

# **Is business war in Japan?: War metaphors in Michael Crichton's *Rising Sun***

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## 1 Introduction

In my previous studies of metaphors used in newspaper articles reporting trade negotiations, war metaphors were often seen in American and British newspapers, while in Japanese media, negotiations were described as cooperative processes rather than acts of war. However, in Michael Crichton's novel, *Rising Sun* (1993[1992]), it is suggested that to the Japanese 'Business is war'. Its characters say, 'In Japan, patenting is a form of war', 'Remember, business is war', 'Business is like warfare to them'.

In some Japanese novels dealing with trade or business, metaphors relating to WAR, such as FIGHT or BATTLE, are sometimes used. For example, expressions like 'win', 'lose', or 'fight' are found in one of Saburo Shiroyama's novels, *Made in Japan*. But as 'Japan lost 5 to 0' implies, they seem to be related to GAMES rather than WAR.

The present study also examines newspaper articles in the database of the *Yomiuri*, one of the leading Japanese newspapers. Concerning 'price', about 4,100 instances of *kakaku kyoso* (price competition) are found while there are only about 40 of *kakaku senso* (price war) during the period of September 1986 to June 2010. Competition and war are similar but different concepts.

This paper aims to show that war metaphors are not commonly used for describing trade and business in Japan and to consider why Crichton used these metaphors in *Rising Sun*.

## 2 Negotiation is War

### 2.1 Japan-US negotiations about automobiles in 1995

In my previous study<sup>1</sup>, I compared Japanese, American and British newspaper articles reporting Japan-US auto talks.

The English language newspapers in Japan are *Asahi Evening News*, the *Daily Yomiuri* and the *Mainichi Daily News*; the American newspapers are *International Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times*; and the British newspapers are *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Times*.

The study showed that whereas American and British papers tended to use war metaphors to describe negotiations, in Japan, when newspapers describe trade disputes, they usually use expressions such as 'trade friction' instead of 'trade war'.

The important thing is that the use of war metaphors is not just a matter of language. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) suggested, 'our conceptual system is largely metaphorical' and 'what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor....' I make the assumption here that most Japanese people try to avoid confrontation and are happy if they can reach an agreement peacefully and friendly. The word 'reach' is more frequently seen in Japanese media than in American or British media.

## 2.2 Bonn Conference in July 2001

In addition, I compared newspaper articles related to the Bonn Conference, which was one of the series of conferences concerning the Kyoto Protocol<sup>2</sup>. Its aim was to tackle the problems of global warming. At this conference, it could be said that the US was opposed to the rest of the world.

Data for this study were collected from the Internet during July and August, 2001<sup>3</sup>. In both British and American media, negotiation was often conceptualised as 'war', and in the US it was also seen as 'opposition'.

As the amount of data is not very large, all the words related to wars—war, battle, fight, combat—are grouped together for counting. The general tendency is that Japanese media use them less frequently than in US or UK media.

In the data from Japanese media, the words that are the most prominent are 'participate/participation'. Although Japan was criticised by other countries for not clearly expressing its own attitude about whether they were going to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the most important thing to Japan was that all the nations, including the US, would harmoniously join together. According to the *Daily Yomiuri*, then Prime Minister Koizumi remarked, 'Unless the United States and Japan join forces (in ratifying the Kyoto protocol), no effective preventive measures will be devised against global warming' [2 July 2001].

In the case of the US, even if it wanted to consider these negotiations to be

wars, it could not 'create' an enemy. In the American media, the most conspicuous words seem to be 'reject/rejection' or 'oppose/opposition'. The country rejected the protocol, saying it was 'fatally flawed'. It could be said that the US government and President showed their firmness or strength to their people by using these words.

If it could be said that the Kyoto Treaty was considered a war by the UK, the enemy was seen to be the US led by President Bush. According to the *Guardian*, 'President Bush as global vandal arrives in Europe...' [18 July 2001] or 'The Kyoto treaty ... an update of the cold war, and this time the "evil empire" is the United States ....' [19 July 2001]. This view, seeing the US or President Bush as an enemy, was rarely heard in the Japanese media at that time.

