

International grobal from Japan the corporation, the agency, the anthropologist, and their friends

Moeran, Brian

Document Version
Final published version

Publication date:
2001

License
CC BY-NC-ND

Citation for published version (APA):
Moeran, B. (2001). *International grobal from Japan: the corporation, the agency, the anthropologist, and their friends.*

[Link to publication in CBS Research Portal](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us (research.lib@cbs.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 09. Oct. 2024



International Global from Japan:

The Corporation, the Agency, the Anthropologist, and their Friends

Brian Moeran
Copenhagen Business School

This paper examines the build-up to a competitive presentation for the international division of the audio-visual manufacturer, Frontier,¹ by a Japanese advertising agency, which was asked to prepare a single coherent campaign for both Germany and the United States of America. It traces some of the problems involved in Japanese ‘imagining the west’, looks at the Agency’s solutions to these problems, and describes the role played by myself as anthropologist in some of the campaign ideas that, eventually, met with success when Frontier awarded the Agency its international audio-visual account.

Whenever an advertising agency is asked to make a ‘pitch’ or presentation to a (would-be) client, it finds itself having to learn – often extremely rapidly – as much as it can about that client’s business. This learning process includes all there is to know (or all the client chooses to let the agency concerned know) about its products, sales, targeted consumers, and so on. But it is not limited to the market in which the client operates (or to the ‘field’ in which it is located along with its several competitors). It also tries to find out about how the client company is itself organised – in particular, the power structure that authorises who are, and who are not, decision makers in its managerial hierarchy. It is mastery of this combination of market, field and organisational factors that enables an agency to win accounts and grow in size.

In this case, the Agency was asked to present several sets of advertising ideas that would, firstly, meet and satisfy prevailing, but rather different, market conditions in Germany and the United States; and secondly, include common language and visuals that would appeal to two national groups of consumers whose cultural backgrounds and expectations were very different. But the Agency also needed to know *who* within Frontier’s Tokyo headquarters was going to make the final decision about whether its work was appropriate. This meant, thirdly, that it needed to take account of one or more particular Japanese managers’ personal likes and dislikes, and their ideas of what might be the best way to appeal to Germans and Americans. This

rather more abstract nature of their work was complicated by the fact that – just as Europeans and Americans tend not to distinguish between Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, mainland Chinese (themselves divided into different groups), and so on, but to see them all as ‘Asians’ – Japanese tend to lump all those living outside Asia and Africa as ‘westerners’. At the same time, moreover, their images of themselves as Japanese have very often been subject to ‘western’ depictions of the other. In short, the Agency found itself in a complex situation where the objective realities of the market tended to be confused with the subjective tastes and preferences of individual personalities, and occidentalism (Carrier 1995) was at times indistinguishable from orientalism.²

It is these confusions that this paper sets out to address as it follows the Agency’s attempt to appeal to two rather different ‘western’ audiences, as well as construct a Japaneseness about Frontier that would ‘work’ in the west.³ At the same time, the paper brings into play a second issue that is of relevance to many of those anthropologists who are involved as more than just participants and observers in the objects of their study, and who find themselves simultaneously acting as consultants – authorities even – on a particular person, thing, event, form of communication or whatever, merely because they happen to have spent a (large) part of their lives in one particular part of the world (which is not that of those whom they study).

One of the questions often faced by anthropologists in the field is: how useful – if at all – can they be to those whom they are studying and who act as their ‘informants’? Partly related to this is a difficulty concerning the very process of the ethnographic act. There comes a point in all fieldwork when we realise that we are getting the same information (albeit in different guises) and that somehow we need to ‘break through’ what we are being told by our informants and so experience a new dimension of cultural understanding. The question is, how does this happen? Sometimes answers to these two questions coincide in a positive manner to assist the ethnographic endeavour. At other times, frustratingly (Bowen 1954), they achieve more or less the opposite effect.

This paper, then, is also about how, as an anthropologist doing fieldwork in what has since become a rather large Japanese advertising agency (see Moeran 1996a), I was able to make a contribution to that agency’s pitch to its prospective client.

Background

In the spring of 1989, the international division of Frontier’s headquarters in Tokyo asked its contracted agency, J & M, to prepare an advertising campaign that would elevate its brand image in both the United States and Germany. At the same time, because the Agency in which I was conducting my research was already successfully handling one of Frontier’s domestic accounts, and because it had learned that certain people in Frontier were not that satisfied with the work currently being done by J & M, it managed to persuade the international division to invite it to participate in a competitive presentation with the rival agency.

Frontier had decided to manage its overall marketing strategy by three broad geographical areas: America, Europe and Asia. Its sales covered a broad range of products from laser disc software to car navigation systems, by way of computer CD

Roms, CD players, multi-cassette players, projection TV sets, and so on. Some of these (e.g. laser disc players) were better established in the United States than in Europe.

