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### A Comparative Study of English and Japanese Proverbs : With Special Reference to Well-known English Proverbs (6) : 日英諺の比較研究

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# A Comparative Study of English and Japanese Proverbs

— With Special Reference to Well-known English Proverbs — (6)

(日英諺の比較研究)

Kengo Tamura

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## I Introduction

The English proverbs used in this paper have been selected mainly from the books listed in the Bibliography at the end of this paper. In the present paper, the 30 proverbs which are taken up are divided into three categories, as shown in Part II of the Contents. These categories are used solely for the sake of convenience, and should not be considered as a definitive classification. For each category, 10 proverbs for (A), 10 for (B), and 10 for (C) have been chosen.

These proverbs were explained and provided with a simple commentary and quoted phrases, with Related Sayings listed below each. By the word 'proverb' as used in this paper is meant a short, popular, and witty saying which expresses some truth or useful knowledge or idea.

## Notations used in this paper

Italics : Japanese

— — : the meaning of each English Saying

“ ” : quotation

## II Categories of Proverbs

### Category A

A-1 A contented mind is a perpetual feast.

— A person with a contented mind will always feel happy. —

As the Bible says, “All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is a merry heart hath a continual feast. (Proverbs)” Those who can reconcile themselves to what they lack are guaranteed to be happy. It is very desirable that even when you are poor or unlucky, you can accept that condition and be contented with it. You will have to recognise that financial support is one of the most important elements for happiness. You need money to enrich your knowledge, to broaden your mental horizons, and even to keep in good health; and so, you have to work hard. It is nonsense if you stay ‘contented’ because of your laziness and expect others to feed you. However, some of the authorities including politicians and rich people, often make the worst of this saying. They say to the poor, “A little bird is content with a little nest.” But the contentment cannot make a hungry stomach full.

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for.” (Epicurus, 341-270 B.C.)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Taru o shirumono wa tomu.* (=He who knows how to be satisfied is rich in mind.)
2. Enough is as good as a feast.
3. Discontent is the first step in progress.
4. Content is the philosopher’s stone that turns all it touches into gold.
5. Content is a kingdom.

— It does not take long for bad news to circulate. —

Information about trouble or misfortune spreads much faster than any other kind of news. You tend to take an interest in others, especially in news about their disasters or setbacks, which spreads more quickly than good news. You can often bear another's misfortunes, although you cannot bear your own so easily. On the other hand, your good fortune or talent often invites the jealousy of other people. "Unwelcome news is always soon enough heard. Good news is scarcely heard."

"Nowadays truth is the greatest news." (Thomas Fuller, M.D.)

"Ill news hath wings, and with the wind doth go, comfort's a cripple and comes ever slow." (Michael Drayton)

"The nature of bad news infects the teller." (Shakespeare)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kouji mon o idezu. Akuji senri o hashiru.* (=A good deed does not go out of the gate. An evil act runs a thousand miles.)
2. No news is good news.
3. He that tells his wife news is but newly married.
4. Ten good turns lie dead and one ill deed report abroad does spread.

— Great barkers are no biters. —

When a dog barks at strangers, this does not mean that he intends to bite them. He may be just excited or frightened. This saying is applied not only to dogs but to people who utter threats in a loud voice. Their threats do not constitute any real danger. Those who make a bluff are only revealing their weakness. As they are actually cowards, they have to pretend to be brave; so you do not have to be afraid of them. The most vociferous individuals are often quite harmless. A man of ability makes much ado about nothing, and quietly waits for a good chance to come. A Japanese proverb says, "A clever hawk conceals his talons." (=A really talented person does not show off his / her ability.) But these days, if you do not try to show off your talent and ability to other people, you cannot be recognised by them.

"Many would be cowards if they had courage enough." (Thomas Fuller, M.D.)

“Perfect courage and utter cowardice are two extremes which rarely occur.” (La Rochefoucauld)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Hoeru inu wa kamitsukanu.* (=Barking dogs do not bite.)
2. Great boasters are not always the best performers.
3. If you can't bite, don't show your teeth.
4. It is easy to frighten a bull from the window.
5. The noisiest drum has nothing in it but air.
6. Still waters run deep.
7. Empty cars make the most rattle.
8. His bark is worse than his bite.

A-4                    He that cannot obey cannot command.

