

# CULTURAL NORMS

Miku Nakamura

## Introduction

If we are asked what the cultural norm is, I don't think any of us can answer.

Last year, I went to a library and found an interesting book. That book's title is "The Japanese cultural norm is not the cultural norm". When I read this title, I felt that only Japan is different from other countries. At the same time, I started to wonder about other countries' cultural norms and whether a world norm exists. This topic thus became the focus for my graduation study progress report.

## Chapter1: *ATARIMAE*

I compared the Japanese cultural norm of "ATARIMAE" with cultural norms of some other countries'. In Japan the acts of slurping noodles, taking off shoes at the entrance, standing in line, wearing a mask and so on are the norm. In other countries, for example, Italy, after having a meal, they don't go in the sea. In Poland, people put yogurt on rice, and put sugar on spaghetti. In China, leaving a little food on your plate is the cultural norm. These are completely different from the Japanese norm. However, when foreigners come to Japan, if they were to leave food on their plate, put yogurt on rice, and

wash shoes and clothes together, Japanese people would be surprised. In a similar way, foreigners are also surprised by Japanese actions.

## Chapter2: Impossible

I researched about what Japanese people think is “impossible” for foreigners and what foreigners think is “impossible” for Japanese people on the internet and in books. I want to talk about the story of a Japanese man working for a Japanese company.

There was an important conference he had to attend. During the conference, he saw a woman who was an American employee and his subordinate, cross her legs. In Japan, it is not a good thing to cross your legs when we are with our superiors, so he was surprised. He didn't understand why she crossed her legs. Actually for women in America, crossing your legs is the formal way of sitting down. She never thought it was troublesome. But according to Japanese people, they see it as such. This is a story of foreigners, from a Japanese point of view.

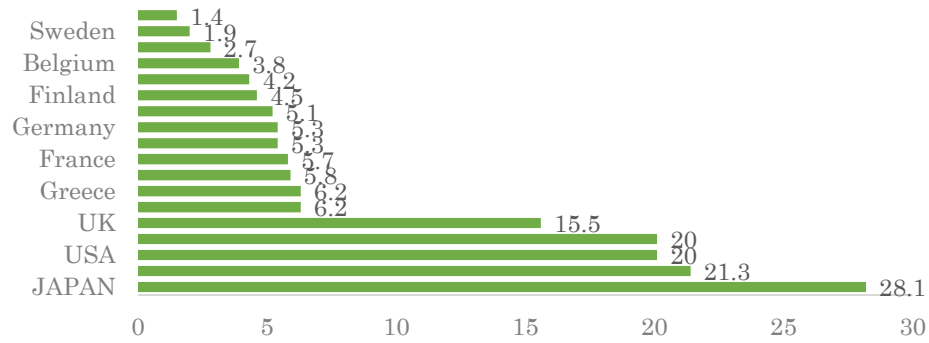
Next I will talk about how Japanese people are seen by foreigners. The foreigners working in Japan seem to have a question towards the Japanese way of working. Foreigners say Japanese overwork and don't use their paid vacation. It is bad for their physical condition and mental health, so they die from *Karoushi*. *Karoushi* means death

from overworking. There is not as much overtime work in foreign countries compared to Japan, and it never occurs that we cannot succeed in life by taking a rest.

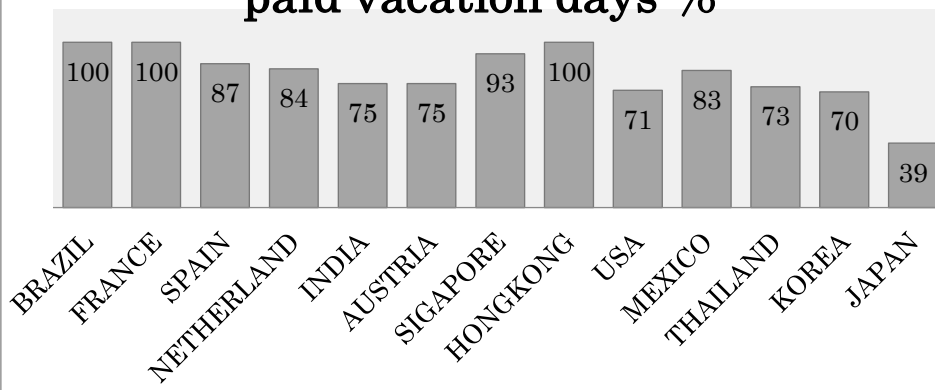
Graph A shows the ratio of workers who work more than 50 hours per week. When we look at the graph, we can tell that Japanese workers work for longer than workers in any other country. It is really bad. Graph B shows you how many people in the world use their paid vacation. According to the graph, paid vacation days that are actually used in Japan are fewer than that of other countries. Brazilian and French workers use 100% of their paid vacation. However, only 39% of Japanese workers use it. Japanese people seem to really like working. Thus, what is natural for Japanese people is not always regarded as natural in foreign countries.

