

国際英会話／「話文」読解演習

Culture Comes from Environment and History

Differences in ways of thinking between countries or regions show up strikingly with regard to food, as we can see, for example, with whales. Snakes are used as ingredients in Chinese dishes, and French cuisine is famous for its use of snails. Japanese are reluctant to eat these things. Conversely, there were few foreigners who ate sashimi a decade ago. They were quite reluctant to eat raw fish. It is well known that adherents of Islam don't eat pork.

Where do differences in value like those seen in food culture originate? The biggest factor is a country's environment. The Japanese have a worldwide reputation for being diligent, and the Japanese tend to view foreigners, especially people in tropical countries, as lazy because they don't work much. But even the Japanese, if they were to live in a tropical country and if, on top of that, there were no modern conveniences like air conditioners, would surely not be very enthusiastic about working. Considering midsummer conditions in Japan, it is easy to imagine what it would be like. What's more, it is all the more understandable because they are blessed with abundant natural resources, have plenty of food and have no real difficulties in their daily lives. The environment not only influences our eagerness for work, it also influences us in many other ways.

It's the same with houses. For example, in the Philippines, where it is very humid, houses are built with raised floors, and in Korea where there's severe winter cold, they've developed the *ondol*, which heats from under the floor. In Holland, where they have strong winds, they've built a lot of windmills, and in Northern Europe, where there's heavy snow, roofs with steep inclines are used to make snow fall off easily. As in these cases, people in all parts of the world have developed different cultures to adapt to their particular environment. Environmental features shape culture, including customs, manners, religious belief and so on. Culture, in turn, shapes different value systems.

In addition to the environment, history also molds people's values. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the history of mankind is the history of wars. As a result of invasions in South America, the Philippines, and of course the countries of Europe and many other countries, different cultures were fused together and new cultures were born. I have been to a small island known as Majoro in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. There I discovered that people say *kacchuro* for a runway (*kassoro* in Japanese). Further, it seems they

—— (中 略) ——

house even today. This is because the *kotatsu* is not just for heating. It also has an important role as a place for the family to get together and enjoy each other's company. This kind of deeply rooted regional culture exists in the daily life found in areas all over the world.

The first step in avoiding friction between different ethnic groups is to know each other's cultures and to recognize differences in values. Cross-culturalists are people who understand the resultant differences in laws of behavior and adapt themselves to them.

