

Language and Culture

Chapter 10

ぶんか にほんご
文化・日本語
Bunka/Nihongo

Culture

ぶんか
文化
Bunka

This section contains a brief overview of some aspects of Japanese culture that you ought to be aware of. If you would like to learn more about Japanese culture, there are a great many books on the subject. This overview is simply meant to help make your life in Japan a little bit easier. The best way to learn proper Japanese manners is to mimic those around you.

Etiquette While Eating

Like every other country, Japan has specific etiquette for mealtimes. When out to eat with Japanese friends or coworkers it is important to be aware of what is considered rude.

- 1 **いただきます** *itadakimasu*. After sitting down to a meal, and just before beginning to eat, many Japanese will put their hands together, much like how Christians pray, and say *itadakimasu*. It is not actually a prayer, however, and literally translates as “I humbly receive this.”
- 2 When out at a restaurant, it is not uncommon for the meals to come out as they are prepared, which may mean that you get your food before your companions, or they will get theirs first. Do not be surprised if they tell you to start eating or begin eating when the food comes. This is just Japanese custom. Generally before digging in you should say something like **おさきにすみません** *osaki ni sumimasen*, which means, “excuse me for going first.” They may urge you to eat. If this makes you uncomfortable it is perfectly ok to explain that in your culture you wait until everyone gets their food before eating, but they will not think ill of you for starting without them. Also, tipping waiters and waitresses is not a custom in Japan.
- 3 **立ち食い** *tachigui*. It is generally considered inappropriate to eat while walking along the streets. Drinking from PET bottles is alright, but eating is not something you will see many Japanese people doing.
- 4 **Chopstick Don'ts**. There are several points of etiquette to keep in mind when eating with chopsticks.
 - a. Do not stick your chopsticks vertically into your bowl of rice (The reason is that at funerals chopsticks are stuck vertically into a rice bowl and placed on the altar.) If you need to put your chopsticks down, lay them across your plate or bowl or put them onto the little chopstick holder at your place at the table.
 - b. Do not pass food directly to another set of chopsticks. (The reason is that at funerals, the bones of the cremated body are passed in this manner.)
 - c. When taking food from a common dish, use the opposite end of your chopsticks if no serving utensils are provided. You might notice your Japanese counterparts not following this etiquette point, but until they tell you not to, it is best to follow it.
- 5 **Don't waste food**. In Japan, it is considered impolite and wasteful to leave food behind on your plate. Most restaurants do not allow or have the resources to allow you to take leftovers home with you, so be sure to order appropriately.

6 ごちそうさまでした *gochisōsama deshita*. At the end of the meal, it is polite to say *gochisōsama deshita* to the person who made the meal or who paid for it.

Visiting Someone's Home

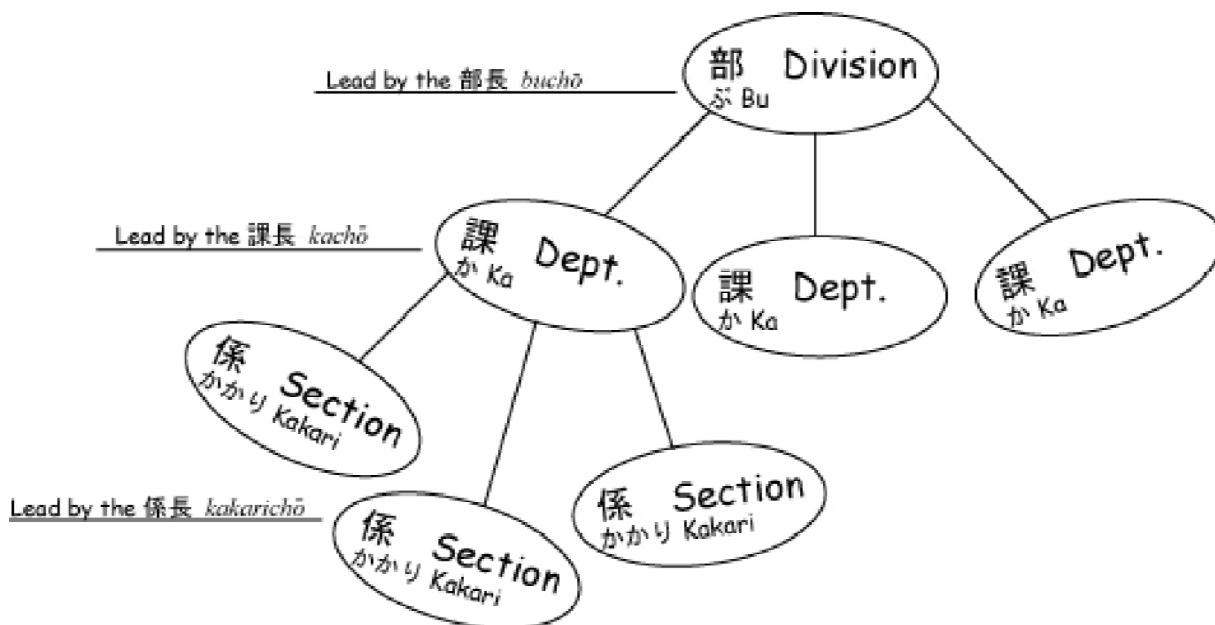
When visiting a Japanese person's home, it is customary to bring a small gift, known as お土産 *omiyage* or 手土産 *temiyage*, usually cookies or a small cake or flowers. It is a way of acknowledging the imposition. When entering a Japanese person's home, be sure to take off your shoes in the entryway, or 玄関 *genkan*, and turn them around. If slippers are available you should put them on.

