



May I Not Have the Envelope, Please!

I mentioned in the story a couple of weeks ago that NHK had been here again this fall, to prepare a half-hour television program on my work for overseas broadcast. I had mentioned this on my website blog, and one of the readers had asked me how much I would be getting paid for my work on the program.

This whole question of payment for TV work is actually very interesting. I am of course not a 'professional' in that field; even though I typically make a few appearances each year on TV or radio, it is always on a 'casual' basis, and I am not a member of one of the unions that represent people such as actors or announcers.

When I was asked on the blog about the payment for this program, I replied that I had no idea, and that - as is always the case - there had been no discussion of this topic before work began. My correspondent was a bit surprised at this; I was willing to do the job without knowing how much I would be paid - or even *if* I would be paid?

Well, yes I was. This is Japan.

An organization like NHK - or any other major media company - clearly has long-established practices for compensation to participants. There is a 'going rate' for each type of job. Bringing this topic up at the beginning of the process can only lead to problems and discomfort. I myself have no idea what any particular job is 'worth', so if I were to ask for a particular fee, I would almost certainly get it wrong, causing embarrassment and friction between us. It's far better just to let the system play out naturally. I know that I won't be cheated, so there really isn't any reason for concern.

But one result of doing it this way is that I usually do get surprised in the end - sometimes happily, sometimes less so.

For some types of TV programs - typically news programs where the appearance has come about due to my own publicity and promotion - there is no fee paid at all. When they are publicizing an exhibition, they know that the publicity is the end in itself, and further payment is not necessary. When the producer and I are saying our 'good-byes' at the end of such a job, I know what to expect - he/she will come forward with a small shopping bag, inside which will be some kind of token present, a small clock perhaps, or a desk pen set with their logo, something of this type.

When the impetus for my appearance on a program has come from *their* side though, not mine, there will typically be payment. But there is a most interesting little 'twist' on how it works. Again, the 'moment of truth' comes at the very end of the program preparation, as the producer is leaving. There will - again - be the presentation of the small shopping bag, containing the souvenir gift. But this will be followed by the next step, which takes one of two possible forms.

If I see him take out a white envelope, along with a little receipt book, I can't help but feel a twinge of disappointment. The envelope contains money, and I will be asked to sign a receipt for it, so why disappointment? Because I am being paid from 'petty cash', along with the lunch money for the crew, the gasoline for their truck, and etc. etc. It will not be very much.

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If though, instead of a white envelope, I see a 'form in triplicate', then I know that the news is good! They are asking for my bank account information, in order to make a transfer later. I happily fill it all in, and apply my seal. Payment won't arrive for a month, perhaps two, but it will be worth waiting for.

And this recent NHK job? Which was it? Actually, neither - but still good news. He merely asked, "Any changes in your bank information?" and I replied that there had been none. They've got me on file! Success!

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