



# KOMABA *times*

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The Komaba Festival and ginkgo avenue. Photo: Yuko Itatsu.

English Newsletter by Komaba Students

## ACADEMIC LIFE

### For the Name or For the Education?

By Su Ching Lim

Something as simple as a name has the power to change a person's impression of you. The prestige that comes with being associated with name universities has drawn many a student to come knocking on its gates. However, when attaining access to these name schools becomes the end in itself problems brew.

It might be a case of exhaustion, but the number of students who lose interest and direction upon entering the university is a constant concern for name schools. Some would assume that no matter how the four years is spent, buoyed by the name, the job markets would simply accept these graduates first, and have them trained later. In the international arena however, competition is turning up a notch. The name might not be enough – education, experience, skills, and more importantly – the right motivation, have to be lined up if one is to distinguish oneself.

Despite its achievements, Todai's academic-focused curriculum might only indirectly equip its undergraduates with the skills for a world outside academia or the jobs of the big four professions (Law, Medicine, Economics and Engineering). Without an active desire to search beyond the bare minimum, there are few requirements in place to stop students from graduating with just an academic transcript. An issue of motivation also comes to play. Drawn by the prestige of the name, not all law students are eager to enter the trade, and medical students might not be as dedicated to saving lives as one would like to think.

Students, who have been solely focused on scoring high marks on examination papers, have

to now decide for themselves how those marks translate in reality. Better now than later, they will have to ask themselves, what they want to pursue next. There is little doubt some students will come up with blanks.

This brings us to the next point. What IS next? If the quality of the students it attracts is high in the first place, the success of students exiting a school is usually a weak indicator of the schools' performance in educating its students. A better measurement of performance would be the improvement between the day a student enters the school and when he or she leaves it.

Adding value to one's education, and making the best out of it is crucial. In that sense of the word, PEAK students have the work cut out for us. Without front-runners to mark the trail, one inevitably has to get creative in exploring the activities to pursue beyond the classroom – seeking out internships, attending talks, taking on exchange or summer programmes, travelling and meeting new contacts- whatever it takes. The extra effort is not always easy, but for many of us, it is necessary to make an education worth the weight of the name.

The small classroom size is an opportunity to be heard and even demand for improvement. The fact that we are here, rather than in universities of English-speaking countries, is but the first step of a wish to carve a new education path that will suit us. Believing that hard work will solve everything is insufficient. Making the best of one's opportunities requires careful planning and quite a lot of gall to pull through. Between deciding

which topics to pursue or how the school breaks should be utilised, there is little space for complacency. Even without a clear direction, moving forward, one step at a time remains preferable.

The ability to pursue opportunities is a skill that does not come naturally. However, what we can do is to at least try to avoid the path of least resistance, be a little reckless and attempt to make university life more difficult. With more thought put into it, one's time at the university is the best chance to prepare oneself for the next stage in life. Passing the screening and getting into a name university is not an end in itself, but simply a tool among others to move forward in probably the only examination that matters, life. Things end when life ends, and in a country known for having the longest life expectancy, this is just the start of one, hopefully crazy, examination.



Titles and certificates don't tell the whole story. What drives you? (Image: ©Florinmihal/www.dreamstime.com)

### A Sobering Entrance Ceremony

By Austin Zeng

In typical Todai fashion, I went for the Entrance Ceremony of Todai in April at the Nippon Budōkan. Given the prestige of the university widely considered the best in Japan, there

was an almost self-congratulatory atmosphere around it. The speeches given by Todai University President Hamada amongst others however, were anything but.

In summary, the message was that "Todai is in danger". More specifically, the dangers of not being diverse.

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## The Problems

The stated fear, and subsequently “weakness”, was that Todai is becoming an increasingly homogenous place, with a lack of diversity in gender, nationality, experiences and backgrounds. Subsequently, that it would become a cloistered institute with a very narrow range of views. President Hamada and other speakers stated the following:

- A wide gender gap: The male to female ratio of the undergraduate cohort is near 8 to 2
- Low international student numbers: Out of a cohort of more than 3200 April-entry students in 2013, the number of international students was 40, or less than 2%
- Highly limited international experience: The quoted percentage of Todai students on study abroad programs at the time of the speech was near 0.5%
- A clear demographic slant: Disproportionate slant towards students from the Kantō (Greater Tokyo) area and from upper-middle class backgrounds

## Current Efforts

President Hamada also added that Todai is currently looking for ways to solve the challenges ahead of it. The PEAK/GPEAK programs are attempts to internationalize Todai in recognition that having a degree course only in Japanese limits the number of foreign students willing and able to study in Todai.

Todai is also looking towards extending outreach to schools beyond the *Kantō* region to attract students from outside greater Tokyo. Furthermore, it is also looking to revise the Semester system, reform the transfer of credits from overseas institutions etc. to allow for students to be able to go abroad more easily.

## Wider Social Problems

That being said, many of the problems above are reflections of wider Japanese society with many other universities facing the same challenges.

The gender gap – which President Hamada noted was due to an unequal number of applicants and not a difference in pass rate – is somewhat a reflection of Japanese society’s unequal expectations regarding female education. As of 2011, the OECD reported that while a majority of males in Japan attend a 4 year course in a college, a majority of females choose to go for vocational training of a two year college course. Furthermore, in a college such as Todai where many students have to take a gap year to retake their examinations (*rōnin*), many female Todai students spoken to commented that there is a stigma towards female *rōnin*. This is also suggested by nationwide statistics in 2011 in which the number of females applying to universities with a gap of a year or more since their high-school graduation was a third of the number of males. These factors discourage female high school students from reapplying to Todai if they fail the first time, or even aim for a higher-tier university given the unequal stress paid towards female education. This may explain the differences in the number of applicants.

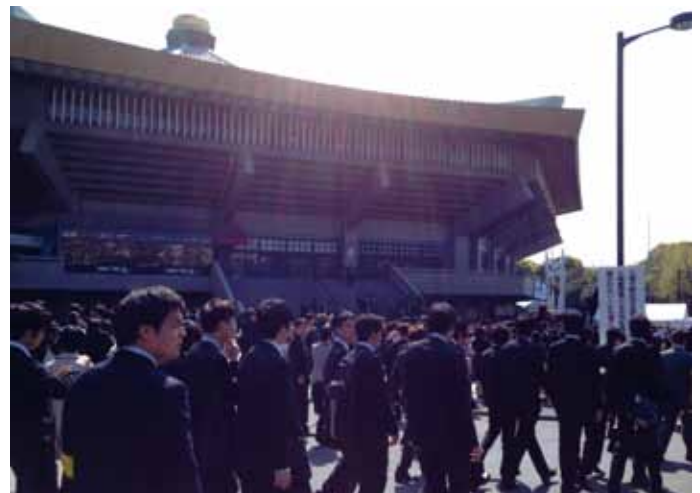
Similarly, Japan’s stagnating economy

has also made it harder for families outside the greater Tokyo area to support a child living in Tokyo. Prep schools and tutoring which are largely available only to the more affluent classes also mean that it is much harder for someone from a lower income group to get the extra help for the entrance examinations. This accounts for the demographic slant in Todai’s student population.

## “Tough Tōdai Students”?

Ending off his speech, President Hamada also mentioned his hope for Tōdai to foster “Tough Tōdai Students” able to face the present world. He appealed to students to take gap years to explore or go overseas.