When you first enter a person's home you should say おじゃまします *ojama shimasu*, which literally translates as "I am going to bother you." You should then hand over the gift you brought, saying これ、つまらないものですが *kore, tsumaranai mono desu ga*, which literally means, "this is something boring" but is similar to the English phrase "This isn't much, but..." Your Japanese host may be surprised to hear you say this but it will show that you are trying to respect Japanese customs and will mean a lot. When you are ready to leave, you should say そろそろ帰ります *soro soro kaerimasu*.

Phrases			
If you don't have any plans	もし予定が入っていないければ	もしよていがはいっていないければ	Moshi yotei ga haitte inakereba
Please come if you'd like.		よかったらどうぞ	Yokattara dōzo
Unfortunately I have plans	あいにく予定があります。	あいにくよていがあります。	Ainiku yotei ga arimasu.
Let's do it another time.	また今度にしましょう。	またこんどにしましょう	Mata kondo ni shimashō.
I will come and pick you up.	迎えに行きます。	むかえにいきます。	Mukae ni ikimasu.
This isn't much, but...		これ、つまらないものですが。	Kore, tsumaranai mono desu ga.
I think it's time I get going.	そろそろ帰ります。	そろそろかえります。	Soro soro kaerimasu.
Thank you for inviting me.	誘ってくださってありがとうございました	さそってくださってありがとうございました	Sasotte kudasatte arigatō gozaimashita.
Please come again	また来てください。	またきてください。	Mata kite kudasai.
I will see you home.	家まで送ります。	いえまでおくります。	Ie made okurimasu.
Be careful	気をつけてください。	きをつけてください。	Ki wo tsukete kudasai.
Said when entering a home.		おじゃまします。	Ojama shimasu.

Office Hierarchy

In Japan, the hierarchy in the office is very important. Everything must go through the correct people and the decision-making process usually begins at the bottom and works its way up to the top decision-makers. You should make sure you know who your direct superior is so that you can discuss ideas or problems with them. You should always consult with the person directly above you and then they will consult with the person above them and so on and so forth. The lowest person in the office, or the woman, is often expected to take on the tasks that keep the office running, like handing out tea to visitors or restocking office supplies. Depending on your position in the company and the office atmosphere, you may be treated differently than the rest of your coworkers.



What to Call People

In Japanese culture, your relationship with the person you are speaking to or about determines what you call them. It can be quite complicated so here are a few general things to keep in mind.

Japanese people usually go by their last names, or 名字 *myōji*, with the suffix -san attached (ex. Suzuki-san). If the person is a teacher, you would attach the suffix -sensei instead (ex. Yoshida-sensei).

In the Office

In the office, you often call your superiors by their titles. Japanese offices are divided into divisions, or 部 *bu*, headed up by the 部長 *buchō*. Each 部 *bu* is then divided into departments 課 *ka* led by the 課長 *kachō*. Then, there are different section within the 課 *ka*, which are led by the 係長 *kakarichō*. You can call these people by their title, or their last name plus their title as the suffix (ie. Suzuki-kachō).

