

Source Packet One: Cultural Norms

“The Birth of Boku”

Rubin, Jay. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. Vintage, 2005.

Elsewhere Murakami has written on style: “At first, I tried writing realistically, but it was unreadable. So then I tried redoing the opening in English. I translated that into Japanese and worked on it a little more. Writing in English, my vocabulary was limited, and I couldn’t write long sentences. So that way a kind of rhythm took hold, with relatively few words and short sentences.”

36

It was a tone he had sensed in Vonnegut and Brautigan.

One is reminded of Samuel Beckett’s experience of writing in French, and clearly the effect in both cases was a liberating coolness and distancing, not only in the language but in the humorously detached view of life-- and death. But Murakami’s world rarely takes on the starkness of Beckett’s hard-edged clowning; it is a much more easily digestible, pastel-coloured world that at times lets the sentiment show through.

Murakami achieves this comforting level of detachment in several ways. The narrator writes of events in his early twenties from the perspective of a wiser but only slightly older self who betrays no hint of adult smugness. It is important that the word Murakami uses for “I” throughout is *boku*. Although the “I-novel” is a long-established fixture of serious Japanese fiction, the word most commonly used for the “I” narrator has a formal tone: *watakushi* or *watashi*. Murakami chose instead the casual *boku*, another pronoun-like word for “I”, but an unpretentious one used primarily by young men in informal circumstances. (Women never use *boku* for “I”. In the few cases where Murakami creates a female narrator, they use the gender-neutral *watashi*.)

Murakami was by no means the first Japanese novelist to adopt *boku* as the “I” of a nameless male narrator, but the personality with which Murakami invested his Boku was unique. First of all it resembled his own, with a generous fund of curiosity and a cool, detached, bemused acceptance of the inherent strangeness of life. This stance normally makes Boku a passive character, which in turn gives rise to a speech habit-- or “Haruki-ism” -- often used by Murakami’s protagonists when they are confronted by confounding situations: “*Yare-yare*”. This has been rendered into English as “Great, just great” or “Terrific” or merely a sigh, depending on the translator and the befuddling context. Murakami chose to call this fictional persona *Boku* because he felt the word to be the closest

37

thing Japanese had to the neutral English “I”; less a part of the Japanese social hierarchy, more democratic, and certainly not the designation of an authority figure.

Early in his career Murakami said he was uncomfortable assuming the stance of a god-like creator, deigning to impose names on his characters and narrating their actions in the third person. The first-person Boku was an instinctive decision to eschew all hint of authority in his narrative. Boku may encounter strange stories, but he speaks to the reader in a voice that feels just as familiar and spoken-- and, in a way, distanced from the events in the tale-- as if a friend were telling us of his own

personal experiences. Murakami's consistent use of the friendly, approachable Baku remained central to his narrative strategy for the better part of 20 years. [...]

Boku is often the least interesting individual in his crowd, but a comfortable guy to be around-- a kind of Charlie Brown who provides us access to the Lucys and Linuses and Schrodgers of the world with their various personality quirks. He is the kind of person that people trust with their innermost thoughts-- a great listener

38

and, as with an analyst, people seem to feel better once they've told him their stories. They are of interest to him, though, only as the possessors of those quirks and those stories, not as fully rounded individuals. It might be said that the only "personality" in most of Murakami's Boku-narrated works is that of Baku himself, whose perceptions never cease to fascinate. The other characters are functions of his psyche. A Murakami story focuses on a strange perception or experience of Baku's; a Murakami novel usually provides many such moments, not the extended exploration of personality or the unfolding of a tightly constructed plot. And where the pursuit of a mystery propels the narrative, the

chase is always more interesting than the goose (or the sheep).

39

"Murakami's International Style"

Strecher, Matthew Carl. *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*. The University of Michigan, 2002.

This cultural confusion-- some would simply term it a new cosmopolitanism-- is reflected clearly in Murakami's language. Dispensing with the inherent subtleties of Japanese-- implied subjects and the like-- Murakami prefers to be blunt. One is rarely in doubt about what is happening, or to whom. Indeed, his work may provide the most translatable Japanese texts ever to appear on the international scene, and this is one of his most unique characteristics. It is not merely the author's liberal use of the first-person pronoun "I" (*boku*) that lends his style a foreign flavor (literary Japanese avoids overuse of pronouns, except where clarity is at stake); it lies also in his use of foreign images and idioms. So much does Murakami's Japanese seem to reflect awareness of Western languages, in fact, that Stalph (1995,

4

105) has declared it to be almost seamless when rendered into them.

