

“Play” and the Japanese

Thomas Guerin

要 旨

日本では「遊び」にはスポーツ、観光、飲み食い等の道楽、また何も活動しないことなどの意味があるが、また「遊ばせ言葉」に見られるように、日本人にとって「遊ぶ」精神は特別なものでもある。人生に対し一歩離れて眺め、私心の無いゲームをやっているような涼しい態度をとる事で一番洗練された人になる。幾らか仏教的な発想だろうが、この様に自分の道を如何に冷静に辿るかは理想に近づく事になる。

その「道」自体は「遊び」でも、「人生」でも、「哲学」でもある。華道、弓道、書道、柔道などなどは欧米の「遊び」にも入るが、欧米では、「趣味」であって、特に凝る人以外は哲学があるような物とは考えない。日本人にとっては「道」であるから、その道を覚えるには練習することこそ大事である。練習も本番も同じく「道」であるが、西洋人は日本人の練習量に呆れるばかりである。

「道」と言えば「武士道」が典型的なもので、武士がその道を忠実に歩くことは、日本人の心の理想を表現することだと言える。新渡戸稲造が「BUSHIDO」で取り上げた武士の切腹する場面においては、その人生観、死に面しての冷静さと「儀式」の正しい形式のこだわり方など、武士が自分の道を「舞台」と考えていることに、人生の「ゲーム」という印象を強く受ける。それこそ、切腹遊ばされたと言うのが適当であろう。

又、「儀式」は欧米人にとって面倒で、自由を奪うものとみえるが、日本人にとっては社会的な役割を果たす。日常生活に節目を付け、また経済的な意味はまったく無いが自分の社会の中の身分や地位を「儀式」によって確かめることで安心する。その反面で、日本人は日本社会の目に非常に敏感であって、国際的な場、例えばスポーツ競技などではプレッシャーがきつくて、失敗することが多いし、「見栄」を張って、それに振り回されている日本人は少なくない。

Preface

Every culture has ways in which people enjoy themselves different from those of every other culture. These ways may manifest themselves in national games and pastimes, in how people spend their leisure time and what they do with their extra money. There is, however, a large difference as to what each culture defines as play, or rather, what the culture sees as non-essential to activities necessary for maintaining and extending life, that is to say activities which are not primarily preventive or productive. In this sense “play” may include all the arts and any other such activity which does not contribute directly to the actual health and wealth of the culture.

Another cultural aspect of “play” is how it is valued within the society. In some societies “play” as a concept is frivolous and somewhat sinful. In Puritan America it was thought a sinful waste of time for children to “play” without learning some moral lesson. There has been a complete turn-around in Western society from this disdain for play. It now evalu-

ates play very highly and, in fact people who “play” for a living have now become idols, receiving envied salaries for their expertise at playing many kinds of games, especially sports. Not too long ago professionals of any sport were considered somewhat shady, certainly not gentlemen, and well into the 20th century people much admired today for their ability, for example, on the golf course, were not really allowed to associate with the members of a golf club off the course because of their status; somewhat as Michelangelo and Leonardo were looked upon as “laborers” at the time of the Renaissance. Though these two artists are much revered today, there was rancor between them because Leonardo, as a painter, felt himself superior to Michelangelo since sculptors have to exert much more energy than painters in labor when creating. Pierre baron de Couberton, when organizing the modern Olympic Games, made sure that only amateurs would be allowed to play, considering it preposterous that an English gentleman would play tennis with, for example, a common working-class person. There is still some hesitancy in allowing professionals to play in many events in the Olympics but the pretense that amateurs are gentlemen has been dropped.¹

It would seem legitimate to view this change of attitude toward professional sports and those who play them as being in direct proportion to the weakening of the work ethic wherein play or leisure has become much more important to the life of the American than what is accomplished in the work place. There are still those Americans who feel that most professional sports stars are extremely overpaid, but they are more than balanced by the number that feel the quarterback who throws game-winning touchdowns deserves all the millions he gets for *playing*. Games are very serious business in most of the world and to express resignation toward the results of a competition by saying “It’s just a game,” is akin to saying “Well, it wasn’t very comfortable anyway,” when your house burns down.

