



Column No.4

Importance of “Ma” (Distance) in Japan

The main point of the phrase “new lifestyle” is about keeping social distance. Maintaining social distance may be unfamiliar to Western people but not to Japanese people. In other countries, you see quite often that kissing, hugging, and shaking hands are common greetings. But Japanese people normally bow when greeting one another. In old movie scenes, soldiers returning from war bow to their family members when they meet. In the last scene of “The Yellow Handkerchief”, famous movie stars Mr. TAKAKURA Ken and Ms. BAISHO Chieko, who meet again after a long time apart in the story, do not hug each other.

With this in mind, please recall that the Japanese word “Ma” means “distance” or “pause” in English. Maintaining “Ma” (distance) and taking a “Ma” (pause) are used when someone tries to remain calm. “Fit for a ‘Ma” (suitable distance) shows “Ma” is considered as something important. To “meet a ‘Ma” (to be on time) is also a positive expression. When something is near, we talk about close “Ma”, which generates a sense of affinity or urgency.

However, if you take “Ma” wrongfully, you feel bad *Ma*, or “*Ma ga warui*” (embarrassed). When you choose a different “Ma”, it becomes “*Ma chigai*” (a mistake). If there is no “Ma”, its absence is foolish, “*Ma nuke*” (fool). If “Ma” is extended, “*Ma nobi*” becomes slow, lazy or stupid. Leaving no space, “*Ma o tsumeru*”, generates the feeling tension as if you will be attacked. In short, “Ma” has a somewhat positive meaning in Japanese.

A lawyer commented that, in handling disputes, Western people tend to step forward and start battle to gain an advantage. On the other hand, Japanese people tend to step backward to make a “Ma” (space and distance), and then step forward to reach mutual agreements at a satisfactory point.

If you observe Japanese culture and lifestyle, social distance is not so difficult.

(YAMASHITA Terutoshi)

Editor's Note

Dreams in the 21st Century

Twenty years ago, I dreamt that the 21st century would be a peaceful era with no disputes thanks to rational thinking and advanced scientific technology, with people living safe and secure lives thanks to the rule of law, and with diseases being overcome by advanced medical science. The reality is quite the contrary. Conflicts among religions and ideologies have become radicalized, the world order, which seemed stable by the end of the 20th century, has become chaotic. Furthermore, instead of the rule of law, a small number of persons rule by exercising coercive power. The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly attacked the world in a way we could never imagine. Serious situations – affecting not only physical and mental health but also the economy – have impacted us all. I am afraid that crime is increasing rather than decreasing under these circumstances. I also have concerns that the Kyoto Crime Congress, which is to address measures against crime, may not be able to be held with full in-person participation.

On the other hand, because of the situation which forces us to work remotely to refrain from going out, we have developed our ability to hold web meetings and engage in online advertisement. The ACPF publishes the ACPF Mail Magazine, which rationalizes and saves labor in some of our work. History has several times tested humanity through ordeals. However, every time we have faced them, we have overcome them. Therefore, I believe that we will realize our dreams after overcoming the present ordeal.

People in society seem to put a high priority on leading healthy and peaceful lives and cannot imagine that they will be victimized by crime. However, telephone fraud and theft perpetrated by promises that “you can obtain a tax refund. . .” are topics of conversation. Furthermore, there is no wonder nowadays that anyone might be victimized by burglary while being away from home. Since the slogan of the ACPF strives for a peaceful and prosperous society without crime, I sincerely hope we will overcome the current situation in which we are restrained from communication in person due to various difficulties, and that we will be able to welcome a peaceful day in which we will be able to directly interact again with UNAFEI participants in Japan and abroad.

(SUZUKI Yuzo)