There were three problematic areas to be dealt with by the Agency. Firstly, *brand image*: Frontier was not seen to be as technologically advanced as Sony, in spite of the fact that it was the originator of laser technology, and was thus in danger of being relegated to the position of a 'mini Sony' in consumers' estimation. Secondly, *the market situation*: connected with the first point, Frontier's targeted consumers were generally seen to be limited because there was an overall impression that they were older than Sony's customers. However, the reunification of Germany and the forthcoming unification of Europe (EU) provided the company with an opportunity to rejuvenate its overall brand image in Europe at least, even though the amount of advertising hitherto done in Germany did not measure up to that put out by Sony. There was also market potential in the distribution of the company's software through the expanding rental markets in both the US and Germany. Thirdly, *products*: most consumers saw no fundamental differences in the essential qualities of the products put out by Frontier and its competitors.

Following from this, the Agency calculated that it was necessary to take account of, and somehow get across to, consumers a number of related points. Firstly, its client should emphasise its brand name: its strength as a 'Frontier' in audio-visual technology. Secondly, it should point to its actual leadership in laser technology (it was the first company to produce laser discs, compatible LDs, and multi-CD players). Thirdly, it should stress the superiority of its laser technology products in terms of density of information, durability, access, digitalisation, 're-writability', and so on. Fourthly, it should play on its record as a technological innovator both in the past and in the future and, fifthly, on the reliability and high quality of its products (already established in the audio field). Sixthly, it should develop a broad corporate concept that pursued an emphasis on personal freedom and the idea of entertainment as a means towards enriching consumers' lives. Finally, it should go about formulating a single concept of 'one brand, one voice' that would function globally and be reinforced by a set of coherent creative ideas (that hitherto had been absent from its advertising campaigns abroad).

To achieve all these aims, Frontier had to address two main target audiences. The first – the 'outer' audience group – consisted of 20 and 30 year old men and women in Germany and the US, who were in an upper-middle socio-economic bracket and included those who already owned entertainment-oriented VTR players, were influential in the development of information technology, as well as steady, rather than just trend-conscious, consumers. The second – the 'inner' audience group – consisted of those employed in Frontier itself, at its headquarters in Tokyo, as well as at sales outlets and in branch offices abroad in Germany and the US. It also included those working on Frontier accounts in American and German advertising agencies.

The campaign's immediate external purpose, then, was to improve Frontier's corporate image, brand prestige and aspirational value. Its mid- to long-term aim was to create a unified global umbrella brand image ('one brand, one voice'), which would cover particular product advertising campaigns in individual countries around the world. Its internal purpose was to boost morale within the client company and ensure that employees realised the initiative being taken by headquarters management in creating Frontier's new image strategy.

Brand Concept and Pre-Presentation

Having arrived at this analysis of the market and Frontier's position therein, the Agency needed to come up with a basic brand concept, corporate slogan and communication strategy that included one or more sets of print advertisements illustrating the approach it was proposing that Frontier adopt. It was here that the anthropologist entered the game.

As part of my fieldwork in the Agency, I was placed in different divisions – print media buying, television advertising, marketing, merchandising, and so on – for a month at a time in order to learn how employees went about their jobs. In due course, I found myself in the Accounts Services Office, a particular opaque part of the Agency because of the extremely intimate relations developed by account executives⁴ with their opposite numbers (product managers, advertising managers, directors, and so on) in client companies (see Moeran 1996a). I had heard about the existence of 'presentations', but had little idea of when or where or how often they took place; of who attended them, or of what they consisted of in substance. I had mentioned this point to Yano, the manager of the office in which I was located, but we both knew that this might be an even more difficult piece of the Agency's business to participate in and observe because of the recurrent problem of 'client confidentiality'.

One evening, however, Yano phoned me up after I had got home and asked whether I would be free the following morning at ten o'clock. "As a matter of fact," he said, "We've been asked to prepare an ad campaign for Frontier to be used in America and Germany, and we need a European to give us his opinion about our visual ideas. Could you possibly oblige, *sensei*?" He asked, politely using an honorific form of address ('teacher'). "There will be an informal presentation to Frontier in the afternoon, and I'll try to get you in on that in exchange."

I was willing, of course, and, of course, I 'obliged'. The following morning, a Friday, I found myself in one of the Agency's small, windowless meeting rooms, surrounded by half a dozen men – all smoking – and gazing at several large placards on the tables in front of us. Boards with ads by rival companies were placed on a thin shelf along one wall of the room in front of me. After a brief introduction by Yano, I was filled in on the situation described in more detail above and was asked to give my opinion on six series of ads that the Agency had prepared for a 'pre-presentation' that afternoon to one of the Frontier managers. The real pitch would take place the following Tuesday.

With that I was shown several sets of pictures, all with headlines, dummy copy,⁵ the client's name and slogan. One series (referred to as 'perspiration', because of one of its visuals) consisted of stark black and white photographs of musicians (a flamenco dancer, jazz drummer and classical violinist). The second (called the 'nature') series was of slightly greenish-grey tinted photographs of what was almost certainly an American desert, while a third ('home entertainment') depicted various combinations of laser and compact disc outlines in which were photos of different entertainers performing. The fourth series (known as 'musicians') consisted of photos of three men with musical instruments; and the fifth ('young women'), of attractive young models asking which company made the first laser disc player and other Frontier products. The sixth series (known as 'creativity quotient' after one of the headlines) had yet to arrive from the Agency's international subsidiary down the road.

