



FEELING THE MEANING: SOBERING THOUGHTS AT SEVENTY*

*When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we see
No I won't be afraid
No I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand, stand by me.*

John Lennon, 1975 "Stand By Me"

Dear Colleagues,

Another title of this Foreword might be “*Ju*, or the differences between 100 fireflies”. Anyhow, the story began “when the night has come” and I sent a message to Professor Hiroshi Yamamoto in Kanazawa asking him to write in Japanese: “Longevity is a good thing”. Shortly I received two kandji, *cho-ju*, calligraphically expressing the meaning of longevity.

– There are 100 different kandji for *ju* – Hiro wrote. And sent them to me arranged as 2 + 48/ 2 + 48 (see below). Although all *ju* are pronounced in the same way, the written version of individual *ju* expresses different meanings ranging from “happiness” to “longevity”.

– How Japanese catch the difference in meaning of each among the hundred *ju*? -

I asked Hiro.

He replied that these kanji are like different fonts by which are written one and the same letter in Cyrillic or Latin alphabet – shape is different, letter is the same.

– We feel the difference of meaning – Hiro explained.

– Well, how Japanese catch difference in meaning of the same sound? – I, like the Little Prince (of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry), repeated my question until not getting answer.

Finally, I understood that one should be born and educated in Japan to feel the meaning of each *ju*.

Or, as the Bulgarian poet Konstantin Pavlov wrote in his “Notes 1970-1993”: “to see the similarity between two fireflies



(or stars) is rather easier (and lazier) than the difference between two fireflies.” However, how can one see the difference between 100 fireflies? I believe Hiro Yamamoto perfectly knows that.

Although *cho-ju* conveys a very exciting message of “longevity is a good thing”, my favorite kanji are those saying “feel happy living one more year”. Someone may say that “there is only one thing that is better than living one more year... and that is living two more years”. Reminding me “if you live 100 years, I want to live 100 years without one day, hence never living without you.”

Today, “when the night *will* come”, I asked Hiro Yamamoto “are there any *ju* for this particular thought of the wise Winnie-the-Pooh (a fictional bear created by Alan Milne)?”

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* I caught “sobering thoughts at seventy” and “some passing thoughts at 70” from Denys Wheatley, who is three weeks younger than me (1,2).

1. Wheatley D. Sobering thoughts at seventy on trivia and serendipity. *Cell Biol Int* 2010; 34: 1049.
2. Wheatley DN. Another decade of evidences in research on primary cilia, porosomes and neosis: some passing thoughts at 70. *Cell Biol Int* 2010; 34: 335-337).