

Cultural Analysis 文化解析

[Giving Compliments]

In English when people give compliments, a very limited subset of English sentence structure and vocabulary is used. That is, we use some conventional or formulaic language when giving compliments. Similarly, there are also conventional, formulaic responses. For example, in English we often respond to compliments by saying “thank you.” However, in Chinese (and Japanese) culture it’s very important to avoid self-praise. One is always taught to be “humble” and polite. Therefore, when responding to a compliment, the formulaic response is “nali, nali (那裡, 那裡),” which literally means “no, no; I’m not that good.” In Episode 2 when Cooper compliments Nana on her great use of her eyes to express feelings while posing for photos, Nana, who’s half American and half Japanese, replies, “Ha, ha! Seriously, I still have a lot to learn.” While an American might simply respond, “thank you,” following the formulaic response, normally, a Japanese (or a Chinese) may say something like “no, no” to reject the compliment, and thus to avoid self-praise.

In addition to providing a formulaic response, one can also transfer the credit to another person when responding to a compliment. An example is found in Episode 3. When Dean compliments Cooper on the great pictures he took of Nana, Cooper transfers the compliment to Nana by saying, “Well, it’s because Nana is so charming.”