I did my best to say something about each. The ‘perspiration’ series might do better in Germany than in the US since it seemed to be aimed more at ‘intellectual’ than ordinary music lovers. Also, *Performance is my soul’s voice* might be a better headline than *Music is my soul’s voice* for the flamenco dancer, if only to avoid repetition of the word ‘music’ that was being used for the picture of the classical musician. The ‘young women’ ads seemed fairly sexist (one model was standing by a doorway with a come-on look that reminded me of Soho prostitutes back in the 50s) and might therefore cause offence in America and/or Germany. Both the ‘nature’ and ‘musicians’ series had some ‘orientalist’ headlines that were styled as if they were *haiku* poems (*Nature speaks / loudest / when silent* and *A month of filming / five minutes / on the screen*). These would probably appeal to Japanese – in particular, the ‘nature’ ads – but I was not convinced that they would persuade the targeted American and German consumers of Frontier’s merits. The ‘creativity quotient’ series, when it arrived, I found hard to grasp. Ad mock-ups showed Jimmy Hendrix with his guitar, Walt Disney with a drawing of Mickey Mouse, and Orson Welles gazing down at *Citizen Kane* on stage (described in the body copy as the ‘Kane Mutiny’!). What was the connection? Each picture, came the answer, showed Frontier’s pioneering spirit. Was it a spirit, then, that existed only in the past?

The Frontier tagline, too, caught my attention: *The pulse of entertainment*. I asked how this idea in particular had been arrived at, but was told that Frontier itself had given the Agency this phrase to work with at its orientation two weeks previously. A second choice had been *The art of entertainment* which, we agreed, was only marginally – if at all – better. A third alternative, much liked by a senior Frontier director, was *The light of joy and creativity*. Hmmm. We had something to think about.

By this time, it was well after midday and someone brought in some *bentō* packed lunches. I was being pressed to say which series I liked best. I went for the ‘perspiration’ series, mainly because of the immediate effect of the stark, black and white visuals of the flamenco dancers, jazz drummer and classical violinist, but I knew that this was a choice based on a combination of personal cosmopolitan eclecticism and (upper middle?) class taste. The ‘home entertainment’ series seemed to be direct and to the point – something that both Americans and Germans might appreciate. The ‘creativity quotient’ series was interesting, but not immediately understandable in the context of Frontier’s *future* marketing strategy abroad.

The pre-presentation took place early that afternoon. Those present included three members of Frontier’s international division, and, from the Agency, its account team; a creative team from its international subsidiary (including an American copywriter [“I didn’t write those nature ads”]); my boss for the month, Yano; the chief of the Agency’s international division; the Agency’s executive director; and myself. During the best part of the following two hours, three different account executives explained the Agency’s marketing and communications strategies. There were some sharp questions from Tanaka, the chief Frontier executive present, who asked the Agency to explain, for example, why it was using red rather than standard blue for his company’s logo; and why it had not made use of the ‘light’ (*hikari*) tagline even though it had been emphasised by the managing director of Frontier at the Agency’s orientation two weeks previously. He asked more detailed questions about the Agency’s media plan and budgeting, before wondering how the six series of ads presented were to be taken. Was the Agency going to recommend a particular

approach? Or was it going to leave Frontier to fumble around on its own (to Tanaka's mind, a fatal strategy)?

The senior account executive was clearly at a loss. Hesitating a few long seconds, he finally suggested that the 'perspiration' series would be the Agency's recommendation – followed by the 'creativity quotient' series with Jimmi Hendrix and his guitar. Tanaka did not seem that impressed. So far as he could judge, the 'home entertainment' series would benefit sales, while the 'nature' ads would probably help Frontier's corporate image. Perhaps the Agency should check consumer reactions to these series by Tuesday? Moreover the Agency had made no attempt to distinguish between American and German cultural differences. This was a problem for Frontier's head office since it had to persuade its people in Germany that what it was doing was right; it needed back-up reasoning for its choice.

Where do we go from here?

It was 3.25 pm when Tanaka and his colleagues took their leave. Once they had been seen off at the elevators, everyone reassembled in the same room for a *post mortem*. The international division chief said that if the presentation proper was to go smoothly, we had to have just one presenter. The senior account executive, Ueno, was singled out for this job. Next, the competing agency, J & M, was bound to take along at least one foreigner to its presentation. We had to do the same. The American copywriter had to be in Chicago that day on another job, so I was asked to act as the Agency's foreign 'spokesman' at the presentation the following Tuesday. Bingo!

The next question was: who was the Agency's target man in Frontier? In other words, who was going to have the greatest say in whether the Agency was, or was not, chosen to represent Frontier in Germany and the United States? One of the domestic account executives quickly mentioned a name, Oba – the man who was keen on the idea of 'light' as an overall concept. Then, continued the international division's chief, we had to decide which ads he was likely to dis/approve of and make our selection accordingly. We had better be quite clear, too, about why we had decided not to go for his tagline, *The light of joy and creativity*.

There followed a long and somewhat convoluted discussion about each of the series presented. Was there a problem of permissions with the 'perspiration' series? No, the Agency had already got permission from the photographer concerned, but there might be a problem perhaps with the performers themselves. Although they didn't have to do anything for the series since the photos had already been taken, they would probably be content with a flat fee of, say, ¥10 million. But their managers would want twice that amount and would probably demand backing from Frontier for their protégées' concerts, once they realised that the ads were for Frontier's overall brand image. Still, there were more than 100 photos available so we could always move to a new artist if one got difficult.