Europeans and Americans also take very seriously their own personal leisure time, placing a high value on “play” in the sense of enjoying oneself. Spending a rather large amount of time away from work to enjoy life is considered a legitimate right of the worker. This paper is intended as a response to the Western attitude toward the Japanese which tends to simply think that the Japanese does not value leisure time very highly and is willing to work himself even to death for his company. The Japanese worker and the society in general is thought to be mechanical, smiling but humorless, and very inhibited in “play.” The value placed on leisure and time away from work has led to the curious judgment that the Japanese as “workaholics” are engaging in unfair competition. By today’s Western standards, it is *natural* that a worker take a certain amount of time off. Not following the “natural” system is somehow cheating. There are those who perceive the problems with this argument and state that it is the grasping employers who are exploiting the Japanese worker, an *a priori* judgment that helps salve the conscience of the Western laborer which tells him maybe he should be working harder himself. There is currently a general movement in Japan to a more Western attitude towards leisure, but there are cultural elements in the concept of “play” which are not likely to change to any appreciable depth in the near future.

Defining Play and *Asobi*

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language² lists a total of 74 definitions for the word “play;” 21 for the noun, 20 for the transitive verb and 33 for the intransitive verb. The Japanese word “*asobi*,” written with the character 遊, is generally equivalent to many of these meanings, especially in the senses related to diversions, pastimes, sports, frolicking, dallying, reveling, and stage performances. The *Kokugo Daijiten*³ defines the noun *asobi*⁴ as 1) to comfort oneself or spirit by doing what one wants to. To enjoy hunting, eating, drinking or other pleasures. It quotes from the Manyoushu (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), ‘Maybe I will find love amid today’s *asobi*’. 2) To enjoy poetry, music, dance, etc. (reference made to the *asobi* of the emperor in the *Nihon Shoki* (Record of Things Japanese)). 3) Dallying with *yujo* (prostitutes) is quoted from the *Tales of Genji*, 4) Gambling, drinking carousing, etc. 5) Time not working or studying, free time=play time. 6) Time when one can do as one likes; or when one takes comfort away from daily life. 7) Pastimes or hobbies. 8) Parts of a machine that fit loosely, (equivalent to the “play” in steering wheel or brakes of a car). Besides these definitions there are *asobasu*, *asobase kotoba* (“play” speech), the verb *asobu*, 40 combinations beginning with *asobi*, such as *asobio* or “playboy,” and 74 combinations using the Chinese reading of the character *yu* grouped into eight different meanings: 1) enjoying oneself; 2) taking sensual pleasure; 3) not working; 4) traveling, touring; 5) moving about freely, (“nomads” are defined as *yubokumin*, or playing-herding people, where the playing refers to freedom of movement); 6) shortstop position on a baseball team, (specialized definition); 7) being with company or friends; 8) float (as materials that float in water).

The number of definitions and combinations of the word *asobi* that coincide with the English are hardly lacking in Japanese, and the concept of *asobi* or “play” could not be thought of as even in short supply.

Play Speech, *Asobase Kotoba*

Defined as very polite speech used mainly by women, *asobase kotoba* constitutes a verb ending of the highest form of honorific. The ending is difficult to translate literally because the concept hardly exists in English. If, for example one said, *Jubun o-nemuri-asobasemashita ka*,” the meaning would be “Did you sleep well?” but, literally it would come out, “Did you play at sleeping well?” This “*asobase*” form is actually expression of the Japanese ideal of how reality should be viewed, “the idea being that the person addressed is in such control of his life and his powers that for him everything is a play, a game. He is able to enter into life as one would enter into a game, freely and with ease...What *has* to be done is attacked with such a will that in the performance one is literally ‘in play.’⁵ The personal involvement in that which is going on, or that which one is doing carries with it the detachment of saying, “It is just a game.” The influence of Buddhism is very evident here where the lack of permanence, and therefore of permanent meaning, in anything of human life means that the person should be above it all. In a sense, the refined Japanese is so far removed from the mundane cares of life that he deigns to take part in them only as a diversion. Even in mat-

ters which would seem to be of extreme seriousness, the superior person “*plays*.” It is not, for example, improbable to hear someone say, “*Ojiisan ga o-nakunari-asobasete, zannen de gozaimasu,*” or, “I’m sorry to hear that your grandfather (has played at having) passed away.” The fiction is, of course, that the most refined person views the world, even death, as a game. Games that are the most fun are also the hardest, and it follows that unremitting pleasure is not the only aspect of the Japanese idea of play. The word *yukyo*, written with the character for *asobi* and *kyo*, a man who does not bow down to power and takes care of his followers, is defined as a chivalrous person who defends the weak, etc. while it also is related to the word *toseinin* or itinerant gambler. There is a “Robin Hood” character evident here, but the use of the character *asobi* has actually become separated from the idea of dissipation to indicate a sort of *noblesse oblige*.

