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N.B. These are some provisional, unpublished and unchecked thoughts written on a plane journey back from Nepal in May 1992 in reaction to Ishiguro's novel. Please treat as such.

Some thoughts on Japan and England after reading Ishiguro's novel, Remains of the Day.

Professionalism, etiquette and the suppression of feeling

Have just read Ishiguro's novel 'The Remains of the Day'. This is a loving picture of two or three features of English society which can be very well depicted by a Japanese because they have strong resonances in Japan. They are as follows: the master-servant loyalty overwhelming all other personal feelings; professionalism and a strict division of spheres and duties centering on the concept of 'dignity'; the suppression of personal emotion in favour of public duty; the importance of etiquette and order; unswerving loyalty leading to dangerous, fascist and undemocratic consequences (with its message for Japan). It is worth looking at these a little more closely as central features which seem to link Japan and England.

The servant-master relationship and loyalty

The novel is much concerned with the unswerving loyalty central to the employer-servant relationship (in this case the servant is a head butler). Ishiguro rightly senses that this is at its most extreme in English culture in the relation of master and servant in a country house (or butler/porter in an Oxbridge College). A combination of respect, pride, devotion and deference is beautifully captured. Since the lord-master, hierarchical, relation is the central core of Japan in the past and present, the novel is exploring an area of great interest in both cultures. This is an historical problem in twentieth century England and a cultural problem in twentieth century Japan, namely how to combine a traditional hierarchical social structure with all its deference, security, **noblesse d'oblige** and so on, with the modern democratic ideas stemming from America.

The essence of the bond is a personal, chosen (gesellschaft) contract of a man to his lord, whereby, in return for patronage, the man provides unswerving loyalty, but also renders himself almost a mat to be trodden on. There is much exploration of the questions of the degree to which self-effacement can go before the butler becomes just a machine.

Honour, service and subservience in the lord-master tie

There is also a good deal of exploration in the novel of why the butler or inferior should be prepared to suppress so much of himself for his lord. The, perhaps Japanese, answer seems to be something which is crudely caught in the idea of reflected glory. By his service, the servant partakes in a little of honour of the master. His master's triumphs become his own. This glow of participation, something akin to the feeling of regimental honour, this fusing of personalities, depends a good deal on the structure of the relationship itself and the respective roles of the people concerned. Yet there is also much discussion of the extent to which such loyalty is unconditional, and how much it depends on the lord being engaged in worthwhile humanitarian or political activities. Ishiguro notes the change from almost automatic loyalty to a greater emphasis on 'noble cause' loyalty.

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The cost; professionalism and the suppression of emotion

This loyalty is obtained at a very considerably psychological cost. The essence of this is the separation of the personal feelings, indeed the personality, of the servant, from his actual behaviour. Just as a nurse has to separate her feelings from her job, so does a butler. The analogy is drawing with acting, and indeed, with the Japanese love of masks, one can almost see the impassive butler acting as a mask. Yet the acting is deeper than normal acting because the mask becomes the face, as we can see that it can never be put off. Even in his private thoughts, we can see the butler has become his mask, with no independent personality. In relation to his two potentially deepest relations, to his father in death and Miss Kenton in love, he is unable to respond for he has become a stiff, formal, mask.

The butler's failure to unbend, respond, let the mask slip, is the result of long, professional, self-discipline which means that not only can be suppress feeling, but it has been entirely repressed, so that it is not felt or recognized at all. Only in one sentence in the whole book, very near the end, does it gush out when he suddenly realizes what he has missed in not realizing that he loved Miss Kenton and "my heart was breaking". Then it disappears again under self-policed surface of his mask.

This abnegations of the selfish, individual, personality in a wider cause to satisfy the lord probably has many resonances for a Japanese in relation to the Bushido mentality. Ishiguro has explored one end of it, the butler's feelings, but no doubt the same treatment could be made at the other end, for we are given hints that the Lord is just as constrained, just as repressed.

Reserve, understatement, repression of emotion

Thus we have in this novel a superb portrait of that central feature of reserve, of the "stiff upper lip" ideal, of under-statement, of calm and non-emotional responses which many have noted to be a central feature of both Japanese culture (to an extreme) and English culture. Many of the most telling examples in the book reflect on this, the episode of a tiger found under the dinner table, quickly disposed of by a legendary butler as "a slight problem", the impassive response to the drunken behaviour of the rude youths in a car, the impassive response of the butler to his father's illness and death.

The quality of dignity and professionalism in service

All these stories are told to explore the quality of 'dignity' which is the supposed essence of being a great butler. This dignity is another word for professionalism, in other words that separation or sublimation of personal whims, of the body, soul, emotion, mind, so that it becomes subsumed in the pursuit of one objects, whether medicine, truth, music, or, in this case, serving, anticipating and supporting every need of the lord. This must be done with complete devotion, with no interference from such things as exhausting9n, principles, individual ideas, emotions, preferences. Like a good soldier, whether of the State or of Christ (e.g. the Jesuits), all these weaknesses have been pruned away by constant discipline so that all thought and all emotion are intensely concentrated on one object and one object alone, in this case serving the Lord.

There is some discussion in the novel of how this kind of professional serving, which might be described as servility, but which the actors define as far from servile, indeed as noble and full of dignity, is only possible in England. The argument seems to be that Continentals are too temperamental, unable to suppress their personalities enough, unable to undertake the Jesuitical, monastic, discipline of serving not Christ, but Lord Darlington, with all their hearts and minds. Although it is not discussed, it might be argued that, as Fanny Trollope beautifully noted, American find it too demeaning to be such servants. Only in England was there the right combination, which allowed a person to be both humble and deferential, but also proud, dignified and far from servile.

Yet this strange English capacity is also present in Japan, though Ishiguro, as a Japanese, never

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mentions this. For Japan is the other great civilization in which there is a nobility in serving, as well as being served. It is the other great 'servant' civilization, where not only in the actual servant relationship, but in many other relationships of father-son, husband-wife, samurai-man, Emperor-subject, commander-soldier, master-apprentice, guru-neophyte, there is built in a measure of structural inequality, a premise of inequality, a superior/inferior, super-ordinate/subordinate relation, and yet, somehow, miraculously, both are noble. This is not truly servile,e it is not slavery, it is not even in the Continental sense to which Dr Johnson strongly objected, patron-clientish. Although the relation is absolute and would appear to be very lop-sided, it somehow preserves the autonomy and independence and essential "manliness" of both sides.

It is this resolution of the contradiction of how to both serve, trust, obey, honour and reverence while at the same time not become a slave, a chattel, a plaything, and how, in reverse, ho to be a lord to such a person without turning them into a slave, which is at the heart of the puzzle of hierarchy with equality, which is a central tension in both Japanese and English society.

The difficulty of combining service with honour

There is no particular problems in the other usual extreme positions adopted by other civilizations. In slavery, caste and situations where there is a premise of inequality, there is no problem, no dissonance as Beteille would put it (q.v). Nor is there a problem in the opposite extreme, where structural equality is assumed, as in America. If people are naturally inferior, one can treat them unthinkingly as such and they know how to act. If all men are born equal, equal relations are all there is.

What is so difficult, as, for example, young people find when they join an Oxbridge College and are treated as "young gentlemen", called "Sir", waited on and so on, all relics of the older deferential world, is how to combine servant-lord inequality with supposed equality. It is basically the problem of how to treat one's secretary, gardener, cook, a problem which is even reflected in the polite deference that is being programmed into certain computer systems.

The problem of inherent equality and constituted inequality

In England and Japan there was the paradox that there were no inalienable differences based on birth. All are born free and were basically equal human beings. Yet, through age, gender, life chances, people were constantly placed in positions of superiority or inferiority. This is usually a transitory and fragmentary relationship, and can usually be dealt with by way of money. Yet, what if it becomes a long-term and enduring relationship, as in lord-servant?

