

CSR and Ethics in Japanese Companies: A Search for Harmony

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Abstract

Behind a seemingly universal adherence to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), there are different approaches rooted in distinct traditions. Even among Western countries, there is a great diversity in the CSR approach (Adams et. al., 1998, Maignan and Ralston, 2002). Recent literature has shifted attention to all the institutional factors favoring corporate responsibility (Waddock, 2008). Despite the large number of debates on how to integrate the concept and philosophy of CSR into the contexts of different countries, and although CSR has been present in management literature for quite a long time (Bowen, 1953, Fitch, 1976, Zenisek, 1979), it was not until the early 1980s that a few authors began introducing Japanese CSR into Western academic debates.

In this paper, while taking a multi-dimensional approach (philosophical, institutional and organizational), we will explore the nature of CSR's importance in the Japanese company, in the Japanese society, the CSR approach taken and in what phase of CSR development is Japan. We will also analyze the influence of institutional variables in order to figure out how Japanese companies have adopted the concept of CSR

and how they have integrated it into corporate processes and management strategies.

Key words: CSR, Japan, Kyosei, CSR Reporting, Stakeholder Theory.

JEL: M1, M14

Perspectives on CSR and Business Ethics

CSR researchers have long argued that companies have ethical and moral obligations to society and its social actors. Although not mandatory, those obligations are expected (Carroll 2004). CSR is, in this sense, the accomplishment of the "double good": ours (profit, profitability and competitive advantage) and that of others (the needs of different stakeholders). As part of the reflection on CSR, Thomas Nagel (1970) states that, in a way, the company is pushed to selfish altruism, particularly through the idea of Corporate Ethics, which does not deny profit and performance but instead, becomes an economic necessity (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics*.)

Thus, in recent times, with the digital transformation and the energy transition, the major challenge has been to reconcile the imperatives of the economy, the search for happiness and respect for the environment. Indeed, we are witnessing an era (called Anthropocene) in which technological evolution is rapidly evolving and conflicting with geological, climatic and biological rhythms. This is the first era in history where human activities are profoundly altering the ecosystem because

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of egocentric behaviors, the foundation of the contemporary economic system. The goal is to justify the need for each individual to look after the good of others so that society works harmoniously, a concept also known as the "Invisible Hand" (Adam Smith.)

Globalization and development in international trade, as well as the growing complexity of the business world, make it difficult to pin down the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, which has acquired new dimensions. This concept does not have the same meaning for everyone. The definition of CSR has evolved in time. The discussion has grown rapidly and internationally over the last two decades, in both business and academia. Corporate Social Responsibility, as a generalized doctrine, is fairly new. However, according to McHugh (1988), the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is not new. Its birth date can be traced back to the earliest ages of industrial capitalism and it officially appeared in the United States in the 1950's. It is thanks to this movement, which has rapidly developed in recent years, that we begin to question the traditional approaches of the company. That is the reason why CSR has become a major concept within companies, organizations and the community in general over the past twenty years.

Research on the CSR theoretical framework began as an effort to resolve what appeared to be an oxymoron: the only way to overcome the contradictory nature of CSR was, according to Devinney (2009) "to adopt a complex and multifaceted approach that brings together critical and septic methodologies integrating the empirical and theoretical disciplines".

To summarize the research on CSR, and the many definitions that have emerged, we consider Corporate Social Responsibility to be a responsible and innovative strategy, integrated

into an organizational structure (Husted, 2000) which states that beyond its technical, legal and economic commitments (which consist mainly in maximizing profit for shareholders (Friedman, 1962, 1970)), the company is aware of its responsibility towards society and social actors (Bowen, 1953, Davis, 1960, McGuire, 1963, Jones, 1980, McWilliams and Siegel, 2001) responding voluntarily and with conviction to their expectations (Manne, 1972, Carroll, 1979, Jones, 1980, Frederik, 1994): not only to its direct stakeholders (employees, shareholders, suppliers and customers) but also to society's expectations as a whole (environment, territories, consumers, public health, etc.) (Clarkson, 1995, Vanmarwijk, 2003) by anchoring the principles of sustainable development and that of business ethics, within its business model (Carroll, 1979, Waddock and Cochran, 1985, Wood, 1991) and its conversion process (Mitnick, 1993) to optimize the operation of the system and solve social problems (Wear, 2006).

Then business ethics (Lewis, 1985) responds to a utilitarian logic, is therefore related to the application of ethical principles to the management and conduct of businesses. refusing to make profit at the expense of a certain number of values, to act in a socially responsible way because it is a moral duty and businesses are obliged to do so; it attributes to the firm a status of moral agent, capable of distinguishing between good and evil.