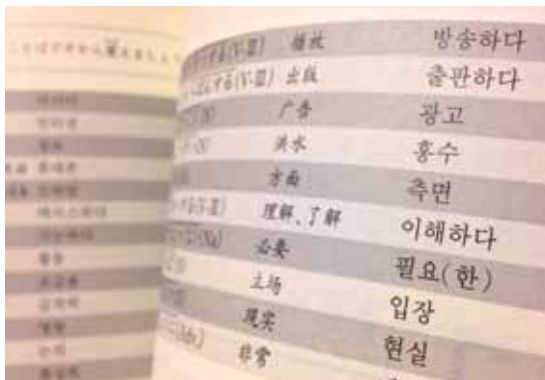
However, given the scale of the issues faced within the university such as budgetary constraints, as well as those from wider society, whether Tōdai will be able to successfully diversify itself remains to be seen.



Outside the Budōkan before the ceremony. Photo by author.

## Trilingualism Trends on the Komaba Campus

By Sherry Zheng



Picking up a third language. Photo by author.

Whilst in the West, most college students are encouraged to pick up a second language, students in the *kyouyou gakubu* (College of Liberal Arts) at Komaba are pushed to pick up a third language, on top of English. The choice is made from a plethora of languages: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Korean and more. However, despite Japan being an Asian country, the choice for a third tongue is surprisingly limited in the Asian languages, with only Chinese and Korean. For those adamant about taking on

Vietnamese, Thai or any other Asian languages, they would have to roll up their sleeves for a *fourth* language.

With the Hallyu<sup>1</sup> (Korean Wave) sweeping people head over heels for K-Pop idols all over the world and China’s economy booming at an astounding annual rate of 10%<sup>2</sup> for the past decade, demand for these two Asian languages up must be through the roof. Yet on the Komaba campus, contrary to belief, this only appears half true.

Chinese learners have been on the rise ever since twenty, thirty years ago, particularly picking up pace in the last decade, for a number of reasons. Amongst Todai students, reasons range from wanting to read the menu in Chinese restaurants, to having been or lived in China before, to wanting to explore the roots of Kanji, even. However, the all-time popular motive for studying the Chinese language appears to be career driven. Students claim Chinese to be the “top language” chosen to aid the ever imminent job-hunting after graduation.

Whilst the number of Todai students studying Chinese has shown a steady rise, Professor Naoki Ogoshi, Korean language professor at the university, reports that Korean learners have also steadily grown, since the 1990’s. Unlike the majority of Chinese language students, these students are drawn in by an interest in the Korean culture and few link it to their future career.

The trend of Korean learners has experienced several peaks in line with major events that have drawn Korea to the spotlight. For example in 2002 the number of students hit its peak with not only both Japan and Korea hosting the 2002 FIFA World Cup, but also the airing of the Korean television drama, “Winter Sonata” starring the famed actor, Bae Yong-Joon (otherwise known as “Yon-sama”).

Whether for authentic Chinese food or for Yon-sama, there are plenty of good reasons for studying our neighbouring Asian languages, however with only two to choose from, is there a push towards the more European tongues?

<sup>1</sup> A worldwide rise in the popularity of the Korean culture beginning at the end of 1990’s

<sup>2</sup> Average of 10% in GDP growth per year – World Bank (2014)



## Grades or Personality? Possible Changes to the University Entrance Exam

By Masashi Mark Sato

How do most students in Japan spend their time during the last year of high school? The answer is, studying. Students spend countless hours studying every day in order to get accepted into their desired university. However, in a few years, students might have to do more than just study.

The University of Tokyo is designing a system that assesses on top of a knowledge assessment similar to that of the current exam, a new entrance exam that will include a separate test or interview conducted by the university. The second part of the exam will enable universities to look at each students' qualities such as personality, thinking abilities, and motivation.

The Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding formed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been discussing possible changes to the current university entrance system, in which students are tested solely on the knowledge they have acquired. According to the Prime Minister's



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website, this new measure will help universities to seek out "diverse human resources who have both independence and creativity to work in various fields of society."

How do students feel about the proposal? According to comments on social media about the topic, it seems that the majority of students do not approve of the new exam. There were various reasons as to why they prefer the current exam system, however common criticisms were that 'it is hard for students to prepare for an exam with no definite answer' and that 'interview lacks objectivity, therefore it is unfair.' Students have also raised the following question, "if we fail

the interview, does that mean our personalities are denied by the university?"

I personally think that the change in Japan's university entrance system is necessary, because students are only memorizing facts and not making use of the learned knowledge. Even English is broken down to a matter of vocabulary and grammar, and due to that many students are struggling to construct a simple conversation in English. If the new exam requires students to have an interview in English, for example, it would encourage students to apply their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary in basic communication.

Many students are confused, and no one is sure whether the new exam system will have a positive or negative effect. However, one thing is for sure - if the new exam system is put into action, each student will have to decide on their own what to do in order to prepare for the exam. Cram school will no longer be a savior for them.

## No More Display of the Results on a Bulletin Board?

By Yasuka Tateishi

Today's annual spectacle comes to an end.

For over forty years, the results of the university entrance exam have been displayed on the bulletin board on campus. The same scene was seen this year. On March 10, 2013, hundreds of people came to see the results of the examination. Bulletin boards were carried by trucks and set up on the avenue, which we call "the road of passing examination." The boards showed 3,009 students who passed the examination. Music started playing and barriers were removed. Students rushed to the boards. Some rejoiced and some sobbed. Members of the American football club and the rugby club tossed successful students in the air. TV cameras reported these scenes enthusiastically. However, we will not be able to see this spectacle from next year onwards.

On July 24, 2013, The University of Tokyo announced the results for entrance examinations will no longer be displayed on the bulletin board. Annually on March 10, the results have been announced in three ways; on the website, by mail, and on a bulletin board on a campus. However, from 2014, the ways students confirm their results will be limited to just via website and mail.

According to the university, the reason for suspension is the construction of the library. The road where the boards are held will be occupied. Since 1972, the bulletin board announcements have been done mostly

on Hongo campus and sometimes on Komaba campus. However, this time, the university was unable to find other adequate locations either at Hongo or at Komaba. Although the construction will be completed in 2016, whether or not the bulletin board announcements will be resumed after then has yet to be decided.

The suspension of the display has disappointed a lot of students because it was one of the most attractive events of the entrance examination. Recently, most Japanese universities announce their entrance examination results only on websites. Due to this, the scene of results being announced on a bulletin board is a popular scene at the University of Tokyo. For most of the students who take the entrance examination, especially those who live around Tokyo, the event is memorable. The anticipation and delight when a student finds their number on the board is special in itself. One student in the University of Tokyo said, "It is a pity because the announcement on the bulletin boards is a kind of symbol of the entrance examination of this university."



Results posted for the entrance exam at the University of Tokyo. Photo by kristi-san | Flickr.

## Smile



By Marina Kondo

Image by Enokson/Flickr.

As a university student, along with keeping up with homework and acing exams, one of the most difficult tasks is coping with stress. Especially during midterm exam and final exam weeks, tensions run high as students give up leisure time to cram in weeks worth of knowledge. Between these hours and hours of studying, there's no time to go drinking at izakayas or singing at karaoke to relieve stress. Although you may find no particular reason to, just slapping a smile on your face can do the simple trick of distressing your body and improving your mood. Here's why.

According to the research in Psychology Today, smiling activates the release of dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin, all neurotransmitters in your brain that make you feel happy. This relaxes your body and causes lower heart rate and blood pressure. The endorphins act as a natural pain reliever, and the serotonin serves as an antidepressant mood lifter - more benefits! Smiling also increases productivity, boosts the immune system, and causes longevity.

Not only does smiling create happiness inside your body, but it also makes you look more attractive. Studies, again in Psychology Today, have shown that those around you view your smiling face more attractive, relaxed, reliable, and sincere. In addition, smiling is contagious! Seeing a smile triggers an unconscious automatic response in your brain that causes you to smile back, which means that you could easily spread all these benefits to those around you!

