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## Impressions of Japan

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Sitting in front of a white piece of paper and thinking about my impressions of living in Japan I find it is a hard job because it touches a wide range of various aspects. Probably it is more a description about living in Tokai-mura because it is up to now the only place in Japan I stayed for a longer period of time.

Before I came to Japan many friends and my family told me (or better saying guessed) that settle down in Japan will be connected to something like a cultural shock. Of course the first steps in a land one is not able to speak, write or read the language is not easy. But I found soon that this potential barrier depends strongly on the mentality of the people of this country. The people of Tokai-mura are very helpful and friendly. Under such circumstances it is possible even with a few words of Japanese and "hand and foot" communication to master most small problems of daily life. Especially from the members of the group I am working in I got great support from the first day. We soon became friends. In fact up to now I never meet an unfriendly or rejectable Japanese. So I can say without any exceptions that I feel comfortable and secure in Japan.

A special pleasure for me is the weekly Japanese language class of JAERI. Within this environment learning the Japanese language is pure fun. Whenever I can I try to use my still basic Japanese. Due to my jolty pronunciation this often leads to a friendly smile on the faces of my colleagues. But

their corrections are very helpful and more valuable than any text book.

The food in Japan is much more diversified than in Germany. But unfortunately I am a so called "bad eater" and whenever I found a dish which I like it is hard for me to change. In this respect my visits at the restaurants in Tokai-mura are not suitable to improve my Japanese. Because in most of the cases the simple sentence "いつものください" is sufficient in my case.

The life in Tokai-mura is silent and comfortable. I would not change it for the hecticness of a bigger city like Tokyo. The nature of the town, itself, with the many scientific institutes and facilities is comparable to Garching, a smaller town near Muenchen where most of the scientific institutes of the Technical University of Muenchen and many Max-Planck-Institutes are located and where I spend the last six years. The people of this region are amongst other things very proud of their good beer. To my surprise (and joy) I found the Japanese beer is from high quality and absolutely comparable to the good beer of Muenchen.

I am very fascinated by the kanji signs. And I am trying hard to learn 5 kanji per day. But unfortunately I forget 3 kanji each day as well. So I calculated that in about 3 years I will maybe be able to read a Japanese newspaper. I am looking forward to this day.

