

The Noteworthiness of Negotiated Understandings on Japanese Flash Fiction Entitled *Two Frogs*

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Abstract

This article exposes crucial points of negotiated understandings between two characters in Japanese flash fiction entitled *Two Frogs*. The story tells about the different dreams between two frogs that have plans to reach their destination to see another town. This folktale wants to tell the readers about the similarities between Kyoto and Osaka. Through qualitative method, this research underlines that, in fact, Kyoto is more traditional than Osaka, but later the characters reach such understandings than flourishing the conflicts. Any difference should be negotiated so that it never comes into bigger conflict. Negotiated understanding then could not be separated from such reciprocal cultural appreciations as well. In conclusion, the description, interpretation, and narration of the story explores indications of moral messages of negotiated understandings. It is simply taken as a token of peace that should always be gained rather than unworthy loss due to upcoming frictions between assumptions and interpretations of the characters.

Keywords: *Japanese Flash Fiction; Kyoto; Negotiated Understanding; Osaka; Two Frogs*

1. Introduction

Flash fiction is a very short story that is famous for its brevity. This story is even readable in one sitting. In the element of flash fiction, the number of words in the short story are less than a thousand words where there is usually only one main theme, some main character, and one main plot (Galef, 2016; Kechula, 2011). However, its short amount of words actually will never fade any deep meanings out of it. The imagination of it does not locate in the idea of the story, but it triggers the audience to assume and figure any aspect by themselves. By doing so, flash fiction through its brevity digs deeper into freedom of writings that result in widened imagination in advance as well (Galef, 2016; Kechula, 2011).

Two Frogs is a classical Japanese folktale from the 10th century (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). The story serves as a reminder about the importance of taking caution and thinking before making a decision. This is very true when it comes to changing life decisions and dealing with unfamiliar situations. From the story, there are two characters with two different objectives. Their names are Kyoto Frog and Osaka Frog. In short, they have a dream to look

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out for another city behind the mountain. Kyoto Frog has a plan to see Osaka City. And on the other side, the Osaka Frog wants to see Kyoto City. So they have a plan to climb the mountain to see what is on the other side of the mountain (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). When they are already on top, they look at each other and seem confused. They see that there are no differences between Kyoto and Osaka. So, at the end of the story, they decided to go back to their own place and live peacefully.

This flash fiction simply teaches the readers that even though something looks better from far away, it does not mean that it is better than what they already have, and that warnings should be taken carefully (Harris, et al., 2018; Menkel-Meadow & Kupfer, 2021). Things should be handled in a negotiated way, as it could widen the perspective of one to another. It could also give more senses about otherness in order to stay away from any egotistical understanding.

2. Method

By using a qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between *Two Frogs* and the negotiated understanding of the story. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes obtaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. The plots and settings of the short story are mainly involved to point to the significant condition of the *Two Frogs*.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 *Two Frogs* and Its Prolonging Different Realities

Two Frogs is a Japanese folktale from the 10th century that explains the story between Kyoto and Osaka Frogs. The characters come from different backgrounds (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). Indeed, it gives sense not only to any assumption of the dialogue, but also how it underlines the matter of cultural appropriation of two different understandings.

「これほど遠く離れていたの、彼らはお互いのことを聞いたことさえありませんでした。しかし面白いことに、世界を少し見たいという考えが二人の頭に同時に浮かんだのです…」

“At such a great distance apart, they had never even heard of each other; but, funnily enough, the idea came into both their heads at once that they should like to see a little of the world ...” (Lang, 1901)

The above quotation shows the beginning of the story. It starts when Kyoto and Osaka Frogs want to visit another city that is different from their own (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). It indicates the idea of Kyoto and Osaka Frogs that they have a desire to see the other side of their world. It means the other side of Kyoto and Osaka. This sentence shows the understanding of curiosity. It is an internal thinking which is the way to active learning and spontaneous exploration ideas (Oudayer, et al., 2016).

Moreover, the quotation also indicates how they would like to show another part of the world rather than their usual perspective. At this point, curiosity is such a spontaneous desire that pushes the two characters to go beyond what they know (Harris, et al., 2018; Menkel-

Meadow & Kupfer, 2021). This is also a matter of going forward. They do not know each other, but later they are united by their mutual desires. Then, at the latest, they understand that curiosity is not something that needs to be fulfilled, but it is such an urge to understand each other better than before.