Rules of *Asobi*

It may easily be understood therefore that this ideal of “playing at life” does not necessarily conceive of play as fun, games and laughter. In one sense the ideal of play can involve extremely serious activity in which laughter or even good humored banter is completely out of place. Some of the most elegant and traditional Japanese activities such as flower arrangement and tea ceremony are basically forms of “play” imbued with a spirituality in which the Japanese finds a quiet enjoyment in the beauty of their organization. “The act of drinking tea is a normal, secular, common everyday affair, so also is sitting in a room with friends. And yet, consider what happens when you resolve to pay full attention to every single aspect of the act of drinking tea while sitting in a room with friends, selecting first your best, most appropriate bowls...etc., then, if in preparing, serving and drinking, every phase of the action is rendered in such a gracefully functional manner that all present make take joy in it, the common affair might well be said to have been elevated to the status of a poem.”⁶ But it is the organization of a long tradition into certain rules and manners which give the tea ceremony its elegance and afford enjoyment for the Japanese taking part. Many Japanese spend years learning to serve tea in the fashion of one of the grand tea masters. Most have no other motive than to be able to reach the stage of accomplishment where the ceremony can be enjoyed with total ease. At every kind of gathering which foreigners may attend there is likely to be a tea-tasting ceremony in which the foreigners are invited to take part. The visiting Westerner is usually at a total loss as to how he or she is to act during this obviously solemn ceremony, a reaction that affords a certain delight to the Japanese who are introducing an aspect of their culture to people who have no category in which to place it. It is a *faux pas* to make a point of how bitter the tea tasted, since the point of the ceremony is hardly the taste of the tea. In the tea ceremony the tea tastes exquisite because of how it is served just as turkey may be many Western children’s favorite food because they get to eat it on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

In the same way, *haiku* is a traditional Japanese form of poetry which must conform to very strict rules. *Haiku* is made up of three lines of poetry, the first five syllables, the second seven syllables, and the third again five syllables long.⁷ There must be a “seasonal” word concerning nature somewhere in the poem, and this seasonal word must be one of a list

of several hundred approved by a school of *haiku*. Originality is welcomed only within these strictures and discovering new ways of expressing feelings in *haiku* is not so important as smooth and elegant expression within this framework. Yet this framework is not considered a burden, any more than the rules for serving and drinking tea during the tea ceremony are burdensome, but the guidelines to enjoyment.

Non-traditional sports enjoying great popularity among the Japanese include soccer and baseball and a number of foreigners are allowed to play on each of the professional teams. Most of the foreigners who play baseball in Japan are Americans who are near major league class and are waiting for a chance at the big leagues or have had a stint there already. The majority of them find that baseball in Japan is much different and considerably more “work” than in the United States. Practice, for example, begins in January, and is euphemistically called “voluntary.” During games the relief pitcher will be in the practice pitching area from the beginning of the game. By the time he may be called on to go into the game he may already have thrown a full game’s worth of pitches. Even children who are members of a soccer team as early as fourth grade elementary school may be expected to attend morning practice before school, arriving on the practice grounds as early as 6:30 am, then practicing for two or three hours after school. In all sports there seems to be a disproportionate amount of time spent on practice in the view of the Westerner. A large amount of the practice time itself is spent in doing calisthenics and muscle-training exercises, most of which would be done individually outside practice time in Europe or America, the social aspect of the sport very pronounced even in practice. But this extended practice is also preparation for the ability to really being able to “enjoy” the game, as much a part of the game as the play itself. Practice, in other words, supplies the player with the framework within which he must play the game, even the game of life.

Japanese and Ceremony, *Gishiki*

In all activities the Japanese must know the framework within which they should move. This is thought of not so much as limitation but as the rules of the game, as in the tea ceremony or *haiku*, and one of the things that supplies this framework in everyday life is “ceremony” which helps make the game of life “play.” The word for ceremony, *gishiki*, is written with one character meaning to “follow the ideal” and one meaning “manners” or “etiquette.” The underlying meaning is therefore not simply a traditional or prescribed movement or action, but performing in unison with another or others a proper ritual etiquette.

