Honne and Tatemae:

Exploring the Two Sides of Japanese Society

Ritgerð til BA prófs í Japanskt mål og menning

Genelyn Jane D Trinidad

January 2014
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Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological investigation of one of the double codes in Japanese society; *honne* meaning the real self or true feelings and *tatemae* meaning the facade. This concept is not unique to Japanese society alone however in Japanese society it is instinctively being used. Furthermore Japanese language is among the few languages if not the only language that has clear terms for this behavior.

The thesis explores the presence of *honne* and *tatemae* in all aspects of the society and its effect on Japanese credibility as perceived by an outsider or a foreigner. In all aspects of Japanese society from mundane day-to-day interaction to politics, corporate setting and media among others, Japanese people behaves accordingly depending on the situation they are in. When among the *uchi* or in-group, Japanese people tend behave using the *honne* while when dealing with *soto* or outsiders *tatemae* or the façade or public face is being shown, making it difficult to read what is really being said and can create confusion and misunderstanding especially for foreigners who are used to accept what is being shown at the outset. When foreigners or outsiders find out that it was not what they thought, foreigners tend to argue that Japanese people are not truthful and questions the credibility of what is being said.
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Introduction

This thesis aims to validate the claim that the tendency to use *honne* and *tatemae* in Japanese society affects the Japanese credibility. *Tatemae* is the pair of *honne*. *Tatemae* is the façade that Japanese people show to outsiders or those who do not belong to their group. It is the standard, principle or rule by which one is bound at least outwardly (Naito & Geilen, 1992). *Tatemae* is the polite and welcoming face that hides the *honne* or the real intention. *Honne* is what a person really feels but cannot be revealed. *Tatemae* and *honne* is one of the double codes in Japanese society along side *ura* and *omote* or the front and rear, and *uchi* and *soto* or the in-group and out-group. These concepts and its interconnection will be discussed further in the thesis. *Honne* and *tatemae* is not considered unique that it can only be observed in Japanese society but it is in Japan that it is used in most aspects of society. It has been noted that even during the educational years of a Japanese children, they are well trained to have a *tatemae* face in the classroom regardless of their personal thoughts on a issue (Hendry, 1995). In the Western society, *tatemae* can be equated with the concept of “front stage” or the presentation of self in everyday life coined by Erving Goffman (1990) a sociologist. Which just shows that the double code, *honne* and *tatemae*, is common among cultures but in Japan it is more evident and acceptable.

The initial motivation in researching about *honne* and *tatemae* for my thesis came up when I noticed that when I ask my Japanese friends to try any food, it could be a food that I made myself or bought, their answer would always be positive. The most interesting part is that the reaction is almost always automatic. The food barely touches their mouth and soon after they would say *oishii* meaning delicious. It made me wonder did he or she really taste the food before saying the food is delicious or is he or she just being polite. During the first few months of my stay in Japan, I have noticed how my newfound Japanese friends are accommodating and friendly. But what struck me the most is that questions about my background are often being asked but most of them are often reserved about sharing information about themselves. It took many outings and *karaoke* sessions before they finally opened up and talked freely about themselves. Similarly, working environment in Japan is full of formalities. However, it is commonly observed that after working hours employees with their superiors go out for a few
hours of socializing, which involves drinking at a bar or at a karaoke. At the first company dinner, after being accepted as an employee, I have witnessed how my superiors and colleagues have changed after a few drinks. Topics ranging from politics down to their family issues were being shared. The next day, the usual calm and professional face can be seen. It is because of these experiences that the topic of *tatemae* became an interest. Upon further readings, I came upon an article in the Japan Times written by author and columnist Debito Arudou. Arudou (2011) criticized Japanese culture as a culture of deceit and discussed the presence of *tatemae* in Japanese government and even how the media is being altered before being published. His column helped in the structure formation of this thesis. This thesis will look further into the presence of *honne* and *tatemae* in different aspects of Japanese society; the history, politics and government, foreign policy, communication, business and media.

In an article written by Debito Arudou for the Japan Times (2011), he stressed out how the Japanese use the concept of 'uso mo houben' or translated as lying is also a means to an end. He argued that this concept sums up the general attitude or the justification of the Japanese for not telling the truth. Arudou described how lies are used in ordinary personal interactions starting with *tatemae* or pretense where the speaker is mainly saying words that he thinks the listener wants to hear. Arudou argued that that act in itself is basically lying especially when contrasted with the speaker’s ‘true feelings and intentions’. The Japanese justifies the use of *tatemae* in order to avoid hurting the listeners’ feelings. On the other hand, revealing one’s true feelings is often seen negatively as *baka shoujiki* or stupid honesty and is often perceived as impudent, naïve and even immature (Arudou, 2011).

Power corrupts which propels many of those in positions of power to lie but Japan takes it to a different level (Arudou, 2011). In Japan there a is little reward for telling the truth and weak laws to protect ‘whistle-blowers’ as was the case of the foreign CEO at Olympus Corp. who was relieved from work after disclosing the company’s’ corporate misconducts. He was relieved due to his incompatibility with ‘traditional Japanese practices’. Furthermore, Arudou (2011) equated politicians to the Japanese society. For their survival politicians appeal to their constituents by telling them what they want to hear regardless of their own
true feelings and intentions similar to that of the Japanese society where everyone alters the truth to suit their audience and gain support while avoiding criticism and responsibility. For the Japanese, as long as they can accomplish their goals, lying is a means to an end, the ‘uso mo houben’ concept. In Japan there are more incentives for not telling the truth and on the other hand punishment waits for telling the truth. Arudou went on saying that the Japanese do not lie, they just do not tell the truth.