Although the Bonn Conference was not a trade negotiation, it can be concluded that Japanese media seldom use war metaphors to report negotiations.

### 3 'Business is war' metaphors in *Rising Sun*

In *Rising Sun*, 'Business is war' is said to be a 'Japanese motto'. Metaphors such as 'Something is war', however, are used in not only business, but also various target domains in Japan. Therefore, even if the narrator or the characters say 'Business is war' to Japanese (examples 1 and 3), most Japanese readers would not agree with them. Passages from the book that include 'Business is war' metaphors are cited below.

As for examples 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, they are narrated from the narrator's or characters' viewpoints. Actually, in this novel, the Japanese are always referred to as 'they', and it is unclear whether they really conceptualise business as war. Examples 8, 9 and 10 show that the characters who are American conceptualise business or trade as war. Example 10, which refers to 'Pearl Harbor', particularly underlines this point.

These are all examples of war metaphors found in *Rising Sun*. They seem to show that the 'Business or trade is war' metaphor is the American way of looking at trade rather than the Japanese way. As Eubanks (2000: 60) points out, 'In *Rising Sun*, Michael Crichton ascribes Trade is War/trade is peace to the Japanese in order to accuse them of out-of-bounds trade practices'.

It is obvious that the word 'war' has negative connotations: violence, aggressiveness, lawlessness and so on. As in example 2 below, all is seen to be

fair in war, therefore 'bribery is fine' to the Japanese. They act 'crazy' and have a 'strange' system (example 4). The Japanese even invented a new kind of trade—'adversarial' trade (example 7). In the quotation above, Eubanks himself decides that the Japanese trade practices are 'out-of-bounds'. Crichton must have felt that the Japanese way of trading was unfavorable, and ascribed the war metaphors to the Japanese.

On the other hand, the word 'war' could have some positive connotations: courage, camaraderie or a just cause, for example. The conversation quoted below (example 10) suggests that Connor and his conversation partner are fostering fellowship by using war metaphors. In this example, the author seems to have taken advantage of the positive sides of the 'trade is war' metaphor.

#### Examples of war metaphors in *Rising Sun*

1. *Business is war.* — Japanese motto (p. ix)
2. "The Japanese often try to bribe local security officers from rival firms. The Japanese are honorable people, but their tradition allows such behavior. All's fair in love and war, and the Japanese see business as **war**. Bribery is fine, if you can manage it." (p.103)
3. "They say 'business is **war**,' and they mean it. ..." (p.152)
4. In Japan, patenting is a form of **war**. The Japanese patent like crazy. And they have a strange system. (p.202)
5. Remember, business is **war**. (p.216)
6. Business is like **warfare** to them. (p.229)
7. But they haven't succeeded by doing things our way. Japan is not a Western industrial state; it is organized quite differently. And the Japanese have invented a new kind of trade—adversarial trade, trade like **war**, trade intended to wipe out the competition—which America has failed to understand for several decades. (p.393, Afterword)
8. This country is in a **war** and some people understand it, and some other people are siding with the enemy. (p.134)
9. "Graham thinks it's a **war**."  
Connor said, "Well, that's true. We are definitely at **war** with Japan...."  
(p.136)
10. "I appreciate your treating this matter as confidential. Because, you know, we have to be careful. We are at **war** with Japan." He smiled wryly. "Loose lips sink ships."

“Yes,” Connor said. “And remember Pearl Harbor.”

“Christ, that too.” He shook his head. He dropped his voice, becoming one of the boys. “You know, I have colleagues who say sooner or later we’re going to have to drop another bomb. They think it’ll come to that.” He smiled. (p.257-258)

(Crichton: 1993[1992], emphasis added.)

#### 4 Japanese novels dealing with trade or business

In this section, business novels by Japanese authors are examined to note if ‘Business is war’ metaphors are found.