The best part of it all is that even in times when you can't find yourself a particular reason to smile, even a fake smile can bring about all these positive effects! So especially when you're feeling under the weather, bombarded with schoolwork, lift up the corners of your mouth and let the magic happen.

## Impressions of PEAK: Before & After

By Chris Jeon

On 27 September 2013, I was simultaneously introduced to both the difficulties of transitioning to university life in a foreign country and the unique qualities of the University of Tokyo that made that transition so much easier.

After graduating high school and heading into what would be my final summer vacation of my grade school days, I was faced with the enviable task of making the most out of the time I had before I would be heading off to university. While that didn't exactly work out the way I had hoped it to – seeing as the majority of my time was spent “resting” at home, meeting people, and making sporadic forays into the realm of “studying” – I still found consolation in the fact that I was becoming increasingly excited for the new school year, which would be my chance to finally attempt to be productive once again.

However, I soon realized that this would be the first time that I would leave my family for an extended period of time, and as I'm sure is the case for many students who go abroad to study for the first time, I felt nervous. I suddenly felt uncomfortable about going to Japan, a land that, to me, was as famous for its cultural beauty and high standard of Asian modernization as it was for its recent development of a rather bizarre culture. This, coupled with the worries about the radioactivity that were so hyped up in



A few meters separating me and the aircraft that would take me to a brand new chapter in my life. Photo by author.

Korea actually led me to have second thoughts about coming to the University of Tokyo.

I am well aware that my experience is not a unique one. Every year, hundreds of thousands of students from countries all over the world go to foreign countries to study in different educational systems/institutions, and I am sure that many of those students had their own doubts and worries about issues that may or may not be similar to my own. However, to the students who are currently thinking about or have already applied to the PEAK Program at the University of Tokyo, rest assured, you will not be in want of a more helpful environment to make a seamless transition into university life.

Any worries that I might have had quickly dissipated when I finally stepped out of the exit gate at the airport. Greeted by the friendly members of the Todai Global Interaction Friends (TGIF), I had no trouble in making way to the International Lodge, where the staff members there were kind enough to have helped me out with any questions that I might have had. The senpais, with their additional year of PEAK and non-PEAK-related wisdom, were also extremely helpful and friendly; they were extremely active in trying help the first-year students by any means necessary.

Speaking of the first-year students, the journey that is the life at Todai would have been extremely difficult if not for the love and support from the people that are currently undergoing the same struggles that I am encountering. The small class sizes helped us to bond, and that in turn makes life that much more exciting.

Starting a new life in a new country in a new environment surrounded by new people can be tough, but help from those new people can go a long way in helping one to become acclimatized to one's surroundings, which in turn can influence one to step out of their newfound comfort zone and explore the country around them.

## 'A one-way ticket to anywhere, please.'

By Su Ching Lim

### An education away from home

January is the peak period for the university admission process. Schools in the US would have released their early admission decisions while students would be adding the final touches to their remaining applications. Choices are to be made and one particularly important one would be whether to study locally or abroad. Beyond just financial concerns, studying abroad comes with various challenges, in the form of the new environment, culture shock and separation from family. There are people who grow homesick, while others might find themselves displaced or isolated from their surroundings. Despite this, a great number of overseas students would agree that studying abroad was worth the effort. The destination need not be Japan, but there is something to be gained through simply the experience of studying in a foreign country. It changes how you think, challenges how you see others and how you view the world.

### A lesson on culture

Our imagination tends to go wild when we think of foreign people and places. The most obvious benefit of going overseas is that it throws

you right into the fire. Myths are incinerated, and 'foreign' people don't seem so foreign anymore. You get to immerse yourself completely in a culture different from your own, people who are different from you in the most unexpected of ways, yet perhaps not so different after all. In the words

of one of my juniors just a month into school, 'Japan is so different from what I imagined, but at the end of the day, people are just people.' There really is nothing more exciting than seeing a mental bubble burst in such an anticlimactic way.



Image by author.



## Looking Within

### By Dionne Ng Zhe Ting

Everybody needs a break.

A break from the banalities of life, the incessant onslaught of assignments and assessments, the tendency to lose ourselves in rapidly advancing technology. A break, well-deserved, away from the hustle and bustle of Tokyo's city life, into the picturesque and almost edenic mountain range in Saitama Prefecture.

As the buses ferrying 33 students of the University of Tokyo ascended the meandering path up the mountain towards Taiyoji Temple, the gradually fading reception on mobile phones brought us a relieving disconnection from the reality we

face in Tokyo. PEAK (Programs in English at Komaba) students, AIKOM (Abroad in Komaba) students or other Japanese Todai students alike, 30th November 2013 was a day that marked the first *zazen* (meditation) experience for many on this trip to the famed Taiyoji Temple, organized by Todai's International Center Komaba Office.

To find a calming emptiness within the depths of your soul, free from the binding commitments of relationships, emotions and duties – this is the heart of the Buddhist Zen practice, also often hailed as the path towards attaining eventual enlightenment. For approximately 20 minutes, students took their places on a *zabuton* (a low,

flat mat) with their hips propped up on a *zafu* (cushion) and attempted to empty their minds of the worldly worries that plague all mortal beings on a daily basis. Under the guidance of the head monk of Taiyoji Temple, students were taught the correct posture of seating in meditation, as well as breathing tips and visualization exercises that proved useful to ease the mind into a state of tranquillity. Commencing with the *shijosho* (ringing of a bell for three times) and culminating with the *hazensho* (ringing of a bell either once or twice), the shortened *zazen* experience for the students of Todai was nonetheless authentic.

This valuable, unprecedented experience of *zazen* in one of the most acclaimed temples for Buddhist Zen meditation highlighted the importance of searching for a brief respite from the asphyxiating pace of modern life. Even as our first attempt at meditation was a far cry from the actual attainment of enlightenment, it was an inspiring and refreshing experience. The rare moments of complete relaxation in the holy compounds of a temple located on a mountain shrouded in trees with flaking golden autumn leaves – these are moments to be cherished and replicated as and when possible, to restore a sense of equilibrium in our psychological and emotional facilities. When we find a vast emptiness of calm and peace within, and when we reflect on our identity and senses, we endow ourselves with a heightened awareness of our *raison d'être*.

Take a break, and take the time to look within yourself while away from the external stimuli that tend to mask our wholehearted embrace of what makes us who we are. Look within, and be prepared to be amazed by what you might discover.



Photo from Kawagoe Zazen by Xuan Truong Trinh.

But on a more serious note, it is not just a foreign culture that you learn about, but your own. You get the chance to be an insider, looking on from the outside. Culture shock highlights what is unique about the things you were previously taught to believe, and you took for granted among your friends at home. I have never identified myself with the typical Singaporean, yet my time here in Japan has hammered in to me that perhaps I was more 'Singaporean' than I thought. There really is nothing more useful than an external contrast to unite even the most deviant in the community.

### The challenge

There are two things people usually do when abroad. They either congregate among themselves, or integrate with the locals. Very often, the 'integrated' would chant to the proverb 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do', while scorning the 'congregators', who prefer to stick to their own communities. In some ways, the 'integrators' could be right. What is the point of going overseas if you are going to stay among people like you? However, it is rarely that clear cut. The challenge is in finding a position between the

two extremes that you are comfortable with, to integrate without losing yourself. While it is wonderful if a person could integrate fully, and for a lucky few, they might find a place where they finally 'belonged', complete conformity to the norm is not the point of being abroad. Rather, I prefer to think that global mindset is about accepting and embracing the fact that differences exist, and negotiating around that. Adopting the likeness of the other party understates the diversity that exists among individuals.