What I want to say is, “Understanding the culture and tradition of foreign countries and not forcing Japanese culture on foreigners is the most splendid hospitality for the foreigners”.

**Graph A: Percentage of workers who work more than 50 hours a week**



**Graph B: How many people use their paid vacation days %**



### Chapter3: Problems between Japanese norms and other country norms

You are a member of society, and you get a job with a company which has Japanese and foreign staff.

One day, the work that you asked the foreign work Mike, one of your subordinates, to do is not completed. But since time is now 4:50 pm, Mike would have to work overtime to finish it. But at 5:00pm, Mike will state that because it is 5:00pm he will then go home.

Though the work that you asked for is not done, he will leave work. I imagine some people would tell him he has to work overtime to finish his work. But I would say something like, "I believe that you will finish the work tomorrow". It is normal that he may not know about overtime work because his country doesn't have such an enormous culture of overtime work like Japan does. However, if he doesn't finish the work by tomorrow, he may simply be incompetent at his job and not suitable for it.

### Conclusion

This is the last question. Do you think that there is a common cultural norm throughout the world? You know the answer. The answer is no. Japanese cultural norms are not worldwide cultural norms and foreign cultural norm are not Japanese cultural norms. We can't make friends with people from different countries if we don't respect each other's countries.

In 2020, the Olympics will be held in Tokyo. Many foreigners will come to Japan. We Japanese must cater to them.

It is good for us to show Japanese culture to foreigners. However, before we explain it them, we should learn, understand and respect their cultures and traditions. The world cultural norm is only one. All countries' cultural norms of the world are not the cultural

norm. There is not one that is right.

#### Reference materials

- ・内閣府「平成28年版国民生活白書」

<http://ronri2.web.fc2.com/data/president.html>

- ・有給休暇 国際比較調査

<http://ronri2.web.fc2.com/data/president.html>

## Space Travel

Akiko Katharina Breuer

I have dreamed about going to space for a long time. I think many of us look up to the sky and watch the twinkling stars or maybe imagine how it looks in space and wonder why only astronauts can go there. First, I wanted to research why humans go to space. Sending humans and satellites into space requires much effort, money, dedication, and sacrifice. In an imperfect world with pressing and important problems, some people ask whether space exploration is worth it. Humanity's interest in the heavens has been universal and enduring. Humans are driven to explore the unknown, discover new worlds, push the boundaries of our scientific and technical limits, and then push even further. Human space exploration helps to address fundamental questions about our place in the Universe and the history of our solar system. Through addressing the challenges related to human space exploration, we are able to expand technology, create new industries, and help foster a peaceful relationship with other nations. Curiosity and exploration are vital to the human spirit, and accepting the challenge of going deeper into space will inspire the citizens of the world today and the generations of tomorrow. In recent years, space travel has even become possible for civilians, so I want to share with you some facts about space travel.

