

Cross Cultural Study of Personality Traits in University Students from India and Japan

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The objective of this study was to explore differences in personality traits among university students from India and Japan. Ten-Item Personality Inventory of the Big Five personality traits is used for this purpose. **Method:** The participants included 191 Indian (91 male, 100 female) and 248 Japanese (131 male, 117 female) students. Data is analyzed using independent samples t-tests and ANOVA to compare personality traits between the two countries. **Result:** The t-test results revealed a significant difference in personality traits between students from India and Japan. Indian students scored higher in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, whereas Japanese students scored significantly higher on neuroticism. Furthermore, the ANOVA indicated significant differences in personality traits between male and female students in India and Japan. Both male and female Indian students scored higher on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, whereas male and female Japanese students scored higher on neuroticism. **Conclusion:** The finding that Indian students scored higher on agreeableness and openness to experience than their Japanese counterparts can be attributed to cultural diversity, which fosters flexibility in different situations. The finding of lower conscientiousness among Japanese students was surprising, considering the prevalent perception of the Japanese as industrious.

Keywords: *Personality Traits, University Students, Cross-Cultural Comparison*

Personality research is a versatile field that garners considerable attention from several perspectives. According to Allport (1961), personality can be described as the dynamic organization of psychophysical systems within an individual that shape their behavior and thoughts. Others have defined personality as a unique combination of characteristics that make a person an individual (Weinberg & Gould, 1999; Lounsbury, Hutchens, & Loveland, 2005; Srivastava, 2010). Therefore, personality traits play a fundamental role in understanding individual differences and human behavior (Ali, 2019). Bandura's social learning theory (1977) states that a person's traits are influenced by both nature and nurture. Bandura (1986) emphasized that personality can either remain the same or change over time.

As research in this field grows, personality traits or factors have been studied extensively. Furthermore, several models exist to assess personalities, with the Big Five personality

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factor model being widely recognized and established. Additionally, many researchers have focused on the measurement of personality traits across different cultural backgrounds.

Extensive research has been conducted on personality traits in India and Japan. However, no study has compared personality traits between these two countries. Although both India and Japan are Eastern civilizations, there are more differences than similarities between these two culturally different countries. Therefore, this study compared the personality traits of people in India and Japan and specifically focused on the Big Five personality factors. India is richly diverse in terms of race, language, and culture, whereas Japan is more uniform. While Indians are tolerant of being different from others, Japanese people tend to find value and security in being the same as others. Therefore, the objective of this research is to investigate whether these differences influence the personality traits of university students from India and Japan.

The Big Five Personality Factors Model

The Big Five personality traits began to attract attention in the 1940s, as highlighted by Allport (1961). Fiske (1949) was an early proponent of the idea that only five factors fundamentally define personality, which has become the basis of the Big Five personality theories (Dweck, 2008). Subsequently, other psychologists expanded the theory.

The Big Five model states that individual personality differences can be classified into five broad categories (factors): neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Everyone possesses all five traits; however, the range of each trait in an individual distinguishes them. Each of these factors represents a continuum between two extremes (Weinberg & Gould, 1999).

Currently, the Big Five personality model is the most popular, widely accepted, and utilized model for measuring personality traits and has gained substantial support due to being extensively researched. Researchers have developed several well-established instruments to measure the Big Five traits in different cultural contexts and conduct comparative cross-cultural studies, such as NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; 60-items; Costa & McCrae, 1992), Trait Descriptive Adjectives (TDA; 100-items; Goldberg, 1992), Big Five Inventory (BFI; 44-item; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), and the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

FACTORS OF THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS

Extraversion

Extraversion refers to sociability, action orientation, an energetic personality (Gurven, Rueden, Massenkoff, Kaplan, & Lero Vie, 2013), and assertiveness. It characterizes people who enjoy drawing attention and becoming involved in discussions (Johnson, n.d.). Extroverted people tend to have optimistic perspectives on personal and social events and often generate positive energy in social environments.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to cooperation, social harmony, collaboration, and friendliness (Bauger, 2011; Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2012). It is defined as the personal capability to work with others for a long time (Mikolajczak, Luminet, Leroy, & Roy, 2007). People with this trait show an inclination towards integration into social environments and providing support to others in society.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness refers to being self-disciplined in one's private and social life, organized, and dependent and preparing and planning for any situation rather than being spontaneous. Moreover, these personality characteristics refer to how individuals manage and guide their impulses (Johnson, n.d.).

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is characterized by depression, anxiety, and emotional volatility and refers to the habit of excessive worrying. It can cause mental distress and emotional suffering, rendering individuals unable to perform daily activities (Johnson, n.d.). According to Fayombo (2010), neuroticism is a negative factor that contributes to undesirable reactions and behaviors such as anger and depressed mood.

