

THE SPECIAL CULTURE OF JAPAN

The culture of Japan contains a deep and meaningful philosophy. Whatever area such as cuisine, calligraphy, fencing, flower watching,...is summarized into a theory and an art. Several special features of Japanese culture are presented as follows.

1. The Lifestyle

Japanese people prefer an *irreducible* lifestyle in which home furnishings are arranged at minimum. In their opinion, too much furniture means loss of individual freedom, loss of time, so it is advisable to keep really essential and vital things for home. Gifts, despite from important givers or souvenirs, they still leave if the gift is not in need. In fact, in tsunamis or earthquakes, fewer injured people are recorded in home with little furniture than that of much furniture.

2. The culture of communication

Japanese society shows unique characteristics of communication. The Japanese usually bow several times in a day, their body and head bow for about a minute with their hands on their hips for the first meeting. For the following meetings, they just bow a little. The level of bowing depends on the social status of both communicators.

- The Japanese tend to suspect utterances, but they pay much attention to actions. They use silence as a strategy of communication. In their mind, talking little is better than talking much. In negotiations, the most senior usually talk the least and what he says is the final decision. Silence is also used as a way of not losing others' face.

- When communicating, the Japanese do not keep direct eye contact with hearers, but look at a mediatory object like a tie, a

book, or a jellery ...or bow, looking at the other side. Keeping direct eye contact with hearers is considered to be impolite, rude and non-standard.

- The Japanese always explain clearly what they mean and what others say ambiguously. They never say "No" or say that they do not understand. If not agreeing or supporting others' ideas, they often say "That's quite difficult". Thus, their smile may be an expression of embarrassment, but not an enjoyment for sure.

- Giving money is considered to be rude to the Japanese, but cash is regarded as a standard gift in wedding or to children on new year occasion.

3. The traditional dress - Kimono

Kimono is a gown which is large enough to wind wearers fixedly and tightly with many belts and ribbons. There are two types of Kimono: large sleeved and short sleeved. Married women are not favor of large-sleeved Kimono as it may cause inconvenience when doing work. When females wear Kimono, their hair is dressed very finically to appeal to others by their reserved beauty and special charm.

Kimono has been in use for a few hundred years recently. These days, because of international integration and modern life, Kimono has not been used everyday as it used to, but just in formal parties, festivals or on holidays. More females wear Kimono than males and female Kimono is usually colorful with attractive designs whereas male Kimono is darker without special designs.

The only one size seems to be a unique feature of Kimono, so it is worry-free to see whether it fits or not. When wearing Kinomo, wearers are necessary to wind

tightly enough to be fit their body. Prior to wearing Kimono, juban - a kind of undervest must be worn to keep Kimono clean. After that, the right side is wound first, then the left side, and finally silky belt Obi is used to tie. It takes much time to put on Kimono, wearers hardly do by themselves. Also, Kimono wearers must wear wooden clogs, and white socks Tabi.

4. The Food and Drink of Japan

Mentioning Japanese cuisine, people usually think about 'first Sushi, then Tea'. Japanese food do not abuse too many spices, but put a great weight on freshness and purity of dishes. Surrounded by seas, sea food is included in most of Japanese diet. Like other Asian countries, rice is the main food. Rice is cooked and covered by dry seaweed bar to make Sushi, regarded as the national dish of Japan.

Talking about drink of Japan, the whole admires Sake, a unique wine dated in ancient time of the country of Sunrise. Sake is a traditional mild wine, made from rice through a multi-step procedure of fermentation with so many rules.

In the culture of Japan, the young must pour tea for the senior; from the most senior to the least, and finally for themselves. When Sake is poured for someone, they must keep the cup with one hand, and the other is put under the cup to show politeness.

5. Samurai – the Symbol of Japanese martial art

Japan is a country with high martialism due to the damage of natural disasters and the loss of severe wars. The Japanese have forged themselves to have a determined and sustainable will in work, in which martialism is regarded as an ideal personality with a determined and willful lifestyle that the Japanese want to achieve.

In the time of chaos, Japan was divided

into many smaller territories which used to fight against one another, so Samurai was born as a high demand of society. Later, the country was united, a new social system was established in the time of Edo (1603-1867), Samurai was ranked on the highest level in Japan, followed by farmers, craftsmen and businessmen. They lived in castles in downtown, and were the only people who had swords and were provided with finance by landlords.

Samurai (侍) means two things: first, in the Japanese mind, Samurai is part of martialists, followers of Shogun (Generals) or Daimyo (Landlords) ranked higher than other martialists; second, in the understanding and popular use of foreigners, Samurai is a class of martialists including Shogun and Daimyo. Samurai symbolizes bravery and loyalty of the Japanese. Talking about Samurai, people immediately think about the image of courageous fighters with a long sword in their hand and incredible energy and will which anyone highly respects.

6. The Martial arts of Japan

Japanese martial art is divided into two big groups: traditional martial arts and modern martial arts as sports. Well-known martial arts include:

Karatedo (martial art without weapons). In ancient time, just people in Okinawa practised this martial art. After Revolution in 1868, Karate become popular all over the nation and after the Second World War, it was spread all over the world. Karate has more than 3 million practitioners and about 30,000,000 participants all over the world. This is martial art with techniques of attack and self-defence, including hitting, punching, and kicking with relatively protective techniques to response to these actions.

Judo (martial art of soft techniques).

In 1882, Kano Jigoro formed Judo based on Jujutsu (Soft martial art). Judo does not use weapons, either, but control the rival with techniques such as throwing, pressing, grasping or locking joints of bone. Judo is very different from Jujutsu: in Jujutsu fighters are allowed to punch, kick and push the rival, while Judo bans these actions because of danger. Judo has become an Olympic sport game since 1964. Now, about 1.5 million of Japanese people achieve the standard of Judo and about 20 million people throughout the world practise this martial art.

Kendo (martial art with sword Shinai) is a sport of martial art in which fighting at some point of rival body is scored with a bamboo sword (Shinai), 118cm in maximum length. Fighters use four protective devices: Men (face mask), Do (chest cuirass), two gloves of Kote (to protect arms and hands) and Tare (hip cuirass). Like fencing in western countries, Kendo has been a modern sport. Fencers in western countries hold a steel sword with one hand, but Japanese fencers keep a wooden sword Shinai with both hands.

7. The Japanese calligraphy

The Japanese calligraphy Shodo is one of the most famous visual arts of the country. Of 127 million Japanese people, approximately 10 million, including well-known people are learning and practising

writing calligraphy. This is one of the arts highly appreciated in the country of Sunrise. The Japanese calligraphy has gained many considerable achievements since the 8th century (Heian time), and since 10th, 11th century.



(Holiday of Calligraphy on 2nd February in Japan)

These days, calligraphy is considered to be a modern art with much innovation. In the early July annually Japan usually holds exhibitions on calligraphy in Tokyo and other nine cities in Japan, as well as in nearly 20 countries in the world. Apart from 2nd of February when the Holiday of Calligraphy is taken place, calligraphy is greatly used in weddings, funerals, house-warming parties, celebration of university entrance or group entrance. Currently, calligraphy is used in general education curriculum for high school students in Japan.

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