

All I Ever Needed to Know, I Learned in Japan

By Joshua David 2025©

At a young age, I developed a love for the Japanese language and wanted to know more about their culture. I grew up at the beginning of the digital revolution, playing video games, first on Atari, but then on the hugely popular Nintendo and other Japanese made game consoles. I was especially interested in those games that were released only in Japan, and so my infatuation was sparked by wondering at the cryptic language that was filled with a variety of alphabets; especially katakana. I felt that it looked like a futuristic, alien language, and so I would often envision it as being written on the sides of spaceships. This made the video games all the more alluring.

Along with the astonishingly complex nature of the lettering, I fell in love with the Japanese anime graphics that were on the cover of the video game manuals and expressed all throughout the gaming experience. This was the beginning of Japanese anime being introduced en masse in the United States. It was so inspiring to see sophisticated and colorful cartoons compared to the silly Saturday morning cartoons, and the drab colors and overly simplistic characters of the American daytime cartoons, some of which I also loved. Even though I had no idea that they were all inspired by Japanese anime at the time, my favorite titles were *Thundercats*, *The Transformers*, and *Robotech*.

In retrospect, it is clear to me now that because of these cartoons and video games, I was attracted to the culture of Japan. I started my real-world

immersion into the world of Japanese language and culture when I was about 12 years old. I would ride almost 7 miles on a one-speed bicycle, sometimes in the rain, to the Buddhist monastery in the nearby town to learn Japanese at their free language and culture classes. I found Japanese language and customs so fascinating because, just like anime, they were so different from our own. Some could even say backwards. It was this early exposure to this counterintuitivity that positively shaped my capacity for imagination and language ability that I still benefit from today.

Although my family moved out of the area and I had to leave my cherished friends and teachers at the Japanese classes, my love for Japan only got stronger. I continued my love for Japanese video games until my teens, but also got introduced to Japanese music while visiting relatives in Utah when I was about 15. Hearing a seemingly complicated language like Japanese making beautiful harmony, I got hooked on karaoke at our local Japanese restaurant close to home. I remember vividly blowing away my friends and family when I flawlessly sang the Japanese superhit “*Say Yes*,” by Chage and Aska.

Because of these influences that had become passionate hobbies, I decided to go to Japan as a foreign exchange student in 1995, at 17 years old. Although I got ill on the cigarette smoke filled 8 hour flight to Tokyo; it was the beginning of a journey of enlightenment that continues to this day. Upon boarding the bus to our meetup point in the center of Tokyo, I remember being deeply impressed by the dimensions of the architecture. Everything was shaped radically differently than all of the bulky, large square buildings that I had grown up with, but were rectangular, thinner,

taller, and yet smaller. The many dazzling fluorescent and LED lights of the megalopolis dazzled my eyes. I had never seen a city so technologically advanced as Tokyo. And this was in 1995.

After our initiation ceremony in Tokyo, my group was sent to Fukuoka, in the southern region, on a 5 five hour, 186 mile per hour rail trip on a *shinkansen* bullet-train that was unlike anything that I had ever experienced. Our destination in Fukuoka was a cultural learning center so that we could get practice in learning the Japanese ways of not wearing our shoes indoors, eating Japanese food, not wasting food, even a grain of rice, and maintaining the respectful reservation that is the hallmark of Japanese people. The hardest part of this process was learning to eat rice and salty miso soup for breakfast instead of the sweet pancakes, bacon, and eggs breakfast that I had eaten virtually all my life. After this basic training in assimilation to Japanese customs, we were disbursed to our respective host families.

My humbling journey began in a lush country town of 4,000 residents in rural Hiroshima Prefecture (State.) Nostalgically, I tearfully report that the city no longer exists by the same name, *Seranishi-cho*, (Seranishi town,) and the campus no longer exists, *Miwa Kotogakkō*; Miwa High School. It was a traditional Japanese farming town of old, as often seen in Studio Ghibli anime features like, “My Neighbor Totoro.” Rice paddies cradled in pristine nature that was interwoven with old-style Japanese folk homes, *minka*, is what defined the landscape. The air was crisp and clear, the water was fresh and naturally clean, and even the milk was raw. This was far off from the futuristic anime adventures that I had identified with Japan.

I was the only exchange student at my highschool, and there was no foreign English teacher at this small highschool of less than 100. I had to make due with only being able to read 80 of the some 2,450 Japanese *kanji*, Chinese pictograph characters, the *hiragana* and *katakana* basic phonetic alphabets, and less than 20 common spoken phrases. The first month of my communications with my new host family consisted of far more awkward silence and unintelligible abominations of Japanese and English than anything else. I guess I can say that my first job in Japan was butchering its language.

