A Survey on the Youth’s Views and Attitudes Concerning Foreigners and Foreign Countries

Vee David

Kyushu University of Health and Welfare

Abstract

Along with Japan’s rate of ageing and low birth rate, the Japanese youth population has been rapidly declining. However, like in other countries, the thinking and behaviour of young peoples are clear indicators of what future will bring. With Japan’s economic status, its leadership role in international affairs is a foregone conclusion. In this survey, the focus is on the youth’s thinking and attitudes with respect to foreigners and foreign countries.

Key words: Foreigners, Foreign Countries, Cultural Barriers, Internationalization, World Leadership, Economic Assistance, Industrialized Nations, Developing Nations.

Nearly four hundred university students, comprising a representative sampling of the Japanese youth participated in a comprehensive survey concerning certain aspects of Japan’s ongoing Internationalization. For this survey, the scope and coverage will be limited to three categories, namely: i) the foreigner or widely known as "Gaijin" in the colloquial expression, ii) as a Japanese person, specifically how he or she relates to the subject within the confines of Japanese culture, and iii) foreign countries. At the outset, the three categories previously mentioned are inherently intertwined, mutually reinforcing and in some cases, overlapping. For that reason, consistency of responses can be verified against each other, resulting to clearer and unambiguous findings. The surveyed students of ages 18 to 21 years old constitute an ideal respondent group since they practically grew up when internationalization or international exchanges on a national scale were underway in Japan. As for geographical location, the respondent group covered a vast diversity of hometowns from Okinawa which is exposed to foreign presence due of US military bases, to the capital metropolitan Tokyo, which is one of the premier international cities in the world, and much of Kyushu Islands and western Japan.

A Nation Transformed

The economic transformation of the 1980s that saw the emergence of Japan as an economic superpower led to changes of how the country and its people are generally perceived from the outside world. In comparison, it took a longer time for Japanese to alter behaviour in world
affairs consistent with the new economic status. By the mid-eighties the top 11 world banks, in terms of asset valuation were all Japanese. Japanese tourists, the world’s biggest spenders were much coveted in every tourist destination. Japanese exports principally automobiles and electronic gadgets were not only known for their top quality but trend setters in their respective industries. Because Japanese exports were dislodging their foreign competitors even in the home markets, pressures mounted to restrain the entry of Japanese goods, either by way of taxation or non-tariff barriers meant to protect local industries. The result was higher prices for Japanese goods. Nevertheless, the popularity of Japanese exports remained unchallenged even at higher prices. In terms of manufactured goods, world consumers were willing to consider anything Made-in-Japan. Brand names of Sony, Toyota, Nissan, Honda, NEC, Fujitsu ruled the advertising waves. This economic transformation made Japan the largest savings holders, some US$11 trillion. In terms of monetary reserves, Japan is the largest holder of United States dollars second only to the US Government itself. In February 1985, the Group of Seven nations, prompted by the United States convened the 1985 Plaza Agreement, where the Japanese yen was appreciated against the US dollar. The result was a more expensive Japanese yen and cheaper US dollar. Almost overnight, Japanese goods in the world markets doubled in prices, thereby discouraging consumers. The objective was to shield local industries from their Japanese rivals. However, by that time, Japanese industries had already move up to a higher production ladder. Labour-intensive production were already shipped out to Southeast Asian nations such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong, Singapore and Malaysia. In short, Japanese industries were no longer competing with foreign industries, but with themselves. Far from dislodging Japanese industries in the export markets, the yen revaluation of the Plaza Agreement made Japanese consumers wealthy against the US dollar. From 360 to 1 US$ in 1972 to 220 to 1 US$ in 1985, nearly everything became cheaper for holders of Japanese yen. This led to yet another unexpected result. With the Japanese yen nearly doubled its value, Japanese engaged in a pattern of purchasing landmark real estates in major capitals—from Hawaii to New York, from Paris to London—and masterpiece works of arts considered national treasures in their home countries. In the US, resentment emerged that “Japan was buying up America”. It would seem that US dominance was over and Japan was the new owners of the world economy.