Japanese people are well known for being polite. Especially for those who have visited Japan for a short period of time, they will agree that the Japanese are the most polite people they have ever met. One can always see smiling polite faces such as in restaurants, departmental stores, post offices, and theatres. However beneath the surface is a different story (Lee, 1993). For those who have lived in Japan for longer period the story is different. In his book Diplomacy of a Tiny Nation, Lee, (1993) a journalist later turned politician, said he finds Japanese bowing and smiling rather superficial and that nobody really knows what is being concealed behind those smiling faces and bowing. They say hai hai meaning, “Yes, yes” but it does not mean they are actually agreeing to what is being said but it just meant, “I hear you” (Lee, 1983). The Japanese’ courtesy can be seen in their bow and smile but whether it is sincere, that cannot be assured. In a book Japan: Between Myth and Reality that Lee (1995) published later, he described in that the Japanese politeness is only skin deep. He further stated that there is a significant difference between private manner and public manner.

Lee (1995) went on describing his own experience when he had to use one of the toilets at a restaurant in Yokohama when the waiter rudely turned him away saying it is not a place for him to release himself. He then went back to his car and when the waiter saw that he was travelling in a diplomatic car, the waiter started to wave and bowed deeply. Lee also touched the subject of bowing. Those who are inferior in terms of age, sex or social status generally bow more often, deeper and longer than the superior. In samurai films characters are depicted as respectful through bowing when a representative of the shogun appeared but soon after he would draw his sword and try to kill him. In short, the respect he showed to the representative of the shogun earlier was just for the sake of formality but in actuality he wanted to kill the man he just bowed and showed respect to.
The pair concept or double code *honne* and *tatemae* is only one of the many aspects of Japanese society. In order to understand these concepts the nature of Japanese society must be looked into which will be discussed in the next chapter.

**The Nature of Japanese Society**

Japan is well known as a very polite society especially when contrasted to the US or European countries. It can be in their manner of dressing, the use of first names and downplaying status among others (Hendon, Hendon & Herbig, 1996). Japanese people are known for dressing conservatively and a being ‘uniformed society’. For most of their lives Japanese people wear uniform and even when going to work they would prefer dark business suits. It is considered inappropriate to be dressed casually during negotiations (Hendon, Hendon & Herbig, 1996), meetings, and formal events and during a job interviews. The Nippon Housou Kyoukai World or NHK World has a program called ‘Begin Japanology’. In one of the broadcasts (aired November 7, 2013) the topic was about the makeup culture in Japan saying that it is just unacceptable to be out and about not wearing make-up. In other words, appearance is everything in Japan or what can be labeled as *omote*. Unless it is considered a very personal relationship it is offensive to use first name to call out someone especially during the first meeting as a sign of respect. It is also extremely important to use honorifics and titles to address counterparts. As mentioned by Professor Okazaki Tomomi of Kyushu University in his Linguistic Description of Japanese course lectures (Spring semester, 2013) Japanese tend to stay silent when meeting for the first time because it is quite complicated to figure out the honorifics and proper language to use.

Japanese people are also emotional and sensitive but emotions are seldom if not, never shown and kept hidden. Emotions are valued but it must be hidden therefore concealing the real feelings and sentiments for it is considered in bad taste and poor conduct for a Japanese person to show such emotions (Hendon, Hendon & Herbig, 1996). The Japanese language have proverbs concerning showing real emotions; *No aru taka wa tsune wo kakusu* or ‘an able hawk hides his talons’ and *tanki wa sonki* meaning ‘a short temper means a lost spirit’ (Hendon,
Hendon & Herbig, 1996). Expression of frustration and anger that can lead to arguments and conflict are considered harmful to the ‘spirit of friendship’ or group harmony that must be preserved within groups. A failure to do so, tends to label a person as one who exhibits inappropriate behavior and has major character flaws.

It has often been observed that Japanese are not comfortable with expressing themselves in a straightforward manner and are careful not to burden or hurt the feelings of the other party. The extensive use of honne and tatemae can also be attributed to the Japanese great respect for harmony or the spirit of wa (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). From a non-Japanese perspective, not conveying information directly and using tatemae to maintain good feelings and thus avoiding tension may seem hypocritical. The practice of using tatemae is the reason why Japanese are inclined not to say ‘no’ to someone (Alston, 2005) as it may seem rude to say no even if the genuine opinion says otherwise.

Just as it is important to maintain harmony in Japanese society, there is also the concept of shuudan seikatsu or communal living. Because of communal living a strong sense of collectivism among its members exist. A Dutch social psychologist Hofstede (1991) defined collectivism as:

‘A society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which through out people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty’.

Collectivism can then offer an explanation as to why Japanese society conceals real intention and feeling just to maintain the strong in-group bond. A further study by Yamaguchi (1994), a social psychologist, revealed that expectations of reward and avoidance of punishment within in-group members reinforce collectivism of Japanese society.