The Japanese have a ceremony for every type of everyday activity, and these ceremonies are an integral part of Japanese life which organize it and help the individual be smoothly absorbed into the larger society. In many ways it is ceremony that supplies the rules for the “game” of life of the Japanese. In terms of production or profit, ceremony is a zero quantity and, in a sense, it is a form of organized “play.” The Japanese often label something a “ceremony,” using the English word, when they see it as having no significant effect, a sort of game. The spring labor offensive, for example, is labeled a “ceremony” since it seems to be more concerned with making noise and affording a chance for the laborers to get together than actually achieving any improvement in labor conditions.

Ceremonies may indeed be a game for the Japanese society, but one that has significant social import. In addition to religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, there are many others which are considered essential to the very structure of the Japanese life. There is, for example, the *hatsu kao awase* (first meeting of the New Year, literally, "first showing of faces") which every public official and officer of every type of official or semi-official organization attends during early January. The mayor of a city or town will have to meet with all the people involved in every department in which the city is active; welfare, health, education, athletics, finances, police, etc. etc. The *kao awase* for the education department will mean a meeting of the board of education, all the principals of all the schools in the city plus the officers of the PTA's of those schools. The meeting consists of two or three speeches by the mayor, the head of the board of education, and then a light buffet snack which hardly suffices for the crowd that remains while the mayor and others go on to the next *kao awase*. Invitation to this *kao awase* is a recognition of the position of the invitee and his importance to the community, but the numbers militate against much individual recognition. It is sufficient that one be invited to be assured of one's position with society.

These ceremonies are of such import that it is difficult for the average Japanese to conceive of their absence, in spite of the fact that the concrete product of such ceremony is nil. There is always a ceremony marking the beginning of the school semester and, when told that there were none such in America, there was wonder among my students as to how school could begin. Everyday greetings of the Japanese mark off the day and reassure the individual that he or she is in contact with other members of society. There are specified salutations for leaving the house, returning, before and after meals, meeting someone on the street, offering hospitality, seeing off, meeting, and a myriad of other situations.⁸ The American would find repetition of the same words in every type of situation a restriction which would diminish his individual choice, and there would soon be a million variations on these greetings if they were part of the fabric in the West. In Japan they help the flow of everyday life to go smoothly and affirm the individual's position within his immediate society. When meeting an acquaintance on the street in Japan, one says, "Hello, where are you going?" The Japanese answers, "Oh, just over there," and is satisfied with having acknowledged the other's interest and knowing that there is an ongoing relationship with that person. The American would be likely to reply, "None of your business," perceiving the question as an invasion of privacy rather than a statement of interest in a friend.

While ceremonies are equivalent to the "rules of the game" for the Japanese, there are times when they are simply a nuisance to the American. A perceptive comment on the custom of Japanese workers to gather for morning calisthenics before work is made in the movie *Gung Ho*.⁹ The American workers managed to upset the new Japanese managers of the factory on the first day of work by making fun of, and generally disrupting the calisthenics they were asked to take part in. The individualistic ideals of the Westerner cause him to feel uneasy and even irked when he is forced to do what everyone else is doing as must be done in a ceremony. To sit or stand on signal, a necessary aspect, for example, of church ceremonies, is somewhat tiresome, and to stand in line for whatever purpose is very hard to do. Due again to the individualistic urgings, Americans make very poor queuers, leaving gaps and standing to the side, etc., even though any line breaker would regret it very quickly if he attempted to take an apparently open place in the line.

The queue however makes the Japanese aware of his physical position in a particular group, which has an effect opposite of what it would be for a Westerner of reassuring him and putting him at ease. Thus, the Japanese are made fun of by the Westerners and seem to be playing a game of follow-the-leader when they are part of a sightseeing group, even though the Japanese themselves find a security in the line that enables them to enjoy sights much more.¹⁰ Curiously, there are still some queue breakers in Japan, usually of the type that already feels outside the normal pale of society such as what is called a *chimpura*.¹¹ The difference in Japan is that seldom does anyone of the others standing in a queue make a protest, feeling the social disruption or fuss created would not be worth whatever good would be gained in righting the perceived wrong done by the line crasher.

