

## *Teinei* (丁寧), *Limao* (禮貌), and *Kongson* (恭遜): A Comparison of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Concepts of Politeness

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**Abstract:** In this era of globalization, there is increased contact among Japanese, Chinese, and Korean native speakers in East Asia. Despite their similar appearance, these speakers often behave differently due to different norms and values in communication. To avoid unnecessary conflicts in communication, it is important to understand the differences in how Japanese, Chinese, and Korean native speakers communicate. The norms and values of communication are often lexicalized in a language as ordinary concepts. In general, the primary concepts in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean are *teinei* (丁寧), *limao* (禮貌), and *kongson* (恭遜), respectively. These words are often regarded as synonymous because they all translate into English as “politeness.” However, *teinei* (丁寧), *limao* (禮貌), and *kongson* (恭遜) are fundamentally different. The aim of this paper is to reveal the differences in their meanings based on lexical explanations in contemporary dictionaries and the results of a questionnaire survey given to native speakers of each language. The results of this study may be applied not only to intercultural communication, but may also help improve the efficiency of foreign language teaching.

**Keywords:** Politeness, intercultural communication, *teinei* (丁寧), *limao* (禮貌), and *kongson* (恭遜)

### 1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, there is increased contact among Japanese, Chinese, and Korean native speakers in East Asia. Despite their similar appearance, these speakers often behave differently due to different norms and values in communication. In order to avoid unnecessary conflict in communication, it is important to understand the differences in how Japanese, Chinese, and Korean native speakers communicate. The norms and values of communication are often lexicalized in a language as ordinary concepts. Politeness has been an important theme in research since Brown and Levinson proposed their politeness theory in 1978. This theory has inspired concerted and continuous research on the notion of politeness. In the past three decades, politeness phenomena have been widely studied by researchers and scholars

of intercultural communication, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, and pragmatics.

Kasper (1990) summarized the work of Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), and Leech (1983) as follows: Politeness is viewed as a rational, rule-governed, pragmatic aspect of speech that is rooted in the human need to maintain relationships and avoid conflicts. By being mutually supportive and avoiding threats to face, according to the standard argument, speakers maintain smooth relations and sustain successful communication. The underlying rationale, motivation, and functional foundations of politeness are assumed to be, to some extent, universal, and are assumed to influence, and be reflected in, various modes of speech in many different languages and cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Watts (2003) argues for a radically new way of looking at linguistic politeness. The commonsense notion is called first-order (im)politeness ((im)politeness 1), and the theoretical notion, second-order (im)politeness ((im)politeness 2). Politeness 1 is a socio-psychological notion that is used for the various ways in which members of sociocultural groups talk about polite language usage, whereas politeness 2 is a theoretical, linguistic notion in a sociolinguistic theory of politeness. Watts (2003, pp. 1-17) states that the terms “polite” and “politeness” and their rough lexical equivalents in other languages may vary in the meanings and connotations associated with them from one group of speakers to the next — even from one individual speaker to the next.

Linguistic politeness, then, reflects cultural values. Correctly identifying polite behavior in a culture involves understanding the society’s values (Holmes, 1995), and different cultural and linguistic groups express politeness in different ways. That is, the range of behaviors deemed polite in American or British society, for example, may be quite different from the behaviors described by the word *teinei* ‘politeness’ in Japanese, the expression *you limao* ‘politeness’ in Chinese, or the expression *kongson* ‘politeness’ in Korean.

It is said that Japan, China, and Korea are culturally similar countries due to their geographical proximity and related historical backgrounds. In addition, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean people have similar physical appearances. Therefore, one might expect that they behave similarly in communication. However, this is not always the case. For example, when a Chinese student talks to his/her Japanese teacher in Japanese, he/she may seem “impolite” to the Japanese teacher. When a Japanese clerk talks to a Korean customer in Japanese, he/she may seem “impolite” to the Korean customer. When a Japanese student talks to his/her Chinese teacher or Korean teacher in Chinese or Korea, he/she may seem “impolite” to the Chinese teacher or the Korean teacher. These examples show that expectations for politeness can differ. That is, an expression or an act is polite in one country. On the contrary, it may seem “impolite” in another country.

Politeness is a pragmatic aspect of verbal behavior appropriate for communication in each language (cf. Kasper, 1990). Each language has certain concepts that are used in ordinary, appropriate communication, and these concepts reflect the cultural norm of politeness for its speakers. The elementary concepts for smooth communication in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean are *teinei*, *limao*, and *kongson*, respectively. These three concepts are often regarded as synonymous because they translate into English as “politeness.” Yet there are also some key differences.

To date, there has been little study on native speaker beliefs about politeness. Thus, we can

ask the following important questions:

- Are the concepts of politeness, *teinei*, *limao*, and *kongson*, really synonymous?
- How are they described in the dictionaries of each language?
- How do people evaluate the concept of politeness in communicative behavior in different cultural contexts?
- How do Japanese, Chinese, and Korean young people perceive politeness?
- What differences are there among Japanese, Chinese, and Korean young people in evaluating politeness?

Interviews or questionnaires focusing on native speaker beliefs about (im)politeness are another valuable source of insight into emic perspective (Haugh, 2007, p. 661). Lexicological explanations of the words for “politeness” were consulted in representative contemporary dictionaries of each language.

The aim of this study is, as already stated, to reveal the differences in the meanings of *teinei*, *limao*, and *kongson*, based on lexical explanations of contemporary dictionaries and to provide useful insights into the thoughts and traditional moral values of young people in Japan, China, and Korea, on which politeness behavior is based. However, we also consider the influence of personal psychology in intercultural communication. In other words, we want to understand real intention and thoughts of young people respectively. We also regard their respective differences and lack of mutual understanding in intercultural communication very highly. An opinion poll was given to Japanese, Chinese, and Korean university students to collect data for a comparative study of perceived politeness in verbal communication. Furthermore, the results were analyzed from the standpoint of gender. The specific purpose of this study was to discover how Japanese, Chinese, and Korean people differ in evaluating the emic conceptualization of politeness.

