

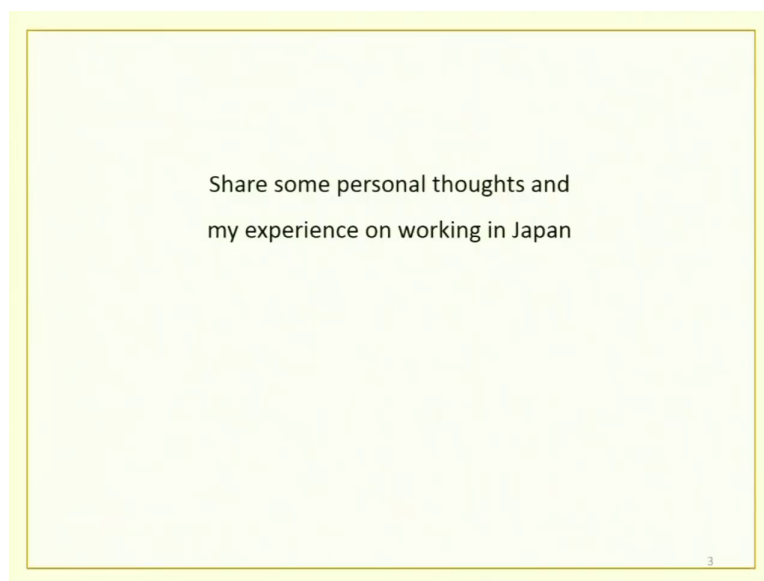
Introduction to Japanese Language and Culture - II
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Lecture: 39
Working in Japan

Konnichiwa minasan/こんにちは みなさん (FL) and welcome to the class in the second lecture series on Introduction to Japanese Language and Culture. So, now this is our last week and as we inch towards the end of the series, I thought it would be a good idea to learn more about Japan. So, I have requested Professor Sudhir Mishra from the Department of Civil Engineering, IIT Kanpur to talk on the approach of Japanese people towards their work. So, some of you I am sure would want to go for higher studies to Japan, some of you would want to work for companies in Japan, some of you would just want to go visit Japan or just be interested in Japanese culture. So, I thought that you might find this discussion interesting. So, let us see what he has to say?:- *Konnichiwa and namaskar minasan*, this is Sudhir Mishra and I teach here in the Department of Civil Engineering, at IIT Kanpur.

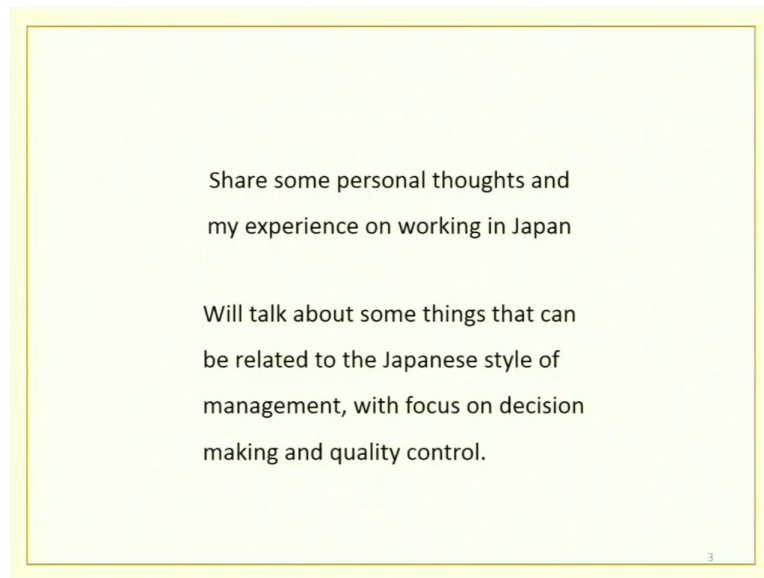
It is a pleasure to be talking to you about some of my experiences in Japan and today the talk is not about the language but ~~what~~ it is about sharing my experiences and thought on working in Japan.

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I worked there for about seven years; five years in one student, two years in another and I will share with you what I saw; how the work environment in Japan is?:-

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So, we will talk about some things that can be related to the Japanese style of management with focus on decision making how they work, quality control which is an integral part of the thought process in Japan and since this discussion is based on personal thought and experience there is always an element of subjectivity in it. It is like saying that if a foreigner is asked who has been to India for a couple of years, do all Indians celebrate Diwali or Eid or whatever the festival is.