What about the 'nature' series? This aroused some controversy. Many of those present liked it, but the American copywriter and myself continued to wrinkle our noses at it for one reason or another, but particularly because of the headlines. After some further discussion, the 'musicians' series was put aside, as was the 'young women' series to which Tanaka had apparently reacted in a manner rather similar to myself since he had been overheard muttering 'prostitution' to one of his colleagues. This left us with the 'creativity quotient' and 'home entertainment' series. The latter

seemed more promising given Tanaka's parting words and its obvious product sales approach. Could its design be altered somehow to fit in with the 'perspiration' series and so enable the Agency to propose 'Phase 1' and 'Phase 2' stages in its presentation the following Tuesday? With a bit of playing around (first, by peeling off some letters down one side of one series), we found that design-wise they could be made to resemble each other. But Ueno, the account executive who was to make the presentation, did not feel very happy about the idea of 'phases', even though it was clearly important for Frontier. He would have to come up with a rationale for them – starting with a broad theme, perhaps, before narrowing down to particulars – in order to justify why the Agency had selected these two particular series of ads.

At this point, there was a long telephone call taken by the account executive in charge of Frontier's domestic account executive. It seemed that someone somewhere in the Agency had already been in touch with Tanaka who had been more than pleased with the 'perspiration' and 'nature' series. Still, J & M were due to make their presentation the following Monday, so maybe we should postpone our final decision until we had heard what had gone on there.⁶

In the meantime, there were things to be done. The tagline, *The pulse of entertainment*, had to be checked in the U.S. by the American copywriter once he got there. He should also try out *The light of joy and creativity*, since this was so close to Oba's heart. We should also include, perhaps, taglines used by competitors – like Sony's *The one and only* – when surveying American reactions. I offered to ask my foreign friends in Tokyo what they thought of these taglines. This was readily accepted. Try to get an overall ranking, too, of each of the series, together with a dis/like survey of visuals, headlines, body copy (where used), tagline, design and total impact. Did the separate elements in each of the series interconnect? Did people actually shift from visual to headline to body copy to tagline? If so, why? And what did they think of Frontier as a result? In the meantime, someone had discovered half a dozen 40 year-old American men with artificial suntans sitting in the corridor waiting to audition for a television commercial and they were brought in to give their (inconclusive) opinions.

Entertaining ideas

That evening I met up with some friends in a Belgian pub, and showed them some of the ad series that I had been given. Not one of them liked the tagline. One – in a passable imitation of Laurence Olivier as Henry V at Agincourt – suggested *To the Frontiers*. Another – who worked in the fashion industry – said that the trouble with Frontier was that it was too frightened of being forthright. "Like its name says," she said, "It's a cutting edge company." This helped me latch onto the taglines, *Like the name says* and *It's (all) in the name*. While I sipped my beer, I also scrawled down another phrase that leapt to mind: *Entertaining ideas for the future*.

Advertising, as I was to learn, often advances by means of a process of *post-rationalisation*. I needed to justify *It's (all) in the name* and found myself going back to principles of structural linguistics read many years previously. The following morning I explained to Ueno over the phone how Frontier needed to set itself apart from its competitors by ensuring that its tagline did not have any associations with those of rival companies. *The art of entertainment* ran into trouble with Aiwa's *The art of Aiwa*, while any allusion to the 'future' would run foul of JVC's *Founders of*

the future, and a focus on technology would clash with Sanyo's *The new wave in Japanese technology*. By focussing on *entertainment*, I reasoned, Frontier would merely be falling in line with a set of associations (art, technology, future) that did not really differentiate one company from another, in the way that Sony had been able to do with its *The one and only*. Frontier needed to be incomparable. It had to adopt a tagline that was distinctive, not subject to fashion and timeless. By going for something like *It's (all) in the name*, *The name says it (all)* or *Like the name says*, Frontier would be able to re-enforce its image and turn back on itself in a never-ending cycle. Frontier, the corporation's name, was a frontier – a descriptive noun that was also the company's name, and so on *ad infinitum*. In short, *Frontier = Frontier*.

Ueno did not sound particularly enthusiastic, and I had the distinct impression that he knew all about semiotics and structural linguistics. Nevertheless, he asked me to write it all down for a Monday morning meeting. In the meantime, I tried to get friends' reactions to the ad series dreamed up by the creative team, and added my own tagline for comment among the others given to the Agency by Frontier. Although there was no clear-cut favourite so far as the series were concerned (the 'perspiration' and 'creativity quotient' ads were generally preferred to the 'nature' and 'home entertainment' series), a resounding majority of the twenty or so people I asked picked out *Like the name says* and/or *It's in the name* as their preferred tagline (provided I drop the *all*).