An example of this problem occurs in Oxbridge colleges and department when dealing with one's colleagues, who are both 'fellows', that is equals, but also, temporarily, need to be asked, encouraged, but never blatantly ordered, in the politest possible way to do things. How is one to maintain 'discipline' without offending sensibility?

The problem is that the relationships one is dealing with are ultimately contractual. They are not based on inherent inequalities grounded on birth or nature, but result from the continuing will of individuals that an arrangement should continue in a certain way. At any point this contract can be cancelled if one part is dissatisfied. It is thus, essentially, constantly being inspected, implicitly re-negotiated and accepted. It is fragile, yet stronger for the fact that it has to be constantly willed and desired.

The difficulty of combining spontaneity with inequality

Another theme of Ishiguro's book is the problem of 'banter'. The butler is constantly worried that he is unable to banter, as his American master appears to wish. As the butler recognizes, bantering has two

features which seem to go against the very principles of all he holds central to being a butler. The first is that it has to be quick and spontaneous; yet the whole of the butler's craft lies in methodical, pre-planned and organized activity. Every little detail is worked out, every possibility thought through. This is all a preparation for the time when the metaphorical tiger appears under the dining table and the training and general **sang froid** and skills of the butler in dealing with the unplanned is his highest triumph. Disorder is quietly reduced to order. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, based on the ultimate butler, Ford Prefect, with his central advice 'Don't Panic', is a modern equivalent, as is Doctor Who.

Yet bantering is based on the principle of invention, creativity, disorder even. As the butler laments, there is little time to work out a reply; it is a rapid game, a creative skill where the skill lies in rapidly and verbally out-manoeuvring one's opponent. The unexpected is consistently met and improved on. Despite the butler's attempts to reduce all this to a set of rules that can be learnt, the butler realizes that it requires skills that cannot be learnt as if one was learning a language. Bantering is the opposite of the reserved, impersonal, calm tone which is the very epitome of the good butler.

The difficulty of combining warmth with inequality

In a second way the notion of bantering contravenes the butler's code, for it establishes warmth, equality, and real communication between the participants. Instead of communicating indirectly, through the silences, through the things that are not said, the things that are not done, in the negative ways in which much of the rather stiff communication takes place in Japan and England, one is communicating directly, through over-stressing things, through risking things, through saying the unspeakable, through saying true things in jest, through exposing something hidden in either oneself or one's guest, by deliberately saying the opposite of what one means, by deliberately telling a half-truth, through exaggeration. It is all very unseemly, frivolous and dangerous. One has not time, as the butler nervously points out, to work out the consequences of one's words. They may constantly mis-fire and cause great damage.

This lack of predictability, the danger of metaphorically leaping and spilling the soup in the master's lap, is a great obstacle, which Ishiguro's butler does not know how to overcome. All the rigorous denial of spontaneity, all the suppression of invention, all the years of self-abnegation have to be overcome.

Yet, as the butler observes, people seem to crave 'bantering'. Why is this? Because it draws them closer. It turns 'strangers' into friends in a few minutes, as the butler observes with wonder towards the end of his tour. Yet the butler is unable to do this, either with strangers or, particularly, with his American employer. The problem with the employer is particularly treat since bantering combines two of the central ingredients which must be systematically excluded from a lord-servant relations these are warmth and an assertion of equality.

Bantering and warmth and affection

It is obvious that bantering involves the going out of oneself to explore the other's foibles. One is mildly teasing them, showing an interest in them, mentally tickling them. This is an affectionate, warming, stroking gesture. As such, it is at the opposite poll to the reserved, non-involved, suppressed behaviour which seems to be the essence of the self-effacing butler.

Bantering and inequality

Secondly, bantering could be considered as serious 'cheek', because the essence of banter is an assertion not merely of equality but superiority. One is trying to play a verbal game in which one out-wits one's opponent, half shaming them, making them the but of one's humour. It is a game between

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equals, and ending with someone, unpredictably, as superior.

Now in this respect it represents the essence of all games, which, as Levi-Strauss remarked, create an unequal conclusion out of what was initially equal. What the butler has based his whole life on, however, is the reverse, namely ritual, which, again following Levi-Strauss, starts with structural inequalities, a premise of inequality, and then, through the performance of the ritual (or, in the case of the butler, of ceremonial), creates (an illusion of) equality. Through the perfect performance of his butler's art, through engaging in the stately minuet of serving, the butler can feel at the end that in his way, in a complementary way, his skill is as valid, and extreme as his employer's. So there is no threatening assertion of initial equality as persons, but equality is gained through the process of the actions, through the communion of repetitive, highly artificial, actions. This is safe, predictable and compatible with an initially hierarchical relationship, made temporarily balanced by the joint participation in ritual, or rather ceremonial.

Thus for the butler to enter into bantering with his employer is asserting an equality which is as threatening as the other form of subversive activity which the butler debates and then rejects, namely a competition with his employer and his friends in terms of knowledge.

The world of the butler and of the tea ceremony

The sphere of the Butler is severely demarcated. It is based on a very rigid mental division of labour. The butler has his skills, secret knowledge, magical tricks, all of which are designed to make the very complex and difficult business of running a large house look effortless. His craft is one of the many which reduces the immensely complex world down to its essence or abstraction, cutting away all distractions.

In this way, the butler's world almost looks like the Japanese tea ceremony. Indeed the formal dinner which he presides over has the same soothing, relaxing, effect (and political functions) as the tea house.

Indeed, Ishiguro's novel could be said to be looking at the precise English equivalent of the Japanese tea house, the secluded, secret, beautiful, ceremonial setting in which people can meet 'informally' and decide, apparently without strain, great matters of state without confrontation. Even the admiring of the silver and the pleasure it gives has a curious resemblance to the admiring of the flowers and tea service which takes place as a central part of the Japanese tea ceremony. Both are, for a moment, "the still point of the turning world". In this reading, the butler is the tea master. He presides over the occasion, calming, arranging things on the basis of his hereditary craft, setting the scene, so that the participants can relax and commune at a really deep level.

Of course there is a difference in that in the Japanese case the role of tea master and host are usually elided. With the increased complexity of an English country house with its houseful of guests, a week-end to fill up, it is not possible be both lord and butler. But in Japan, lord and butler fuse into the perfect tea master, the gracious host, artistic director, craftsman of space and time.

Specialization and the need for innocence of butlers

Now these special skills require infinite competence in a very restricted zone. Like the master of Mann's glass bead game, every aspect of the minutiae must be known. This is very specialized, though also quite general as the butler is the impresario co-ordinating all the staff. Yet outside this area, there is innocence. In a sense, the butler is a specialist in the same way as a judge. Just as judicial 'innocence' has to be maintained, it must be thought that the judge, at least when on duty, has no views or even knowledge of politics, no religious ideals, no economic knowledge, is utterly "unworldly", thus a butler must also be unworldly.

Hence the discussion of whether a professional such as the butler should have views on, or even knowledge of, such matters as international politics. The butler refuses, when asked, to betray any knowledge of such matters, probably deliberately concealing his opinion. This is partly a recognition of the hierarchical division of labour. Lords and politicians are 'professionals' who know about these matters and should be left to get on with them, while butlers should "stick to their last", in other words not stray out of the realm of their competence to compete where their masters have been training for so many years.

