Japanese Birthing Culture

Japanese culture dates to 250 AD and is one of the oldest cultures still present today; it has enriched the rest of the world so seamlessly that most people do not notice how many of the things in their everyday lives are the result of Japanese influence (Japan Society, 2025). Some examples of this are popular video game franchises like Super Mario, Zelda, and Final Fantasy, common foods such as sushi and ramen, and Zen architectural designs. With an estimated population of 123 million, it is no surprise that Japanese culture has spilled out of Japan's borders and gone on to enhance the rest of the world (Population Clock, 2025).

The two main religions practiced in Japan are Shintoism and Buddhism, which both emphasize the importance of living in harmony with nature, respecting elders, remembering ancestors, practicing mindfulness when interacting with the public, and modesty (Watt, 2003). As a result of the value these religions place on modesty, many Japanese women prefer to have a female provider in the labor and delivery setting, however, utilizing a male provider is not forbidden; modesty has also had an effect on the way the Japanese prefer to handle pain, often driving them to suffer silently to avoid the possibility of becoming a burden to others (Watt, 2003).

In traditional Japanese culture men were not present during the labor and delivery process, but there has been an increase of fathers wanting to remain present for this process in modern times (Lerner, 2023). However,

the absence of men during the labor process should not imply that the Japanese were lacking in their post-partum care. In the United States it is common for birthing parents to be discharged twenty-four hours after an uncomplicated vaginal delivery, but in Japan birthing parents often remain in the hospital for five to seven days (Lerner, 2023). Additionally, new Japanese parents are strongly supported by their families during a “confinement period” where the birthing parents stay inside for one hundred days to honor the parent’s and the newborn’s need to bond with each other, rest, and recover; to aid with this the birthing parents are nourished with easily digestible foods such as soups and porridges to help them regain their strength (Lerner, 2023).

Japanese culture traditionally follows a generational structure, meaning that elders are held in the highest respect and remain living in the same home with their children and grandchildren instead of living independently (Sakamoto et al., 2025). Japanese culture is traditionally patriarchal as well, allowing men to speak for women in many circumstances (especially formal), but this is becoming less common in modern times (Sakamoto et al., 2025). In general, Japanese men and women usually prefer to communicate with others in a straightforward manner and rely heavily on non-verbal cues like bowing and avoiding eye-contact to show respect (Sakamoto et al., 2025).

When caring for Japanese patients in a labor and delivery setting a nurse can show inclusivity and compassion by communicating with the patient clearly about whether they would prefer to have a female nurse over

a male nurse, using non-verbal assessment guides to assess discomfort (the Japanese often under report their pain as a way of retaining their modesty), and honoring the Japanese postpartum traditions of recovery by offering the appropriate foods to the birthing parent (most western food is not easily digestible or nourishing). Though these things may seem like common sense to most, it is easy to get swept up in the chaos of the day on a labor and delivery floor and a little effort can go a long way in making Japanese patient’s feel seen and respected.

References

About Japan: A teacher's resource | Early Japan (50,000 BC - 710 AD) | Japan Society. (n.d.). https://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/early_japan_50000bc_710ad#sthash.rV0aib9e.dpbs

https://www.census.gov/popclock/world/ja

Japanese religions. (n.d.). FSI. https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/japanese_religions

Lerner, R. (2023, April 10). *What does postpartum care look like around the world?* https://www.mavenclinic.com/post/what-does-postpartum-care-look-like-around-the-world

Population clock: World. (n.d.). https://www.census.gov/popclock/world/ja

Sakamoto, Taro, Watanabe, Akira, Masai, Yasuo, Hijino, Shigeki, Jansen, B, M., Masamoto, Kitajima, Toyoda, Takeshi, Hurst, Cameron, G., Latz, Gil, Notehelfer, & G, F. (2025, July 7). *Japan | History, flag, Map, Population, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Japan/Daily-life-and-social-customs