

## Shyness~ Are Japanese people really shy? ~

### Outline

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### 1. Introduction

Everyone has various characteristics because they have different lives, jobs, condition, experiences, and sets of values, and these are deeply related to their background and culture. However, many foreigners say that Japanese people are shy (Top 10 Adjectives to describe Japanese people characteristics, n.d).

I also agree with them because when I meet many foreign people in the United States for the first time, I cannot talk with them easily. Also, at that time, I find it difficult to speak out during class even though I want to say something. Thus, I really am concerned and wondered why I am shy, and why some people say Japanese are shy, but I also wondered if every Japanese is really shy. Therefore, I

will figure out the doubt whether Japanese people are really shy by my research and some researcher's opinions.

## 2. How do foreigners describe Japanese people?

- What do you think about Japanese people? – If people ask the question to Japanese people, it is hard to answer because we cannot identify our nationality by themselves. However, if you ask foreigners, they can answer more easily than Japanese do. According to a research (Top 10 Adjectives to Describe Japanese People Characteristics, n.d), Japanese people are described by 10 adjectives. First, they often said, “Japanese are polite”, which means Japanese people have a polite nation, and it is said that the “polite” came from the East Asia philosophy based on Confucianism. Confucius says there is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son. (Analects XII, 11, trans. Legge). It means that each person has a different social status, depending on the person one is dealing with. The teaching of social harmony has been taught well in Japan. Also, foreigners say Japanese people are the most “punctual” nation in the world. For example, when looking at the train in Japan, being late 5 minutes in Japan, people are more

likely to think the train has gone. However, there is nothing such a thought in Malaysia even though the train is late 1 hour. Moreover, Japanese people tend to think of others, before considering themselves, so they are often called as “Kind”. Also, Japanese people always give an image of “hardworking” because Japan is ranked 12nd in the world as its “longest annual working time”. However, in fact, they work more over-time that is not stated in the official document.

Additionally, Japanese tend to show respect and deal politely with other people, so foreigner people often say Japanese people are “respectful”. Therefore, they have the idiom that is “good manner even between friends”. Besides, from the western’s view, Asian people are considered as “intelligent” and “smart”. For example, they are good at languages, math, or business. Moreover, they like to work with a “group” rather than any individual member. It is different from many western countries.

Also, because of the social harmony thinking, Japanese tend to be “formal” in dealing with social relationships. However, they can be a little informal in only to their internal relations. As you know from these facts, Japanese tend to think and respect others too much. Also, in addition to these characteristics, Japanese

people often painted as shy. Of course not all Japanese are shy to stranger, but the majority of Japanese have the shy image.

### 3. My hypothesis

I believe the reason why Japanese people are considered shy by other countries people is relating to Japanese culture because Japanese people take it for granted that they have to respect others, so they sometimes worry about other's thinking too much, like how they are thinking about me. Therefore, when they also talk with foreigners, they tend to be shy because they try to behave politely, and not harm others. That is why I think the reason why Japanese people are shy is strongly connect with Japanese culture, which is respecting others too much. Therefore, I will figure out whether my hypothesis is true or not by research.

### 4. What is shyness?

Before starting research, we have to make sure what is called shyness in general. Most people feel shy at least once. When we stand in front of many people, when they talk with stranger, we will feel shy. Shyness is typically negative feeling about themselves, or worries about how others view them. Thus,

shy people seem awkward to others. Also, especially this phenomenon occurs when they are in contact with unfamiliar people. At this time, they are worried or tense about themselves, and often become nervous (American Psychological Association, n.d). Additionally, shy people have specific symptoms, and these are separated in two pattern. First one is called outward symptoms, and it physiological and behavioral types. Physiological symptoms are blushing, sweating, a pounding heart, or upset stomach. Also, there are some behavioral symptoms, which are not speaking or saying very little, stuttering, very little or no eye contact, standing apart from others, and speaking in a low voice. These symptoms we can see clearly, and it is hard to hide.

Second one is known as inward symptoms such as self-consciousness, negative thoughts, fear of being judged by others, excessive worry, feeling embarrassed, anxiety, sadness, or depression. These symptoms happen on the inside and they are easy to hide compared to outward symptoms (Don't Be Shy, n.d).

## 5. Research

I asked 20 people 10 who are Japanese, and others are from foreign

countries. The reason why I choose these people is that I wanted to know the differences of opinion in each country, and I also wondered if not only Japanese but also foreigners think Japanese are shy, so I chose these people. Also, I made 4 questions (1. Do you think Japanese people are shy? [Especially compared to other countries people] 2. Why do you think so? 3. I think it is related to Japanese culture like Japanese people respect others too much. Do you agree or disagree? 4. Do you think all Japanese people are shy? ) I asked these questions to 20 people, and I investigated the differences.