「カエルたちは、しばらく何も言わずにお互いを見つめました。それから興奮して自分たちの冒険について話し始めました。二人とも日本をもっと見てみたいという同じ願いを持っていたことがわかってうれしかったです。どちらのカエルも急いでいなかったのので、旅を続ける前に涼しく湿った場所で体を伸ばし、よく休むことにしました。」

“The frogs looked at each other for a moment without speaking, and then started talking excitedly, talking about their adventures. It was delightful to find that they both had the same wish — to see more of Japan! Since neither frog was in a hurry, they decided to stretch themselves out in a cool, damp place, and have a good rest before they continued with their journeys.”
(Lang, 1901)

The quotation above underlines dialogues that happen between the two frogs. They understand their purposes are not quite different from one to another. even their dialogues seem more interesting than their journey themselves (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). They share their adventures together as if they found a new friend to go ahead with. Moreover, they find each other as a company who will cooperate with each other. In the end of the dialogue, they understand each other more since they have the same desire, that is to see more of Japan (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). That desire also pushes them to go forward hand in hand to realize what they want to reach in advance.

Indeed, the scene above emphasizes such determination and cooperation that they want to realize. They know that their destinations are different from each other. However, they found such a silver line between their forward adventure (Harris, et al., 2018; Menkel-Meadow & Kupfer, 2021). It is that they have desires to see wider aspects of Japan. Later on, they do not really see Japan in its wider area, but they see such hospitality of the people as seen in how they cooperate together. It is also amusing to see how determination later is not totally individual, but related to cooperation among people with the same purpose (Harris, et al., 2018; Menkel-Meadow & Kupfer, 2021). This is the essence of determination that could widely see the freedom of other people as well.

「そこに二人は立って、できるだけ高く体を伸ばし、倒れないようにお互いをしっかりと抱きしめていました…」

“There they both stood, stretching themselves as high as they could, and holding each other tightly, so that they might not fall down...” (Lang, 1901)

The above quotation shows the conflict of the story. This scene is showing the reader about how they see the difference between Kyoto and Osaka (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). As a frog, they can not stand perfectly like a human. They are trying to hold each other so they can stand up and not fall down while looking for their spot. This scene tells the audience about how

the people have to be in teamwork, so there is no any differences between them. What the reader sees, hears, and touches appears to give the reader certain knowledge of reality (Priddy, 1999; Prassa & Stalikas, 2020). It is always better to cooperate than to compete with each other.

The scene above also underlines how each other may have different purposes to reach, but they know their limitations as well. They know that they could not stand to see what is beyond the mountain. Holding hands together is a way to tell the readers that things are not always within any expectation. Somehow, any help from other people could make someone go forward or even merely stand higher (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Callaghan, 2008). The frogs have different assumptions about each other's cities, but they have one main thing to catch. This is such a result of negotiated understanding in which they have to reside any ego for them to go beyond what they could have in advance.

「…京の蛙は大阪に鼻を向け、大阪の蛙は京都に鼻を向けた。しかし愚かな者たちは、立ち上がると大きな目が頭の後ろにあり、鼻は行きたい場所を指しているかもしれないが、目は自分たちが来た場所を見ていることを忘れていた。」

“... The Kyoto frog turned his nose towards Osaka, and the Osaka frog turned his nose towards Kyoto; but the foolish things forgot that when they stood up their great eyes lay in the backs of their heads, and that though their noses might point to the places to which they wanted to go, their eyes beheld the places from which they had come”. (Lang, 1901)

The conflict began when Kyoto and Osaka Frogs did not recognize that their eyes were looking behind because their eyes were on the top of their heads (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). Even though their nose is toward the front, their eyes are still on the back. It indicates the idea of Kyoto and Osaka Frogs that all this time they have seen the other side of their world in the wrong way (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). It means that the other side of Kyoto and Osaka are seen by Kyoto and Osaka Frogs in a different way. This sentence underlines such misunderstandings between them. They think that they have done a good way to reach their dreams, but their perspectives are already incorrect from the beginning.

Indeed, what the frogs quarrel is actually their incorrect assumptions of perspectives. They think that their destinations will be so much different from their hometowns. However, what really happens is that they could easily see the two cities if they work together. They forget to negotiate with each other (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Callaghan, 2008). They also do not know that they were wrong all the time. It is in line with Buddhist perspective that indicates no one is wrong, but she/she has not known the truth. When someone knows the truth, she/he will realize the mistake and try to explore the truth through otherness as any good living matter.