## 2. *Teinei*, *Limao*, and *Kongson* in Contemporary Dictionaries

There is a growing awareness that the term “politeness” needs to be defined more precisely and consistently if more fruitful cross-cultural research on politeness is to be pursued (cf. Watts, Ide & Ehlich, 1992). In order to clarify the differences among *teinei*, *limao*, and *kongson*, we research their definitions in three contemporary dictionaries: *Kojien* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2008), 現代漢語詞典 [Contemporary Chinese Dictionary] (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2012), and *Standard-Korean Language Dictionary* (web edition, 2012). These three modern dictionaries are very important and well-known in Japan, China and Korea. They also gave us the newest interpretations in their latest ones.

According to these modern Japanese, Chinese, and Korean dictionaries, *teinei*, *limao*, and *kongson*, are defined as follows:

*Teinei*: 「注意深く心がゆきとどくこと。また、手厚く礼儀正しいこと」 ‘to be attentive to what the other does. And to be warm-hearted and correct in the *reigi*’ (*Kojien*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2008, p. 1908)

*Limao*: “人際交往中言語動作謙虛恭敬，符合一定禮儀的表現” ‘in interpersonal contacts, modesty and respect, expressions that accord with regular ceremony and propriety in language and behavior’ (*Xiandai Hanyu Cidian*, 6th ed., 2012, p. 793)

*Kongson*: 말이나 행동이 겸손하고 예의바름 ‘to be modest and correct in the *reigi* in language and behavior’ (*Standard-Korean language dictionary*, web edition, 2012)

The three concepts are summarized as follows, offering similar lexical explanations among the three concepts:

*Teinei*: to be warm-hearted and correct in the *reigi*

*Limao*: modest and respectful manners that are expressed in language and behavior

*Kongson*: to be modest and correct in the *reigi* in language and behavior

What is the emic notion of politeness in Japan? English-Japanese dictionaries typically translate “politeness” as *reigitadashisa*, *teichousa*, *omoiyari*, *teinei(sa)*, or *poraitonesu* (“politeness”). Japanese-English dictionaries typically translate “*teinei*” and *reigi* (*tadashii*) as politeness; courteousness; civil manners. According to Haugh (2007, p. 661),

The emic notion of “politeness” in Japanese can be approached, in the first instance, from the perspective of two key lexemes: *teinei* and *reigi* (*tadashii*). According to the Kojien dictionary, *teinei* is defined as “to be warm and correct in one’s *reigi*” and “to be attentive in what one does (*teatsuku reigi tadashii koto and chui-bukaku koto ga yukitodoku koto*)” (Shinmura, 2006, p. 1818), while the main sense of *reigi* relating to “politeness” is “the behavioural forms and patterns that people ought to preserve in order to protect the order of social life, in particular, manners/etiquette which express ‘upward’ respect (*shakaiseikatsu no chitsujo o tamotsu tameni hito ga mamoru beki koto yoshiki, tokuni kei’i o arawasu saho*)” (Shinmura, 2006, p. 2827). An initial analysis of these two lexemes thus indicates that *teinei* involves being warm-hearted (*teatsuku*) and attentive (*chui-bukaku*) (p. 1818), while *reigi tadashii* involves showing upward-looking respect (*kei’i*) towards others (p. 2827).

Language usage plays a large role in Japanese politeness. The use of *keigo* (honorific forms) is a major strategy in demonstrating politeness in Japan (Ogawa & Gudykunst, 1999-2000). Japanese scholars speculate that it developed from terms used to praise God, terms used to avoid taboos, and other types of expressions. The use of beautiful language toward God was thought to bring happiness to people through the magical power of language, thus functioning as a positive strategy. Honorific forms also originated from expressions referring to something or someone of high status. As these expressions were used repeatedly over time, they became conventional grammatical forms that developed into a system of honorific forms.

What is the emic notion of politeness in Chinese? The closest Chinese equivalent to the

English word “politeness” is *limao*. English-Chinese dictionaries typically translate “politeness” as *limao*; *keqi*. Chinese-English dictionaries typically translate “*limao*” as politeness; courtesy; manners. Mao (1994) stated the relationship between Chinese face and politeness (*limao*) as follows:

More specifically, to be polite, that is, *you limao* (有禮貌) in Chinese discourse is, in many respects, to know how to attend to each other’s *mianzi* and *lian* and to enact speech acts appropriate to and worthy of such an image. Otherwise stated, mainland Chinese speakers can be seen as being polite if they demonstrate with words their knowledge of *mianzi* and *lian*, as such a demonstration tends to epitomize politeness in the eyes of their discourse partners.

What is the emic notion of politeness in Korean? According to Kim (2011, pp. 176-177),

Interestingly, native speakers of Korean may conceive the notion of politeness as a concept that is intricately associated with a linguistic entity known as honorifics — a system that encodes one’s deference towards speaking partners who are viewed as superior in age or social standing. A Korean speaker will translate the English word *politeness* as *yey’ ui-palu-m* 예의 바름(禮儀) ‘to be deferential’ or *kongson-ha-m* 공손함(恭遜) ‘to be deferential/to be reverent.’ In other words, native Korean speakers appear to perceive the notion of politeness largely through honorification, and they take the absence of honorification of a superior naturally as a lack of politeness, that is, rudeness with respect to such a person. This occurs in Japanese as well, as shown in Ide and Yoshida (1999, p. 461), where the Japanese adjective *teineina* 丁寧な — the Japanese approximation of the English “polite” — has a strong association with notions such as *keii no aru* 敬意のある ‘with deference or respectful’ and *tekisetuna* 適切な ‘appropriate.’

Some traditional Korean linguists would argue that the notion of politeness which developed in the work of Goffman (1955) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) has no place in the study of Korean politeness, because Korean has a system of honorifics that is comprehensive enough to account for any aspects of polite expressions in Korean. This traditional view notably emphasizes a fundamental cultural difference between Korean society and the West, arguing that theories based on the notion of politeness are hardly capable of capturing the culturally ingrained Korean notion of politeness (Kim, 2011, p. 177). A researcher immediately encounters difficulty in distinguishing between the notions of politeness and honorifics in the study of politeness in Korean. In a word, the Korean honorific system contains the most important polite expressions in Korean.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were four hundred twenty college students living in Japan, China

and Korea. Among them, data were collected from three hundred twenty respondents. One hundred sixty Japanese students (55 males, 105 females) were enrolled at universities in Tokyo (November 2008), and Toyama and Kanazawa (May 2009) and one hundred sixty Chinese students (55 males, 105 females) were enrolled at universities in Beijing (March 2009). One hundred Korean students (49 males, 51 females) were enrolled at East Asia University in Pushan (November 2010). The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 28 years.

