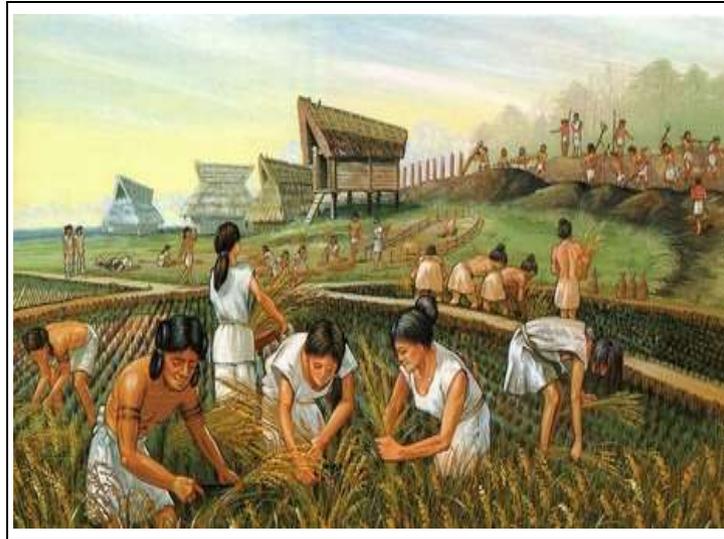


Slide 1

Aspects of Japanese Culture & Personality

Face / Bowing / Seken tai / Ninjo

Slide 2



Notes

Because of the multiple tasks involved with wet rice cultivation it was a labour-intensive process that required considerable co-ordination.

As a result, village family units were required to pool their labour, and to also share their water resources and irrigation facilities.

Typically, irrigation arrangements called for water to run downhill, linking all the surrounding families with their shared destiny of communal resource usage.

Further, people lived in houses clustered together in small villages and depended heavily upon each other since the rice was usually planted on the same day after several days of intensive watering.

These activities necessitated an emphasis on group interests, the enhancement of skills in group decision-making and the avoidance of friction between families who would be neighbours and workmates for generations.

Psychologists today have identified a number of commonly observed psychological characteristics in the lives of modern Japanese.

One of the characteristics still to be seen with Japanese people today is strong sense of belonging to the 'group' or 'communality'.

This value refers especially to the family, but also refers to one's school, place of employment, and any other long-enduring group to which one belongs.

It is an interesting possibility that this character feature of communality and group may have derived from behaviours that could also be observed in ancient villages whose farmers exhibited very similar behaviours in their rice production activities.

In this lesson I will briefly share some of those aspects of Japanese culture and personality that I have learned about in my studies and observed during my visit to Japan.

Slide 3



Notes

Of all the peculiarities of Japanese culture, the concept of 'face' is perhaps the most difficult for Westerners to fully grasp and deal with.

Saving **'face'** (mentsu) is one of the strongest forces motivating behaviours in Japanese society, both historically and at present.

'Face' is a mark of personal dignity and means being highly regarded by one's peers -it requires Japanese people to avoid publicly hurting the feelings of another.

Japanese at all times are very much aware of the possibility of losing their self-esteem (face) in public, particularly in the eyes of their close 'groups' (their boss, work mates, family, team, immediate local community)

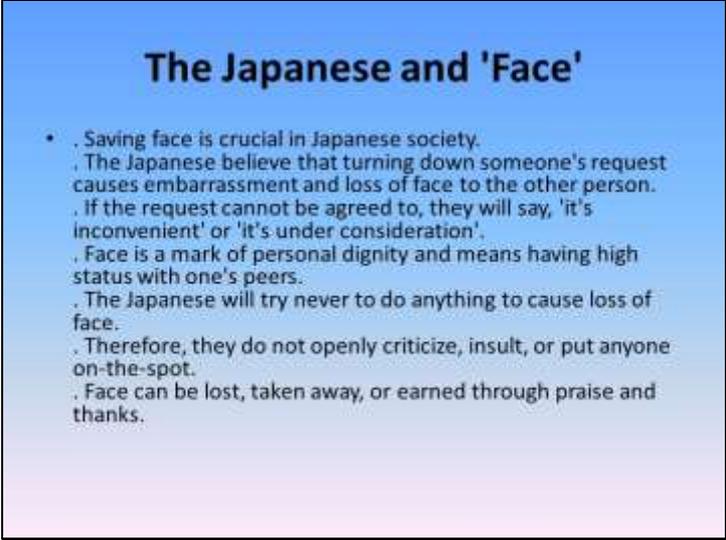
As an example, IF I was a Japanese teacher I would lose 'face' in any situation where somebody in my class was to question / contradict me in front of others in public and thereby cause me embarrassment.