As a result, a new growing large body of thinking emerged that somehow “Japan was number one” of “Japanese superiority” in almost every field from business, manufacturing, construction to education, arts, food & diet, to crime prevention, social peace to mail delivery and garbage disposal. In sum, the 21st Century will be known as “the Pacific Century” led by Japan. Though much of the world saw Japan as a model to be emulated, some countries experienced difficulties in accepting Japan as a new world leader. Trade frictions between the United States and Japan were staple diets of world newspapers. The United States and European countries did not relish the idea of Japan running massive current account surplus, when much of the world was incurring deficits and shortfalls. Succeeding US Governments kept the pressure on Japan to assume a more responsibility, greater burden on world leadership commensurate with its new economic status. Among these policy recommendations were to open up the vastly rich Japanese market for foreign goods. Facing stiff resistance from local Japanese industries, the Japanese Government grudgingly acceded to growing US pressures. In the Fall of 1993, Japanese politics dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party since the post war years took a dramatic shift with the election of Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa’s coalition government. The LDP which was seen as a consortium of vested interest groups-farming blocs to industrial conglomerates-was visibly resistant to change. Two landmark achievements of the Hosokawa government were: First, the opening the Japanese market to foreign competition-culminating in the importation of foreign rice, inspite of the fierce opposition of the powerful Japanese agriculture group. Japan saw not only the massive entry of cheaper foreign goods, but along with it, foreign companies meant to succeed in the Japanese market. Many of these foreign companies subsidiaries of world conglomerates were listed in the Tokyo Stock Exchange, which since then was an exclusive preserve
of Japanese companies. Second, the dispatch of Japanese self defence forces to Cambodia—the first troop deployment overseas since the Second World War. The latter move was in sharp contrast with Japan’s actions in the international coalition led by the 1991 United States to repel Iraq’s invasion neighbouring Kuwait. In the months leading to the Gulf War, Japan did not send troops unlike coalition partners including Arab nations citing a constitutional prohibition. Instead, the Japan graciously donated US$9 billion to finance the enormous operations. The amount was the highest financial disbursement in any single effort. Yet, in spite of its noble intentions, Japan was castigated for "chequebook diplomacy" in major world editorials. The willingness of the Japanese to dole out money in settling disputes has long been a matter of culture and history. Yet, this cultural behaviour has no resonance and may even be insulting in the many countries. When Kuwaiti was liberated, the Emir of Kuwait found it necessary not to include Japan in a letter of gratitude advertised in The New York Times. Nevertheless, the stage was set for a new world leader. The Hosokawa measures ushered a new Japan’s willing to undertake bold and painful steps in light of its new status as a world leader, and prepared to assume heavier burdens of world responsibilities.

Enter the Gaijins

The word "Gaijin" literally translates to "the outside person" or "the outsider". The word "Gaikokuj" literally means "outsider's nation". Due to layers of cultural barriers—not to mention-language difficulties, Gaijins find it almost impossible to be integrated in Japanese society. In addition, Japanese laws restrict Japanese citizenship to blood kinship. That is, if either parent is Japanese, then the citizenship is passed on to the child. In many countries, including the United States, Britain and Germany, citizenship is acquired if the child was born inside its territory, regardless of blood kinship. Hence, third-generation Koreans who were born and raised in Japan and smoothly pass for Japanese, cannot acquire Japanese citizenship. They are foreigners in the land of their birth. Cultural and language barriers are also deeply-embedded in Japanese laws. In July 1999, when Keizo Obuchi became prime minister, he launched a series of initiatives aimed at making the Japan a more international environment. English, which has long been a foreign language would be recognized as Japan’s second national language by an act of Parliament. But this proposal did not sit well with Japanese conversatives, who fear further foreign incursions in Japanese society.