### 3.2. Material and Procedure

This study employed written questionnaires. The Japanese questionnaire surveyed university students' current conceptualizations of what constitutes *teinei*. It was taken from Marui, Nishijima, Noro, Reinelt, and Yamashita (1996) and also translated into Chinese and Korean. The survey allowed us to plot the concepts of communicative behavior concerning politeness, *teinei*, *limao*, and *yey' ui-palu-m* (禮儀), or *kongson-ha-m* (恭遜) against other concepts in English, Japanese, and Chinese that assess human behavior. Thus, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean versions of the questionnaire were prepared. In order to avoid the distortions of direct translation, bilingual and bicultural speakers discussed the translations and verified the accuracy of the final questionnaires. Some of the questions were multiple-choice, but most allowed the students to respond freely. Most of the findings have already published by the authors. For example, "A Comparative Study of Perceived Politeness in Chinese and Japanese Verbal Communication" (Tao, 2012), "A Comparative Study of Evaluating Concepts of Communicative Behavior Concerning "Politeness" in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian" (Tao, Yoon & Nishijima, 2012). This paper addresses findings based on the participants' responses to the last and the most important one of the 28 questions:

Question: Finally, when you hear the term "politeness," what do you imagine at first? Please write about what you imagine.

Japanese: では最後に、「丁寧」という語を聞いて、あなたはまず何を思い浮かべますか？思い当たることばをいくつでも書いて下さい。

Chinese: 最後，當聽到「禮貌」這個詞時，你首先聯想到什麼？請寫下你聯想到的幾個詞語。

Korean: 「공손」이라는 단어를 들으면 무엇이 떠오릅니까? 생각나는 것을 여러 가지 적어 주십시오.

### 4. Results

To examine the differences between Japanese and Chinese males and females, we first separated the questionnaire responses by the participants' gender. Then, qualitative differences among the responses were identified by grouping them into specific categories. This analysis revealed a great variety in the types of responses. Below, we examine the similarities and differences in politeness described by Japanese and Chinese students.

The Japanese participants gave 15 types of answers (Tables 1 and 2). Most mentioned "honorifics and polite expressions," "polite behavior," "ceremony and propriety,"

“consideration,” “a way of speaking,” “refined and cultured,” and “personal relationship.” The male Japanese participants gave 13 types of answers (Table 1), the main ones being “honorifics and polite expressions” (25.0%), “polite behavior,” “ceremony and propriety” (17.9%), “consideration” (13.1%), “refined and cultured” (7.1%) and “personal relationship” (7.1%).

Table 1. Types of Responses to Question 28: Male Japanese Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Honorifics and Polite Expressions	honorifics 1; respect 3; Thank you 7; Look after a bit 1; See you soon 1; I am sorry 1; Add <i>desu</i> to the end of a word 3; Add <i>masu</i> to the end of a word 1; Please do 1; polite 2	21 (25.0%)
Polite Behavior, Ceremony and Propriety	It is polite. 5; propriety 3; elegance 3; manners 1; common sense 2; gentleman 1	15 (17.9%)
Way of Speaking	the wording 1; word 1; greeting 1; beauty 2	5 (6.0%)
Refined and Cultured	It is wonderful 1; You should acquire it 1; humanity 1; steady person 1; reliable person 1; good person 1	6 (7.0%)
Consideration	scrupulousness 1; Care is good 1; having a mind of consideration 1; solicitude 1; carefulness 2; affectation, posturing 1; Be careful 1; delicacy 1; show consideration 1	11 (13.1%)
Personal Relationship	personal relationship 1; exchange by social intercourse 1; society 1; palliative of interpersonal relationship 1; exchange with interested concern 1; stranger 1	6 (7.0%)
Hierarchical Relationship	hierarchical relationship 2; one's superior 3	5 (6.0%)
Senior or Junior	exchange relation to senior 1; age 1; on age 1; senior 1	4 (4.8%)
Kindness	kindness 4; good feeling 1	5 (6.0%)
Work	work 1; interview 1	2 (2.4%)
Social Importance	the important one 1	1 (1.2%)
Gesture	look a person in the eye when speaking 1	1 (1.2%)
Being Stiff	stiff and inflexible 1	1 (1.2%)
Miscellaneous	calligraphy 1	1 (1.2%)
<b>Total</b>		84 (100%)

The female Japanese participants gave 15 types of answers (Table 2). They mentioned “honorifics and polite expressions” (39.8%), “polite behavior, courtesy, and manners” (18.6%), “consideration” (7.6%), “a way of speaking” (7.6%), and “refined and cultured” (5.2%).