What permits Japanese and non-Japanese readers alike such unmitigated accessibility to Murakami's "voice" as a writer? One suspects it lies in his intimate, somehow personal way of describing things as though they were matters that anyone would understand immediately from his own experience. The world he describes is at once

2

personal and yet shared, unique yet commonplace. We can almost always understand what Murakami tries to show us by relying on our historical pasts. One can almost hear him say, "Surely you understand what I mean from your own similar experiences." Perhaps this is the real source of the intimate connection that seems to form almost instantly between the narrators of Murakami works and those who read them. Much of the author's popularity seems to come from his ability to make the reader feel what he himself is feeling, the mark of any good writer or poet.

5

"Legitimation of Double Codes"

Sugimoto, Yoshio. *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. 3rd Ed., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

In this context, one must be mindful that dominant subcultural groups rely heavily on an ideology which discourages transparent and forthright interactions between individuals. While indirectness, vagueness and ambiguity are facets of human behavior in any society, the Japanese norm explicitly encourages such orientations in a wide range of situations. Double codes are legitimized in many spheres of Japanese life, thereby creating a world behind the surface. The Japanese language has several concept pairs which distinguish between sanitized official appearance and hidden reality. The distinction is frequently invoked between the facade, which is normatively proper and correct, and the actuality, which may be publicly unacceptable but adopted privately or among insiders. In analyzing Japanese society, one should caution against confusing these two aspects, and pay special attention to at least three such pairs.

One set is *tatemae* and *honne*. *Tatemae* refers to a formally established principle which is not necessarily accepted or practiced by the parties involved. *Honne* designates true feelings and desires which cannot be openly expressed because of the strength of *tatemae*. If *tatemae* corresponds to 'political correctness', *honne* points to hidden, camouflaged, and authentic sentiment. Thus, an employee who expresses dedication to his company boss in accordance with the corporate *tatemae* of loyalty and harmony may do so because of his *honne* ambition for promotion and other personal gains. Or an advocate of the *tatemae* principle of the

32

unique place of Japanese rice in Japanese culture may be a farmer whose *honne* may lie in the promotion of his agricultural interests.

Another pair is likened to two sides of a coin or any other flat object with *omote* (the face) and *ura* (back). The implication is that *omote* represents the correct surface or front, which is openly permissible, whereas *ura* connotes the wrong, dark, concealed side, which is publicly unacceptable or even illegal. Thus, in the business world, *ura* money flows with *ura* negotiations and *ura* transactions. Wheeler-dealers use various *ura* skills to promote their interests. At some educational institutions, students whose parents have paid *ura* fees to school authorities buy their way into the school through

3

the 'ura gate' (back door). In community life, *ura* stories (inside accounts) are more important than *ornate* explanations.

The third pair consists of *soto* (outside or exterior) and *uchi* (inside or interior). When referring to individuals' group affiliation, the dichotomy is used to distinguish between outsiders and insiders, or between members of an out-group and those of an in-group. When talking to outsiders, company employees often refer to their firm as *uchi*, drawing a line between 'them' and 'us'. One cannot candidly discuss sensitive matters in *soto* but can straightforwardly break confidentiality in *uchi* situations. In the context of human interaction, while *soto* aspects of individuals or groups represent their superficial outward appearances, their *uchi* facets account for their fundamental essence and real dispositions. For instance, a female worker may make a pretense of being obedient to her male supervisor in *soto* terms but may in fact be quite angry about his arrogant behavior in her *uchi*.

These dichotomies also exist in other cultures and languages. In Japanese society, however, these particular forms of duality are invoked in public discourse time and again to defend the publicly unacceptable sides of life as realities to be accepted. According to the dominant social code, the *honne* of the *uchi* members should be winked at, and the *ura* of their activities must be purposely overlooked. The legitimation of duality underlying the Japanese vocabulary provides a pretext for corrupt activities.

In the *ura* side of business transactions, for example, Japanese companies use the category of *shito fumei kin* (expenses unaccounted for) to conceal the identity of the recipient of the expenditure. They can do this as long as they declare those expenses to be subject to taxation. The corporate world uses this method extensively to hide secret pay-offs, kickbacks, and political donations. About half the expenditures unaccounted for in the construction industry are thought to be undisclosed political donations of this nature. The *honne* of the participants in these

deals is to promote the mutual interests of *uchi* networks of business and politics.