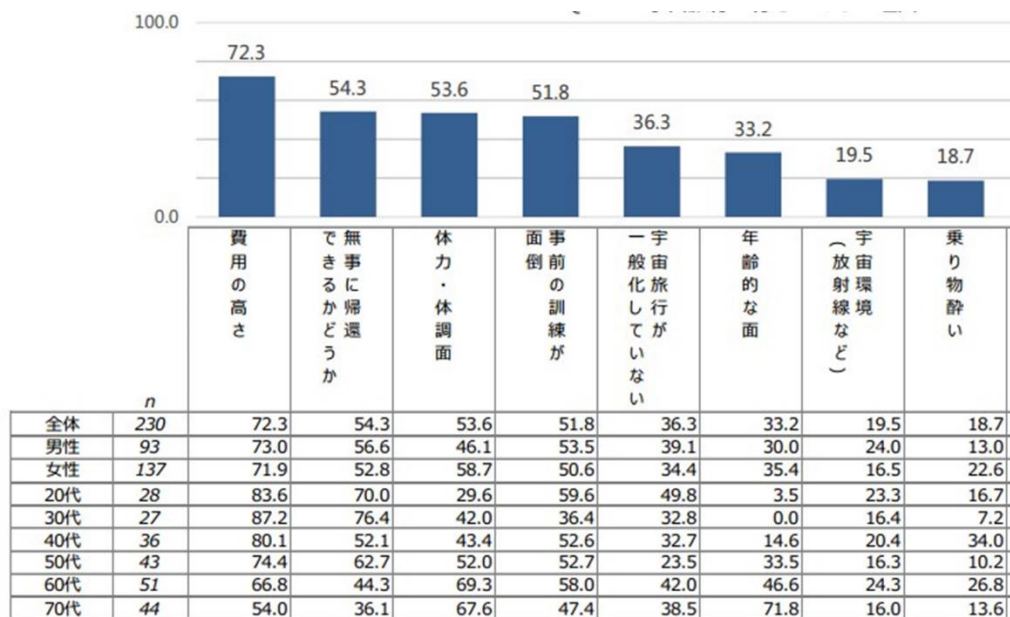
Some people may be familiar with Virgin Galactic. It is a spaceflight company within the Virgin Group (A multinational corporation) It is developing commercial spacecraft and aims to provide suborbital spaceflights to space tourists, suborbital launches for space science missions, and orbital launches of small satellites. It is also united in creating something new and lasting: the world's first commercial spaceline. Virgin Galactic's ticket to space costs about twenty-five million yen per person and about five million yen for the preparation training that you have onsite at Spaceport America. The two conditions for participation are to be over eighteen and have a normal healthy body. You can enjoy a perfect two-hour flight in which you can experience true, unencumbered weightlessness and see the best view of Earth and the blackness of space. Throughout all of human history, only five hundred and fifty-two people have been to space and most of our planet's seven billion people have had no opportunity to experience space and all of its possibilities for themselves. This means that not only have most of us never been to space, but also that most of us have never even met someone else who can tell us about the experience. Human spaceflight has tremendous value in inspiring and educating our society, but that value is limited because flights have been so rare. However, Virgin Galactic is changing that. It is opening space to the rest of us.



As you heard, one flight to space with Virgin Galactic costs twenty-five million yen, which is very expensive. So, I started to wonder if people would really pay that amount of money for only a two hour flight.

According to an investigation by JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency), 57.3% of the Japanese population want to travel to space while the other 42.7% don't. The number of people who want to travel to space is a little bit higher, but I was surprised that so many people don't want to travel to space. I would like to introduce three reasons why this is so. The most common reason with 72.3% of the Japanese population is because of the high cost. Although 65% of respondents believed that in the years ahead ordinary people will travel to outer space, the median price that they were willing to pay was just 230 thousand yen – a far cry from the twenty-five million yen ticket.

Also, some people complained about why we don't use the money to address the current problems on Earth. The second most common reason with 54.3% is whether they can return safely. I think this preconception appears because they can't trust the safety of the spaceship or even the trained astronauts. The third reason with 53.6% is fear about their physical condition. The environment in space is completely different from that of Earth and something dangerous could happen, so that can be a reason for fear. There are also many other reasons as you can see from this picture.



If you hear “Space Travel” many of you may imagine exciting things and can enjoy it but actually there are many serious matters, too. People always complain about when something new happens or changes. However, we are here because our ancestors tried and challenged new things. So if we don’t explore and try new things, we can’t improve our society and systems, and our future will not change. Stephen Hawking, the renowned British astrophysicist said, “Spreading out into space will have an even greater effect.

It will completely change the future of the human race and maybe determine whether we have any future at all. It won’t solve any of our immediate problems on planet Earth, but it will give us a new perspective on them, and cause us to look outwards rather than inwards. Hopefully it would unite us to face a common challenge”. Going to space won’t be cheap, but it would take only a small proportion of world resources. And yes,

there might be some fear and danger and it won't be so easy to go to space. However, if we want to change our future, someone has to go.

While writing this essay, I became more and more interested in going to space.

However, to be frank, the only problem for me is the money. If they would change the cost and I had the chance to contribute to our future, I want to try space travel. I hope that my thesis could encourage someone to go to space and that much more people become interested about space.

## Making a Better World

Kimberleigh Su Atkin

Today we live on this planet, Earth, which is blessed with nature so beautiful and life so precious. On this planet, we humans have evolved into such a being that it is quite fair to say that we have conquered the food chain. In other words, we have no predator. While in the wild, gazelles are killed by lions and seals are hunted by killer whales, we have seemed to have found a place above all else, and that is where we stand today.

Today, 16,306 species are deemed endangered. Over 16,000 precious species

on our planet are facing the threat of extinction today. We cannot hide the truth that numerous human activities towards nature have created such a number. Once a species that lived harmoniously with nature has now, possibly become the most deadly predator.