Therefore, CSR requires transversal management that affects different practical activities in the organization, such as corporate reputation (Fombrun, 1996), human resources (Aguilera et. al., 2007), communication (Mosing and Beckmann, 2006), strategy (Porter and Kramer, 2006) and philanthropy (Porter and Kramer, 2002). All these different activities within the company should be managed in a strategic and holistic manner.

CSR in Japan

There is much debate about how to integrate the concept and philosophy of CSR into the contexts of different countries. Although CSR has been present in management literature for quite a long time (Bowen, 1953, Fitch, 1976, Zenisek, 1979), few authors have introduced Japanese CSR into Western academic debates, until recently.

This essay is the summary of a research project that was conducted in Japan in the summer of 2018, after having visited and met with officials of five major Japanese companies (Toyota, Shiseido, Toray, DNP, Kizakura). Studying the case of Japan was an opportunity to discover their management style in general and their CSR practices in particular, which had until then remained a mystery.

Longevity and resilience of Japanese companies

Literature on CSR starts focusing on the link between CSR and resilience, both

having as common objective “sustainable development” (Simionescu, Dumitrescu, 2016). One of the reasons we chose this field of research was the exceptional longevity and prosperity of Japanese companies, as it shows the resilience and flexibility of Japanese management during turbulent environment by building up towards a new pathway. As shown in the table below, 3113 companies in Japan have been operating for more than 200 years. In his book titled *21st-century Japanese Management* (2006), Abegglen noted that the oldest company in the world is Kongo-gumi, specializing in the construction of temples. It was founded in 578 and led by the 40th generation of the Kongo family and operated for more than 1400 years. The second oldest is Hoshi, a hotel management company founded in 718, led by the 46th generation. Among the listed companies is also Surugaya, founded in 1461, a preferred producer of Japanese confectionery.

World ranking of long-lived companies

(more than 200 years history: 7,212 companies in 57 countries)

	Countries	Companies		Countries	Companies
1	Japan	3,113	9	Switzerland	130
2	Germany	1,563	10	The Czech Republic	97
3	France	331	11	USA	88
4	UK	315	12	Belgium	75
5	Holland	292	13	Sweden	74
6	Austria	255	14	Spain	68
7	Italy	163	15	China	64
8	Russia	149	16	Denmark	62

Source: Goto, T. (2009) *the rules of the companies lasting over 3 generations and 100 years, President*, p. 91

According to Abegglen, one of the common features of all these companies is the establishment of a management system rooted in Japanese culture, as well as in the culture of communitarianism and egalitarianism (i.e., that all members of the company, from the highest to the lowest

level of workers, share the same spirit of collaboration and philosophy (Gotoh, 2009).

Official birth of CSR in Japan

After being developed in Europe and the United States, the global CSR movement finally gave birth to the concept of CSR in

Japan in 2003. The first report on the subject was published by the Japanese Association of Business Leaders (Keizai Doyukai) in March 2003 and its focus was to raise awareness on the importance of CSR (Keizai Doyukai, 2003). In October 2003, the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren) made a call to business leaders to discuss socially responsible management. From then on, CSR started being rapidly institutionalized by Japanese firms seeking to comply with global standards. As a result, the majority of the listed companies have created a CSR department and despite the 2008 crisis, they continued to carry out CSR activities and set up CSR programs (Nippon- Keidanren, 2009). Consulting firms also have had a major role in the development of CSR in Japan by offering services to companies to assist them in their processes of integration of CSR principles into their strategies (Tanimoto, 2017). With a lack of NGOs in Japan, there is a lack of maturity within civil society organizations (Tanimoto, 2017). NGOs in Japan have taken a long time to develop and people largely depend on the government to try and solve societal problems (Tanimoto, 2002).

