

Chadisitic Japanesy Stuff

What Are They Thinking!?

Chad Mullane is a Perth-born Tokyo-based comedian who has performs on TV and stages throughout Japan. In this series he uses his unique insight to discuss the cultural differences between Japan and Australia.

The Japanese are perverted. Yes, do a little web surfing on a computer with the adult-content filter turned off, and you'll see what I mean. I'm not merely referring to the erotic aspects, but rather the unique sense of beauty and twisted ways of thinking that led them down the road to kinkiness in the first place. Now please forget about my crass attempt at getting you interested, and allow me to pose a question.

How would you convey amorous feelings to someone you secretly admired?

Would you blurt it out the moment the idea popped into your head? Would you crave for Valentine's Day's early arrival? Would alcohol do away with your inhibitions, and perhaps even any recollection of your confession? Or would you just take it slow and enjoy fantasizing about how things might be, savoring the sweet sorrow, the sweaty palms, the palpitations every time even a mere glance comes your way, enjoying the wait until the perfect opportunity arises... perhaps you are perverted yourself!

Soseki Natsume, the famed early 20th century novelist and Professor of English Literature at Tokyo Imperial University, once asked his students to translate into Japanese the English phrase "I love you". They all gave the literal Japanese equivalent "Aishiteimasu". He was furious. His reasoning was that no Japanese person ever said such a

thing in real life. The students all agreed. The translation Soseki offered was "Tsuki ga kirei desune", or "isn't the moon beautiful..." His version implies such words would be uttered with both parties gazing up at the sky (or perhaps while looking at a reflection upon a pond). No eyes would be transfixed upon any



others. Nobody would be down on bent knee. And this idea of how to say "I love you" sounds very Japanese to me. After finally mustering up the courage to say such a thing, even a reply in the positive could mean, "I love you too", or "yeah, great cloudless night". The ambiguity of it all...

Why did this restrained form of communication come into fashion? My understanding is that it all stems from the fact that Samurai were responsible for setting the standards in Japan over a the period of a few centuries. Warriors as they were, Samurai tended to keep things to themselves. You wouldn't often hear them say "ouch". When they spoke, it was with brevity, and they aimed to do so in poetry. War, honor, words and death. These were the Samurai's cherished arts. *Jiseinoku* (poetry one would utter in death on the battlefield), are a valued part of Japanese literary history. The Samurai aimed to be chivalrous gentlemen, in both principle and practice. A Samurai gentleman would never lower himself to voice feelings of affection with such a coarse phrase as "I love you". Conversely, it would be a tricky deed were you to ask a Samurai if an ugly girl was indeed ugly or not. Unable to lie, yet having to be the polite gentleman, he would endeavour to muster up a painfully poignant poetic response. Or perhaps he would slice you in two for dishonouring the lady through asking such an un-Samurai-like question in the first place.

So, Samurai spent centuries trying to only speak of that which was really worthy, and in a classy fashion too. Direct and frank communication was replaced with the concept of *Honne* and *Tatemae*, or 'One's Real Intention' and 'The Façade'. Words wouldn't necessarily reflect what the speaker is truly thinking. Or perhaps they would, but in a cryptic way. It is easy to understand why one might babble on about the moon when one is a little frisky. But, it is also easy for one to see through such a façade. Perhaps it is more puzzling for the non-Japanese when they discover that this vague way of speaking permeates all aspects of life. Even when one reaches an understanding of this 'perverted' method of communication, one may come to a conclusion that in modern Japan, all of this is now merely a bad habit, with the noble intentions behind the behaviour all but lost. Personally, I like the poetry, but I also keep my wits about me.

In conclusion, do not feel frustrated when a Japanese person says "sorry" more than you would expect. Do not be annoyed when they laugh at things that aren't funny. And do not wrongfully assume that they are emotionally empty. You are simply on the other side of the façade. Remember, you've seen on the Internet what they do behind closed doors! Keep your eyes open, notice the subtleties, and you should be able to sense what they are honestly thinking without any vocal confirmation. If you still remain puzzled at the end of the day, at the very least, admire them for having such a complete façade.

Profile



Chad Mullane was born in Perth in 1979. He went to Japan for 6 months on a student exchange programme, and after finishing high school he went back there to become a Japanese comedian. 12 years later, he's one of the most famous Aussies you've never heard of.

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