

EPISODE 8 TRANSCRIPT

Hello, everyone, I'm Sonia Paul. Welcome to this week's episode of Shizuoka Speaks. We give an in-depth, personal look at language learning and living in Shizuoka City, in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan.

*In last week's episode, we heard some Japanese views toward the English language and speakers of English. Today, we're going to talk about Japan--different peoples' perceptions of the country and culture, and how they view it compared to other countries in Asia. Remember that these are the **personal** opinions of our guests based on their experiences living in Shizuoka.*

So, what's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Japanese people?

Kotomi: Japanese people...we are really hard workers...

That's Kotomi speaking here. She's a 24 year old Shizuoka native. So work ethic is a pretty recognizable Japanese trait. But what else?

Kotomi: ...Mm...we are maybe crazy for beauty--

Sonia: Crazy for beauty!

Kotomi: Yeah...ey to...maybe if you feel like if you are working in a school, and you are with Japanese teachers, and when they have a meeting, we really decide very small things, and if you have events, and event is after two months, but even though, they want to make sure--where can you get the chairs? Where can you get the microphones? How many? What time?

Sonia: Details.

Kotomi: Details, yeah. And also, we are kind of detail makers as well...and also very...kind of sensitive...and what else...kind...punctual

Sonia: But like, the way of thinking and the way of living...When you came back from the Philippines, did you sort of see Japan with new eyes?

Kotomi: Ahh, yeah...when I came back to Japan, I didn't notice, but my mother mentioned, "Why you are always singing at home?" and, "Eh!" Because people in the Philippines, even the workers who are cleaning the toilet in the department stores, they are singing. And also, office workers--they are singing as well, so they are really, oh relaxed. But Japanese people, we have so much tension. Mm. So, if you work in the

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company, the smiling...is not good. Laughing is not so good. Joking is not so good. So be in tense...that is kind of our culture...

So that's how Kotomi perceives her own culture. But what about other countries in Asia? How do they compare with Japan?

India, for example. And for that, let's talk to Manasi.

Manasi: Ohh...Indian culture--I think it's extremely rich, for one. And I don't think I'm extremely knowledgeable about the vast culture that my country has. But what I know is that right now, it's changing like--at a REALLY great speed, and...now it's more of an American culture getting mixed up with Indian culture. But I think even now, we're very society-conscious, very conscious of other peoples' views, you know...what is right and what is wrong. And most of the people ARE religious, somewhere or the other. And we DO believe it, you know, evil, good, those things, and we are superstitious, and uh, we have those old kind of snake charmers, views that you have about our country, but...but it's changing SO quickly that I don't know.

Sonia: So what are these changes?

Manasi: Basically, the biggest change is in the thought process? And the way people think?

Sonia: So, how--how did people think before?

Manasi: Before this, I think people in India were quite ignorant--the biggest thing that I felt it was. They don't want to look beyond, you know, what is there. Now, people know so much more because there's so much more exposure, the media, everything's changing. It's becoming so international now. Plus, you know, now...we do not see ourselves as inferior to probably any other race. You know, now, even the auto-walas and the rickshaw-walas, I don't know if you know what that is--

In India, autos are three-wheeled motorized vehicles, similar to taxis. Rickshaws are non-motorized wagons whose drivers ride bicycles or pull the wagons on foot. In India, autos and bicycle rickshaws are common forms of transportation. So an auto-wala refers to an auto driver, and a rickshaw-wala refers to a rickshaw driver.

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Manasi: But, basically even them. Now, if a foreigner comes in, an American, they'll just be like, ooh, how do I make money. They will not be like, ooh, how cool is she. So we stopped idolizing people because the whole world has started looking at us in a different way. You know, now, people want Indians to come to their country and work for them. Everything is changed. So even the way we look at ourselves has changed so much, so there's a lot more of confidence, a lot more information about the world.

Sonia: So how do you feel about Japan in comparison to India?

Manasi: I think Japan is still in awe of the whites...Because...when they talk to Europeans...no matter how the people are, they just, somehow, feel inferior. And, about the Japanese, I don't feel they are quite confident about themselves. Probably the ones I have met. They're very conscious of how they are and how they look to the OTHER person. And, they're very closed. They're not very extremely open. I think they are quite...what do you say? They're quite conservative, aren't they? I didn't think it to be so conservative.

Sonia: How do you mean, conservative?

