Present-day Interpersonal Relationship Values : A comparative study based on Japan and Sri Lanka

D. Rathnayake

N. Komatsubara

Abstract

Language and culture have a strong relationship and a language is considered as a mirror of its culture. Hence identifying the culture belonging to the language we learn is important. The only way to understand a culture is through experience gained by living with the people of the target culture and observing it carefully. However, this is not an easy task for students who are learning a language far away from the target language environment. Thus, the learners should be provided with adequate information to understand the culture, nature of people belonging to the culture, their behavior patterns, their thoughts, their values, and norms. This paper examines present-day interpersonal relationship values of Japanese people and compares them with the values of Sri Lankan people to identify the interpersonal relationships values of Japanese people and their behaviors. This comparative study is based on the results of a survey that was carried out in 2018 by distributing questionnaires among Sri-Lankan and Japanese citizens. Data were collected from a sample that consisted of 100 Sri Lankans and 100 Japanese. Data is classified based on the gender, age, and marital status of the participants. It was revealed that as Japan and Sri Lanka are both Asian countries, some similar values can be seen in both cultures when maintaining interpersonal relationships, however, there are gaps in the attitudes and thoughts, and behavior patterns of the two cultures that need consideration when building social relationships.

Keywords*:* Culture, Values, Japanese, Sri Lankan

1. Introduction

People around the world today show a big interest in learning foreign languages and engaging in intercultural communication for various purposes. Language and culture are intricately interwoven, and one cannot separate those two without losing the significance of either language or culture (Brown 1994). Culture can be defined in different ways, however, in the anthropological sense "Culture is an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behaviour of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behaviour starting from birth" (Chastain 1988:302). It is very important to have cultural intelligence for successful intercultural communication (Bucker, J. 2014). Cultural intelligence refers to the skills to behave and work effectively in culturally diverse situations. This is even more true with a language like Japanese which has a unique culture. Japanese cultural intelligence impacts successful Japanese language communication to a large extent and Japanese culture is often reflected in Japanese language and expressions of communication. According to Bücker et all (2014), cultural intelligence is important for effective communication, and knowledge of cultural differences prepares individuals for proper verbal and non-verbal communication in intercultural interactions.

The Japanese language is often considered as a language that is very much closer to Sinhala and even similarities are visible in the surface level of the culture as Asian countries. However, it is notable very clearly that there are many differences in behaviours, attitudes, and thoughts between Sri Lankan and Japanese people. There is much evidence to prove that language communication is not becoming successful even though language competence is of a high standard, but cultural intelligence is poor. To improve cultural intelligence in Sri Lankan Japanese learners, the cultural gap should be clearly identified. This paper aims to examine the two cultures of Japanese and Sri Lankan comparatively focusing on interpersonal relationship values to identify the cultural gap between the two cultures.

2. Literature Review

Hofstede developed a cultural dimension theory, and it describes the effects of society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior. Hofstede developed his original model using factor analysis to examine the results of a worldwide survey of employee values by IBM between 1967 and 1973.

The original theory proposed four dimensions along which cultural values could be analyzed: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance (strength of social hierarchy) and masculinity-femininity (task orientation versus person-orientation). Later he added a fifth dimension,

long-term orientation, to cover aspects of values not discussed in the original paradigm.

In 2010 Hofstede added a sixth dimension, indulgence versus self- restraint. At present, there are 6 cultural value dimensions it continues to be a major resource in cross-cultural fields. It has inspired several other major cross-cultural studies of values, as well as research on other aspects of culture, such as social beliefs.

Hofstede (1994) defines values as the deepest manifestation of culture, and he claims "values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Values are feelings with an arrow to it, they have a plus and a minus side" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 8).

The focus of this paper is on interpersonal relationship values and limited to Japanese and Sri Lankan cultures in general while Hofsted's focus was on work culture values.

Schein (1984) describes culture through three different levels. The first level is the artifacts and creations. The second level is the values, and the third level is basic assumptions.

Artifacts and creations are difficult to understand and analyze as the artifacts most often are not clearly spoken. It is easy to understand how and what, but why is more difficult to grasp.

According to Schein (1984), one needs to understand the culture's values to understand why people act the way they do. The values focus on what people say is the reason for their behavior.

Further, he says that to understand a culture, one must take a step further, to the last level, the basic assumptions. The primary or underlying assumptions are often unconscious but determine how people perceive, think, and feel.

