Please yoroshiku this paper! = I hope you will look kindly on this paper!

Yoroshiku is a common expression used daily in Japanese speaking communities. Although, this expression is frequently uttered by Japanese people, it is almost impossible to find an equivalent word in English. The first time I realized the richness of this phrase was when I was helping a student translate a New Year’s card from Japanese to English. Like other typical season’s greetings, the Japanese New Year’s card greeting has a cliché of “Kotoshimo Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu.”

Kotoshimo translated in English means “this year also”, onegaishimasu translated in English means “please.” However, I was at a loss in front of my student for not being able to translate this customary saying of yoroshiku into English. This was because English does not have a concept similar to yoroshiku, which the Japanese depend on. Also I have always been unsatisfied with the orthodox English translation of another usage of yoroshiku, which we use in situations when meeting someone for the first time. It is usually translated into “Nice to meet you” or “I’m pleased to meet you.” However, this English translation does not completely express all the meanings this word carries in Japanese. I wondered why I could not simply translate this expression into English even though I knew the complete meaning and connotation in Japanese, and why the general translation seems to lack in meaning. Having been given the chance to explore and take a deeper look into the concept of yoroshiku for this research project, I have been able to reach the conclusion that the Japanese culture plays an important role in richly shaping the commonly used term yoroshiku. In this paper, I will first explain the richness that the word yoroshiku carries in meaning by giving examples, and then analyze how the uniqueness of the Japanese culture can be drawn out from the connotation of yoroshiku.

Since I am Japanese and I grew up in the Japanese culture, I have a fairly firm understanding of this expression. Therefore, I used a mixture of observation and collection of data through my own experiences as self-analysis, and also gained some help by interviewing two people.
**Yoroshiku** can be considered a universal phrase, because it does not have any boundaries on sex, age, and situation. It can be used by anyone in either formal or informal situations. However, due to a characteristic of Japanese language, uttering *yoroshiku* itself tends to be informal. In formal settings, one should add “*onegaishimasu*” after yoroshiku, as one adds “please” in English. The meaning does not change according to the person’s sex, age, or in formal or informal situations. Rather it depends on the context in which it is used. In order to understand the variety of meanings the expression *yoroshiku* has, I am going to list different situations where this expression is used, and include a literal translation of the expression. Following each example, I will give the actual closest meaning of the expression in English.

(A) Meeting someone for the first time: “How do you do? Please *Yoroshiku.*”

→ How do you do? Nice to meet you.

(B) On the New Year’s card: “Please *yoroshiku* this year as well.”

→ I hope I can rely on your cooperation this year, as well.

(C) When your daughter sleeps over at her friend’s house: “Please *yoroshiku* my daughter.”

→ Please look after my daughter.

(D) When parting after a negotiation or a meeting, Japanese businessmen often say: “*yoroshiku*”

→ Good bye and I am depending on you.

(E) When a company introduces a new product on a commercial, sometimes they introduce another new product at the very end by saying: “Please *yoroshiku* this product also.”

→ Please consider this product as well.

(F) “Please *yoroshiku* to your father.”

→ Please give my regards to your father.

(G) “My father said *yoroshiku* to you.”
→ My father sends you his best regards.

(H) “My son has won the favor of his boss and is doing yoroshiku.”

→ My son has won the favor of his boss and is happy with his work.

(I) “I suppose he is doing yoroshiku with her.”

→ I suppose he is having a good time with her.

The first two examples above are greeting situations. In (A) and (B), people tend to utter yoroshiku as a norm rather than giving a special meaning to it. However, as I have mentioned before, “Nice to meet you” is not a favorable translation because yoroshiku also includes the hope for friendly or kind relations in the future. My friend and I, who are both exchange students from Japan, came to this conclusion by comparing our experiences of meeting new people in America as opposed to meeting new people in Japan. A more direct and simple English translation of yoroshiku in this situation would be “Please treat me kindly”, which sounds strange to the English speaking culture.

In cases (C), (D), (E), yoroshiku is also used to ask someone for a favor. Unlike yoroshiku in (A) and (B), which is used more habitually, (C) usage can have all different levels of connotations. As illustrated in the example, parents can use it to ask the friend’s parents to take care of their daughter while she sleeps over at her friend’s house. Or it can be used in a more formal and more meaningful setting such as at a wedding. The parents of my sister-in-law said the same expression used in example (C), “Please yoroshiku my daughter,” to my brother on his wedding day. This expression meant more than just “Please take care of her.” It included the lifelong meaning of “Please make my daughter happy forever.” It is interesting that even if people utter the same short yoroshiku phrase, it can contain all different degrees of meaning because we usually do not make clear the content of yoroshiku. This is one of the unique characteristics of the expression yoroshiku. Example (D) also does not mention the requesting matter in concrete terms. Since the relationship between two different sides at a negotiation or a meeting tends to be very sensitive and tense, the expression yoroshiku is
used as a polite request, such as, "I am depending on you," "I hope you will take proper action," or "Please give it your consideration". Generally, American businessmen tend to clarify and paraphrase the content of one's request. On the contrary, Japanese businessmen do not mention it and just say "yoroshiku". This is to show politeness since ambiguity is favored in the Japanese culture. Also, Japanese people expect others to understand one's request from the expression yoroshiku, without having to clarify the request. Usage (E) is a good example of avoiding impoliteness by using yoroshiku to request their demand. The aim of TV commercials is to get people buy the products advertised. "Yoroshiku" softens their demands, and instead gives people a polite and good impression of the company and products advertised.

