



SHIKITARI

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Shikitari literally means "what we have come to do." In other words, it's the time-honored customs and practices of everyday life in Japan. Since arriving here for the National Science Foundation's Summer Institute, I have experienced many aspects of Japanese shikitari, and often, my American shikitari clashes with that of my Japanese hosts.

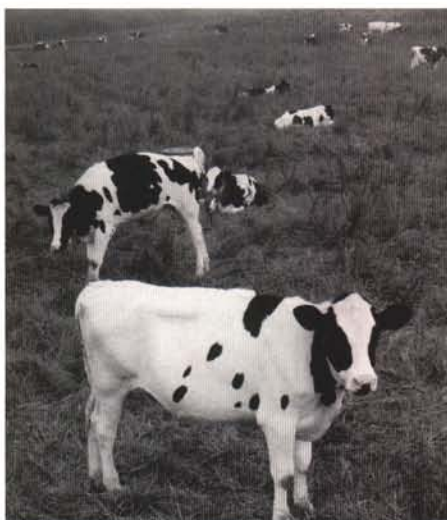
My first big struggle was bowing instead of shaking hands. How deeply to bow is a difficult thing for Westerners to understand, so I began just nodding slightly instead. I came upon this compromise in the writings of Walter Mondale, former vice-president and ambassador to Japan. We both agree that there are so many rules to bowing, called *ojigi*, that it seems silly for an American to even attempt it. The Japanese understand this. *Ojigi* is still very common at shrines and temples, but the practice continues to change. The practice of bowing at a ninety-degree angle toward a picture of the Emperor officially ended when the Allied Forces occupied Japan after World War II.

After all the bowing is completed, it's time to exchange business cards. Sounds simple enough, right? Well, there is proper etiquette for *meishi-kokan*. For instance, you must accept a business card offered to you with both hands, looking at it thoughtfully and carefully. It is considered an insult to stick the card immediately in a pocket or to write on it in front of the person who gave it to you. Business cards are such an important part of Japanese business culture, stores sell card books, so your *meishi* are available for quick reference. In this culture, contacts and appointments are set up through mutual acquaintances, making networking of vital importance.

Honorifics are very important. If you don't know what honorific means, don't worry. It's not a common concept in America. The word means showing respect or honor,



I enjoyed a soak in a volcanic hotspring near the active Mt. Iwate.



Japanese dairy cows looked a little skinny.

and in Japan, the respect is displayed in addressing someone. Adding *-san* to someone's last name denotes respect. Wives call their husbands *shijun* in front of company. It means master. The first time I heard a woman address her husband that way, I laughed out loud! There is a pervasive, male-dominating atmosphere in Japan, and women tend to be very submissive. This could be



The Japanese Racoon-Dog was everywhere and always reminded me of a drunken and obese Bucky Badger. The animal was a symbol for food and drinking.



The 1998 Kanken baseball team took fourth place in the Japan Institute Tournament. That's me third from the left in the front row. I was the first foreigner to ever play in the tournament.

why some Japanese men are afraid of American women.

Eye contact is sometimes avoided during conversation. There was an etiquette book written in the Muromachi period (1338-1573) that specified certain levels of eye contact in accordance with the social status of the person being addressed. Speaking Japanese is enough of a challenge without all these added factors!

Conversation, also known as practicing our Japanese, is the main activity at tea time. In the laboratory where I've been studying, the Matsumoto-san Lab, tea time is every day at 3:30, always ending at 4:00. We usually drink green tea, or very strong coffee (can't wait for a cup of Steep 'N Brew!) with some Japanese sweets, usually made of beans and rice, beautifully decorated and assembled. Lunch time is announced with a bell and everyone heads to the cafeteria for a bowl of curry rice or tempura set. It's a quick lunch, because some take naps and others want to exercise.

Walking around the Institute, a popular lunch-time activity, also comes with many rules. One must wear flip-flop shoes. I had to change out of my hiking boots and in to flip-flops to walk the grounds. I have to wear different flip-flops in clean areas like the sterile hood room. Then there are the flip-flops for going to the bathroom! You must leave the flip-flops right outside the toilet and always leave them pointing toward the stool.

Speaking of bathrooms, there are two types of toilets in Japan: Western and Japanese. The Japanese toilet is

basically a hole in the floor that you have to squat over. These toilets scare me. I tried to use one in a public bathroom once, but chickened out at the last minute when I had a vision of falling over while squatting and getting my pants all wet and having to explain what happened! Needless to say, these toilets are not conducive to one's morning constitutional and I almost injured myself in rural Hokkaido trying desperately to wait until we returned to the hotel and a



My teammates constantly challenged the "American-jin." I was victorious in my arm wrestling matches until I fractured my thumb in practice.

Western toilet. It was right after reaching that Western toilet that I paused to think about what a lucky man I am.

I have been so fortunate to have been selected for this science exchange. I have learned so much about myself, about Typhula snow molds and about Japan and its people. Hopefully this Japan/Wisconsin snow mold bridge of knowledge will continue to strengthen after I'm gone. 🌱