What is Said vs. What is Meant

Honne and *tatemae* are important concepts for people living in Japan. Essentially, *tatemae* is what is said: polite forms of speech which serve to maintain the harmony between people. Japanese children are trained in this concept from an early age, and this surface politeness is almost second nature for most Japanese people. Although people do not agree all the time, Japanese people often try to express their differences of opinion without disturbing the harmony. Though what is said is polite and non-confrontational, subtle variations in what is said point to the real meaning—the *honne*. This is often frustrating for foreigners who don't know Japanese or are learning Japanese and cannot read the subtle differences. *Tatemae* may come off as seeming deceitful but it is not meant to be. For example, if you wear a tank top to work and your co-workers keep asking you if you are cold, they might be trying to tell you that you shouldn't wear a sleeveless top without offending you.

You may also find that in general vagueness and ambiguity are evident in many aspects of Japanese life. This indirectness is meant to allow time for a situation to be felt out in order to avoid conflicts. Instead of saying "no," they might say it's "difficult." You may notice that Japanese people often repeat each other or double check everything to what may seem a ridiculous extent to you, but they are just trying to avoid miscommunications or mistakes.

In the workplace, conformity and harmony are desirable qualities for the individual. Instead of viewing oneself as a separate working unit, the group to which one belongs takes precedence. The individual then sees the

identity of the group as his or her own identity.

Personal opinions and criticism are generally expressed with simplicity and softness. This is in order to avoid bringing special attention to oneself as an individual and is considered to be a sign of strength and self-control.

Politeness

Bowing

In Japanese culture, the bow おじぎ *ojigi* can have many different meanings and the circumstances determine the necessary length and depth. A shallow bow can be used in greeting, in expressing thanks, or in saying goodbye. When apologizing for something you should make sure to bow more deeply. When meeting someone you bow as you introduce yourself and the person of lower rank should bow deeper. When receiving a business card, you should receive it with both hands while bowing. You should also make sure to look at it carefully before putting it away.

Complimenting

You may find elaborate praise given to you when you do even the most simple of “Japanese” things, such as using chopsticks or saying “arigatō gozaimasu.” However, the Japanese themselves may not appear to be comfortable with excessive flattery. It is customary to negate flattery with an いえいえ *ieie* when it is given to you. Below is a list of common compliments and ways to wave them off with polite modesty.

English	Kanji	Kana	Romanization
You're so good at	_____が上手ですね。	_____がじょうずですね。	_____ga jōzu desu ne.
How nice/pretty.	素敵ですね。	すてきですね。	Suteki desu ne.
Not bad.	悪くないですね。	わるくないですね。	Waruku nai desu ne.
There's no problem.	問題ないですね。	もんだいないですね。	Mondai nai desu ne.
Not really.		そんなことはないです。	Sonna koto nai desu.
I still have a long way to go.		まだまだです。	Mada mada desu.
No, not at all.		とんでもないです。	Tonde mo nai desu.
No, I am really bad at it.	いえいえ、下手です。	いえいえ、へたです。	Ieie, heta desu.

Apologizing

At first it may seem like Japanese people are always apologizing, あやまる *ayamaru*. However, you will probably soon find that there are many levels of apology ranging from common courtesy to earnest, reflective apologies, indicated by the language used. Also, a simple apology can also mean thank you. In Western culture, people often give explanations for their mistakes or failures, but in Japan it is usually interpreted as giving excuses and not taking responsibility. It is often best to apologize profusely rather than to offer an explanation.

I'm sorry, excuse me		すみません	Sumimasen
I'm sorry, forgive me		ごめんなさい	Gomen nasai
Excuse me	失礼しました	しつれいしました	Shitsurei shimashita
To apologize	謝る	あやまる	Ayamaru
To make an official apology	謝罪する	しゃざいする	Shazai suru
An apology	お詫び	おわび	Owabi
An excuse	言い訳	いいわけ	Iiwake
Nothing but excuses	言い訳ばかり	いいわけばかり	Iiwake bakari