Depending on what kind of an experience he has had in India he will answer the question one way or another. And that Foreigner to whom he tells the story comes back to India asks another Indian that well I have learned this about India that fellow may or may not agree with that. So, the moral of the story is that what I am going to tell you is a matter of personal experience. Maybe the Japanese if you ask Japanese they agree with it, they may not agree with it they may say that well this indeed used to happen several years ago but it does not happen any longer. So, all these things are possible, having said that let me share some of the thoughts.

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Is Japan a small country ?

First of all let me ask you a question; do you think Japan is a small country? Obvious question would be that small in what respect and so on but then let us stick to the question is Japan a small country.

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Country / Region	Area (in '000 sq.km)
India	3287
China	9597
Japan	378
USA	9833
EU	4233

Now if you look at countries and regions in the world and look at their areas in thousands of square kilometers; Japan surely does not seem to be a very large country compared to China, U.S, even India, the entire European Union have put in one place. So, if you look at these numbers Japan you can say is not a very large country. Of course please verify these details in this day and age you should always verify them, there is enough literature available enough sources available on the internet and so on.

Where you can check some of these facts and say that well this is correct this is partially corrected so, on. So, now to put this area business in perspective there is some homework for you.

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Country / Region	Area (in '000 sq.km)
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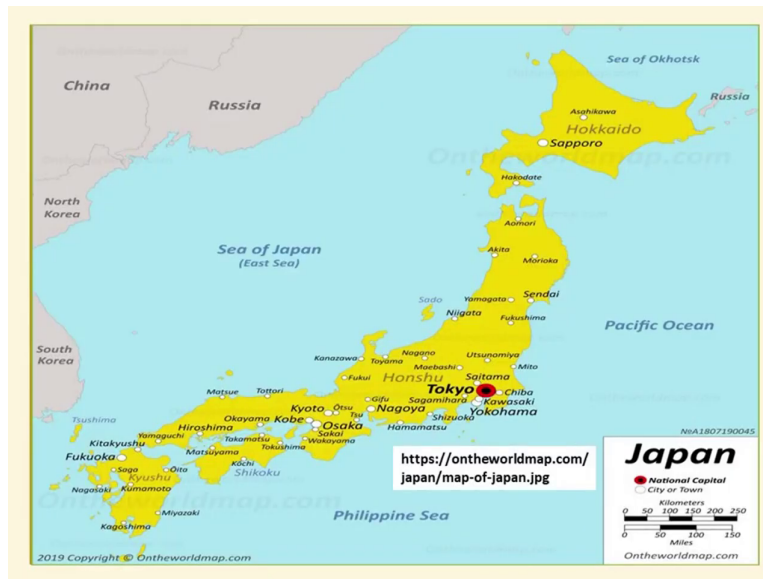
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Food for thought:
Find out some typical distances between major cities in Japan and try to relate to distance you may be familiar with

Find out some typical distances between major cities in Japan and try to relate this to the distances that you may be familiar with. For example you can find out the distance between Tokyo and Hiroshima find out the distance between Tokyo and Sapporo, relate these two distances let us say to distances that you are more familiar with Delhi ~~daily~~ to Hyderabad, Delhi ~~they need~~ to Kolkata, Bombay to Pune.

So, that will give you an idea that well whether this 378000 square kilometers which is roughly one tenth the size of India; how does it translate as far as distances involved is concerned that will also put in perspective for you the actual geography.

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Japan is an island country and it is fairly long it is not very wide at places but the distances are not so, small; have not talked about the area let us talk about another dimension which defines or which has been used to define whether a country is big or small and that is population.

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Country / Region	Area (in '000 sq.km)	Population (in '000)
India	3287	135,26,42
China	9597	141,26,00
Japan	378	12,55,02
USA	9833	33,18,93
EU	4233	44,70,07

Please verify !!

Food for thought:
 Find out the population of major cities in Japan and try to relate to the data for cities you may be familiar with.

So, if you look at the population distribution you can say that well in India it is about 135 crores, China is about 141 crores, Japan is 12 crores, U.S is 33 the European Union is 44. So, here too Japan is 12 crores and that is about one tenth the size of India by the way of population; once again verify this and try to find out the population of the major cities in Japan. So, first of all you will have to know what the major cities are maybe Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima, Sapporo, Nagoya, Nagasaki and so on.

So, then you will be able to relate that what is the size of these cities in terms of population in terms of areas and you will be confronted with the question as an Indian would be if we were asked ok what is the population of Delhi or what is the population of Mumbai? Now one can say that well we are talking of Municipal limits that is one population but in both these cases in Delhi there is the NCR region.