「そして二人はお互いに丁寧な別れを告げ、再び故郷へ向かいました。そして二人は人生の終わりまで、二つの町ほど違う大阪と京都は同じように似ていると信じていました」豆。

“Then they took a polite farewell of each other, and set off for home again, and to the end of their lives they believed that Osaka and Kyoto, which are as different to look at as two towns can be, were as alike as two peas.” (Lang, 1901).

The above quotation shows the end of the story. The conflict ends when Kyoto and Osaka Frogs recognize that Kyoto and Osaka are not different places (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). Those are the same, but in a different culture, it means that Kyoto has more traditional culture than Osaka but Osaka is more modern as the economical epicentrum of Japan. It indicates the idea of Kyoto and Osaka Frogs that they finally understand the other side of their perception of their own cities and the other city (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). It means that the other side of Kyoto and Osaka have their own surplus and minus as well. This sentence underscores the understanding of relief. It means that Kyoto and Osaka Frogs finally agree on what they see and decide to go back to their house with no compulsion.

The scene above also indicates such regrets that both of them face when they finally see the other side of their own city. Each of them has seen another part of the world, but they are not satisfied at all. It explores that desire is not merely about satisfaction, but it should be seen as a push to forwarding cultural understandings (Pizer, 2021; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). In this sense, this is a matter of negotiated understanding. This is what the essence of the story would like to tell about. It is not about resolving conflicts through other's struggle, but through each own understanding according to various cultural matters (Menkel-Meadow & Kupfer, 2021; Sarmi, et al., 2023).

3.2 Negotiated Understandings and Its Cultural Senses

Negotiated Understanding is the way of analysis that explains the first understanding to another by the data of observation that have been negotiated. Negotiation makes an understanding can be understood clearly (Brett, 2017; Asyraf, et al., 2021). Some problems cannot be solved only with one understanding. There are also many observations or surveys that explain an object of analysis that wants to be chosen. Negotiating one data to another makes analysis powerful and easy to understand (Stein & Albro, 2001; Holliday, 2019). By doing so, the indications of plural aspects of data could also be obtained furthermore.

It is usual that people have some understanding of the need for the spirit of unity in human affairs (Priddy, 1999; Jackson, 2002). The intelligence of understanding enables the people to meet the great challenges raised by the first global culture in history, especially in the population of the natural environment and the inequalities of the people by different races, beliefs (religion), and countries. Not only that, the intelligence of understanding also explains the culture, as the one of the history and also about how the people live in a country ((Stein & Albro, 2001; Holliday, 2019). Through that sense, matters of understanding actually have been known since the first time human beings came to this world.

However, in fact, many people do not hold some beliefs that are not supported by known facts, or that will later prove untenable (Priddy, 1999; Gelfand & Brett, 2004). For example, when there is a novel explaining about the story that in the end the writer says, "based on the true story", if there is no fact or even proof to make the readers believe, that story is not strong enough to be believed by the readers. Not only about the imagination, the wide knowledge is also important to make the people believe that the story is more interesting (Jackson, 2002; Gelfand & Brett, 2004).

The science of understanding is certainly very widespread in human affairs and scientific data makes the flash fiction story explain its forms to the reader (Kiosses, 2021; Yemets, 2019). The flash fiction story is also not based on a true story but can also explain about the imagination of the writer itself. Flash fiction is also in line with such negotiated understanding. The way the writers write does not depend on how many words they should write, but they care more for the idea of meanings and concepts (Kiosses, 2021; Yemets, 2019).

Therefore, the brevity of flash fiction then results in ideas of negotiated words into further meanings of literature.

Understanding the defining features of a culture is useful simply because those features describe what is normative in a culture (Brett, 2017). The strategies show that the cultural negotiator affects their interests, priorities and the strategies that they bring to the negotiation table refer to the reason why the negotiator takes their position. Priorities of their position refer to the relative importance to each negotiator of the different issues to be negotiated (Stein & Albro, 2001; Holliday, 2019). Negotiation strategy is a set of goals that people use when trying to reach agreement in negotiations. It is also in line with cultural matters of negotiation that tend to consider any background of the negotiated things and the negotiators as well.

Negotiating in a general meaning that a clear understanding of how 'the negotiators' cultures influence their interests, priorities, and the strategies that they bring to the intercultural negotiation table (Brett, 2017). Many people indeed are interested in the culture. To understand culture, they need to have strategies on how the culture can be understood by the people. One of the strategies is negotiating one data to another data that is not far from the culture itself (Stein & Albro, 2001; Holliday, 2019). Culture differences in the negotiation strategy make the culture negotiation more challenging. This means that people in different nations have different cultures that resolve the problems of social interaction, for example the negotiation.