How to influence a superior without destroying hierarchy

Wodehouse's 'Jeeves' plays a great deal on this contradiction for, of course, Jeeves is much more knowing and is in the position, familiar to other formally weak individuals such as children and wives, of being thought of as inferior, ignorant, stupid and so on, and yet constantly knowing better than their husband, parents, masters. How to get their opinions adopted without threatening the conceit of their superiors and hence undermining the relationship? Much of Wodehouse's craft lies in showing the subtle ways in which Jeeves manipulates Bertie Wooster, without subverting the relationship.

The butler in 'Remains of the Day' no doubt acts in something of the same way, like a sheep dog which through its watching stillness, creeping forward, gently driving an almost unknowing sheep/master in the right direction. This is a problem with all 'inferiors', whether batmen and lower officers, craftsmen to patrons, students to teachers, secretaries to bosses. But we hear little of this problem in this novel, perhaps because the division of labour is so absolute that the butler has little overlap with his employer, a far more distant figure than Bertie Wooster.

The need for dignity in an hierarchical relationship

Much of the discussion in the book is concerned with the word "dignity". Part of this is perhaps a defensive realization of the danger of the indignity of the relationship for, ultimately one is a servant. The butler's will is not his own, he is an intellectual and emotional eunuch, his independent spirit is (self) castrated. This could potentially be very demeaning. To constantly assert, and come to believe and be seen by others as dignified, is very important.

Dignity and poise and the avoidance of embarrassment

Dignity also seems to describe the central feature of poise. When giving the quintessential example of dignity, the tiger-shooting episode, the essence seems to be that the butler did not panic. The butler is like a fly-wheel which maintains the equilibrium of the organization. When the unexpected occurs, when that destroyer of all trust and communication in Japan and England, social embarrassment, is likely to occur, he intervenes. He is an etiquette doctor. Through his skill in avoiding solecisms, in making sure that no one's **amour proper** is damaged, no-one gets irritated through feeling slighted or ignored, in making sure that everyone feels wanted, comfortable (physically and socially), he complements the host, whose function is through charm, in other words a touch more warmth and wit, to spice the butler's dignity, to make people feel at ease.

Reserve, shyness and the creation of social ease

This creating of an easy atmosphere is a particularly difficult task in the two venues which Ishiguro is explicitly (and implicitly) exploring, namely England and Japan. If one is dealing with the kind of products of Japanese samurai education or British public schools, one is faced with those somewhat stilted, shy, reserved people who find it difficult to communication, like my father grand-father, uncles and so on. They are used to acing, wearing masks, leaving important things unsaid, interpreting silences, quelling all emotion. They find it difficult to inter-act with others, to unfreeze some of their reserve, to be

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'natural'.

The ceremonials which take place in the tea house or at formal hall, whether in Darlington Hall or King's College, with all the accoutrement of a country week-end, are precisely designed to overcome the barriers which keep the English silent in public places and inhibit them from curiosity about strangers.

The usual situation is that even mutual acquaintances or friends enter the arena warily, defences high, minds either blank or pre-occupied with some outside problem. The atmosphere is often 'sticky'. Then the magic begins. A combination of verbal stroking - "How lovely to see you", "Have you met so and so, he's been so looking forward to meeting you", of drink and food placating the senses, of space, light and colour well ordered, builds up increasing confidence and camaraderie. The pace warms up. People start taking little risks, intimacies occur. By the end of the evening or week-end, new and perhaps lasting contracts or friendships are formed and minimally people leave feeling relaxed and benign. They feel that for a moment the separateness and loneliness has been overcome through a real and honest exploration of other people's personalities.

Reserve and etiquette in Japan and England

This unbending or unfreezing, which is notoriously performed in much of Japan after the formality of the office in the local saki bar, is very necessary and very difficult in both cultures. It is partly difficult because both cultures are so highly insistent on etiquette. The butler could be seen to be the impresario of etiquette. Like the host, his reputation depends on being almost subconsciously aware of all the rules of etiquette. Without these thousands of rules, where guests should sit, what to eat with what, how a room should be arranged, how people should be addressed, how large tips should be, how to thank one's host and so on, the whole elaborate dance of social life would collapse. A great deal of the communication burden is carried in this non-verbal dimension, through deeds and actions rather than words, in both Japan and England.

Yet this etiquette is almost invisible. None of the wild hand-waving and body language of the despised Continentals or gross Chinese is performed. Rather, by the inflection of a word, the slightest difference in the depth of a bow, an allusion or refraining from an allusion, a slightly raised eye-brow, one conveys a wealth of meaning. 'U' and 'non-U' are the essence of etiquette, what can and should be done and said. Mistakes in etiquette immediately deaden all communication. One vulgar, socially embarrassing remark or action and the relationship can be permanently cauterised.

The danger of becoming involved; reserve and warmth

In such a situation there are many risks and hence Japanese and English tread like the proverbial hot tine roof cats. There are many traps. In such an atmosphere of wariness, people will not show that honesty, that ability to take risks, which is necessary for deep communication. Etiquette will establish the first basis of Trust, showing people that they are alike, 'One of Us'. Yet there is still the question of why one should make the effort to communicate, take that further risk.

Here there is a second level, the force created by various 'warming' devices, which help the person relax and unbend, which do so through a stimulus to the human senses, by sound, sight, smell, touch and so on, for instance through good food, wine, music, colours. These enchant, enthuse, energise people so that real flights of imagination and communication can take place, whether over the after-dinner port in King's College or in a saki bar in Tokyo. It is not just the alcohol that looses the tongue and for a while allows people to forget the very rules of etiquette which kept them apart. The very etiquette rules themselves change. What was unpermitted talk in one setting, among colleagues formally at the work place in Japan or with mixed company at the dinner, is now permissible or even encouraged when the men 'retire' to their port and cigars, or the workers join their mates at the bar.

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Everything shifts into an intermediary world which lies between the dangerous world of the utterly public and the jealously guarded world of the utterly private. One is in a middle zone, combining the best of both. Intimacy with strangers, confidence with the unknown, real communication at a deep level. Even if one cannot remember everything that occurs in such moments of relaxed communication, things will have been said in the unguarded moment which may be worth a thousand dry and formal and yet essentially neutral messages sent in the more formal settings of life. For one is speaking from the heart, and not from the mind.

Why is there so much reserve in England and Japan?

How is one to explain this central feature of reserve, which is connected to the English and Japanese pleasure in understatement, the English (and Japanese?) passion for irony, self-mocking and so on? One of the things behind all this is an attempt at neutrality, a refusal to be taken off too enthusiastically in any direction. Control, moderation, the compromise between opposites, the abandonment of principle with the need for pragmatism, all these are essential English (and Japanese?) characteristics which need explanation.

Reserve and the tension of separated spheres

It might be possible to link them to the theme of the increasing 'rationalization' (Weberian) of life through the greater and greater artificial division of spheres. The English (and Japanese) were attempting to maintain a precarious balance between the demands of practical necessity (economics), political power, ethical principles (religion) and biological and psychological drives (kinship). To yield absolutely to any one of these was a sort of anti-rational fanaticism which was considered disastrous. Consequently a person was constantly rejecting these demands, not allowing family emotion to sweep him away, not adhering to the demands of the church, not kow-towing to political demands, not allowing the market to invade his every thought and deed. This constant negation requires great tact, forethought and skill. In order not to offend it is mainly achieved through negative signals, by silences, absences, emptiness, "the stills and deeps of ordinary life" (Maitland). One does not say no to such demands, which would be offence, one just does not say yes.

The Japanese partly overcome this problem by using the same word for yes and no and leaving the receiver of the message to use his or her tact to discern what it meant. The English have another device (where cited?), using the phrase "yes...but...". Thus a puzzled diplomat said he only began to be able to deal with the English when he realized that "yes...but" meant a polite no, while apparently saying yes.