So, there are regions around Delhi which by and large can be taken to be a part of Delhi in certain contexts, for example the population; for example the number of people who work in Delhi and so on. So, the same questions or the same issues will confront you when you are talking about the population in let us say Tokyo. So, there is a Tokyo metropolitan area, there are areas around Tokyo, Chiba, Yokohama, parts of Saitama where the population lives there yes by the way of postal address but they work in Tokyo.

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Country / Region	Area (sq.km)	Population (in '000)	Population Density (/sq.km)
India	3287263	135,26,42	411
China	9596961	141,26,00	147
Japan	377975	12,55,02	332
USA	9833520	33,18,93	33
EU	4233262	44,70,07	105

Please verify !!

So, now if I combine these two parameters that is the area in square kilometers here and population in thousands or whatever we have talked about just now, we come up with the measure of population density. How many people are living in a square kilometer in that country? Now if you look at it that way this number and this number is pretty close that is to say that Japan by population density is not a small country compared to India.

It is about one tenth the size in area and about one tenth the size in population and that is why the population densities are more or less the same. So, one has to understand that there are different ways of looking at whether a country is small or large and population density is one of them. So, this discussion here puts a part of our narrative in perspective.

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Food for thought:

- Volume of import and export of Japan
- Compare that with similar figures from some other countries
- The GDP of Japan and that position in the world

Having said that now let us go to some home works figure out the volume of Import and Export of Japan. Try to compare these numbers with similar figures of other countries China, India, U.S any country that you want find out what is the GDP of Japan and that position in the world; what is the size of the economy of Japan in relation to the economy of different countries. The question basically that we need to answer or we need to learn some lessons about is what has made it possible for Japan to achieve what it has achieved.

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- Japan is poor as far as natural resources are concerned, except the large population and the coast line
- It imports raw materials and exports finished goods.
- The country has a well developed manufacturing base, does a huge amount of value addition to goods.
- **To my mind, one of the biggest secrets is the fact that the (relatively) large population is an asset !!**

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In the area of technology in the area of economy with a small area, relatively small population but a lot of population density; go back to some of the books and facts we will realize that Japan is poor as far as natural resources are concerned except for the large population and a large coastline. It imports raw materials and exports finished goods, what

does that mean? The country has a very well developed manufacturing base and does a huge amount of value addition to the goods.

Try to see the amount of import; try to see the amount of exports and what is happening in between is the value addition to those products. Look at it that way for the different regions different countries in the world and you will realize this very important thing here that is what is the amount of value addition going on as far as the manufacturing sector is concerned. It imports raw materials exports finished goods that means that is precisely, what is value addition?:-

To my mind one of the biggest secrets in this case is the fact that the relatively large population in Japan is an asset. Now the question is, how does that population become an asset and that is the central theme of the Japanese style of management, the Japanese functioning, the Japanese society and so on and so forth. In that education system it is drilled into the student.

We are a poor country as far as natural resources are concerned and therefore we need to work hard to value add to the raw material that we import so that our goods can sell in the world market.

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- It has been able to do that because of an uncompromising attitude towards 'quality'
- Japanese products are now synonymous with quality. Japan has made huge contributions to the theory and practice of quality control and management

Suggested reading : History of quality management

*Kaizen
Quality
Circle*

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So, moving forward you can sell your products in the market the global market, global competition only when you have an uncompromising attitude towards quality you have to be able to produce goods and sell goods which are quality products and if they are quality

products yes you can ask for a premium price. So, the point basically is quality products everyone has to be very, very careful conscious of producing quality products.

No matter what they are producing, what they are doing it is all a matter of quality doing it properly doing it right to the last detail and getting it right the first time. These are the kind of principles that we hear in a management class. Japanese products are now synonymous with quality; Japan has made huge contributions to the theory and practice of quality control and management. I would request you those of you are interested; those who are specially working in the industry to look up the history of quality management in the world.

And you will find that a lot of quality related literature developed post-second World War a lot of things happened in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and try to identify how the Japanese have been an integral part they have been at the forefront of quality control and quality management techniques. Things that come to my mind immediately are the concepts of let us say Kaizen or Quality Circle these are Concepts which are Central to the idea of quality control on a industrial shop floor. The Japanese have been at the forefront of some of these concepts.

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Japanese companies always think of

- How can an existing product be improved
- Excellent innovators – PLUS ALPHA
- What can be added to a product – combine and radio and cassette player, add functionalities to a phone, or a watch....

