



## A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Japanese and Karakalpak Greetings

Seytjanova Luiza Taxirovna<sup>1</sup>  
Axmetova Moldir Kasim kizi<sup>2</sup>

EFL teacher at KSU, Scientific advisor, Karakalpakstan, Nukus<sup>1</sup>  
3rd year student at KSU, Karakalpakstan, Nukus<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Greetings are an essential part of human communication, serving not only as an introduction but also as a reflection of the cultural values embedded within a society. This paper takes a closer look at the greetings in two distinct cultures—Japan and Karakalpakstan—focusing on their verbal and non-verbal elements. Through this comparison, we uncover how these simple exchanges convey respect, social structure, and underlying cultural principles.

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### Introduction

Greetings are much more than polite formalities. They offer insight into how societies function, reflecting underlying values such as respect, social status, and interpersonal connections. In this article, we will explore how greetings are structured in Japan, a country known for its deep sense of formality and respect, and Karakalpakstan, where greetings emphasize community and hospitality. By comparing these two cultures, we aim to reveal how the simple act of saying "hello" varies dramatically based on cultural context.

### Verbal Components of Greetings

#### Japanese Greetings

In Japan, greetings often follow a strict pattern, underscored by respect for hierarchy and social norms. The common greetings, such as "こんにちは" (Konnichiwa) for the afternoon, or "おはようございます" (Ohayou gozaimasu) for the morning, serve more than just their literal purpose—they also signal the speaker's awareness of the other person's status or role. Even casual greetings are shaped by Japan's culture of politeness, where adding honorifics like "さん" (san) or "さま" (sama) indicates not only who you're speaking to but how much respect you are expected to show.

What makes Japanese greetings unique is how meticulously they reflect the social pecking order. It is not just about exchanging pleasantries but about positioning oneself within society. For instance, the way people greet their boss differs greatly from how they would greet a close friend, where casualness is acceptable. Japan's hierarchical structure is interwoven into even these brief interactions, revealing the significance of status in daily communication.

#### Karakalpak Greetings

In contrast, Karakalpak greetings feel more direct and grounded in community ties, though respect remains an important element. "Assalawma aleykum", meaning "Peace be upon you," is a traditional Islamic greeting widely used in Karakalpak society. Its use spans both formal and informal interactions, uniting people through a shared cultural and religious bond. The response, "Waleykum assalam", reflects mutual respect and signals the start of a conversation.

Karakalpak culture, deeply influenced by its nomadic heritage and Islamic traditions, places significant value on gestures as part of non-verbal communication. Gestures in this culture often serve to complement spoken language, enhancing the expression of respect, sincerity, and communal bonds. For example, handshakes are a common gesture, especially among men, to signify both respect and mutual acknowledgment. In formal settings or when greeting elders, a handshake may be followed by placing the hand over the heart, symbolizing warmth and sincerity. Unlike some cultures where certain gestures may be reserved for specific social classes, in Karakalpak society, these gestures are more universally applied, reflecting the community-oriented nature of the culture. Gestures also play a key role in conveying emotions or reinforcing social norms, such as showing respect during greetings or in communal gatherings. Additionally, physical space and proximity in gestures highlight the importance of personal connections, making them an integral part of everyday interactions in Karakalpak life. This emphasis on respectful, inclusive gestures underlines the importance of both tradition and interpersonal harmony in Karakalpak culture.

In Karakalpak, it is impolite and disrespectful not to greet adults. This is also mentioned in folk proverbs. For example, proverbs such as "Bir hárip úyretken ustazga qirq jil salem ber" (meaning: "He who teaches you a single letter is worthy of forty years of respect."), "Ádeptin basi sálem" ("Politeness begins with a greeting"), "Bir kun duz bergenge qirq kun salem ber" ("Show respect to those who have shown kindness") are common among the people. Other than "assalawma alaykum" greetings, the words "sálem", "qalaysan" are also widely used between friends or relatives of the same age.

– Assalawma aleykum, Shamurat ag'a,– dedim qol alisip, biraq eki ko'zim awzinda.  
( "Assalauma aleikum Mr.Shamurat," I said while shaking hands, but my eyes were on his mouth.)

– Waleykum assalam, – dedi ol. ("Waleykum assalam", he said)

– Densawliq qalay, ag'a? (How are you, Mr?)

– Jaman emes, qosshim.(1.121.) (Not bad, bro.)