— A person who cannot be a follower cannot be a leader. —

A person who has not served or neither understands nor respects his / her followers cannot be a good commander, as Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) wrote: “He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.” There are many leaders around us, but there are no inborn leaders; their era, environment, and above all, their own strong desire will be important factors to make them leaders. It greatly depends on when and where they become leaders whether or not they can demonstrate their leadership ability. This saying teaches us that the experience which we gained when we obeyed orders is valuable to make us qualified to give such orders.

“A leader is a dealer in hope.” (Napoleon)

“Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint..... The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life.” (Max Weber)

“No man is great enough or wise enough for any of us to surrender our destiny to. The only way in which anyone can lead us is to restore to us the belief in our own guidance (ability to guide others).” (Henry Miller)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kerai to naraneba kerai wa tsukaenu.* (=If you do not become a follower, you cannot be a commander.)
2. It needs more skill than I can tell to play the second fiddle well.
3. If two men are to ride on a horse, one must ride behind.

#### 4. Through obedience learn to command.

#### A-5 He who excuses himself accuses himself.

— To excuse is to accuse. —

If you persistently provide reasons or a justification for your actions when other people do not approve of what you did, it means that you blame yourself, saying that you have done something wrong or bad. When you make a mistake, it is better to admit it frankly and try to make up for the loss caused by your failure. You should not waste time or energy for nothing. Those who always make an excuse for justifying themselves may be egocentric, irresponsible, and not very intelligent. They may not be aware that their situation becomes worse and that they lose the confidence of others. 'What is done cannot be undone', so, 'it is no use crying over spilt milk'.

"One of man's greatest failings is that he looks almost always for an excuse, in the misfortune that befalls him through his own fault, before looking for a remedy - which means he often finds the remedy too late." (Cardinal De Retz)

"Several excuses are always less convincing than one." (Aldous Huxley)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Iiwake suruhodo warukunaru.* (=The more you excuse yourself, the worse you become.)
2. A bad workman blames his tools.
3. Don't make excuses, make good.

#### A-6 If one sheep leaps over the ditch, all the rest will follow.

— One sheep follows another blindly. —

It is in the nature of sheep to follow each other, but one of them must be more courageous than the rest, and must set an example before the whole flock will take a risk. This saying has two meanings: (1) the leader of a group should have firm leadership, for the destiny of the group depends on his judgment and action; (2) you are likely to be influenced by other people. There is a Japanese proverb which says, *Gan ga tateba hato mo tatsu.* (=A wild goose flies off, and a pigeon follows it.) Blind following is dangerous and has caused many problems and even wars. You should have courage to speak out and act against the misjudgment of the majority of people or even that of your leader.

“People, like sheep, tend to follow a leader – occasionally in the right direction.”

(Alexander Chase)

“Evil communications corrupt good manners.” (Corinthians)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Ikken hoyureba, hyakken koe ni hoyu.* (=When one dog barks, a hundred others take up the cry.)
2. If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.
3. There is safety in numbers.
4. One sheep follows another.

#### A-7                    If you want peace, prepare for war.

— If you want to preserve peace, you must maintain military forces. —

If a country is well armed, its potential aggressors will be less likely to attack it. But historically, we were unable to avert war by threatening our opponents by our military power. We should know that attempts to intimidate people into domination by force cannot be a deterrence in the long run. It is said that not a few children in the world do not know ‘peace,’ ‘pleasure,’ or even ‘laughter,’ because their countries have been at war, since they were born.

“To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.”

(George Washington)

“Arms alone are not enough to keep peace. It must be kept by men.” (John F. Kennedy)

“I am not only a pacifist but a militant pacifist. I am willing to fight for peace. Nothing will end war unless the people themselves refuse to go to war.” (Albert Einstein)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Chi ni ite ran o wasurezu.* (=In peace, don't forget war.)
2. He that considers in prosperity will be less afflicted in adversity.
3. Nothing can bring peace but yourself.
4. Let us not forget the tempest in the calm or sickness in the moment of health.

