

A brief glance at the Japanese culture

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Geography

- ¥ Japan is a country of islands. It consists of four main islands, also known as “Home Islands”. From north to south they are: Hokkaidō, Honshū (the mainland), Shikoku, and Kyūshū.
- ¥ There are also about 3,000 smaller, adjacent islands including Okinawa, and islets.

Demographics of Japan (2008) & CIA World Factbook (2008)

Demographics in Japan

- ¥ Japan's population is around 127.8 million
- ¥ World's tenth most populated country
- ¥ Ranks 32nd in population density
- ¥ The majority of the population is concentrated on the Pacific shore of Honshu.
- ¥ Tokyo is the world's most populous city, with 35,000,000 people
- ¥ It's estimated that 99% of people over the age of 15 are literate.

US Census Bureau (2005), Demographics of Japan (2008), Japan Statistics Bureau (2008) & CIA World Factbook (2008)

Japanese Population in the United States:

- ¥ Total: 796,700
- ¥ Under 5 years: 27,148
- ¥ 18 and over: 695,296
- ¥ 65 and over: 161,288

US Census Bureau (2005)

Birth Rate

- ¥ Japan is held as one of the fastest aging and least growing countries in the developed world.
- ¥ In 2006 the first significant rise in birth rate was announced in 40 years, at 33,500 new births that year.

Demographics of Japan (2008)

Aging

- ¥ In general, Japan is considered an older country
- ¥ In 1989, only 11.6% of the population was 65 and over, but it is projected that in 2030 25.6% of people would fall into that age group
- ¥ In 2007, 21.2% were already 65 and over, the world's highest
- ¥ The aging of the population was brought about by low birth rates and high life expectancies.

Hewitt, Campbell & Usui (2003) & Demographics of Japan (2008)

Immigration History

- ¥ The Japanese began to immigrate to the US when the land of their native country was becoming limited. The largest wave of immigration occurred between 1891 and 1907.
- ¥ Japanese immigrants worked the lowest paying jobs in mining, railroad building, agriculture, fishing, and small business.
- ¥ In the 1980s and early 90s many Japanese people were living abroad for extended periods of research, or business assignments.
 - Despite the benefits of living abroad, individuals who were gone for extended periods often faced problems of discrimination upon their return because they were no longer considered by some fully Japanese.
 - In the 1980s bullying of returnee children in the schools had become a major public issue both in Japan and abroad

Japan Statistics Bureau (2008) & Demographics of Japan (2008)

Health Factors

- ¥ Everyone is covered by health care insurance
- ¥ Japanese has a belief that poor health is the consequence of a polluted spirit.
 - They will not want to discuss such an illness of fear of spiritually contaminating others. Therefore, discussions of terminal diseases may be avoided.
- ¥ Traditional Japanese elders who subscribe to Taoism and Buddhism perceptions of illness often believe suffering is an essential part of life.
- ¥ Progressive liver cirrhosis with failure may occur, which seems common in Japanese patients.
- ¥ Microbial food-borne illnesses pose a significant health problem in Japan.
- ¥ Japan has the highest suicide rate in East Asia and one of the highest in the world.
 - More than 30,000 have committed suicide every year since 1998.
 - This phenomenon strikes more frequently among middle aged men.

Jackson & Jackson (2006) & Schaechter, Moselio and Lederberg (2003)

Religions

- ¥ There are two major religions of Japan (most people can identify with one or both of these religions), and both coexist in Japan.
- ¥ The average person in Japan participates in religious ritual ceremonies that celebrate events such as birth, weddings, and funerals; however, religion is not a large part of daily life for Japanese people today.
- ¥ The following is a brief overview of each of the major religions of Japan:

Shintoism

- The Shinto gods are called *kami*. The religion is deeply rooted in the Japanese people and their traditions.
- Shinto is commonly translated as "The Way of the Gods."
- Humans become *kami* once they have died. The Sun Goddess Amaterasu is considered Shinto's most important *kami*.
- Shinto is an optimistic faith, as people are thought to be good at their core and there is an understanding that nobody is perfect. There is no absolute right or wrong in the Shinto religion.
- It does not follow a formal dogma, nor are there set prayers that must be recited.
- Evil is caused by evil spirits.
- People pray at home altars or by visiting shrines, and talismans are used to bestow good health, safe deliveries, success, traffic safety, etc.
- Focus of religion is not on the afterlife, but on fitting into this life.

Buddhism

- Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BC.
- The Mahayana, also known as the "Greater Vehicle" Buddhism, is the branch of Buddhism found in Japan.
- About 90 million Japanese people consider themselves to be Buddhists.
- Typically, funerals are carried out according to Buddhist tradition.
- The third, fifth, and seventh birthdays hold importance for those who practice Buddhism.

