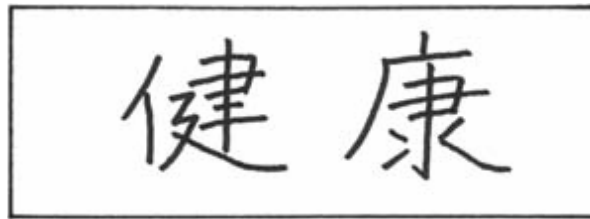


# Japanese Culture



Researched by:

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### A. Demographics

- According to the U.S. census (2000) there are approximately 796,700 Japanese people residing in the United States.
- Additionally, 55,537 people identified as part Japanese.
- There are approximately 616 Japanese people living in Maine, primarily residing in the southern region of the state.

### B. Brief History of Japan

- Rice cultivation begins around 100 B.C.
- Between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., rice cultivation practices influence the evolution of social class structure.
- Japan started as an Imperialist military in 645.
- Monasteries gain political power between 710 and 794.
- Elected officials are considered Erai (great, respected).
- Government respects the virtues of Buddhist and Confucius beliefs.
- Japanese government originally based around a Buddhist constitution by 794.
- Korea becomes a Japanese Colony in 1910.
- In 1912, Emperor encourages citizens to work to strengthen industry to make Japan prosperous.
- The Communist Party is formed in 1922.
- By 1945, the military becomes Nationalist.

### Brief History of Relations Between Japan and the United States

- In 1853, the U.S. demands to use ports in Japan for commercial trade. This marks the end of Japan's isolation, and the new "Meiji" government began new programs geared towards industrialization and militarization.
- As Japan modernized, displaced Japanese farmers began immigrating to the United States. Between 1885 and 1924, approximately 200,000 Japanese migrated to Hawaii, and 180,000 moved to the mainland.
- In 1924, U.S. Senate passes the Immigration Act, restricting immigration into the United States. Japan views this as a racial insult.
- In December 1941, the United States joins World War II after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.
- Approximately 110,000 Japanese-Americans from the Pacific coast are removed from their homes and forced to live in internment camps.
- The United States defeats Japan at sea in June of 1942.
- On August 6, 1945, the United States drops the atomic bomb on the Japanese City of Hiroshima. On August 9, 1945, the U.S. drops a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.
- September 2, 1945, Japan surrenders to U.S.

- After the end of the war, the U.S. forces democratic reforms on Japanese Government, and plays a role in the reconstruction of the country.
- Japan regains independence in 1952.
- The 1950's to the 1970's mark the start of Japan's economic growth.

#### C. Foods

- Rice, sometimes referred to as “the essence of culture” is a staple.
- Sushi (sometimes referred to as pickled fish or meat) is another popular course and is generally prepared with rice.
- The most common and basic soup is *miso shiru*, which generally contains *wakame* (seaweed), tofu, pickles, and fish.
- *Tsukemono* (pickled vegetables) are commonly used in *miso shiru* and also as side dishes for other various courses.
- Noodles (*udon*, *soba*, *ramen*, etc.) are popular side dishes.
- Dining utensils are primarily chopsticks.
- *Shoyu* (soy sauce) is a popular flavoring.
- Soy products (tofu, edemame, soy sauce) are staples.

#### D. Dress

- People of Japan wear various modern styles of clothing including pants, shirts, sweaters, etc.
- Traditional clothing is worn for special occasions.
- The Kimono is traditionally the clothing worn in Japan. Design and color has changed from each Japanese era and is worn by all genders and ages. There are several kinds of Kimonos for men and women, and depending on the occasion, specific Kimonos are selected for specific engagements. Men's Kimonos are generally black and women's Kimonos are usually colorful and floral.
- The most common Japanese footwear is the *zori* and *geta*, which are sandals made of wood with leather or cloth on the soles for support. On rainy days, *ashidas* (*getas* with high soles) are worn. Traditional Japanese footwear is still very common today, though sneakers and dress shoes are also worn.

#### E. Language/Communication

- Japan is a collectivist society, and members tend to prioritize others before themselves.
- When communicating with others, the Japanese value harmony within the group, and tend to believe that contention will create embarrassment or disharmony. To avoid this, speech is often indirect or ambiguous.
- Both men and women are relatively reserved in their displays of emotion.

- In conversation, the Japanese will frequently apologize for themselves and praise the person they are speaking with.
- Bowing is used for greetings and saying good-bye.
- Bowing is also highly respectful and there is order to who bows first when greeting, for example when a patient and a doctor meet, the doctor will bow first as they are the wiser and more respected of the two. Generally, the same applies for hand shakes.
- The Japanese employ silence within conversation, leaving space to listen, interpret, and formulate thoughtful responses.
- In groups, the Japanese tend to make decisions based on consensus, and are concerned with ensuring that all members agree.
- Japanese people take time to reflect on how they will tackle a problem, and believe that the means are just as important as the ends.
- Before meetings, Japanese people will research the person they are about to meet to ensure a pleasing relationship.
- Japanese often prefer to communicate through writing.
- Japanese written language includes three types of characters. There are over 2,000 characters used in the Japanese language.