However, for most researchers, values are the central part of the corporate culture. It shows the reasons for people's behavior and through the awareness of cultural values, we can understand a culture more effectively.

This paper was examined the 2nd level, proposed by Schein (1984), the interpersonal relationship values of the culture comparatively to identify how the Japanese and Sri Lankan people maintain interpersonal relationships the reasons for those behaviors.

3. Methodology

This comparative study is based on the results of a survey by distributing questionnaires among Sri-Lankan and Japanese citizens to identify their perspectives on social values. 8 values were selected for the basic awareness and understanding of how people's relationships with others and what they value when building relationships and their attitudes. The followings are the 8 values to identify how people maintain Interpersonal relationships and compare them with Sri Lankan culture.

> 1.Important things in life, 2. Important people in life, 3. Important factors in finding a life partner, 4. Important qualities expected in a life partner, 5. expected qualities in own child, 6. expected qualities in friends, 7. person value by the society, 8. things cannot be allowed in general

Data were collected from a sample that consisted of 100 Sri Lankans and 100 Japanese. Data is classified based on the gender, age, and marital status of the participants. There were 69 female and 31 male respondents for Japanese culture while 70 female and 30 male respondents from Sri Lankan culture. The age range of the respondents is 18-25,26-40,41-55 and 56-70. The marital status of respondents was classified as married and single or unmarried, there were 69 married respondents and 31 single respondents from Japanese culture while 60 married respondents and 40 single respondents from Sri Lankan culture.

The structure of the questions and the process of analyzing information was gathered through a questionnaire comprised of nine close-ended questions. The participants were expected to rank the given answers after analyzing their content.

4. Analysis

When analyzing the questionnaires, marks were given for each answer according to the ranking order, and the total marks scored by the participants were taken into consideration to draw conclusions. The total marks were varied according to the number of choices.
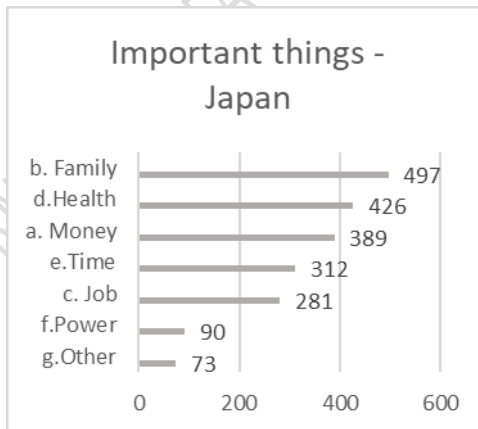
4.1 Important Things in life

Certain similarities between the interpersonal relationship values of the Japanese and Sri Lankans can be seen from the collected data. For example, both Sri Lankans and Japanese consider "Family" as the most valuable thing in their life.
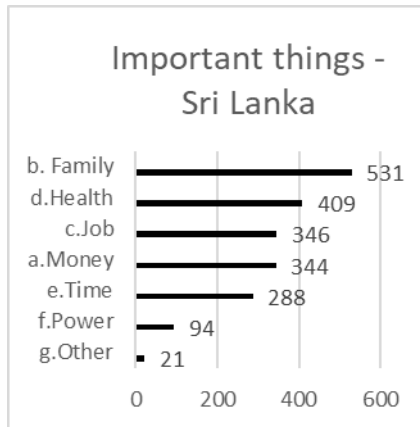
However, when analyzing carefully, it is notable that Sri Lankans seem to be a bit more attached to the family than their Japanese counterparts. Both Japanese and Sri Lankans have ranked "Health" as the second most important thing. Japanese have ranked "Work" as the fifth important thing, whereas Sri Lankans have ranked it as the third important thing. Further, the Japanese have selected "Time" as the fourth important thing while Sri Lankans have selected it as the fifth important thing. The ranks attached to time by both Sri- Lankans, and Japanese indicate the amount of importance given to time by both nations. The results of the questionnaire further show that "Power" is considered the least important thing by both Sri Lankans and Japanese.