Openness to Experience

Openness to experience entails a degree of creativity, level of intellectual curiosity, and preference for newness. This personality factor is defined in various ways, including wisdom. Moreover, openness is associated with the manifestation of emotions, thoughts, actions, and experiences that highlight mental creativity and performance (Poropat, 2009). It can be characterized by an interest in new ideas, an imaginative mindset, and creative thinking (Johnson, n.d.).

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Japan

Several studies in Japan have examined the correlation between the Big Five personality traits and aspects of Japanese society. In a survey of middle-aged and older adults, women and men were found to have higher neuroticism and lower openness to experience, respectively (Iwasa & Yoshida, 2018). Furthermore, regional differences in personality traits within Japan have been investigated. Yoshino, Shimotsukasa, & Oshio (2020) found a negative association between daylight hours and neurotic tendencies, suggesting that regional factors influence personality traits.

The relationship between academic performance and the Big Five also been examined. One study found students' active class participation to be related to higher agreeableness and lower neuroticism (Kodaira, Fuse, & Ando, 2018). A study on the relationship between career decision-making and personality traits of university students reported that those who had studied abroad tended to have higher openness to experiences in their careers (Oka, Ishida, & Hong, 2018).

Another study exploring the relationship between the personality traits and health-related behaviors revealed that higher extraversion and lower conscientiousness were associated with higher BMI (Body Mass Index) in men, whereas lower conscientiousness was associated with higher BMI in women (Yoshino & Oshio, 2020). These studies demonstrate the influence of extraversion and conscientiousness on health-related behaviors.

India

In India, many studies have examined the relationship between personality traits and well-being. Tanksale (2015) conducted research on 183 middle-aged Indians (aged 30–40 years) to examine the relationship between factors of subjective well-being (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect) and the Big Five traits, which indicated that life satisfaction is affected by conscientiousness. In contrast, neuroticism and extraversion

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predicted a negative and positive effect, respectively. The remaining Big Five dimensions (openness to experience and agreeableness) were not related to subjective well-being.

Arora and Rangnekar (2016) examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and career commitment factors (career identity, resilience, and planning) among 363 Indian managers and found that openness to experience is significantly related to all three career commitment factors. Furthermore, the findings indicated that conscientiousness and agreeableness were significantly related to career identity and planning, respectively.

In addition to the Big Five personality traits, India has its own Triguna Theory, which comprises three dimensions: sattva (stability), rajas (activation), and tamas (inertia) (Srivastava, 2012). Triguna refers to the three inherent qualities of living beings that constitute a person's behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical Concerns

The researcher obtained approval for this survey from the Research Ethics Committee at the researcher's current university. Then the researcher obtained written informed consent from the survey participants before conducting the survey. During the survey, hard copies of the questionnaire were provided to the participants.

Research Instrument

The following research instrument was used to collect data.

The Big Five Personality Traits

The TIPI (Gosling et al., 2003) and a Japanese-translated version of the TIPI (TIPI-J; Oshio, Abe, & Cutrone, 2012) were used for data collection in India and Japan, respectively. The TIPI comprises ten items, with two items (positive and negative) for each dimension. The participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale. Values for internal consistency, ranging from .40 to .73, showed positive correlations (Gosling et al., 2003).

Participants

Initially, the participants included 234 (120 male and 114 female) and 257 (135 male and 122 female) university students aged 17–23 and 17–22 from two universities in West Bengal, India, and Tokyo, Japan, respectively. The researchers excluded incomplete or incorrectly completed responses; 191 (91 male, 100 female) and 248 (131 male, 117 female) students' data remained, after exclusion, from India and Japan, respectively.

Survey Period

A questionnaire survey was conducted in India and Japan from February to May 2023.

Data Analysis

The analysis in this research utilized SPSS version 26.0 for conducting data analysis, specifically employing an independent samples t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS

A comparison of the personalities of Indian and Japanese students using an independent sample t-test showed significant notable differences between the two groups in terms of agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Table 1, Figure 1). Indian students scored higher than their Japanese counterparts in agreeableness ($t = 6.16$;

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$p < .001$), conscientiousness ($t = 9.08$; $p < .001$), and openness to experience ($t = 8.26$; $p < .001$). Japanese students scored higher on neuroticism ($t = 7.02$, $p < .001$). No significant differences were found between Indian and Japanese students in the extraversion dimension.