In contrast, in our Australian culture there is an underlying assumption of equality, whereby students are generally considered to be intellectual equals, and are therefore often encouraged to openly question or disagree with the opinion of a teacher in class, without anybody losing esteem.

In Japan, on the other hand, if someone of importance in the organisation was to praise my efforts as a teacher in public, that would be an example of 'giving face'.

In a complex society with trillions of daily human interactions, a majority of Japanese aim to avoid possible situations that could cause someone to lose face and lower the status of that individual in the eyes of their peers.

Slide 4



The Japanese and 'Face'

- . Saving face is crucial in Japanese society.
 - . The Japanese believe that turning down someone's request causes embarrassment and loss of face to the other person.
 - . If the request cannot be agreed to, they will say, 'it's inconvenient' or 'it's under consideration'.
 - . Face is a mark of personal dignity and means having high status with one's peers.
 - . The Japanese will try never to do anything to cause loss of face.
 - . Therefore, they do not openly criticize, insult, or put anyone on-the-spot.
 - . Face can be lost, taken away, or earned through praise and thanks.

Notes

The VIP treatment that Japanese are so good at giving to honoured guests and high-ranking people can be seen as an example of 'giving face.'

Our Australian and other western cultures tend to put a premium on **straightforwardness** – 'telling it like it is' and 'calling a spade a spade'.

Worrying about someone's feelings – which is basically what 'face' is – is not something that is considered to have first priority in western business culture. Rather, facts and the truth are given the highest degree of emphasis, whilst feelings are relegated.

What many westerners fail to realize when dealing with Japanese is that failure to pay attention to matters of face can cause such offense that it may completely sour a relationship. In other words, in Japan 'feelings' are really important.

Slide 5

Western Face Vs Japanese **Face**

Conflict

 **Japanese :**



- see conflict as dangerous to relationships.
- view conflict as something that should be avoided at all costs.
- value harmony and "saving face."

Notes

'Western face' is a more self-oriented and individualistic pride or ego, and is more about how one is viewed by others. 'Japanese face' is about how one treats others not about the self, and can be given or earned. It can be also taken away or lost.

As a general sociological statement, Western cultures tend to focus on the individual as an independent and self-reliant being. In raising children, the focus is on helping them develop a strong sense of personal integrity and individuality.

In contrast, Japanese culture has downplayed the concept of the individual, instead emphasizing the supremacy of the family and the 'group'. It is all about bringing honour to your clan. With the emphasis on the collective, the sense of self is downplayed so much that it practically doesn't exist, and 'individualism' is virtually seen as immoral.

Slide 6



Notes

Western cultures tend to think in terms of ‘truth’ and ‘rightness’, where children are taught to respect objectivity and facts. The law applies equally to everyone and behaviour is something expected to be guided by personal conscience.

In the West, honour or face is more about personal integrity. There is admiration for the integrity of those who uncompromisingly face objective truth, regardless of how self-damaging the results may be. Westerners can admit and apologize for personal shortcomings and gain respect for honest efforts to learn from the past and are generally forgiving of someone whom takes responsibility for such problems.

The Japanese concept of the ‘truth’ is not black and white.

The emphasis in Japan is less on always telling the objective ‘truth’ and more about the giving consideration as to what the relationship calls for.

This explanation helps to explain the cultural differences of ‘lying’. The Japanese will go to great lengths to protect face, their own as well as others. In fact, in Japan it’s perfectly acceptable to tell a lie – even a bald-faced one – if it serves to protect face.

Japan’s culture of shame doesn’t think of lies in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, instead the goal of Japanese truth is often to protect the face of an individual, a group or even the nation.

In these situations, both Japanese parties can usually read between the lines and know when the ‘truth’ is being modified to help protect face.

Unfortunately however Japanese will often assume that Westerners visiting Japan will know as well.

For instance, a Japanese hotel receptionist might tell a potential Western customer an obvious lie that they don't have any room vacancies. This is likely to be their face-saving way to avoid having to say that their hotel doesn't accommodate foreigners.

Westerners often have a hard time with this and dislike being lied to. In many cases a Westerner's reaction has been to call the offending party out on the lie. However in most such cases open confrontation is counter-productive and will usually result in denials or feigning ignorance.

Slide 7



Notes

A better appreciation of 'saving face' can go a long way in helping visitors better understand Japan.

