

*Culture Shock  
and Japanese-American Relations*

*Historical Essays*



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## Preface

An interesting way of approaching the history of Japanese-American relations is by examining the culture shocks experienced by the main actors, either individually or collectively. And starting with the visit of Commodore Perry's "black ships" to Japan in 1853, the relations between the two countries have been replete with instances of culture shocks. According to Kalervo Oberg, "Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse." It involves "a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feeling of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture." In this volume I shall employ this term broadly as any situation where an individual or people are forced to adjust to an unfamiliar socio-political situation where previous learning no longer applies.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of culture shock will conveniently bring together such diverse topics as naval strategy, the decision-making process, transpacific racism, and the atomic bomb controversy. I have emphasized mutual perceptions and the interplay of ideas, examining how cognitive dissonance can cause conflict and escalation into crises, even a war. These essays will show that the interplay of ideas and cultural exchange are highly complex and sometimes destructive—contrary to the prevalent notion that cultural exchange is an agent of peace.

It may be an unusual way to open a book on the history of Japanese-American relations, but in response to the request from the director of the University of Missouri Press, I give a brief intellectual autobiography. It is a belated and partial answer to the late Harold Isaacs, the author of *Scratches on our Minds* and a behavioral scientist at MIT. During a visit to Kyoto in 1965, Isaacs discovered that I had spent nine youthful years in America

1. Oberg, "Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments"; William A. Smalley, "Culture Shock, Language Shock, and the Shock of Self-Discovery"; Paul Pederson, *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents around the World*, 1.

and indicated that he wanted to do an in-depth psychological case study of me. I admit that in embarrassment I politely declined.

Seven of the essays in this volume have been previously published in English or Japanese. They are expanded and updated to make them more pertinent or accessible to Western readers by incorporating new research, recent literature, and changing points of view. I decided to reprint "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender—A Reconsideration" (*Pacific Historical Review*, November 1998), because it has often been cited in a controversy occasioned by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (2005). I append to this essay a critical note on *Racing the Enemy*.

The origins of the present book lie in the encouragement of an old and esteemed friend who told me I should put together a collection of my essays. From the beginning the director and editor-in-chief of the Press, Beverly Jarrett, has been enthusiastic about the project.

No historian is an island, and I wish to thank friends who have helped me along the way. I must first mention my graduate teacher, the late Samuel Flagg Bemis, whose memory has been a tower of strength on many occasions. Since my graduate student days, Robert H. Ferrell has constantly supported and encouraged me. Also helpful were Aruga Tadashi, Michael Barnhart, Robert J. C. Butow, Roger Dingman, Waldo H. Heinrichs, Hosoya Chihiro, Ishii Osamu, Charles E. Neu, Ian Nish, Ronald Spector, and the late David A. Titus. I greatly appreciate the enthusiasm of the director and editor-in-chief of the University of Missouri Press, Beverly Jarrett, and the transpacific efforts of my editor, Susan King.

This book is dedicated to my former students at Doshisha University.

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