Table 1 T-test Results for the Big Five Personality Traits between India and Japan

	Indian Students ($n = 191$)		Japanese Students ($n = 248$)		t -value ($df = 437$)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Extraversion	7.81	2.94	8.14	3.34	1.08
Agreeableness	12.06	2.32	10.75	2.11	6.16***
Conscientiousness	9.88	2.97	7.50	2.50	9.08***
Neuroticism	6.69	2.98	8.59	2.66	7.02***
Openness to experience	10.63	2.59	8.50	2.75	8.26***

*** $p < .001$

SD: Standard deviation

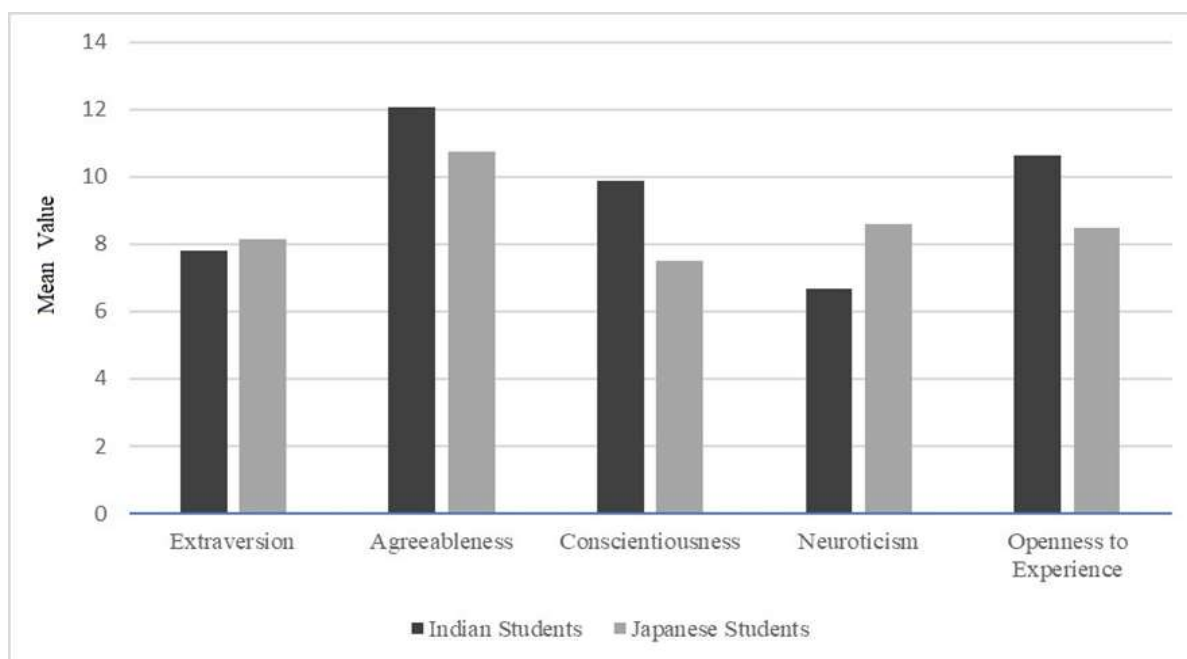


Figure 1 Average Scores of the Big Five between Indian and Japanese Students

An ANOVA performed to compare students in the two countries by gender showed similar results to those of the t-test: Indian male and female students scored significantly higher than their Japanese counterparts in three dimensions (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience), and Japanese male and female students scored significantly higher in neuroticism. However, no significant differences were found between the male and female students in each country. There were significant differences between male and female students in India and Japan in terms of agreeableness ($F = 13.84$; $p < .001$), conscientiousness ($F = 28.23$; $p < .001$), neuroticism ($F = 19.13$; $p < .001$), and openness to experience ($F = 23.64$; $p < .001$). However, no significant differences were found between Indian and Japanese students for extraversions (Table 2).

In the agreeableness dimension, the results showed that both male and female Indian students scored higher than male and female Japanese students (IF/IM > JF/JM, Mean: 12.34, 11.75, 10.78, 10.72, Mean differences: IF and JF: 1.55, IF and JM: 1.61, IM and JF: .97, IM

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and JM: 1.03, $p < .001$). In terms of conscientiousness, the results showed that both male and female Indian students scored higher than their Japanese counterparts (IF/IM>JF/JM, Mean: 10.09, 9.65, 7.67, 7.35; Mean differences: IF and JF: 2.41, IF and JM: 2.73, IM and JF: 1.98, IM and JM: 2.30, $p < .001$). In terms of neuroticism, both male and female Japanese students scored higher than their Indian counterparts. (JF/JM>IF/IM, Mean: 8.76, 8.44, 7.19, 6.15, Mean differences: JF and IF: 1.57, JF and IM: 2.61, JM and IF: 1.25, JM and IM: 2.28, $p < .001$). In terms of openness to experience, both male and female Indian students scored higher than their Japanese counterparts (IF/IM>JM/JF, Mean: 10.69, 10.58, 8.75, 8.21; Mean differences: IF and JM: 1.93, IF and JF: 2.47, IM and JM: 1.82, IM and JF: 2.36, $p < .001$).