For instance, foreigners will often notice that Japanese employees will go to great lengths to steer clear of them. Most visitors assume this is because of their 'being shy' or their inability to speak English. However, that's just part of it – having to speak with a foreign visitor is a frightening possibility for the average Japanese person.

In conversation with a foreigner Japanese believe there is a lot of potential for appearing incompetent and losing face, especially in front of other employees or the boss.

Even though they are in their own country many Japanese feel obliged to speak English when talking to a foreigner (instead of the other way around). Even when they do speak English there can be the fear that their English may not be understood, that they may make an incorrect pronunciation that needs correcting or worst of all, may even be laughed at.

In general, therefore many adult Japanese avoid situations with foreigners where their peers might see them make a 'mistake' and thereby lose face.

While all Japanese people know the ground rules governing 'face', they fear the responses of potentially unpredictable, emotional and loud *gaijin* ('foreign devils').

For better or worse many Japanese have a perception that Westerners easily lose their cool and will fly off the handle at the drop of a hat. Worse, they may have personally witnessed

or experienced past incidents where an angry foreigner exploded in frustration leading to a loss of face for all parties involved.

Thus the average Japanese person on the street can be apprehensive when approached by a foreigner who is asking for directions, taking a photo or making conversation etc.

In these situations a foreign visitor to Japan can increase the comfort level around them by not acting like a loud, back-slapping 'ugly' Australian or 'ugly' American – a reputation that unfortunately many of us have earned in post war Japan.

Slide 8

The Japanese Bow- (Ojigi)



Slide 9



Notes

Being such a densely populated country, Japanese culture places a heavy emphasis on respect, and **bowing** is the predominant method used to communicate that respect to other people.

Social interaction in Japan is about much more than just verbal communication, and people will quickly notice another person's expression in the form of body language as well.

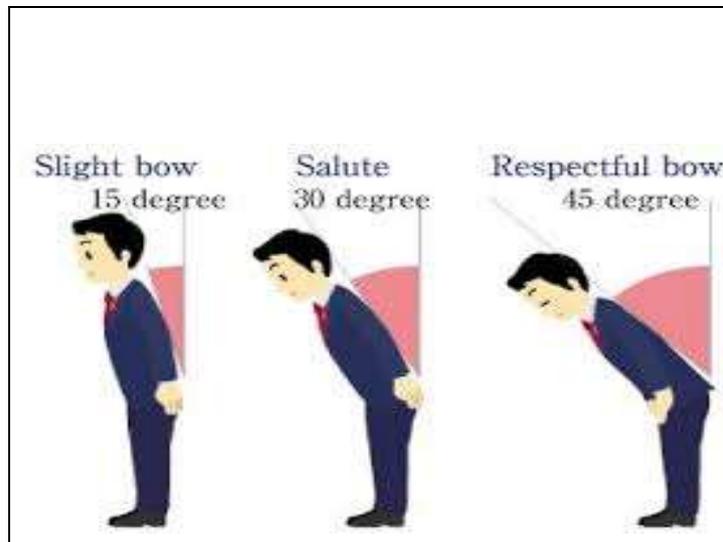
The Japanese bow is an important feature of the culture, and there is a lot of meaning in its usage.

The concept of bowing is simple and basically shows that whatever your social status is, you are lowering yourself and putting yourself in a position that is vulnerable. Bowing demonstrates to the other person that you are placing them over yourself and that you are thankful for your interaction with them.

Simple gestures like bowing go a long way in terms of communication in Japan, and sometimes are even more powerful than words.

Identify in the above slide the individual who is not bowing properly .

Slide 10



Notes

How to bow in Japan

In Japan, learning how to bow is one of the best ways to show that you appreciate the culture. The Japanese bow is simple, but there are a lot of subtleties that go into bowing. When bowing, it is important not to slouch over and curve your back; nice, straight posture shows that you are putting on your best for the other person.

Bowing should also come from the upper torso, meaning that your lower body should not move and should remain perpendicular to the ground, as if you were standing straight up. Your gaze should be focused downwards when you bow, having your head move downward with your torso.

Men should bow with their hands and arms at their sides, while women bow with their hands and arms in the front.

There are different types of bows meant to show respect in various forms. For example, the degree of the angle in which a person bows is connected with the depth of respect the person is showing.

A simple bow of about 5 degrees is commonly used in informal gatherings such as amongst friends and family.

Eshaku is a bow of about 15 degrees that is used around acquaintances and is a generally polite way of saying thank you or casually greeting someone.

Keirei is the next level of bow that is about 30 degrees. This bow is commonly used in business situations such as greeting potential business partners or customers, or to show respect to someone of higher status.