When visiting a friend’s house and being asked “Won’t you dine with us”, Davies and Ikeno (2002) argued it is not really an invitation but a subtle hint that it is time to go home and that the proper answer should be “Thank you very much, but I am not hungry.” Honne is the expression of true feelings and desires, which is being suppressed by the strength of tatemae. In the work place, an employee may use tatemae in the form of showing dedication to his company boss in line with the corporate tatemae loyalty and harmony in order to achieve his honne ambition.
such as promotion and other personal gains (Sugimoto, 2010).

Honne and Tatemae

The pair concepts of honne and tatemae are very important in Japanese society. There is a distinction placed between the façade, which is normatively proper and correct and the actuality that may be unacceptable in public acceptable privately or among members of the group (Sugimoto, 2010). Carlet (2011), a writer for the Japan Times, argued that tatemae is often confused with lying but it is a form a telling the truth although through pretense. She further argued that tatemae is used when both the speaker and listener knows the truth therefore there is no need to voice it out loud. Having both the speaker and listener being aware of the truth, deception or lying then is ruled out.

There is no established origin of honne and tatemae although in ancient times, tatemae was a description of the ceremony held after the foundation of a building had been laid out while honne is belived to have originated from a combination of honto no niero meaning real sound or true timbre (Prasol, 2010). Prasol (2010) in his research contrasted honne and tatemae in a very broad context.

Tatemae means; things that are pronounced publicly, things that coincide with group interests, a common wish or goal, a systematized theory and practice, in religion it is an orthodox belief or one of its versions, a father or a paternal line or position and tradition or precedent. Honne on the other hand means; things that are kept inside one’s heart, things of personal interest, personal wishes and goals, a non-systemized theory and practice, in religion it is a secret, apocryphal theory or doctrine, mother or a maternal line or position and an innovation or reform (as cited in Shibata, 1986).

Furthermore, tatemae can be anything that is difficult to oppose in public such as behavior and thoughts admitted by the majority while honne is anything connected with a person’s heart and senses and are hidden and should not be discussed in public (Prasol, 2010). The decision to hide the honne can either help or hinder the person in achieving his goals but the main reason why honne should
remain hidden it smoothen things and is appropriate especially in delicate circumstances. Voicing facts can cause the other party involved to ‘loose’ face or disgraced. Tatemae then is used to help maintain honor and avoid conflict of interest. Prasol (2010) also mentioned “A Japanese man who has been bred according to old traditions is a polite, tactful and fairly cultured man. If a Japanese man with such an education is a pretentious and proud person by nature, then he will artfully hide these qualities, displaying modesty and prudence in public” (as cited in Nikolaev, 1905).

In Japanese culture, it is a sign of maturity when a person fully understands both sides in other people (Naito & Gielen, 1992) while skillfully assessing the situation and use honne or tatemae to communicate depending on what the circumstance requires. Similarly, Hendry (1995), a professor of social anthropology, mentioned that Japanese children are taught to understand their own selves so that they can use this empathy and devise behavior which will consider the inner feelings of others.

The custom of Japanese using tatemae can be traced back from the samurai period (Prasol, 2010). Their habit of concealing their feelings and thoughts can be traced back when samurais were instructed to “always watch what you say because one word is enough for people to guess what you think (as cited in Sato, 1999). Due to its deep roots it has been embedded into Japanese subconscious. The expression of one’s true feelings can be seen as unfavorable justifying the Japanese’ habit of using tatemae and thus labeled as a culture of self-control, self-restriction and reticence (Prasol, 2010). Even if this habit is the norm for Japanese, how about is it perceived by other culture?

The Double Codes: Honne and Tatemae, Ura and Omote, Uchi and Soto

Human behavior in general is commonly characterized with indirectness, vagueness and ambiguity but it has to be the Japanese who, according to Sugimoto (2010), legitimized the use of double codes, honne and tatemae impeccably. Honne refers to one’s true feelings and intentions and by contrast tatemae are words that the speaker thinks make the other person feel better or is expected to
say about the other person (Alston, 2005). Furthermore, Alston (2005) defined *tatemae* as social lies and verbal noise that are not meant to convey information instead they are used keep the good atmosphere and ultimately avoid tension and conflict.

_Honne* and *tatemae* can also be thought of in terms of *ura* and *omote* or the ‘rear’ and the ‘front’. The *honne* or the *ura* is the actual and genuine intent or the hidden intent side of the subject related to *watakushi* or ‘I’ in a private, informal and non-ceremonial setting (Feldman, 2004). *Tatemae* on the other hand is the *omote* or the ‘face’ of the subject. It is the presented truth or the side that can be seen by everyone. Another pair that is related to *honne* and *tatemae* and *ura* and *omote* is the concept of *soto* or outside and *uchi* or inside. These three are the main double codes that are dominant in Japanese society. The *uchi* and *soto* concept commonly relates to an individual’s affiliation, distinguishing between an outsider and insider. Japanese refer to their in-group as *uchi* such as their firm or their family. They do not carelessly discuss sensitive matters in *soto* but can be very straightforward with in the *uchi*. In connection to *honne* and *tatemae*, Japanese brings out their *honne* or real disposition when they are around in-group members or the *uchi* and by contrast when they are dealing with *soto*, they don their superficial outward appearances (Sugimoto, 2010).