Incoherence, indecision and lack of conviction

As Yeats memorably put it, "The best lack all conviction", they are filled with indecision. Thus in a sense a great deal of the impassivity, calmness and reserve seems to represent a sort of central, dead-locked, indecision. It is like the freeze of a trapeze artist. As soon as he starts to tip in one direction (showing family feeling, religious enthusiasm and so on), this is 'bad form' and a negative feed-back mechanism is automatically invoked which counters this. The result is often almost incoherence. This is encouraged by the educational system with its emphasis on counter-suggestibility. Good undergraduates are above all given the critical apparatus to beak down arguments, both those of others and their own. Everything becomes grey or brown in the attempt to avoid the extremes of black and white or bright primary colours.

The absence of all extremes and inhibition

Such avoidance of extremes is evident in all spheres of life; muted colours, low-key music, restrained

dress, non-rhetorical conversational speech. Such greyness, epitomized by Major as the grey man with no conversation, gives the chance of maintain a balance; on the one hand, on the other and so on. The final perfection is minimalization of everything; the effortless, almost languid, non-involved, ironical, calm, detached, balanced approach of the consummate diplomat or dilettante.

The absence of extremes, detachment and life as a game

The lack of involvement, the iron,y the distancing or positioning of the self away from the threats of the external world is very central to the culture of both Japan and England. It is again shown in one aspect of 'Remains of the Day' in the comments on the British and French attitude to German reparations. For the British, once the war was over, the game was over. Winners and losers could become good friends. It had all been good sport, something to pretend to get excited about but in the end just acting, like everything else. Like any good professional, one did not muddle up the external actions or statements with one's personal, cool, assessment. One switched on and off. War was a game, politics was a game, making money was a game, even religion was a bit of a game.

In other words, while partaking in it, one was also detached, watching oneself, and hence able to suffer set-backs, criticisms, loss in the game, without feeling a deep internal sense of loss. All this is a very good protection and helps one from committing that very serious breach of etiquette, taking things (and oneself) too seriously.

On the other hand, as depicted in 'The Remains of the Day, the French really did hate the Germans and after the First World War was over were set on vengeance. Their whole morale or being had been threatened, and nearly broken. They needed to restore it with enemy blood. It was a matter of pride and national honour.

Pride, honour and machismo in Japan and England

This question of pride is another important theme to consider in relation to the contrast of the British and Japanese on the one hand and the Continental and Ancien Regime countries on the other. In the majority of societies, and Spain or Italy would fit in here as well as Turkey or parts of Latin America or India, male pride (machismo) is a central organizing principle of the society. Life is a constant battle to beat off implicit and explicit threats to one's **amour propre**. Often one has to act in a bombastic, assertive, strutting and, to the English or Japanese, offensively aggressive and cocky manner in order to assert one's manhood. The English often look at this, more or less correctly, as a sign of insecurity. People are constantly behaving like cockerels on a midden heap because they fear the challenge of a larger cockerel.

Now all of this is very far from the bushido tradition of Japan or that of the English gentleman. In both cases, a man's power and influence are hooded, concealed like Gandalf's magic behind a self-effacing hood. The ideal is modesty, quiet dignity, a man of few words, a hint which will impress far more than swaggering and boasting, as is shown by the differing behaviour of the really great and the pretentious samurai in 'The Seven Samurai'. Bullying, shouting, large moustaches and large gestures are not the English style. The quintessence is the man who when asked whether he plays cricket, mutters something about how he can knock a bit of leather about with luck, and turns out to have been a Test match play, or the man who at dinner admits that he "knows something about chemistry" and turns out later to be a Nobel laureate in that subject.

Status achieved through crushing others

The essence of maintain superiority in the archetypal macho society is through treading on others. The more one can push down others, whether by bating up one's wife and children, being rude to one's

inferiors, conspicuously wasting people's time (chakari) or any other device, the more one is elevated. Status is built on the sweat, tears, ignominy and pain of others. The leader of the herd is the stage who has bloodied and subdued the maximum number of potential rivals. It is all a game of conkers. This would, indeed, appear to be an almost necessary principle. How else could any animals establish their superiority but by making others inferior through force and cunning. It may be brutal, gross, humiliating, but it seems to be the law of the jungle (see Borges, Short Stories).

Japan and England and the turning of the other cheek

Yet, miraculously, at least two civilizations have developed which have reversed this tendency. It can partly be seen in their religions: instead of the fiercely aggressive cults of the warring Hindu Gods, or the wrath of the Old Testament Jehovah, or the martial thrust of Islam, we have a pale defenceless young man who never raised a hand to defend himself, who admonished his followers to love, not hate, who advised them to turn the other cheek, to be meek, to submit, to bend. Such a pacific and non-aggressive doctrine could, of course, be perverted into the militaristic creeds of the Crusaders or Conquistadors. Yet there was a strain of abnegation and understatement in Christianity which found its full fruits in the northern sects and especially the Quakers.

The same strain could be found in the main Japanese religions, Confucianism and Buddhism. Buddhism again, in its Thai or Cambodian versions could be as militaristic and aggressive as certain brands of Catholicism. But in its more Tibetan version it preaches self-abnegation, humility, the renunciation of violence, the purging away of pride, humility, calmness, self-restraint. Not a little of Japanese self-control and understatement must stem from this.

The cult of the 'gentleman' in England and Japan

What we have in both England and Japan is that there is a cultural ideal of the 'perfect gentleman'. It is worth noting here the significance of the 'gentle' in the composite word. He is not a 'violentman' or 'bullyman' as he might be in the caquismo (cockerel) cultures influenced by Spain. He is 'gentle'. What then, we may wonder, were the central precepts of being a gentleman in England, or its curiously similar parallel in Japan, the cult of bushido, and how was that very curious development whereby power is achieved and maintained and respect earnt without bullying or violence.

The exercise of power without violence

The way in which power is exerted without the overt use of aggression or physical force would make a fascinating study. It is partly through the manipulation of symbols, dress, gardens, house architecture, "the ritual of the Justices study" (Thompson) and other forms of what Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital" and no doubt others would describe a symbolic violence or the "hidden injuries of class". The stately home or gentry house and its accoutrements (or Oxbridge College) produces awe, both by its grandeur and aloofness and also by its signs of obvious, if discretely veiled, wealth.

It is partly through controlling all major avenues of advancement that the gentry ruled; through the network of justices they provided law and licensing, their sons were in all the professions, they ran the country in parliament. It was also achieved through ritual, the close association with the Church of England which, through patronage, they also controlled. It was also achieved through language, the understated, yet authoritative upper class language (cf. D.H.Lawrence poem on).

The sum of all this was that with a minimum show of physical force and without overt threat, in the main people did what they were told: a suggestion was enough. The gentry made offers which was wise not to refuse, not because one would end up dead or literally bruised, but because one would end up morally, socially or economically at the edge of 'society'. This is the world which Jane Austen so exquisitely analyses.

How did the samurai achieve the same effect? It would seem that they were a sort of half-way house, standing between the English extreme, and the 'caquismo' extreme. With their swords and arrogance, they were much nearer to the swashbuckling, machismo end than an English gentleman. Yet I suspect that just as in their favourite martial arts, ju-do, the aim was to use the minimum physical force to defeat one's opponent (using the weight and strength of the opponent and one's own skill), so the art of bushido was much closer to the concept of gentleman than one finds in any other ruling class ideology in the world. It was based, I suspect, on ruling through awe, through respect for one's character, dignity, a gentle yet firm approach, rather than straight physical aggression.

