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# Know your country, appreciate your culture

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How well can you introduce your country to foreigners? I think that it is necessary to know your country and appreciate your culture for international exchange. In this essay, I would like to explain why I think this way.

First of all, I think that just speaking the same language or just being good friends with foreigners are not equal to international exchange. Real international exchange may be achieved only after exchanging opinions and views based on each other's culture.

A few years ago, my family hosted an American family. At the beginning, I was able to talk about myself and about my school. But when I got close to them, they asked me about Japanese traditional dishes which they were fond of. But I got perplexed because I could not answer well. On the other hand, they taught me about their traditional local dishes in detail, and I found it very interesting. So I wished I could have told them about Japan that well in return. At that time, I realized that international exchange might start with knowing my own country.

To know your own country, I think it important to appreciate your culture. You tend to forget to appreciate your own culture because you are always surrounded by it. In Japan, we think that we know Udon, but can we explain the difference between Udon and, for example, Somen? Japanese often eat Udon and Somen, but I think that there are not many Japanese people who can explain the difference precisely.

Likewise, some foreigners might wonder why Japanese people have ritual ceremonies in different forms of religions. Others might ask me about Japanese historical figures whom I am not familiar with. And I am not sure if I can answer clearly when asked regarding Japanese political system, world-famous Japanese novelists, or the reasons why Japanese public transportation is so punctual.

As such, we Japanese may not be good at explaining Japanese culture because we are so accustomed to it. And I think that it is also because we are likely to regard other countries' cultures as superior, and try to follow them. But it seems to me that most foreigners are interested particularly in Japanese culture. Since we have such wonderful culture that many foreigners love to know, why don't we appreciate our own culture? And if we appreciate it, we may find it easier to look into it in depth, and then we should be able to explain that to foreigners.

In addition, if you know your own culture, you can compare it with foreign cultures.

Then you may be able to respect the differences which might perhaps deepen understanding of each other. In that way, I believe, you can have real international exchange by comparing and respecting the differences.

From ancient times, there have been unceasing conflicts all over the world. Those conflicts are mainly caused by the differences in creeds, ethnic backgrounds, or political interests. But, if you can understand that it is natural to have differences and try to understand the significance of others' beliefs, maybe conflicts will decrease. It would be very difficult to actually do so, and it will not be done soon. But still, if you try to know your own culture as well as others', we might find ourselves respecting the differences, and hopefully that will bring us a peaceful world.

Know your country and appreciate your culture. Are we being able to do that? Nowadays, international exchange is ever needed for acquiring foreign countries' technologies and ideas. For that too, I think, it is essential to know your own country, and then you would become able to appreciate foreign cultures and values. In the days ahead, I think that we will have more opportunities to get involved with foreign countries, but first, I will try not to forget to know my own country and culture.