##### 4.1 Saburo Shiroyama (1927-2007)

Shiroyama was well known for his business novels, some of which are mentioned below. In Japan this genre is often called ‘economic novels’. Shiroyama taught economics at the university, before he became a novelist.

##### *Yushutsu (Export) (2009[1957])*

*Export* is a short story about employees working for a Japanese trading company. No war metaphors are seen in this novel. ‘Sales’ and ‘trade’ are referred to as *kyoso* (competition) rather than war. [‘Sales competition’ is found on p.71; ‘trade competition’ is found on p.72]. As the phrase ‘lowest price-fixing agreement’ (p.72) suggests, Japanese companies prefer ‘agreement’ to ‘war’ at least in 1957 when this story was written.

##### *Made in Japan (2009[1959])*

*Made in Japan* is a story of a sincere hydrometer exporter who fights against others in the same trade and against tariffs imposed by the United States. In 1959, when this novel was published, the phrase ‘made in Japan’ had an equivalent signification as ‘poor quality’. After Fujishita, the exporter, had made desperate efforts to develop a market abroad, other exporters sold cheap, inferior hydrometers overseas and ruined the reputation of the Japanese product. And when those fellow traders agreed to set the prices, for example in the United States, the US government tried to disrupt the imports by raising tariffs.

Metaphors concerning 'fight' or 'battle' are seen throughout the story. *Tou* (fight) or *sen* (battle) are used eight and five times respectively. Words related to 'win' or 'lose' are also found: *shori* (victory), once; *shobu* (match, win or lose), three times; and *make* (lose), eight times. But as the phrases 'Japan lost 5 to 0' and '3 to 2' (p.152) imply, these metaphors seem to be related to GAMES or SPORTS rather than WAR. Fujishita once compared his battles to 'challenging specters'.

It could be said that the 'Business is Fight' metaphor is used throughout the story. However, this fight or battle does not seem to go so far as to say WAR.

#### *Kakaku Hakai (Price Slashing) (2007[1969])*

*Price Slashing* is said to be based on a story of Isao Nakauchi, the founder of Daiei, the major Japanese supermarket chain. Several war metaphors are seen in the story. However, this is not because the main character Yaguchi, nor the narrator, sees business as war but because Yaguchi often remembers his harsh experiences in the Second World War and tends to compare his business with those experiences.

In fact, other kinds of metaphors than those of war, such as SPORTS, MONSTER, MAHJONG, TAG (a game played by children), SEA or POND and so on, are also found in places.

#### 4.2 Seicho Matsumoto (1909—1992)

##### *Ku no Shiro (Castle in the Air) (2009[1978])*

Seicho Matsumoto was a very popular and prolific writer who was known mainly as a mystery writer. *Castle in the Air* is based on a real story about the bankruptcy of a trading company. The writer seemed to be keen on giving facts and figures, and very few metaphors are found in this novel. If 'Business is War' is one of the conceptual metaphors in Japan, it would most likely be seen in this kind of realistic novel too.

#### 4.3 Jun Ikeido (1963— )

##### *Tetsu no Hone (Iron Frame) (2009)*

Let us look at one more example from a recent novel, which was adapted for a TV drama: In *Iron Frame*, Heita Tomishima has worked for a construction company for three years, and then is unexpectedly transferred to a section

engaged in bid-rigging. Young and sincere, Heita does not like bid-rigging, but as a member of the company, he tries very hard to get a contract with his superiors and fellow workers.

As he and his co-workers are carrying on fierce competition for winning contracts, war metaphors do appear several times. But words or expressions concerning 'competition' are more frequently seen than those concerning 'wars'. Other metaphors like 'a female lion' (p.102) or 'weed' (p. 131, p.147) are also found. In many other places, characters talk about 'cooperation, order, coordination' in the industry.

As we have learned from the examples above, 'Business is war' metaphors are not widely or generally used in Japanese business novels.

## 5 'Trade or Business is war' metaphors in Japanese newspapers

To consider whether 'business' is really 'war' in Japan, I will once again examine the language in newspapers in this section.

