

COMPARISON OF INDIAN AND JAPANESE CHARACTERISTICS OF THINKING AND BEHAVIOR



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ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparison of India and Japan, highlighting the socio-cultural and behavioral similarities and differences between the two countries. India and Japan have shared diplomatic relations throughout history. The migration of Indians to Japan for education as well as for work has been increasing rapidly in recent years and is expected to keep rising. Naturally, people from both countries are interacting with each other more and more for work, education, and daily interactions. Studying the culture and characteristics of people from both countries is especially relevant in such a situation. There are a lot of cultural differences between India and Japan, with both countries having their own sets of unique characteristics. For example, Indian flexibility is in contrast to Japanese rigidity and standardization. On the other hand, India and Japan have a shared heritage of Buddhism, and as they are both Asian countries, we can see a lot of cultural commonalities. Furthermore, with globalization and a lot of developments in recent years, there is a lot of cultural convergence in both Indian and Japanese cultures. This paper compares India and Japan, taking into account Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Edward Hall's high and low context cultural comparison. It also highlights a few prior studies on India and Japan. Understanding the cultures, communication, and thought patterns of both countries will help build a foundation for further studies of India and Japan such as migration studies, language studies, and other sociocultural studies.

Keywords: India, Japan, Culture, Communication, Migration

INTRODUCTION

A lot of prior research focuses on contrasting cultures, especially Japan and the USA¹²³⁴. There are a lot of individual differences within a culture and a lot of cultural similarities across cultures⁵. Some cross-cultural studies involving the Japanese have not produced findings that would be expected based on Japanology. This is because of cultural convergence due to globalization⁶. However, there are some unique cultural characteristics of India and Japan that can act as a basis for gauging how the two cultures interact with each other.

Indian and Japan

According to the latest data⁷, there are over 40,000 Indians living in Japan and are expected to keep rising. Prior research on Indian migrants in Japan has studied their social lives, ethnic identity, their perceptions of Japanese workers, etc.⁸⁹¹⁰

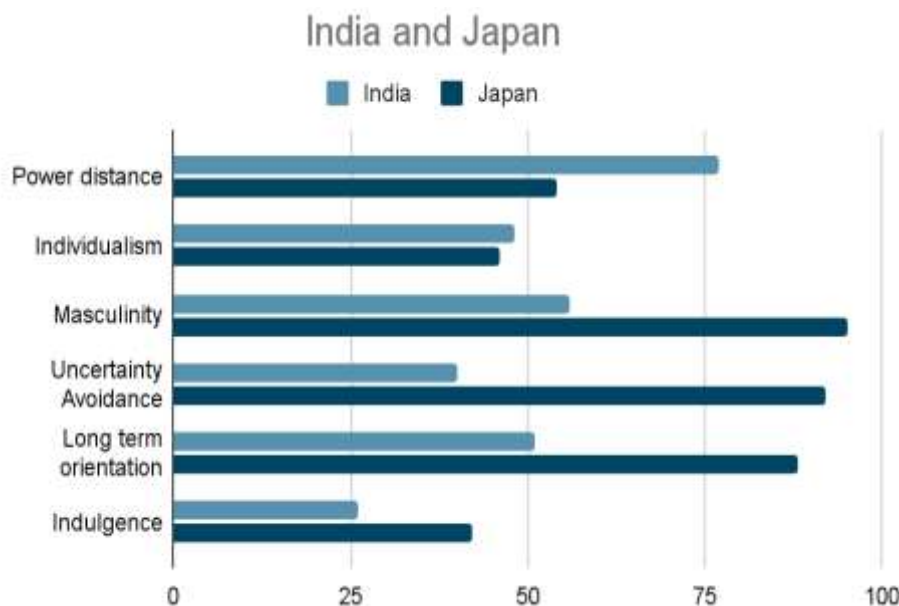
India is a diverse country, and it is nearly impossible to define what it means to be an Indian. There are many languages, regional and climatic differences influencing the characteristics of Indians. However, most Indians have similar perceptions about Japan and Japanese people. They appreciate Japanese punctuality, politeness, and trustworthiness. Indian punctuality depends on the context. Errands always take longer than planned, which is why patience and personal adjustment are very important in India.¹¹ Indians find Japanese people ambiguous in their communication,

leading to misunderstandings. They seem unconcerned with clarity. Their sentences are open-ended, as though protecting oneself from asserting or committing¹². Indians, on the other hand communicate freely and do not hesitate. Japanese people perceive Indians to be talkative and direct in their communication. Japanese people are restricted by systems and are not risk takers, or willing to explore new things. Indians, however, are more willing to fail if it means learning something new. Clashes between the two cultures occur in a number of areas. Many Japanese assume that India needs help or requires their support, and try to preach to Indians, and this never goes well with Indians. Even in terms of technology, Japanese people misunderstand that India needs help. Furthermore, India refuses to take help or support from others, and does not admit when she is in a weak position. Japanese people are thought of as considerate and kind, but also intolerable and haughty. They do not trust Indians, and have a superiority complex about their culture. They feel that are in the higher position. They simply assume that Indians will not be able to handle the computer programs in Japanese¹³.