Table 2. Types of Responses to Question 28: Female Japanese Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Honorifics and Polite Expressions	honorifics 15; honorific language 2; <i>itadaki</i> 1; please 1; <i>gozaimasu</i> 3; humble expression 1; I'm very sorry. 1; I'm sorry. 3; certainly. 2; <i>itasimasu</i> 1; polite language. 3; <i>desu</i> 7; <i>masu</i> 7; Please sit down. 1; Look after a bit. 1; Thank you. 15; Take care. 1; Good morning. 1; express your gratitude. 1	67 (39.8%)
Polite Behavior, Courtesy, and Manners	courtesy 9; polite 11; politeness 1; common sense 3; manners 2; diplomatic 1; formality 1; elegance 3; dignified 1	32 (18.6%)
Way of Speaking	language 2; greetings 4; beautiful word 1; beautiful wording 1; It is beautiful 2; beauty 3	13 (7.6%)
Refined and Cultured	character 1; sincerity 1; seriousness 1; serious diligence 1; serious; tidy person 1; neat 1; person who is fully alive 1; sincerity 1	9 (5.2%)
Consideration	Japanese virtue 1; be considerate of others 1; careful 1; scrupulous 2; suppresses one's own feelings for the other person 1; consideration 2; It is pleasant 1; Thinks before speaking 1; takes care 1; moderation 1; good attitude 1	13 (7.6%)
Hierarchical Relationship	used when speaking with persons of higher rank 1; imperial household 1; crown prince 1	3 (1.7%)
Good Image	good image 1; good impression 2; other party's favorability 1	4 (2.3%)
Personal Relationship	It is natural in the first meeting 1; member of society 1; <i>otonashii</i> 'obedient, docile' 3; TPO (time, place, occasion) 1	6 (3.5%)
Kindness	seems gentle 1; gentle 2; kindness 1	4 (2.3%)
Importance	importance 1; I think it is important 1	2 (1.2%)
Senior or Junior	<i>senpai</i> (senior) 1; one's senior 1; <i>kohai</i> (junior) 1	3 (1.7%)
Good Breeding	environment in which one grows up 1; good breeding 1	2 (1.2%)
Work	work 1; train conductor 1; news broadcaster 1	3 (1.7%)
Stiff	stiff 1; stiff and awkward (formal) 1; tightness 1	3 (1.7%)
Miscellaneous	It is comprehensible 1; clearly 1; slowly 1; woman 1; blood type A 1; detailed 1; penmanship 1; have one's own ideas 1	8 (4.7%)
<b>Total</b>		172 (100%)



The Chinese participants gave 16 types of answers. Most associated politeness with “honorifics and polite expressions,” “good breeding,” “polite behavior,” “ceremony and propriety,” and “being refined and cultured.” The male Chinese participants (Table 3) gave 13 types of answers: They used expressions such as “honorifics and polite expressions” (33.3%), “good breeding” (19.0%), “polite behavior,” “ceremony and propriety” (19.0%), and “sense of morality” (6.3%).

Table 3. Types of Responses to Question 28: Male Chinese Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Honorifics and Polite Expressions	politeness expressions 1; 您 ( <i>Nin</i> ) 1; please 3; 您好 ( <i>Nin hao</i> ) 3; respect 1; Thank you. 5; Excuse me. 1; It doesn't matter. 1; I'm sorry to trouble you. 1; You're welcome. 3; Take care of yourself. 1	21 (33.3%)
Good Breeding	one's self-cultivation 2; self-cultivation 2; be well brought up 2; character is very good 1; have a good education 1; good breeding 2; be self-cultivated 1; traditional virtues 1	12 (19.0%)
Polite Behavior, Ceremony and Propriety	ceremony and propriety 1; etiquette 1; manner 1; disposition of refined and courteous 1; Nobody will blame you for being too polite 1; one's moral quality 2; human dignity 1; knowledge and etiquette 1; behavior and manner 1; polite; courteous 1; Japan 1	12 (19.0%)
Being Refined and Cultured	warm 1; honesty 1; honesty, unsophisticated 1	3 (4.8%)
Sense of Morality	good child 3; elementary school child 1	4 (6.3%)
Personal Relationship	outsider, stranger 1; stranger 1; a member of society 1	3 (4.8%)
Senior or Junior	the old 1; senior 1	2 (3.2%)
Hierarchical Relationship	one's superior 1	1 (1.6%)
Consideration	modesty 1	1 (1.6%)
Distance	distance 1	1 (1.6%)
Derogatory Sense	derogatory sense 1	1 (1.6%)
Miscellaneous	one's home 1; vary with each individual 1	2 (3.2%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>63 (100%)</b>

The female Chinese participants (Table 4) also gave 13 types of answers. Most associated politeness with “honorifics and polite expressions” (38.6%), “good breeding” (19.9%), “polite behavior, ceremony and propriety” (11.4%), “refined and cultured” (6.3%), and “harmony and kindness” (6.3%).

Table 4. Types of Responses to Question 28: Female Chinese Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Honorifics and Polite Expressions	honorific words 1; <i>Nin</i> (您) 6; <i>Nin hao!</i> (您好) 8; <i>Ni hao!</i> (你好) 3; Excuse me? 4; Thank you! 14; Thank you very much! 1; Please! 13; Goodbye! 3; Bye-bye! 1; <i>bai</i> 1; I'm sorry to trouble you. 2; Please do me a favor! 1; Please Look after me a little. 2; You're welcome. 1; Take care. 1; respect 4; esteem 1; Japanese 1	68 (38.6%)
Good Breeding	good breeding 11; family education 1; be self-cultivated 10; well-grounded 4; very well-grounded 2; Parents are also of good character 1; culture 1; The level of the education is fairly high 1; intelligent 1; One has cultivated one's knowledge 1; a person with culture 2	35 (19.9%)
Polite Behavior, Ceremony, and Propriety	being polite 2; know etiquette 1; refined and courteous 7; gentle, urbane 1; gentleman 3; play the gentleman 2; have poise 1; lady 1; a man of noble character 1; land of ceremony and propriety 1	20 (11.4%)
Being Refined and Cultured	refined in manner 4; gentle and soft 1; refined and elegant 1; gentle and quiet 2; refined and cultured 1; relation with one's disposition 1; habits and customs are good 1	11 (6.3%)
Harmony and Kindness	harmony 2; be easy to approach 1; kindness 4; be a person of excellent character 2; be in a cheerful frame of mind 1; be comfortable 1	11 (6.3%)
Sense of Morality	sensible and intelligent 1; good boys or good girls 2; student 1; behavior regulation of middle school student 1; good person 1	6 (3.4%)
Gesture	smiling 2; smiling expression 1; bowing 2	5 (2.8%)
Personal Relationship	earnestly occasion 2; social occasion 1; strange 1	4 (2.3%)
Hierarchical relationship	superior 1; mother 2	3 (1.7%)
Distance	show distance 1; have a feeling of distance 1; security in distance 1	3 (1.7%)
Consideration	modesty 2; be guarded in one's disposition 1; reserved 1	4 (2.3%)
Being Stiff and Awkward	not intimate 1; stiff and awkward 1; feel rather ill at ease 1	3 (1.7%)
Derogatory Sense	sometimes appropriate politeness 1; you feel some derogatory sense 1; sometimes feel a little hypocritical 1	3 (1.7%)
<b>Total</b>		176 (100%)

Unlike the Chinese female participants, the Chinese male participants did not give any answers regarding harmony and kindness, gestures, and stiffness and awkwardness. On the other hand, unlike the Chinese male participants, the Chinese female participants did not give any answers about personal relationships, the home, or variation depending on the individual. However, the total results for Chinese participants of both genders tell us that Chinese young people think politeness involves honorifics and politeness expressions, shows good breeding, is indicative of polite behavior, is used in ceremonies, and shows propriety.

