Imagine leaving your home, culture and familiar language thousands of miles behind as you carry your nation's hope for space exploration on your shoulders.

That's just what some of Japan's space pioneers have been doing for a number of years as they prepare their country's first human spaceflight facility.

The Japanese Experiment Module is called Kibo -- which means "hope" in Japanese.

The first two components of Kibo are now undergoing processing and checkout in the Space Station Processing Facility at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Tetsuro Yokoyama, operations project deputy manager for Kibo, says of the cultural challenges they've faced:

"Difference of language might be the biggest one, for which we Japanese were prepared to work with the NASA engineers in English."

"For me to see situations for our bright engineers, despite their excellent knowledge and experience, struggle to make themselves understood -- I would assume our Japanese speak in English better than Americans speak in Japanese."

Koki Oikawa, who is in charge of both pressurized Kibo components as well as their launch site operations, has seen the mutual understanding evolve:
"After some accumulated experience in the joint operations at KSC, the American team started to understand our culture and even our individual personalities and ways of thinking."

While Kibo’s orbiting of Earth as part of the space station will be the tangible result of the cooperative effort, Scott Higginbotham -- NASA's payload manager for the Kibo elements -- recognizes the commonalty that exists.

"We all have a passion for excellence; we have a passion for manned space flight, and for making the world a better place for our children."

And that common goal binds us together and helps us in our day-to-day activities as we're all focused on the same ultimate objective."