Language is the biggest hurdle for Indians and Japanese to connect with each other, and for Indians, social life in Japan is a big culture shock¹⁴¹⁵. There are many social obligations and demands in the Japanese society such as rank awareness, fulfilment of social roles, etc. Even Japanese people find these social obligations stressful. There are rules about social behavior, norms of self-display, depending on the context and relationship with the person. Indian social life is entirely different. Personal and professional lives are mixed. There is a lack of privacy in social life and personal space is not very important. Friendships are very deep and committed. Therefore, Japanese social life is hard for Indians to adjust to.

Comparing India and Japan on Hofstede's cultural dimensions

The IBM survey was conducted with employees of 72 countries creating an enormous database for cultures of different countries, their characteristics, differences, similarities, etc.¹⁶ National cultures are believed to be relatively stable over time. Any changes or shifts are caused due to external factors that affect more than one country at a time. Thus, the differences between countries would remain constant even in this case. There are six dimensions of national cultures and the scores range from 1 to 100, 100 being the highest.



Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/india,japan/>

1. Power distance: It refers to how the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed in an unequal manner.

Japan scores 54 on this dimension, i.e. borderline hierarchical. Japan seems extremely hierarchical because of their bureaucracy and slow decision-making. They act in accordance with their social status and position in every setting. There are different speech levels for different levels of politeness.

India scores 77 on this dimension. Appreciation and favors from the boss are more important than achievements. They look up to their seniors for guidance, and managers count on their employees for cooperation. India ranks among the top among countries with employees “afraid” of their boss or seniors. Authoritative behavior from seniors is accepted as common knowledge, and communication is formal. The gap between people of two positions is seen in the nature of the parent-child relationship, the teacher-student relationship. Corporal punishment was very common until a few years ago and it was meant to teach children to “respect” their elders. In India, the social categorization of people according to their caste has existed since olden times and continues to affect many aspects of life even today¹⁷. It is a major source of inequality and inevitably impacts the power distance in India. Caste is a determining factor in getting into educational institutions, jobs, and social life in India is highly affected by the caste system. It is a determining factor in marriage, even though intercaste marriages are permitted by law.

In Indian companies, the final decision-making power rests with the company president. Employees don't give their opinions until called upon by the president. Negotiations begin after the president has their doubts clarified. It is a top-down society. The top authorities are believed to know small details about the company. They do not seem to delegate these things to their juniors. On the other hand, in Japanese companies, some smaller things are delegated to the juniors, and a difference of opinion may arise at the time of meetings¹⁸.

2. Individualism: This dimension refers to how much people in a country are dependent on one another, and how much they identify themselves in terms of their group. This is a factor where India and Japan are very similar.

Japan scores 46 on Individualism and is often characterized as collectivistic. There is a strong sense of harmony, putting the group's needs before individual needs. The Japanese self is described as contingent on the other, as seen through the language. There is no single equivalent for the word "I" in Japanese. The first person pronoun used is dependent on the situation and relation between the speakers. The “*theory of ba*” explains how the Japanese style of conversation is more interdependent and relational as compared to English, which is direct and independent¹⁹. However, Japan is individualistic as compared to other Asian countries.

India scores 48 on this dimension. On the collectivist side, it is expected that individuals behave in the context of a larger group. The influence of family, friends, neighbors, society are important. Many decisions are affected by relationships and connections. Having new encounters is an important part of Indian social life. Getting things done through connections is a common occurrence and furthermore, Indians are willing to take the effort to form such connections¹³.