#### A-8                    The first blow is half the battle.

— If you deal someone or something the first blow, it is the most important step towards achieving victory. —

This saying is almost always shortened to ‘half the battle.’ If you start something before your rivals, you can gain an advantage over them, because you acquire confidence in yourself, and you are motivated to work hard and to preserve your present advantageous position, and to take the lead and thus you will eventually win. But some people are impatient and often jump to the wrong conclusion by overestimating their ability only by their ‘first blow’, and they do not keep on trying their best, and so they lose. To them, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” They may think that chance and timing are more important for success than hard work.

“The passion to get ahead is sometimes born of the fear lest we be left behind.” (Eric Hoffer)

“Delay always breeds danger and to protract a great design is often to ruin it.” (Cervantes)

“What may be done at any time will be done at no time.” (Thomas Fuller, M.D.)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Sakinzureba hito o seisu.* (=If you go ahead of others, you control them.)
2. A good beginning makes a good ending.
3. Well begun is half done.
4. First come, first served.

A-9

‘They say so’ is half a lie.

— Half a rumour is unbelievable. —

You should not be too ready to believe what people say when they are having just an informal conversation. In order to force their opinions on others, young people often say, “Because everybody says so, you must be wrong,” although this ‘everybody’ often means just ‘one or two’ persons. It is foolish to believe an unofficial report or piece of news that may have been invented, and was spread by an indefinite number of people. It is very difficult to draw an exact line between a lie and a truth.

“A falsehood once received from a famed writer becomes traditional to posterity.” (John Dryden)

“A big lie is more plausible than truth.” (Ernest Hemingway)

“Society can exist only on the basis that there is some amount of polished lying and that no one says exactly what he thinks.” (Lin Yutang)

《Related Sayings》



1. *Uwasa hanbun uso hanbun.* (=Half a rumour half a lie.)
2. Half the truth is often a whole lie.
3. Few are they whom fair-minded Jove (=Jupiter) loves.
4. Give a lie twenty-four hours' start, and you can never overtake it.
5. Don't believe everything you read in the papers.

#### A-10 When things are at the worst, they begin to mend.

— When you are in the worst situation, things are beginning to go better with you. —

When you are driven to an extremity and are at the end of your tether, strangely enough, you will apply all your imagination and skill to deal with the situation. You will exert all possible efforts, even if you are usually lazy. Eventually you can succeed in getting over the difficulty. A comfortable life is likely to deprive us of being willing to take risks and to try out new things, but on the contrary, a hard situation may lead us to many valuable inventions and enable us to enjoy many benefits.

“To have a grievance is to have a purpose in life.” (Eric Hoffer)

“The sovereign source of melancholy is repletion. Need and struggle are what excite and inspire us; our hour of triumph is what brings the void.” (William James)

“When you are in Rome you long to be in the country, and when you are in the country you praise the distant town to the skies.” (Horace, 65-8 B.C.)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kyūsureba tsūzu.* (=When you are placed in a fix, you can figure out some solution.)
2. Desperate diseases must have desperate remedies.
3. Necessity is the mother of invention.
4. Things must get worse before they get better.

### Category B

#### B-1 A rich man's joke is always funny.

— A rich man's joke, even if it is not amusing, provokes laughter. —

This couplet was written by the English poet Edward Brown; “Money is honey, my little sonny. / And a rich man's joke is always funny.” This saying is used ironically. As a matter of fact, a rich man's joke is often boring, but his flatterers and yes-men laugh as if it were very funny in order to curry favour with him. This saying tells us

that we can buy any favour or influence which we may desire, if we are rich. The following was sung by the British soldiers in the First World War. / 'She was Poor but she was Honest' / She was poor but she was honest / Victim of a rich man's game. / First he loved her, then he left her, / And she lost her maiden name..... / It's the same the whole world over, / It's the poor wot gets the blame, / It's the rich wot gets the gravy. / Ain't it all a bleedin' shame? / (Anonymous)

"Riches attract the attention, consideration, and congratulations of mankind." (John Adams)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kane areba baka mo rikō* (=A rich person, even if a fool, can be treated as a wise man.)
2. God help the poor, for the rich can help themselves.
3. The pleasures of the rich are bought with the tears of the poor.
4. Money talks.
5. A full purse never lacks friends.
6. Money makes the world go round.

B-2                      Cut your coat according to your cloth.