### 5.1 Price

The database of the *Yomiuri*<sup>4</sup> contains articles published since 1986. As for its English edition, the *Daily Yomiuri*, its articles since 1989 are included in its database.

Concerning 'price', 4,104 instances of *kakaku kyoso* (price competition) are found while there are only 42 of *kakaku senso* (price war) in the *Yomiuri* articles during the period of September 1986 to 14 June 2010. Competition and war are similar yet different concepts.

Words related to wars are found here: *kakaku sen* (price battle), twice; *kakaku senryaku* (price strategy), 321 times; and *kakaku senjyutu* (price tactics), eight times. However, these words, *sen*, *senryaku* and *senjyutu*, are not only used in business, but are also seen widely in Japanese society.

On the other hand, in the *Daily Yomiuri*'s database, price competition(s) are found 178 times and price war(s) 201 times. This is because the *Daily Yomiuri*'s articles are not literally translated from the *Yomiuri*, as will be seen in an example below.

## 5.2 War metaphors in the Trade and Business section

### The *Yomiuri*

Now, let us look at the war metaphors in the Trade and Business section of the *Yomiuri*. These examples are taken from between the middle of March 2010 through the beginning of 2009 (my translation). I may have missed some of the metaphoric uses of *senso* (war), but it is evident that the word *senso* is rarely used metaphorically in the Trade and Business section. Besides, three of them are taken from the American media.

- 2010.03.19 'Home electronics war' (between two retailers)
- 2009.11.22 Free trade is economic war
- 2009.04.02 Sales war called North-South war
- 2009.02.05 Trade war (Obama)
- 2009.02.04 Trade war (Senate Republican Leader McConnell)
- 2009.01.23 Trade war (*The Wall Street Journal*)

### The *Daily Yomiuri*

The following are examples of war metaphors used in the *Daily Yomiuri* during the same period. They appear a little more frequently than in the *Yomiuri*. However, many of them are 'price wars'.

- 2010.03.10 a proxy-soliciting war
- 2010.02.22 a price war
- 2009.12.20 its ongoing war of attrition
- 2009.12.17 retailers' price war
- 2009.12.01 waging a price war
- 2009.08.05 a war of attrition
- 2009.07.04 beverage price war
- 2009.05.05 sales war
- 2009.03.23 price-cutting war
- 2009.02.14 bidding war

### The *Daily Yomiuri* and the *Yomiuri*

As I pointed out above, the *Daily Yomiuri's* articles are not literally translated from the *Yomiuri*. The following is an example of equivalent articles that



appeared in both newspapers. In the *Daily Yomiuri* article, the term 'price war' is used, but in the *Yomiuri* 'price-cutting competition' is used.

2009.12.17 Retailers' price war has proved ineffective, Aeon's Okada says  
Aeon Co. President Motoya Okada believes a truce may have to be called soon in the price war fought by retailers. (The *Daily Yomiuri*)

2009.12.29 Aeon shifting from 'general shop' to development of Private Brand products  
Aeon Co. President Motoya Okada acknowledged the limit of the price-cutting competition, saying 'It does not work if you sell one yen cheaper than other stores.' (The *Yomiuri*, my translation.)

## 6. *Senso* (war) and *sen* (battle) in all the sections

### 6.1 *Senso* between 10 April 2010 and 10 June 2010

To analyse in what sections, other than business, war metaphors are used, all sections in the *Yomiuri* are examined for the word *senso*.

In all of the sections printed in the 2-month period between 10 April 2010 and 10 June 2010, 431 articles have the word '*senso* (war)' used at least once. Almost all of them refer to real wars, and only 15 of them use the term figuratively.

As cited below, I found the following amount of uses: In Business, 4 instances; in Election, 5; in Politics, 2; in Exams, 2; in Nature, 1; and in Jobs 1 (from Korean's interview). There are examples of 'Business is war' but they are mainly in parentheses, which means they cannot be said to be conceptualised metaphors.

Examples of figurative uses of *senso* in the *Yomiuri* (my translation)

Business 2010.06.10 'It's a war during peak times'.

