

# 日本の研究生活

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## Life as a Researcher in Japan

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### Abstract

I have been working and living in Japan for a little over 10 years now. I first came over as a graduate student, to work on SuperKamiokande, then started working at KEK as a JSPS fellow after graduating, and now work in the Accelerator Division at KEK. My experiences have varied much over that time, due to different locations and different types of job, but as I look back on my first ten years in Japan, I think I can say that the experiences have been (almost) all positive.

### 1. General Impressions

When I first came to Japan, I did not have much idea of what to expect. I was sent to Japan to work on SuperKamiokande when the project in the US on which I was planning to do my thesis research got cancelled. I was sent over with 8–9 month's notice, and while I started studying Japanese as hard as possible before coming over, I was starting from scratch and there was not very much time to become properly prepared for life and work in Japan.

My impressions of Japan before coming over were of a very economically powerful, technologically advanced country, where rules of politeness are very, very complicated and strict. My biggest concern when studying Japanese was to try to learn how to be polite enough not to offend too many people.

When I arrived in Japan, the visible economic might of the country was indeed impressive. I never saw an old or beat-up looking car on the road, and even the design of trucks and construction machinery had style. Nowadays, everyone remarks on how Japan has the most advanced cell phones, computers, and the fastest and cheapest broadband access in the world, but the thing that first amazed me, though it may seem a trivial thing, was that the bank ATMs were capable of

counting cash! (In American ATMs, one has to deposit money in envelopes, and a human counts it later.)

As for the issue of politeness, I found that people were much more relaxed and friendly than I had feared. They were also amazingly hard-working: everyone seemed to walk very quickly and purposefully, and they worked very hard but also very cheerfully. It was easy to see why so many Japanese companies seemed to be at the global top of their industries. An American professor I knew once remarked, "Now, this is a country that knows how to work!".

### 2. Research Life

When it came to research, the thing that first struck me was, as it does to many, how much people work in groups, and how many meetings people have. Of course, there are meetings in the US as well, but my impression was that they tend to be more frequent here. I was accustomed to thinking that meetings are an interruption from work, and was surprised to see so many meetings, and such long ones. I thought, "how can people get any work done when they are in meetings all day?" but eventually realized that some people were actually doing their analyses during the meetings, as a group. I have to admit that it is still not my

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favorite style of working, but I can see how some people can find it useful.

The other characteristic type of meeting is the hikitsugi, carried out to exchange information between experimental shifts, for example. This is usually done in a more thorough manner than is done in the US. I am occasionally asked what a good English word for hikitsugi is, and I still have not found one. In fact, it is such a useful word and concept that the foreigners I know in Japan have adopted the word “hikitsugi” into their English speech to describe them.

Another thing which struck me, as Nicholas Delerue observed in Volume 1 Number 3 of this magazine, was the extensive use of subcontractors in Japanese research, and the close ties between research and industry in Japan. This seems to be connected to another difference which I have observed: in Japan, it seems to be relatively easier to get money for equipment than it is in the US, and relatively harder to get money for people to travel. (And travel is not always fully reimbursed in Japan.) I wonder sometimes if all of the achievements accomplished here are disseminated as well as they could be to the rest of the world.

Finally, the biggest difference that has struck me and other foreigners is how seriously schedules are kept in Japan. When SuperKamiokande was being built, it seemed such a huge job that none of the foreigners working on it believed that it would start taking data on schedule, and yet it did. When KEKB was being commissioned, it likewise seemed to be on an impossibly aggressive schedule, and yet it also came on line on time— and has also exceeded its design luminosity, which seemed hopelessly optimistic in the beginning, to become the highest luminosity machine in the world. To witness and participate in such feats of drive and endurance have been very impressive (and exhausting).

Of course, finding a balance between work and family life can be a challenge under such circumstances. This is not an issue unique to Japan by any means, and at KEK is perhaps exacerbated by the relative isolation of Tsukuba. When I first arrived in Tsukuba, I was surprised that there were no trains here, and that one had to drive everywhere; Japan’s famed rail network did not extend to here. The arrival of the Tsuku-

ba Express will soon make Tsukuba seem much less isolated for newcomers, both foreign and Japanese. In the meantime, after many years of living in Tsukuba, I have learned the locations of many things hidden around the city, and it has finally come to feel like home. One of the nicest features of Tsukuba, for example, is the extensive network of public parks, which are great places to take children.

Speaking of children, I must say that I have been very impressed at the quality and convenience of the daycare facilities (hoikusho, youchien) available in Tsukuba, both public and private. The staff members take their jobs very seriously, so one feels that their child is in good hands, and the availability of extended hours is very important for researcher families. In addition, the health services and coverage for young children provided in Tsukuba make it a very good place to raise children. One thing that would be nice to have is a Monkasho-accredited bilingual school, and I have heard rumors that one may be coming to Tsukuba soon. I think such an institution would be very popular among both foreign and Japanese parents.

### 3. Conclusion

I have found Japan a much easier place to live and work than I had initially expected, enough so that it has become home to me now. It does take a relatively long time to feel that one has been accepted as a regular member of society, but with enough patience and perseverance it is possible. I can recommend it to other foreigners as a fine place to build a career and raise a family.