My research is about one particular species that has been facing the threat of extinction for quite some time now: whales. I chose this animal over all others because sadly, Japan has, and is to this day, playing a big role in this animals capture and slaughter. This is known as whaling.

The description of whaling is simple. It is the act of fishing whales. This has been a traditional type of fishing, dating back to the Jomon period in Japan. Though in recent years, international organisations such as the IWC (International Whaling Committee) and the UN (United Nations) have made rules and bans on such fishing to ensure the animals' safety and survival.

However, Japan has seemed to have found a loophole, and departed its whaling ships in December of 2015 to the Antarctic and the North Pacific.

This so called loophole, is “scientific whaling”. There have been many disputes between Japan and numerous whaling organisations because the so-called “scientific whaling” Japan has been conducting is yet unclear of its true purpose and many questions remain about what really goes on at sea. In years gone by, scientists studying animals such as whales have received special permits to kill the animal for information on its blood, its construction, and many other objectives. However now in the era of DNA sampling and remote monitoring, scientists have no need to kill the animal in order to gain the information they require.

One of the main reasons Japan is accused of covering up its ongoing commercial whaling by stating it is “scientific” is the large market of whale meat that remains even in local supermarkets to this day. In 2013 a ship with over 1000 tons of whale meat was on its journey to Japan, and was planning to make a number of stops on the way at different harbors, but was only able to stop at one, just outside of Madagascar’s harbor, because protests in South Africa prompted the government to declare the ships with whale meat unwelcome.

Another and more well-known protest is by Sea Shepherd, an international non-profit, marine wildlife conservation organisation based in the United States. During 2007 to 2008 they conducted an expedition called Operation Migaloo in the hope to save the whales targeted for capture, and succeeded in doing so, freeing 484 whales from the hands of the Japanese whaling ships.

It cannot be said that Japan is conducting illegal whaling, or that other countries and organisations are simply acting too harsh, because it is just such a mystery. An example of how unknown the truth is can be seen from this one particular movie, *The Cove*. This movie is an American documentary on the dolphin drive hunt which is also classed as whaling, in Taiji of Wakayama prefecture. This movie won an Academy Award and Best Documentary Feature after its release in 2010. Although it is well known and appreciated abroad, it is relatively unknown in Japan. The main reason for this is because it was actually banned from being shown in Japanese theaters, as nationalists protested, and film makers and officials argued the release of information about such fishing, and finally announced its ban on the lines

that the content was “too sensitive”. The big question is, why did they have to go to the extent of banning the movies screening just because it was a documentary on dolphin hunts? Only clips of this movie can be found on YouTube, and some of them are very graphic, and hard to watch, but if that is what one country has as a traditional method of fishing, and insists on continuing, the reason for it to be kept such a secret is baffling. The whole world saw this, and yet Japanese citizens know almost nothing of it.

The following statement is something other than the strict facts, but something that seemed to stand out as a pattern while researching this topic and is one of the very roots of this study. It is the difference in the description of Sea Shepherd and other organisations when searched on the internet. On an all English website, it described Sea Shepherd as an organisation devoted to saving marine life. However when searched in Japanese, the result was quite different. The description was that they were “Pirates”. It is fair to say that when any of us think of modern day pirates, we do not imagine humble beings on a quiet and harmless ship, but dangerous people on board an armed vessel. The difference in description of this particular organisation seemed to

represent the approach to whaling that differs greatly from Japan and other countries. Every search done in English about Japanese scientific whaling ended with the words “the truth of it is yet unclear” or “what becomes of the whale meat is unknown” and any search done in Japanese seemed to be rather vague in its explanation and some called anti-whaling organisations “prejudice” and “misleading”.

The truth behind this industry is still a mystery and not something to be uncovered easily any time soon. However this study has led to the conclusion that there needs to be an understanding, on an international scale. If the scientific whaling of Japan is not proven, Japan will keep on being deprived of its fishing rights by numerous organisations. If the law on whaling isn't enforced clearly, then loopholes will continue to emerge and no protection of the animal will be successful.

The course that Japan has taken on whaling has led to the country losing global respect, and on a larger scale, our world has suffered countless losses to its beautiful nature. There is no greater tragedy and irresponsibility than



to let the only Earth this universe will ever have dissolve and perish in countless selfish human activities.

The hope is that in years to come, humanity will come to an understanding on this matter and together, take the first step to healing the damage caused over centuries.

We must unite our strengths for both a better relationship with the world, and a better world for nature.