The absence of machismo in Japanese culture

There appears to be little machismo in the great literature, in the Genji, Pillow Book and so on, all of which is singularly devoid of duels, challenges to honour, threatening and aggressive behaviour. The Genji shines through his symbolic superiority, his drawing, music, perfumes, wit, clothes, poetry and so on, not because he is a 'beaux' in the Italian or Spanish Don Juan tradition. Nor, as far as I know, is the assertion of superiority through violence a theme of the noh or kabuki plays. The idea of the danger of being thought weak and effeminate if one is restrained as a man is not a central worry in England or Japan as it is in an 'honour and shame' culture.

The absence of the gladiator tradition in Japan and England

The archetype of the proving of manhood and machismo is through animal fighting, as in the gladatorial contest and its modern equivalent the bull fight. There is no equivalent in mainstream English and Japanese cultures to the bull fight. The fox hunt is not a test of personal bravery; the fox and the hunter never contest as equals. It is a test of endurance, skill, wealth and connections, etiquette.

Understatement and minimalization in Japan and England

The use of understatement and minimalization seems to be a central feature which is common to both Japan and England. It contrasts with traditions which, to English eyes, devalue the currency by over-statement. For example, the American academic reference is known to go "over the top" in order to achieve its end. The British reference or praise in general is understated and the reader, knowing the codes, tops it up according. "Not bad", "Not at all bad", " A good chap", "A bit of a mess", "Quite a tough ride", all these and many others are interpreted as understatements, to be expanded in the mind of the receiver. This is far more economical: the verbal currency is kept clean, with minimal signals finely graded. The same is true of formal art, which famously in Japan is simple and under-stated, whether in furniture, architecture, haiku or painting. Just a hint or suggestion is made, which the receiver elaborates into the full message. In effect this restricted and much more allusive, abstract, unfilled in code is more powerful than the more exaggerated and literal codes that are usually employed.

Zen, Quakerism and the power of minimalism

An extreme example of this lies in those two distinctive movements in England and Japan, namely Quakerism and Zen. Both eschew all show, whether in language (no extremes, no swearing) or dress (no ostentation, no extreme colours) or gestures and postures. The aim is simplicity, directness, economy. Things are paved down to their essentials, to their bare bones.

Minimalization and rationalization

All this minimalization, functional efficiency and so on no doubt fits with other aspects of the rationalization process. Communication about one thing does not clogged with emotional 'noise; emotion

and elaborate rhetoric is banned. Minimal force is deployed. The elegance of the solution, whether in mathematics, poetry or conversation or religion is measured by the parsimony. Simplicity is no sin. There is no need to "show off".

Honesty and the double-edged remark

All this again is tied to he need for honesty rather than duplicity. If communication changes are assumed to be basically dependable and open, there is less need for duplicity, concealment, camouflage through over-statement, whether visual, oral or whatever. There is, however, one sort of duplicity that is an English speciality, rather similar to the "yes...but". It is another negative comment concealed within the apparently positive, the many variants of "damning with faint praise", the leaving of things unsaid, the absences. This is an art form in itself, for example perfected in the writing of references, where one is forced through courtesy to say something, yet cannot be enthusiastic.

Positive and negative communication; sound and silence

This leads one to consider two rather different forms of communication which one might call positive or negative. In the majority of societies most of the information conveyed by symbols, whether words, dress, architecture or whatever code, is conveyed by direct statements. Iconic representations are made which convey the meanings in words, gestures, dress and so on. The important things are what are said; there is a welter of 'information' and he who shouts symbolically loudest is heard. It is the world of the soukh or social bazaar; a jumble of positive messages.

The stark contrast is the world where most 'information' is conveyed by absences, by the quiet empty lawns of a Cambridge College, by the emptiness of a Quaker meeting house or Shinto temple, by the emptiness of a tea ceremony, by the emptiness of a good haiku or Japanese silk screen, by the emptiness at the centre of many Japanese paintings. The striving is to convey as much as possible indirectly, "between the lines". What is not said,d the gaps in the conversation, the unfinished phrase, are what is important. This mode distinguishes Japan and England on the one hand and China and India on the other, which to the former people seems to have an overloaded, loud, brash, too direct form of communication.

Negative communication, absences and the need for closeness

Such negative communication, of course, requires a greater closeness than positive communication. The greater the distance between sender and receiver, the more the need for explicitness and directness. Different castes or kin groups or classes will not know the grammar of a shred language and hence they will not pick up the resonances or even notice the implied, the unstated, the understated. Only, as in a good marriage, when the two or more people who are communicating share an enormous amount, a consensus on many basic values and appreciation of most of the rules of the grammar of communication, can the much more economical negative communication take place.

For negative communication is a form of short-hand; the assumed, stated, accepted world is taken for granted and does not need to be elaborated. Only deviations, absences need to be noted. In such a situation the empty passages become most important, and even when something positive is being called up, it is done, as with short-hand, by the merest allusion.

Yet, as with all symbol systems, this only works if both sender and receiver share the symbolic grammar. A splash of grey on a blue background may send a trained Japanese into paroxysms of pleasure as he recognizes and quickly fills in a flock of flying winter geese. To the average westerner, it is probably a mystery or perhaps a mistake. As with satire and irony, which can only work if the recipient recognizes the inverted allusion which re-doubles the effect by saying the opposite of what is

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meant, all this is wasted on people who do not closely share the code. Perhaps why this is why writers are advised to avoid irony when writing for an American audience.

The impossibility of allusion in divided cultures

Now in most cultures, while a small intimate group can communicate in this minimal way, husbands and wives, neighbours working together, an orchestra, a football team, an army platoon, most people are too distant to make this possible. Society is not homogeneous enough. The gaps between people, because of differences of education, language, status and so on, are so large that messages have to be explicit and formal, dramatic. Thus Mickey Mouse or Rambo has a world currency because the violence or humour is easy to understand across the barriers of language and culture. America, where cultures have not properly melted, faces a similar problem in this respect to India or China.

How then was it that Japan and England, almost alone, developed this minimalist, negative, understated form of communication which is, for instance, so beautifully shown in the work of Jane Austen or Trollope? It would seem that it reflects, among other things, two major features of the cultures in question. One is the sharing of much of a common framework of assumptions, culture and society.

Negative communication in homogeneous cultures

In both cases an island people with an integrated economy, one language, one law, one set of cultural markers, one political system and a shared identity, could explore those smaller differences with which they ordered their lives. They could at times pretend to stress the differences, whether in the rudeness of parliament, of a football match or other games, the satire of Private Eye or Spitting Image. But they could do all this because, in fact, the fundamentals were secure that there was little basic disagreement on the deepest values. Or they could communicate subtly through omission, through silence, through irony, through minimal allusion.

The sharing is linked, or is perhaps another way of saying that there were not discrete groups, whether held apart by caste, geography or whatever. People merged into each other and there was much homogeneity, whether in their sense of humour, sense of pleasure or sense of proportion. This is very unusual. That a Chinese mandarin, Brahmin or Spanish lord could have anything in common with the ordinary illiterate peasant, or even with small shop-keepers would seem absurd. But in England "a cat may look at a king", the jokes of one group amused the other. There was really only a relatively small gap, indeed really no fully established 'Great' and 'Little' traditions. How two civilizations emerged (of which the Dutch are also a part) which had so much internally in common, is an historical question, obviously related to their island location and the cut-off nature of the societies that were created on these islands, a sort of social Galapagos.

Negative, understated communication and freedom

Another function of negative communication is that while it is more economical for the sender, it is also preferable for the receiver. All communication is an exercise of power and the more blatant and explicit the message, the more difficult it is to exercise discrimination, that is free will, in receiving the message. An explicit order, as in the army, is the worst; it is flatly coercive, binding, inhibiting flexibility and initiative. Equivalents to these direct, coercive, messages can be found in religious ritual or certain symbolic systems which allow not scope for interpretation or equivocation; one must either totally agree or totally reject - with all the consequences. They do not provide options or clues, but are in the nature of what Leach calls signals. A red light cannot be debated; one must stop.