However, at the end of my stay, with the help of my many curious and kind friends and family, at the end of my stay, I was able to read, write, and speak Japanese at a super-fluent, newspaper level. I was even writing song lyrics in Japanese, and playing chords on piano because of the heavy influence of the surreal amount of people in town that were heavily into music. I passionately sang at karaoke, most of the top-ten pop songs that came out in 1995, what I still consider “the golden age of Japanese contemporary J-POP.” I was even on Hiroshima Television, at a Japanese language speech contest for foreign exchange students. I learned a lot and did a lot during that year in rural Japan. It will forever be in my heart.

I consider that year in Japan to be my “golden age.” I had more fun than I have ever had in my life since then. I learned a lot in Japan, but the most valuable lessons that I brought home with me had little to do with culture, language, music, or public speaking. What I learned that was most valuable was Japanese *values*. At the airport on the way home from rural Japan, I was immediately appalled by the entitled, hot-tempered,

consonant complaints of foreigners, *gaijin*, of virtually every westernized “modern” nation around the world at the airport. This left me with a terribly dreadful premonition of what I was going to see when I got back home.

It all started on the first day I got back. As if in the movie, *Castaway*, I was mortified while witnessing person after person eating a little of the oversized meal they had and carelessly tossing the rest in the garbage. I couldn’t bear to look at it, and I mentioned to one person, “You shouldn’t waste food.” They sharply answered back in a passive-aggressive response that, “this is what is good about living in America!” My stomach sank, and so much of why I had such a good time in Japan became obvious. I felt like Tom Cruise in the movie, *The Last Samurai*, when his lieutenant scornfully asks him, “why is it that you hate your own people so much?”

And so it began... I started seeing it everywhere. People preparing a huge dinner and throwing half of it away. People not only wearing their shoes in the house, but sleeping in their bed with their shoes on. People complaining about the \$1.15 price of gasoline, when gas was \$4.75 in Japan. People complaining about the cost of a \$2.50 gallon of milk while it was \$8 for a gallon in Japan. Impishly ignorant and poshly belittling questions of my peers asking, “did you see a lot of samurai there?” “Did you eat a lot of rice?” These not only startled me, but hurt me.

Personal indulgence instead of self-respect. Hordes of obese people that were non-existent in Japan. Overabundance of drugs that needed a

war. Nightly gun and gang related murders on the news. Men striving and being expected to be macho and insensitive. The irony of women painting their faces for a better complexion, overcompensating to the point of looking like a circus clown, when *not* wearing makeup is what gives one a better complexion became apparent to me. Competition instead of cooperation. Self-serving instead of self-management. The audacity to proudly announce in public, “It’s all me up in here!” Personal excellence instead of societal excellence. Justifying sin, “finders keepers.” Chaos instead of harmony. The list goes on and on.

What scared me most was the ignorance of my own ignorance before I went to Japan. What I had proudly thought of as the best; freest, richest, most advanced, most powerful nation on Earth, became the worst; ignorantly conformist, richest though morally poorest, least societally advanced, and most powerful nation on Earth. I became anti-American because I saw people waving a proud flag of a country that allowed all of this to happen to their citizens. I became antisocial because I didn’t want to live in a world like this nor participate in its continuation. Because of my upbringing in this society, I still only had skill in finding problems, and knew almost nothing about solving them.

Until I came home from Japan in highschool, I was a proud patriot and natural super-star in so many ways, but after returning home to a land that was way too satisfied in having less, but in the completely wrong way; I withdrew. I felt helpless. An education system of eugenics; nurturing desperate indentured servants with specialized science degrees and not progressive, non-conformist, self-reliant, thinkers of imagination, agency,

and ambition. Politicians scaring the population to comply with their bad laws with racially-fueled wars on drugs. Preachers claiming that kindness is charity. A society that was addicted to the cocaine of convenience. A society of “I’ll do it for you,” “you do it for me;” but again, in a perverse way. A society that had fallen ill to the “kill ‘em with kindness” that my grandfather would often mysteriously mutter. Bigger, better, faster, cheaper; *for me, me, me, me!* And without any effort.

I regretfully inform those that haven’t realized it yet; it’s *still* this way, 30 years later. An education system that does not want you to think for yourself, but to know only what your employers will want you to know in order to make finding a job more *convenient*. Politicians that *give* your children values instead of work-fatigued parents needing to teach them. Religious institutions that support with loaves and fishes instead of ovens and fishing poles. Mental Health Care that calls people “abnormal” for being defiantly natural in an *unnatural* world; giving them *convenient* ways to continue thinking they are ill, and *convenient* medications. Drug epidemics that are treated by a medical establishment that made these *convenient* drugs available in the first place. Inconveniently mounting numbers of homeless individuals that are only victims of all of these things, but “need to be held accountable.”

