What I reflected on Japanese culture

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Hello, everyone.

Today, I'd like to share something I've been thinking about deeply over the 18 years of my life.

Let me ask you a quick question. Comparing Japan with other countries, don't you think it's a truly wonderful place? If you asked me today, I would proudly answer, "Yes!"

To be honest though, there was a time when I really disliked being Japanese. One reason is that in Japanese society there is a strong pressure to value harmony, and avoid standing out. As Prince Shotoku famously said, "Harmony is to be valued." However, I constantly wondered: "Why can't people express their individuality more, like they do in Western countries?"

Of course, both co-operation and individualism have their pros and cons. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when our government asked citizens to wear masks, people across Japan started wearing them immediately. This happened because Japanese people naturally consider others and act as a group, and this helped slow the spread of the virus. On the other hand, if the emphasis on harmony goes too far, it can create excessive peer pressure. But how Japan responded to covid 19 made me see why our society values harmony.

Another thing I have come to like about Japanese culture is our language. This happened when I watched a YouTube conversation between Shinji Ishimaru

and the linguist, Professor Anne Crescini. Professor Anne grew up abroad and later moved to Japan. Looking at our culture from an outside perspective, she pointed out that the everyday words Japanese people use carry amazingly deep meanings.

Take "Itadakimasu," for example. In English, people simply say, "Let’s eat." But in Japanese, "Itadakimasu" means so much more. It expresses deep gratitude toward the living beings that became our food, as well as everyone who grew, transported, and prepared it. Respect and thankfulness are condensed into that single, everyday word.

Professor Anne was also deeply impressed by the unique creativity of *waseieigo*—Japanese-made English expressions, such as ”Door Punch.” This refers to accidentally hitting the car next to you with your door in a parking lot. In English, people call it a "car door ding." But to a Japanese ear, "ding" sounds very light and mild. On the other hand, "punch" instantly conveys a strong impact—a heavy "bang!" The moment you hear it, a vivid picture forms in your mind. I realized then that Japanese people have a wonderful sense for adapting foreign words into intuitive, visual expressions.

Listening to the conversation between Professor Anne and Shinji Ishimaru made me realize that what I used to see as "suppressing individuality" is actually part of a rich culture — a culture that is rooted in respect for others, gratitude for life, and social wisdom for living peacefully together.

Thank You for listening.