

Human Journals

**Short Communication**

March 2021 Vol.:18, Issue:1

© All rights are reserved by Jun Kobayashi et al.

## What Happened to the Japanese Greeting?



**IJSRM**  
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY  
An Official Publication of Human Journals



**Jun Kobayashi\*<sup>1</sup>, Keiichi Ikeda<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Nutrition, University of Kochi, 2751-1 Ike, Kochi, Kochi 781-8515, Japan; <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Hokuriku University, 3 Ho, Kanagawa-machi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-1181, Japan.*

**Submitted:** 01 February 2021  
**Revised:** 20 February 2021  
**Accepted:** 10 March 2021

**Keywords:** Traditional Greeting, Reduced Greetings, Japanese Culture, Information Technology

### ABSTRACT

Foreigners visiting Japan have often commented on the polite nature of the Japanese people. However, in recent years, foreigners staying in Japan as students and tourists have reported that the traditional Japanese greeting is being used less. Thus, this article considers why traditional greetings have reduced, and considers the psychological reasons behind choosing to not greet. We conclude that this is likely due to the nature of the Japanese people as a whole, the current developments in information technology, and the social situation.



HUMAN JOURNALS

[www.ijsrm.humanjournals.com](http://www.ijsrm.humanjournals.com)

## INTRODUCTION:

The dictionary definition of a greeting is “a ritual action or word to be performed when a person meets or leaves an individual, or the statement of a word that demonstrates respect or endearment to the other person. An act that has the effect of smoothing interpersonal relationships and facilitating social life”<sup>1)</sup> Foreigners visiting Japan have often commented on the polite nature of the Japanese people<sup>1</sup>. However, in recent years, foreigners studying abroad or sightseeing in Japan have noticed a change that the traditional Japanese greeting is being used less<sup>2</sup>. Thus, this article considers why traditional greetings have reduced, and considers the psychological reasons behind choosing to not greet. We conclude that this is likely due to the nature of the Japanese people as a whole, the current developments in information technology, and the social situation.

### Reasons for not greeting

Regarding greetings, the target population of this study can be divided into three groups. An overview is shown in Table 1. First, individuals can be divided into those who perform greetings and those who do not. Those who do not perform greetings can be further divided into those who do not take the initiative to greet and those who do not return a greeting even if they are greeted.

Table 1 also shows examples of the psychological reasons for each grouping. A person who does not initiate a greeting is not unusual within Japanese culture. This may seem inconsistent with the Japanese reputation for politeness. However, many Japanese people are shy in character and tend to be reluctant to initiate greetings. Some Japanese people can greet strangers without fear, but many people tend to avoid it because they think that greeting may cause them harm. In other words, they often do not expend energy initiating a greeting due to the risk of it not being reciprocated<sup>3</sup>. In addition to this risk, psychological reasons for not initiating a greeting include not wanting to feel unpleasant, anxious, or embarrassed.

However, some people do not return a greeting even if they are greeted. There are several possible reasons for this, but the primary one is that they put no value in greetings<sup>3</sup>. People might choose not to greet because they are busy or because they dislike the other person. Such people end up with notes and emails, even if they have important notices. There is also a high possibility of these people becoming troublemakers at work or in the neighborhood. If you think from the

standpoint of the person who greets you, you will understand, but you do not know what the person is thinking, and you will find it difficult to communicate<sup>4</sup>. In extreme cases, such a person may be considered suspicious, ill-mannered, or unwilling to engage<sup>5</sup>. Failure to reciprocate a simple greeting may cause professional relationships to deteriorate. On the other hand, those who actively greet others are considered to be socially successful<sup>3</sup>. While a single predictor of what makes a person likely to perform greetings cannot be identified, it stands to reason that people with strong communication and social networking skills greet more frequently. As a result, these people are also more likely to progress professionally.

There are also reasons why children and young people do not always perform greetings. This is greatly influenced by parental education. If a parent does not have the habit of actively greeting, their child may be shy and unable to greet or may become accustomed to not greeting by following their parents' example. Psychologically, as in the case of adults, children may think that it is troublesome or unnecessary to perform a greeting or do not want to be disturbed by having to greet someone when doing other things. Also, children may be encouraged not to greet strangers as part of their parents' educational policy<sup>6, 7</sup>. Such an educational policy may be in response to child kidnapping, which has been increasing in Japan in recent years, so it cannot be said unconditionally that it is not good practice. It encourages children to be vigilant to protect themselves.