Like any other industrial giants, Japan has long been an attractive destination for foreigners. Recent statistics compiled by the Japanese Bureau of Immigration show a continuing pattern. In 1950, the recorded number of foreigners visiting Japan stood at 18,046. From that starting point, the number rose higher and higher in the direct path of its GNP growth: 55,638 (1955); 145,661 (1960); 775,961 (1970); 1,296,666 (1980); 2,985,764 (1990); 3,504,470 (1991); 3,855,932 (1992); 3,926,347 (1993); 3,747,157 (1994); 3,831,367 (1995); 3,732,450 (1996); 4,244,529 (1997); 4,559,514 (1998) and 4,555,645 (1999). The entry of foreigners peaked in 1998 at 4,559,514 then slightly declined to 4,555,645 in 1999, reflecting the current economic stagnation. However, from a base of 18,046 in 1950 to 4.6 million in 1998 represents a two hundred fifty times increase. This figure must be taken with a cautious note. As of 1997, Japan’s foreign population was merely 1.2% of its population—least among industrialized nations—far below the record of Luxembourg, where the foreign population stood at 34.9%. Outside and from within, there are pressures for Japan to accept more foreigners, but the realities of cultural barriers and language difficulties, not to mention current economic stagnation will bring forces to bear.

The Survey Questions

1) Do you have a Gaijin friend or relative?

This question was answered by 372 students, 125 male and 247 female. The objective of the question was to measure their proximity or exposure to foreigners. Levels of exposure range from weekly to monthly. Having a foreigner friend or relative necessarily exposes oneself to foreign cultures and behaviour, and helps explain why foreigners act in certain ways different from Japanese. Forty-two
percent of the male and 40% of the female respondents answered in the affirmative. Fifty-sixth percent of male and 59% of female respondents answered to the negative. The remaining 2% for both male and female respondents were uncertain. The usual case was the first acquaintance with a foreigner was in one's middle school or high school. Since 1987, the Japanese Government initiated the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, where young foreigners recruited in their home countries were assigned to middle schools and junior high schools for a period of two years. The purpose was to promote human interaction and cultural exchanges and instill a spirit of international understanding among the Japanese youth. To date, well over 85,000 foreigners have come to participate in the programme. With 45% coming from the United States, we can digest that interests and goodwill with the US remains strong in Japan. Expanding the programme, young foreigners were also assigned to work inside the Prefectural Office or City Hall to assist in policy implementation concerning international exchanges. The programme is entirely financed by the Government of Japan. For young foreigners fresh from college, the programme offers a very ideal employment opportunity. Given the increasing role played by foreigner teachers as ALTs or foreign faculty members, the level of contact with foreigners is expected to increase, thereby deepening mutual understanding.

1) Do you have a Gaijin friend or relative?

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2) How do you find the Gaijin behaviour?

This question was answered by 361 respondents, 121 male and 240 female. The objective was to measure Japanese reaction to certain attitudes and behaviour of foreigners. "Hien na Gaijin" is a common expression in Japan. It refers to certain attitudes that are unthinkable or unacceptable in line with Japanese culture. With a long history of nearly 2,000 years of civilization and 200 years of national isolation during the Tokugawa Era, Japanese culture was insulated from foreign influences. The result was a distinct Japanese culture entirely unique on its own. In comparison, nearly all countries especially the western world have common characteristics, by way of religion, civilization, culture, language or shared experience as colonies. A French visiting Madrid may not be able to speak the Spanish language, but he or she can read the Roman alphabet and thus, can communicate. Japan on the other hand is entirely different. In almost every field, there is a "Japanese-way-of-doing-things". Unless one is married to a Japanese or one is a longtime resident of Japan, Gaijins are helpless at a loss navigating through the cultural maze. Strange behaviours of foreigners include: a) openly praising one's family in public, b) openly showing one's emotions and c) insensitivity to other person's feelings. On this question, 18% of male and 27% of female respondents find Gaijin behaviour to be "shocking", while 9% of male and 4% of female respondents categorized Gaijin behaviour as "strange". However, majority of the respondents find Gaijin behaviour to be "not entirely different" from their Japanese counterparts. Seventy-three percent of male and 69% of female respondents cited Gaijin behaviour to be "not entirely different". We can digest that the foreign behaviour given the influence of widespread and instantaneous foreign
media either through satellite television, movies, Internet is beginning to influence Japanese youth.