As opposed to Sri Lankans who had not suggested "Other Values" as requested by the questionnaire, the Japanese had mentioned various answers. Among those answers, 10 people had written "Friend" and 7 others had written "Hobby" are important things in their lives. Especially, young unmarried people, between 18 years to 25 years, seem to consider 'Friends' as important. Further, the Japanese also consider "Hobby" as an important thing. This shows that the Japanese value their free time and use their leisure to engage in hobbies. On the contrary, most of Sri Lankans spend their free time with their families. See Graph 1 and 2.
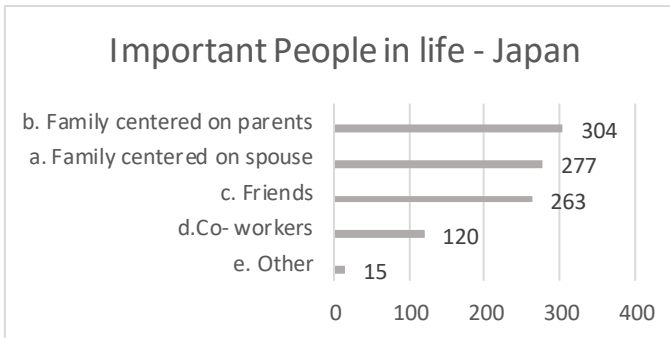
Graph 1

Important things - Japan

b. Family	497
d.Health	426
a. Money	389
e.Time	312
c. Job	281
f.Power	90
g.Other	73

Graph 2

Important things - Sri Lanka

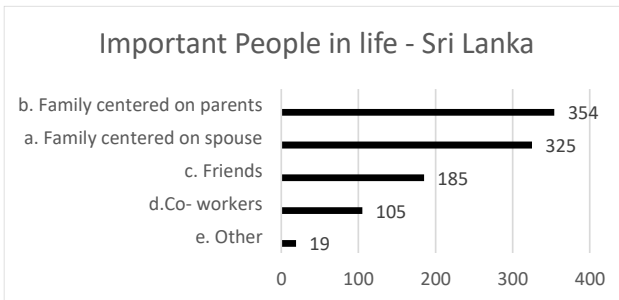| Category	Value
b. Family	531
d. Health	409
c. Job	346
a. Money	344
e. Time	288
f. Power	94
g. Other	21

4.2 Important People in Life

This part can be divided into two, married and single. When inquired about the important people in their lives from married ones, both Sri Lankans and Japanese had ranked **a)** "Family-centered around parents" in the first place and **b)** "Family-centered around spouse" in the second place. When the marks of **a)** and **b)** received by the participants are added and placed under "Family", the final score of Japanese adds up to 581 points, whereas the final score of Sri Lankans adds up to 679 points. The difference between the two scores is 98. From the above figures, it becomes clear that Sri Lankans are more attached to their families than their Japanese counterparts. However, the Japanese seem to be more attached to their friend than the Sri Lankans. For instance, the Japanese have ranked their friends as the third important thing. Further, the points received by the Japanese based on the importance given to friends are 263 as opposed to 185 scored by Sri Lankans. Apparently, the lack of attachment displayed by the Japanese towards their family is thus compensated by their attachment towards their friends.
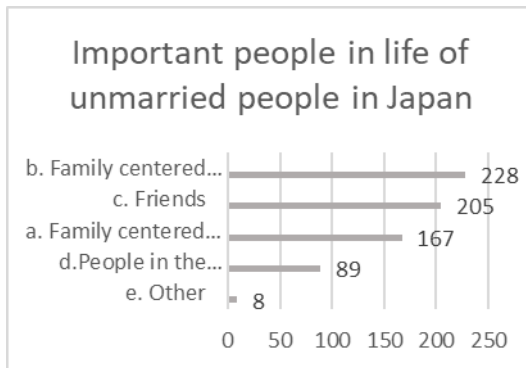
Graph 3

Important People in life - Japan

b. Family centered on parents 304
a. Family centered on spouse 277
c. Friends 263
d.Co- workers 120
e. Other 15

Graph 4

Important People in life - Sri Lanka

b. Family centered on parents 354
a. Family centered on spouse 325
c. Friends 185
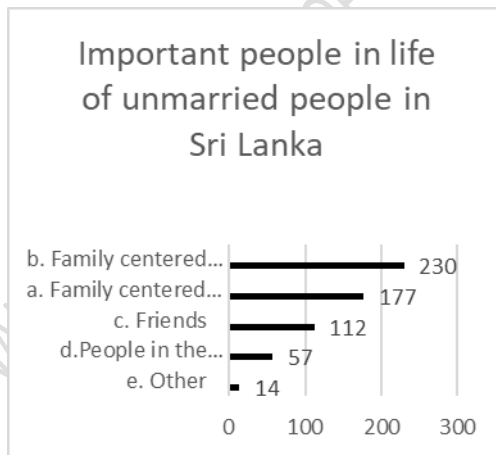d.Co- workers 105
e. Other 19