The notion that the dual codes must be seen as facts of life is sometimes used to justify murky collusion known as *dangō*, the illegal practice most predominant in construction company tendering for public works projects. Companies which take part in *dangō* engage in artful pre-tender arrangements where they agree in advance among themselves on their bids and on which company will be the successful tenderer. In return, it is agreed that the unsuccessful companies are entitled to a certain share of the successful company's profits. The practice of *dangō* rests upon the prevailing 'closed' tender system in which a government body designates several companies as entitled to tender. As the number of companies designated is normally limited to ten or so, they can easily engage in pre-tender negotiations and come to mutually agreed clandestine deals. To win designation, companies vie with each other for the arbitrary favor of bureaucrats and the influence of politicians, and this also tends to create an environment for corruption. The practice rests upon the *ura* operations of *uchi* insiders attempting to materialize their *honne* of profit maximization among themselves.

To accomplish the *ura* part of their business exchanges, Japanese companies spend enormous amounts on entertainment expenses. The *tatema*e and *omote* justifications of these expenses include the importance of informal contacts and communications. Many important political policy decisions are made by politicians who wine and dine in high class Japanese-style restaurants (called *ryōtei*) where *ura-type* trading is done behind closed doors. Similarly, local

government officials often entertain their national counterparts in these and other restaurants in order to secure high allocations of national government subsidies, a *ura* practice which citizens' groups have criticized as illegitimate use of taxpayers' money.

In the sphere of law, the Japanese are said to be reluctant to sue. In *tatemae* and *omote* terms, this is often attributed to a peculiarly Japanese cultural aversion to litigation. In *ura* reality, however, suing does not pay in Japan because the cost of taking a dispute to trial is high and pay-off is low for a number of reasons. The utility of judiciary solutions is reduced by bond-posting requirements; the limited dissemination of information about the court; the relatively small numbers of lawyers; and delays in court proceedings. Because the *honne* of Japan's potential litigants is no different from their counterparts in Western countries, they do take legal action once the availability of judiciary relief and the effectiveness of litigation become known. This was the case with lawsuits by feminist

34

groups, environmental organizations, and other citizens' movements in the 1980s onward.

Studies of Japanese society are incomplete if researchers examine only its *tatemae*, *omote*, and *soto* aspects. Only when they scrutinize the *honne*, *ura*, and *uchi* sides of Japanese society can they grasp its full picture. To be Japan-literate, researchers should not confuse outward appearances with inside realities when examining a society in which double codes play significant roles.

35

“More Than Meets the Eye: All about Context”

Condon, John C. and Tomoko Masumoto. *With Respect to the Japanese: Going to Work in Japan*. 2nd Ed., Intercultural Press, 2011.

SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND ASSUMPTIONS AS CONTEXT

“In America, words are the way to communicate; in Japan, words are a way to communicate.” Masao Kunihiro, anthropologist, government advisor, and former Diet member, expressed simply what others have said in more elaborate ways, even in the form of a theory about words and all that provides the context for the words, that helps us interpret how to interpret the words, and that may indeed be even more important than the words themselves.

If all meaning were expressed in words taken at face value-- where “yes” always meant yes, and “no” always meant no--then context could largely be ignored: it would matter not at all who said the “yes” or the “no,” to whom, in what situation, and in what form-- spoken or written-- and if spoken in a soft voice or a shout. If relationships are clear and unalterable, if things never change, then words may carry a different kind of meaning.

In a traditional wedding ceremony, vows are exchanged; this is an essential part of the ceremony. But taken at face value, the promises exchanged are vague. Compare that with prenuptial agreements that are reviewed and formalized by

27

attorneys: they include explicit enumeration of what is promised and what is not, and what will happen if conditions in the agreement are breached. Or compare a spoken promise affirmed with a handshake with something "in writing:" dated and signed by the parties. There are matters where trust, reputation, or just gut feelings are sufficient for one to enter into an agreement with another. And there are matters where we want a precise statement, a written contract that we believe reduces ambiguity and minimizes misunderstandings for both parties. In most societies we experience and value both. The particular situations and application of these, however, differ across cultures.

In our lives, in our work, and in our relationships, paying attention to what someone says is often important, sometimes crucial. But it is not just the words said, but how they are said, who says them (and sometimes words that were expected but not said), where they are said, or how they are expressed-face to face, in an e-mail, in a voice message, and so on. All of those other parts of communication are often the most important part. Where relationships are irrelevant-- for example, instructions on installing a computer program-- what matters are words that are clear and that can be taken literally, at face value.