— Adjust your expenditure (coat) according to the means or income (cloth) you have available. —

This saying tells us that (1) we should keep our expenditure within our income; (2) we should adapt ourselves to our condition and live within our means. "Historically, the proverb may well reflect the laws that governed the amount of cloth that English citizens were permitted to wear according to social rank by an Act of Parliament passed in 1533. These laws were introduced in the wake of the Black Death,....." (Cassell's Dictionary of Proverbs) It seems difficult for us to compromise with our principles according to what is only reasonable, regardless of our present condition. Class struggles are long-lasting.

"Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure." (Samuel Johnson)

"Emperors, kings, artisans, peasants, big people, little people - at bottom we are all alike and all the time; all just alike on the inside, and when our clothes are off, nobody can tell which of us is which." (Mark Twain)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kani wa kōra ni nisete ana o horu.* (=The crab digs a hole according to its shell.)
2. Stretch your legs according to your coverlet.
3. A kennel is lodging good enough for a dog.

B-3 Don't cross the bridge till you come to it.

— Don't worry about whether you can cross the bridge or not until you come to it. —

The meaning of this proverb is that you should not deal with anticipated problems until they actually arise. Don't worry about what may not happen. Your fear may be groundless. This saying has been traced back to the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who said, "Don't cross the bridge till you come to it, / Is a proverb old, and of excellent wit." As a rule we are likely to be more scared of what is going to happen than at what has happened, because what we cannot see is more difficult to deal with than what we have actually seen. "What's the use of worrying? / It never was worthwhile, / So, pack up your troubles in your old kitbag, / And smile, smile, smile. (George Asaf)

"Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear." (Bertrand Russell)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Ashita wa ashita no kaze ga fuku.* (=Tomorrow's wind blows tomorrow.)
2. Don't cry before you are hurt.
3. Don't meet trouble halfway.
4. Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you.

B-4 It is too late to lock the stable when the horse has been stolen.

— It is nonsense to lock the stable-door, after the horse has been stolen. —

It is useless to take precautions in order to prevent any damage or loss that has already been done. Originally this saying referred to horse-stealing, but now it can be applied to anything that is done too late rather than too early. It is easy to guard against a misfortune or a disaster which you can foresee, but it is difficult to put this precaution into practice, because human beings by nature are forgetful of their unfortunate experiences. And they unconsciously try to escape from the regrettable memory that their horse was stolen, and they make the same mistake again and again.

“Folly is perennial and yet the human race has survived.” (Bertrand Russell)

“Not the power to remember, but its very opposite, the power to forget, is a necessary condition for our existence.” (Sholem Ashs)

“The best way to suppose what may come, is to remember what is past.” (Lord Halifax)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Nusubito o toraete nawa o nau.* (=One makes a rope after seizing the thief.)
2. After death, the doctor.
3. It is easy to be wise after the event.
4. It is too late to cover the well when the child is drowned.

B-5            It will be all the same a hundred years hence.

— In a hundred years’ time, we shall all be dead. —

This saying gives us a sound warning against worrying too much about death. Man is mortal. Even a special, important, or powerful person cannot hope to continue living forever. You have to die sooner or later; and so, even when you are in despair mentally or physically, you should not back yourself into a tight corner. It is very important to enjoy this short life while we are alive.

“Old and young, we are all on our last cruise.” (Robert Louis Stevenson)

“Our lives.....are but a little while; / so, let them run as sweetly as you can, / and give no thought to grief from day to day, / but life hurries on its business, and is gone.” (Euripides, 484-406 B.C.)

“Life is but a day; / A fragile dew drop on its perilous way / From a tree’s summit. (John Keats)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Shōja hitsumetsu esha jōri* (=Living creatures are destined to perish. Those who meet are bound to part.)
2. Dying is as natural as living.
3. Death is the grand leveler.
4. There is a remedy for all things but death.
5. Death when it comes will have no denial.

## B-6

## Spare the rod and spoil the child.

— A child who is not punished when he has done wrong will grow up to be selfish and inconsiderate. —

Children are basically concerned with or directed towards their own advantage, and so if you allow them to behave just as they wish and give them too much praise and attention, they will become egoistic, ungovernable, and lacking in care and respect for others. It is important to discipline children especially while they are young. You should neither dote on them nor let them grow up overprotected. When you consider discipline, you should take the age of the children as well as their character and temperament into consideration. Children do not like to listen to their parents, but they imitate them; so, we should show them our 'back' (what we really are) honestly and let them see that their parents' life is full and happy. "As the old birds sing, the young ones twitter."

