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To Go With or Against the Flow?

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Ever since I remembered, Japan has been a nation built on group work and collectivist ideologies. The only right way is the way that everyone else is doing something – regardless of if you agree with it or not. For my interviewee, this is a culture that she grew up in, left, and then returned to throughout her education. Whether it comes down to taste, clothing, dating habits, or even something as simple as using an escalator, there is a right and wrong way to do something in Japan. Perhaps, the best way to describe this is as is your action suitable for Japan's culture? Take, for example, the escalator; In the States, some people stand and hold the handrail, some people walk up the steps, and some just line up. In Japan, you line up along the left-hand side. It isn't illegal, but it is looked upon to walk past people on the righthand side. Only those who are rushing to get somewhere are often seen doing that.

After spending time here and speaking with my interviewee, it is apparent what "sticking out of the crowd" does in Japan. In the US, children are praised to be different from their peers and to express themselves in their hairstyles, clothing, and hobbies. The idea of being open when communicating is taken as a strength than a weakness. Yet, in Japan, sticking out results in stares, confusion, and occasionally inconvenience for others. My interviewee spent her high school years studying at Keio High School in New York before returning home to attend Keio University. She began to adopt a more American mindset but quickly found that she needed to change when returning to Japan. Due to different values and the importance of seniority, there is no opportunity to give opinions and feedback in club or work settings. Her first boss initially even tried to force my interviewee to attend a convention on how to be a "normal Japanese society member" and change

her style of clothing. I think for many Americans, this type of uniform idea is too extreme and wouldn't be favored.

On the other hand, we could also say that members of American society are doing whatever they can to "fit into being an American." Of course, there is no one right way to do things, but perhaps this is what it means to be American. To be unique and "stick out of the crowd" is to be American, while to go with the flow of things is to be Japanese. This might be a large generalization that doesn't truly describe either country, but Japanese values and traditions could not easily be replicated in the States.

Speaking with my interviewee made me recognize a few things about myself after coming to Japan. We are both very similar in the sense that there is a mix of both Japanese and American views in us. While we have different likes and dislikes, being in Japan makes it hard for us to completely stick out and completely fit in. I have become more aware of my actions, expressions, and the clothes I choose to wear for the sake of fitting in more. I am happy to go along with the flow if it isn't anything unethical or immoral. Of course, if it were something I believed was wrong even if everyone else were doing it, then I would not choose to follow the status quo. But, at the same time, the societal environment in Japan has helped me find a way to look deeper at my own personal identity, too. Perhaps my interviewee and I will always be in the process of figuring out our identity, but we will take it along with all the different aspects that come from our cultures and experiences.