## 6. Consequences of the research

From the research, I found interesting opinions between Japanese and Foreigners. First, through the first question, we could see Japanese people think they are shy more than foreigners because all of the ten Japanese people said “I think Japanese are shy”, but a few foreigners responded Japanese are not always shy. The reason why they thought like that is even though Japanese are passive in class, they are extrovert, and also some of them said it depends on personality. On the other hand, people who agreed with the question said that Japanese

people are often afraid of making mistake, especially when they speak English.

Also, they tend to worry about what others think about us, so they try to be polite when they communicate with someone. Therefore, many Japanese believe they have shyness. Second, I asked them if it is relates to Japanese culture, and 95% of people who I asked said they agree with the opinion. Also, some stated in addition to the Japanese people, Japanese education might be one of the main reason, because Japanese education does not focus on the individual which means group society is more important. That is why there is the environment that they cannot share their feelings or thoughts freely. Third, all of them answered not all Japanese people are shy, but majority of them are shy.

## 7. Some researcher's opinions

Some other researchers have some unique and different opinions about shyness. Dr. Bob Tobin, who is professor of Business and Commerce at Keio University, there is the fear of speaking English, fear of speaking up, fear of not being understood (Are Japanese people really shy, July, 2014). It means shyness then becomes a useful shield to protect the supposedly shy person from speaking up or speaking out. According to researchers (Tokyo Premium Real Estate, n.d.),

there are two typical types of Japanese who are in front of foreign people. One is “behavior of shyness”. When someone who is from overseas asks some question to them, they would escape from foreign people. On the other hand, there are aggressive Japanese people who want to talk with foreigners. However, they have no freaking idea for conversation, so it sometimes makes foreigners uncomfortable. Also, some people say, ” they are kind and polite”, but some foreigners say, “ I feel ignored” although it is not actually true. It is caused by always having fear that someone might accuse them. Additionally, many Japanese people are not good at making a presentation in front of people because they tend to be too careful about the eyes of others. Therefore, Japanese will take long time until they can talk with someone without hesitation.

Some people say the national character of Japan is difficult to understand. Probably, the reason why people think like that is it might relate to Confucianism and Zen. In the thought of them, modesty and humility are virtues in Japan. Also, the Confucianism, which emphasizes courtesy, and Zen, which simplicity and the tranquility have become rooted in Japan. Eyes of other people are not only a fear, but it is also the cause of social problems.



Moreover, to speak English is hard for Japanese people because they tend to be afraid of making mistakes. It is said that English skills of Japanese are relative high, but the pronunciation is totally different between English and Japanese, and they have only a little opportunity to speak English. That is why many Japanese are not good at speaking English. In addition, they are educated well in the school, so people, especially who are good at learning English, tend to be afraid of making a mistake when they speak English.

#### 8. How can they overcome it?

However, even if they have nationality which is shy, Japanese can change themselves by using some ways. First, they have to understand their shyness. In other words, it is thinking about the root of their shyness, and for some reasons they get embarrassed when the spotlight hits them. Thus, we have to consider about when and why we become shy. Here are the possibilities of where the shyness come from, which are they have weak self imagine, or others label them as shy. Moreover, make a list of situations that make them feel nervous because by writing down the situations, we can image and prepare for it. After that, conquer the list. After making the lists, start working to overcome them, one by

one. Also, if you start with “easier” one firstly, it will help to build your confidence so that you can continue to tackle more difficult situations. Finally, challenge yourself. For instance, setting a goal for yourself is an easy way to challenge yourself like I want to speak English more fluently with native speaker. Also, you had better practice placing yourself in uncomfortable situations. Actually, you do not want to be in the place, but you do not need to put yourself in too hard an environment. Practicing little by little is the best way to get over your shyness.

## 9. Conclusion

For some people, especially most Japanese, shyness is hard to deal with by themselves. Through this opportunity to research about shyness, I reconfirm “Japanese are shy”, but not all of them are shy, and there are some extrovert Japanese people. As I stated before, I also believe the reason why Japanese people are called shy is relating to Japanese culture. However, I also knew Japanese education and society, which is focused on individuals, greatly affect their nationality. Moreover, in some cases, their background might cause those characteristics. However, it is difficult to change our nationality, but I also think we have to be proud of our Japanese culture. Even if it sometimes triggers people

shyness, we have a splendid nationality such as “respectful”. Respectful is the thing, which we have to be proud of the most because it shows how we can describe Japanese people. According to Japanese education that cherishes group working, we built our wonderful nationality. Also, if we strongly want to overcome shyness, we can get over it by using ourselves. Therefore, we do not have to really worry about that. That is why, it is clear that Japanese people are actually shy, and it is caused by Japanese culture, society, and education.

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