On Monday morning I presented my findings to Ueno who seemed more preoccupied with other, more urgent, matters. So little time, so much still to do. The creative people had been working through the weekend and all last night, trying to get everything right. The media planner had been faxing back and forth between Tokyo and the Agency's offices in Los Angeles and Frankfurt, trying to get the necessary information on costs, reach, frequency, gross impression and the other imponderables of audience reception, so that Ueno could confidently answer any nasty questions about the proposed campaign budget when we made our presentation the following afternoon. There did not seem to be much that I could do, apart from pointing out one or two spelling mistakes and misprints, so I went off and did other things about the Agency. Maybe I had been a bit overoptimistic about my own potential usefulness as both foreigner and academic in the creation of the Frontier campaign.

Presentation and Result

Or had I? The next afternoon we took a train down to Frontier's headquarters in Meguro, heavily loaded with slide and overhead projectors, a couple of dozen bound copies of the presentation proposal, ad story boards, and so on. We were sent up to the twelfth floor and prepared ourselves for the 'tournament of value' that was about to take place. The Agency fielded ten people all told (three of them senior executive directors who were not involved in preparations for the presentation), while Frontier brought in almost two dozen – ranging from senior executives to middle- and low-ranking managers. We sat one side of a long oval table, they the other and at the end of the boardroom.

Proceedings began with the usual greetings, before Ueno was given the floor. He started off on points made in Frontier's orientation to the Agency, moved to a market analysis and then embarked upon the Agency's proposed communication strategy. Making use of slides, he outlined the 'inner' and 'outer' target audiences, the

campaign aims and basic brand concept, *Towards New Frontiers in Entertainment*, before shifting to a discussion of the tagline. After outlining reasons for adopting *The Pulse of Entertainment*, he suddenly flashed on the screen as an alternative, *Entertaining Ideas for the Future*. This, he said, had been very favourably received in the United States (he had actually had the tagline checked) because it attracted one's attention, gave off an impression of creative products, resonated well, was future oriented and suitable for entertainment-related products.

Just as I was praising the creative effects of Belgian beer and wondering whether I might have a future career in an American advertising agency, Ueno introduced a new slide proposing a second series of taglines – *Like the name says, The name says it all* and *It's all in the name* – under the umbrella concept of *Frontier = Frontier*. He then proceeded to justify the Agency's reasoning along precisely the lines that I had used over the phone to him the previous Saturday morning.

The creative recommendations that followed were divided into 'depth' (*Frontier = Frontier*) and 'scope' (*Entertaining ideas for the future*) approaches. The 'performance' series was recommended for the depth approach (with *Performance is my soul's voice* as the headline for the visual of the flamenco dancer), and the 'nature' series as back-up. For its 'scope' approach, the Agency recommended the 'home entertainment' and 'creativity quotient' series in that order. Noticing my surprise, the international division chief, who was sitting beside me, leant over and whispered in my ear: "Very good ideas, *sensei*."

But would they be good enough to persuade Frontier to choose the Agency over its rival, J & M? We found out soon enough. The very next afternoon, I was asked to present myself in one of the Agency's smartest meeting rooms at 4 o'clock when Tanaka was coming to inform us officially that Frontier had decided to award the Agency its international account. We gathered on the ninth floor of its offices in the Ginza – Tanaka and his two junior colleagues from Frontier, a dozen or more from the Agency, including two or three from senior management. Tanaka informed us that those present at the two presentations the previous afternoon had been involved in fairly lengthy discussions over the de/merits of each of the agencies' proposals. Two things had had to be decided: the brand concept and tagline; and the communication strategy and ad campaigns to be used. As a result, Frontier had decided to go for *The art of entertainment*, and to turn down all communication strategy ideas and ask for new series of ads to be made. While younger members of Frontier had felt more inclined to support J & M's vision of *Power Technology*, older members had felt that the Agency's 'perspiration' and 'home entertainment' series were closer to Frontier's vision. However, all agreed that the Agency had *potential* and it was this potential – exhibited in its ability to come up with new taglines in particular – that decided Frontier to award it its account. Apparently *everyone* present had agreed that the tagline to go for was *It's (all) in the name*. This, they felt, expressed exactly what Frontier was all about. But those at the top – and, remember, Oba was still keen on his 'light' idea – had felt that it was perhaps a little too ahead of its time (20 to 30 years ahead in fact) and that it was a mite too close in concept to Sony's *The one and only*. If Frontier came to be seen as a 'mini' Sony, that would be the end. So, reluctantly, they decided to shelve *It's in the name*, even though the tagline remained consciously in their minds.

Commentary

What does this brief account of the Agency's preparations – and my own role therein – for its presentation to Frontier for an advertising campaign aimed at American and German markets have to tell us?

Firstly, let us take the problem of Japanese perceptions of the western other. Generally speaking, Japanese distinguish between themselves and other Asians (extending as far as India and the South Asian continent); between themselves and Africans; and between themselves and 'the west' (*seiyō*). They also make less general classificatory distinctions between the 'middle east' (*chūkintō*), 'Europe' (*yōroppa*), the United States (*beikoku*), South America (*nanbei*), and so on, but the people who live there – with the exception of indigenous populations such as American Indians and the Inuit – are categorized as 'westerners' (*seiyōjin*). In this respect, they promote the same sort of difference between 'us' (the familiar) and 'them' (the strange) that Edward Said (1978:43) notes of orientalist writing about the east. They also indulge in the same kind of essentialism and absolutism, since Japanese – like those writing about Japan – define what is notable about the other by resorting to features such as non/individuality, non/hierarchy, and dis/harmony. In general, we may say that, as a result of their economic success in the second half of the twentieth century, the Japanese have been able to re-image characteristics applied to them by 'western' orientalists and now successfully propagate 'counter-orientalism' (Moeran 1996b) as a new hegemonic discourse.