Manasi: Conservative as in, even right now, even in a developed country...like, if you walk around with a guy, or hands in hand, kissing him--I mean, that's like, pretty normal. But they do get shocked. They're not very comfortable with that kind of situation. In terms of, okay, clothing and all--they don't really care what you're doing, what you're wearing. But, somehow, what the other person thinks about them is somehow really important. And they won't say what they want to say to your face? They won't say it.

Plus--this is the biggest thing that really hit me--about their work. Even if they don't like their work, they have to stick to it because they feel like they have some duty to do the company or something. And they have to be loyal to it. And they can't really say no to their boss. These things are quite prevalent...as of what I got to hear, experience...

That's Manasi's experience dealing with Japanese people. But what about Japanese people who are dealing with other cultures? Take Kotomi. She spent a year studying in the Philippines when she was a student at Shizuoka University.

Sonia: What was your first impression of the Philippines? When you first went there, what did you notice at first? What were the things that stood out to you?

Kotomi: Ah, maybe I really got energy to live, energy to survive.

Sonia: How do you mean?

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Kotomi: Mm, for example, because I am Japanese, I stayed here in Japan since I was born here, and I just met...of course, like ALT, and...some teachers who are foreigners. And I had some foreign friends. But, I had the experience to LIVE in other countries, and I chose the Philippines because of my second language, and when I lived there, and I stayed in the mountain area, there is no light, no electricity...and really indigenous people. Their lifestyle is really tough, but...their smile was so beautiful...which I've never seen in Japan--that was what I felt there. And they really, really talk, and they really took the time to do like farming or to communicate with people. Of course, they don't have electricity, so at nighttime, they just eat, talk, sleep! That's it! So...what I really impressed, that is, their smile was so beautiful. Maybe that is because they really talk to the people...and...to take care their families and the villagers...

Sonia: So, for you, this was your impression of the Philippines. But how did your experience growing up in Japan shape that impression for you?

Kotomi: Ah...you know, when I was born in Japan, everything was set. For example, if you want to make...uh, rice, you just push the button on the rice cooker. If you want to make hot water, you can just push--you can just press the button!

Automatic rice cookers and water boilers are extremely common in Japan.

Kotomi: ...So everything was very comfortable, everything is very set. So...we can live very easily, but...maybe I really feel something is lost. Maybe something is...different. Maybe that is young people...I mean, deeply...maybe they just, they really feel...Japan is very good country. Clean. And high technology. Developed. But, for example, my parents. My father was working in bonito flakes company?...

Bonito flakes are fish flakes, by the way. A common ingredient in many Japanese dishes.

Kotomi: ...So sometimes, they didn't come back our house for...two months or three months...for his work. So, the image of good things? That is to earn money. Demo, of course, children cannot be satisfied to earn money, right? But, gradually, if you grew up as adults, and after that, as...what our parents did... "Ah, we have to earn money, we have to make money...to survive, to feed the family..."

So...maybe I have satisfied with some things, like TVs, books, games...but when I went to the Philippines...of course, no electricity. I just faced--I have--I had to face the people

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in the village. Demo...demo...for sure, I was really happy when I was there. I really could feel what I couldn't feel in Japan. Mm. Maybe that is what Japanese people lost in the process of development...

Sonia: They lost an energy to live?

Kotomi: Energy to live and also...energy to...survive, and also...nandero na...

Sonia: Energy to survive?

Kotomi: Yeah...

Sonia: I mean, because if you were to look outside and you see all these salarymen, people are so busy, they walk very fast, they stay very, very late at work, you might think to yourself, they have an energy to survive. I mean, how--how do they get their energy to stay at work for so long? So how is that energy--what, what kind of energy are you talking about? How is that different from that kind of energy?

Kotomi: Mmm...yeah, of course, Japanese people, we really, really hard work. Demo...if you see the people on the train in the morning? Most of the people, they look so sleepy...there is not like, happiness? Of course, they are earning money, they are working hard. Demo, that is from their, "Oh, I have to do that!" That is not, "Oh, I want to do that!" So, that is a different. So, in the Philippines, in the village, they really...mm...mm...I cannot explain very well, but when I saw their eye...I really felt the differences between Japan and Filipino people. Their eyes was very...bright. Mm. Demo...people in Japan...I couldn't feel...more...energy...genki!..

Sonia: Genki...