But we know that what gives meaning to our lives cannot easily be put into words.

The late American anthropologist Edward T. Hall pointed out in his theory of content that we can put our trust in words to understand and be understood, or we can look for meaning in the context within which the words are spoken- such as who says the words, where and how they are spoken, and so on. Cultures differ in what they emphasize. On a world scale, America ranks very high in the trust one puts in words and low in the importance of knowing the context as the carrier of meaning. Japan, and indeed much of the world, seems more comfortable in paying attention to context in order to interpret the meaning of words that may be said. The reasons for the difference are many, but some important reasons are clear. The better people know each other, the less that needs to be put explicitly in words.

Close family relations or friends of many years can often sense what the other is thinking without having to be told because they have shared so much that just a few words tap a reservoir of meaning. Strangers can assume little about what the other is thinking and thus have to rely on words. Where tradition or precedent is a reliable indicator, less new information may need to be expressed than in a new relationship where nothing can be taken for granted. Where people are heavily dependent on what others think, especially in the form of social pressure, maintaining one's reputation is crucial. This applies to

28

other matters as well--contracts, for example. In cultures where context more than "in writing" is all that matters, a contract represents a kind of best guess, a formalized point in a changing reality, so that if the terms of a contract cannot be met, the parties will get together and discuss things again. Where words outweigh context, then the terms of a contract tend to be fixed and rigid. In a survey in Japan, people were asked what should be done if a contract had been signed but after a period of time it was impossible to fulfill the terms because conditions had changed. Less than a quarter of those surveyed

responded that “a contract is a contract;’ and people should feel bound by its terms. Two-thirds chose the alternative-- -to talk it out with the other party and see what adjustments might be made .

Where sensitivity to “context” is important, the burden of understanding lies with the person hearing or reading, and if present, observing. Where there is less attention to the who, where, how, and when of the message-- the “low context” manner of expression-- the burden is on the person who wants to send the message.

Interculturalist Janet Bennett suggests a different metaphor: wide scanning or narrow scanning. Japanese, like many others-- like most others in the world, perhaps-- scan widely, observing and sensing one’s place in relationships, occasion, hints, and more. The more familiar people are with the many contexts in which and with which they work, the more efficient interpersonal communication can be. “A word to the wise is sufficient” is said in the West, but it resonates in Japan.

Communication that is expressed and assumed to be understood without being said in so many words can be a source of anxiety for someone who expects an explicit verbal message, as in the case of “feedback” about one’s performance at work. As we will discuss in Chapter 7, North Americans experience considerable stress if they do not receive the kind of explicit verbal feedback they expect. Even after a year’s work in Japan some returned home, frustrated because there were not sure what their supervisor thought of their work. Similarly, when a Japanese is hired by a Japanese company, he or she might not be given a precise job description; the new employee may not even know what the salary and benefits will be, a condition that few Westerners would feel comfortable with. “How do you know you will even get paid?” an American asked a Japanese friend who described this situation. The Westerner wants the promise stated clearly in words. The Japanese places the trust more in other matters-- the company’s reputation or the person who may have recommended the candidate.

29

Anthropologist Chie Nakane was once quoted by a *Newsweek* reporter as saying “the Japanese have no principles.” Taken out of context, that seems a terrible thing to say about any people.

Many people pride themselves on being people of principle, even if they do not always live up to those principles. They would like the same principles to apply to all people in all situations. Experience may not conform to these ideals. Japanese communication, as noted, values sensitivity to situations, to doing or saying what is appropriate in a particular circumstance. The Japanese do not expect all people to be treated in the same way in all situations, nor do they think it is wise to always say what one believes. From a Japanese point of view this is a recognition that a “case by case” practicality should be regarded as necessary and practical. (“Case-by-case” is an idiom often used in Japan, in English.)

TATEMAE AND HONNE

Many who study about Japan have heard the Japanese terms *tatemae* and *honne* to describe two standards that work in parallel, not in conflict. *Tatemae* is literally the outward structure of a building; the term refers to what is outwardly expressed, what appears on the surface (“fayade” conveys the wrong impression). It is the appropriate presence. *Honne*, literally one’s “true voice;’ refers to what one really thinks or feels. The Japanese assume that there may be a difference between what one says and what one thinks. How else could it be in a society that values harmony in

interpersonal relations, that discourages individualistic outspokenness, and that restrains the bold expression of personal feelings? It is not that this is unique to Japan: everywhere one recognizes the voice that says, "This is what we say, but let's be honest (or practical)."

