



## Case Report

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# The Malicious Use of Self-Modesty in Folk Communication between Japan and the United States

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Received Date: December 15, 2022

Published Date: February 17, 2023

## Abstract

Honorific form is one of the characteristics of Japanese. It can not only show the identity differences between the two sides of communication but also reflect the moral identity inequality between the two sides caused by crimes and other acts in real life. The author found that the Japanese media deliberately used self-modesty in the honorific form when reporting that the American World War II veterans returned the relics of Japanese veterans. This choice of language implies that the United States is the aggressor and Japan is the victim. This is one of the means commonly used by the Japanese to distort history and confuse right and wrong. Its influence is subtle and harmful, which should arouse our vigilance.

**Keywords:** Japanese media; Apologize; Self modesty; The maliciously use

## Introduction

Japanese society is a hierarchical society. All aspects of social life are permeated with differences in social status. This ideology is reflected in the language that the honorific system is very developed. Respectful expression is divided into honorifics and self-modesty. Honorifics are to respect him, and self-modesty language is to suppress oneself. By raising others and belittling ourselves, we can open the differences between the two sides of communication and highlight the inequality between the two. The research shows that whether Japanese use respectful expression in communication activities needs to consider not only the identity differences of both sides but also many factors such as power relations, interest relations, internal and external intimacy, and estrangement relations. However, the news taken by Japanese media shows that the use of the respectful expression is not limited to this natural

identity difference but also the de facto inequality in social life, such as the relationship between creditors and debtors in commercial activities, the relationship between perpetrators and victims in criminal and civil cases, the relationship between aggressors and aggressors in war, etc.

## Apology function of self-modesty

Regardless of the social status of both sides, if one party's behavior brings loss or injury to the other party, it will lead to moral inequality between the two sides. The victim is in a high moral position, while the perpetrator is in a low moral place. The difference of this position is consistent with the primary connotation of respectful expression. Therefore, the perpetrator needs to lower his posture and use self-modesty to apologize to obtain the understanding of the other party.

In September this year, Ying Shou Tanaka, former president of the University of Japan, was arrested by the special search department of the Tokyo District Prosecutor's office for concealing 120 million yen of income and evading taxes of up to 53 million. Afterward, Naoto Kato, President of a Japanese university, held a

press conference to apologize to all students, parents, and relevant personnel. When apologizing, they not only bow but also use self-modesty to show that they belong to the wrong party and are in a low moral position, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Naoto Kato, President of Japanese University, bows his head and apologizes (the above figure is taken from: <https://news.tbs.co.jp>)

In Japan, there are numerous examples of using self-modesty to apologize. In case of a major accident, the victim can even ask the other party to kneel down and apologize. After the Fukushima earthquake in 2011, the president of Tokyo Electric power company went to the shelter to visit the refugees. The Fukushima nuclear

power plant incident was not only a natural disaster but also a manufactured disaster. Therefore, the refugee was very angry and asked him to kneel down and apologize. He also used self-modesty in his apology. As shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** President of Tokyo Electric Power Company apologizes (the above figure is taken from: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn>)

Japanese scholar Keiko Ikeda said: "the Japanese world outlook is centered on the real world and has no deep sense of original sin. They believe that all evil and inner filth can be eliminated through rituals such as repentance and prayer." Bowing, kneeling and self-modesty are the standard forms of apology and confession. However, the author believes that the meaning of an apology based on criminal events is not only confession but also the identification and commitment to moral responsibility.

It is worth mentioning that on August 15, 1995, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender in the Second World War, former Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama issued a famous "Murayama talk" to apologize to China, South Korea, and

other Asian countries invaded by Japan, in which "heart, surprise, persistence" shows that "heart, mind, heart and soul" is a typical self-modesty.

### The malicious use of self-modesty in folk communication between Japan and the United States

More than 70 years after World War II, the smoke of the war has long dissipated, and folk exchanges have also shown a diversified trend. There is not only the phenomenon of American veterans returning Japanese relics but also the incident of Japanese survivors looking for debris in Hawaii.

In February 1945, the US army launched the battle of Iwo Jima, and Frank Hobbes participated in the battle as a signal soldier. He accidentally found an envelope in the pocket of a dead Japanese army. It contained photos, letters, and other items. With the permission of his boss, he took the envelope back to the United States and put it in a photo frame, which has been preserved to

this day. In 2009, he contacted the Japanese survivors through the Japanese Consulate and returned the envelopes and photos to the survivors. When the Japanese media reported on this incident, they translated Frank's words into self-modesty "return to China." As shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Translated Frank's words into self-modesty (the above figure is taken from: <https://news.tbs.co.jp>)

In December 1942, the Japanese army secretly attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Ms. Nakano's fiancé, Shimizu Haosheng, took part in the sneak attack as a Japanese pilot. During the war, Shimizu's plane was shot down. In 2010, Ms. Nakano came to Hawaii to find the remains or relics of Shimizu. Local history researchers in Hawaii

found the place where the Shimizu plane crashed and promised to return the remains to Japan if they were found. When translating, the Japanese media also used the self-modesty "return, return, return, return". As shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Japanese media also use self-modesty in translation (the above figure is taken from: <https://news.tbs.co.jp>)

As mentioned above, apology is one of the important functions of self-modesty. When dealing with the issue of World War II, the Japanese media frequently maliciously use self-modesty to translate the American dialect theory, which is easy to make the Japanese people have an illusion: the United States is apologizing to Japan and further believes that the root of World War II lies in the United States, the United States is the perpetrator and Japan is the victim. This language choice of the Japanese media is ill intentioned

and has a terrible impact.

### Terrible Consequences

In 2010, when Ms. Nakano visited Hawaii, she had an exchange with an American veteran. When she learned that the veteran had fired a gun to fight back, she said, “you may be a prisoner.” By prisoner, of course, she meant shooting down her fiancé. As shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** Ms. Nakano Visits Hawaii (the above figure is taken from: <https://news.tbs.co.jp>)

In 2010, Ms. Nakano was 86 years old and had 86 years of life experience. It was incredible that her historical cognition was so naive and ignorant. We can't help asking: what about the historical cognition of the whole Japanese people?

After World War II, many Japanese politicians verbally said they wanted to reflect, but in fact, they have been doing activities that distort history. According to phoenix.com, as many as 13 cabinets, prime ministers, and ministers visited the Yasukuni Shrine. At the same time, Japanese people have also made frequent moves to disguise themselves as victims by tampering with textbooks, selective reports, and abusive use of self-modesty, which makes the vast majority of Japanese people not know what their government did in the war.

Previously, with regard to the distortions and even negations of history by some Japanese politicians and some non-governmental

forces, our focus mainly focused on the focus issues, such as visiting the Yasukuni Shrine and tampering with textbooks, while ignoring other ways. The Japanese media's deliberate and selective use of self-modesty and distortion of history through obscure means should arouse our vigilance.

### Acknowledgement

None.

### Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of interest.

### References

1. <https://news.tbs.co.jp>.
2. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn>.