Discerning the difference between *uchi* and *soto* is made clear to Japanese starting from young age. Adults behave differently when inside or outside the house and if an outsider who does not belong to the family comes over and visit (Hendry, 1995). It is made clear to children that when inside or in the *uchi*, *honne* is being used and on the other hand the behavior changes to *tatemae* when one ventures into *soto*.

**Honne and Tatemae in the History of Japan**

While *honne* is for private use *tatemae* being commonly accepted by society is used for public interaction thus acts as lubricating oil that maintains harmony. Japanese people being brought up into these two concepts hardly ever confuses one from the other but have gained the skills to be able to switch between the two as a way of interacting with one another (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Japanese
can tell the difference between honne and tatemae. Japanese children have grown up with these two concepts and have used them in most of their transactions (Davies & Ikeno, 2002) throughout their lives. As a result, a Japanese person can effortlessly and skillfully switch between honne and tatemae depending on the situation they are in and with whom they are with. It has become a customary that they rarely consider that it might cause misconception and confusion for those who are not familiar to this kind of interacting style.

De Mente (2005) supposed that the honne and tatemae system was officially adopted by the Japanese government during the Heian period from 794-1185. Yoritomo Minamoto, the founder of the shogunate system of government formulated extralegal posts and regulations giving all the power to the shogunate in Kamakura. All the while the Emperor and the Imperial Court situated in Kyoto is intact but holds no power at all. Hence, the existence of a shadow government that is still evident in all of the aspects of Japanese society. Its influence reached to Japan’s culture overall and in every level of the society even influencing the Japanese corporate culture.

With roots that can be traced back to the Heian period, it is no surprise that people behind “front men” control the Japanese government on every level (De Mente, 2005). Administrative actions are also heavily based on extralegal, basically not in accordance with the law, but on the hidden personal agenda of those who are ‘actually’ running them.

**Honne and Tatemae in Japanese Politics and Government**

Anomalies in government and politics are not unique to Japan. What makes Japan special is that the public is fully aware that anything that government and political officials declare in public is not the truth but only publicity. Bureaucrats are not expected to fully disclose information and what the constituents gain are only a series of vague directives with masked intentions (Arudou, 2011). The Imperial Diet or the Japanese Kokkai or the National Assembly is the national legislature of Japan. For the Diet members or the leaders of political groups and government officials honne and tatemae signify the difference between public disclosure and private discretion as argued by Arudou
Feldman (2004) argued that in Japan \textit{tatemaes} is the most common form of public speaking. It is not socially acceptable to express personal feelings or opinions, \textit{honne}, in public forum or to voice out personal opinions in public affairs (Feldman, 2004). Depending on the situation they are in, politicians and government officials present their views with different levels openness, \textit{honne}, or fuzziness, \textit{tatemaes}.

When speaking before large public gatherings politicians and government officials speak in general terms in accordance to the official line of their administration or political group. Politicians and government officials tend to use broad statements of philosophy that can be interpreted in many ways. They deliberately avoid the use of vocabularies that implies judgment on any given issue or words that will indicate their position on a given topic. Feldman points out that during public discourse, politicians and public officials use terms such as \textit{maemuki ni} which corresponds to positively or constructively giving a ambiguous impression that even if it is not specified when, they intend to move on an issue (Feldman, 2004). Additionally words such as \textit{jubun ni} meaning adequately or thoroughly as a ‘delaying tactic’ and \textit{tsutomeru} meaning to endeavor or work hard when they intend to take no personal responsibility (Feldman, 2004). It is impossible to determine where the Japanese politicians and officials really stand on a certain issue since their speeches are filled with jargons and abstractions devoid of their personal opinion. As a result the image of being neutral on a particular issue is being preserved.

\textit{Honne} and \textit{tatemaes} reflects the divided quality of Japanese politics where every aspect has its \textit{ura} and \textit{omote}. \textit{Honne} is sometimes revealed to the outside world or \textit{soto} through \textit{hougen} or irresponsible utterance or \textit{shitsugen} slip of the tongue (Hagstrom, 2000). According to Feldman (2004) there are many occasions where \textit{tatemaes} is perfectly executed by public officials. Occasions such as the policy speech by the Japanese Prime Minister delivered to both houses of the Diet upon the establishment of new administration, speeches at party conventions and fund raising events, frequent press conference that Japanese leaders hold, the regular press briefings that the Chief Cabinet Secretary holds, the Diet deliberations and Diet committee meetings and the list goes on. These events are
carefully staged where politicians and officials talk in ambiguous terms and try to appear as neutral as they can concerning sensitive issues (Feldman, 2004). The speeches generally refer to major issues that Japan is currently facing such as foreign affairs, trade disputes, educational reforms and the economic slump that Japan is currently in. The content usually contains strong words such as maintaining social stability, taxation and educational reforms, expanding Japan’s role through the United Nations and to promote economic cooperation between Japan and other countries through Official Development Assistance or the ODA or different bilateral agreements.

The Asahi Editorial that was published came on May 11, 1994 (Feldman, 2004) commented that it is a common knowledge that the prime minister’s speech must be a vague speech that ‘touches everything covers nothing’. Which a further evidence that the Japanese are already knowledgeable that these speeches are only for show and that they do not in actuality address current issues.