Battle (2002) & Schauwecker (2004)

Society

- ¥ Traditionally, Japan's ideology of homogeneity has been intolerant of ethnic and other differences and caused much discrimination.
- ¥ 90% of the population consider themselves middle class.
- ¥ Although most people express satisfaction with their lives and economy, Japanese individuals also average lower levels of happiness when compared to most of the developed world
- ¥ The Japanese society values outward conformity, so individual needs are not as important as the group's

Venhoven (2007) & White (2007)

Gender and Family Roles

- ¥ Japanese family members have well-defined roles that they adhere to.
- ¥ Women are considered to be responsible for child rearing.
- ¥ Families tend to value obedience, formality in interpersonal relationships, restraint in expression of emotions, and dependence on the family.
- ¥ Children are expected to be emotionally dependent on their parents, while dependence and self reliance are of secondary importance.
- ¥ More recently, gender roles have become more flexible.

"Japan Gender Roles" (2008)

Social Conventions

The following is a list of socially acceptable behavior of the Japanese culture that may affect the therapeutic interaction:

- ¥ It is polite to refuse help. Traditionally an offer is made three times before the offer is accepted. It is polite for Japanese women to cover their mouths with their hands when they laugh.
- ¥ It is considered rude to be late to appointments.
- ¥ Excessive physical and eye contact is considered inappropriate.
- ¥ Silence is often used as a means to communicate.
- ¥ Education is highly regarded in the Japanese culture, and students are expected to be attentive, cooperative, and willing to learn.
- ¥ The number four is considered "unlucky" because it is pronounced the same as the word for death (shi). Therefore, one should not give presents that consist of four pieces, or use activities centered around the number 4.

The Japan FAQ (2002) & Schauwecker (2008)

Table Manners:

- ¥ In Japan, you say "itadakimasu" ("I gratefully receive") before eating, and "gochisosama (deshita)" ("Thank you for the meal") after finishing the meal.
- ¥ It is customary to serve several dishes of food at the table rather than serving each person an individual dish.
- ¥ Blowing your nose in public, and especially at the table, is considered bad manners, while it is considered polite to clean your plate to the very last grain of rice.
- ¥ Talking unappetizing topics, such as using the restroom during or before a meal is not socially accepted.
- ¥ It is considered bad manners to burp.
- ¥ It is customary to move all plates to their initial position on the table once the meal is over. This includes replacing the lids on dishes and putting your chopsticks on the chopstick holder or back into their paper slip.
- ¥ The formal way of sitting for both genders is kneeling (seiza)



women only



seiza



men only

Schauwecker (2008)

Greetings

- ¥ Bowing
 - In Japan, people greet each other by bowing.
 - A bow ranges from a small nod of the head to a long, 90 degree bend at the waist.
 - A deeper, longer bow indicates respect to those of higher status.
 - It is also common to bow to express thanks, to apologize, to make a request or to ask someone a favor.
- ¥ Shaking hands is uncommon among the Japanese.
- ¥ Frequent Japanese phrases:
 - Good morning = ohayou (pronounced “ohio”)
 - Good afternoon = konnichi wa (pronounced “cone knee chi wah”)
 - Good evening = konban wa (pronounced “cone bawn nah”)
 - Goodbye (long absence) = sayounara (pronounced “sigh ya nar rah”)
 - See ya! (relatively short absence) = mata ne (pronounced mata neh)
 - To encourage someone to do their best, good luck, or to say “keep at it” = ganbatte (pronounced gone bot te)

Schauwecker (2008)

Language

- ¥ 98.6% of the population is pure Japanese, and 99% of the population speaks Japanese as their first language
- ¥ Geographical distribution of the language
 - Distribution of Languages in the World
 - Asia contains approximately 32% of the world’s languages
 - Estimated number of Japanese L1 & L2 speakers
 - 126 million
- ¥ While the standard language or hyojungo is understood by almost all Japanese, regardless of their level of education, many speak strong local dialects (known as ben as in the famous dialect Kansai Kansai-ben).
 - These dialects particularly in rural areas are difficult to understand, even for Japanese from other parts of the country.
- ¥ Japanese is part of the Altaic language family
- ¥ The written language is adopted from the Chinese system
 - Chinese symbols were modified for phonetic purposes
 - Is organized into a syllabary called Kana
 - each symbol represents one syllable
 - uses characters called Kanji

Baker (2001), Battle (2002) & The Ministry of Justice (2007)