The Korean students gave 15 types of answers (Tables 5 and 6). Most mentioned “polite behavior, courtesy, and manners,” “refined and cultured,” “good image,” “hierarchical relationship,” “work,” “good breeding,” “consideration,” “honorifics and polite expressions,” “a way of speaking,” and “personal relationship.” The male Korean participants gave 14 types of answers (Table 5), the main ones being “polite behavior, courtesy, and manners” (37.3%), “refined and cultured” (8.6%), “good image” (8.6%), “hierarchical relationship” (5.6%), and “work” (5.6%).

Table 5. Types of Responses to Question 28: Male Korean Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Polite Behavior, Courtesy, and Manners	Confucianism 1, courtesy 34, good manners 2, manners 2, politeness 4, ceremony and propriety 1, common sense 2, gentleman 5, lady 2	53 (37.3%)
Being Refined and Cultivated	refined 5, honest 2, personality 2, character 1, honest character 2	12 (8.6%)
Good Image	impression 1, adult 4, good person 3, well-behaved 4	12 (8.6%)
Hierarchical Relationship	one's superior 8	8 (5.6%)
Work	business 5, high occupation 1, service 2	8 (5.6%)
Good Breeding	culture 2, has education 4, intellectual 1	7 (4.9%)
Consideration	modest 1, consideration 3, thinking atmosphere 1, discreet 2	7 (4.9%)
Honorifics and Politeness Expressions	honorifics 3, respect 2, Excuse me 1, I look forward to the continued enjoyment of your favor 1	7 (4.9%)
Way of Speaking	speaking words 2, greeting 4	6 (4.2%)
Personal Relationship	sociability 1, ripeness 1, discreet 1, how to get along in life 1, wish to be close 1	5 (3.5%)
Kindness	kindness 2, good will 3	5 (3.5%)
Distance	distance 3	3 (2.1%)
Gesture	smile 2, handshaking 1	3 (2.1%)
Stiff and Awkward	be not pleasant 1, difficult 2, not intimate 1, formal 1, I am not used to politeness 1	6 (4.2%)
<b>Total</b>		142 (100%)

Table 6. Types of Responses to Question 28: Female Korean Participants

Type	Expressions Used, Number of Respondents	Number (%)
Polite Behavior, Courtesy, and Manners	courtesy 29, manners 1, politeness 1, order 1, good manners 3, gentleman 2, common sense 1, social rules 2	40 (39.5%)
Being Refined and Cultivated	refined 3, well studied 1, character 1, right character 3, accurate 2, honest 1	11 (10.8%)
Kindness	kindness 5, gentle 2, warmth 1, closeness 1	9 (9.0%)
Honorifics and Politeness Expressions	respect 2, I'm very sorry. 1, thank you. 3	6 (5.9%)
Good Image	first impression 1, a good impression 1, clever 1, adult 2, good person 1	6 (5.9%)
Good Breeding	culture 2, family education 3, cultured person 1	6 (5.9%)
Hierarchical Relationship	have (social) standing 3, teacher 1, senior/old 1	5 (5.0%)
Way of Speaking	way of speaking 2, greeting 2, did you have a meal? 1	5 (5.0%)
Personal Relationship	Personality 1, human nature 1, an exemplary/a model 1, person 1	4 (4.0%)
Work	salesman 1, operator 1, guide 1	3 (3.0%)
Consideration	Consideration 1, modest 1	2 (2.0%)
Stiff and Awkward	not intimate 1, uneasy to be treated as a partner 1, formality 1, weight 1	4 (4.0%)
<b>Total</b>		101 (100%)

The female Korean participants gave 12 types of answers (Table 6), the main ones being “polite behavior, courtesy, and manners” (39.5%), “being refined and cultured” (10.8%), “kindness” (9.0%), “honorifics and polite expressions” (5.9%), “good image” (5.9%), and “good breeding” (5.9%).

Unlike the Korean male participants, the Korean female participants did not give any answers regarding “distance,” “honorifics,” and “gesture.” On the other hand, unlike the Korean females, the Korean males did not give any answers about “social rules,” “thank you,” “family education, a cultured person,” “have (social) standing,” or “teacher, senior/old.” Overall, the results for the Korean participants of both genders tell us that Korean young people think politeness involves polite behavior, courtesy, and manners, which shows that one is refined and cultured or has good breeding.

The results indicate cultural and linguistic diversity. Most of the respondents associated polite characteristics with “honorifics and polite expressions,” “polite behavior,” “courtesy, manners,” and “being refined and cultivated.” More Japanese and Chinese participants than

Korean participants felt that politeness meant using “honorifics and polite expressions.” Unlike the Japanese and Chinese participants, most of the Korean participants associated polite characteristics with “polite behavior” and “being refined and cultivated.” An important finding of this study is the cultural differences regarding the responses “good breeding,” “consideration,” “way of speaking,” and “sense of morals.” More Chinese participants than Japanese and Korean participants believed that politeness meant good breeding (male, 19.0%; female, 19.9%) or a sense of morality (male, 2.8%; female, 6.3%); but more Japanese participants than Chinese and Korean participants thought that politeness meant showing consideration (male, 13.1%; female, 7.6%) or a certain way of speaking (male, 6.0%; female, 7.6%). Of particular interest is the fact that no Japanese students used the expressions “sense of morality” or “distance”; and no Chinese students answered using the expressions “good image,” “work,” or “importance.” Only a few Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students felt that sometimes politeness would be derogatory, stiff, and awkward (“It is formal”) or not intimate, or would make them feel ill at ease or a little hypocritical. This reflects the fact that most of the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean participants are conscious of using polite expressions as a means of minimizing or avoiding conflict, as a way of maintaining smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations, and as socially appropriate behavior.