The live coverage of the Diet deliberations and Diet committee meetings are also filled with tatamæ. Similar to the speeches given by the prime minister, Diet members abstain from stating concrete opinions, personal opinions and judgment during these events because such acts might provoke anger or embarrass colleagues (Feldman, 2004). Similarly, they use diplomatic terms such as okiki suru meaning they would respectfully listen but most likely no action would be done; zensho suru or to deal with properly to evade the issue; or kentou suru meaning to look into if they intend to toy around the idea but probably will do nothing about the it (Feldman, 2004). Another situation where Japanese politician try to evade exposing their true feelings is when a colleague was discovered that he is engaged in scandal. Instead of saying that he will ‘take legal action against the colleague’ he will say ikan ni omou or literally translated as ‘I feel sorry’ (Asahi, 1998 as cited in Feldman 2004). Ikan ni omou in actuality does not express accusation or personal apology but only indicates that the speaker understands that he is supposed to ‘feel sorry’ about a certain incident involving his colleague.

It is highly important for politicians and officials to avoid ‘loss of face’ or the public embarrassment leading to loss of self respect for both for himself or the listener. Hence, tatamæ where ambiguous opinions commitment and emotions are expressed is the safest way for politicians and officials to retain political hold.
Politicians and officials are well aware that *tatemae* is the best method for being accepted and liked should they aspire for higher positions and gain support from as many people and groups as possible (Feldman, 2004).

As a result, the Japanese public does not trust the Japanese government. The *Tokyo Times* (2011) reported that eight out of ten Japanese felt that the leaders were not telling them the truth especially in the wake of the Great Tohoku Earthquake. Just as the Japanese government shy away from telling the truth they are in fact loosing the trust of their constituents. And it does not help that the media does not disclose the whole truth either for it may cause them to loose favor with the government officials and politicians concerned. The *honne* and *tataemae* involving information dissemination will be discussed further in the following chapter.

**Honne and Tatemae in Japanese Media**

Most Japanese weekly news magazines are more willing to publish speculations and rumor based on information bought out from ‘underpaid’ writers from major news papers which refuses to publish them (Farley, 1996). The credibility of these magazines vary from one another but they provide unedited information, most often the *honne*, that one would not be able to find in major news papers (Gamble & Watanabe, 2004). Japanese newspapers are affiliated with monthly and weekly magazines. Filtered information deemed inappropriate for newspapers are delegated to magazines (Farley, 1996). Japanese mainstream press is considered authoritative and respectable while weekly news magazines are considered unreliable, sensationalistic and trashy (Gamble & Watanabe, 2004). However, Gamble and Watanabe (2004) argued that what mainstream media reports is the official but superficial side of the story or the *tatemae* while on the other hand weekly news magazines offers the truth behind the story or the *honne*.

It can be noted that Japanese mainstream press tends to cover the façade that politicians show to the public, the *tatemae*, while ignoring the reality behind it, the *honne* (Farley, 1996). As it is in the nature of Japanese people to skillfully discern between *honne* and *tatemae* it also applies within the media. Japanese media are expected to acknowledge the surface but fully understand the reality
behind it (Farley, 1996). Because of the collusive relationship of the Japanese media with Japanese government and corporate sources they tend to present information in a formal and superficial manner that as far from reality (Gamble & Watanabe, 20014)

**Honne and Tatemae in Foreign Policy**

_Honne_ and _tatemae_ being present in almost all aspects of Japanese society it is not unusual to see its influence on how Japan deals with other countries. One important aspect of Japan’s foreign economic policy and diplomacy is foreign aid allocation pledging to contribute to the economic development and prosperity in the world (Furuoka & Kato, 2008). Japan is one of the biggest donors of Official Development Assistance or ODA alongside France, Germany, United Kingdom and the United States (OECD, Net ODA 2010). The official definition of the ODA as defined by the OECD is as follows:

“Flows of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective, and which are concessional in character with a grant element of at least 25 percent (using a fixed 10 percent rate of discount). By convention, ODA flows comprise contributions of donor government agencies, at all levels, to developing countries ("bilateral ODA") and to multilateral institutions. ODA receipts comprise disbursements by bilateral donors and multilateral institutions.” – OECD, Glossary of Statistical Terms

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) states that Japanese ODA is extended to developing countries where governments and people are facing various concrete problems. Furthermore it also states that Japan may provide aid more generously to countries that show progress in democratization or transition to a market economy to encourage such positive progress. However, Furuoka and Kato (2008) argued that even in Japan's allocation of ODA, _honne_ and _tatemae_ is being practiced.

The real intention behind such foreign aid as argued by Furuoka and Kato (2008) is to foster Japan's own commercial interest. Putting it simply, altruism
which is the tatemae that hides the hidden real intension, the honne, which is selfishness. The ODA program of the Japanese government has been under criticism for being commercially motivated (Furuoka & Kato, 2008). Apparently, honne and tatemae plays a major role in the decision-making process when it comes to the distribution of ODA to selected Southeast Asian countries.