In the traditional sports of Japan, ceremony has a major place. Those sports which have become international such as judo still maintain a certain amount of the ceremony surrounding them within Japanese society, including the bowing to the opponent and the referees, etc. *Sumo* is a very ceremonial sport, the great proportion of the time allowed for each match involved in preparatory parading and posturing, much of which expresses with determined gestures and movements the prematch spirit of valor, confidence, threat, etc. not without a certain amount of movement whose meaning has been lost to antiquity. *Kendo*, or Japanese fencing, also involves a great amount of ceremonial activity, including the *toki-no-koe* or battle cry. *Kyudo*, or Japanese archery, also has much ceremony attached to it, with each movement dictated down to that of the eyes.

Military Arts, *Bugei*

It should be noted that traditional Japanese sports practiced today are all military, with the exception of *sumo*, and even *sumo* was for a long while the province of the samurai. There are two ways of writing the Japanese for Military Arts; one, *budo*, which would indicate the "military way," which will be spoken of further, and *bugei*, in which the "arts" is expressed by the same character as used for the fine arts or the performing arts. In some way the military manner is appropriate to the social orientation of the Japanese. The individualism of the Western cultures finds regimentation abhorrent and, while requiring armies of regimented people to fight their wars, they especially cite those individuals who are "above and beyond..." those who stand apart from their fellow soldiers. In Europe and America it is rare for a high school to have uniforms for the students, and most of them that do in the U.S. are military prep schools. Western visitors to Japan see the junior and senior high school uniforms as basically military in character, and indeed they tend to recall the Japanese prewar military uniforms. The few universities that prescribe uniforms for the students are usually very nationalistic in orientation, a good example being Kokushikan University which has military-style uniforms and whose very name means "Hall of Patriots." Until recently the cheerleading clubs in the universities of Japan were all male and wore military-style uniforms. The cheerleading at any sports contests even now does not try to excite exuberant yells from the crowds but to concentrate the voice into strict repetitive calls for "fight" from the team.¹²

In Japanese junior- and senior-high schools there are many rules concerning dress and

the school uniform. While the students in general are not too happy with all the rules, the attitude of the school administrator is that the uniform is an expression of the school spirit and any deviation from the uniform in order to express individuality detracts from the totality of the school spirit. This "cooperative school spirit" creates a very pleasing resonance in the Japanese heart, seeing the group orientation of the school somewhat as the group loyalty of the samurai to their lord and each other.

The Way of the Warrior, *Bushido*

It was among the samurai and nobles that *Bushido* or "the way of the warrior" flourished. *Bushido* may be called the Japanese equivalent of chivalry and Inazo Nitobe wrote a book about bushido entitled *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*.¹³ In this little volume the foundations of Japanese ethics and morals are found in a combination of Buddhism and Shintoism, but are especially remarkable for the high place they give to the feeling of detachment which is described so well by the *asobu* mentality. The pride, perhaps the word "face" could be used, of the samurai is in this total command of all his emotions and of the game of life itself. A typical saying describing the samurai is, "...*kuwanedo takayoji*." "...sporting a toothpick even when he hasn't eaten." This type of behavior might be attributed to bravado by Westerners, but it actually derives from the felt necessity to conform to the role which one is playing within society. In the immediate context the saying is used to tell of the way the samurai must be impervious to hunger or any other type of suffering, but the motive for demonstrating such forbearance was to live up to the ideal that Japanese society, and indeed the samurai himself, attached to the role of samurai. As "all the world is a stage" for Shakespeare, one's whole life was the stage for the samurai. Even his ritual suicide, *hara-kiri*, was "staged" as a tragic drama, a play worthy of the Greek theater. Joseph Campbell quotes from Nitobe, who quotes in turn from Mitford's *Tales of Old Japan* in which a description is given of a samurai's *seppuku*¹⁴ for having allowed his men to fire on foreigners in Kobe when there was still much resistance in Japan to the encroachment of foreign countries. The solemn preparations, the equanimity of the principal in the face of his own demise, the selection and preparations of the *kaishakunin* who was to finally sever the head when the samurai had gone as far as he could in cutting his own belly open, all are related in fascinated wonder at the staging of what could only have seemed an "event." There is another quotation in Nitobe however, which even more markedly emphasizes the "play" or "game" element of the samurai existence.

It seems that two brothers who had attempted to assassinate Iyeyasu Tokugawa Shogun were caught and all the male members of their family were sentenced to death. While condemning the attempt, the courage of the brothers was admired and they were allowed to die in the manner of a samurai, that is by *seppuku*. The execution order included the eight-year-old brother of the older two.