The effects of this difference in "standards" are many. Japanese are more likely to take into account the circumstances in which something is expressed and judge accordingly how much reflects *honne* and how much is *tatemae*. Context is all-important. Westerners who expect to be able to take words at face value and discover a difference between what someone says and what is actually believed may be upset and complain. A German reporter living in Japan once defined "*honne*" as "duplicitous." Japanese, on the other hand, may sympathize with a person who is put into a situation where it is difficult for that person to say what he or she is thinking.

30

Those who go to work in Japan are well advised to always consider the circumstances in which something is said. While this may also be good advice everywhere, the occasions, settings, and "contexts" in Japan generally exert much more influence on what is said or not said than is the case for many Westerners. Often circumstances dictate whether one can reveal one's "true voice," or say what is expected or what circumstances constrain one to say. One's true voice can be heard in a situation that allows for it. This is one reason the informal, after-hours settings for gathering with coworkers are so important in Japan. For the same reasons, foreigners working with Japanese should take care not to ask blunt questions in situations where the Japanese would find it difficult to respond frankly.

Expats working in Japan have complained that they get "too much *tatemae*" from the Japanese and not enough *honne*. Said one expatriate manager with considerable overseas experience and who is now based in Osaka, "It's a lot harder to know what my Japanese staff members are thinking than with people from any other culture I've worked with." Japanese, on the other hand, are sometimes irked by what they feel is childish, to express a "true voice" in situations where more *tatemae* is called for-- as in some formal settings or in staff sessions with the top officials of the organization.

But there is more to this than an imbalance of courtesy and candor. There is a kind of American style of *tatemae* that Japanese sometimes interpret as *honne*. A Japanese engineer, transferred to the American home office, was at first confused and then upset when Americans, seeming outwardly so friendly, would make vague overtures of invitations to dinner but never follow through. Later he philosophized, "Americans think we Japanese are too polite for too long-- but it takes a longer time for Japanese to become real friends. But Americans, I think, seem too friendly too soon, so we Japanese don't know if they are really friendly or just being polite American style."

CONTEXT AND RECIPROCITY

There is a context of a social balance sheet, in matters small and large. In New York, "I owe you lunch!" may be a joke about the next time friends will meet. In Japan the calculation of social reciprocity may be more serious. One feature of interpersonal relations in Japan can be likened to

what happens on a seesaw, when one of the people moves up on the board in such a way as to cause the other to be elevated, and the other end tips down to the ground. Was it the lowering

31

that caused the other to *rise*, or allowing the other to rise that caused oneself to be lowered? Or is it that these are both part of the same process? Japanese show respect and express gratitude and politeness by elevating, in words and actions, the other person. Like the physics of the seesaw, they can do the same by humbling themselves. Both the deference that raises the other and the humility that humbles oneself are basic principles of interpersonal relations in Japan. Indeed, the logic of the seesaw is sometimes almost comical when two people attempt to out-humble themselves or out-compliment the other. Westerners may do as well as the Japanese in extolling praise for or expressing concern about the other, but they may not be as prepared to be quite as self-effacing as their Japanese friends.

In the implicit hierarchy in Japanese relations, where one is always conscious of who defers to whom, there is little ambiguity about the meaning of polite amenities. Often the conversation simply reaffirms a relationship, treating a person as he or she expects or feels entitled to be treated. When this is lacking, the person may be irritated or confused. The same thing sometimes happens in other societies of course. When customers feel they are not being treated courteously by salespeople in a store, or when parents feel they are not shown some modicum of respect from their offspring, they are bothered or feel hurt. In the army that sort of thing is called insubordination. American culture in particular, however, discourages people from expecting any special treatment that has not been "earned." The expectation of being treated in a certain way by virtue of one's relationship with another is the norm in Japan. One does not expect to have to negotiate each new relationship. Thus it is that Japanese managers in factories can dress like everybody else and eat in the company cafeteria alongside the workers without feeling that their position is threatened: everybody knows the relationship without its having to be demonstrated outwardly.

While who sits where and who defers to whom will be perfectly clear within an organization where people know each other, what happens when strangers meet? How does one know how to act appropriately? Several points should be noted.

First of all, Japanese do not always know how to tip that seesaw when they first meet someone, particularly if the meeting is informal and unexpected and if there is no clear difference in age. They may ask some of the same questions anyone would in the same situation, but do so more cautiously and with an ear to learning at least who is older. In business and professional circles, *meishi* (business cards) will be exchanged, and the recipients will pay most attention to the other's position in the company. Companies or other organizations, of course,

32

also have their own status and relative rank, just as they do anywhere, and this too enters into the calculation.