The individualistic side of Indian culture is seen in workplaces. They take every opportunity to speak, and it may seem that they are speaking for their own interests. This attitude is disliked originally, but people who are used to it might appreciate it as well. Japanese people might find their own culture of “consideration” to be troublesome. There is more of a group spirit in Japan, while work in India is individually driven. In Japan, if the work is going well, everyone works together and is motivated to keep going. In India, there are a variety of people, with a variety of opinions working together right from the beginning. Therefore, even when things don't go well, they don't bother about what is going on around them and keep going. Indians are strong in the face of such adversities²⁰. Harmony is important in Indian culture, as in other high-context cultures. They are collectivist in local groups but individualistic in relation to outsiders²¹. However, Indians who have lately been exposed to Japanese or American cultures of discipline, or been abroad, have

started becoming more considerate and soft. Especially those who belong to a higher social class are very polite and mannered.²²

3. Masculinity: This refers to the importance given to achievement, success, and competition by a country. A feminine society is that which gives less importance to achievement and drive and attaches more importance to caring relations with others.

Japan is ranked first on masculinity, with a high score of 95 and an “absolute gender role division”. Women may attend to emotional needs, while men are expected to be dominant. People strive for excellence and perfection in the tasks that they undertake ranging from production to presentation. There is a lot of competition, but unlike other masculine countries, this competition is among groups and not individuals. Similarly, they are less assertive as compared to other masculine cultures.

India scores 56 on masculinity. Displays of success and power are important to Indians, but sometimes they are restrained by the Indian values of humility and modesty.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance: This dimension is associated with the way a society deals with the fact that nothing about the future is known. The scores are based on how each country manages this ambiguity. This is a dimension with one of the highest discrepancies between India and Japan.

Japan scores 92 on UA. It is one of the most uncertainty-avoiding countries in the world. This is attributed to the geography of Japan. Japan is often at risk of natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and volcanos. So, they like to stay prepared for anything that happens. This seeps into other aspects of their lives. They have ritualized customs, like fixed outfits for events, fixed dates for school ceremonies, and also ritualized behavior that they follow. They like to be completely informed about everything²³ and are not risk-takers²⁴.

India scores 40 on UA. Indians generally have a tolerance for imperfection or things not going as planned, and rules are often bent. Indian culture is based on adjustment, and Indians are flexible to change²⁵. Wadhwa writes about how *jugaad*, i.e. making do with the situation in some way or the other is a major part of the Indian mindset²⁶. Mathew writes about the *chalta hai* attitude of Indians which means an “it’s okay” attitude in response to whatever happens²⁷. This characteristic is both an empowering aspect as well as a weakness of India. The free and direct attitude of Indians is also seen in traffic situations, where they don’t care about discipline. Most of the time, minor rule-breaking is permissible or ignored and does not turn into a big fight²⁸.

5. Long-term orientation: This is the extent to which societies honor their traditions and customs, and how much they accept or encourage new customs and change. A high score indicates resistance or less encouragement to new ideas.

India scores 51. Most Indians follow Hinduism, which is more a philosophy or a way of life than a religion. Indians are found to be tolerant towards other ways of life and religious views. Indians are okay with changing their lifestyle depending on the circumstances.

Japan scores 88 on this dimension and is one of the most long-term-oriented societies. The Japanese live by rules, customs, and virtues with the thought that one has to do their best in the short life that one lives. In the corporate world, there are long-term investments with the aim of serving future generations and not just making quarterly profits.

6. Indulgence: This is the extent to which people have control over their natural desires or id impulses. This is highly influenced by the way people are raised and socialized.

Japan and India are both societies of restraint that give less emphasis on leisure time. Japan scores 42 and India scores even lower, i.e. 26. Behavior in both societies is restrained by social

norms and customs. The gratification of desires makes people feel guilty or that there is something wrong.

High and low context²⁹

Cultures can be defined as high context and low context based on the style of communication that they follow. In high-context cultures, interpersonal relations and behavioral norms carry a lot of importance. A lot of the speech carries “between-the-lines” meanings rather than explicitly stating things. Non-verbal communication and unsaid meanings are to be understood with the help of background knowledge, which includes history, status, relationships, etc.³⁰ This kind of ambiguity and reservation in speech helps maintain harmony. As opposed to this, low-context cultures are explicit, linear, and direct. They are more precise, dramatic, and express true feelings³¹ as they are more individualistic in nature.

Japan has been listed at the top of high-context cultures, possessing all the characteristics of a high-context culture. A study found that Japanese people avoid confrontations, and try to cover up disagreements more than Americans. Furthermore, they act as they “should” rather than how they would like to.³²

Harmony is very important in Indian culture just like in other high-context cultures. They are collectivist in local groups but if compared to other cultures, they are quite individualistic³³. In fact, India is gradually turning into a low-context culture³⁴. Due to globalization, Indians are adopting aspects of western culture. Indians, as opposed to the Japanese, are more verbose, dialogue-oriented, and more direct in their communication. They are described as “extrovert, talkative, emotional, and unpunctual, and they mix professional and family affairs”.

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