### Finding the Self

Abroad by yourself, with no family to run to, friction between you and your environment is just waiting to occur. Fortunately, as a student, mistakes can be made, you can do the unthinkable and have your family none the wiser. What happens there stays there, your tiny secret to be kept, and to be chuckled at when you are grey and wrinkly. Your beliefs are going to be challenged, your views questioned, you might even come to question yourself. However it is within this tension that you get the chance to reflect on yourself without the influence of family dogma and the environment you grew up in.

Being abroad helps you see which principles are worth fighting for, and which hold little traction. You might find yourself accept ideas you would otherwise not even consider. The ideas you disagree and agree with become clearer than ever before, and at the end of this confusing tunnel of thoughts, there is light.

### Negotiating perspectives

Of course the experiences and takeaways vary for each student overseas. Just how much they learn and benefit comes down to the individual. Being in Japan did not make me more Japanese, while some of my friends have changed greatly. I'd like to think that in this time and age, your own beliefs and decisions form your identity far more than your birth, race or culture you grew up in. Stepping beyond your shores forces you to transition from seeing the world through the framework of 'us versus them' to the notion 'me, and you and you', as it should be.

For those fortunate enough to have the chance to be abroad, even if it's just for one year, are you up for the challenge? It is a wide world out there. Not all of it is great, but there is space for you.

## All We Need Is Art: Art Scene at Komaba

By Nina Belova

Marvelous works of El Greco, Mucha, Rousseau, Van Gogh, Da Vinci, Rubens, Michelangelo, and... The collection of ancient Greece and China, Gandhara style Buddhist art, post-war California style design, 20th century's naïve art, and so on.

Can you guess what the list above is?

They all are the works I had seen during my first year in Tokyo in 2013. You may be surprised that Tokyo has such a rich art environment. Tokyo is just a city on a small island in a part of Asia, and it has no world famous museums with a mammoth collection. However, as Dr. Atsushi Miura, professor of art at the University of Tokyo, says, no other city in the world holds so many and diverse exhibitions almost every day as Tokyo. Most of them are well-balanced, well-organized exciting exhibitions that give the viewer inspiration and great pleasure.

However, the art education Todai offers in the first two years at Komaba is far behind the city's advanced view towards fine art. To my disappointment, the art scene at Komaba is not rich enough when compared to all the academic environment this campus has. Only 5 classes were offered that were related to fine art this academic year. In none of them students can pick up a paint brush. Also, it seems that not so many students have an interest in this field. How many of them have ever visited the Komaba Museum? Take a look at circle activities. There are only 3 art-related circles (including manga) in Todai, which is far less than the 41 musical circles.



Drawing by author.

This shows that art education is considered to be of little significance at this university, though the first two years at Komaba are aimed to provide students with “a comprehensive liberal arts education encompassing the humanities and sciences” according to the official homepage of the College of Arts and Sciences. Can we exclude fine arts, one of the greatest ways to look into human spirit and history, from the cur-

riculum of the best university in Japan?

Perhaps the lack of art education is a fundamental problem that Japanese education system has as a whole, not only Todai. There are many examples that illustrate this problem, but few solutions. However, we can only blame Todai for making little of art after taking full advantage of what it already offers us. Let me give you two examples. First, advanced tickets for art exhibits are sold at the university COOP. You can save your time and money by purchasing tickets on campus than at the museum counter. Second, the University of Tokyo is a member of the “National Museums Campus Members” system. This allows all Todai students to see the permanent collections at national museums for free, and their special exhibitions for a discounted price.

Some of you may say, “Why don't you go to an art school instead of Todai, then?” Of course that is a choice, too, but I believe that art can be at its height when combined with other intellectual fields like science or psychology, about which Todai knows very well. Also, many students have hidden talent and passion for artistic expressions. Every month there is a new signboard for a play production at the main entrance, which makes me stop for a while. Think of how many attractive signs and T-shirt designs saw at the Komaba Festival!

I hope someday the university will be able to support us properly by providing more opportunities related with art. In addition, I want more students at Komaba to make full use of the rich environment they have in Tokyo.

“Tough and Global”? That's great, but let me say, “Todai, be Creative!”

## What to Sell in School Festivals

By Kohei Yagura

Are you interested in selling something in May Festival and Komaba Festival? It is great fun and an invaluable experience to set up a food booth with your friends in your class or circle activities. The ties among your friends will surely get tighter, too! However, you will face difficulty when deciding what kind of food to sell. I was responsible for the booth of our class in both the May Festival and Komaba Festival. From my own experience, I would like to tell you the criteria of what kind of food to select.

The most important point is whether the food sells well or not. You have to make as many people as possible buy your food, so it must be attractive. I personally recommend desserts since people eat them at any time, not only at lunch time. You have to consider the weather, too; cold food is better at the May Festival and hot one at the Komaba Festival. Since there are so many food booths in both festivals, it is likely to have several booths selling the same food. If you want to avoid competition with others, it is important to have a unique and wild idea.

Another important thing is profitability. When you think of maximizing your profit, you have to select the food with inexpensive ingredients and high selling price. For example, cotton candy, *Wataame* in Japanese, matches well in this criterion because its only ingredient is sugar. The more profit you earn, the more fun you get at the party with your friends!

Whether it is easy to make the food or not is important, too. This is controversial, though. When you emphasize the efficiency of the food booth, easier ones such as tapioca drinks would be better. But when you think more of togetherness among your friends, difficult ones such as *Taiyaki* (a fish-shaped pancake with *anko* in it) and waffles, which I had sold in the two festivals, would be better. You can make better friends with your fellow classmates through hard work.

In setting up food booths in the school festivals, preparation beforehand is necessary. It's better for you to start thinking now of what kind of food to sell. It is fun, too, to come up with many ideas and to simulate them in your own mind! So let's try it!



May Festival at the Hongo campus. Photo by author.



## Sleep Pattern Abnormality: Unproductive, Lazy and Unenergetic a Social Bias

By Yen Hyoung Cho



Night owls lack the ability to wake up early in the morning to be productive. Which sleep pattern fits you the most? Photo by author.

Looking through the morning classrooms of Universities, there are generally two types of students. Those who seem to arrive ahead of time and are always ready to start an early day, and those that are always either late or falling asleep during the lectures. It is all too easy to label the differences between the two types of people as a “morning bird” or a “night owl”, and judge the latter as an abnormal lifestyle because of social standards. Because of the fact that the day starts early for many people, late night sleepers always seem sleep deprived and lacking in concentration when subjected to early morning routines. Most people would overlook the situation as having a bad sleeping habit but never consider that perhaps it is a chosen lifestyle that allows them to be most efficient during their own waking hours.

As a “night owl” myself, I have commonly been referred to, or rather falsely diagnosed by my peers as: an insomniac, being lazy, having a bad biological rhythm or lacking an internal clock. It is true that I sleep at the most ungodly hours of dawn and need a scheduled nap during the afternoon to make up for my lack of sleep, but

this is a choice of lifestyle I have continued since middle school that has never failed me since. This routine, as what most people would refer to as being irregular, is actually a known form of sleep cycle called the “Biphasic sleep pattern”— a common sleeping pattern many nocturnal people adopt to fit into the early waking society we live in today.

The most widely known form of sleeping pattern is the Monophasic sleep, where a person sleeps an average of 8 hours a day. This pattern allows a person to stay awake throughout the day and maintain an early sleeping cycle according to the rising and setting of the sun. It is the form that is more commonly recognized amongst the public, and it is the time frame our lives rotate around.