Better [*Safety*, *Economic*, *Function*, *Ergonomics*] *Innovate*

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In Japan whatever limited experience I have with working in Japan dealing with people who are working in different companies. The companies are always thinking of how an existing product can be improved they look at a product whether it is their own product whether it is a product from a competitor within Japan outside Japan and try to see that okay this is what the product is can we make it better. Now this business of making better is very interesting better could be in what?

It could be in terms of safety that product could become safer to use, that product could become more economical, it could become cheaper, it could become more functional. You have a product which has functionalities 1 2 and 3 you try to find out whether functionality 4 or a 5 can be added to it without adding to the cost without compromising the safety, ergonomics, whether the product becomes more ergonomic.

Looking at these kinds of concepts; looking at these kind of different dimensions of a product they are always looking to innovate. Now that is very important to understand that innovation is at the bottom line of Japanese production, quality of course yes without compromising quality and what is quality is a different story altogether? We are not getting into that at least in this discussion.

Excellent innovators in terms of plus Alpha. Now this plus Alpha was a very interesting thing which I was told when I started working my boss told me that well everybody does research in concrete and that is the area in which I really work, but he said that well in our research institute we should try to produce a Concrete Plus Alpha and this Alpha here refers to some of these things.

A concrete or a construction method which is better safer in this day and age we could add sustainable, we could add cheaper we have already talked about it what can be added to a product combine a radio and a cassette player functionalities to a phone or a watch. So, that is how the Japanese thought process works. And this idea of innovation runs across the company, it is not only the R and D department which will do it.

It is even the sales people who will do it, it is the marketing people who do it, it is the technical people who do it they may or may not be given specific targets yet they will try to improve that. So, one thing that is very important as far as Japanese management or Japanese thought process is concerned and companies is the idea of innovation. The idea of adding something to it value addition.

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Meticulous plans are drawn up with different contingencies.
These plans are endlessly debated and options considered –
in other words, decision making takes time but the
implementation is very smooth
Helps align the employees' personal objectives with the
company's objectives.
Efforts are made to ensure that all employees feel equal

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Now how does it happen? There we come to management. The Japanese style of management was a big buzzword long ago and perhaps it still is the Japanese style of management as I have seen it is often bottom up and not top down, great emphasis on consensus building involving everyone in the decision making. So, that everyone knows exactly what his or her role is in the scheme of things.

So, we have a company which runs like this, this is the company top and this is the company's middle let us say, then there is the grassroots operators here who are at the bottom of the ladder. So, Innovation happens all over the place sometimes the top tells you certain things to do sometimes you suggest to the top that in this product I would like to do this why cannot we try to do this get an approval.

Try to work on it develop a new product and in any major decision making very often different people from here know what their role is because finally once the is received from the top and we have to implement that decision; then everyone really knows that ok this is what the decision is because they have all been part of it. It was a pleasure to work with the Japanese people because they were professional's excellent disciplined team players.

So, the steam play that is working together, feeling that you are part of a team that was what made it different than perhaps working in India. Each player knew what exactly his or her role was in a certain scheme of things and everyone knew the larger picture as well. In top down decision making or in top down decision implementation very often people at the bottom do not know the overall picture and that makes it difficult to implement the entire

decision bits and pieces of it get implemented, bits and pieces do not they lag behind and so on.

As part of decision making, as part of doing something new meticulous plans are drawn up with different contingencies; these plans are endlessly debated and options considered in other words the decision making takes time but implementation is very smooth. So, there is a stage of decision making and there is the stage of implementation.

So, if everyone in the decision making process has been involved they know how the larger picture has emerged what their role will be what their boss's role will be and what is the boss's role going to be. Then the implementation is much easier it is much smoother. In fact this discussion or this approach towards work helps align the employee's personal objectives with the company's objectives and that is something which is very, very important in order to achieve a good work ethic within a corporate organization.

We always talk of this in management that an organization would be good it would be successful if the employees felt a part of the team and their own personal objectives in terms of growth, in terms of promotion and so on that was aligned with the objectives and growth of the company. And that is something which probably in Japan is easier to achieve or it has been achieved to some extent.

One of the preconditions for this kind of a thought process however is long-term employment. Things have changed in Japan but in principle the Japanese companies and the Japanese employees had long-term commitment towards each other. It was not very easy and it was not very common for people to change jobs especially without the employer's consent. There would be some cases where people would change jobs but that would be for very special reasons without severing the relationship with the previous company and so on.