"I have never observed other effects of whipping than to render boys more cowardly, or more willfully obstinate." (Montaigne)

"Children should be led into the right paths, not by severity, but by persuasion."  
(Terence 186-159 B.C.)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Kawaii ko ni wa tabi o saseyo.* (=Let your beloved child experience the hardships of travelling.)
2. Better be unborn than untaught, for ignorance is the root of misfortune.
3. Obey your children if you don't want them to be accursed.

## B-7

## Too many cooks spoil the broth.

— When too many cooks are involved in cooking, the food is easily spoiled. —

In any kitchens, when several persons take part in cooking together, disagree with one another, get in their ways, and insist on interfering with what should be done with this and that, it will spoil not only the soup but also the whole meal. Especially good cooks have their own specific tastes and are very particular about their ways of cooking. This saying is not restricted to the kitchen only. It can be applied to other situations. If too many people work on the same project at the same time, the result will be confusion. This saying is known in other European languages, including

Dutch, Turkish, Polish, Spanish, and Russian.

“At bottom, and just in the deepest and most important things, we are unutterably alone, and for one person to be able to advise or even help another, a lot must happen, a lot must go well, a whole constellation of things must come right in order once to succeed.” (Rainer Maria Rilke)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Sendō ōkushite fune yama ni noboru.* (=Too many boatmen will run the boat up.)
2. All chiefs and no Indians.
3. Where every man is master, the world goes to wreck.
4. Everybody's business is nobody's business.
5. Too many dressers put the bride's dress out of order.

B-8

United we stand, divided we fall.

— When we are united, we are safe; when we are divided, we run into danger. —

This saying originated in the patriotic “Liberty Song” written by John Dickinson, the American politician in 1768; “Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all. By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall.” It was used during the American War of Independence and has been used as a rallying cry throughout the English-speaking countries in trade unions, churches, and armies. When we start doing something or fighting against others in a group, we should stick together; then, we shall be successful, but if we don't, we shall fall or be attacked by our opponents. In 2005, Japan won the First World Classic Baseball Championship by defeating many strong foreign teams. The Japanese players were physically inferior to those from other countries, but they were firmly united and pledged themselves to bring victory to Japan. A weak power can defeat a strong power by uniting.

“We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.” (Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Ippon no ya wa oreyasuku juppon no ya wa orenikui.* (=A single arrow is easy to break, but a bundle of ten is not.)
2. Union is strength.
3. Unity is the strongest bulwark of cities.
4. Weak things united become strong.

— You are dependent on what you eat. —

This saying is sometimes attributed to the French gastronome, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin who wrote: “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” This means that your health, looks, way of thinking, and well-being are the result of what kinds of food you eat. But nowadays, young people in particular prefer junk food to traditional food. It is said that the physical strength and fitness of present-day children are far lower than those of children many years ago, although they are much taller and bigger on an average. Unhealthy food shortens our average life span. We should eat many kinds of food which does not contain artificial ingredients or too much sugar or fat.

“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.” (Virginia Woolf)

“Isotopically speaking, you are what you eat..... Any carnivore that eats a lot of salmon will raise the proportion of heavy nitrogen and carbon in its body.” (New Scientist)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Ishoku dōgen*. (=Medicine and food have the same origin.)
2. Spread the table and contention will cease.
3. More die of food than from famine.

— It's no use trying to get blood from a stone. —

This saying has two meanings: (1) you can get nothing from someone, if he has nothing. (2) here ‘blood’ means compassion, and ‘stone’ is a cruel person; so, you cannot get sympathy from a cold-hearted person. You should keep it in mind that, however earnestly you may ask someone to help you, if he is heartless by nature, he will not help you; so, it is no use asking him repeatedly. There may be a case when he has no option but to refuse your request, although he is really kind-hearted. It depends on your own judgment whether he is charitable or uncharitable. This sort of judgment influences your life greatly.

“Nothing will come of nothing.” (Shakespeare)

“The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilised, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority, they don’t dare to assert themselves.” (Mark Twain)

《Related Sayings》

1. *Nai sode wa furenu.* (=One cannot swing long sleeves if one does not have them.)
2. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.
3. If you squeeze a cork, you will get but little juice.
4. It is hard to get a stocking off a bare leg.
5. A man cannot give what he hasn’t got.
6. Where there is nothing, nothing can be had.

