

Keiichi Nakano – The Gentleman

I believe you all know the word “*Otokomae*”. But just what is *otokomae*? Or who?

I will explain the precise meaning for those who haven't heard of it. “*otokomae*” primarily refers to a man who is masculine yet dignified, and follows through on his word with action. The origin of the word in Japanese comes from *kabuki*, one of Japan's classical arts, where the splendour and strength of the leading male role was valued as “*otokomae*”, or “a gentleman”.

Therefore, whether or not someone is *otokomae* is something that should be judged primarily based on his work and his actions, but recently it appears that the word is often used, incorrectly, in way that denotes only physical appearance.

That is something that happened when I went with my family to a relative's wedding. I have a good-looking, apparently “cool”, younger brother. When my brother took his seat at the wedding venue, the comment from the people around him was “ahhh, *otokomae!*”. His action was only to sit down, and there was nothing particularly masculine about the way he did so, but the people around him used the word to value his physical appearance.

Apparently, in Japan it is becoming the norm to use the word in this way.

In Japan, there is a certain talent agency to which only young, handsome men belong. When the young talents of this agency appear on TV talk shows, the host will sometimes lightly remark “*otokomae*”. The power of TV is considerable, and its viewers (especially the men) have become conscious of these young, handsome stars, and are beginning to care only about their physical appearance rather than their actions and behaviour. Young men in Japan these days are obsessed with their clothes and hairstyle, and even eyebrow-plucking has become the norm.

In older Japan, there were many people who displayed the appropriate behaviour of a gentleman. Ryouma Sakamoto was one of those people. Ryouma Sakamoto fought fearlessly for the future of his country. He was quoted as saying things like “rather than be discouraged, I am the type of person that is always thinking of the next step”, and is still valued to this day as an outstanding *otokomae* of irreproachable action.

However, somewhere along the line, good-looking young talent stars started being called gentlemen, and I believe Japan is entering a time where there are no men who can call themselves *otokomae* with the word's true meaning.

Australia has a relatively short history compared to Japan, so there has not yet been a person like Ryouma Sakamoto to push the country forward. Despite that, there are many gentlemen even at present, taking influential action.

This is something I realised on a recent trip to Ballarat. I didn't know where to go and when I asked a bus driver, he said he would take me there, and indicated for me to get on. When I got off I thanked him, and he said to me "It's my job. More importantly, go and enjoy yourself". The smiling face of the driver that I saw before he pulled away was more attractive and had more spark than any young talent agency pretty-boy. The thoughtfulness that I came across during that trip made me realise that those are the kind of actions that make someone a gentleman.

(And another thing, this is not something you see much in Japan, but in Melbourne when a woman tries to get on a tram with a pram, male passengers help her lift it onto the pram without a second thought. Trying to lift a pram onto a tram whilst holding a small baby is extremely difficult by yourself, so this is another example of actions taken by outstanding gentlemen.)

I think that in Japan, if people were to strive and be forward in stepping in to help others, not forgetting to look inside and think about human action rather than judging them by their face or their style, then young Japanese boys might learn to think of others and society as a whole rather than their own eyebrows.