Slide 11



Notes

'Dogeza' is a grovelling bow that was historically used by commoners whenever a person of noble rank passed them by.

Slide 12



Slide 13



Discuss Obama's possible intentions in this photo with Emperor Akihito

Slide 14



Review the Trump hand grip????

And Shinzo Abe's sitting posture???

Slide 15



Seken Tei – Maintaining Appearances



Notes

The Japanese term Seken-tei is best translated as ‘maintaining social appearances’.

Seken-tei derived from the samurai warrior class who, perhaps more than anyone, were concerned to maintain face and the honour of their name and status among their contemporaries.

Despite a great many social changes, even since the end of the Second World War, both *giri* and *seken-tei* continue to exert considerable influence over the Japanese mind and social behaviour.

Seken refers to the community of people with whom one comes into contact with in his/her daily life. Such people would include their neighbours, work colleagues and might include baristas and shopkeepers with whom they are familiar.

The suffix *-tei* refers to ‘appearances’ Therefore, *seken-tei* refers to how a Japanese person ‘appears’ to the people of his /her local community.

The following are examples of how the concept of *seken-tei* applies in Japanese society.

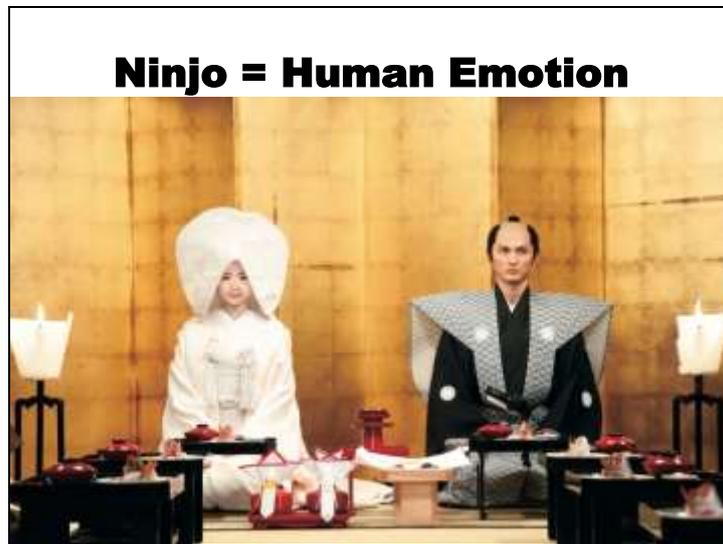
Casestudy 1: A thirty-five year old woman living in a rural community in Japan may decide to confine herself to the house. When she is asked the reason, she explains that, because all of her contemporaries from schooldays are married, she is ashamed for remaining single. She is worried that others will disapprove of her and so she attempts to isolate herself and tries to avoid meeting other people.

Casestudy 2: A couple is on the brink of divorce. Disputes over property, child custody and maintenance are not as yet resolved. However, they do not want to use conciliation proceedings and still less to resort to litigation. They will attempt to solve their difficulties privately because of the sense of shame that would be involved through revealing their private affairs to outsiders with whom they have no relationship, such as a judge or family court counsellors.

Casestudy 3: A Middle School girl becomes pregnant. When her mother hears about it, she is shocked. But instead of thinking of the welfare of her daughter, or the unborn child, she concentrates on keeping the matter secret from the local community. Typically she might arrange for her daughter to change her school or to have an abortion.

In Japan it is the sense of 'shame' within one's *seken* group which controls individual behaviour and not a general societal sense of shame. The belief that a member(s) of your *seken* group disapproves of some action you have taken is very potent and can reach levels akin to mental torture, sometimes causing very extreme reactions including suicide.

Slide 17



Notes

Ninjo is the Japanese term for **'human emotion'**

In Japan, both real life and fictional dramas usually involve the conflict between duty (*giri*) and human emotion (*ninjo*).

The classic historic example is the lowly Samurai who falls in love with the Shogun's daughter. He is bound by duty to stay away from her. However, he's in love — his *ninjo* is running wild.

A more modern example would be the family salary earner who hates his job and wants to quit to follow his dream of becoming a professional musician (*ninjo*). However, he has a family to support (*giri*).

A less dramatic example could be a waitress who has an obnoxious customer. Her *giri* tells to treat the customer with respect. Her *ninjo* tells her to spill his coffee on him.

Young People

According to conventional Japanese wisdom, when *giri* declines and *ninjo* escalates — social harmony is threatened. In Japan today, older generations complain that young people have forgotten about *giri* and are too driven by *ninjo*.