Things have changed in Japan but then that is the original thought process that is the original thinking and that is part of the ethos in working in Japan. Efforts are made to ensure that all employees feel equal. Of course there is a situation where the boss has a higher salary than the person who's working with him or is subordinate. But they feel part of the same team and that is something which gives rise to the typical *sarariman* / サラリマン (FL) or the *kaisha-in* / 会社員 (FL).

In fact if you ask in Japan a lot of people would say that they all belong to the middle class. People who respond that they belong to the middle class in Japan is probably larger than any other part in the world that is because all of them feel that they are all in the same boat. So, that is what is important, that is what is interesting to be working in Japan.

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What makes the Japanese style of management click:

- Team work
- Hard work
- Pride in their work
- Commitment
- Dignity of labour
- Respecting skills
-

Deru kui ga utareru

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Now let me come to a small summary of some of the points that we have been talking about what makes the Japanese style of management click. Teamwork in fact for teamwork I am reminded of a Japanese proverb which says *deru kui ga utareru* / 出る くい が うたれる; ~~(FL)~~ I do not know whether you have done this proverb in this class or not *deru kui ga utareru* / 出る くい が うたれる; *kui* / くい ~~they both (FL)~~ is a pile. So, what we are talking about is in civil engineering construction there are lots of these piles let us say and they are all supposed to be here.

So, that something else can be built on this. Now if there is a situation that this pile extends beyond where it should be; then we need to hammer this pile down to become uniform. Now that is precisely what the proverb is *deru kui ga utareru* / 出る くい が うたれる, *kui* / くい ~~(FL)~~ or pile is protruding, *detemasu* / 出ます ~~(FL)~~ is protruding will be hammered down. Now we can interpret this probability which way we want but in principle to me it means that it is not very expected that somebody would try to stand out in a Japanese team even though everybody would know what their role is maybe even the leadership role.

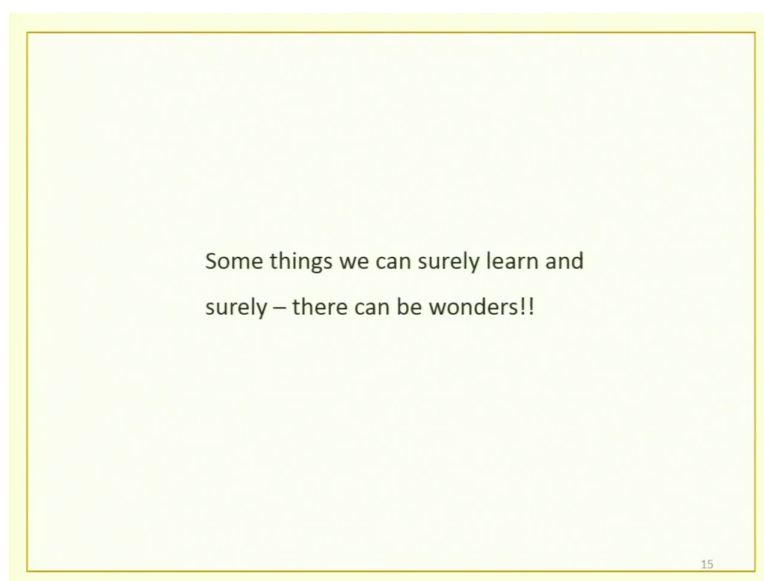
But that does not mean that the leader will stand out, everybody recognizes the leader but at the same time the leader thinks and the people also think that they are all part of the same team. So, teamwork is possibly one of the key elements of Japanese work ethic. Hard work pride in their work they are very proud of the work they are doing no matter what work it is, commitment to that work commitment to the company loyalty that is what we talked about long-term commitment long-term employment.

Only when there is long-term employment and long-term commitment both on part of the employee and the employer there will be the issue of investment from the employer in developing the employee, training the employee in an appropriate manner. Dignity of Labour everybody does what is required to be done without any shame, without any thought that this is not my job this below my dignity to do this job.

Respecting the skills manufacturing engineering are skill based professionals you need welders you need people on the assembly line who may or may not be very highly educated they may not have the highest degrees but they will be highly skillful they need to be highly skillful that has to be respected not only from the point of your salary but also by way of social recognition. So, that is the part of the Japanese management.

There are so many other things that we can talk about I think in a very small bird's eye view of what I learned from Japan is some of these things. What I saw in Japan was some of these things.

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If we are able to learn some of these things imbibe them in our own work ethic I am sure there can be wonders. With this we come to an end of our discussion today *doumo, arigatou gozaimasu* / どうも、ありがとうございます; ~~(FL)~~ thank you so much, it has been a pleasure to be talking to you on different aspects, sharing my experience with you and I wish you all the very best thank you once again.