3) Do you believe there is such thing as a "similar" Gaijin behaviour?
This question was answered by 383 respondents, 130 male and 253 female. The objective was to ascertain a tendency of lumping together all non-Japanese persons in one single category as Gaijins. In many industrialized nations, the word "foreigner" is almost non-existent. A non-American person in the US is not referred to as a "foreigner", but "British", "Canadian", "Chinese" his or her nationality. The distinction is important since one's nationality is considered "a badge of honour" in many countries. In Japan however, the insularity of Japanese history and culture prevented a clear and distinct separation of nationalities. Israelis and Arabs, who have nothing in common are considered in the same grouping in Japan. The prevailing notion is to lump together all non-Japanese in one group, as if there are only two kinds of peoples; Japanese and non-Japanese. On this inquiry, 38% of male and 35% of female respondents deny the existence of a similar Gaijin behaviour. This represents an important step in distinguishing foreigners on the basis of nationalities. On the otherhand, 12% of male and 14% of female respondents recognize a similar Gaijin behaviour. For both genders, 51% responded to be uncertain.

4) Which do you thing is stronger, national character or individual character?
This question was answered by 387 respondents, 130 male and 257 female. The objective was to ascertain which one, whether national character or individual character plays a greater role in shaping behaviours. Sixty-three percent of the male and 61% of the female respondents thought individual character rather than national character governs one’s behaviour. On the otherhand, 27% of male and 31% of female respondents pointed to national character. Ten percent of male and 8% of female respondents were uncertain. The apparent shift from national character in favour of individual character represents a dramatic departure. In Japanese culture, group mentality is deeply-embedded. There are prescribed sets of norms and behaviours expected of a Japanese person. National character or kokuminsei defines Japanese norms or conduct. A traditional Japanese behaviour, sensitivity to others is an outward form of group mentality. As foreign influence is finding more inroads in the Japanese society, Japanese youth is increasingly becoming more and more individualistic.

5) Do you think there is a Gaijin behaviour even among Japanese?
This question was answered by 378 respondents, 130 male and 248 female. Fifty-five percent of male and 52% female respondents replied to the affirmative. They recognize even among their peers, there are Japanese who behave like Gaijins. On the otherhand, 14% of male and 17% of female respondents answered to the negative. Thirty-one percent for both genders were uncertain. The result confirms a growing trend that foreign influence is already a factor in Japanese youth. Hence, the impact of popular culture is clearly evident. The latest fashion trends in New York City and Paris dictate the behaviour of Japanese youth. US baseball is the national sports in Japan. Some US movie stars have
more fans in Japan than in America. Through the mass media, certain cultural barriers are beginning to let loose. The end result is the Japanese youth behaving more like foreigners than their previous generation.

6) Have you been influenced by a Gaijin?
This question was answered by 392 respondents, 131 male and 261 female. Fifty-two percent of male and 39% of female respondents replied to the affirmative. On the other hand, 24% of both male and female respondents answered negatively. The same figure of 24% for both genders was recorded as uncertain. The results confirm a growing assumption that foreign cultures are finding their way into Japanese society. Japan’s economic status and high standard of living will continue to attract more foreign influences.

7) How would you describe that influence?
This question was answered by 358 respondents, 124 male and 234 female. When asked to describe the foreign influence, 43% of male and 39% of female respondents mentioned "generally good", while a slight 4% of male and 3% of female respondents answered their foreign influence as unfavourable or bad. The remaining 24% of male and 57% of female respondents were uncertain. Overall, it would seem that Gaijin influence on the Japanese youth is generally favourable.