A Biphasic sleeper, however, chooses to sleep twice a day; once a regular sleep (around 5 hours) and the other a power nap (usually 90 minutes). This system has been proven to work because it gives the body time to complete a full REM cycle, so when it is time to wake up the person would feel naturally awake and refreshed. Although it is not considered all that common in many areas, some countries such as Spain and many Latin American countries practice this form of life cycle to maximize productivity in a person.

Just like there are benefits for Monophasic sleep, Biphasic sleep is not without its advantages. Monophasic people need an average of 8 hours to stay functional, and even the slightest change in their sleeping hours can be the cause of fatigue and unproductivity during the course of the day. But for the Biphasic sleepers, not only is sleep time reduced to 6.5 hours a day, but it also becomes flexible as long as the scheduled nap is kept at constant intervals. Also, allowing

the brain to relax for even an hour or so helps to organize thoughts and produce more energy during the day with the small disadvantage of not being able to fall asleep early.

Some comment that the Biphasic sleep pattern is a luxury only University students with flexible schedules can have. But, there exists one more sleep pattern known as the Polyphasic sleep pattern. Dymaxion sleep, which is the most recommended out of all the existing Polyphasic sleep patterns requires a 3.5 hour major sleep and three power naps throughout the day; a more suited lifestyle for the busy businessmen who can afford a few minutes of shut-eyes on their office desk.

Many societies are designed around Monophasic sleep patterns and as a result it is easier for Monophasic sleepers to adapt to work and socializing conditions. But, people who have chosen to adopt the Biphasic form of sleep should not be judged for their lifestyle selection. After all, the reason for choice remains the same for both sleep cycles— to optimize performance during their respective waking hours.

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## The Todai Jinx

By Marina Kondo

As the leaves begin to turn soft shades of red, orange, and yellow, they welcome a new season of joy and festivities for all, but for first year girls at the University of Tokyo, this season brings a slight feeling of panic. The “Todai Jinx”, as it is commonly known, states that if a first-year girl at the University of Tokyo does not have a boyfriend by the time the leaves on the ginkgo trees at the Komaba campus fall off, she will not be able to have a boyfriend for all four years at the university.... Ridiculous, no? Yet as a first year girl at the University of Tokyo, watching the leaves slowly change color day by day kept bringing this jinx back to mind.

Where did this even come from? The University of Tokyo is known for having a majority of male students due to the fact that it used to be an all-boys school. For females, this means that with the 8:2 gender ratio, this situation is ideal for finding a boyfriend... or so would one think. But in reality, it seems as if relationship-seeking

male students at the University of Tokyo pursue girls from different universities, leaving female students at the University of Tokyo also having to seek outside of their own school. Unfortunately, it isn't common in Japanese society for men to be very fond of smarter women. This means that for female students at the most prestigious university, male students from other schools are not quite an option. In addition, for April entry students, opportunities to meet new people are concentrated in the spring and summer, and therefore, autumn brings a closure to opportunities to meet a potential partner. So in conclusion, female students at the University of Tokyo aren't so lucky when it comes to romantic relationships.

So then this thought brought me back to the jinx, that completely and utterly ridiculous jinx. Why should we ruin such beautiful scenery with such nonsense? So ladies, leaves or no leaves, boyfriend or no boyfriend, let us enjoy the season of beauty with no worries.



Photo by author.



## The Guy on Campus We've All Been Waiting to Meet

By Hitomi Kayama

It's to my knowledge that just about every person on campus has spotted, if not goggled at, the student wearing blue robes, matched with a turban-like head covering. If you still can't recall exactly who I'm referring to, just think back to the

Kyosuke at the Shokudou.  
Photo by author.



last guy in Komaba you took a second glance at. Or perhaps several glances.

I remember my initial reaction when seeing Shionoya Kyosuke for the first time. *Woah - cool, Todai has a Nepalese exchange... On second thought, maybe he's Mongolian.* And then of course, the speculations came buzzing into my head after I'd seen him multiple times: *for a foreigner he seems to be pretty intermingled with the Japanese students... he can't be Japanese, can he? Does he actually wear the same thing every day, or am I just seeing him on the same day, every week? I wonder what he's going to do when it gets too humid for robes...* I grew more puzzled and confounded as I continued to make futile attempts at making sense of him.

Upon questioning a fairly diverse range of people who had seen him before, though – my friends within PEAK, a few of my teachers, the odd Japanese Todai student or two, it became very clear that barely anyone knew why he wore this thing rain or shine, let alone the culture to which his very interesting attire belonged. So as a new writer for the Komaba Times, I felt it my duty to uncover once and for all the questions most of us on campus have been itching to ask him.

A very casual conversation with Kyosuke was more than enough to fill in all the blanks. To give a brief introduction, he's a first year Humanities III student who was born and raised in Japan, and was your very typical Japanese University student until the summer of 2013 (despite his very exotic look he still does enjoy singing anime

songs at karaoke from time to time). To my utter disbelief, this was when he started wearing the clothes we now all recognize him by – merely less than five months ago. What's truly intriguing is that Kyosuke's not so sure why he wears what he does – 'I've always been drawn to wearing something like it ever since I was in junior high school. The robes are Chinese, and I bought them from a store in Japan that specializes in them. About the turban – it's a gift my friend brought back as a souvenir from Syria.' As he said this, I was pleased to find out exactly how he's managed to negate all those guesses that have been made as to what culture his clothes are supposed to represent.

He was very honest as well – with a grin on his face, he looked pretty pleased with himself; 'It's a total hassle going to the bathroom. But it's worth it. The robes are very warm and easy to put on, lots of people approach me at social events out of pure curiosity, and the turban even serves a double function as a head cushion.' I couldn't help but laugh at the last thing he told me, though. 'My parents, with whom I no longer live in the same house, haven't seen me since before I began wearing these robes and this turban. Oh, and they have no idea I'm wearing them.' He used a term to describe how they would react if they saw him now, the humour of which would simply be lost in translation – 'koshi nuku deshou,' literally meaning 'they'll lose their hips and will be unable to stand'. This is something Kyosuke will inevitably have to face at some point, owing to the fact that he's planning to wear his robes for the rest of his life.

## Ramen Culture in Todai

By Yasuka Tateishi

A lot of students in the University of Tokyo eat ramen noodles for lunch.

In April, the cafeteria was so crowded that people have difficulty finding a seat. Little by little, students learn to look for alternative eateries: some of them go outside the campus to eat ramen.

In fact, there are a lot of ramen restaurant near the Komaba campus. Close to the back gate of the campus, there is *Senrigan*. It is famous for its quantity of ramen. Usually, noodles of ramen are about 200g or so, but here, the regular size is about 300g. *Ramen Yamate* is one which places backside the campus, too. In front of the Komaba-todaimae station is *Komatetsu*, where we can eat *tsukemen* (a kind of ramen where the noodle is dipped in the soups that is served separately). If you walk a little from the station, you will find *Samurai*. On the way to Shibuya, there are more. At most of these restaurants it's free or cheap to add noodles or toppings and this service is helpful for hungry students. Some of the restaurants have special service for students, too. One student said he doesn't get tired of eating ramen everyday.

Of course, in the cafeteria, ramen is the one of the most popular items on the menu. There are 4 to 5 kinds of ramen and often seasonal ones, too. A long line can be seen in the ramen corner every lunch time. The popularity of ramen is increases in winter because ramen makes our cold body warm.

What worries us most with this ramen culture is that it is high in calories. It contains a lot of oil in the soup base. In addition, some slice of *cha-shu*, thick roast pork, is added as a topping. Noodles are high in calories, too. It is said ramen has 700 to 1,000 calories in regular size and some ramen has over 1,200 calories. Usual calories that we take in a day are 2,000 for males and 1,800 for females. More than half calories that we take in a day! The student interviewed above said he seems to be getting fat day by day because of ramen.



