

The art of saying sorry

Displays of remorse by bosses of scandal-hit Japanese companies highlight subtle complexities in culture of bowing

Executives of big Japanese corporations have been seen bowing deeply at press conferences in recent years. They were apologizing, in Japanese style, for their companies' misconduct.

The scenes have become a familiar sight in Japan with the high number of corporate scandals, from deadly air bags to falsified product data, from improper accounting to flawed inspections.



Cai Hong

Household names whose reputations were tarnished have included Kobe Steel, Mitsubishi Materials, Nissan, Toray and Olympus, to name just a few.

To express remorse, the bosses of scandal-hit companies put their hands by their sides and bow at a 45-degree angle, their faces looking directly at the floor. It must be 45 degrees — a 35-degree angle represents greeting.

So bowing, or *ojigi* in Japanese, does not simply mean contrition. Japanese people bend forward for many purposes, from saying hello to saying goodbye, and of course, saying sorry.

The Japanese are not a "skinship" nation. Touching someone on the shoulder you first meet is not the appropriate thing. Until they

get to know you, an invisible shield encompasses them and the bow is the only way they know to greet you, thank you and show respect to you without lowering the shield.

The correct way to bow in Japan is to bend at the waist, keep your back and neck straight, feet together, eyes downward, and have your arms straight at your sides. Women often bow with their fingertips together or hands clasped in front at thigh level.

The deeper the bow, the more respect and submission is shown. A quick, informal bow involves bending to around 15 degrees, called *eshaku*. A more formal bow calls for you to bend your torso to a 30-degree angle, known as *keirei*. The deepest bow means bending to a full 45 to 90 degrees, called *saikeirei*, while you look at your shoes. The longer that you hold a bow, the more respect is shown.

Corporate bows are usually held for around 10 or 15 seconds. When the former chief of Mitsubishi Motors Corp apologized for two decades of product defects, he bowed for a full minute. Sony's bow was seven seconds.

The last one and the most extreme bow is *dogeza*, or groveling. This one has a truly deep meaning, even more than *saikeirei*.

If someone has made a fatal mistake, the kneeling bow with his or her head on the ground is usually committed. It was also the one for people in Japan to show respect to

their emperor in ancient times. People prostrated themselves outside the Imperial Palace in Tokyo as they listened to Japanese Emperor Hirohito's radio broadcast announcing their country's surrender in World War II.

In 1996, when a Japanese drug firm admitted that several hemophiliacs had contracted HIV from its contaminated blood products, one victim's family complained that the company's contrition did not come from the heart. Within moments, the firm's six top executives silently fell to their knees before the families, lowering their foreheads to the floor.

Bowing is so important in Japan that parents begin to teach the practice to children shortly after they start walking, and some schools hold enormous assemblies where preteens spend hours bowing in unison to master the postures.

School kids stand and bow when their teacher enters the room. Even at many supermarkets, cashiers will give a slight bow when handing over the change. And at many shops, clerks will bow after customers make a purchase.

In general, people in Japan should bow more deeply to superiors, elders, people of rank or office, and anytime the situation demands additional respect. Bows of sincere apology are usually the deepest and last longer than other bows.

Sometimes, it does not even matter if customers can see the bow or

not. The other day, I saw a car salesman at a Lexus dealership bow for a good minute or so as a customer picked up his car after having it serviced and drove it down the road. The driver could not see that the Lexus salesman kept his head down. Everyone else, however, could. It is a visual manifestation of gratitude.

At the end of their matches, Japanese football and baseball teams always bow to their fans on the field. In 2014, the baseball team of Noshiro Shoyo High School, in Akita prefecture, went to extremes to show its gratitude. After the team was defeated and lost the chance to appear in the national tournament, all players lined up by the side of the road outside the stadium to see off their fans. The players said "thank you" and bowed to every car. Since there was traffic, they ended up standing there for almost an hour in the rain.

Sometimes a combination of handshakes and bows will ensue — but never at the same time. Mixing the two is inappropriate and hard to do: In a handshake, people make eye contact, but they look at the floor when bowing.

Meeting with Japanese Emperor Akihito in Tokyo in November 2009, visiting US president Barack Obama erred by bowing deeply and, at the same time, shaking hands.

US conservatives criticized Obama's low bow as a sign of sub-

mission. Former US vice-president Dick Cheney said there is no need for an American president to bow to anyone.

During his stay in Tokyo in November, US President Donald Trump greeted Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko with a genteel handshake and nod, but no bow. Trump was observed to have stooped and slightly tilted his head as a gesture of respect to the 83-year-old symbol of Japan.

So the bow can also be seen as a diplomatic gesture.

As a form of apology, it can be ritualistic, leading some to question the act's sincerity.

People believe the best gauge of remorse is how low the bow is, so photojournalists like to stand off to the side of the press conference podium to capture the angle of a company executive's bow.

On Dec 19, several officials of West Japan Railway Co joined the legion of high-ranking apologizers, bending forward to the cameras out of remorse over a crack and oil leak found underneath a running shinkansen bullet train in the first "serious incident" affecting the Japanese high-speed train system.

The bows of business heavyweights in recent years have betrayed the problems in Japan's manufacturing industry and the trust they have lost.

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IT, services keys to quality growth

Benefits for the world as digital innovations drive new phase of China's continuing economic transformation

By CHI FULIN

China's economy has reached a new phase of transformation, and now the focus is on high-quality development instead of following the high-speed growth model. This transformation and upgrading of the Chinese economy will benefit both China and the world.

A strong driving force of China's economic transformation is the fast-developing digital technology, which has facilitated innovations in the traditional manufacturing industry and helped create new innovation-oriented industries. For instance, the information technology industry is expected to reach 12

trillion yuan (\$1.81 trillion) in value, and e-commerce about 67 trillion yuan in volume, by 2025. Which means innovation-oriented transformation of the emerging industry will ensure lower but sustainable and high-quality economic development that will provide a big and profitable market for the world.

The services sector has been playing an increasingly important role in China's economic transformation, with a significant increase in services' proportion of the economy. According to the National Bureau of Statistics' estimate, the services sector will account for nearly 60 percent of China's industry in 2020, and the scale of the sector will increase from 33 trillion yuan last

year to 50 trillion yuan.

Besides, the change in the consumption structure will boost the development of China's market, with the services market expected to account for about 50 percent of the total economy and increase to about 50 trillion yuan in 2020.

This will help China to build a solid foundation to develop free trade with the rest of the world, which General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October. Accordingly, China will grant foreign investors greater access to its market, further open up its services sector and build more pilot free trade zones. And services trade

will be key to the open economy as services are predicted to take up a more than 20 percent share of foreign trade by 2020.

A new type of urbanization, as well as urban-rural integrated development, will pave the way for investment and consumption of nearly 100 trillion yuan over the next decade, with the rural market becoming a new driver of China's medium- and long-term development.

Moreover, the economic transformation may have a cumulative effect. Statistics show that from 2012 to 2016, about 1.7 million jobs were created in the nonagricultural sector with each percentage point increase in GDP, and the ratio will

increase if the services sector keeps developing.

And as the middle-income group is predicted to make up half of China's total population in the next 10 years and energy consumption is expected to decrease by about 14 percent by 2020, the country's social structure and environmental health will greatly improve.

Therefore, the upgrading of the economy will help China to maintain stable growth as well as contribute to the global economy, and enable it to build a community of shared future for humankind.

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