The word genki is a pretty important word in Japanese. The equivalent of the English sentence "How are you?" is "Genki desu ka?" Literally, it means, "Are you healthy?" But the word genki, like other words in Japanese, has several connotations. Among them are energy, vigor, stamina, spirit, health, and courage.

Kotomi: I was in a really, really rural area, because mountain side, demo...they really--more than Japanese people--they really know about what they have to appreciate. That is sand, soil, and wind, and the rain. Japanese people, what I feel, we really forget...what we should appreciate. That is not TV, that is not computer. That is parents, the families...or the food...which every day we can eat...

Sonia: Do you think this is something that's true about Japanese people in general, or Japanese people living in cities, or...

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Kotomi: Ahh, so da rou na! You know, even you are living in mountain, you can watch TV, and...if you drive a car for thirty minutes or one hour, you can go to the shopping, right? Yeah, but...the people living in the city...

Sonia: Like Shizuoka City, for example.

Kotomi: Ah, Shizuoka City. But actually, in Shizuoka City, 70 percent of Shizuoka City's land, that is mountain. So...we can really easy to feel the mountain and the nature. But people who are living in the downtowns...of course they really...enjoy their life, very easy...It's very...easy to live, ne.

Easy to live. That's one of the impressions that Ria, from Indonesia, has of Shizuoka as well...

Ria: Uh, yeah. Actually...this is really a nice place to stay compared to my country. It's...everything is set up really...almost perfect here, and...neat, you know, you can really live easily, and you are really appreciated as humans here, but not...in my country.

Sonia: What do you mean by “appreciated as humans”?

Ria: Like, I don't know, maybe it's already, like, a developed country, so it's also...make an influence. Like the car, you can really, like, won't die if you walk here...no pollution at all, not like in my country...yeah, those, those kind of things.

What Ria is getting at is the difference between Japan and some other countries in Asia. In Japan, traffic is controlled. The country is clean. It's organized.

Ria: So we're both the same, Asia, Asian countries, but it's totally different. Indonesia is like a...it's a *developing* country, you know?

Ria: Well, the good thing is that...we are a warm-hearted people. You will always find someone who will smile back at you even if you don't know them. It's not like here, you know? It's kind of bit, like, cold? You know...

Sonia: Here?

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Ria: Yeah, and like, and if you don't know...yeah. You just walk somewhere, and...they really look busy with their self, and too fast and everything...but the people in my country, it's not, not, not like that...

Sonia: So when you came to Japan, did you have culture shock?

Ria: Not that really big, but the culture here is like, you shouldn't put any trouble to other peoples...in any kind of situations. So for example, if you go in a coffee shop or somewhere, if you want to just talk, you can only do it at like, I don't know, midnight in an izakaya kind of stuff, that you can really talk loud, laugh loud...

An izakaya, by the way, is a Japanese-style pub.

Ria: ...But not in the lunchtime or just in the coffee shop. You can't really like, make noise, you know, you can't...really laugh so hard, it's like, ahh!...I laugh so hard when I laugh. Because once, I was in a restaurant to have lunch with some people, five people or more. We talk, and I think it's loud, and one of the waiter like, "Can you please turn your voice," and then, "Ahh!"...better get going.

Phan: We have the incredible flexibility. We Vietnamese enjoy the other culture, and think and feel it in our own way, and then a new kind of good is created.

Phan, from Vietnam, has his own take.

Sonia: What do you think about Japanese people in comparison? How would you describe Japanese people?

Phan: From the first time that I came to Japan, I thought that Japanese people is a workaholic. They live to work, and they work to live. Their real life is their work, and...mm, I think they are a very lonely person.

Sonia: Lonely.

Phan: Lonely. In the first month in Japan, I work in a convenience store. And my, uh, sempai--I mean, my senior--he is Japanese. He is a good worker, and after work, he

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didn't go home quickly. He stayed in the store, he checked everything, and then he did every little thing until he feels satisfied, and then he leaves for home.

Sonia: Do you think your view is the same as other Vietnamese people?

Phan: My friends and my sempais seem to be very impressed about the strain of the Japanese.

Sonia: The strain?

Phan: Yes, I have to use the word...because my friend worked at another factory. He said that his manager--even though his manager is at his 80s, he still worked for 10 hours a day.

Sonia: So when you say strain, do you mean their strength, or do you mean the way they--

Phan: The mind. Their mind.