Unlike the examples above, Yoroshiku usage in examples (F) and (G) can be used to express one's regards or best wishes. The meaning and usage of yoroshiku are quite similar to how one would use "regards" and "best wishes" in English. One difference might be the flexibility of the expression yoroshiku has compared with the equivalent expression in English. The situations in which "regards" and "best wishes" are used, tend to be formal, whereas "Say 'Hi' to your father" is informal in the English language. However, yoroshiku can be used in both formal and informal situations. I can use it to both my friends and my former bosses by just adding "Please" at the end. This broad usage of yoroshiku comes from the formal and informal characteristic of Japanese language as I have mentioned in the beginning.

Lastly, yoroshiku in examples (H) and (I) is used completely different in meanings from the other examples. As you can see from these two examples, yoroshiku in these situations can mean "fine" or "well" in English. Although this is not a common usage of yoroshiku today, this was how the word yoroshiku was used originally since yoroshiku is an adverb of the adjective yoroshii, which means fine and good.

As I proceeded, the analysis of the expression yoroshiku, four aspects of the Japanese culture
came to light behind this expression. These characteristics are the factors which make this expression "a rich point", and without understanding these characteristics, it is impossible to fully understand the meaning of *yoroshiku*. After carefully examining the usage examples of *yoroshiku*, my two interviewees and I arrived at the following characteristics of the Japanese culture: ambiguity, 'reading each other's heart or mind', indulgent dependency and collectivism. These four notions are not new concepts, rather, many researchers often use these terms to explain the uniqueness of Japanese culture.

As I have already mentioned, the Japanese characteristics of ambiguity and "reading each other's heart and mind" are important keys to understanding the expression *yoroshiku*. Many American people find Japanese people's communication ambiguous because most Japanese do not directly clarify one's thinking or opinion. The notion supporting this ambiguity can be explained from the famous proverb of "ishin denshin" which is literally translated into "direct communication of mind to mind." In the Japanese culture, non-verbal communication is considered just as important as verbal communication. The Japanese believe in and rely on the notion that one can presume and understand the other's will or request without directly uttering it. As we have seen in the examples, one assumes that others can understand one's request by circumstances without clarifying the context, and by simply saying *yoroshiku*. Most of the time this is true, and there are no problems with understanding and communicating. However, the journalist whom I interviewed pointed out that sometimes the Japanese rely too much on this notion which sometimes results in miscommunication. Since *yoroshiku* is used commonly and many of the Japanese do not realize that the Japanese culture is helping to shape the richness of this expression, miscommunication tends to happen with non-native Japanese speakers. In fact, one of my American friends told me an excellent example of this. She had a Japanese friend in one of her classes and she was helping her friend by lending her notes. One day, her friend said "Yoroshiku in the future as well" to my friend in Japanese. At that time, my friend did not know the exact meaning of *yoroshiku*, and did not understand what was meant. When I heard this
story, I immediately knew that her friend was asking her to continue to lend her notes in the future. Her friend used “yoroshiku” to show her politeness, and assumed that my friend would recognize the true meaning behind it. When I explained this to my friend, I got an unexpected response from her. She asked me if it was rude to ask such a thing since it showed that her friend was fully depending on her and expecting her help again in the future. I wondered why it seemed rude to her, and realized another important characteristic of the Japanese culture behind the expression *yoroshiku*. The Japanese culture emphasizes collectivism, whereas the western cultures emphasize individualism. A researcher by the name of Takeru Doi observed and examined the characteristics of a collectivist society, and found that these are societies where cooperation and good relationships with others are considered more important than the individual, and where people are encouraged to depend on each other. This concept later became known as “indulgent dependency”. In his research, he showed that the Japanese people depend on others as a child depends on his/her mother. Dependency and cooperation are thought to be natural in the Japanese culture, and often *yoroshiku* includes the aspect of dependency. Earlier examples of (A) through (F) include the notion of dependency, which makes it difficult for people who do not know the Japanese culture to understand the connotations *yoroshiku* carry.

I will conclude this paper by stating that the meaning of the expression *yoroshiku* is shaped by the unique characteristics of the Japanese culture of ambiguity, “reading one’s heart or mind”, indulgent dependency and collectivism. It is impossible to find an English equivalent word for this expression because the Japanese culture is playing an important role in this expression. It is also difficult to explain the connotations of *yoroshiku* to an outsider, because the meaning depends on the complex knowledge of those four aspects of the Japanese culture. I was not able to notice that the clear example of the language culture was hidden in this commonly used expression, until I observed this word from cultural viewpoint.