8) Would you consider marrying a Gaijin?
This question was answered by 385 respondents, 130 male and 255 female. The nature of this question is highly personal. The objective was to measure the possibility of choosing a Gaijin spouse as a lifetime partner. Thirty-one percent of male and a higher 38% of female respondents said "yes", that it would be conceivable for them to marry foreigners. On the other hand, 35% of male and 31% of female respondents reacted negatively to the question, while 34% of male and 30% of female respondents were uncertain. International marriages or Japanese marrying foreigners is an increasing trend in an increasingly international Japanese society. As more Japanese visit foreign countries and more foreigners come to Japan, the trend will continue. As recent as the mid-eighties, some Japanese parents disowned their daughter for marrying a Gaijin. "Kando" was a buzz word of deleting one’s daughter from the family register. The racial singularity or homogeneity of the Japanese race reveal a hidden fact. That inter-racial
marriages were apparently discouraged. Language difficulties and cultural barriers were overwhelmingly in the recent past. However, in an increasingly international environment, certain established inhibitions are giving way to cultural diversity.

9) **Do you have a Japanese friend married to a Gaijin?**

This question was answered by 376 respondents, 125 male and 251 female. Seventy-eight percent of male and 75% of female respondents answered to the negative, while 14% of male and 19% of female respondents replied, "yes". The remaining 7% of male and 6% of female respondents were uncertain. Though the figures of 14% (male) and 19% (female) are comparatively small compared to other industrialized nations, those figures should be judged in light of Japan's cultural insularity.

10) **Have you ever been in another country?**

This question was answered by 383 respondents, 128 male and 255 female. Foreign travels is surely a learning experience, where one immerses in foreign culture. As Japanese tourists dominate the world tourism spenders, the average age of Japanese visiting overseas is getting younger. In most middle schools, overseas travels usually to neighbouring Asian countries are part of the curriculum. Its frequency and affordability is making air travel no longer a luxury reserved for some, but for general consumption. Not only Japanese tourists outnumber and outspend other tourists in destination cities, but they usually bring wads of cash and come in teeming groups. Thirty-five percent of male and 42% of female respondents have gone overseas, while 65% of male and 58% responded to the negative. Yet, the next question will indicate their willingness.

11) **Would you consider living in another country?**

Three hundred eighty-six responded to this question, 130 male and 256 female. Thanks to modern advances, it is now possible to experience living in another country while maintaining one's cultural roots and after sometime return to one's nation, either for a visit or a permanent stay. Advances in communications and mass media enable peoples living in a foreign soil to keep in touch with his or her relatives, friends in the home country. In the United States, new immigrants retain their bi-cultural and bi-lingual roots unlike the first immigrants who came ahead in the early 20th Century. Because continental travel took nearly half a year, leaving their home countries meant a final farewell. That was the last they would see of their friends and relatives. Because information and communications were awfully slow, it meant they would have to completely sever their cultural bonds with their home countries. That hastened the process of assimilation, necessary for social cohesion in the adopted society. An overwhelming 55% of the male and 59% of female respondents answered to the affirmative, while 38% of male and 35 of female respondents said, "no". The remaining 6% for both genders were uncertain.
12) Is there something to be proud of as a Japanese?

Three hundred seventy-seven responded to this question, 129 male and 248 female. A recent study conducted by the Ministry of Education pointed to a general lack of patriotism among the Japanese youth. This could be a result of the continuing economic stagnation, where prospects for employment after graduation remains bleak. Another is moral debasement when considered in light of increased juvenile crimes. Though 45% of male and 58% of female respondents were uncertain, 32% of male and 22% of female responded affirmed that there is something to be of being a Japanese. Japan’s rise from the ashes of the Second World War to an economic giant is surely something to be proud of. However, the respondent age group did not experience that transformation. Having lived in relative luxury compared to the previous generation, the level of satisfaction among the Japanese youth is very difficult to reach. Simple things like owning a bicycle pleased their parents and grandparents. Today, owning a car is not enough to please the present youth. This is also true in other industrialized nations.

13) As a Japanese, do you believe there is such thing a "Japanese superiority"?