For unmarried Japanese, the second most important person in life is "Friend". But both married and unmarried Sri Lankans have ranked "Friend" as the third most important person. A person's marital status can also influence the importance he or she gives to friends. Since the Japanese had mentioned "Friend" in "Other" of "Important people in Life" in 4.1, it is evident that the Japanese have a strong tendency to consider "friend" as an important person. But for Sri Lankans "Family" is the most important unit and "Friend" is always placed below "Family". See graph5 and 6.

Graph 5

Important people in life of unmarried people in Japan

b. Family centered... — 228
c. Friends — 205
a. Family centered... — 167
d. People in the... — 89
e. Other — 8

Graph 6

Important people in life of unmarried people in Sri Lanka

b. Family centered... — 230
a. Family centered... — 177
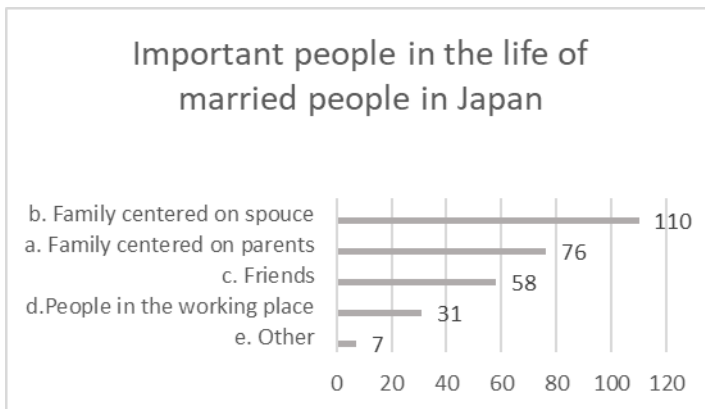c. Friends — 112
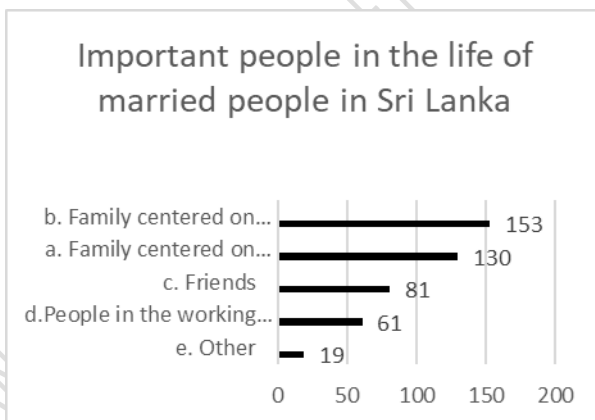d. People in the... — 57
e. Other — 14

Married persons in both countries had marked "Family-centered around spouse" as more important than "Family-centered around parents". Thereby, we understand that the important person in life can change after marriage.

The importance given to "Family-centered around parents" and "Family-centered around spouse" by married people in both countries is considered separately for better analysis. The results of the analysis show that for Sri Lankans, as opposed to Japanese, the family-centered around parents holds importance both before and after the marriage. See graph 7 and 8.

Graph 7

Important people in the life of married people in Japan

b. Family centered on spouse	110
a. Family centered on parents	76
c. Friends	58
d.People in the working place	31
e. Other	7

(0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120)

Graph 8

Important people in the life of married people in Sri Lanka

|	
b. Family centered on...	153
a. Family centered on...	130
c. Friends	81
d.People in the working...	61
e. Other	19

(0, 50, 100, 150, 200)

## 4.3 Expectations when looking for a life partner

According to the survey conducted proves that Japanese consider "Personality" as the most important factor that a partner should possess. Sri Lankans consider "Love" as the most important factor and "Personality" as the second important factor. The order in which importance is given to the aspects of a partner such as "Occupation", "Appearance", and "Financial power" by the citizens of both countries is similar.

Unlike in the days gone by, most Sri Lankans do not consider matching horoscopes as a necessity for finding a partner. According to the results of a questionnaire, it was revealed that the young generation of Sri Lankans does not adhere to such customs.