This study shows that there is a gender difference in perceptions of politeness. For example, more female than male Japanese participants associated politeness with honorifics and polite expressions. No male Chinese students used expressions such as “harmony and kindness,” “gesture,” or “stiff and awkward.” No female Korean students used expressions such as “distance,” or “gesture.”

In summary, the types of behavior covered by the Japanese term *teinei* (politeness) show that traditional aspects of politeness in Japan and Japanese virtues (honorifics and polite expressions, polite behavior, ceremony and propriety, consideration, and beautiful words (way of speaking)) remain. The Chinese concept of *limao* (politeness, including respectfulness, attitudinal warmth, refinement, good breeding, and a sense of morality) is also still important and meaningful to Chinese students. Contrary to general belief, the Korean concept of politeness, translated as *yey’ui-palu-m* (禮儀) ‘to be deferential’ or *kongson-ha-m* (恭遜) ‘to be deferential/to be reverent’ does not emphasize honorification as important or particularly meaningful, as shown by the responses of the Korean participants. In other words, native Korean speakers do not appear to perceive the notion of politeness largely through honorification; instead, they attach greater importance to “polite behavior” and “being refined and cultivated.”

## 5. Discussion

This study has elucidated the similarities and differences in the concepts of politeness in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean verbal communication. A large amount of information was collected: The number of expressions used was 256 for the Japanese participants (males, 84; females, 172), 239 for the Chinese participants (males, 63; females, 176), and 243 for the Korean participants (males, 142; females, 101). The results not only reflect the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean cultural and behavioral differences in perceived politeness in communicative behavior, but also enable an objective comparison of the awareness and usage of polite expressions in

the three languages.

Figure 1 shows the responses of the Japanese participants by gender. Most of the Japanese participants associated politeness with the expressions “honorific forms,” “polite behavior,” “refined and cultured,” “consideration,” “personal relationship,” and “way of speaking.” The female Japanese participants were much more conscious of honorific forms than their male counterparts.

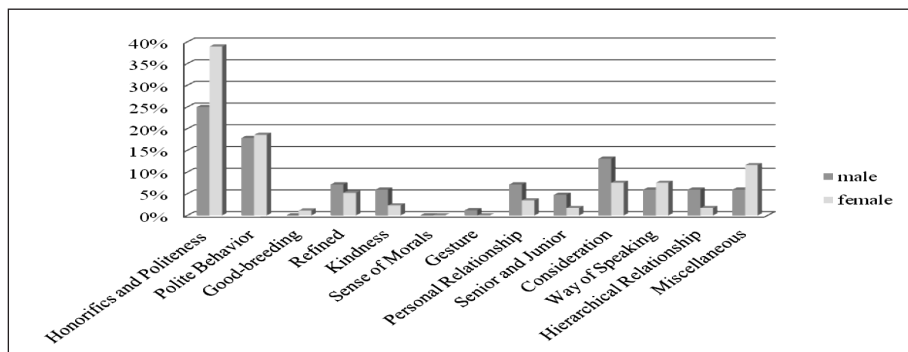


Figure 1. Japanese Responses by Gender

According to Haugh (2007, p. 661), “the emic notion of politeness in Japanese can be approached, in the first instance, from the perspective of two key lexemes, namely *teinei* and *reigi* (*tadashii*).” Language usage plays a large role in Japanese politeness. The use of *keigo* (honorific forms) is a major strategy in demonstrating politeness in Japan (Ogawa & Gudykunst, 1999-2000). The findings presented here confirm this point. Many students mentioned honorific forms as their image of politeness, or *teinei*. Akasu and Asao (1993) explain that “*Keigo* typically is used to show deference to the listener, to some third party, or to some referent related to him/her. That means that the person to whom the *keigo* is directed must be someone worthy in some way of that deference” (p. 98). The more recent conceptualization of politeness in Japanese shifts the focus away from a concern for social position (*mibun*) or status (*chi'i*) to potentially less hierarchical dimensions, such as the dignity and character of others (*jinkaku*).

Using native-speaker judgments, Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, and Kawasaki (1992, p. 290) demonstrated that the Japanese concepts of politeness include that one is respectful (*keii no aru*), pleasant (*kanzi yoi*), appropriate (*tekisetuna*), and considerate (*omoiyari no aru*). Ide et al. (1992, p. 290) states:

*Tekisetuna* is the adjective used in Japanese to evaluate behavior in the light of worldly criteria, i.e., *wakimae* (discernment), which is the key concept of linguistic politeness in Japanese (Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1989).

In Japanese, it is crucial for a speaker to perceive the social context, such as the type of situation or setting that he or she is in. It is also called discernment; that is, in contact between Japanese people, the speaker should pay attention to addressing certain factors of

the situation, and then select an appropriate linguistic form and appropriate behavior. Obana (1994) reported that her respondents associated politeness with knowing where one stands in social interactions (*wakimae* ‘discernment’), showing upward respect (*kei*’i) towards others and modesty about oneself, and horizontal distance. Interesting additions to the notions of politeness that emerge from ordinary speakers of Japanese, which are not encompassed by dictionary definitions, include showing consideration and relational distance towards others, as well as modesty towards oneself. Different cultural and linguistic groups express politeness in different ways. Politeness in Japanese can also involve showing one’s social standing (*shitsuke* ‘breeding’) and modesty, although this is restricted to certain individuals who use beautification honorifics to show good breeding (Ide, 2005). Politeness thus involves not only showing what one thinks of others, but also what one thinks of oneself (Chen, 2001; Haugh & Hinze, 2003; Ruhi, 2006; Haugh, 2007). However, the findings of this study show that good breeding is not an important part of politeness for some participants. None of them mentioned distance as a factor in politeness.