"When they were all seated in a row for the final dispatch, Sakon turned to the youngest and said, 'Go thou first, for I wish to be sure that thou doest it aright.' Upon the little one's replying that, as he had never seen *seppuku* performed, he would like to see his brothers do it and then he could follow them, the older brothers smiled between their tears; — 'Well

said, little fellow! So canst thou well boast of being our father's child.' When they had placed him between them, Sakon thrust the dagger into the left side of his abdomen and said — 'Look brother! Dost understand now? Only, don't push the dagger too far, lest thou fall back. Lean forward, rather, and keep thy knees well composed.' Naiki (the other older brother) did likewise and said to the boy, 'keep thine eyes open or else thou mayst look like a dying woman. If thy dagger feels anything within and thy strength fails, take courage and double thy effort to cut across.' The child looked from one to the other, and, when both had expired, he calmly half denuded himself and followed the example set him on either hand."¹⁵

Nitobe goes on to mention that "the glorification of *seppuku* offered, naturally enough, no small temptation to its unwarranted committal. For causes entirely incompatible with reason, or for reasons entirely undeserving of death, hotheaded youths rushed into it as insects fly into fire; mixed and dubious motives drove more samurai to this deed than nuns into convent gates."¹⁶

The "game" aspect of *seppuku* is readily evident in the attitude of the young samurai who see the act as a kind of apotheosis, the fitting end to the drama of their life, or fitting terminus of the Way of the Warrior. In *bushido*, "Do" (pronounced "doe") or "Way" is a word used to indicate a discipline in the sense of a system of rules governing a particular activity, especially a cultural activity. There are *Kado* (flower arranging), *Sado* (tea ceremony), *Kendo* (Japanese fencing), *Kyudo* (Japanese archery), *Aikido* (another form of weaponless attack), *Judo* (literally "the pliant or soft way"), *Shodo* (calligraphy), besides *Doraku*, which is literally "the way of pleasure," and many others. In other words, Japanese traditional sports, games, and every special form of life are disciplines with a particular set of rules, including *Butsудо* and *Shindo*, the ways of the Buddha and the Gods. Conforming to these rules of the "Way" constitutes correct moral conduct for the Japanese and, indeed, the word "morality" is rendered as "*dotoku*" or "virtue of the way." The "way" in this case is life itself, or "the game."

In other words, every aspect of Japanese life presents itself as a "way" which has specific rules attached to it. A "Way" such as *Sado*, "the Way of Tea" is not a pastime practiced in one's spare time, with its prescribed gestures and movements it also demands a way of thinking or looking at life that is expected to continue outside the time actually spent practicing it. The "Way" may be what would be labeled a game or sport in Western society such as *Judo*, or a cultural activity such as *Kado*, or it may be the station or role one plays in life such as *Bushido*, but it has its own view of life, a philosophy defined by the Japanese society and which, if the "Way" is mastered, will define the person. There can be no urge to change the rules whether they concern a game, an art, or religion because they are part of the philosophy and to change the rules would mean that there is something to be changed in the way of viewing the world.

It therefore follows that the criterion of excellence within any of these disciplines is the perfect adherence to the defined rules. In *sumo* (on occasion referred to as "*sumodo*") for example, there are 70 *kimarite* or ways of beating an opponent which are sanctioned by the sumo association, all other throws being *jado*, the wrong or evil way. In any Japanese game or art, a technique or method not included in those traditional accepted is *jado*, even though it is not specifically against the rules and may be successful in achieving the purpose of the

game such as scoring points. In disciplines such as flower arrangement, the beauty of the finished product is in direct proportion to the extent it conforms to the rules of the particular school of flower arrangement. In these areas, *jado* is simply equivalent to ugliness, no matter how fine they may seem to the unpracticed, eye since they deny the world view or philosophy of the particular discipline.