Graph 9
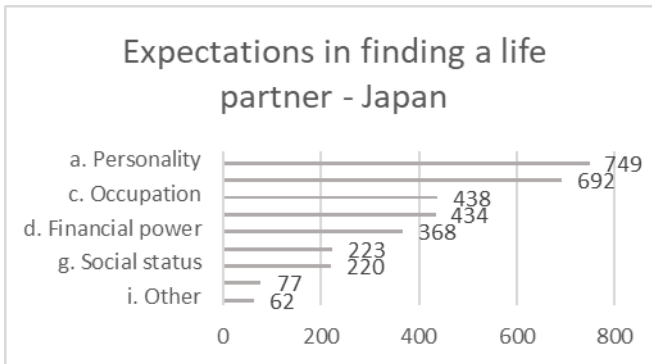
Graph 10
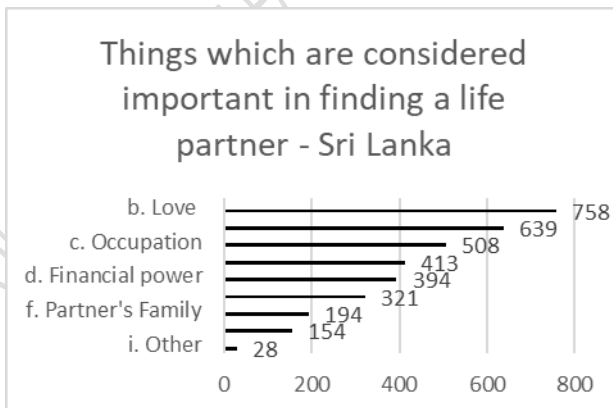
4.4 Expected qualities of life partner

In section 4.3 it is mentioned that personality is considered as an important requirement that a partner should possess by both Japanese and Sri Lankans. Graphs 11 and 12 indicate the responses received when inquired about the ideal partner. Japanese give priority to qualities such as "Kindness /Thoughtful consideration" while Sri Lankans give priority to a "Person who gives importance to the family". Since Japanese people consider family as In-group and family members as their equals, they tend to give importance to those who are outside the family or to those who belong to the Out-group. Therefore, the Japanese may not expect a partner who gives importance to their family as do the Sri Lankans.

Surprisingly, Japanese who are well known for their politeness and who are viewed as "Very polite" by foreigners, had marked "Politeness" as the eighth important factor in the aforementioned survey. Sri Lankans, on the contrary, had marked "Politeness" as the fifth important factor.
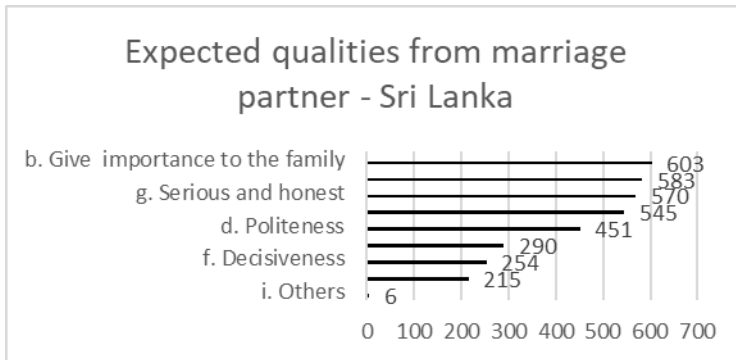
The above facts do not imply that the Japanese overlook the importance of politeness, rather being always polite, politeness might not appear to them as a very special characteristic. On the other hand, Sri Lankans may notice politeness as an important factor.

Though the Japanese had ranked "Cheerfulness" in fifth place, Sri Lankans had ranked it in eighth place. From the above fact, we can assume that having a cheerful and happy family is significant for the Japanese whereas for Sri Lankans it does not appear to be a necessity as they always spend time with their families.

