

## How can CARP possibly function?

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How do Japanese W-CARP members keep, what appears to be from the outside, such a strict lifestyle when, as we can see from STF graduates and European “CARP” houses, it is so easy to let everything slip?

Is it the vertical culture of the Japanese that keeps people in line? Leaders using militaristic tactics and incentives to ensure the motivation and dedication of the membership?

Or maybe it is dependency that keeps the center together. Much like some gap year programs where there is very little room for individual independence, is it total dependence on the leaders and structure that dictates the members’ ability to function?

Although these two principles can and are used effectively when applied to many projects and programs, it does not work for CARP style house management. Overbearing leadership styles are good for some aspects of CARP life, such as witnessing, but hinder other aspects, like personal study. Militaristic leadership can sometimes create a culture in which people look forward to and take advantage of time that isn’t being actively led. Although productivity is high when the members are pushed, it can lower productivity of unscheduled time. 80% of a CARP member’s time is unscheduled.

CARP members also have the ability to be financially independent. Living in a CARP house is a choice, of which there are very few consequences to leaving. The number of second generation who chose to join CARP during their university studies is in the minority, so peer and social pressure is not much of a factor. Something else must be incentivizing members to, not only join, but decide to come back year after year for the duration of their studies.

During my stay in Japan, I have come to the conclusion that the lifestyle that breeds an atmosphere which allows people to function and benefit from the CARP house is one based on tradition and order. By tradition I certainly don’t mean conservatism or religious worship. Each and every tradition followed by the CARP members has its root in something practical and important to the wellbeing of the CARP house and its members. Everything from the call and answer style greetings frequently used as part of morning/evening service to the cult like chant they all recite before tucking into their evening meal. All, if omitted from the tradition, would have a negative impact on the physical welfare of the house.

During morning service, the members will give single word answers in unison about 10 times replying to the person giving morning service. This simply keeps people attentive during the least attentive part of the day.

Before meals, the chant they all sing together consists of: a greeting, an acknowledgement of the chefs, an introduction of the food by the chefs, thanks, and a prayer. This simply has 2 main effects. It keeps the important tradition of eating as a group strong as everyone starts the meal together. It also praises the chefs and gives them a platform to introduce and show off their food while the whole house has the opportunity to give positive feedback on the dishes put in front of them. Cooking, especially for a large group, can easily become a chore. If given proper appreciation and support, people will tend to use the opportunity to make an effort and even show off a little, thus increasing the quality of food over time.

Every time someone leaves the house to witness, travel or just go about their daily business, all the members within earshot will go to see them off. The moment they leave the threshold, they all say a little 30 second prayer in their head for that person. Ignoring any spiritual benefit, what effect does this have on the house and its members? While living in a large house with many people in it, and spending most of your time in university by yourself, it is easy for one or two people to become isolated. When, every time you leave the house, a crowd of people asks where you are going, wishes you luck, waves you goodbye and says a prayer for you, it is impossible for wallflowers to feel secluded. When the first thing you do when you get back is to be greeted enthusiastically while, instead of going up to your room, you sit down in the lounge with a cup of tea and talk about your day, even the most socially inept person is successfully brought into the group and made to feel part of the family.

This is the essence of the CARP houses’ culture and traditions. It is this atmosphere that, not only breeds academically successful people but a force that can be mobilized to do other things.

I think a functional CARP house is possible and can be very successful in London if it is set up with the in-house leadership creating and following strong traditions.

As a relatively young person, I find myself without the knowledge of house traditions such as there come about. One would imagine it is simply a case of some authoritative figure declaring “This is how it is” and everyone agrees “Yes”.

If traditions can be laid down and followed for a short period of time by a small amount of people, a mobilizing organization such as CARP can grow in a city like London. Its focuses and traditions may appear different, but if its traditions are solid, it can become strong and active, something which the UK and European movements are in need of right now.