The "way," for the Japanese, pervades life, and any new aspect of life is approached from the standpoint of seeking the proper "Way." Thus, even non-traditional sports such as baseball and skiing are seen as having a proper "Way" or philosophy, and mastering that "Way" is the road to success. For this reason the Japanese are great experts on the proper form in throwing a baseball or skiing the slalom, the understanding being that "form" is part of the sanctioned technique as well as the philosophy. This accounts for the amount of time spent by the Japanese in practicing a sport or any of the artistic or cultural activities mentioned previously. It also militates against the Japanese finding new techniques in any sport or artistic activity, since to practice anything other than the accepted forms would be *jado*. Once new techniques have been established elsewhere as successful, the Japanese are quick to master them as part of the accepted canon.¹⁷

The Eyes of the World, *Mie*

All these ways presume a society in which the "Way" is practiced and which directly or indirectly sanctions the rules by which it is practiced. Of course any cultural activity in the world belongs to some culture or other and presumes a background society. In the case of the Japanese "Ways," however, the degree of conforming to the rules is the criterion of success. Society sits in constant judgment on the performance of anyone performing in a role of their chosen "Way." As the samurai was constantly aware of the role he played as samurai, so the Olympic skier or Judo wrestler is aware of the role he or she is playing within Japanese society. The social unity of the Japanese is such that the fortunes of any athlete, for example, who is in competition with foreigners, is reported widely in the news. A Japanese golfer's scores on the PGA circuit are faithfully reported though they may consistently be well out of contention. Even the spring-training pitching record of a Japanese baseball player who may have a chance of playing with a major league baseball team is reported in detail and becomes a major topic for Japanese sports fans, and much disappointment is registered in the press when he is assigned to the minor leagues.

Whereas most Westerners feel pressure when called upon to perform in crucial contests, the individualistic orientation usually makes the *social* pressure secondary, whereas the Japanese athletes or others acting on an international stage seem to be constantly aware of the eyes of the Japanese society, the expectations of society. At least it seems that Japanese athletes whose record would seem to favor their success in a competition somehow fail consistently in the final test. If there is a cultural explanation for this phenomenon it must lie in the acute awareness of the role or "way" within society and the necessity of living up to it, as the samurai with his touted toothpick or ceremonial *seppuku*.¹⁸ This awareness of the social environment pervades Japanese activity and colors his every action. It contributes to what the Japanese call *Mie*, which may be translated as vanity, but is written with the

characters for “showing” and “prosperity” indicating the feeling that it is necessary to show society that one is living up to one’s station. It means also that when the Japanese are on holiday, buying souvenirs, eating in restaurants, etc. price is never questioned since to argue over price would indicate that one is somehow stingy or poor. Haggling over prices as major entertainment in Mideastern bazaars carries an entirely different valence for the Japanese who must demonstrate his samurai’s *toothpick* of not being in want, especially in his role of being free from daily cares on holiday. This *Mie* is directed toward the Japanese society, the one that dictates the “ways” and rules of the “game,” not simply “human society.” The Japanese tourist may sometimes act in a way that would be offensive to people of non-Japanese countries, but while they are not so much aware of the “eyes” of other societies, they are very much so of Japanese society. The Japanese tourist in London’s Heathrow Airport rejoices in being able to buy souvenirs to bring back to his friends in Japan at 30-40 percent discount, but whatever he buys must at least measure up to the social position of the intended receiver or even flatter his importance; meaning that it is most often a luxury item. Airport discount shops cater to this *mie* of the Japanese by stocking whiskys, wines, perfumes, fashion items well beyond what the individual Japanese would buy for him- or herself.

Summary

1. “Play” for the Japanese as represented by the word “*asobi*,” includes the activities of sports, eating, drinking, dissipation of various types, and taking sightseeing trips, which means “getting away from it all” in a sense. Beyond this, however, there is an ideal present in Japanese society which sees life itself as a “game” in which the superior Japanese person takes part at will but with detachment, an attitude expressed by the “*asobase kotoba*.” This ideal attitude would extend the “play” of the Japanese to all of life.

2. Anything that is perceived as an art, sport, or even a special mode of living is dubbed a “Do” or “Way,” which is a discipline endowed with a specific canon of rules sanctioned by society, and one following this “way” must adhere to in order to succeed. The “Way” had its epitome in *Bushido*, the “Way of the Warrior,” in which the greatest virtue was to live a life and to die in perfect accordance with the rules of the game of the samurai life.

3. While adherence to rules has a military aspect pervading the traditional forms or Japanese arts and sports, rules themselves are considered the guidelines to enjoyment and practicing the established methods sanctioned by society, the route to finding fulfillment within the “Way.” In fact, the “Way” for traditional Japanese activities includes the meaning of “practice.”

4. Ceremony is an expression of the unity of the Japanese society and reaffirms that unity as well as the position of each member within the society. Ceremony physically demonstrates the relationships and importance of every group and individual within it.