### **Why Japanese people have stopped greeting**

In the previous section, we considered the reasons for not greeting. Now we consider why such a change has been seen. Something within Japanese culture is thought to have changed. It is thought that young people have been particularly affected; therefore we will consider the content of the interviews with young people in advance<sup>8</sup>. There are three reasons why young people reported not greeting. The first reason is that the greeting itself is considered inefficient. If you greet every time you meet an acquaintance, you'll spend so much time on it that you think you can't do anything else<sup>8</sup>. Second, there is a tendency to dislike increasing the number of catch balls for words such as email and LINE software, which they think are meaningless. Third, the development of Social Networking Service (SNS) tools has made it easier to communicate. Thus, reduced greetings could be a result of young people using informal, abbreviated language

on such networking tools<sup>8</sup>). Many young people think that content that is not directly related to requirements, such as fixed phrases, should be omitted from communication. If the young people who take this for granted become adults, the time may come when idioms such as “Dear Sir” and “Thank you” will disappear<sup>8</sup>. We don't know if it's a more direct reason, but Japanese people are too accustomed to being proactively told by employees to say “Welcome” or “Thank you” when they go to the store as a customer. There is also a chance that they no longer take the initiative in greeting<sup>6</sup>). Foreigners visiting Japan seem to feel that much of the information given in places such as public transportation stops and ATMs is voice-automated, reducing human greetings. Given that, such a situation may be a problem peculiar to Japan. Furthermore, some people think that the overall manners in Japan have deteriorated in recent years<sup>9</sup>. Such deterioration is more noticeable between Japanese people of different generations (in the way young people treat older people) than it is for foreigners in Japan. In recent years, many people bump into other people while walking or step on other people's toes on the train and ignore it without even giving a bow. We also feel that the number of people who walk while staring at smartphones and women who apply makeup on public transportation has increased. This may be due to the increase in the number of people who only think about satisfying their desires and who do not think about the inconvenience and feelings of those around them before greeting. This may be considered a result of reduced societal empathy. The ability to give a sign to let others know what you want to do has also diminished<sup>6</sup>. When people got off the train during rush hours, they used to say “I'm sorry” or “Please let me through” to others near the door. Nowadays, people who say such things are rare in Japan, and recently, many people shove others on their way to the exit. Overseas, it seems that they often develop into injury cases. The Japanese still have a bit of a reluctant personality, so maybe there are only people who take advantage of it as an insult. These are dangerous signs because they are thought to lead to major troubles.

### **Interacting with people who do not greet**

Here are some examples of how to interact with people who do not greet and how to improve their ability to greet<sup>3-5</sup>. Examples of the former are summarized in Table 2, and that entices to facilitate the greeting, be greeting even if it is not returned the greeting is considered as a workaround. When people talk to them with their eyes, they feel that they must reply. Using such techniques, one might be able to encourage someone to perform a greeting.

In terms of improving other ability to greet, we have no choice but to think and act on our own. Gradually greeting people close to you (i.e., others in the same department at work, people sitting next to you, neighbors) might be a good starting point. Doing so is circumstantial and up to personal judgment. Even if somebody does not respond to your greeting, they may be the only person who does not. You should muster up the courage to try. If you do not have the time to greet someone, you should make more time. If you get to work early in the morning, you may have more time to greet your colleagues, and you may have a chance to greet your family better when you get home earlier. It may be necessary to find meaning and take action with a sense of comfort. By continuing to greet others you might form a positive habit. However, no one is obliged to return your greeting, so there is no choice but to act patiently without expecting a reply. You should not avoid greeting others just because they do not return your greeting.

### **The original meaning of greetings in the Japanese sense**

Greetings serve as a gateway for connecting and making someone's acquaintance<sup>1)</sup>. The reason for greeting strangers in foreign countries other than Japan is often to let someone know that you are not hostile. Greetings do not have this reason in Japan because it is a safe place.

The Japanese people's attitudes to greeting change drastically depending on whether they are addressing a friend or acquaintance. Japanese people always greet people who are close to them. They do not greet acquaintances. They tend to greet to confirm the relationship with the people they are close to. They may or may not greet depending on the traditional level of intimacy in their community<sup>1)</sup>. However, the range of communities that have greeting practices may be very small, as more and more people aren't greeting their colleagues and neighbors these days. Nonetheless, I believe the use of greetings could increase again.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Greetings are necessary. They improve interpersonal relationships and facilitate social activities. Casual phrases such as "Thank you" and "Hello" connect people, bridge the gap between individuals, and improve quality of life<sup>1)</sup>. Greetings are the first step in communication<sup>6)</sup>. If the greeting is accompanied by a feeling of gratitude and respect, then it will lead those performing the greeting to form feelings of respect and gratitude for each other.

We would like to introduce a little story of a talent<sup>10</sup>. This is a person who has visited many long-established stores that have been in business for over 100 years and considers immutable things. Various industries have long-established stores in Japan in which greeting customers is common practice<sup>10</sup>. The greeting method of bowing is beautiful and elegant, and customers who are greeted in such a way report feeling good. Such stores may wish to continue greeting practices if they research the opinions of customers. The talent knows from experience that in stores where a greeting is not performed, customers are less likely to speak to the staff.

