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私は、米国でのコロナ禍に感じた日米の文化差、特に表情の捉え方の違いを文章にしました。これからも、自身の価値基準だけで人やその行動を判断しないオープンマインドネスを大切にしていきます。		

From Annoyance to Understanding

"I HATE MASKS!!!" Oh no, not again. That was the thought I had every time I heard someone shouting those words. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, I was living in America for my father's job. During that period, many countries mandated people to wear masks to prevent the virus from spreading. However, many people in America did not like wearing them.

Growing up in Japan, wearing masks was nothing special. I had often worn them when I got sick or just to prevent myself from getting sick. Because of this, I did not understand why Americans hated masks so much. To be honest, I grew so tired of and annoyed by hearing those three words—"I hate masks." I kept wondering, "Why can't they just get used to wearing them?"

One time, I asked my friend why he hated wearing masks. He told me, "First of all, masks are just uncomfortable. Plus, they make it hard to communicate with each other. You can't read people's facial expressions when they're wearing one." His first reason was quite understandable, but his second reason puzzled me. I had never felt that way before. His point intrigued me, so I decided to think about it more deeply on my own. It was then that I realized that Japanese and Americans value different things in communication.

Japanese are known to express their thoughts and ideas indirectly. We often imply our honest thoughts in conversation, so we tend to try to understand people's true feelings from small details like eye movements. Americans, on the other hand, value conveying their opinions clearly in words. This difference led me to the idea that during a conversation, Japanese tend to focus on a person's eyes, while Americans focus on their mouth. Americans feel they cannot read other people's facial expressions when their mouths are covered by things like masks. In contrast, Japanese often feel a sense of unease when a person's eyes are covered by

sunglasses, as it becomes difficult to read their expressions. In fact, I have often heard Japanese people say that wearing sunglasses makes people look “scary” for that exact reason. I also found another fascinating difference when I compared Japanese and American emojis. For example, the Japanese emoji (Kaomoji) (^_^) indicates happiness, while (>_<) indicates struggle. These two emojis convey completely different emotions, yet the shape of the mouth remains the same—just a line. In contrast, American emojis such as :) and :(express smile and sadness, respectively. They convey two different emotions, but the shape of its eye stays the same—just two dots. Taken together, these examples clearly show our contrasting communication style. While Japanese rely on the eyes to convey emotions, Americans use the mouth as the primary indicator of feeling. It shows how deeply rooted these different ways of communicating are in our respective cultures, even in something as modern and casual as digital communication.

Through these discoveries, I realized that Japanese and Americans value different aspects of communication. At the same time, I was struck by the danger of judging people based solely on their behavior. I used to be annoyed by people shouting, “I hate masks!” I viewed them as people who simply complained without putting in much effort. Now, however, I understand that there was a reason behind their view: a reason rooted in their cultural background. This experience taught me a profound lesson that when we encounter behavior or ideas that are unfamiliar or difficult to understand, we should choose to accept them with an open mind. We must look beyond the surface and seek to understand the reason behind someone’s actions. I believe that this willingness to understand is the essence of true communication. By learning to see beyond our own cultural lens, we take our first step toward building bridges instead of walls. These bridges allow us not only to connect with people from different backgrounds, but also to discover new perspectives, ideas, and values, turning differences into opportunities for deeper understanding and mutual respect.