More on Language

- ¥ Japanese is polysyllabic and has an elaborate inflectional system
- ¥ Japanese is not tonal, every syllable is given equal stress
- ¥ Has 5 vowels
 - /a/, /e/, /u/, /e/, and /o/
 - Vowels vary in duration, as they do in English
- ¥ Has 18 consonants
 - /k/, /s/, /t/, /n/, /h/, /m/, /y/, /r/, /w/, /g/, /d/, /b/, /z/, /p/, /ch/, /sh/, and /j/
- ¥ Only /n/ occurs as a final consonant
- ¥ Double consonants such as /kk/ and /pp/ may occur

Battle (2002)

¥ Influence of Japanese on English Phonology

- ¥ Common phonetic difficulties encountered by Japanese people learning English are:

- Substitutions of:
 - /r/ for /l/
 - /s/ for voiceless /th/
 - /z/ for voiced /th/
 - /j/ for voiced /th/
 - /b/ for /v/
- Addition of vowels to words ending in consonants
 - Deske for desk
 - Miluku for milk
- Approximations of phonemes
 - The /f/ sounds is produced between /f/ and /h/
 - Resulting in food/hood
 - The /r/ sound is produced between the English /l/ and /r/
 - The closest approximation to the voiceless /th/ is /t/ in English
 - The /d/ comes closest to the voiced /th/ in English
 - And /j/ comes closes to the English /z/ as in azure
- Syllable structure C-V may result in a vowel insertion after the final consonant or between consonants in clusters such as /spaleshes/ for /splashes/
- Prefix O is used for politeness
 - Sushi becomes osushi in public settings

Cheng as cited in Gonzales (2005)

Influence of Japanese on English Syntax

- ¥ Grammatical features of Japanese that interfere with learning English
 - Personal pronouns are often omitted, because they are inferred from the context
 - No distinction is made between the singular and plural
 - Hon means book and books
 - The meaning is inferred from context
 - Because yes and no questions are marked by a final particle, question markers (what, where, etc) are not needed at the initial position of a sentence
- ¥ Syntax
 - All verbs appear in sentence-final position
 - Personal pronouns are often omitted
 - Singular-plural distinction is not made
 - Relative clauses precede the nouns they modify
 - Particles are used at the end of sentences
 - noun and verb reversal may occur

Battle (2001), Cheng as cited in Gonzales (2005), Goldstein (2000)

Influence of Japanese on English Semantics

- ¥ Language-specific patterns of development occur as all children do, regardless of ethnicity
- ¥ There are almost 100 ways to say “I” or “me” in Japanese, It varies depending on age, gender, SES, and pragmatic context

Cheng as cited in Gonzales (2005)

Influence of Japanese on English Pragmatics

- ¥ Narrative and pragmatics
 - Japanese children speak succinctly about collections of experiences rather than elaborating on any one experience in particular
 - Japanese mothers
 - request proportionally fewer descriptions from their children,
 - pay more verbal attention to boys than to girls,
 - give fewer evaluation and
 - show more verbal attention than parents in North America
 - The Japanese concept of rapport and empathy says that the children are expected to anticipate what will be asked of them and to do it without being asked directly
 - Communication relies heavily on the listener's ability to empathize with the speaker to comprehend the message
 - Implicit communication is valued above an explicit style of communication
- ¥ Distinct cultural differences between the Japanese and Americans in classroom interaction
 - for example, group behavior and cooperation, important cultural concepts in Japanese society, are taught and learned in pre-school
 - going to school in Japan is primarily training in group life
 - Japanese students do not just work in groups, they work as groups
 - Teachers create groups and group activities to help children enhance one another's strengths and overcome one another's weaknesses
 - Japanese children in the US may still be expected to behave this way because of parental influence

Minami & McCabe as cited in Battle (2002), Minami & McCabe as cited in Gonzales (2005), Lebra as cited in Gonzales (2005), & Gonzales (2005)

Resources:

- ¥ <http://www.xculture.org/> The Cross Cultural Healthcare Program: Serves as a bridge between communities and health care institutions to ensure full access to quality health care that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- ¥ <http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/languageList.html> Languages of the World: Learn about the history, status, sound system, grammar, vocabulary, writing and much more of over 120 languages.
- ¥ <http://accent.gmu.edu/> The Speech Accent Archive: Presents a large set of speech samples from a variety of language backgrounds.
- ¥ Please see references list for full list of helpful resources on the Japanese culture.

ASHA (2008)

Tests:

Bilingual Verbal Abilities Tests (B-VAT)

Directory of Speech Language Pathology Assessment Instruments (2007 ed.)

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