An important point to note about the continued efficacy of orientalist and counter-orientalist images is that it is the *media* that are most active in their dissemination to *mass* audiences that have immediate access and reaction to such images throughout the world. In this respect, media have, perhaps, far greater influence than ever was exerted by the scholars and administrators discussed by Said in his exposition of orientalist practices in earlier times (Moeran 1996b:108). Part of the reason for the media's adoption of these grossly contorted views of 'the other' is to be found in the constraints of time and/or space under which they operate.

Clearly, advertising suffers from such constraints. It needs to get across a particular set of images that reflect a marketing need and appeal to a particular group or groups of people in a single printed page or television commercial that, in Japan, usually lasts no longer than fifteen seconds. To this end, advertising is obliged to make use of existing classifications that are readily understood by its targeted audiences, while ensuring that these classifications set advertised products *apart* from other similar products. It is thus likely to avail itself of existing orientalist or occidentalist images in order to achieve its aims, since it does not have the space or time for complicated, or for complicating, issues. In this respect, we may say that at one level the relentless dichotomy of orientalist and occidentalist images found in advertising indicates *stylistic* differences – which are compatible and comparable, rather than opposite and irreconcilable (Moeran and Skov 1997:182). At a second level, these common differences are not suppressed but *promoted* and *structured* by an advertising system that is now becoming global in its forms (cf. Wilk 1995:118).

In preparing for the Frontier presentation, the Agency adopted as stylistic differences the general structural principles by which Japanese classify foreigners.

Americans and Germans were both ‘westerners’ (in other words, not ‘Japanese’) and therefore more or less the same. If pressed, those concerned could fall back on secondary clichés. Americans were only interested in a ‘hard sell’ (hence the account team’s preference for the ‘entertainment’ series, which was backed up in discussion by Tanaka when he visited the Agency to award it the Frontier account). Germans worked hard and had a tradition of ‘musical culture’ (hence its choice of the ‘perspiration’ series, featuring flamenco, jazz and classical musicians).

That these differences were also reflected in *my* comments as a European on the Agency’s creative work shows how much we all rely on this structure of common differences. After all, I pointed out that Germans probably valued their musical tradition more than Americans (in spite of the fact that one of the ads in the perspiration series featured a black jazz drummer). I had no difficulty in accepting my Japanese colleagues’ expectations that Germans would link the ‘perspiration’ series with their own (essentialised?) self-image as a hard-working people (making them akin to Japanese themselves). And I could readily see how the straight-to-the-point ‘home entertainment’ series would probably appeal slightly more to an American audience. There is support here, therefore, for James Carrier’s argument that there are two kinds of occidentalism: one existing within academic anthropology; the other used by people being studied by anthropologists (Carrier 1995:8-14).

At the same time, the example given here shows just how ‘political contingencies shape the orientalisms and occidentalisms’ (Carrier 1995:8) of the Agency’s account team and members of its targeted client, Frontier. Throughout its preparations for the presentation, the Agency did its best *not* to make a selection from its six main campaign series by proposing one or two of them to its client (until ordered to do so by Tanaka). In a way the account team wanted to *avoid* making a distinction between two audiences – one in Germany and the other in the United States – which were, in the normal course of things, not clearly distinguished, but lumped together as ‘western’. At the same time, though, because it was trying to win its client’s account, the Agency needed to find out precisely how those in Frontier themselves defined ‘the west’, and what images they would use to differentiate between Americans and Germans. More specifically, members of the account team had to find out who in particular was responsible for the decision to award, or not to award, the Agency the Frontier account. The final images – the final orientalisms and occidentalisms – used by the Agency in its presentation, therefore, depended in large part on the *individual* interpretations of what constituted ‘German’ and ‘American’ by two members of Frontier’s senior management (Tanaka and Oba).⁷

As a result of these contingencies, which also included the Agency’s own need to adapt creative ideas to its market analysis of Frontier’s situation and an Anglo-Irish anthropologist’s views on what made sense to himself as a European (after living a dozen years in Japan and having to struggle with orientalism during most of his academic life), the Agency eventually put forward four main ideas. By then it had a pretty good idea that its two main choices – the ‘performance’ and ‘home entertainment’ series – were approved of by Tanaka, if not Oba. But each of these series also reflected other aspects of the Japanese discourse of the western other. The ‘performance’ series was proposed for ‘depth’ in the Agency’s communication strategy because Europe is seen by the Japanese as a repository of ‘high culture’ (Moeran 1983:102-3; Moeran and Skov 1996) and thus of cultural ‘depth’. Similarly, the sheer geographical expanse of the United States was reflected in the Agency’s choice of the ‘home entertainment’ series for ‘scope’ (*hirogari*), which was also

epitomised by the supporting ‘nature’ series that made use of visuals of vast expanses of uninhabited American desert.