On the other hand, the kind of indirect, negative, allusive communication which is a peculiar characteristic of England and Japan allows much more flexibility on the part of the receiver. He or she is

presented with an opportunity to draw conclusions, "Perhaps you would like to consider..." This approach has several advantages. Firstly it avoids infringing the integrity of the other's will; acts are apparently entered into with free will, as the contracts of rational actors. Thus one does not say to one's Secretary "You must type this letter, Miss X" or "Shut that window", but rather "I need to write to Professor X, I wonder if you would..." or "Its a bit cold, don't you think, could you possibly..." Thus it is a form of courtesy or politeness, the essential requisite of the gentleman.

The indirect approach of the sheep-dog or ju-do expert

This might be termed the good sheep-dog strategy. To run straight at a sheep or herd of sheep barking loudly, to be imperious or aggressive, is to invite counter-aggression, subservience, or panic. It is much better to shepherd, to gently edge the individual towards agreement without apparent direct pressure. Thus he or she has the allusion that he or she took this path of their own free will. Let their force be channelled rather than met by counter-forces , as in Zen or Ju-do. It might also be termed the 'Jeeves' approach, for it was a favourite ploy of that famous butler.

The need for persuasion and assent of equals

To act under duress puts one in the position of the dependent slave. To act after considering options and alternatives and out of freely given and rational assent is the option of the free and independent spirit. The charge against the mafia is that it appears to make offers which one cannot afford to refuse because of that demeaning human characteristic, fear or cowardice. The charge against the English officer, employer, teacher, clergyman or whatever is that he or she makes an offer which it would not be sensible to refuse, not because of physical or other fear, but because of the self-interest of the individual to whom the offer is made. The trick is that the offer sets up a situation where both parties are expected to gain, from the welcome visit of Professor X after the Secretary has written to him, the warmer room after the Secretary has closed the windows, from the essay which "one wonders whether" the student would care to write.

The ultimate in communication; anticipation of the wish

The ability to make "your wish my command", of putting into practice the "who will rid me of this treasonous clerk" request, is one of the most important forms of communication. This is a situation of almost purely negative or absence signals, the silence, gap, unasked question, unformulated request. This is the height of Japanese (and English) communication. The communication is sos good, the actors are so conjoined in mutual benefit, that only the slightest hint, if that has to be uttered, will lead to action. Indeed it is the receiver's pleasure even to anticipate the needs and wants of the sender. These negative signals, being absences, are very open to interpretation, or can be ignored. By not asking for help, it makes it possible to offer help or not, to offer a lot or a little. Often this elicits greater response than something more direct or explicit, for the giver feels a sense of gratitude and generosity, for he, likewise, has not been put under pressure. Many would prefer to give largely than to be forced to pay in a small way.

The impossibility of force in a contractual society

This strategy is also a necessary one where free and independent individuals are inter-acting. In an advanced and open and balanced economy and society where fear is minimal, cajoling, requesting, persuading is all that can be done. People are not slaves, nor even clients. They can always vote with their feet, take their labour or their over-drafts elsewhere. The art, one which English gentry and the Japanese are particularly adept at, is that of reversing the obligation, making the person who is under pressure feel that he is being done a favour through the kindness of the person who is real exerting the pressure. It is a variant of the famous trick of the public school prefect beating the boy, "I can assure

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you Smith Minor, this hurts me more than it does you".

It is, of course, the technique which has to be employed in the economy. You cannot, except in monopoly markets, be forced to buy a commodity, or forced to give your labour. You need to be cajoled or encouraged in such a way that in the end, instead of feeling you are being cheated, your money grabbed from you, you come to feel that the seller is doing you a favour, letting you have this precious article at an exceedingly cheap price. Perhaps this lies behind some of dynamic of bargaining; as each person lowers or raises their offer to come closer to the other, they are reducing their social distance, tacitly acknowledging the other's claims, making it easier to enter into a bargain without loss of honour or individuality.

Possibly one could liken positive communication to the syntagmatic flow of notes in music, which is very obvious and direct. Negative communication is much more like the paradigmatic communication of a chord, a comparison of the actual with the possible.

The importance of courtesy and politeness in Japan and England

It would be worth studying more deeply courtesy and politeness. Why are these qualities so deeply associated with the Japanese, so very polite that they become inscrutable to the western observer? And why is politeness and especially courtesy so much a central feature of the English gentleman? And how far is all this different from what in France or Italy is meant by "polite society", "politesse".

As far as I know, 'polite society' has two very different meanings. In the word 'politesse' and 'polite society' as used in French or Italian or Spain, we are talking about the observing of a strict code of etiquette which is only known to, and shared by, a small group. It does not necessarily have any relation whatever to courtesy, or politeness or thoughtfulness or kindness. Thus 'polite' people are known because they hold their handkerchiefs in certain ways, walk in a certain manner, leaver their knives and forks at a certain angle on their plates. These are social conventions which help to regulate society, with little reference to the showing of regard or 'courtesy' towards others, except in a very general and diffused way. This is the stuff of snobbery and elites, and of **nouveau riches** everywhere.

The importance of courtesy as part of politeness

What is rather unusual are the cases, which I am certain exists in England past and present, and I suspect in the Bushido and wider etiquette of Japan, where people are encouraged to go out of their way to show respect and courtesy to the partner in social interactions. This consists of putting oneself to some trouble to place one's partner either as one's equal, or even as one's superior. This is not just a crude matter of opening doors or walking on the outside of pavements, of enquiry after birthdays, of remembering employees families. It is basically an attitude in which, perhaps with a whiff of patronising or even deceit in the eyes of foreigners, whereby the English gentleman or Japanese try to minimize social distance and the force of command. They show as much modesty, humility, generosity and thoughtfulness as possible; this is the essence of true courtesy.

Respect as a result of negative power

What is required is a freely given effort of time, trouble and attention to the other where this is not really necessary and there is no direct return to the person in the position of power. "Lord X is a true gentleman', not because he has things, or has power, but because he restrains his things, cloaks his power. It is in the abnegation of power, that true power comes.

In one sense this looks like the common characteristic of societies where power comes not from accumulating but in giving away. The true gentleman creates social debts and respect not by coercing his

superiority on others directly through command, but by his self-abnegation which, given the mutual knowledge of what he could have done, puts the receiver even more in his debt, adding respect and affection to the feeling of inferiority. Thus acts the great army leader, the great politician, the great teacher, drawing on an emotion which is even more powerful than fear, namely love.

Generosity and graciousness as elements of power

The love comes in the end from self-love. For the essence is that the true gentleman has shown that he or she has recognized the dignity, freedom, autonomy and worth of the other. He has made them special in some way, noticed them, not seen them merely as a means but as an end in themselves. This is sometimes termed graciousness; it is the art above all which someone like the Queen must master. She must make people who mean nothing to her and cannot possibly do anything for her seem to be important.

Now I know too little, as yet, to know whether courtesy, 'generosity' (in the older sense), politeness and so on have quite the same, or even a very significant meaning in Japanese culture, as they do in England. Yet I suspect they are important, for instance in the ethic of bushido, and a study of this would be most interesting.

The restricted and generalized arenas of courtesy

Related to this is the contrast of the arenas within which these qualities are deployed. Here we might distinguish between two extreme cases. At one end one has societies which show courtesy, possibly exaggerated, but within very restricted spheres or on particular occasions. One thinks of feuding kin groups at a reconciliation feast; kin groups at a marriage feast; host and guest. Here the obligations to courtesy are usually restricted to a small group and 'strangers' only incorporated on certain, set, occasions. The opposite to courtesy is war, and Warre, as Hobbes observed, is the natural state of man. One cannot afford, nor is it thought appropriate to be courteous to unrelated person.