Table 2 One-Way ANOVA for Indian and Japanese Male/Female Students (TIPI)

		India		Japan		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> =3,435)	Post-hoc Bonferroni test
		Male (<i>n</i> =91)	Female (<i>n</i> =100)	Male (<i>n</i> =131)	Female (<i>n</i> =117)		
Extraversion	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	7.60 (3.05)	8.01 (2.84)	8.29 (3.38)	7.98 (3.29)	.855 <i>n.s.</i>	
Agreeableness	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	11.75 (2.54)	12.34 (2.07)	10.72 (2.14)	10.78 (2.07)	13.84***	IF/IM>JF/JM
Conscientiousness	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	9.65 (3.22)	10.09 (2.73)	7.35 (2.59)	7.67 (2.40)	28.23***	IF/IM>JF/JM
Neuroticism	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	6.15 (3.02)	7.19 (2.87)	8.44 (2.69)	8.76 (2.63)	19.13***	JF/JM>IF/IM
Openness to experiences	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	10.58 (2.68)	10.69 (2.52)	8.75 (2.84)	8.21 (2.64)	23.64***	IF/IM>JM/JF

Note: IM: Indian Male; IF: Indian Female; JM: Japanese Male; JF: Japanese Female; *M*: Mean; *SD*: Standard deviation

*** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The results showed significant differences between Indian and Japanese Students in four of the Big Five factors: agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Indian students scored higher than Japanese students on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, while Japanese students scored higher on neuroticism. Regarding gender, there were significant differences between male and female students from the two countries; however, no significant differences were found between male and female students from the same country.

Indian students scored higher on agreeableness and openness to experience. India is characterized by cultural diversity, where people of different religions and cultures coexist in the same society. Therefore, different situations and ways of thinking are common in Indian society, which necessitates understanding and accepting other people's points of view to foster harmony (Sahgal, Evans, Salazar, Starr, & Corichi, 2021). This cultural context may have contributed to the greater flexibility observed among Indian students (Nishaat, 2022).

Furthermore, India is a rapidly developing nation experiencing fast technological changes. Thus, Indians must adapt to these changes in their everyday lives. This exposure to novelty and change may have increased Indians openness to new experiences, resulting in higher

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scores for agreeableness and openness to experience among Indian students than among Japanese students.

Japanese students scoring lower than Indian students in the conscientiousness dimension was surprising, as there is a well-established perception that Japanese people are industrious. However, this may be because of the age of the survey participants. Kawamoto et al. (2015) examined the characteristics of the Japanese personality based on their age and gender. The results showed that conscientiousness was significantly lower in younger generation. This result is similar with the result of the present study.

In another study, it was found that Japanese university students spend lesser time in study than they do in high schools (Landsberry, 2018). The university years are often regarded as a long vacation before starting a working career. Furthermore, studying intensely at a university is not particularly advantageous in the job-hunting process because Japanese companies rarely evaluate candidates based on university grades. Consequently, Japanese university students generally spend less time studying. This might be the reason of lower score in conscientiousness in Japanese students.

India's case is quite different from that of Japan. Indian students face intense competition for employment. Having a strong academic background is a very important factor in securing a good job in both the government and private sectors. Thus, for Indian students, achieving good results at university is directly related to securing good jobs. These contrasting circumstances between the two countries might account for the lower scores in conscientiousness among Japanese students compared to Indian students.

Regarding neuroticism, Japanese students scored higher than Indian students, which is consistent with previous studies. Many comparative studies of personality between Japanese people and people from other countries show that Japanese people score higher in neuroticism than others (Matsumoto, 2006; Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martínez, 2007). Research by Schmitt et al. (2007) focusing on personality in various cultures, which was conducted with 17,837 individuals from 56 nations, showed similar results for Japan and India. India scored higher on extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences, while Japan scored higher on neuroticism. Furthermore, McCrae and Terracciano (2005) conducted research on personality profiles in 51 countries with 12,156 participants. In their study, Japanese participants scored higher than Indian participants in neuroticism. However, Japanese participants also scored higher than their Indian counterparts in openness to experience and extraversion, which differs from the results of the current study. In their study, Indian participants scored higher on agreeableness and conscientiousness which is consistent with current study.

One major limitation of this study is that it targeted a specific age group (university students). More participants from different age groups could provide a more complete picture of personality trait differences between India and Japan. Second, the data for India was collected from only one state (West Bengal). However as already mentioned above, India is socially and culturally diverse. Including data from other states in India could provide different findings on personality traits.

Overall, this study compared the personality traits between Indian and Japanese individuals. The results obtained in this study help provide a deeper understanding of the differences in personality traits and factors that shape those differences in India and Japan.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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