Figure 2 compares the responses of male and female Chinese students to Question 28 “When you hear the term ‘politeness,’ what initially comes to mind?” It is natural to expect great differences in the degree of politeness related to differences in politeness demands based on social distance and differences in social status, familiarity of the speaker with the listener, in-group or out-group status, and gender.

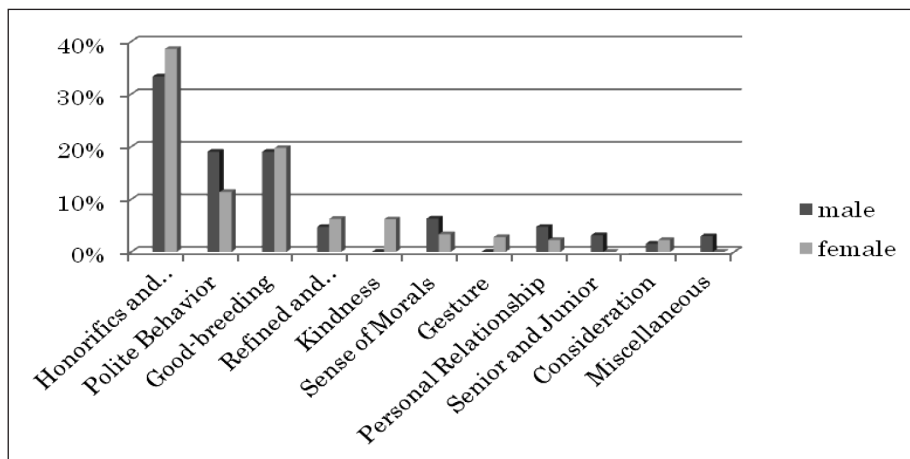


Figure 2. Chinese Responses by Gender

The results show that most of the Chinese participants associated the following ideas with the notion of *limao*: polite expressions, polite behavior, good breeding, and being refined and cultured. In addition, some participants mentioned kindness, sense of morality, personal relationship, senior or junior, and consideration, but the number of such responses was small. In addition, five students mentioned the gesture of smiling. They thought that politeness meant greeting someone with a smile.

*Limao* is the closest Chinese equivalent to the English word “politeness.” Gu (1990) pointed out that there are basically four notions underlying the Chinese conception of *limao*: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement:

“Respectfulness” is the self’s positive appreciation or admiration of others concerning the latter’s face, social status, and so on. “Modesty” can be seen as another way of saying “self-denigration.” “Attitudinal warmth” is the self’s demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to others. Finally, “refinement” refers to the self’s behavior toward others which meets certain standards. (p. 245)

In the last three decades or so, the “Beautification of Speech” campaign (which focuses especially on the words *Ninhao* ‘How do you do?’, *Xiexie* ‘Thank you,’ *Zaijian* ‘Goodbye,’ *Duibuqi* ‘Excuse me,’ and *Qing* ‘Please’) has tried to revive these four elements, which are part of Chinese heritage, and has explicitly appealed to the nation to abide by them. Thus, in this study, many students used words associated with *limao*, namely, *Ninhao*, *Ni hao*, *Nin*, *Xiexie*, *Qing*, and *Goodbye*. *Nin* is an honorific form for the second person. Chinese always use this word when showing deference to someone. Deference is an important element of modern *limao*. Its social function is to maintain harmony, eliminate conflict, and promote cooperation between people. Generally speaking, “to understand Chinese politeness, it is necessary to study *face* (*mianzi* and *lian*) from an ‘emic’ perspective” (Mao, 1994, p. 466). After all, being polite in Chinese discourse makes a good impression on the listener as well as those nearby; and it improves one’s reputation (*lian* and *mianzi*) in society because polite behavior is praised by society. Thus, one earns a good reputation, thereby increasing one’s self-respect. In this study, the Chinese participants showed that respectfulness, polite expressions, polite behavior, good breeding, and refinement are still very important in the Chinese concept of politeness (*limao*).

Both the Japanese and Chinese participants were aware that the use of politeness in verbal communication is very important in maintaining good human relations. In addition, a few of the Japanese participants mentioned “good breeding,” “kindness,” “senior or junior,” and “hierarchical relationship.” Unlike the Chinese participants, only one mentioned the gesture of looking a person in the eye when speaking.

Figure 3 shows the Korean responses by gender. Most of the Korean students associated politeness with “polite behavior,” “being refined and cultured,” and “good image.” The female Korean participants were much more conscious of “polite behavior,” “being refined and cultured,” and “kindness” than their male counterparts. This result demonstrates that the Korean participants of both genders were aware that the use of politeness in verbal communication is very important in maintaining good human relations. However, they also differed in their identification of different characteristics or behaviors representing politeness. A few of the female participants mentioned “good breeding,” “kindness,” “senior or junior,” and “hierarchical relationship.” Unlike the Korean male participants, no Korean females mentioned “honorifics,” “distance,” “good will,” or “gesture.” Only two mentioned “consideration” and “modesty.” On the other hand, none of the Korean male participants mentioned “have (social) standing,” “social rules,” or “family education.”



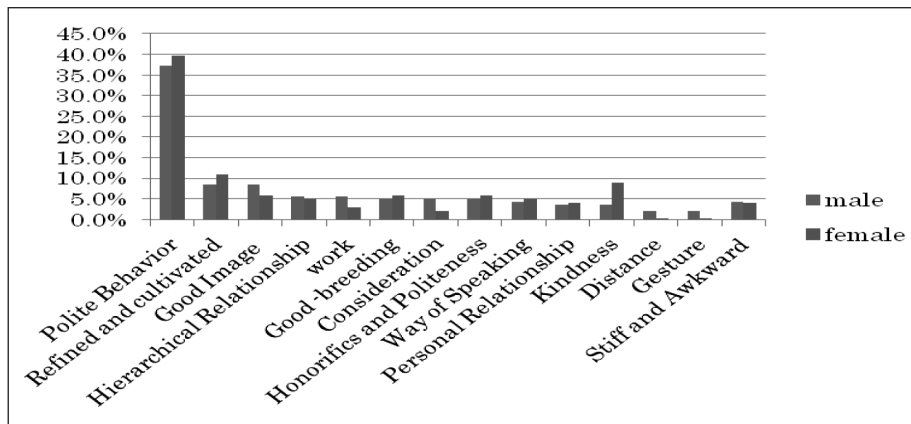


Figure 3. Korean Responses by Gender

However, this study could not explain that “native Korean speakers appear to perceive the notion of ‘politeness’ largely through honorification, and they take the absence of honorification of a superior naturally as the lack of politeness, that is, rudeness with respect to such a person” (Kim, 2011, p. 176). This is because few students associate the notion of politeness with honorification.