As kinship gives way to proximity as the basis for social organization, so neighbours or the whole village becomes the arena for courtesy. Yet this is soon cross-cut by rank and caste. There is no obligation to show courtesy to people of culturally or socially separate groups. Indeed caste is the very antithesis of courtesy, which is by definition considerate and levelling. There is nothing more 'discourteous' than telling a person he is ritually polluting and should not enter one's house, eat with one, marry one's daughters. To entertain in all these ways is the ultimate mark of courtesy.

Thus in the majority of agrarian civilizations, courtesy runs along well-marked channels. It would be inconceivable that a Brahmin be 'courteous' to a leather-worker, a Spanish don to a peasant on his estate.

The situation of diffused courtesy

At the other extreme is the situation of diffused or generalized courtesy, that is to say an obligation to treat as (almost) equal, worthy of respect, dignity and consideration, a wide range of people, many of them unrelated, strangers, people who have no practical importance to one and who will not bring either direct benefits or cause difficulties. Such people may indeed by **prima facie** very unlikely to be of help; poor, less educated, even uncouth and vaguely unpleasant or repellent. Nevertheless the diffused obligation is present that one should at least be civil and, if possible, helpful and courteous. Good manners enjoins this, one's Christian duty and general morality counsels that one should do as one would be done by.

Of course one explanation of this is that in a fluid and mobile society it is best to assume that

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everyone may potentially be useful: "be nice to the girls for you never know who they mary marry" as one Headmistress advised her teachers at the start of term, or as Robert Chambers found through the rewards of courtesy. So, casting one;s courtesy upon the waters may be the best long-term strategy. Yet there is probably more to it than this.

Firstly there is the group altruism dimension. If all are courteous and generous, then all will benefit. Rudeness breeds rudeness, what one might call the bad college porter syndrome, while kindness breeds kindness. Once a general market in courtesy is established, like the associated market in honesty, it works more efficiently. Co-operation is often the best policy.

The politeness and considerateness of the Japanese

Yet the infrequency of such generalized courtesy, perhaps most extremely represented by the superficial glad-handing of America, suggests that it does indeed need explanation. It will also be interesting to see how far it is a common phenomenon in Japan, outside small groups. Superficially, Japanese seem exceedingly polite and considerate. Is this just to those within a group or relative equals, or is it even more pronounced with the weaker, lower levels? It is so very easy to be discourteous, denigrating, slighting, unthoughtful and so on, that it is curious that Japanese and English put so much energy into maintaining a high standard of courtesy. It will be worth looking at books on manners to look at their stress on this.

Courtesy as a recognition of equality

What is being conceded in such courtesy or politeness is that in some basic senses both partners are equal, whether in the sight of God or man. this basic premise of natural equality, of course warped by chance success, teaches some humility: "there but for the Grace of God, go I...". Furthermore, it is a premise of very limited geographical distribution, and indeed it goes against the basic premise of the majority of societies. Again the only major world civilizations which have espoused it seem to be North West Europe and Japan. Courtesy and politeness means projecting oneself into the position of the recipient, a form of empathy or sympathy which is pointless except between people who believe themselves to be, in essence, close enough or equal enough to have some sense of the other's feelings or predicament. This is hardly the feeling which an Ancient Regime nobleman or priest would feel himself to be in when dealing with his "swinish", illiterate and almost sub-human peasant countrymen.

Social mobility is important. If all positions are impermanent, status is achieved and so on, one may have come from that very status which now holds out a begging hand in the street, or return to it one day, in one's own person or that of one's children. If status is fixed and there is a gulf, there is less incentive to courtesy.

The preservation of another's integrity or social space

Yet courtesy and politeness are also distancing mechanisms, for they establish a certain common closeness, but then keep people at arms length. They can be used to emphasize the other's separate needs and wants, their personal social space. This can be a form of honouring of the other's identity, the personal identity of the other on which the more powerful is careful not to tread.

This idea of the social space surrounding an individual is an important one and goes with the individualism. The appropriation of the social space of those weaker than oneself, making another forgo his own time, space or will to accommodate one's own, is one of the chief devices for gaining power in the majority of societies. Trampling on another's time, as in chakari, is just as effective as physical abuse. Yet true courtesy is just the opposite of this; it is respecting that social space, keeping one's distance while showing concern.

The preservation of social space and body distances

The 'social space' is partly symbolic and invisible and hence dealt with through gestures, postures, language. But it is also partly physical, and hence can be observed in body distances. Here one would have to consult the work of E.T.Hall and others on proxemics. But my guess would be that the range of body distance varies very roughly with the degree of intimacy and equality that is thought to exist in the relationship. At one extreme is 'untouchability', whether literally (as in the caste system) or through keeping one's distance, as with a nobleman finding it distasteful to be close to a commoner. Neither of these two extreme situation are what we commonly associate with England or Japan, but rather with very hierarchical societies of the Ancien Regime type, China, India, France in the eighteenth century. They deny brotherhood and fraternity and emphasize great distance.

At the other extreme are what we might archetypically describe as certain tribal societies, particularly Africa, but also, to a certain extent tribal India, Nepal and so on. Here there is, within the group, very little social and physical distance. So people will often stand or sit disconcertingly close for a westerner's tastes. There seems to be no appropriate appreciation of privacy, separateness, the need for a protected zone of intimacy into which no one intrudes; "nous" and "moi" seem to be painfully confused.

Japanese and English body distances; a middling solution

Thus the Japanese and the English effect a compromise, the same physical distance is maintained for everybody, whether close or far. Everyone is treated as standing under one law. This law says that people should remain not too far apart, nor too close. They should be close enough to show engagement and involvement, but not so close as to cause embarrassment and intrusion into another's personal space. It is a delicate compromise, which becomes confused by such space-reducing customs as the hug or kiss of the Continentals.

Even the hand-shake, like the Japanese exchange of name cards, is a delicate act of balance. It symbolizes friendship, equality, mutual grasping, in other words involvement and the taking of a calculated risk (of being rejected) by stretching out one's hand. On the other hand, the arm is extended and fends off the other, it is not a drawing together as in the embrace. It is a stiff gesture; let us be friends, but not so much or too close. The process is slightly more intimate, with at least some physical contact, than the exchange of cards which Japanese undergo and their elaborate bowing. Such devices are even more of a delicate compromise. A strong acknowledgement of the other is made, but no physical contact is established: communication without personal involvement, like two trains running alongside each other.

The gentle art of conversation in Japan and England

The establishing of a minimal bridge of communication through the hand-shake, bow, or cards is, of course, only a start. It is related to the conversational bridges that are thrown out. The art of entering into conversation is a delicate one in both England and Japan. Among the obvious dangers are the fact that one might become too deeply or quickly involved, and hence trapped, the problem of closing the gap too quickly, and hence leaving no room to retreat. This is at one extreme. At the other is the danger of confrontation, disgust, bad feeling, argument and loss of face.

The situation is aggravated because at the initiation of a contact very little, if anything, is known about the Stranger (see Simmel on this). Given a common humanity, a bond has to be established, but it is likely that one will soon find that the Stranger is of no real interest, or, more fundamentally and awkwardly, that his or her attitudes are very different to one. What thus happens is that a delicate process of sounding out the other takes place. A sort of boot-strapping is performed, as with a

computer. First a very thin thread is cautiously thrown across between the two communicating entities, a handshake, a card, a smile, a bow, a polite "How do you do". The first exchange is balanced, courtesy is observed, the door is ajar, but one has not entered and can indeed retreat at this stage.