“*SO, what do we do about it?!*” Globalization? No. We learn from the Japanese, and retrofit what has become a broken system. It is more than safe to say that the Japanese are no longer our enemies, but great allies. However, this only applies to military and geopolitical politics. We haven’t learned a thing from them, and that which we did try to apply in our society

in the post-war 1950's was a conformity to be polite, and *compulsory* happiness. For men to work in the field and women in the kitchen. For there to be strict law and order. For there to be a common, unifying culture, social, and moral code. But unfortunately we were too literal and scientific about it; as usual, we hit the edge of the target from 1000 yards away with pin-point accuracy.

What we missed was that Japan has traditionally been a naturally evolved, collectivistic society. We took them literally and thought that we could apply these as *rules*, and not *values*, into a system that had become not about natural human values, but *superhuman* values of individualism for which humans do not possess a natural capability to operate. The reason for our problems in this country, and in most industrialized nations, isn't because of capitalism. Our problems are because we have lost our way as nations and got caught up in wanting only more *monetary* capital; and we are doing it in *the* most unintelligent way possible. This is because our current administration of capitalism is morally bankrupt under the definitions of "Good" and "Evil" as set forth by the definitions in my debut web article, *Overcoming Evil with the Power of Love*, and as proposed in my debut book, *The Power of Us*.

The famous quote by our former president, Adam Smith, the "Father of *pre-Modern Economics*, pre-World War II capitalism, "Individual interest serves the common good," obviously states that individual interest is a *means* for the desired *ends* of the *common* good. It does not mean, "the common good serves the individual interest;" at the cost of public health. This is the historical proof that we have indeed lost our way. The way we get

back to the intended spirit of capitalism, and realize an evolution of it that produces *more* capital *and more* public health, is to take what is already a good system and get back to basics by retrofitting it with a firmware update utilizing the *more* advanced, though ancient, society building technological wisdom of the Japanese.

The reason we ought to do this is because Japan's ruling class, the Land of the Rising Sun, although largely not monotheistic, understands the *true* definitions of "Good" and "Evil." That harmony is the key to the sustainability of any system. Those that understand that it is a natural *law*, that when a system demands more than is already enough, the system is inevitable to fail. They understand the power of harmony and how it is the only dynamic that can resist chaos and the inevitable collapse of the system. It is this dynamic of harmony that controls the power of the sun. Some may argue that Japan is rapidly approaching #5 in the world economic system, but they fail to acknowledge that Japan has almost no natural resources, and to recognize that America is overflowing with them.

There is nothing that says that by doing so, we would become a socialist nation. Capitalism is, "Individual interest serving the common good." Ask Adam Smith! We need to stop running our system of harmony *from* chaos, but the inverse. Otherwise, by the self-evident and scientifically verified laws of nature, our current system is destined to supernova sooner than later. Furthermore, it would only be *unintelligent* economists, business leaders, and politicians that would claim counter to this. Running a harmony in chaos model would only produce *more* monetary capital due to greater productivity, efficiency, and even faster innovation.

I submit that running an economic model of harmony for a select few derived from chaos within the general population is destined to fail. It is a dystopian pipe dream; not dystopian for the sickly people being prayed on by the system, but a dystopia for the few at the top that benefit. Under the current strategy of class separation and oligarchy, the ruling few will come to own *all* of the infertile, desolate land, polluted air and water, and destitute, mentally and physically ill, unproductive workers that their fat wallets can handle. They will become the lords of the flies. They will ride their fancy yachts on oceans of cesium-137, which is already happening due to the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima, Japan.

There is *no* getting around the immutable ecosystemic nature of the construction of the universe. We. *Will*. Fail definitely in the long-run, at the current rate.

“OK, smarty pants high school graduate, how do we stop this from happening?” I’m glad you asked. We stop discouraging people to be smart, and tell those that think they are smart, to *be* smart. We must be a society that acts in *its* own best interest globally. By “globally” I mean both consumer and producer alike. In order to make this happen there are two imperatives that we must market:

1. We must inform the population that monetary success and life success are *both* necessary for a satisfying success. That in order for one to be truly successful, one needs both. For a complete sense of true life success to happen, one *must* have a sense of

purpose, as a means to these monetary ends. To attain a sense of purpose, there must be a benefactor, *other than ourselves*. This is a well-known psychological and human development science fact.

2. We must also do the same with corporations. We must re-educate the economic community that the *best* way to make the *most* net revenue is to utilize an economic philosophy which is commensurate with the spirit of the famous quote by our former president and founding influencer Adam Smith. That corporations, their owners, shareholders and investors, must reconsider and innovate what we consider “capital.”