Ramen at Samurai. Photo by author.

Ramen is delicious indeed. Most of Todai students love it. But this winter, be careful with your health when you eat ramen; or else you will gain weight.



## Teaching

By Kohei Yagura



It is January, and the entrance exams are approaching. Last year, I felt like the exams were silently crawling and chasing me. This year, I'm having the same feeling as last year. However, it is not as one of the students taking the exams but as one of the teachers whose own students are taking them.

I'm teaching at a cram school where teachers give individual lessons. I'm teaching a 6th grade student in elementary school and three senior students in high school. They all have their entrance exams this year. I am not alone in this matter. I know many friends at the University of Tokyo who have taken up tutoring as their part-time jobs. Teachers are just as important as students in order to pass entrance exams. In this article, I would like to introduce a way of teaching that I personally think is good.

The most important thing about teaching is to work together with the students. It is quite easy to just give explanations and answers and finish teaching, but it is not a good way. Although students might feel like they have understood, they actually do not. It is essential for students to think on their own. The role of the teacher is not to just give answers, but to help them think by giving appropriate hints. So, active communication with students is severely needed in teaching. Through good communication, we can understand their way of thinking and know the areas where they are facing difficulty with.

Another point is not to forget to look at things from the viewpoint of students. The solution to the problem might seem obvious to us. But it might be hard for them to solve. Teachers shouldn't be arrogant of their own ability. We should always think about student's way of thought. By doing so, we can give accurate advice and support their studies. On the other hand, it is sometimes useful to show them our superiority or excellence. Being admired is often the best way to motivate them in their studies.

Teaching is difficult, but it can be very interesting, too. What the teachers do affects their students directly. Their success partly depends on our ability and action. If the students successfully pass the exams, the successes would be so grateful for teachers, too. The students seem like my own children when I teach them. Maybe, this is the reason why I am still doing this job right now in spite of the low wages.

## French Cuisine: Today's Hidden Gem

By Hitomi Kayama

A hidden but significant perk at Today's Komaba Campus is its French cuisine. After having stepped inside the doors of *Lever Son Verre* and had a taste of its food (and prices!) it becomes no wonder that insiders and outsiders alike have kept the secret to themselves. Discreetly situated behind the University's lecture theatre, the restaurant itself is impossible to merely 'stumble upon'. It certainly requires some deep digging to find this gem, (unless you are, like me, just dismal at navigating yourself around the campus and tend to find yourself on untrodden territory). This may serve to explain why the restaurant is usually only filled with those unaffiliated with the University.

This is a true shame, because *Lever Son Verre* is a gift from heaven.

The lunch course is so reasonably priced it almost appears unreasonable for the restaurant's finances. If you are on a budget or just plain frugal, this is the place for you. At a bewildering 800 yen, my lunching experience at *Lever Son Verre* was perhaps the most cost effective time of my life. I know next to nothing about fine dining, but one thing I do know is that I enjoyed every dollop of food there. The course I chose was the

restaurant's discounted lunchtime offer, which consisted of bread rolls and salad, followed by a main dish of either fish, meat, or pasta. My mother has always said that a salad gives away the quality of what's to come, and how right she was. Having been impressed the second I took a munch out of their small salad, my gut told me there was something greater to come next. The sea bass *poiret* – they call it – generously blanketed with a white cream sauce, was to die for; light with a melt-in-the-mouth texture, and topped with a skin roasted crispy to the finish. If you're a fan of French desserts, you'll also be pleased to know that *Lever Son Verre* offer a nice array of seasonal treats, immaculately arranged on their signature plates. I declined, having been fully content from my 800 yen meal, but I have my companion's testimony that the chocolate gateaux was 'rich for its size', and satisfying overall.

So next time you're willing to spend 300 more yen than a quick bite at the shokudo for lunch or want to give yourself a pat on the back for acing that maths test, head on over to this restaurant and 'lever son verre' (raise your glass) to Today's culinary excellence.

## The Power of Community

By Chris Jeon

Whether we realize it or not, the grind that people face on a day to day basis can often cause them to forget about the good things in their lives. This past December, a group of students worked to become a reminder for others.

This past November, the Philippines bore the brunt of the effects of the Super Typhoon Haiyan. The storm left a wave of destruction in its wake: the destruction of infrastructure, the death of thousands of people, and leaving countless others without food, shelter, and familial support. It was a rough time for the Philippine people, but a number of organizations worked toward easing that pain.

Among those charitable groups was one that was comprised of our very own University of Tokyo students. Kotoe Kuroda, a first-year PEAK student, organized a Christmas caroling session on campus with the help of a few of her friends in order to raise funds for the Philippines. When asked about the inspiration behind this project, Kotoe said that she wanted to do charity work even before coming to Today, but felt even more compelled to do so after coming. She also explained that the relative lack of prior charity events on campus

left the Student Support Section of the College administration unsure of how to respond to her request, but that they eventually opened up to the idea and was cooperative throughout the entire process.

The day of the caroling, several tens of Today students gathered in front of the shokudo and sang a variety of Christmas carols in both English and Japanese. While the initial group of carolers was large, the joyful atmosphere that pervaded the area persuaded many students who did not practice (myself included) to join in.

The event accomplished its primary goal, raising a total of ¥39050 for the Philippines. Apart from that however, it also provided an opportunity for Today students to gather, momentarily free themselves from the stress of daily life, and work (or sing, in this case) together for a unified cause.



Christmas Caroling for the Philippines. Photo: Xuan Truong Trinh.

## The First International Student: Sergei Eliseev

By Nina Belova



Komaba campus at dusk. Photo by author.

Today, about 8% of all students at Todai are international students (according to the university's homepage). It is about 2,500 people in number, and 80% of them are from Asia. It is a quite low rate compared with other prestigious universities around the world. This fact drives Todai to enrich programs for accepting international students. In this article, I am not going to discuss globalization strategy. I will leave that topic to others. What I want to do here is to invite you to a historical trip. Let's fly back to 100 years ago, and discover who was the first international student at Todai.

His name is Sergei Grigorievich Eliseev. He was

born in a rich family in today's Saint Petersburg, when Russia was still an empire. Like many other Europeans at that time, he had a strong interest in the East. When he was studying in Berlin, he met Izuru Shinmura, Japanese linguist known for compiling *Kojien* (the most authoritative dictionary in Japan), and decided to go to Japan. It was in 1908.

At that time in Meiji period, the Japanese tried to learn as much as possible from western cultures. Japanese government had sent a number of students to Europe, so they knew how it is difficult to come, live and study in a foreign country. Eliseev got a lot of help from various people at

Todai. It took him more than a month to come to Japan, using the brand new Trans-Siberian Railway. He became the first foreign student who was allowed to enter Todai, and started to study Japanese literature.

His life as a student in Japan was quite flamboyant. He never had a problem with money and loved parties. He tried any kind of Japanese entertainment including Kabuki, Rakugo and playing with Geisha. He learned a lot of Japanese expressions from these kind of activities, so he had a strong Shitamachi dialect (working-class accent). It is said that he had a nice sense of humor and was handsome, he was quite well off with plenty of girls around him.

However, Eliseev never forgot the reason why he came to Japan; to study. In fact he was a great student. He acquired Japanese soon and studied Japanese literature of different historical periods. Soseki Natsume gave him his own book with Haiku written for him, and Eliseev kept it as a treasure for the rest of his life. In the final exams, he got 82 points out of 100. It was the third highest grades among all students, so he graduated with honor.