At the same time, having discarded the Frontier managing director’s idea of ‘light’ (*hikari*) in both its choice of tagline and campaign ideas, the Agency’s account team *had* to find something that it knew would appeal to the client’s decision makers. Thus, against the advice of its resident European anthropologist and American copywriter, the ‘nature’ series was included because the Agency knew that it would appeal to both major decision-makers in Frontier (Oba and Tanaka). Why the appeal? Because it invoked an essential Japanese orientalism of ‘naturalness’ that not only posits a trinity of nature, harmony and race, but sets these against ‘the west’ in numerous different ways, often relating ‘nature’ to technological superiority (see Moeran and Skov 1997:182-185).⁸

In other words, in trying to isolate and express corporate and commodity differences, the Agency tried to narrow its client’s gaze to *particular kinds* of difference. Rather like beauty pageants in Belize, therefore, advertising campaigns can be said to:

Organise and focus debate, and in the process of foregrounding particular kinds of difference, they submerge and obscure others by pushing them into the background. They standardise a vocabulary for describing difference, and provide a syntax for its expression, to produce a common frame of organised distinction, in the process making wildly disparate groups of people intelligible to each other. They essentialise some kinds of differences as ethnic, physical and immutable, and portray them as measurable and scalable characteristics, washing them with the legitimacy of objectivity. And they use these distinctions to draw systemic connections between disparate parts of the world system.

(Wilk 1995:130)

What this discussion shows us, I think, is just how difficult it is to separate the elements that go into our own and others’ constructions of others (and ourselves). As Lise Skov and I (1997:191-194) have argued more generally elsewhere, the fact that Frontier and the Agency were embarked upon a global campaign strategy merely complicated the way in which a proposed advertising strategy participated in cultural reproduction. Campaigns addressed at American and German target audiences had little choice but to adopt a *lingua franca* of consumerism which acted as a visual shorthand for specific places, dramas and meanings. In spite of the structure of common differences, therefore, orientalist and occidentalist images become focal points in a *global stylistic continuity* (Moeran and Skov 1997:193) and tend thus to be the same, whether they are produced in Japan (Creighton 1995), Europe (Moeran 1996b), or the United States. They both integrate the other and are integrated in the other.

Concluding Ethnography

And finally, what does this discussion tell us about doing fieldwork in large organizations like an advertising agency? A little background detail is necessary here.

Firstly, I entered the Agency through personal contacts resulting from my own activities as a contributor to a major regional newspaper in Japan. I was accepted by the CEO as a researcher whose clearly stated aims were to find out the social processes behind the construction of advertisements and who was thus more concerned with the world of advertising than with advertisements as products.

Secondly, the Agency planned a full programme for me prior to my joining the organization. I started out in the President's Office for two weeks, before moving to Media Buying (with a week each in magazines, newspapers, television and radio) and thence, for a further two months, to Marketing and Market Development. It was then planned that I join Account Services, before being placed in the International Division, followed by Creative, PR and S(pecial) P(romotions). Initially, it was also planned that I stay with the Personnel and Finance divisions towards the end of my year's fieldwork in the Agency. However, it was agreed that the programme would be flexible and, as time went by, I found myself making numerous adaptations to the original plan as particular interests or case studies led me astray from the division in which I was supposed to be nestling at a particular time. My stay in media buying, for example, became extended when I found myself involved in the Agency's important work in animated cartoons (as part of their business strategy of programme development). I entered the International Division somewhat earlier than planned because of an impending European car account presentation, and stayed rather longer off and on in Account Services because of the case study of a contact lens campaign that, all in all, lasted four months. I spent the best part of an extra month with the new recruits in April as they underwent their training programme. Eventually, it was agreed that I would not spend any undue length of time in either the Personnel or Finance divisions, although I did, of course, carry out interviews with senior management therein.

Fieldwork in the Agency, like all fieldwork experiences, was 'a period of particularly heightened intensity' (Watson 1999:2) during which I found myself struggling to grasp the complexities of Japan's advertising industry as a whole, on the one hand, and the particular practices of the Agency and its different divisions, on the other. As in previous fieldwork experiences, I developed special relationships with two or three of my informants. As on other occasions, I experienced a particular moment that led to my learning far more about the subject being studied than might otherwise have been the case. This paper records that powerful moment when I was, by a combination of luck and social skills, able to make the kind of breakthrough in fieldwork enquiry that all anthropologists need.

But the nature of that breakthrough was rather different in kind than that experienced elsewhere and, so far as I can judge, by other anthropologists (see, for example, the contributors to Watson 1999). I say this because, whereas in my first fieldwork experience (in a Japanese pottery community), I came to have a deeper understanding of people's lives and ways of thinking from a close personal friendship with an informant as well as from a tragic accident involving my elder son (see Moeran 1998 [1985]), in a later study (of art marketing in Japan), I was able to come to appreciate some of the difficulties expressed by my informants when I found myself holding my own pottery exhibition in a Japanese department store (Moeran 1990). Here, it was my own knowledge of the craft or trade being studied that led me, I think, to appreciate issues in a manner that went beyond the intellectual level (see, among others, Wacquant 1995 and Wulff 1998).