Culture refers to the unique character of a group (Brett, 2017). Every character in the story has their own background of place and time. Each place and time has their own culture that explains how the character acts, reacts, and also interacts with each other. Studying culture and negotiation explains the strategy that is usually used in characteristics of the people from the different nation, political, and society that provide the sociality. Understanding the definition features of a culture is useful to describe what is normative culture. By no means everyone in a culture follows the same norms or holds the same values or negotiates exactly the same way (Brett, 2017; Lempereur, 2023). Indeed, culture is plural and could not be mixed by any means. However, understanding cultural matters is important to know exactly what something means rather than depending merely on one's own interpretations.

That is no knowledge can be arrived at other than on the basis of assumptions in understanding of theory. Theory never becomes fact but theory explains the fact (Stein & Albro, 2001; Holliday, 2019). With theory, some idea of the topic of the article can be understood by the readers, which themselves usually showing some meaning as to the part of the story. Reflective actions could always involve some form of social action following its own explanations, including preconceptions of the people. The preconceptions are the cultural backgrounds itself (Lewicki, 2020; Gates, 2023). People never have dialogues without any former understanding since any idea is actually culturally constructed. Through negotiated understandings, otherness of cultural matters could always be explored especially through mutual dialogues in discussing problems being faced.

Culture in structures of values, norms and beliefs characteristic of the people from that nation and the political, economic, legal systems, provide structure of social interaction and functional solutions to problems of social interaction (Brett, 2017; Wertheim, 2020). Some people use the same negotiation strategies in every culture, but the emphasis varies. It means that cultural study can be understood in many ways, but can be used in one way, one strategy. Negotiation is the key to the observation of culture (Lewicki, 2020; Gates, 2023). It will never omit the richness of such values. In reverse, by appreciating every culture in its fullest, further understandings could be gained too. This is in line with understanding that appreciating every

culture to its absolute points will result in full understanding of various indications of them as well in advance.

3.3 The Continuation of Negotiated Understandings in *Two Frogs*

Frog has been represented in a variety of cultures as a unique symbol, playing important roles in folktales, fairy tales, drawing, myth, and painting (Mingei Arts, 2024; Nakagamas, 2023). It is related to various symbols of animals being used in various cultures. *Kaeru* as the Japanese language of frog is a symbol of fertility and good fortune (Mingei Arts, 2024; Nakagamas, 2023). It also has a meaning "to return" in Japanese, so it means frogs can be linked with things or people return to their original place. In the *Two Frogs* story, two characters of frogs are discontent with their hometowns of Osaka and Kyoto. They meet each other on the top of a mountain, and decide to help each other to get their destinations. Being silly little frogs, they mistakenly stand up so they can only see where they came from (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). The Osaka frog faced Kyoto, but he could only see Osaka. The Kyoto frog did the same. The silly frogs mistakenly believed the towns were exactly the same. Each frog sets off thinking their destination will be better than their hometowns. This mistaken idea leads the frogs to be disappointed when they see their destinations' on the mountain (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). In short, this story tells the audience about how expectations and people's easily mistaken senses can lead them to understand the messages involved incorrectly.

Kyoto and Osaka Frogs are identical with the real situation of Kyoto and Osaka City. Kyoto and Osaka have their own culture. Kyoto is a large city in Japan, reaching 320 square miles inland of the island (Aaron, 2023; van Hout, 2023). Much of this area includes outlying districts in the Kyoto province, and the city center is more compact. As Japan's past capital city, Kyoto is a city with cultural attractions and historical destinations. There are many thousands of Buddhist temples and shrines, with the most famous being the Kinkakuji Temple, Ryoanji Temple, Kifune Shrine, Fushimi Inari Shrine, and Kiyomizudera Temples (Aaron, 2023; van Hout, 2023). With a rich traditional culture and history following both the Buddhist and Shinto religions, Kyoto is a great place to educate the people on Japanese culture. With all of its historical arts, Kyoto is a modern city where ancient traditions make it an interesting destination for visitors to see the richness of Japan's cultural past.

Meanwhile, Osaka is the third largest city in Japan (Aaron, 2023; van Hout, 2023). It is located on Japan's main island of Honshu at the mouth of the Yodo River on Osaka Bay, and the city alone extends for over 86 square miles. Osaka is a big city with an excellent public transport network. Transport is relatively expensive, but efficiently connects all parts of the city. Osaka is often referred to as the nation's kitchen due to its diverse food culture (Aaron, 2023; van Hout, 2023). The term *kuidaore* means to ruin oneself by extravagance in food, reflecting the Osakan tradition of enjoying good food until the money runs out. Known as the city that has delicious street food, Osaka is often referred to as the "Kitchen of Japan" due to its culinary scene.