Graph 11

Graph 12

Expected qualities from marriage partner - Sri Lanka

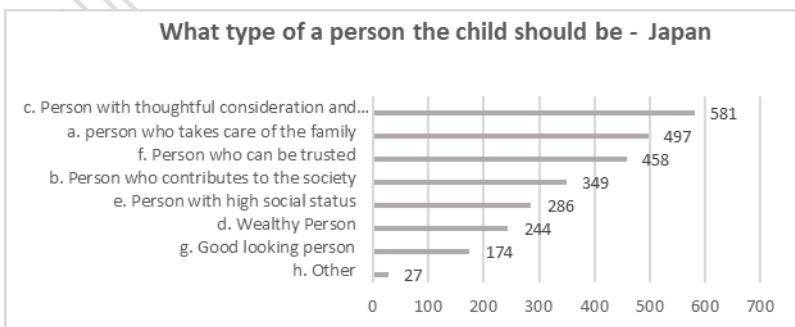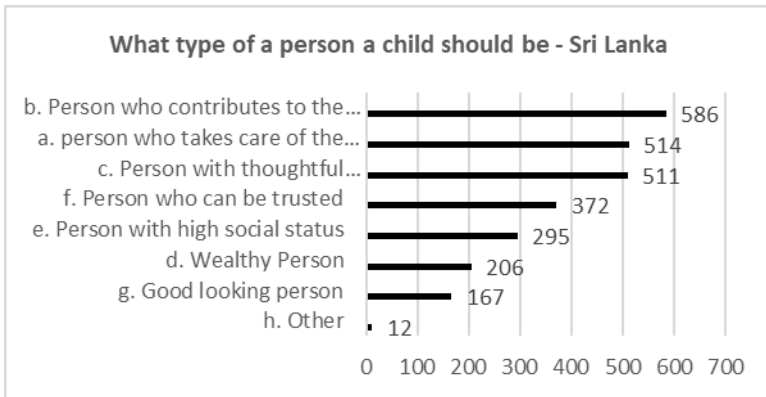| Quality	Value
b. Give importance to the family	603
g. Serious and honest	583
(unlabelled)	570
d. Politeness	545
(unlabelled)	451
f. Decisiveness	290
(unlabelled)	254
i. Others	215
(unlabelled)	6

4.5 Expected qualities from the child

Graphs 13 and 14 indicate the responses received when asked: "What type of person should your child be". Most of the Japanese had selected the option that reads "Person with thoughtful consideration and kindness". This has been the same answer the Japanese had given regarding the qualities of a life partner in 4.4. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Japanese consider kind people who are considerate about others as people who possess good values.

In conversely, Sri Lankans had selected "A person who contributes to the society". From the above results, we can conclude that the Japanese consider maintaining human relationships with their children as important while Sri Lankans opt to gain more besides human relationships.
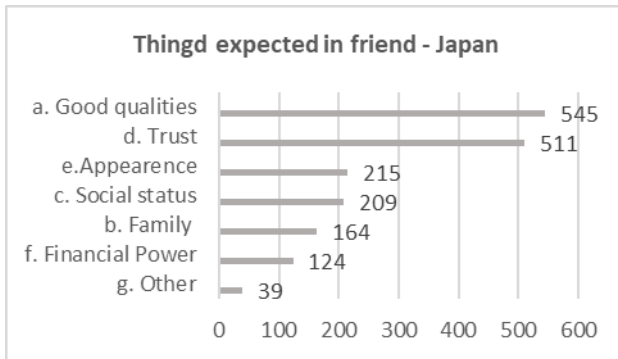
Graph 13

What type of a person the child should be - Japan

Type	Value
c. Person with thoughtful consideration and…	581
a. person who takes care of the family	497
f. Person who can be trusted	458
b. Person who contributes to the society	349
e. Person with high social status	286
d. Wealthy Person	244
g. Good looking person	174
h. Other	27

Graph 14

What type of a person a child should be - Sri Lanka

Category	Value
b. Person who contributes to the…	586
a. person who takes care of the…	514
c. Person with thoughtful…	511
f. Person who can be trusted	372
e. Person with high social status	295
d. Wealthy Person	206
g. Good looking person	167
h. Other	12

4.6 Expected qualities in friends

Graphs 15 and 16 depict what people expect from their friends. The first thing the Japanese expect from a friend is good qualities. The survey further shows that the Japanese expect good qualities from their marriage partners as well as from their friends. Japanese consider kindness and helpfulness as good qualities. That is why they had selected the option "A person who thinks about others and is very kind" as a response to "What they expect from their partners in marriage" as well as to "What type of a person you expect your child to be".

Sri Lankans expect a reliable person as a friend. In section 4.4, when asked about the qualities their life partner should have, Sri Lankans have placed the quality of being "Serious/Honest" in the third important position. Therefore, Sri Lankans value an honest and reliable person as a friend or partner.