The empirical results analysis from the research conducted by Furuoka and Kato (2008) showed that there is a significant and negative relationship between per capita income and the ODA fund allocations. It indicates that that Japan truly allocated more ODA funds to poorer countries. But the intriguing part is that it also showed that Japan’s exports to the selected Association of Southeast Asian Nation or ASEAN members aid recipient countries had a significant and positive relationship with Japan’s ODA funds distribution. That means that the trade partners of Japan in ASEAN countries received higher development funds from Japan. In 2005, according to MOFA statistics, among the ASEAN members benefitting from ODA allocations, the countries allocated with higher ODA funds are China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam and the Philippines. Interestingly, they are also major trade partners of Japan (Furuoka & Kato, 2008).

According to the results they have gathered, it showed that Japan tends to grant bigger amounts of foreign aid to poorer countries demonstrating altruism or tatemae. However, countries that are commercially essential to Japan received even more foreign aid compared to those who have weak trade connection with Japan. Japan’s tatemae is then showed in the form of altruism but on the other hand honne, which is to secure strong trade relations, weighs heavier (Furuoka & Kato, 2008). Furuoka and Kato then concluded that Japan understands that as an aid donor they should include ‘universal values’ into their ODA program and tatemae fits this requirement. Tatemaefi emphasizes the altruistic side but it is also marred by Japan’s pursuit for its own economic interest or the honne.

**Honne and Tatemae in Businesses**

Among other determinants of corporate ranking in Japan is the age. Those who are at higher position or superiors are usually older and subordinates or juniors are younger. Alston (2005) pointed out that in the case that younger
employees are more familiar with the new technologies and procedure the Japanese corporate solution using *tatemae* applies. The younger more capable employees will be allowed to make decisions however the official credit will go to the superiors. Everyone among the group is aware of the *honne* being suppressed as *tatemae* demands conformity to positions and age rankings and the respect towards senior officials (Alston, 2005). Hence it becomes unclear who really is in charge of projects in some companies.

*Honne* and *tatemae* in Japanese corporate setting can also be seen when employees take their vacation leaves. *Tatemae* being the companies offering paid vacations and employees in turn can take these vacations freely however, the *honne* or expectation of the company is that the employees are not expected to use those given vacation (Bachmann, 2011). In a survey conducted by Reuters (August 2011) Japan has the least vacation from work with an average of nine days per year (Goldsmith, 2010). This hold true when compared to other developed nations (in terms of Gross Domestic Product or GDP) such as the US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, Australia and South Korea (International Monetary Fund, 2012). In Japan, even paid public holidays are not guaranteed (Ray, Sanes, & Schitt, 2013). Even if Japanese employees have the right to claim their vacation leave freely, there is a possibility that the employer may move the scheduled leave if it affects business operations (“Japan-Working Time”, 2011). Consequently, Japanese employees usually feel uneasy taking long paid vacations as it may affect their performance evaluation and that it may bring burden to their colleagues due to additional workload (Naze yasumenai no. [なぜやすめないの"], 2010).

The roles of double codes of Japanese society discussed earlier in this paper can be seen in Japanese corporate environment. In the business world *ura*, the front, money flows with *ura* negotiations and *ura* transactions (Sugimoto, 2010). Sugimoto (2010) cited the practice of *shito fumei kin* or the ‘expenses unaccounted’ for by Japanese companies. *Shito fumei kin* masks the identity of the recipient of the expenditure, which is a legal as long as the expenses are declared for taxation. This is a common practice in the corporate word to hide secret pay-offs, kickbacks and political donations (Sugimoto, 2010). Such as in the construction industry, about half of the expenditures unaccounted for are assumed to be undisclosed political donations (Sugimoto, 2010) for easier approval of paper
works. The underlying *honne* for such practices is to promote the mutual interest of *uchi* networks of business and politics, which deepens the ties between involved parties.

Another concept that is dominant when discussing deals conducted by construction companies involving public works is *dangou* or sometimes described as ‘murky’ or anomalous collusion. Construction companies, usually limited to ten, involved in such *dangou* will agree in advance who will win the bid and in return companies who did not win the bid upon agreement are entitled to a certain share of the successful company’s profits (Sugimoto, 2010). The process of selecting the ‘winning’ company entails competing for the arbitrary favor of bureaucrats and politicians, which also entail negotiations that can be classified under corruption. This practice falls under the *ura* operations of the *uchi* insiders, which in this case are the companies involved in the *dangou*, trying to materialize their *honne* in the form of profit maximization.

To accomplish the *ura* of business transaction or the *honne*, the ultimate real goal of Japanese companies, they often turn to entertainment. These entertainments come in different forms such as dining and wining in high class Japanese-style restaurants more commonly known as *ryoutei* (Sugimoto, 2010). These entertainments held by Japanese companies can cost them immense amount of expenses however it makes it easier for them to achieve their ultimate goal. These entertainments can be classified as the *tatemae* or the *omote* as they pave way for the companies to ultimately achieve their *honne* or *ura* or their hidden intentions. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of informal contacts and communications.