The perspectives of two different cities above underline that the cities are totally different from one to another. However, the differences somehow could not be fully appreciated fully by people (van der Toorn, et al., 2014; Wartheim, 2020). Consequently, many people desire to go from one hometown to another. They do not think that the hometown indeed has its uniqueness compared to the other one. Therefore, negotiated understandings should be improved more not only to regard other matters but also own matters as well (Lewicki, 2020; Gates, 2023). This is intended to show that one's own values are incomparable to another. One

may have more absolute goodness than another. That is why at the end of the story, the two frogs return to their hometown with a thankful feeling that they have found peace by seeing that their own city is as good as the other one.

The *Two Frogs* story has many valuable lessons about perseverance, determination, and teamwork. Perseverance is the ability to pursue a goal or passion even though there is an obstacle or setbacks (Lang, 1901; Schafnerr, 2020). Perseverance implies a commitment of the people to seeing a task or objective even when the path is tough or progress is slow. The people who possess perseverance in their life are more likely to overcome obstacles, learn from failures, and continue working toward their goals. Perseverance staying focused on the end goal, maintaining a positive attitude, and adapting strategies as needed to overcome challenges along the way (van der Toorn, et al., 2014; Wartheim, 2020). Determination is the ability to stay focused and committed to achieving the goal even in the face of obstacles and challenges. Determination also is a key component of success, as it allows individuals to overcome setbacks and persevere through difficult times. Determination can be cultivated through practice and discipline. By setting clear goals, developing a plan of action, and staying motivated, the people can strengthen their determination and increase their chances of success (van der Toorn, et al., 2014; Lempereur, 2023). In short, perseverance is more about sustained effort and resilience in the face of challenges, while determination is about taking the decision and focusing on a particular goal. Perseverance involves the ability to keep going despite difficulties, while determination is the initial and ongoing resolve to achieve a goal.

Perseverance and determination are included in the story covered with the fulfillment of reciprocal teamwork. Like it is said in the second line of the second paragraph, it says “*The journey was more tiring than they expected, for they did not know much about traveling, and halfway between the two towns there arose a mountain which had to be climbed. It took them a long time and a great many hops to reach the top, but there they were at last, and what was the surprise of each to see another frog ...*” (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). Osaka and Kyoto city have the same destination to go to the top of the mountain. The trip is tiring, but they still have the spirit to keep it up, in other words, to reach their goals. They never give up and keep climbing so hard so they can reach the top and meet each other.

Not only that, Perseverance and determination also can be seen in the first line of the sixth paragraph. It says “*he at once jumped up and put his front paws on the shoulder of his friend, who had risen also. There they both stood, stretching themselves as high as they could, and holding each other tightly, so that they might not fall down*” (Lang, 1901; Devi, 2011). This line also explains how teamwork is built. When people have the same goal and they can make it on their own, they will work together to reach their goal together.

Through the senses above, it could be understood that teamwork is actually one main idea that should be dug furthermore. This is also one essence of negotiated understanding, especially when one's own interest is yielded to find better purpose ahead (Prassa & Stalikas, 2020; Mind Tools Content Team, 2023). Teamwork is about cultural understandings in which it could widen such narrowed perspectives before. Any kind of perseverance will not go forward if it ignores the presence of other people. Such strength of being perseverant will merely reach the status quo if further appreciation towards otherness is not realized. Even any determination could not flourish if it merely states the idea of being egotistical. It needs the help of other people (Wartheim, 2020; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). It is reflected in this story that actually the frogs remind one another about the similarities of the two cities and uniqueness of one's own city compared to another. Being determined will find its clear path if only someone

regards other people alongside its unique conditions and backgrounds as well (van der Toorn, et al., 2014; Listyaningsih, et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

The *Two Frogs* explores the idea that how perceiving a situation can significantly impact abilities to overcome it. With negotiated understanding, the story reflects cultural values such as perseverance, determination, and teamwork in the framework of cultural understandings. Kyoto and Osaka city are the same as Traditional City and Modern City. However, even though Kyoto and Osaka are different in culture, they have absolute and irreducible uniqueness of each own. The flash fiction underlines values that people should always care for other persons by yielding their own interests to find better purposes. By doing so, the eyes could be widely opened and further peace could be gained through cooperation rather than digging more into conflictual competitions.

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