There is an interesting episode about his graduation ceremony. For his high grades, he was allowed to sit in the front row, just in front of Emperor Meiji. It was a great honor even for a Japanese student. However, Russian biographer Vasili Molodyakov claims that he was treated unfairly. He says that Emperor Meiji presented a golden watch to all students with high grades, except Eliseev, for being a foreigner. Eliseev was disappointed, so was the president of Todai, who decided to present him a silver watch few years later. This story shows that the university was very supportive for him, knowing that the difference in race means nothing in academic fields.

Soon after his returning to Russia, the Russian Revolution broke out. Because of his noble roots, Eliseev exiled himself to France, and later to the United States. He continued studying about Japan at Harvard University, and became a father of Japonology. It is a famous story that during the World War II, he entreated Douglas MacArthur not to attack Jimbo-cho area in Tokyo, because he knew that there are millions of precious old documents. He saved Japanese history from burning.

Over 100 years had passed since Eliseev, the first international student of Todai, passed the Akamon gates. Japan and the university has undergone many big changes, but is still fascinating young people around the world. Eliseev was able to lead a good life as a Todai student not only for his own open-minded character but thanks to the help of many people in the university. It seems that Todai today is struggling to accept more international students in order to catch up with other prestigious universities. However, the main reason for proceeding with the globalization strategy is to reach out a helping hand to students who truly want to come to Japan, not just a simple increase in number, isn't it?



## Unconventional Forms of Success

By Hitomi Kayama

Skim through any list of famous, influential, and highly-accomplished Japanese individuals, and you'll notice fairly quickly that the majority of them have tread upon the same, familiar ginkgo leaves that plaster our campus grounds. Take for example the seven (out of nineteen) Nobel Prize Laureates, the Crown princess, and the 15 prime ministers which have served throughout the country's peaks and troughs. It's tempting to boast about one's own institution, but this is apparently observable even at a bureaucratic level – famously, government agencies were once ordered to implement a 50 percent quota of Todai-graduate employees in fear of loss of diversity. If you're like me, your future prospects might not be so elaborate, let alone comparable to the folks mentioned above. But fear not – closer inspection of the myriad of names gives hint to the fact that University life, regardless of how much time your particular course demands, won't prescribe you to any expected role in the

future. It becomes clear that success is indefinable, comes in unexpected forms, and is nothing elusive if we find a more personal way to make a difference. Here are just a handful of names you might not have come across before, but will surely recall in the future.

**Kikunae Ikeda** patented the manufacture of monosodium glutamate – if this doesn't ring a bell, think 'umami'. Ikeda was a chemist who just happened to discover the chemical root of one of the basic tastes (the others which are sweetness, bitterness, sourness, and saltiness).

**Kanō Jigorō** was the founder of judo, the first Japanese martial art to be recognized as Olympic-worthy. To top this, he was the first Asian to serve in the International Olympic Committee, and played a pivotal role in bringing the Games to Tokyo in 1940.

**Hidesaburō Ueno** is famed for being the owner of Hachiko, the most loyal dog that lived. The innumerable books and films, as well as the bronze statue that stands to this day in Shibuya, pay tribute to the unconditional care one can suppose he gave to his faithful hound. On a more poignant note; the Komaba campus was the exact location Ueno died whilst giving an agricultural studies lecture. It's almost impossible not to revere him for his dedication to Todai, where he undertook both undergraduate and graduate studies, as well as taking up positions as an assistant and professor.

**Seiji Ogawa**, currently aged 79, is the founder of the technology behind fMRI – otherwise known as brain imaging. Having invented what is now an indispensable tool in the world of both clinical research and medicine, this man has single-handedly saved and will continue to save lives.

## The Stench of History and Utility

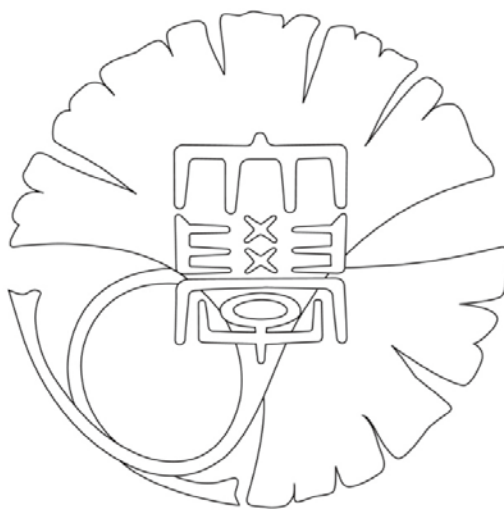
By Mark Sato



東京大学  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

Around October or November, I imagine many students at Komaba campus begin to wonder, "What kind of plant is releasing this unpleasant smell, and why would a university want to plant such trees on the main street of an university?" I myself had the same question, so I decided to take time to look into the unlikable plant and share it with our reader.

To begin with, here is the basic information; the plant is called ginkgo (commonly known as *ichou* or *ginnan* in Japan) and is a deciduous tree, which can grow up to about 40 meters tall. One



Former logo of the University.  
Courtesy of the University of Tokyo.

Current logo of the University.  
Courtesy of the University of Tokyo.

of ginkgo's unique characteristics is the shape of its leaves, and it resembles a fan or foot of a duck. Another known unique characteristic is the smell of its fruit. Many sources describe the odor as similar to that of a vomit or 'rancid butter.'

So why did the university decide to plant so many ginkgo trees alongside the main street on Komaba campus? There seems to be two main reasons. The first reason is to make the campus a better environment for students. Since ginkgo is a deciduous tree, its leaves fall off during autumn, becoming "naked" during the cold winter.

This allows sunlight to shine on the street, enabling students to feel a little warmer during cold winter days. On the other hand, ginkgo trees full of leaves will block sunlight during hot summer days, providing shade for those walking to and from classes.

Another reason is rather simple, and that is because ginkgo is the symbol of the university. The ginkgo remained as a symbol to represent University of Tokyo even when the university redesigned the symbol after becoming a national university corporation in 2004.

The new symbol consists of two ginkgo leaves that are colored in yellow and light blue. They kept the ginkgo design to "show determination that even if the University of Tokyo face big changes, they will lead college education and academic research with their long history and tradition, according to the university website (translated by author)."

Besides relationship between the university and ginkgo, I also found out about practical use for the infamous ginkgo fruit despite its stench. According to University of Maryland Medical Center, although it cannot be eaten raw, the nut within ginkgo fruit can be used as an herbal supplement to treat cold, and the leaves contain memory-boosting substance.

Although researchers have discovered what type of chemical is causing the ginkgo fruit to release its stench, they have not found an explanation for "why" it smells so badly. Perhaps it is the smell of various utilities and long history all mixed together.

## Does My Presence Make Todai International?

By Austin Zeng

Anyone living in Japan can tell you that the word “internationalization”, or “kokusai-ka” in Japanese, is a popular catchphrase now. The whole of Japan is currently swept up in a wave called “Go Global”. But as a foreign student in Japan, I can’t help but wonder - for a term that has gained such traction, no one has actually defined what “internationalization” means.

Basically, employers are hoping to employ more foreign employees and are demanding a good TOEFL score for Japanese job-seekers. Schools are trying to increase the number of foreign students with Todai’s PEAK being one of the programs with such an aim. Rakuten, one of the largest Japanese shopping portal sites, has even made their company operating language English to both praise and derision.

At first glance these are credible attempts at increasing the international input in Japan but the inside story is more mixed. Does my presence in Todai make it a global institution? Does a good TOEFL score make someone a global person? Does making its employees use their non-native (albeit “global”) language make Rakuten a global enterprise?