### Category C

#### C-1 A friend in need is a friend indeed.

— A friend who supports you when you are in need of help is a true friend. —

Greek playwright Euripides (484-406 B.C.) wrote: “in adversity good friends are most clearly seen.” People have pondered upon the nature of true friendship since ancient times and have concluded that the test of friendship comes in time of hardship. Here is a Japanese poem (*tanka*): *Ochiburete sode-ni-namida-no kakarutoki hito-no kokoro-no okuzoshiraruru.* (=When I am reduced to poverty, my tears of sorrow drop on my long sleeves, and I could see even the bottom of my friend’s heart.) It is true that we do not know what others truly think until the time comes when they have no option but to reveal what they think. However, there are not so many times when we are cornered into a difficult situation in our lifetime. Moreover, it is more important to have a harmonious relationship with your friend every day than to rely on his help, thinking of ‘our time of need’. Long-lasting friendships are nurtured by mutual help and assistance. An everyday friend is better than a friend in need.

《Related Sayings》

1. Friends are made in wine and proved in tears.
2. Perfect friendship cannot be without equality.
3. He is a good friend that speaks well of us behind our backs.
4. A friend to everybody is a friend to nobody.
5. Have patience with a friend rather than lose him forever.
6. Friendship is a plant which must be often watered.



C-2 A man is as old as he feels, and a woman is as old as she looks.

— If a man feels lively and strong, it does not matter how old he looks. As for a woman, if she looks old, she is to be judged accordingly. —

This saying shows that women have always been judged by their outward appearance, while men, on the other hand, have been thought to mellow physically with age, achieving a distinguished appearance. This way of thinking may be caused by the man-oriented structure of society. Men have been playing an important and leading role in society. Men are evaluated not by external appearance but by their achievements. But once they begin to have all sorts of aches and pains, they cannot keep a youthful outlook, and they suddenly get old. Moreover, these days women are playing an important part in society. They look younger and livelier than formerly. Whether you are a man or a woman, your spirit seems to age at the same rate as your body. However old you may be, you can remain young-at-heart and you can keep making progress until you die.

“Women are not so sentimental as men, and are not so easily touched with the unspoken poetry of nature; being less poetical, and having less imagination, they are more fitted for practical affairs, and would make less failure in business.” (Charles Dudley Warner)

《Related Sayings》

1. Women’s instinct is often truer than men’s reasoning.
2. Men acquire wealth and women keep it.
3. Men make houses, women make homes.
4. A woman is flax, man is fire, and the devil comes and blows the bellows.

C-3 A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

— It is not what a person or thing is called that matters, but what he or it is. —

This quotation comes from a passage in Shakespeare’s tragedy, ‘Romeo and Juliet’. Two lovers are thwarted by a bitter feud between their families. Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, a Capulet, fall in love with each other, but their marriage is forbidden by their families. Juliet laments that she was born a Capulet and Romeo that he was born a Montague; “ ’Tis but thy name which is my enemy..... / What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet; / So

Romeo would, were he not Romeo called.” It is quite true that intrinsic quality must be evaluated correctly, but as a matter of fact, the counterfeit goes unchecked in society everywhere and always. There is a popular Japanese saying: *Na wa tai o arawasu*. (=The name given you by your title or position represents yourself.) We should take care not to be cheated by excessive advertisement of things. You should not forget ‘appearances are deceptive’ and ‘a name doesn’t harm a man if a man doesn’t harm the name’.

“Our names are the light that glows on the sea waves at night and then dies without leaving its signature.” (Rabindranath Tagore)

《Related Sayings》

1. If the cap fits, wear it.
2. Names and natures do often agree.
3. A good name keeps its lustre in the dark.
4. An evil name is evil fame.
5. A good name is more precious than gold.

C-4            Every family has a skeleton in the cupboard.

