



The Grass is Always Greener ...

I'm sure you've heard the expression before - 'The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence'. It's an idea that is probably common to many cultures and languages; things that we don't have look more attractive and interesting than the ones we do have. But did you know that 'The *vacuum cleaner* is always greener on the other side ...'?

All during the time I was growing up, and before I ever came to Japan, the vacuum cleaners I saw around me (I don't want to say 'I used', because honestly speaking I certainly didn't do much vacuuming as a child!) were all of a similar type; they contained an inner paper bag that was removed and discarded when it became full of dust. A fresh empty bag was then inserted, and the cleaner was ready for use again.

I was aware that expensive homes sometimes had built-in vacuum systems, where the suction pipes were hidden in the walls, with a socket in every room for a handle to plug in, but normal households all used the type I have described - with a removable dust bag.

It was thus with quite some interest when, on my first trip to Japan in the early 1980's, I discovered that Japanese vacuum cleaners were different. They had no bag inside! I thought this was such a neat idea! You never had to think about whether or not you had any bags left, you never had to spend money on them, and you didn't have to be concerned that the bags for your type of cleaner would become unavailable in the future. Cleaning the machine was easy - just open it, dump the dust into the trash, close it, and continue vacuuming.

I was not surprised when a few years after this, I first started to see vacuum cleaners of this type being offered in the North American market, and they quickly became very popular.

But in the meantime, what was happening in Japan? Well, as Japanese readers know quite well, the market here has moved in exactly the opposite direction; nearly all vacuum cleaners in the shops here now are the type with the bags, and it has become difficult to find a bagless model!

I guess the people using these new models would say "It's so convenient; when the cleaner becomes full of dust, I just lift out the bag, and insert a new one!"

I find this movement in opposite directions quite fascinating, as I think it points out that most of us seem to feel some kind of attraction for new ideas and new ways of doing things, over and above any consideration of whether or not the 'new' way is actually better than the 'old' way.

In a way, this is not a bad thing in itself, because it does lead to constant innovation. Many people are working very hard to develop new and 'better' ways of doing things, and that brings about a steady improvement of our living standards.

Which kind of vacuum cleaner do I now use? Well, my current vacuum cleaner was a present to me for Xmas, and was purchased in Japan, so yes, it does have a bag. But do you know, even though it is only about six years old, bags to fit this model have already disappeared from the shops, and I have to trim and distort a similar size bag to fit inside the compartment. So I think I know which type is 'best'!

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