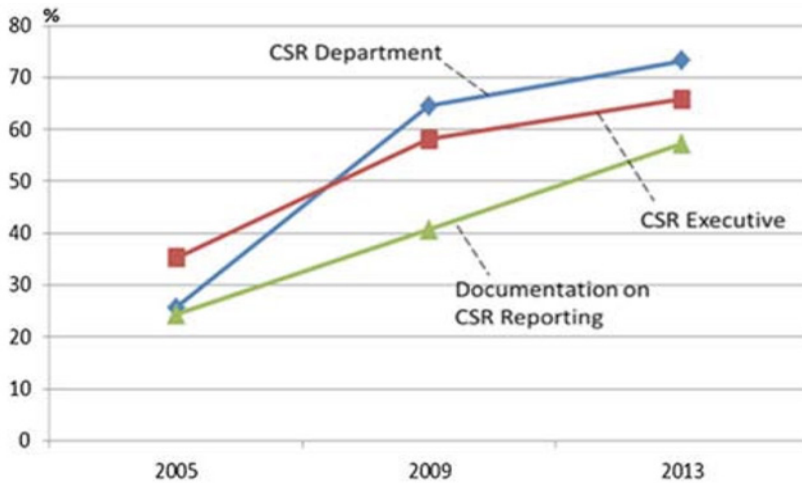
Mizuo (2010) emphasized that the Japanese CSR revolves around four responsibilities: environmental responsibility, economic responsibility, ethical/moral responsibility and responsibility for social contribution. It appears also that Japanese companies favor the environment. Japanese CSR does not mention the social issues that come under traditional Japanese values. The 3 main CSR activities within Japanese companies, according to JACE (2010), are providing reliable and sustainable products and services, liability and ethics assurance and the mitigation of environmental burden during the process of

transformations and commercialization of products and/or services. In the past, the Japanese model had always been described as a “stakeholder model.” According to a survey conducted in 1990 by Japanese companies on the notion of enterprise, and in response to the question: “In what interest should we manage the company?”, 97.1% of executives from Japanese firms responded that a company exists to meet the interests of all stakeholders, while only 2.9% responded in favor of shareholders only (Yoshimori, 1995). Yoshimori argued that this concept translates into long-term employment, and long-term relationships with other actors (banks, suppliers, subcontractors and distributors). Japanese companies and their main regular stakeholders formed a “closed network” and cooperated to maximize economic and social benefits (Tanimoto, 2002, 2009, 2014). These stakeholders also shared common values and goals in terms of economic development.

CSR reporting in Japan

Schneider and Barsoux (2003), explained that in Japanese companies, “intensive and in-depth discussion is encouraged at all levels, both inside the company (among employees) and in the outside world (with suppliers and customers). The adaptability of Japanese companies is often attributed to this open and cross-border flow of information.”

Japan has ranked among the top countries in the world in terms of reporting on the last decade (KPMG, 2011). Data from Toyo Keizai (2013) 73.2% of the companies surveyed were placed in a CSR department, 65.8% had a CSR manager and 57.2% of CSR policy documentation. In Japan, Japanese companies are now outstanding and disclose their performance in CSR.



According to the KPMG International survey on corporate responsibility conducted in 2011, 99% of Japanese companies report their impacts on society and the environment. The Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) also focuses on CSR reporting as a tool for linking the market, consumers and investors to businesses and encourages its member organizations and groups to actively establish

and publish the report (METI, 2012). All these factors contributed to the development of CSR discussions in Japan.

Japan has become one of the countries with the largest number of participants (99%) in the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which is currently the most recognized CSR reporting system in the world.

National rates of CR reporting, 2015 and 2017

Countries with CR reporting rate higher than 90%



Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on the Institutionalization of CSR in Japan

In general, FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) plays an important role in the institutionalization of CSR as an innovation in business management practices. Foreign investments encourage and stimulate the diffusion of innovation and R&D activities. Many studies show there is a positive relationship between foreign investment and these practices (Suzukia, Tanimoto b, Kokko c, 2009) because they constitute an

opportunity for meetings and exchanges between the various actors of innovation to learn about foreign practices that are not yet common in the local market (Fontagné, Toubal, 2010). They are thus more attentive to international ideas (Katz and Allen, 1982). The conclusion is that foreign investment has a positive effect on innovation and that foreign affiliates, overall, perform better than domestic companies (Bellak 2004, Sadowski and Sadowski-Rasters, 2006). In terms of CSR practices, and if foreign investments

encourage the diffusion of innovations and these practices are considered as innovations, companies with larger foreign investments should be among the first to embrace CSR (Suzukia, Tanimoto b, Kokko c, 2009).

In Japan, there is a tendency to believe that foreign investors appreciate this institutionalization of CSR instead of calling it an expensive practice. For this reason, and according to (Suzukia, Tanimoto b, Kokko c, 2009), there is a strong positive correlation between the increase in direct and foreign portfolio investment and the growing interest in institutionalizing CSR. Therefore, the larger the share of foreign investment, the more likely the enterprise is to institutionalize CSR. There is also evidence from Tanimoto and Suzuki (2005) that Japanese companies with a high rate of exports and foreign shareholders actively respond to CSR (for example, by creating CSR reports guided by the Global Reporting Initiative).