— Every family has a secret which it wants to keep hidden. —

A skeleton in the cupboard here means ‘an unpleasant secret’. Generally speaking, the family is the place where both good and bad things will happen. When something unpleasant happens, every family tries to conceal it from the world. Samuel Butler, the English writer, said: “I believe that more unhappiness comes from this source (the family) than from any other — I mean from the attempt to prolong family connections unduly and to make people hang together artificially who would never naturally do so.” But in order to keep shameful secrets of the family hidden from public view, each member of the family has to cooperate with one another and try to protect their pride and honour by all means. Being faced with difficulties often makes family ties firmer.

“If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.” (George Bernard Shaw)

“The family..... the home of all social vices, where children are taught to tell their first lie; the charitable institution for all lazy women.” (August Strindberg)

《Related Sayings》

1. It is a poor family which has neither a whore nor a thief in it.

2. One does not wash one's dirty linen in public.
3. A secret is either too good to keep or too bad not to tell.
4. Those who hide can find.
5. Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.

C-5      If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

— If you cannot bear the pressure, get away from it. —

This expression is commonly attributed to US President Harry Truman, who quoted it when turning down the presidential nomination in 1952, and used it on a number of occasions in both spoken and written contexts. The saying means; (1) if you do not like something, quit doing it; (2) if you cannot do it, don't do it; and (3) if you cannot tolerate the pressure, leave it to those who can handle it without complaining. Several years ago, a newspaper wrote that some aged people thought that air-conditioning was bad for their health; and so, they stopped using the air-conditioner in the middle of the night in spite of the intolerable heat. Eventually they died from dehydration. In life, there are many occasions when we should remove ourselves from pressures and hardships. The thing to do then is to escape from them at the right time.

"The man does better who runs from disaster than he who is caught by it." (Homer, 962-927?)

"Flight is lawful when one flies from tyrants." (Racine)

"It is always fair sailing, when you escape evil." (Sophocles, 495?-409 B.C.)

《Related Sayings》

1. If your seat is hard to sit on, stand up.
2. It is not work that kills, but worry.
3. If you can't ride two horses at once, you shouldn't be in a circus.

C-6      If you want something done, ask a busy person.

— If you want somebody to help you with your work, ask a busy person. —

It is natural that you cannot finish your work properly if you are too busy; and so, this saying is an apparent paradox. People who do a lot have the most energy. Even if they have many jobs, they by necessity keep them in good order, and get them done more efficiently than idle people who have more free time. Our life is short. The

time to spend in life is quite limited; so, whether our life is successful or not is sure to be decided by how we make the best of the time given to us. Twenty-four hours in a day is equally given to us all, but the value of the time is quite different, depending on the individual. When jobs need to be done, you should do them straight away, and find the time for what you want to do. A busy person seems to enjoy his / her life better than an idle person.

“If all the year were playing holidays, / To sport would be as tedious as to work; / But when they seldom come, they are wished for.” (Shakespeare)

“There is time enough for everything in the course of a day if you do but one thing at a time; but there is not time enough in a year if you do two things at a time.” (Lord Chesterfield)

《Related Saying》

1. The busiest men find the most leisure.

## C-7            Never let the sun go down on your anger.

— Deal with your anger before the sun sets. —

This saying is derived from the Bible: “Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” (Ephesians) Even if you are angry with someone, it is not a sin, but you should decide to solve the problem promptly, without letting it drag on into the next day. In Christian tradition, anger is one of the ‘seven deadly sins’ namely, pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. We know that anger starts with an act of folly and makes us all stupid. It ends in repentance and makes us all unhappy; but we repeat these follies again and again.

“Anger is momentary madness, so control your passion or it will control you.” (Horace, 65-8 B.C.)

“I was angry with my friend: / I told my wrath, my wrath did end. / I was angry with my foe: / I told it not, my wrath did grow.” (William Blake)

“A background of wrath, which can be stirred up to the murderous infernal pitch, does lie in every man.” (Thomas Carlyle)

《Related Sayings》

1. If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.
2. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
3. To carry care into your bed is to sleep with a pack on your back.

— One swallow does not necessarily mean summer is now properly under way. —

The swallow is a migratory bird, and in ancient Greece, it was considered a herald of spring; so, schoolchildren in Attica were given a day's holiday when the first swallow was seen. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), the Greek philosopher wrote: "One swallow does not make spring, nor does one fine day make spring." This saying tells us that we should not draw conclusions prematurely and think that something is going to happen, only because we have seen one piece of good evidence. Related sayings are: "one fair day does not make birds merry" and "one fair day assureth not a good summer". This well-known saying is still applied figuratively in a wide range of contexts, such as: 'one good character does not make a good wife' or 'one good economic indicator does not mean an end to a prolonged recession,' etc. It is a general belief that our life is decided by whether or not we can deal with various problems carefully from many different viewpoints.