The result proves that a traditional view notably emphasizes a fundamental cultural difference between Korean society and the West, arguing that theories based on the notion of politeness are hardly capable of capturing the culturally ingrained Korean politeness in general (Kim, 2011, p. 177). Some researchers argue that Japanese and Korean politeness, in contrast with politeness in Western cultures, is based on conformity to social conventions. In summary, politeness in Japanese verbal communication is somewhat similar to that in Chinese and Korean. According to Werkhofner (1992), we are beginning “to understand how politeness is actually constituted and used not only in terms of purportedly universal principles, but in both universal and specific terms, thus finally taking into account social realities, be they traditional or modern ones” (p. 158). However, different cultural and linguistic groups express politeness in different ways. More Japanese participants than Chinese or Korean participants associated politeness with honorification, from which we can conclude that honorific speech has a greater impact on the minds of Japanese speakers. On the one hand, more Korean participants than Chinese or Japanese participants emphasized non-verbal actions, from which we can conclude that polite behavior has a greater impact on the minds of Korean speakers. In short, Korean people believe it is common sense to use polite language.

This study shows that the concept of politeness in communicative behavior is specific to a particular culture, sense of values, and standard. For example, in Japan the use of polite expressions may relate to the Japanese concepts of *tatemae* ‘façade’ and *honne* ‘true feelings.’ The traditional aspects of politeness in Japanese society, including upward respect, honorific expressions, beautiful language, and consideration, still remain. On the other hand, based on four notions underlying the Chinese concept of *limao* (respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth,

and refinement), more Chinese than Japanese students think that, if a person does not use polite language, he/she is uneducated or ill-bred (Tao, 2012). The Chinese students have a keen sense of morals. This is because being polite in Chinese discourse makes a good impression on the person to whom one is speaking and on the people nearby, and it improves one's reputation (*lian* and *mianzi*); in a word, polite behavior is praised by society. Thus, one earns a good reputation and self-respect. Moreover, women in both Japan and China tend to be more verbally polite than men (Tao, 2010, 2012). These results show that the concept of politeness in intercultural communication should involve polite expressions, beautification language, and polite behavior if one wants to communicate smoothly and make a good impression on the listener.

Moreover, it is significant that the idea that politeness should be understood as strategic conflict-avoidance arises, for example, in the view that the basic social role of politeness is in its ability to function as a way of controlling potential aggression between interactional parties (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 1) or in the views that connect politeness with smooth communication (Ide, 1989, p. 225, 230) or with avoiding disruption and maintaining the social equilibrium and friendly relation (Leech, 1983, p. 17, 82). It is most especially good in foreign language teaching. Understanding differences of culture and knowing the politeness expressions of a conversation partner's country can help avoid conflict and promote smooth communication in cross-cultural interaction. Linguistic communication requires that interlocutors understand each other's utterances. For example, "May I have your name?" is more polite than "What is your name?" in English. That is, in English, linguistic structures do not in themselves denote politeness. Rather, they lend themselves to individual interpretation as polite in instances of ongoing verbal interaction. In Japanese, "お名前は何とおっしゃいますか (*O namae nann to o syai masuka*)?" is more polite than "名前は何かといいますか? (*Namae o nann to iimasuka*)."  
In this sentence, "お (o)" is an honorific prefix attached to a name in Japanese. It sounds more polite with the addition of the honorific verb "おっしゃいます (*osyaimasu*)."  
This proves that Japanese speakers use honorifics for politeness expressions. On the one hand, "您貴姓 (*Nin gui xing*)?" is more polite than "你叫什麼名字 (*Ni jiao shenme mingzi*)?" in Chinese. Here, "您 (*nin*)" is an honorific term for the second person, and "貴 (*gui*)" is an honorific prefix attached to a name. This case shows us that Chinese speakers also use honorifics for politeness expressions. On the other hand, there are different words, *ilum* "이름" and *sengham* "성함", that both mean 'name' in Korean. *Sengham* "성함" is used to address to a person who is older than (or the same age as) the speaker, and *ilum* "이름" is used for a person who is younger (or the same age).

Speakers from different cultures or linguistic backgrounds will produce a given expression differently. As mentioned above, we suggest that foreign language teachers should not only teach language, but also teach knowledge about cultural backgrounds, politeness expressions, and the different norms, values, and traditions or customs of communication in a particular language.

## 6. Conclusion

The Asia-centric focus of this study is valuable to future research on politeness, especially in the era of globalization. This study makes an important contribution to comparative studies

of intercultural politeness. Especially, the use of native-speaker judgments in the comparative study of intercultural politeness in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean verbal communication is an important theme. The concepts of politeness discussed here validate many opinions of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students regarding cultural awareness and evaluated concepts of the self-concerning politeness. Polite expressions, beautification language, and polite behavior continue to be key characteristics of the Asian social-perspective tradition of politeness, in the view of today's Japanese, Chinese, and Korean young people.

It will be necessary to conduct a similar analysis of intercultural politeness in other societies in the future to examine how to improve cooperation through an understanding of communicative behavior. Further research on concepts of politeness in intercultural communication should more fully explore cultural and linguistic differences, and other questions for linguistic and psycholinguistic theory because of variability. We subscribe to the view of Eelen (2001, pp. 253-256) and Matsumura, Chinami, and that the notion of politeness is in need of further investigation. Different kinds of research methods should be used to investigate ordinary people's notions of politeness, such as informal interviews or examples of actual politeness evaluations. As Held (1992) states, "Several questions have not been solved but rather brought to a head. From this point of view, the linguistic concern with politeness is a task for the future, not a thing of the past" (p. 151).

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