In the case of my fieldwork in the Agency, the fact that I was able – by a combination of luck and a little training in structural linguistics – to come up with a corporate slogan for a potential client had an immediate effect upon my research. Until that moment, some three to four months into fieldwork, I had – I realised later – been skating along on the surface of the advertising industry and the Agency’s participation therein. But once I had been given and taken the chance to prove that I could make a *contribution* to the Agency’s work, I found all sorts of doors suddenly opened to me. People whom I hardly knew suddenly approached me, asking for my ‘advice’ on this and that – including anything from how to brand ANA’s business class travel to creating a campaign idea for the sale of a fabric softener, by way of writing copy for a VISA commercial. Some of the ideas that I came up with were successful (the VISA copy passed the client first time round, much to the astonishment and admiration of a seasoned New York advertising executive stationed in the Agency); others less so (I don’t think ‘*ClubANA*’ plus related ‘*AmericANA*’, ‘*CubANA*’, ‘*MexicANA*’ and so on ever took off!). But they all provided me with great opportunities to find out about the different kinds of work that the Agency was doing, how it interacted with its clients (since I was often invited to Agency-client meetings), and how employees in different divisions in the Agency itself interacted.

In this respect, then, fieldwork in an advertising agency actively demanded participation in the tasks that were set the organization. Failure to come up with ideas that were seen to be ‘good’ would not, I am sure, have enabled me to gain access to so many different activities and work situations and so to make the kinds of observations that I was able to do. Success makes me think very hard about what sort of organization I should study next.

References

- Bowen, Elenore Smith 1954 *Return to Laughter: an anthropological novel*, New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Carrier, James (ed.) 1995 *Occidentalism: images of the west*, Oxford: Berg.
- Creighton, Millie 1995 'Imaging the other in Japanese advertising', in J. Carrier (ed.) *Occidentalism: images of the west*, Oxford: Berg.
- Moeran, Brian 1983 'The language of Japanese tourism', in N. Graburn (ed.) *The Anthropology of Tourism, Annals of Tourism Research* 10: 93-108.
- 1990 'Making an exhibition of myself', in E. Ben-Ari, B. Moeran and J. Valentine (eds.) *Unwrapping Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 1996a *A Japanese Advertising Agency: an anthropology of media and markets*, London: Curzon.
- 1996b 'The orient strikes back: advertising and imagining Japan', *Theory, Culture & Society* 13 (3): 77-112.
- 1998 *A Far Valley: four years in a Japanese community*, Tokyo: Kodansha International (Second edition of *Ōkubo Diary: portrait of a Japanese valley*, Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1985).
- and Lise Skov 1996 'Images of Spain in Japanese women's magazines'. Paper presented at the Japan Anthropology Workshop, Santiago de la Compostela, Spain, May.
- 1997 'Mount Fuji and the cherry blossoms: a view from afar', p. 181-205 in P. Asquith and A. Kalland (eds.) *Japanese Images of Nature: cultural perspectives*, London: Curzon.
- Morley, David and Kevin Robins 1995 *Spaces of Identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*, London: Routledge.
- Tobin, Joseph 1992 'Introduction: domesticating the west', p. 1-41 in his edited *Re-Made in Japan: everyday life and consumer taste in a changing society*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Said, Edward 1978 *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage.
- Wacquant, L is 1995 'Pugs at work: bodily capital and labour among professional boxers', *Body and Society* 1 (1): 65-93.
- Watson, C.W. (ed.) 1999 *Being There: fieldwork in anthropology*, London: Pluto Press.
- Wilk, Richard 1995 'Learning to be local in Belize: global systems of common difference', p.110-133 in D. Miller (ed.) *Worlds Apart: modernity through the prism of the local*, London: Routledge.

Wulff, Helena 1998 *Ballet Across Borders: career and culture in the world of dancers*, Oxford: Berg.

Notes

¹ All names of people and organisations mentioned in this paper have been changed from their original forms. The title 'international grobal' is not a spelling mistake, but an actual advertisement headline for a fashion house (ICB) that hit the magazine racks in the spring of 1990.

² Of course, I refer here not to the actual west (whatever that may be), but to those aspects of the west (real and imagined) that the Japanese incorporate into their version of occidentalism (cf. Tobin 1992:4).

³ I will sometimes use the phrase 'the west' as shorthand for Germany and the United States because Frontier's aim was ultimately to create a global advertising campaign that would be carried in other parts of Europe and the Americas.

⁴ In Japanese, they are called by the rather more down-to-earth title of 'salesmen'.

⁵ 'Dummy' copy is often used in presentations since a competing agency is not usually given all the information required for it to write the body copy of an advertisement. In other words, what is usually presented by an agency to its client at a competitive pitch is one or more series of visuals, headlines and slogans.

⁶ It was abundantly clear that the Agency had an extremely good communication channel, or 'pipe', to someone in Frontier (cf. Moeran 1996a:87-8).

⁷ They also had to pander to decision-makers' self-image of what Frontier was as a company. The 'home entertainment' and 'creativity quotient' series openly stressed and implied respectively the historical role Frontier had played in the development of new audio-visual technologies.

⁸ In fact, by openly advocating Frontier's technological superiority in the 'home entertainment' series, the Agency might also have played into the hands of 'techno-orientalists' who use the association between technology and Japaneseness 'to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection the rest of the world' (Morley and Robins 1995:169).