed in the traditional terms of *Oyabun* and *Kobun*. According to her:

> **Oyabun** *means the person with the status of* **oya** *(parent) and* **Kobun** *means with the status of* **ko** *(child) ... The essential elements in the relationships are that the Kobun receives benefit or help from his Oyabun, such as assistance in securing employment or promotion, and advice on the occasion of important decision-making. The Kobun, in turn, is ready to offer his services whenever the Oyabun requires* (Nakane, 1970).

This ranking and seniority consciousness illuminates the card-carrying of the Japanese. A Japanese, meeting an 'outsider' for the first time, exchanges personal name cards with him. On the card is written his personal background, that is, his qualifications and the actual post he is occupying. The essence of this is to familiarize the outsider with his position in the emerging group, thereby placing everybody in the new group in their appropriate hierarchical order.

The structure of the Japanese bureaucracy is based on this vertical organization, which defines superior-subordinate relationships. Paul Kim has identified three broad types of these relationship in the bureaucracy: the superior-subordinate relationship, the *Senkpai-Kohai* relationship, and the *Oyabun-Kobun* relationship (Kim, 1988: 44-45). In the first type of relationship which is largely determined by rank, "the subordinate tries to avoid open confrontations with his superior and, if there is a difference of opinion, he always yields (Kim 1988: 44-45). A subordinate can hardly say no to his superior, or refuse him anything, even when it means going against his own principles. This fact is well illustrated in the trip organized by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, as described by Miyamoto: Even when subordinates have had enough drinks, "when a superior offers to pour you a drink, it's hard to say no" (Miyamoto, 1994: 59). Saying "no", even in such a situation, may be taken as an act of insubordination to a superior or a rejection of his authority. This relationship extends to discussions. Subordinates "are expected to listen silently to their superiors and not inject their own opinions into a discussion" (Miyamoto, 1994: 59).

In the Senpai-Kohai relationship, a civil servant regards his colleagues as either Senpai (seniors), Kohai (juniors) and Dohai (those of equal seniority). The distinction among the three is based on seniority and ranking, determined by their age, and year of entry into the Ministry. This relationship determines largely the promotion pattern. In the Japanese bureaucracy, it will be difficult and indefensible, to promote some members of the same rank and leave others behind, not to talk of promoting a Kohai above his Senpai.

The third pattern of relationship, according to Kim, is the Oyabun-Kohun (patron-client) relationship. This is "largely personal and grows out of superior-subordinate or Senpai- Kohai relationship". This type of relationship resembles that between lords and their vassals, master artisans and their apprentices, and landlords and retainers. This form of relationship, though a practice of the pre-war years, still exists in most ministries today. It is built around old school ties (*gakubatsu)*. This is visible not only in the type of relationship that exists between subordinates and superiors but also in the manner in which differences in perceptions are settled among the various policy makers in the country (Zhao, 1995).

GROUPISM

One other aspect of the cultural environment that is feasible in the bureaucratic set-up is groupism or "in-group consciousness" (Hirai, 1983: 118). The root of this could be traced to the Japanese emphasis on "frame" (*ba)* instead of "attribute" (*shikaku).* "Frame", unlike "attribute", places the individual within a group. It "indicates an individual insofar as he constitutes part of a specific

group within a particular framework, such as a locality or institution, without reference to any difference in attribute (Lebra and Lebra, 1974: 80). The preference given to frame over attributes makes the Japanese to associate themselves, first and foremost, as a member of an organization.

This in-group consciousness developed from the traditional concept of *ie* or household. The ie institution is not limited to the idea of the family alone. According to Fukutake it included:

> *the house and property, the resources for carrying on the family occupation, and the graves in which the ancestors were buried, as a unity stretching from the distant past to the present and occupying a certain position in the status system of the village or the town. The i.e. in that sense was far more important that the individuals who were at anyone time living members of it, and it was seen as natural that the individual personalities of family members should be ignored and sacrificed if necessary for the good of the whole.* (Fukutake, 1989: 28)

Interpersonal relationship within the ie are primordial over all other forms of relationships. This bond is strengthened by the evaporation of individual independence behind group loyalty. This makes the relationship with a non member of the group (an outsider) difficult since such links are blocked. This explains the reason why "most Japanese find it difficult to relate to people they do not know, and this is why they prefer to get introductions from a third party when they find it necessary to have dealings with a stranger (Ike, 1978: 19). As a result, the "we" and "they" attitude is built into the members of the group, who see their individual world from the aspect of the group. As a member of a group "freedom of expression disappears; open expression of critical thoughts is not tolerated without approval by the entire group (Miyamoto, 1994: 22). In sum, there is no more "*droit a la difference*".

The groupist ethic permeates every aspect of the Japanese society, including the bureaucracy. Its nature, extent and influence on the Japanese are better appreciated from the following quotations:

> *To expand Japan Inc., the bureaucracy introduced the philosophy of* **messhi hoko**, *or self-sacrifice for the sake of the group. This philosophy requires the subordination of individual lives to the good of the whole. It is difficult to say 'no' to messhi hoko and look for another job, since most Japanese companies are based on this philosophy. A person who rejects the concept of self-sacrifice can expect total isolation from the group. The fear of ostracism evokes strong anxiety in most Japanese, therefore the threat of removal from the group exerts a strong controlling influence on individual behaviour....(The philosophy) has infiltrated the daily lives of the Japanese, particularly through the education system, which the bureaucrats control* (Clark, 1996: 4).

Among the methods that are used to reinforce group solidarity are office trips to the sea or a hot spring

> *(which serves as a kind of training ground for carrying out well ordered group activities, as well as mechanism for stress management that allows people to release pent-up stress from daily tensions organise baseball tour*

naments, sports days, helping someone move, attending weddings and funerals, Friday drinking, or even dressing alike for soirees. (Muyamoto, 1994: 67).

Though these solidarity outings serve as morale boosters for some, its boomerang effect is the high level of loyalty that members show to group interests. In the civil service, for example, it has created jurisdictional jealousies among the various ministries to the detriment of the national goals.

CONCLUSION

Traditional cultures have often been regarded as constituting obstacles to the development of modern administration and economic advancement. In the case of Japan, it has supported the transformation of the social, economic and political fabrics of the state. This paper has concentrated on identifying those cultural practices that shape and determine some bureaucratic attitudes and personnel policies in Japan. It has attempted to justify current practices by looking at the Japanese culture and not by analysing the National Public Service Law (NPSL) promulgated in 1974 to regulate the conduct of the public servants because these practices are rooted in culture rather than in law. One can then assume without presumption, that the bills that are currently being enacted by the *Diet* targeted at reducing the influence of bureaucrats both in politics and in everyday life of ordinary Japanese (The Japan Times, 1999) may serve little or no purpose at all. In short, reclaiming Japan from the bureaucrats may not be for now (The Economist, 1999). As Wilson has rightly said:

> *In all phrases of social and cultural life, the influences of environment are potent. The play of custom, tradition and the mores, the influence of institutions, the binding force of legislative and executive acts, are essentially responses to social environment. Law abidance or the lack of it is a state of mind and is contagious; the prevalent types of reaction to the social environment become an important part of the environment itself. A prevalent disposition to obey laws is a more effective influence than the police and the courts; thus the unwritten sanctions are more important than the written, for they determine the reactions to the written* (Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. V-VI: 564-565).

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