Confucianism, Kyosei, Shuchu-Kiyaku, Sampo-Yoshi: The Evolution of CSR Thinking in Japan

In this section, we will explore, among others, the principles of Sampo-Yoshi and Kyosei, which date back to the Edo period and the Meiji era, when attention to the various components of society was very strong. These ancient principles guide the companies' commitment and their roles vis-à-vis society and social actors. We will also explore "The axio-normative system" within the Japanese company, which, according to Piotr Sztompka, is "a related set of rules, norms and values, concerning the specificities of a particular culture" (Sztompka 2002). In this particular case, these rules and values are: efficiency, importance of success, quality, profitability, trust, the honor of society, professional pride or standards such as homework and professional achievement,

discretion at work, punctuality, reliability, responsibility, etc. In this section we will talk about the factors that determine Japan's approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR). We will trace the modern application of CSR to the old Confucian thought which is one of the determinants of Japanese culture: a humanistic philosophy, which provides a set of pragmatic rules, but also Shintoism and Buddhism considered as religions that seek virtue rather than truth, Shintoism considers that kami exists in nature, which explain the strong relation of the Japanese to nature.

According to Hofstede (1984, 1988), the philosophy of Confucianism has a significant impact on the long-term orientation of East Asian countries. Harmony in society is one of the foundations of the Confucian philosophy (Ip 2009, Yum 2014, Hennig 2013 and Lu 2003). Japan is a harmonious society because of a focus on stable and lasting relationships, a concept that was born of Confucianism. Confucianism was incorporated into the first Japanese business philosophy that taught mutual prosperity through business and harmony, with the environment and nature emerging as a core value. These Confucian values are rooted in a hierarchical and patriarchal system where individuals must always respect their senior citizens, who must in turn protect and care for their subordinates (Zinzius 2004 & Hennig 2013). Community success and maintaining harmonious relationships are always valued more than individual success (Hennig 201, Robert et al., 2008). Confucianism is a pragmatic moral foundation and therefore, a system of behavior that should be applied in society to maintain peace and prosperity (Kang, 2003).

CSR has been implemented in the Japanese company since the 17th century, under other names. In fact, CSR thinking in Japan dates back to the Meiji era (1867-1911).

In his manuscripts, Eichi Shibusawa, the “founder of Japanese capitalism”, presented his ideas on how economic activity should be based on moral standards (following the teachings of Confucius). It is rooted in the concepts of Shonin-do and Sampo-yoshi practiced during the Edo period (1603-1868), which inculcate virtue-based management principles and which call for the contribution of enterprises to society (METI, 2004). We also found traces of this thinking during the pre-war period (1911-1945) with Koyata Iwasaki, who led Mitsubishi Zaibatsu and introduced his company’s two main values: “Shoki Hko” (corporate responsibility to society) and “Shoji Komei” (integrity and justice). Also, since the implementation of the Environmental Management System ISO 14001, in 1996, Japanese companies are leading with the number of certifications. Long before the emergence of CSR, the Japanese officially introduced the Kyosei concept which means symbiosis and which is influenced by some key notions of Shintoism, Confucianism and Japanese Buddhism. It has also helped to raise awareness and promote the concept of cohabitation. Ryuzaburo Kaku, President of Canon and Gaishi Hiraiwa, President of Tokyo Electric Power Company, were the first to incorporate this concept into their corporate strategy.

The concept of Kyosei was first attached to corporate behavior by the Osaka Kaitokudo Merchant Academy (established in 1726) with the aim of linking business and Confucian thinking. The concept of Kyosei (the Japanese version of CSR) incorporates both Japanese Confucian beliefs developed during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the principles set out in the Shuchu Kiyaku written at the beginning of this period. Since the 1960s, many Japanese companies have adopted Kyosei to promote brand awareness. The Kyosei concept of

“cohabitation” has long been known for its role in strengthening society and the environment in the East, and has had a significant impact on many aspects of Japanese life. Murakami (1992) defines Kyosei as a “cooperative symbiosis”, a concept with ecological roots: “kyo” meaning “to work together” and “Sei” meaning “life”. It is about living together and working together for the common good, allowing co-operation and mutual prosperity to coexist with healthy and fair competition.

In 1987, Ryuzaburo Kaku, president of Canon, began to apply the concept to the structure of the company. According to Kaku, success can only be based on respect for the interdependence of companies with people, the environment and the communities in which they operate, while also assuming global social responsibility: promote innovation and competitiveness, but also ensure the interests of all their stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, customers and the local community. It can also be viewed as a form of corporate diplomacy that allows the company to manage its relationships with its various internal and external stakeholders, nationally or internationally, in order to resolve problems and create opportunities for different groups. According to Gaishi Hiraiwa, chairman of the Tokyo Electric Power Company, Japanese companies should create symbiotic relationships. More generally, Kenneth Goodpaster (1998) stated that “Kyosei takes us beyond traditional business thinking (markets and laws) to achieve a global aspiration to happiness, justice and cooperation.”