Japanese, in conversely, had given preference to "Personality /Qualities" and "Faith" over other items.
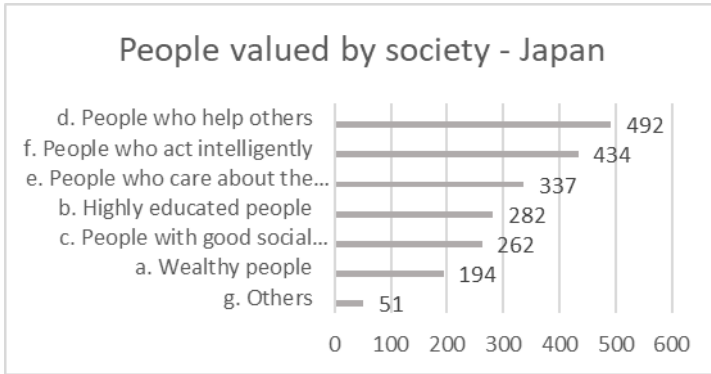
Graph 15


Graph 16
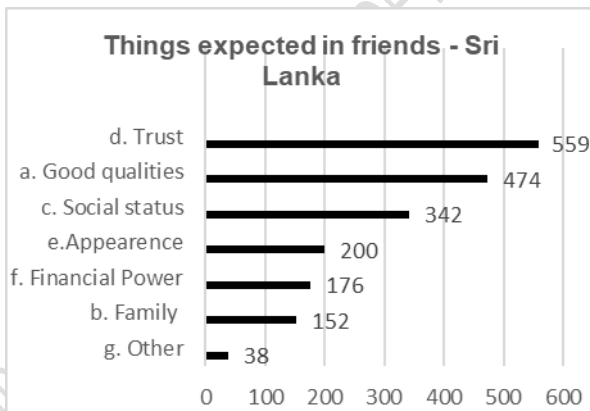
4.7 person with value in the society

Both Sri Lankans and Japanese seem to have similar ideas concerning the 'person valued by society. Both had selected the option that reads "People who help others" as the first important requirement. Since both Japan and Sri Lanka have faced natural disasters from time to time, the importance of helping their fellow citizens in times of distress is evident to them. This idea seems to have influenced people to think that a valued person should be a helpful person.

Further, as Sri Lanka is a country that respects education and educated people, Sri Lankans have stated that an educated person is a valued person. In the survey, this response of Sri Lankans amounts to ninety points. More than the Japanese, Sri Lankans seem to believe being educated adds to the worth of a person. See graphs 17 and 18.

Graph 17

Graph 18
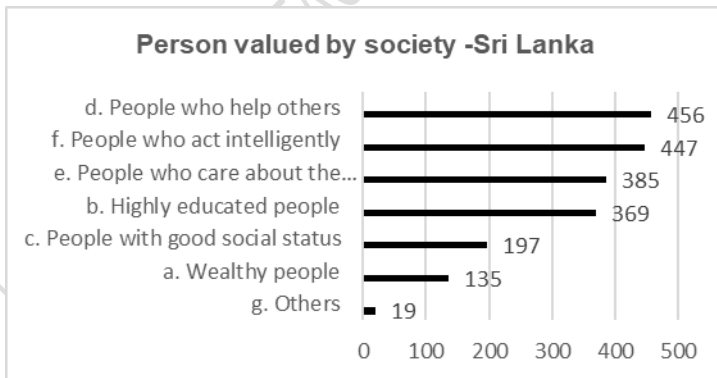
4.8 Things that cannot be allowed/excused

As shown in graphs 19 and 20, both Japanese and Sri Lankans had placed "Killing people" as the worst deed that cannot be excused.

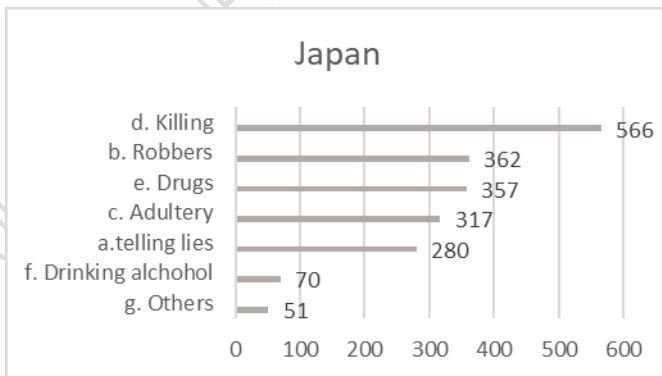"Robbers" and "Drugs" were stated as the second most unpardonable thing by the Japanese.