Business 2010.06.09 'Department store war' in Osaka

Election 2010.06.05 'War between Prime Minister Kan and government officials'

Politics 2010.05.29 Governor Hashimoto stated 'war with established political parties'

Business 2010.05.15 'Electric vehicle war'

Nature	2010.04.29	'Dandelion war'
Business	2010.04.22	Distribution war, department war
Election	2010.04.22	'Awa war' (*Awa is the name of a place.)
Election	2010.04.20	'Joshu war' (*Joshu is also the name of a place.)
Politics	2010.04.20	It will be a great war with established political parties. (Governor Hashimoto)
Exams	2010.04.18	Exam war
Jobs	2010.04.16	'This is the time for job wars. We don't have time to drink'. (Interview of a Korean student in Seoul)
Election	2010.04.16	'Awa war'
Election	2010.04.13	Proxy war between the Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party
Exams	2010.04.13	'Exam war'

## 6.2 *Sen* on 1 June 2010

In Japanese, *senso* (war) is not the only word that refers to war. One Chinese character included in *senso*, *sen* (battle), is also used for referring to wars. There are numerous articles with this letter '*sen*', so only the articles of 1 June 2010 are examined here. In the database of this day's articles, 145 contain *sen*, and a few of them have more than one example.

The section where the metaphoric uses of this character, *sen*, are found most frequently is in Sports. *Sen* is included in the Business section, too, but three of its uses are written as *senryaku* (strategy), which is the word widely used in various sections of the newspaper.

When writing about sports in English writing classes, Japanese students often use the word 'enemy' instead of 'opponent' because the word *teki* is used for both wars and sports in Japanese.

**Table 1.** Sections in which *sen* are found.

Section	Occurrence
Sports	69
War	24
Election	17
<i>Shogi</i> (Japanese Chess)	8
Business	6
Others (in various)	19

## 7 Conclusion

In my previous studies of metaphors used in newspaper articles reporting trade negotiations, war metaphors were often seen in American and British newspapers, while in Japanese media, negotiations were described as cooperative processes rather than acts of war. However, in *Rising Sun*, it is suggested that to the Japanese 'Business is war'.

The present study has also examined a few Japanese novels that deal with trade or business. In some of them, war metaphors are found; however other metaphors are also used. It cannot be said that in Japanese business novels, business or trade is generally conceptualised as wars.

Both in business novels and in the newspaper database in Japan, the 'Business is war' metaphor is not commonly used in Japan. So, why did Michael Crichton state that 'Business is war in Japan'?

As the examples from *Rising Sun* show, it is considered to be an American metaphor. The author viewed Japanese ways of business and trade, and conceptualised them as war. This is his way of looking at business and trade, not that of the Japanese. He also ascribed the negative aspects of the war metaphor to the Japanese way of business. To me, he seemed to have been deeply submerged in his 'Business is war' culture. These days, Japan is not a threat to the US, but I think if Crichton were still alive and wrote another business novel, whether about Japan or other countries, he would have used war metaphors for whatever country, regardless of the subject of his writing.

## Notes

- 1 See Sera (1998).
- 2 See Sera (2002). Part of this study was presented at the annual conference of PALA held at the University of Birmingham in 2002.
- 3 The British newspapers are *Guardian Unlimited* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>, 25,884 words), *Independent* (<http://www.independent.co.uk/>, 11,538 words), the *Times* (<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/>, 17,779 words); the American media are *CNN* (<http://www.cnn.com/>, 2,587 words), *International Herald Tribune*

(<http://www.iht.com/>, 7,806 words), *USA Today* (<http://www.usatoday.com>, 9,248 words); and the Japanese newspapers are the *Asahi* (<http://www.asahi.com/english/>, 6,964 words), the *Daily Yomiuri Online* (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/>, 6,102 words), the *Mainichi Daily News* (<http://www.mdn.mainichi.co.jp/>, 3,140 words). See Sera (2002), for detailed information on each article.

4 The *Yomiuri* has the largest circulation in Japan.

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