Three hundred eighty-two responded to this question, 125 male and 257 female. The notion of Japanese superiority inspired the previous generation and was the engine of the economic miracle. Though Japanese are very polite and humble, the notion of superiority is unexpressed. Thirty-eight percent for both male and female affirmed the existence of Japanese excellence. Thirty-six percent of male and 38% of female responded answered to the negative. The narrow gap between the affirmative and negative sides would suggest a need for further research. Twenty-six percent of male and 25% of female respondents were uncertain.

14) Do you agree that Japan has a responsibility to assist foreign countries?

Three hundred forty-four responded to this question, 120 male and 224 female. Thirty-three percent of male and 32% of female reacted negatively when asked about assisting developing countries. Thirty-two percent of male and 19% of female affirmed Japan’s responsibility to help other countries. Those uncertain were equally in large numbers, 35% of male and 49% of female respondents. Throughout the years, Japan remains the highest donor of Overseas Development Assistance (ODAs). Developing nations pin their economic hopes on Japan’s willingness to dole out ODAs. Importation of foreign goods is also seen as trade assistance to developing countries. The dependency relationship has reached a point, that if Japan were to stop doling out ODAs, many developing nations would simply flounder. That if Japan were to stop buying foreign goods, many developing nations would virtually collapse. As a result, many developing nations see Japan assume
an active world leadership role. But recent economic recession facing Japan would stand in the way.

15) Do you agree that Japan should continue its UN Peace-keeping Operations even in the event of Japanese casualties?

Three hundred seventy-seven responded to this politically-sensitive question, 124 male and 253 female respondents. Thirty-three percent of male and 19% of female reacted negatively to sending Self-Defence Forces in life-threatening UN peace-keeping operations. On the other hand, 32% of male and 19% of female responded affirmatively. They recognized Japan’s role in United Nations activities. It has been nearly 10 years since Japan started deploying SDFs in war-ravaged areas, first in Cambodia and recently in East Timor. The remaining 35% of male and 49% of female responded were uncertain. Given the politically-sensitive nature of this question, it is understandable why a large percentage stayed on the sidelines.

16) Do you agree that Japan should extend foreign aid (ODAs) even in the current economic recession in Japan?

Three hundred seventy-four responded to this politically-sensitive question, 123 male and 251 female respondents. Thirty-seven percent of male and 30% of female respondents answered "yes", while 31% of male and 28% of female responded negatively. The remaining 32% of male and 42% of female were uncertain. In light of the current recession and unemployment rate hovering at 5.5%, it is understandable that the responses were equally divided. The Japanese youth recognize Japan’s responsibilities and burdens as a world leader, but are equally cognizant of pressing domestic problems.

Conclusion

After conducting the survey, we can conclude that inspite of prevailing cultural barriers and language difficulties, internationalization or international understanding has taken a great leap in once rigid Japanese society. As exhibited in the survey, the Japanese youth is keenly-aware of the nation’s new role as a world leader. Hence, it has duties and responsibilities to the world community. For a generation that was born, nurtured and raised in relative luxury unlike their parents, they are aware of the nation’s economic weight and its leverage vis-a-vis other countries. For a generation that did not experience the horrors of war and have known nothing but peace, they would prefer to dole out economic assistance to developing countries rather than deploy troops in potential battlefields. Based on the empirical data, the present Japanese youth is more outward-looking, a world view necessary for a new world leader.

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国際化社会における外国・外国人に対する
日本の若者の意識に関する調査

ヴィー・デヴィッド

九州保健福祉大学社会福祉学部東洋介護福祉学科

要旨
当調査では、日本の国際化に関して幾つかの分野において大学生の意識調査を行う。日本は現在、世界経済において重要な役割を担う国としてその責務や負担などを増し続けている。一方、日本経済が不景気状況を迎え11年目のようであるという現在、若者は「不景気世代」と呼ばれること。その特別な立場から、国際社会および、外国・外国人についての多岐にわたる調査を分析し、論じるものとする。

キーワード：外国人、外国、文化的障壁、国際化、世界のリーダーシップ、経済援助、先進国、発展途上国