Japanese do their homework in preparing for meetings with others. There may be cultural differences in how one thinks of when communication begins: at the time of the actual, physical meeting of people, or long before with messages exchanged and homework done to know whom one will be meeting. The Japanese will want to know at least enough about the person he is meeting for the first time in order to act appropriately, rather than trying to figure out the relationship at the time of

the meeting. All this has to do with more than just *aisatsu* (greetings), of course, for it also anticipates what kind of future relationship, if any, should be encouraged. This desire to be prepared for meetings is one reason Japanese prefer to use an intermediary in making introductions, for the third party can help to clarify a situation in a way that avoids awkwardness and potential embarrassment. It is also a reason that Japanese are uncomfortable with “cold calls” from persons who want to do business. Businesspeople who arrive at a Japanese company without warning do not make a good impression and are not likely to be well received. The company is literally unprepared to receive them.

NEGOTIATING STYLES

The importance of context and the expectation of reciprocity are both central to Japanese negotiating styles, as explained by United Nations University Vice Rector and international relations professor Kinhide Mushakoji’s distinction between the adjusting style (*awase*) and the selecting style (*erabi*). Does one first try to create a social context of relationships and then see what is possible, or does one begin with a plan of demands: business before pleasure?

The *erabi* style is that of a choicemaker, one who chooses or selects-- the style associated with American negotiators. On the assumption that one has some control over events and that one enters into a bargaining situation only when one’s goal is clear, the *erabi* style is marked by a series of choices that lead directly to the desired goal. In presenting his theory, Mushakoji notes that these choices are of an “either/or” and “yes or no” sort; he compares them with the kind of choices one makes when playing chess. For instance, Americans who speak about their “game plan” clearly exemplify the *erabi* way of thinking.

The *awase* style, on the other hand, is characterized by continuous adjustment to an ever-changing environment. “*Awase*” comes from the word *awaseru*,

33

meaning to adjust to something else or to combine; this is the style associated with the Japanese. From an *awase* point of view, one cannot proceed toward a fixed goal but rather must adjust to changing and uncertain conditions. The *awase*- style negotiator, therefore, may not have a fixed goal in mind until after entering into negotiations and sensing what might be possible under the circumstances. Consistent with this, the language of *awase* style is “more-or-less” rather than “either-or. Nuance and shades of meaning are very important.

A television set provides an analogy for the two kinds of negotiating styles. The *erabi* or American style is likened to choosing one channel or another. The *awase* style is more like the volume control, which may be adjusted to be slightly softer or a little louder, depending on circumstances.

What happens when more traditional Japanese and Westerners attempt to negotiate and the *awase* and *erabi* styles meet? In the first place, there may be a clash of protocols. One side may want to put forth their proposals immediately, to “lay their cards out on the table”-- again the game metaphor is revealing. The Japanese may not be prepared to do so; they may want to spend much more time during which, in effect, they can come to know the other side better so as to see what might be worked out. Thus the one side may be viewed as too “fast;” too blunt or aggressive, and possibly

too uncompromising. The other side, in contrast, may be perceived as too “slow;’ too cautious, and too guarded about their position.

The awase-style negotiator also assumes that the adjustments will be reciprocal, though the expectation of a quid pro quo may not be stated. Americans do not make this same assumption. There are many cases in business and government relations where the Japanese have been startled to find that Americans did not reciprocate as expected.

The awase (Japanese) mode of thinking also expects there to be an unavoidable gap between form and reality: “We say things should be this way but we know that in practice it is not so simple.’ This is very different from the erabi style, which usually is most concerned about the formal outcome of negotiations-- the agreement, contract, or whatever. If one side wants to have detailed and binding contracts while the Japanese would prefer a less precise document that serves as a symbol of their efforts to work together, there may be problems. Japanese may continue to negotiate for favors after a contract has been signed, a position that those accustomed to the erabi mode regard as most improper.

The erabiawase comparison like others, such as the role of context, can be overdrawn and in an ever-changing, globally connected world, suggest contrasts that are less apparent in the early 21st century than they were a decade or two earlier. And yet these distinctions have value as points of reference, an expanded

34

perspective about intercultural communication. To state a choice and await the other’s response, or to be more cautious and want to sense the other’s feelings and preferences before proceeding-- this distinction continues to be one that is helpful when working in Japan.

34