Sonia: Their mind?

Phan: I mean both. Because they were born to work as long as possible, and after a long time of working, they get their body stronger and stronger.

Sonia: Would you say that is untrue for Vietnamese people?

Phan: Vietnamese people is a good worker too. But we have the good skill of balance in our life. We know when to stop and we know when to rest.

Sonia: Are there many Japanese people in Vietnam.

Phan: Yes, they grow much every day.

Sonia: Really?

Phan: Yes. I thought the main reason is the Vietnamese life is much easier than Japanese. They don't have to work until death, and they have a lot of friends in Vietnam. For example, a lot of my Japanese teacher got married in Vietnam. And they don't even have the determination to go back to Japan.

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Sonia: How are the Japanese people in Vietnam different or similar to the Japanese people in Japan?

Phan: Uh, I think the Japanese that are in Vietnam is good at enjoying life. Because when I speak with them, the Japanese always show an open attitude, but the truth lies in their eyes. When I spoke with the Japanese in Vietnam, they really look at my eyes, and the answer lies in their eyes. But, when I spoke with my boss in work, he look at me with the eye that have, "Speak quicker and go back to work."

You may be thinking these views are crazy or rude. But they are just a few of many.

Before we finish today's episode, let's talk about something that many people don't really associate with Japan--religion.

For that, we're going to talk with Ria. Her home country of Indonesia is one of the most religious countries in the world.

Ria: So we have like five big religions. Muslim, the biggest percentage, Islam, and then Christian, we have Protestant and Catholic, and then Buddha, Hindu.

In Japan, many people identify as Buddhist or Shinto, and they follow certain traditions associated with the religions. Shrines and temples exist throughout the country. But even so, Japanese people--in general--do not describe themselves as religious.

Sonia: What do you think of religion in Japan?

Ria: They don't really have one, right? But the cool thing is THAT, you know? And still, I really want to know more. I mean, they teach the people here so that they can really be polite and really...really polite and really like...honest? Because it's really safe here, and they're really *clean*...Uh, well, in Islam, you know, cleanliness is the really like, important thing. But in Indonesia...we're not as honest as those people here, we're not as neat as those people here, and we're not...it's different, I mean--they don't have this book to like, to told you, to tell you not to do this things or that things. But, they really like, appreciate other people, and Indonesia people mostly don't do that, I think.

Sonia: How do you think Japanese people came to be that way then?

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Ria: I think it's the education from like the children. I once asked one of my friends, "Do you have this religion education in school, because I do have that." "No, I don't. Yeah, we just teach the values." Yeah, it's the country's values, I think. You know, not something from religion kind of thing.

The educational values...this brings us back to the topics from our first couple of episodes. Susan, the junior high school Japanese Teacher of English we've spoken with, also believes the education has much to do with the way Japanese act in daily life.

She also looks at Japan differently after traveling. For her, Japanese people seemed busier and tired in comparison to the people she met while she traveled. But why?

Susan: It's a very difficult question to answer because...one of the problems is the Japanese government, I think. Or Japanese economical problems, mm...is one of the reasons...for our tiring or our...mm, busy days.

Sonia: How is it the problem? Like, because the government, or the economy, requires everyone to work so hard?

Susan: Mm, yeah. So very long time ago, Japan is a developing country, so people believed if we study hard and go to college, we can get the good job, but now, it's not. So many people don't have their own goals, strong goals to live...that's a problem, I think. But when I go other countries, I notice the Japanese good things also. So Japanese people is very...ey to ne...has good manners! I think thanks to the education in Japanese schools. From the moral education.

Sonia: So, and the moral education is the kokoro development?

Susan: Yes, that's right.

Again, as a reminder from our first episode, the word kokoro connotes many things in Japan, such as heart, mind, and spirit. But, as a method of education, it basically refers to character development...the process of raising citizens who are both polite and well-mannered, but also strong in their own convictions.

We've talked with four people in this episode. Kotomi. Manasi. Ria. Phan. Different nationalities, different experiences...and as a result, different ideas about the world. Different perceptions of Japan.

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And now that we know more about these perceptions, what about the people having them? Next week: more from Manasi, Ria, and Phan about their lives in Shizuoka.

Thanks to Manasi, Ria, Phan, Kotomi, and Susan for sharing their views for today's episode. I'm Sonia Paul. Thank you for listening to Shizuoka Speaks.