Make no excuse	言い訳をしない	言い訳をしない	Iiwake wo shinai
To forgive	許す	ゆるす	Yurusu
To regret	後悔する	こうかいする	Kōkai suru
I was wrong/bad	私が悪かったです	わたしがわるかったです	Watashi ga warukatta desu
It is my fault.	私のせいです	わたしのせいです	Watashi no sei desu
I am reflecting	反省しています	はんせいしています	Hansei shite imasu

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs

Most people in Japan make no distinction between different kinds of illegal drugs. While in many other countries drugs are often viewed as having levels of “badness,” in Japan marijuana is no more acceptable than heroin or cocaine. There is also no distinction made between past and present drug use. Furthermore, in Japan, guilt by association will extend beyond the people immediately involved. It will affect your coworkers, other foreigners, etc. They may be questioned by the police in the event that you get caught using drugs. Also, since the crime rate is relatively low in Japan, your chances of getting caught are higher because more resources can be allotted to catching drug users.

Arrest for drug use is very serious. Oftentimes, offenders are detained throughout the period of indictment, which can be extended at the request of a judge. Offenders are interrogated for hours at a time, about things not even related to the incident, and kept in very uncomfortable surroundings, such as 24 hour daylight conditions. On top of this, the financial repercussions are astounding. In one case, a foreigner arrested for drug use spent upwards of 2,000,000 yen on lawyers, money transfer charges, bail, etc.

Alcohol

In contrast to the views toward drugs, views toward alcohol are somewhat more relaxed than many other countries. Alcohol is a very important aspect of Japanese business culture. Alcohol is viewed somewhat as a social lubricant and offices will often have drinking parties after work, where everyone can relax and get to know each other in a more relaxed atmosphere. If you are not a drinker, you should not feel pressured to drink, but you should try to attend these parties because they are a good way to get to know your coworkers. You can order tea or juice or anything you want. They may push you to drink at first, but they will respect you if you say no.

However, the consequences for drinking and driving are more severe in Japan than other countries. Insurance will NOT cover alcohol related accidents. Drinking and driving in Japan is a very serious offense, and this includes riding your bicycle. One drink before getting behind the wheel is enough to get you time in prison, a hefty fine, and a suspended license. If you drink, do not drive. If your friends have been drinking, it is YOUR responsibility to make sure they do not drive. In Japan, everyone else in the car with the intoxicated driver is also held accountable and will face similar punishment.

In both cases of drugs and alcohol, if you are caught breaking the law, the consequences are severe. You will almost definitely lose your job, and before you are deported, you will be forced to publicly apologize to everyone you work with. You will lose a great deal of your time and money as well as go through a great deal of emotional stress.

Language

にほんご
日本語
Nihongo

Spoken Language

One of the characteristics of spoken Japanese that most frustrates non-native speakers is the convention of using direct (dictionary form) or indirect (desu-masu) speech patterns, as well as humble or honorific patterns (keigo), depending on who is being spoken to or about. Spoken Japanese has many levels of politeness that are an important part of Japanese culture. When speaking to your boss you should use humble forms in reference to yourself and honorific forms in reference to your boss. Also, when speaking to people you have just met you should use indirect speech patterns, or verbs with the ending of ～ます *masu* and sentences ending in です *desu*. Among close friends you can use direct speech patterns. This is far too complicated to describe in detail in this guide. For more information you should consult a Japanese textbook. For non-native speakers, it is generally safe to stick to the desu-masu system. It may be too stiff in some situations and not polite enough in others, but most Japanese people are forgiving of non-native speakers.

Pronunciation

In Japanese, double consonants represent a slight pause in speech, except for ‘n n’ which should be an elongated sound. Likewise, double vowels should be double in speech length. The ‘r’ should not be rolled at all. It can be read more like an ‘l’ or a very soft and quick ‘d.’

Japanese vowels are similar to Spanish vowels, and there are only five of them, <i>a, i, u, e,</i> and <i>o</i> .	a	i	u	e	u
	father	eat	food	end	old

Kansai Ben

Kameoka is located in Kyoto Prefecture which is the Kansai region of Japan. Japanese is spoken slightly differently in different regions of Japan. Most often, standard Japanese, or 標準語 *hyōjungo*, is taught in schools abroad, so if you have studied Japanese in school, this is most likely what you have learned. Almost all Japanese people will understand *hyōjungo* when it is spoken to them. However, this does not mean that they will speak it back. Japanese has different “dialects” known as 弁 *ben*. 関西弁 *Kansai-ben* is the dialect spoken in the Kansai region. This also varies slightly between cities, so Kyoto-ben is different from Osaka-ben, which is different from Kobe-ben. Kansai-ben is what you will hear on most of the comedy shows on TV. Kansai dialect is well understood by most Japanese people, but in some places, like Aomori Prefecture, the dialect is so different that they have to run subtitles in standard Japanese if a person from Aomori appears on the news.