#### F. Religion and Holidays

- The Japanese primarily practice Shinto and Buddhist religions. Many people also incorporate Taoism and the teachings of Confucius.
- Approximately 1% of the population of Japan practices Christianity.
- Through religion, the Japanese value their ancestors, family, the natural world and humanity.
- If Buddhism is practiced, then a domestic Buddhist altar is displayed within the home. Mountaintop shrines and temples are built for worship.
- Festivals are annually celebrated for each religion.
  
- *Oshogatsu* (Japanese New Year or New Month)
- *Setsubun*, February 11 (National Founding Day)
- *Shumbun-no-hi*, March 20 or 21 (Vernal Equinox Day)
- *Umi-no-hi*, July 20 (Marine Day)
- *Shubun-no-hi*, September 23 or 24 (Autumnal Equinox Day)
- *Kinro-kansha-no-hi*, November 23 (Labor Thanksgiving Day)
- *Tenno-tanjobi*, December 23 (Emperor's Birthday)
- *O-misoka*, December 31 (New Year's Eve)

#### G. Family, Relationships, and Roles:

- Japan is a collectivist society, and personal identity is largely based on identification with larger group.

- Interactions are based on clearly defined social roles within a vertical hierarchy.
- Different roles are outwardly acknowledged by adhering to social customs (i.e: deferential speech)
- Women have historically been responsible for child rearing. Recently, educational programs designed to help men become more involved with their families have been presented in the workplace.
- Equality between men and women has yet to be entirely established, though the government is making efforts to promote equality between all people of Japan. The Japanese government has recently created ways to promote women in society, especially through opportunities of education.
- The principles of gimu (obligation) and sekinin (responsibility) guide the Japanese within their interpersonal interactions and relationships.

#### H. Concepts of Work, Play, and Time

- Japanese value hard work, and view “enduring hardship” as a central moral virtues.
- People form their concept of self around the work they do.
- Recreation and sports are accepted for simple leisure, but work and education tends to be more highly valued within the culture. Many Japanese find meaning and identity through hard work and industry.
- Harmony and trust are prioritized in the workplace.
- Advancement is based on seniority and merit, though mobility is more horizontal than vertical.
- Many workers hold one job for their entire career

#### I. Health and Wellness

- Japan provides universal health care coverage; citizens are either covered by the Employees’ Health Insurance or covered by the National Health Insurance.
- The Employees’ Health Insurance covers people who work for medium to large companies, national or local government, private schools, and some smaller companies.
- The National Health Insurance covers people who work in agriculture, forestry, fisheries; those who are self-employed or the unemployed (including expectant mothers) also qualify.
- An allowance is paid for funeral expenses.
- If a long-term illness arises, an allowance will be supplied based on the individual’s salary.
- Premiums for both insurances average at about 4% of the individual’s salary.
- If moving out of the country, a refund of no less than half and up to three

times the individuals' salary will be paid if the individual paid into their insurance for at least six months prior to the move.

- Traditional medicine includes a variety of spiritual practices, acupuncture, herbal remedies, cupping, and dietary healing.
- Japan is a fast-paced and high stress society, and current trends focus on reduction of stress and promotion of relaxation. Some strategies include animal therapy, oxygen bars, and nap salons.

### Challenges

- Due to the hierarchical structure of Japanese society, many Japanese people would not question their health care providers. This can make it difficult to assess a client's true understanding of, and feelings regarding their treatment.
- In an attempt to avoid inconveniencing others, Japanese may be reluctant to share their medical concerns.
- Hospital stays are generally longer in Japan than the average stay in the West to ensure great quality for care, therefore creating longer waiting periods for future patients.
- There is a stigma against the mental health population and is often labeled with shame.

### Suggestions for Health Care Providers

- As Japanese culture is collective, health care providers should attempt to include family members in treatment planning and implementation.
- In conversations, many Japanese people use silent pauses to think and formulate. Health care providers can respect this silence by resisting the urge to fill in the silence with more talk.
- It is important to remember certain rules that pertain to greetings, such as bowing or shaking hands.
- Healthcare providers should consider the effects of stress on health and wellness.
- Japanese society is arranged in a vertical hierarchy, and the Japanese often place great trust in the knowledge and experience of professionals; therefore, a professional should take note of this and respect the individuals' requests.
- More attention should be made to those with mental illnesses, care providers need to educate about the possibilities for those inflicted with mental illnesses.

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