5. The awareness of society and the “eyes” of Japanese society by the individual Japanese creates great mental pressure in the Japanese who is active as the representative of a part or all of the Japanese society. It also makes “*Mie*,” or the need to be perceived as living according to the “Way,” an outstanding trait of the Japanese.

Conclusion

If the Westerner looks at the amount of time the Japanese spends at what are thought of as leisure activities in Europe and America, especially in relationship to the amount of time spent working, then the Japanese may “play” less than the Westerner. “Rest and relaxation” is not, however, high on the list of values for the Japanese. The Japanese spend less time on extended vacations than Westerners, but “play” pervades Japanese life. The most sophisticated form of play for the Japanese could be designated as a “*Do*” or “*Way*” which indicates not a form of diversion but a culturally accepted discipline or way of life demanding a great amount of spiritual, and sometimes mental effort to master. Mastering the role requires a great amount of practice which would necessarily be classed as drudgery by most in the West, but practice is part of the “play” for the Japanese and the easy “practice” of the way is the final goal.

While a “Way” is “Play” for the Japanese, it is not really something practiced only during leisure time but becomes an attitude carried through all daily activities and may even become a role by which the person may be described. The role “played” by a Japanese, however, is necessarily social, since the rules by which it is described are social and its value and that of the person practicing it are totally a result of Japanese society.

Thus it would not necessarily be just to criticize the Japanese for not “playing” enough. It would rather be to the point for the Westerner to understand the way in which the type of “play” and its value are totally determined by Japanese society, and lose their meaning for the Japanese outside that society. There is no way that Japanese “Play” can be evaluated using the categories of another culture.

Footnotes:

1. The word “amateur” derives from the French “*amator*” meaning “lover,” and indicates one who plays a game for the love of it, not for money.
2. Random House, New York, 1981.
3. Shogakkan, Tokyo, 1982.
4. Translation by the writer.
5. Campbell, Joseph; *Myths to Live By*; Souvenir Press, London, 1973; p. 122.
6. Campbell, Joseph; *Oriental Mythology, The Masks of God*; Penguin Books, New York, 1962; pp. 503-4.
7. The Japanese and English syllable are entirely different in makeup and attempts at translation into English of Japanese *haiku*, while they may transmit some of the flavor of the poetry, cannot approximate the feeling of the rhythm created by this particular number of syllables in Japanese.
8. At a three-day training camp at which my Japanese students were supposed to speak only English, I was asked by one of them how to say “*itadakimasu*,” the word of announcement which begins a meal in Japan. I told her that there was no English greeting like that, to which she replied, “But then, how do you eat?”
9. *Gung Ho*: Paramount Pictures, 1986: Produced by Tony Ganz & Deborah Blum; Directed by Ron Howard.
10. When escorting tours of my students in Europe, in very Western fashion I find myself separating myself from the group, walking on the other side of the street, etc. to avoid

- the stigma of being thought part of the group being led by the guide, a feeling certainly due to values imbued at a very early age in America.
11. A *chimpira* is a brash young *yakuza* = a member of a Japanese gang.
 12. A video taken of a Japanese university cheerleading club performing was shown to people in France who were asked to guess what the people were doing. Responses ranged from demonstrating politically to practicing military maneuvers, with almost no one guessing that they were cheering for a team playing a game.
 13. Nitobe, Inazo; *Bushido, the Soul of Japan*; Charles E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo, 1969.
 14. "Seppuku" is the Japanese word usually used instead of *hara-kiri*. Both words mean approximately the same thing but are written with different characters and those for *seppuku* are given their Chinese pronunciation.
 15. Nitobe, pp. 121-2.
 16. Nitobe, p. 122.
 17. An outstanding example of this is in ski jumping. Jumping with the ski tips pointed outwards in a "V" form was bad form until a Scandinavian jumper proved that it led to much longer jumps under the right conditions. Once the "V" form was sanctioned, Japanese jumpers mastered it quickly enough to steal a march on the rest of the world while it was catching up.
 18. There is the famous incident of the marathon runner Kokichi Tsuburaya who came in third at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. When he entered the stadium he was in second place after Abebe who had already finished. He had the misfortune, however, of being ignominiously overtaken in front of the huge crowd by a British runner on the backstretch. Several years later Tsuburaya committed suicide and remarked in the note he left behind that he could no longer run, he was tired of trying to live up to all the expectations laid upon him.

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