The incontrovertible truth about human happiness is clearly elucidated by studies by the world’s top universities like Harvard and its study, *The Harvard Study of Adult Development*. It is the longest-running longitudinal study in the history of mankind, that clearly continues to prove that *social connection* is directly tied to longevity, *healthy* longevity, and a happy longevity at that. It has clearly concluded that those with social connections and relatively little money are happier than those with only monetary wealth. These findings are synonymous with widely reported stories in the media that most people who win the lottery are less happy than they were when they were poor. Although these claims are highly disputed, Harvard has verified that without people to share this wealth with, and in a healthy environment, they would almost certainly be dissatisfied. This is not “success.”

In the same way, those that own, invest in, and run the high levels of international conglomerates that are made up by corporations must consider this same thing for themselves. Is it “capital” to have all of the monies producible by a sickly society and all-ownership of mostly polluted lands; to revel in their economic triumph surrounded by a world like this? Or is it “capital” to have *more* money produced by more productive, healthy peoples and all-ownership of more highly developed lands, and to revel in their economic triumph amongst a society that isn’t dilapidated and beleaguered by poverty, petty in-fighting social bullying, preventable illness, drug epidemics, homeless epidemics, and masses that need to be incarcerated due to unrest?

Often we treat it as a hopeless moral choice, but it isn’t only that, and it is anything but hopeless. It is only intelligent. It is an issue of good taste and good class. It is an issue of good business. It is a legal issue of fiduciary duty, assurances of against harmful products under the Federal Trade Commission Act, and it is definitely an issue packed with antitrust violations. Most crucially, willfully damaging the population at a profit is an issue of public health like that of the opioid epidemic or tobacco companies. It could be said that under our current system, the real epidemic concerning public health is greed with premeditated malice intent. I don’t see anything “capital” here.

We all want to think of ourselves as “smart,” “powerful,” “in the know,” or “down with it.” But the objective truth is that citizens and corporations alike are *looking* smart, powerful, in the know, and down with it. They are not *acting* smart, powerful, in the know, and down with it. Like

any frustrated psychologist might pound his fists screaming, I assert that “you need to cut the shit and get real!” It is about living intelligently, *living smart*. It’s about definitions of what is “capital.” It is about having more of that which makes all of us *sustainably* happy, *sustainably* healthy, and thus; sustainably *more* wealthy. Corporations may be Evil entities that are destined to be locked onto the Penrose staircase and bottomless oven of the quarter to quarter rise in profit, infinite growth paradigm, but there are many ways to circle these steps.

It’s not rocket or economic science; it’s economic *art*. The Japanese have been doing it for thousands of years. The other indigenous peoples across the world that we exterminated as heathens were doing it way before them. It’s all about putting an emphasis on higher quality, longer-lasting, fewer products that aid one’s life-smartness and not fuel their desperosity. It’s about products that enable more satisfactory and sustainable lifestyles, and not disable satisfaction with cheap products of programmed obsolescence. It’s about curbing inflation by not compelling people into debt to repetitively buy things that are not these. You can never get enough of what almost works.

When we do this, we don’t lose money, we produce *more*. Productive citizens have more expendable income to buy yet higher quality, more longer-lasting, fewer products. This drives innovation like wildfire. This is made possible by an economic model where products and services are passed *up* to the consumer and not handed *down*. It is to sell convenient ways and means to a *better* life and not a suffering one. As I stated in my upcoming book, Self-Discovery Therapy (SDT,) we *know* what good living

consists of, it is set in stone. Far too many of us will brag about how we were able to work hard and cheat the system, when it would have been much easier and beneficial to just go with it. The economics that sells us this sly hacking of life as an ideal, is a major part of the problem.

I claim that by running our capitalist economic system on this circular model that is already realized in Japan, in the spirit of *omotenashi*, “take care of the customer, everything will take care of itself,” that America can leapfrog communist China and be the country of incontrovertible cultural and economic leadership that it once was. The truth is many in the world do not like American products, they do not think we have a good culture; and if you read the first part of this article, I agree with them. It is slipshod and predatory, with the emphasis on profit and not *value*. It’s a completely superficial, paper-tiger product that doesn’t deliver on its promises. We can change this and become *the* most advanced nation on Earth in a fraction of the time that it will take us to destroy ourselves.

This is the most valuable lesson I learned in Japan. This is my imported knowledge for you. Take it or leave it; it is not my show to run....

Please continue your journey with me by joining my readership! I already have published my debut book, *The Power of Us*. I am publishing *Self-Discovery Therapy (SDT)* in March, and I feel that I knocked not only morality but scientific understanding of the universe out of the park with my other web article, available on my website joshuadavidbooks.com, *Overcoming Evil with the Power of Love ~ An Article on the True Definitions of Good and Evil*. See you again soon.

God bless and Godspeed!

Joshua David