Since "Robbers" and people who are addicted to "Drugs" are punished by the law, people also seem to have the idea that both stealing and drug addiction are not excusable offenses.

In Sri Lanka "Adultery" was ranked as the second unpardonable guilt, whereas stealing and lying were ranked as the third inexcusable offense. As the five precepts of Buddhism emphasize "Adultery" as a sin that one should refrain from, it is highly condemned in society.
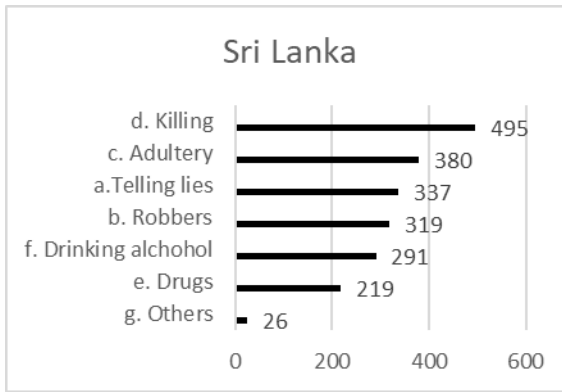
Japanese do not consider drinking alcohol as a bad thing. There were some Japanese who had mentioned in the survey that "As alcohol is not bad it is not added to the ranking". But "Drinking alcohol" was ranked as the fifth most inexcusable act by Sri Lankans. According to the Japanese, lying is a less inexcusable offense than drinking alcohol.

The reason may be the influence of the five precepts in Buddhism that teach people to restrain from using alcohol. In fact, selling of liquor on Poya days is prohibited in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan women seldom consume alcohol. For instance, during wedding ceremonies, only the males get together and drink. In the column allocated for "Other" inexcusable deeds, the Japanese had written bullying people and hurting people. It shows that although drinking alcohol is not seen as an offense by the Japanese, they consider the above acts as inexcusable.

Graph 19

Graph 20

Sri Lanka

Category	Value
d. Killing	495
c. Adultery	380
a. Telling lies	337
b. Robbers	319
f. Drinking alchohol	291
e. Drugs	219
g. Others	26

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to pave the way for successful communication between Sri Lankans and Japanese cultures by providing information about the gap in interpersonal relationship values.

The specialty of this paper is that it examines a sphere that has not been previously subjected to research much. It focuses on comparing the values that are being currently upheld in Sri Lankan and Japanese societies.

This paper draws upon the findings of Japanese anthropologists and sociologists to elucidate the values of Japanese people, while the first-hand data gathered from research conducted by the author herself are used to elaborate on the values of Sri Lankans.

Since both Japan and Sri Lanka are Asian countries bestowed with hereditary Buddhism, similarities in socio-cultural values can be observed. Yet, research reveals that there are differences where the attitudes and thought patterns of the two cultures are considered.

If a person is not aware of these varying cultural values and thoughts, he may face difficulties when communicating with those who come from other cultures. But a person who is aware of and sensitive to the cultural values advocated by another country will be able to overcome the obstacles that might occur in intercultural communication.

Different cultures possess different values and thought patterns. To be sensitive to those cultures and to accept cultural diversity, it is important to learn about those cultures. Imparting cultural awareness in parallel to language teaching is our duty as Japanese Language teachers.

References

Dimino,G. et all.(1987). *A Comparative Analysis of Social Values of Chinese and American Children.*
https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002187018001007

Godwin,C.et all (1995). *Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Japanese Cultural Values.* Behaviormetrika 22, 1–35 (1995).
https://doi.org/10.2333/bhmk.22.1

Hall, E. T., (1976). *Beyond Culture.* New York. Anchor Books. Doubleday.

Freeman, M.A (1996). *Factorial structure of individualism/collectivism in Sri Lanka.* Psychological Reports 78:907–914.

Hofstede, G.(1994).

Hofstede, G. (1980a). *Culture's consequences:International differences in work-related values.*London.Sage Publications.

Robert T, Craig, (1999). *Communication Theory as a Field.*

Sawang SO, Tian PS, and Goh YW, (2006). *Are country and culture values interchangeable?* A case example.using occupational stress and coping.

Sawang SO, Tian PS, and Goh YW, (2006). *Are country and culture values interchangeable?* A case exampleusing occupational stress and coping. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management 6*: 205–19.

Schein, E.H., (1984). Culture as an environmental context for careers,
https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030050107