#### **Non-verbal Components of Greetings**

##### Japanese Non-verbal Communication

In Japan, much of the communication surrounding greetings happens without words. Bowing, or "お辞儀" (Ojigi), is perhaps the most iconic non-verbal element of Japanese greetings. This gesture is not just a polite formality; it conveys deference and humility. The angle of the bow varies based on the relationship: a deep bow is offered to show great respect, while a slight nod is sufficient among equals or friends.

Interestingly, while many cultures might emphasize direct eye contact as a sign of sincerity, in Japan it can be seen as inappropriate, especially when bowing. Instead, focusing on the bow itself becomes a way to show that you are acknowledging the other person with the proper level of respect. The absence of eye contact during these exchanges underscores the value placed on humility and self-restraint in Japanese society.

Gestures are more important than words:

Words are of course important, but in Japanese culture they fade into the background. Japanese etiquette primarily pays a lot of attention to the behavior and gestures of interlocutors. In Japan, bowing is of great importance when communicating, of which there is an incredible amount. And in order not to offend or offend your interlocutor, you should know in advance how and to whom you should bow. The main rule: you need to bow neither your head nor your shoulders, but your entire body from the waist or even from the pelvis. The higher the position of the interlocutor, the deeper the bow should be:

- When you see the emperor, you should bend at an angle of at least 70 degrees.
- When meeting with a boss, leader, or senior revered relative, bend 45 degrees.
- When greeting equal but respected people, lean 30 degrees. This category includes work

colleagues and business partners.

- But when meeting with friends and good acquaintances, you don't have to bend your back. A slight but noticeable nod of the head will be enough.

- There is no need to bow to the staff you pay for their services. Taxi drivers, waiters and salespeople should only be greeted with words. But they can bow to you in response.

However, local residents treat guests calmly and do not require deep knowledge of etiquette. Therefore, if you bend at the waist when greeting, this will already be regarded as a sign of honor and respect. But in relation to each other, the requirements are so strict that the interlocutors, out of habit, bow even when talking on the phone.

#### Karakalpak Non-verbal Communication

In Karakalpak culture, greeting gestures play a significant role in demonstrating respect, hospitality, and social connection. One of the most common and important greeting gestures is the handshake, which is typically used between men. This handshake is often firm and may be accompanied by a slight bow of the head, showing both respect and acknowledgment. Additionally, when greeting elders, it is customary to enhance the handshake by placing the right hand over the heart after the handshake, a gesture that expresses deep respect and warmth. In rural areas and more traditional settings, younger individuals may also perform a slight bow or lower their gaze when greeting older members of the community, emphasizing humility. Women in Karakalpak culture often greet each other with a handshake or by placing their hands on each other's shoulders, reflecting familiarity and mutual respect. These gestures are not just routine social actions but are steeped in cultural meaning.

Unlike Japanese culture, eye contact is valued in Karakalpak greetings, as it is seen as a sign of sincerity and trust. Smiling and direct engagement are common, reflecting the warm and hospitable nature of Karakalpak society. The physical touch aspect of greetings contrasts with the more formalized, distant nature of Japanese non-verbal communication.

#### Cultural Values Reflected in Greetings

##### Japanese Culture

Japanese greetings reflect the cultural importance of "wa" (和), or group harmony. The hierarchical nature of the society is embedded in every interaction, with greetings being no exception. Bowing, polite language, and the avoidance of direct eye contact all serve to maintain social order and show respect. The formality of the greeting often depends on the context and the relationship between individuals, making greetings a crucial aspect of daily life in Japan.

##### Karakalpak Culture

In contrast, Karakalpak greetings emphasize community and social connection rather than hierarchy. The Islamic influence is evident in the use of Arabic greetings, while the handshake and direct eye contact reflect the nomadic traditions of openness and hospitality. The more relaxed, inclusive nature of Karakalpak greetings mirrors the collective identity and communal values that are central to the culture.

#### Conclusion

While both Japanese and Karakalpak greetings serve as essential social tools, they differ significantly in terms of verbal and non-verbal elements. Japanese greetings are formal and highly reflective of social hierarchies, emphasizing respect and group harmony. In contrast, Karakalpak greetings are more communal and direct, reflecting values of hospitality and sincerity. These differences highlight the broader cultural frameworks within which each society operates, offering a fascinating glimpse into how greetings function as both social and cultural markers.

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