Therefore, the goal of Kyosei is to establish harmonious relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, governments and the natural environment (Richard Wokutch, Jon Shepard, 1999). It can become a powerful force for social, political and economic transformation. Indeed, it allows the creation of

a spirit of cooperation among the collaborators within the company. This approach is popular in Japan, where employees usually spend their entire career within one company. They are well known for investing in high salaries, comprehensive training programs and generous vacation plans. It also calls for cooperation with external groups, such as customers, by meeting their expectations, providing suppliers, technical support, and also cooperation with competitors (by entering into partnership agreements). Not to mention the community groups that become partners in solving local problems. By working with the general public and communities, companies generally bring their technological know-how, putting technology to the benefit of the community. Beyond the local community, Kyosei also claims the importance of acting on a more global level, cooperating with foreign organizations. It allows companies to not only increase their base of activities but also attack global imbalances, create jobs, thus improving the living conditions of disadvantaged populations. Another important aspect of this concept is to work in harmony with the environment, which means to try to find ways to reduce air and water pollution, protect nature and reduce energy consumption

The Toyota Case

We studied the case of Toyota in order to explore how the company attempted to move from a traditional CSR to a transformative CSR in order to find new and innovative ways of operating: how can the company create an effective CSR strategy and integrate sustainable social and environmental practices into the long-term strategy?

Toyota is one of the companies investing their time and resources to move to a more sustainable and inclusive business model as it considers it an investment and development opportunity. In their “Global Vision” report,

we discovered that their goal is to find the most responsible way to engage people through constant innovation in line with the needs of the community and respect for the planet. The notion of harmony found in Confucian philosophy is very present in Toyota’s CSR statements, especially that of finding a harmony between man, nature and the machine. There is a real application of the Kyosei concept in their practice. Thus it is a mixture of international standards (ISO, Label, Reporting,...) and local practices and values (Ganshi Ganbutsu, Kyosei, Sampo-Yoshi,...).

Internally, mutual trust is emphasized. One of the main focuses of the company is to establish harmony between governance and execution. Management is responsible for ensuring the long-term stability of the organization and ensuring that employees’ personal lives flourish at the same time. In turn, employees have an obligation to respect the company’s policies, standards and methods. However, it does not just mean following the company’s rules. Employees are expected to collaborate and come up with new ideas to work better together and meet current and future demands for personal mobility. The goal is to create a sustainable business model based on harmony between the employee’s efforts, the company’s products and the need of the customer. This is illustrated by their logo, a symbol of harmony: the largest circle is the world with the horizontal circle representing the needs and desires of their customers, and the other vertical circle representing the company’s effort to satisfy the needs and desires of their customers. “Ganshi Ganbutsu”, represented by a tree, is a Japanese principle shared within Toyota. It symbolizes going to the source and finding what is required, identifying problems and finding solutions with the people who are directly implicated. Since machines cannot replace men, there is an obligation to strike

the right balance between what people can and should do, what complex machines can and should do and especially what should a car do in terms of observation, decision and action, as opposed to a human being?

In 2014, Toyota created the “Toyota Foundation for Mobility”, an independent organization established to identify projects around the world related to mobility, in every community, working closely with local stakeholders and inviting collaboration to create more harmonious solutions related to mobility.

Conclusion and discussion

While Japanese firms have a long tradition of environmentally and socially responsible practices, the approach is largely voluntary and Japanese companies are committed to follow moral values. Their commitment to CSR is not identical to that of European or US companies given the distinct characteristics of the Japanese economy and society. Therefore, they do not need to respond to socio-economic changes in the same way as businesses in other countries. In Japan, there is a strong awareness of social issues, and a strong commitment to environmental innovation, in addition to a powerful initiative to publish, share, and be transparent on these topics. Hence, and according to the Mirvis and Googins (2006) model, CSR in Japan can be classified in the Innovator phase, during this stage of the development of social responsibility, companies begin to broaden their activities by adopting a more global conception of citizenship. High levels of innovation and learning mark this stage. The authors found that a myriad of programs related to corporate citizenship are planned, funded and launched during this innovative stage. Companies are also beginning to monitor their social and environmental

performance and publish the results in public reports.

We can conclude by saying that the internationalization of the concept of CSR follows two paradoxical trends. On the one hand, it is becoming universal under the aegis of the multiplication of international standards. On the other hand, with the influence of institutional variables, it has become autonomous, with each country acclimatizing it to its local, cultural and institutional patterns.

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