Talking about the weather and neutral conversation

Then one may follow up on a subject which is as neutral, general and likely to cause agreement as possible. Characteristically, in England this is the weather. "Terrible rain we've had lately" is perfect. It asserts a common humanity for "we" are subject to the same malign English God of weather. There is little room nor little expectation that the other can do anything but vigorously assent, perhaps adding some gloss such as "Yes, not good for the harvest", or whatever. To which one can in turn assent. This is neutral, a matter of act rather than opinion; Labour or Conservative voters can agree about the weather. One does not burn people for their views on the weather. It is a subject to which everyone can contribute. And it is bounded as a topic. After a couple of exchanges, the duty to communicate has been satisfied, the subject is exhausted, one can beat one's retreat if that is what one wants to do.

Deepening the conversation; moving on from the weather

On the other hand, the door is ajar, the thin thread has been thrown over the chasm, and it is possible, if desired by both parties, to go further with another, perhaps mildly more personal gambit, "Do you come here often?", "Where do you live?" and so on. Then there commences a phase of placing the other individual. This is often deftly done in a few questions which establish the respective status, background and so on of the individuals, eliciting the kind of information printed on the Japanese name cards. This process also establishes two other important things. The first we may roughly call attitudinal. Is the conversational partner likely to have contrary views on fundamental issues, on the death penalty, women (or men), war, race and so on. If this begins to emerge, then communication is usually broken off. But if there is a "meeting of minds", it may continue and deepen.

The growth of liking and proper exchange

The further deepening of the relationship will depend on another dimension, on the exploration of a more personal kind. It is quite possible to meet someone from the right background, with similar views to one's own, but basically not to find them "attractive", in other words one does not "warm" to them.

The metaphor of heat is an interesting one. People are conceived of, certainly in England, as basically cold or even icy particles. Occasionally they are 'warmed' by others, and hence like all things which are warmed, they begin to 'thaw', or even to melt, to lose some of their separateness, hardness, distance. This allows them to enter a deeper level of communication, where their minds begin to communicate directly. Such communication, which tends to be total, through body language as well as speech, as in Japanese haragei, is a risky business and can only be based on trust. All the careful preparations have to be made and also, at least with Japan, a way to retreat should be maintained.

The depth and permanence of friendship in Japan and England

The stakes are high, for any initial encounter may, if both partners are willing, lead into a relationship for life, in other works into true friendship, which could totally change a person's life. Yet only very occasionally does this happen and one needs to proceed very slowly and warily like the 'Petit Prince' with the fox.

What both British and Japanese find so alarming, and objectionable, about the Americans, is the over-hasty (if endearing) way in which many Americans enter into apparently deep relationships. They seem to war their hearts on their sleeves, pouring out intimacies and psychological problems as the first encounter in a way that oversteps the bounds. But just as they seem to move too fast into a relationship

for many Japanese or English, so also they move out too fast. Japanese often tell of their bitterness when they discover that Americans who seemed to encourage an open and intimate relationship soon neglected or even rejected it. Once a real friend is made in England or Japan, the ideal is a lifelong relationship. It is a contract, no doubt, but a contract of an enduring type like that of master-servant, teacher-pupil, adopted father- adopted son. In America, easy come easy go: people appear to be like any other consume durables which one picks up, uses while it is useful, and then scraps when it no longer has any direct utility.

The essence of friendship in Japan and England

Perhaps this also suggests a difference of what constitutes the essence of friendship. In the Japanese and English case the difficulty lies in overcoming, in a limited way, loneliness and separateness. Normally reserved, heavily defended, individuals gradually learn to trust and to open themselves up. Once this mutual trust has been established with someone, any exercise of the trust is a source of warmth and satisfaction. Just to be in an atmosphere of easy conviviality, to be able to relax and joke, to share memories, all this is enough, especially if it is combined with some common interest, golf, bridge, one's children.

In contrast, American search for more in their friendships. Getting quite close to people is easy, convivial familiarity is not something exotic, a treasured experience in itself. The relationship must be positive, active, have content. It should involve continuous learning about the other, continuous exchange or continuous mutual benefits. Once the current passing between the friends stops for a while, the friendship is replaced by others. Hence there is what appears to English and Japanese a fickleness, restlessness, lack of loyalty and of constancy. They discern or feel that what satisfies them no longer satisfies the friend, who is constantly "roaming" in search of the "new fangled" and indulging in "a strange fashion of forsaking" of old friendships (cf. the Wyatt poem which captures this excellently).

Since much of the communication in England and Japan is negative, friends can sit in companionable silence for hours and yet still feel that they have had a good evening together. This would just strike Americans as dull. The subtle hints, oblique references to shared experiences, the nuances which are so deftly caught, for example, among the three friends in "Last of the Summer Wine", where a companionable drink in the pub and allusions to Nora Batty's stockings are considered a good night out, would strike most Americans as puerile, superficial or both. American friendships are kept alive by action, by doing things together. While doing things together is not unimportant in Japanese and English friendship, the emphasis is really more on being together, just existing along-side each other. The companionship of tea house, sake bar or pub or club are joys which are special to Japan and England, though they can also be found, with variants and in a milder form, elsewhere.

The engaging of the full personality in friendship

The difference may be to do with the degree to which a person engages another's personality. As Tonnies and others have observed, it is a characteristic of most of the social life of those in Gesellschaft or Capitalistic societies that they have partial, fragmented and broken relationships. People are like the many-sided mirrors or lights that hang in a discotheque, reflecting from many surfaces, each one turned to a different person or relationship. The encounters are brief, neutral, balanced; they take place fleetingly in the market, on the bus, at work, with neighbours. Occasionally, however, a persons meets another and begins to build up a trusting and deeper relationship, whether in love or friendship, a relationship of mutual delight. It is not an exclusive relationship, but the whole of a person is engaged. In the Japanese metaphor, the two partners become two mirrors, each reflecting and re-reflecting the other in a deeper and deeper enchantment, until they for a moment, as in Donne's 'Ecstasy', become conjoined so that the friendship "defects of loneliness controules".

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Absence of intense friendship in most agrarian societies

Now this kind of mental and emotional release seems rather different from the rather more specific, active, transitory kind of American friendship. Yet it is equally, if not more different, from the relationships in the many agrarian societies where there is no friendship of this kind. This absence is due to several reasons, including the fact that loneliness caused by separateness does not need to be overcome since it never occurs in the first place. Nor does one achieve closeness through effort; closeness is ascribed. One is born with a ready-made set of people who have an identity of interests with one, one's kin, and one does not need to search the world for such people. Indeed it would be bizarre, if not dangerous and traitorous to do so. In a world of limited good, to establish a friend outside the group is a great to relations within the group.

The difference between ritual friendship and real friendship

In agrarian societies lacking western or Japanese style friendship, one device which is curiously the antithesis of the informal, gradually established model of friendship of the West, is the institution of ritual friendship (of which blood brotherhood is one variant). In such a system the gap with non kin is closed and made void by a fiction, by using ritual to create friendship, to make a non-related person into a kinsman. Yet in doing so, it is a travesty of friendship on the English or Japanese model, for now one is kin, in other words in a status relationship, obliged to behave like kin (or ritual friend) for life, whatever one feels.

This is contrary to the essence of real friendship which is contractual, freely chosen, freely abandoned, arising out of mutual need or desire, and lasting only as long as both partners desire. Friendship is based on liking, while kinship and fictive kinship is based on blood. Some of this is captured by Wilde's remark to the effect that one cannot be expected to like one's family, since they are willed on one, whereas one's friends are chosen.