While it is true that formal transactions are done in offices and boardrooms, it is not unusual for the Japanese to make important decisions or seal deals while dining and wining in a high class Japanese-style restaurants (Sugimoto, 2010). Moeran (1989) emphasizes the importance of alcohol as an indispensable social activity in Japan. It is also common that business transactions are usually carried out during *karaoke* sessions or in the clubs where businessmen are occasionally caressed by attractive hostesses pouring their drinks (Moeran, 1989). These entertainment sessions are usually friendly, very informal and can be at times sexually aggressive (Moeran, 1989). It is during these occasions that they are
able to conclude numerous business transactions. This form of transaction does not only happen in businesses but also with politics. Local officials often entertain their national colleagues, which will allow them to assure higher subsidy allocations. Citizen's groups criticize this practice by public officials as an illegal use of taxpayers' money (Sugimoto, 2010).

The role of alcohol is not only limited to easing business transactions but also in easing communication between colleagues. Coworkers may go to a bar after work and it is possible that during drinking sessions, it is possible to be more frank with each other as compared to the formal atmosphere in the office or factory (Hendry, 1995). While drinking together, a subordinate can criticize his or her superior directly it is a common consensus that what is said during drinking session will soon be forgiven and forgotten (Moeran, 1989). Drinking is then seen as a means to break social barriers by breaking down hierarchies as well as communication barriers and ultimately bridging the gap between honne and tatemae.

Honne and Tatemae in Japanese Communication

Japanese society being group oriented contributes to its cultural and social homogeneity (De Mente, 2005). The Japanese being used to living in small spaces and the culture of working together makes them very familiar with the character, personality, likes and dislikes of the other members. Influenced by the mixture of geographical, historical and economic factors, Japanese people tend to resemble each other in terms of behavioral patterns (Kato, 2000). Japan being a homogenous nation makes it easier for Japanese people to understand each other's behavior and act accordingly. Kato (2000) labeled this behavior as:

"Ishindenshin or telephatic communication; me wa kuchi hodo ni momo wo iu meaning eyes speak as much as the mouth does."

It is then apparent within in-group members of a homogenous society that they understand each other even if there is no actual information or tacit understanding or in Japanese language, anmoku no ryokai (Kato, 2000).

The Japanese grew up following universal etiquette as well as house and
group rules for many centuries resulted to their homogeneity in terms of actions and thoughts (De Mente, 2005). With the presence of strong bonds nonverbal communication is common. If Kato (2000) refers to that concept as *ishindenshin*, De Mente (2005) refers to it as *haragei* or the art of the stomach or belly ((De Mente, 2005). *Hara* is the area surrounding the navel that corresponds to the English word belly (Matsuki, 1995). In Japanese metaphors *hara* is used as the container of emotions. Matsuki (1995) summarized *hara* as:

“The belly or stomach or the center, the inside of a mother’s womb, the heart or real intention and courage and nerves.” (As cited in Koojien)

With regards to *honne* there is a corresponding metaphor that goes ‘*kimochi wa wakaru keredo hara ni osamete kudasai*’ meaning ‘I understand how you feel, but keep it inside your *hara*’ (Matsuki, 1995) which possibly explains *haragei* or the art of stomach. The distinction between *honne* and *tatemae* is encouraged when the inner mind of a person is deemed unsuitable to be expressed freely according to the accepted standards.

Communicating through the use of the ‘atmosphere’ rather than words resulted to the emphasis of external appearances or the *tatemae*. Without words, one concentrates on the appearances to be able to read the others’ reaction. De Mente (2005) argued that this cultural conditioning of the Japanese was so strong and pervasive that after many centuries it still exists in modern day Japan.

*Honne* and *tatemae* can be equated to that of Erving Goffman’s ‘front regions and ‘back regions’ respectively. Goffman (1990) used the imagery of theater as a model to portray social interactions. He argued that similar to human social interaction, in theatrical performances consist of front region where the actors perform in front of the audience and the back region where individuals can be themselves free from the roles they play on stage. Similarly, *tatemae* is akin to performing in front of the audience and *honne* is when a person steps out of the role he or she is expected to play.

Robert March (1988) equated *tatemae* to the notion of ‘face’, saying further that *tatemae* is a behavior that decided on as permissible and fit for consumption. Thus *tatemae* is equated to ‘face’, a face that that is suited for
particular occasion (March, 1988). Similar with March (1988) describes the extent that the Japanese conceal their feelings as unusual, Berton (1998) describes the Japanese negotiating behavior as almost unique compared to other countries.

Edward Hall (1976) used the concepts of low context and high context in discussing the differences in communicating styles where the most explicit is the low context while most implicit is the high context. The Japanese communication belongs to the category of high context meaning there is a high difference between what is being said being the tatemae and what it really meant being the honne according to Hall.

**Honne and Tatemae from Outsider’s (Foreigners) Point of View**

Foreigners are usually labeled as gaijin, a shortened form of gaikokujin, which literally means ‘outsider people’. For most of foreigners who visit Japan for variety of reasons they may draw conclusions basing from what they have seen during their brief stay. It is often noted that foreigners are amazed at the tidiness and availability of urban facilities especially in Japanese cities such as Tokyo and Osaka in relation to the size to the reliability and availability of public transport. For short-term visitors Japan can be seen as spectacular as Oz or Wonderland (Woronoff, 1990). What gaijins might have seen is the tatemae or the illusion or idealization.

