

HAVE YOU EVER EATEN PIZZA?

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“Have you ever eaten pizza?” If someone asks you this question, how do you feel?

When I visited Minooka, which is a small town about twenty-five kilometers southwest of Chicago, a ten-year old boy in my host family asked me this question. In addition, when I said, “We also have MacDonaldis in Japan,” my host mother seemed to be very surprised. I was really shocked, and at the same time I thought Americans should have much more interest in Japanese culture. As the days passed, I noticed this is not an advancing idea, and it is me that should actively give information about Japan to foreigners.

Now Japan has great power in terms of economics, and many people appreciate it. But it seems that many people in other countries have only a little knowledge of Japan. Perhaps I go too far in saying this, but all they seem to know about are Toyota, Honda and Suzuki. I think there is something wrong with this situation. Now is the time not only to learn something from foreign countries but to get Japanese culture known. And each of us has to assume the responsibility for transmission. Yes! We have to act as a go-between in telling about Japanese things and culture to foreigners. Then what is the obligation for us as go-betweens?

First, it is to study Japanese culture. If we do not know about Japan well enough, we will have a hard time explaining our culture to foreigners. I, myself, have had some bitter experiences on this matter because of my insufficient knowledge of Japanese culture. One day, when my friends from Los Angeles visited us in Japan, we drove around a small town in Saitama. There we happened to see a lantern parade outside. Seeing the lanterns, my friends said, “What is that? Why are they walking around with something like lamps?” But at that time I couldn't explain it at all, and all I did was to laugh off the embarrassing situation. How strongly mortified I felt then! I can't forget that embarrassment. You might not need to have much knowledge about Japanese culture, but I'm sure the more knowledge you have, the better you will be as a go-between.

The second obligation is to study the culture of other countries. It is important to know it to have good communication with people overseas. This summer I went to Philadelphia. Philadelphia, as everyone knows, is the birthplace of America and many historical monuments. Of course, I visited some of them. But since my knowledge about American history was very poor, I couldn't be deeply touched and,

what was worse, I could not be taking part in the conversation with my American friends.

I think we definitely need to study our Japanese culture and the culture of other countries. But that is not all we need to do. The most important thing for us now is to improve our ability in expressing ourselves. When I visited New York, I was surprised to see that people in New York seemed to have very strong personalities. Since they expressed themselves so vividly, I said to my host sister, "I was really surprised that people here have very strong personalities." Then she said that unless they expressed their ideas clearly, they could not live in New York.

Japan is an island, and most of us in Japan have a common historical and cultural background. So even if we do not purposely express our idea, other Japanese can guess what we want to say. But New York is a melting pot in terms of the racial and cultural background of its people. So to express their idea clearly is very important to have their ideas understood. Whenever we visit foreign countries, we are in the same situation as people in New York. In foreign countries, our common sense often cannot be communicable to the local inhabitants. Unless we try very hard expressing ourselves, we will not be able to transmit our ideas clearly to the people overseas, who have different cultural background from ours.

Today, it is required of us to have a global view and to work hard for promoting mutual understanding even beyond cultural differences. What can we do as college students? Fortunately we have many opportunities to visit other countries and to have contact with foreigners visiting Japan. On those occasions we have many opportunities to learn many things from others, and at the same time. We should give them as much information about Japan as we can. When we visit other countries in the future, we should study Japan's and the other country's culture before leaving Japan. In visiting these countries, we must express ourselves and transmit Japanese culture positively to the local people.

I do not want to hear the question again, "Have you ever eaten pizza?"

Don't you think so, too?

(これは、音声と身体表現を伴って発表したものの原稿である。)