A lack of conversation reduces the amount of knowledge shared. Information can be found without the help of others, but a lack of interaction with others can lead to bias. Learning without communication also requires extra effort. If you take too long to consider something, you may lose as a result<sup>11</sup>, and your range of options may narrow<sup>10</sup>. Not everything you learn from others will be correct, however, through greeting and interacting with many people and hearing various opinions at no cost to yourself. Therefore, even if you are a typical Japanese person who is shy and reluctant, you should continue to greet others courageously.

## REFERENCES:

- 1) Why don't Japanese people greet? -Told by a foreigner living in Japan. PTA is PTA, Ameba Blog, published 3/4/2019, Available from <https://ameblo.jp/niku18kuni18/entry-12444419352.html> (browsed December 2020).
- 2) Japanese do not greet -International students have the question, "Why don't Japanese people say hello?" Yahoo! Japan Answers, published 11/10/2010, Available from [https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1050166745?\\_yosp=5oyo5](https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1050166745?_yosp=5oyo5) (browsed December 2020).
- 3) Psychology of people who do not say hello and four characteristics - How to deal with people who do not say hello and how to treat them well. Carearte, published 3/27/2017, Available from <https://i-am.jp/decision-making/career-up/5019> (browsed December 2020).
- 4) Eight psychological reasons for not saying hello - What to do about people who ignore you at work or in your neighborhood. Published 9/14/2019, Available from <https://smartlog.jp/147123> (browsed December 2020).
- 5) Nine psychological reasons for not saying hello! - Three options for dealing with people in the workplace who do not greet. Chokotty, Available from <https://cktt.jp/68903> (browsed December 2020).
- 6) Kiwamu Maki. *Children who do not greet - Thoughts from student answers*. Bright ideas, nice design. Available from: <https://www.jissen.ac.jp/kankyo/ab-maki2/maki/essay/essay30.html> (browsed January 2021).
- 7) Why don't children say hello? - In some cases, they dare not say hello for safety. Ameba News, published 6/26/2020, Available from: <https://news.ameba.jp/entry/20200626-303/> (browsed December 2020).
- 8) Shocking facts – What a young man said when asked why he does not say "hello". Livedoor News, published 10/24/2016, Available from: <https://news.livedoor.com/article/detail/12186325/> (browsed December 2020).
- 9) More than 70% of people feel that the number of people with bad manners has increased. Nifty News, published 3/20/2016, Available from: <https://news.nifty.com/article/item/neta/12225-160519007136/> (browsed December 2020).

10) People who don't greet simply get sick. - King Kong Nishino explains the logic". Akihiro Nishino Entertainment Research Institute Voicy, R25, published 1/23/2020, Available from: <https://r2.jp/article/769140472487185692> (browsed January 2021).

11) Brief commentary -Characteristics of people who do not greet. Kyokujitsu San Blog, published 10/8/2020, Available from: <https://kyokujitsu256.com/aisatsu> (browsed December 2020).



**Table No. 1: Reasons for not greeting**

Targets	Psychological Reasons
People who actively greet others	<p>They greet unconsciously</p> <p>They think it is better to initiate a greeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They find significance in a greeting</li> </ul>
<p>People who do not greet others (People who only perform a greeting when someone greets them first)</p> <p>People who greet carefully</p>	<p>They lack self-confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They are worried about what other's think</li> <li>-They are self-conscious about their voice</li> </ul> <p>They are embarrassed to raise their voice</p> <p>They don't have a habit of greeting</p> <p>They have a lot of pride</p> <p>They are afraid to greet because greeting gives them a bad feeling</p>
<p>People who do not greet others (People who do not perform a greeting even if someone greets them first)</p>	<p>They prioritize rationality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They do not consider greeting necessary</li> <li>-They are busy with work</li> </ul> <p>They dislike many people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They do not want to greet to people who they do not like</li> <li>-Their feeling of dislike exceeds their common sense to observe manners</li> <li>-Like it too much to greet</li> <li>-They hate humans</li> </ul> <p>They do not want to communicate with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They shut out others from the beginning</li> <li>-They do not expect others to greet</li> <li>-They want to enter my world</li> </ul>

The reasons are roughly divided, but may also apply to other subjects.

Based on the data in references 3-5).



**Table No. 2: How to deal with people who do not initiate greetings**

Targets	Workarounds
People who only greet when someone greets them first	Encourage them to say “hello” -Greeting them in a loud voice -Greeting them with eye contact -By initiating a fun conversation, and greeting them with a smile after that
People who do not perform a greeting even if someone greets them first	Stop caring about whether they return your greeting -Greet even if there is no reaction -Believe it is worthwhile to greet Bring it to a state where you need a reply -Praise them -Talk to them further -Tell them that “greeting is also very important in their work” if you are a subordinate or colleague in the workplace.

Based on the data in references 3-5).