You may also notice that when speaking casually, Japanese people often drop sentence particles (を、は、が、と etc.). They also rarely use any of the many words they have that mean “you.” When referencing the person you are speaking to, you often use their name instead of a pronoun.

Studying

There are many different kinds of resources available for anyone wanting to study Japanese, including a great many language exchange programs and courses you can sign up for.

The Kyoto Prefectural International Center on the 9th floor of the Kyoto Station building offers a Beginners Japanese Course for between 5000 and 6000 yen. For more information please visit www.kpic.or.jp/class.html. You can contact Kyoto Prefectural International Center for information about private tutors or other language exchange opportunities. However, one of the best things you can do is to get involved in the community and make Japanese friends.

Written Language

The written Japanese language is a combination of three styles of characters and also sometimes roman letters as well. Literacy in Japanese requires comprehension of all three styles: hiragana, katakana, and kanji.

Hiragana

ひらがな

Each hiragana character represents a single mora (syllable). They were derived from the Chinese characters, or kanji, and are characterized by curved strokes. Each symbol represents the sound of a vowel, the sound “n,” or the sound of a consonant-vowel pairing such as “ma.” Hiragana are used for words for which no kanji exists, including particles such as “kara” and suffixes like “san.” Hiragana are also used as verb and adjective inflections such as the verb stem “masu.” Hiragana are known as “furigana” when placed above kanji characters as a pronunciation guide (as commonly used in this guide).

a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	ra	wa
あ	か	さ	た	な	は	ま	や	ら	わ
i	ki	shi	chi	ni	hi	mi		ri	
い	き	し	ち	に	ひ	み		り	
u	ku	su	tsu	nu	fu	mu	yu	ru	wo
う	く	す	つ	ぬ	ふ	む	ゆ	る	を
e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me		re	
え	け	せ	て	ね	へ	め		れ	
o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	ro	n
お	こ	そ	と	の	ほ	も	よ	ろ	ん

Katakana

カタカナ

Each katakana character represents a single mora (syllable). They were derived from the Chinese characters, or kanji, and are characterized by short, straight strokes and sharp corners. Each symbol represents the sound of a vowel, the sound “n” or the sound of a consonant vowel pairing such as “ma.” In modern Japanese, katakana is most commonly used to represent words taken from a foreign language.

Words commonly written in hiragana or kanji may also be written in katakana in advertisements for emphasis.

a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	ra	wa
ア	カ	サ	タ	ナ	ハ	マ	ヤ	ラ	ワ
i	ki	shi	chi	ni	hi	mi		ri	
イ	キ	シ	チ	ニ	ヒ	ミ		リ	
u	ku	su	tsu	nu	fu	mu	yu	ru	wo
ウ	ク	ス	ツ	ヌ	フ	ム	ユ	ル	ヲ
e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me		re	
エ	ケ	セ	テ	ネ	ヘ	メ		レ	
o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	ro	n
オ	コ	ソ	ト	ノ	ホ	モ	ヨ	ロ	ン

Kanji 漢字

Kanji are the Chinese characters used in Japanese writing. Originally, Japanese had no written language and when Chinese characters were first used over 1500 years ago they were in documents written in Chinese and would have been read as such. Kanji were eventually adopted to represent Japanese words and currently represent nouns, adjective stems, and verb stems. Hiragana and katakana were derived from kanji to supplement for verb and adjective endings and words without kanji, as well as borrowed words. Since kanji were adopted from Chinese, they have at least two readings, an *onyomi* and a *kunyomi*, or the Chinese pronunciation and the Japanese pronunciation respectively. The *onyomi*, or Chinese reading, is most commonly used in kanji compounds. A kanji in isolation is usually pronounced with its *kunyomi*, or Japanese pronunciation.