For foreigners who have stayed for longer period of time, they may be able to distinguish the difference between honne and tatemae. For Japanese dealing with Japanese tatemae is the standard and deception is the main intention but an alternative way to present issues. On the other hand for many foreigners, tatemae is seen as false and futile even dishonest because foreigners are used to receiving the truth or akin to it (Woronoff, 1990). The ‘feeling’ of being betrayed may just be the justification why Arudou argued that in Japan ‘lying is a means to an end’ or uso mo houben because foreigners are not used to the double codes in Japanese society.

It takes a long time to get to know the Japanese. There are many rules both spoken and unspoken being followed leaving it to the outsider to interpret the meaning. Tatemae is one of the barriers to understand and fit into Japanese
culture (Gondor, 2011). As described by Carlet (2011) that as it is a form of pretense it is difficult to gauge what is happening behind the surface. For a foreign outsider, the impression will be that Japanese are really welcoming and loving however Japanese are likely showing up their *tatemae* face and pretending to keep social harmony (Gondor, 2011) that in turn can create misunderstanding and conflict.

The majority of Japanese people they make use of *honne* and *tatemae* extensively because it is considered a virtue to not express directly one’s real feelings and intention (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Because of this distinction it becomes difficult especially for foreigners at times to fathom what really being said thus possibly creating confusion and misunderstanding. Often, very little information is being provided while being polite and careful not to offend others. Using the *tatemae* or the façade and holding back the most likely offensive but informative *honne* or their true emotion (Hendon, Hendon & Herbig, 1996) can lead a foreign outsider to misunderstand their Japanese counterpart.

The use of *tatemae* by the Japanese also poses a difficulty for anthropologist. During data gathering Moeran (1989) found out that his ‘informants’ had shifted from *tatemae* to honne during drinking sessions in the evening. He found himself listening to topics that they refused or evaded to talk about during daytime. Most significantly, Moeran (M1989) found that the information he received under normal circumstances was directly contradicted as he drank together with the informants. Keiko Kato (2000) conducted a study regarding *inshu-bunka* or drinking culture in Japan. *Inshu-bunka* promotes positive attitude towards drinking in Japan. Kato mentioned that according to the Census Bureau of Japan, 73.2 percent of Japanese believe that drinking helps smooth relationship between people. Furthermore Kato labeled this process as ‘nominication’ derived from the verb *nomu* meaning to drink and *communication* (as cited in Sorifukouhoshitsu 1989: 36-37; De Mente 1987: 261).

These further the argument that one has to ‘work hard’ at getting to know a Japanese to be able to get to know what really goes on under their cool faces.
Conclusion

The concept of honne and tatemae is not unique to Japan. It exists in every society but not as systematically and spontaneously used as Japanese people do. What makes Japan unique is that honne and tatemae along with the other double codes in Japanese society, ura and omote and uchi and soto are deeply rooted in the society dating back to the Heian period or even older and are explicitly used in all every aspect of Japanese society in until today. The existence of the words honne and tatemae in Japanese language alone when most language struggle to find a words to describe this type of specific behavior demonstrates how these concepts are embedded in Japanese society. Furthermore, every Japanese are aware that what is being said may not be what it seems and to believe such pretenses can be considered as a fool or simple-minded.

This thesis have looked into the different aspects of Japanese society from politics, media, foreign policy, corporate setting and even in communication. In all of these aspects, honne and tatemae is present. It is practically the norm in Japan but not in the opinion of most outsiders or foreigners. Honne and tatemae is seen as deceitful and lies as Arudou Debito argued. For foreigners or outsiders, getting to know a Japanese and Japanese society as a whole can take a long time. It can entail going out for long sessions of drinking together, getting drunk together, sharing common interest, hobby or entertainment (Lee, 1995). Japanese people tend to dig into personal information such as the occupation of one’s parents or other information that are not normally shared during first meetings. Outsiders or those who belong to the out-group, the soto, often see only the tatemae or the ‘cool faces’ following the Confucius doctrine of not showing happiness or anger in one’s face (Lee, 1993). And for those who have visited Japan for only a short period of time, Japan can exude an image of a perfect society where people are polite, very tidy and orderly although crowded and reliable transportation among others. However as Moeran (1989) and Woronoff (1990) have argued it takes more than just a few days to get to know Japan and Japanese people in general.

When foreigners find out that the whole truth was not provided, they would say that Japanese people are not trustworthy or credible. Whose fault is it then when such occasion arises. Is it the fault of Japanese people who were only
behaving according to what the standards dictate or is it the fault of the outsider or foreigner for not being able to differentiate between *honne* and *tatemae*, *ura* and *omote*, and *uchi* and *soto*. When Japanese people use *tatemae*, deception is not the intention but is considered the standard and are aware that it is not the truth. As it is the standard especially when dealing with people who are not considered as part of the *uchi* or in-group, which most often involve foreigners, it can be considered deceitful. In a foreigner's point of view, they expect to be told the truth but it is just not the case in Japanese society. It takes time.

Small changes can be seen in modern Japan. Some traditions are slowly being forgotten and as the population shrinks there is a possibility that some traditional values will be forgotten. Younger generations are starting to venture abroad and are exposed to Western culture. Japanese people are now more welcoming to influences from ‘outside’. It might be worthwhile to examine how these changes affects Japanese behavior towards *soto* in the future.
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