"By a small sample we may judge of the whole piece." (Cervantes)

"Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk." (Thoreau)

"Nay, soft (said the widow) one swallow makes not a summer, nor one meeting a marriage." (Thomas Deloney)

《Related Sayings》

1. One particularity concludes no generality.
2. One robin doesn't make a spring.
3. A falling leaf tells us that autumn has come. (*Ichi-yo ochite tenka no aki o shiru.*)

— It is quite natural that we should protect ourselves first. —

Although we cannot say clearly that you may be proud of yourself without being considerate of others, it is quite natural that you should think it a top priority to think of yourself. Every living thing must fight to survive. We have the instinct to safeguard our own life and interests. We have often heard a young couple saying; "We are going to be married next month. Which one, you or I, is more important in our future married life for you?" It is a silly question, but can you answer it in this way? "Of course, I am. If I am not happy, I cannot make you happy. If our boat sinks, we

both sink.” You must not use this saying as an excuse for your own selfish conduct.

“We prefer ourselves to others, only because we have a more intimate consciousness and confirmed opinion of our own claims and merits than those of any other person.”

(William Hazlitt)

“Self-love is the instrument of our preservation; it is the provision for the perpetuity of mankind; it is necessary; it is dear to us, it gives us pleasure, but we must conceal it.” (Voltaire)

《Related Sayings》

1. Every man for himself and God for us all.
2. Near is my shirt, but nearer is my skin.
3. Self-interest is the rule, self-sacrifice the exception.

#### C-10 The best Doctors are Dr Diet, Dr Quiet, and Dr Merryman.

— Sensible eating, and a cheerful spirit are the surest remedies for ill health. —

In order to preserve and improve your health, not one but three doctors are needed as the title of this chapter shows: (1) even if you eat good food, gluttony will definitely damage your health; (2) you should behave in a calm way, and avoid getting angry and upset too easily. You must also get some rest when you are worn out; (3) you should always be merry, and be hopeful for the future, without being worried about trifles. In Japan, cancer, apoplexy, heart disease, etc. have been called the diseases of adult people (*seijinbyō*) till quite recently. But these days not only the aged but the young are suffering from these diseases. At present, we call them diseases caused by ‘habits of daily life’ (*seikatsu shūkan-byō*) instead of *seijin-byō*. People have come to know that these diseases are caused mainly by their way of life, by their living environment, and by everyday habits.

“Digestion exists for health, health exists for life, and life exists for the love of music or beautiful things.” (G.K.Chesterton)

“Life is not just living, but living in health.” (Martial)

《Related Sayings》

1. Temperance is the best physic.
2. A good surgeon must have an eagle’s eye, a lion’s heart, and a lady’s hand.
3. A merry heart lives long.

### III Conclusion

The 30 English proverbs in this paper have been selected according to the writer's personal preference in view of their usefulness, the same as in his previous papers. Consideration of these proverbs has led the writer to reach the following conclusions:

- (1) There is a great deal of similarity between English and Japanese proverbs which deal with universal truth and basic human feelings.
- (2) Some popular English proverbs were quoted from old writings in Greek or Latin.
- (3) As the writer mentioned in his previous papers, there are some social, racial, cultural, and geographical background differences between the East and the West.
- (4) Most English proverbs are generally in complete sentence form with subjects and verbs. Most Japanese proverbs take an abbreviated form.
- (5) English proverbs are logical, powerful, and straightforward. Japanese proverbs are metaphorical and the expression is exquisitely varied.
- (6) English proverbs show traces of the influence of Christianity, Shakespeare, other famous writers, great people and so on, to say nothing of common people. English proverbs are greatly influenced by early and modern western culture and civilisation. Japanese proverbs are greatly influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Oriental culture and civilisation.
- (7) The 30 in this paper are well known. It is confirmed again that the more research is carried out in the two different cultures through English and Japanese proverbs, the shorter the cultural distance between the two countries grows.

(本学教授=英語担当)

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