Let’s start at the background first. The current wave of “internationalization” started a few years ago when many Japanese companies started facing fierce competition from neighboring South Korea and China. Former electronics industry leaders such as Sharp and Panasonic are currently facing heavy losses. In addition, the Wall Street Journal has reported that the best selling

phone in Japan is the iPhone, outclassing the Japanese phones which used to be considered extremely technology advanced.

Japan as a country has realized (belatedly) that a long reliance on a large domestic market, the homogeneity in the workforce and poor language skills have been reasons for stagnation and poor competitiveness. It is because of this that many Japanese firms are increasing their attempts at hiring non-Japanese employees.

Similarly, universities have come under pressure to develop “global leaders” and “internationally capable manpower”. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has also unveiled its Global 30 program, where students can do a full degree course in English at thirteen listed universities in Japan.

The problem is that these efforts in themselves do not guarantee “internationalization” and within Japan a range of successes and failures at “internationalization” exists. There are companies which eschew the typical suit and tie and where hierarchy is not so strict - these are environments which foreigners are generally able to thrive in. But at the same time there are companies where unspoken social rules dictate absolute obedience to your superiors.

The same thing applies to schools. There are schools where student life is very integrated between foreign students and Japanese students but there are also schools where international

students are isolated and tend to clump together.

The situation at the University of Tokyo is slightly mixed. Individual differences exist but international students studying in Japanese tend to be integrated into mainstream student life. However, international students studying in English largely tend to socialize with each other to a degree - though this is perhaps inevitable given language barriers and how such students tend to share many common classes. However, as students studying in Japanese are also able to take English courses, most of these have some Japanese-course students participating in them. In addition, there are multiple international interaction student circles such as TGIF, Chabashira, KIC etc. Thus, there are links between the main student body and English language students, and students who wish to socialize beyond their coursemates have avenues to do so.

It seems to me that Japanese attempts to “internationalize” by bringing in more foreigners, enforcing standards of English etc. are simply fulfilling the prerequisites of internationalization - and not necessarily internationalization itself. Because yes, without foreigners, there can be no foreign input. And without a degree of English, global communication is often difficult. But there are deeper problems such as homogeneity which need to be addressed too. To me at least, how global Japan will become will largely rest on efforts to tackle the deeper problems and not just those on the surface.

## Longing for a Home- A Place where I can Belong

By Yen Hyoung Cho

A simple question of “where are you from?” has one answer to some of us, but to others, the answer is a long winded explanation that has molded who we are today.



The road that takes us home-where we belong. Photo by Jenny Lee.

For many international students who have lived in two or more countries, deliberately or not, the question holds no meaning, or rather holds a different meaning. For those who have found an ideal identity it is a ‘happy ending’, however for those who have not, we continue to search for the one place we fit only to run into a brick wall time and time again. Is it where we were born? The country we lived in the longest? Or, where we reside now?

Having lived in five different countries in the life span of twenty years, with Japan being my fifth, I myself have never been able to find the answer. Imagine making friends knowing you will have to part within years to come - accepting the fact that they may not remember who you are because time continues to tick even when your presence are not there. Repeat that process over and over again and soon you lose the warmth of what it means to feel safe and secure in one place.

Throughout my life I have received many questions regarding where I really think of as ‘home’, even from my own parents. The usual laugh is all that is required to brush the comment off along with a light-hearted remark: “I haven’t quite

come to the conclusion yet”.

According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary the definition of home means “a place of origin”. But, I’m sure there are those who would walk away from this every day definition that can easily be found in the dictionary.

The sense of belonging no longer exists for people who expect departure from the moment of interaction. After many tearful hugs of good-byes the one thing we really long for is a place to return to, a place we can call home. For people whose ethnicity holds no meaning, the search for a place to belong is a journey to find one’s cultural identity, which is why some of us have come to an easier conclusion; a re-definition of the word.

Some define home as “Somewhere I can relax, and go back to regardless of residence”, and others “Where you can be yourself”. Now it is my turn to depict what home is, a definition to my liking. I define home to be a place where you can feel safe and secure, a place that will welcome me back with open arms.

So, what is your definition of home?



## When in Tokyo, Do as Tokyoites Do

### A Gaijin's (Foreigner's) perspective of the Japanese way of university life

By Dionne Ng Zhe Ting



Where some of the foreign students of Todai call home. Photo by author.

Overwhelmingly famous and representative, the Merlion is apparently the most reminiscent symbol of Singapore in the minds of local Japanese students at the University of Tokyo. To date, a simple self-introduction of “Hello, I’m Dionne from Singapore,” garners the most common response of “Ah! The Merlion!”

Yet, just as how the irrefutably small city-state of Singapore encompasses so much more than just the Merlion, living in Japan requires the recognition of many things beyond the tourist favourites of the Tokyo Skytree and the Shibuya Scramble. For now, let us focus on some striking features of university life in Japan from the eyes of a foreigner in Komaba.

Firstly, compare the style of instruction in a standard Japanese classroom with a PEAK (Programs in English at Komaba) or foreign classroom. The top-down approach in a Japanese-style lecture or seminar allows for the traditionally fundamental purpose of classroom education – learning via direct instruction – to occur efficaciously. Any Japanese student who has attended a PEAK lesson would be able to highlight its stark contrast with the Japanese-style lecture. The ‘Western’ style of teaching fosters an atmosphere of active discourse and self-directed learning under the close supervision of the professor. Students’ active participation in lessons allows for a more close-knit environment with little distance between the students and the professor.

The converse that occurs in the Japanese-style classroom is an oft-lamented issue by the new generation of Japanese students in the University of Tokyo. Even with nation-wide shifts in pedagogical approaches from *tsumekomi* (rote-learning, prior to 1980) to *yutori* (‘relaxed’ education, 1980s to 2000s) and back to *datsu-yutori* (a balance between *tsumekomi* and *yutori*, 2011 onwards), the style of instruction has remained largely constant throughout primary to tertiary education. As an ardent supporter of the Western style of collaborative learning, yet having gone through educational experiences similar to the Japanese style, I can empathize with foreign students who experience an institutional culture shock after attending Japanese-style classes as

they may have spent a large part of their lives undergoing a Western style of education.

Additionally, communication appears to be a baffling component of Japanese society for most foreigners. In the mastery of the Japanese language, foreigners have to grasp the concepts of using distinctively classified forms of words when speaking in various contexts. Some of the more commonly-faced difficulties include the appropriate use of *keigo* (honorific language) as well as the use of body language to express intentions that may not be well-represented verbally. Bowing, for instance, can account for several actions depending on circumstances – a handshake as a form of salutation, the expression of gratitude, and simply a show of respect to the other party. In the University of Tokyo, this would be especially applicable to *bukatsu* (clubs) and occasionally *sa-kuru* (circles) as communication between seniors and juniors requires a dedicated show of respect to one’s superiors at all times; for foreigners who are completely new to this part of Japanese culture, regardless of their proficiency in academic Japanese, communication barriers and faux pas become inevitable.

The crux of the issue is this – in order to assimilate well into a new society as a foreigner, little details like the abovementioned have to be diligently accounted for. When in Rome, do as the Romans do; similarly, when in Tokyo, do as the Tokyoites do. Foreigners will, more often than not, find themselves acclimatizing to their new habitat by picking up the habits and practices of the natives around them while attempting to retain a semblance of their own culture back home. Likewise, as a foreign student in Todai, the myriad of practices, traditions and stereotypical aspects of the school that one has to get accustomed to is simply incredible. I look forward to the day when I can finally call myself a true *Todaisei* – the day when I no longer respond with ‘Ehhhh?!’ and an appalled expression to the revelation of yet another amazingly unique aspect of the way of life in the University of Tokyo.

## Upworthy Has the Secret to “Epic Share-ability.” Should We be Worried?

By Chris Jeon

By now, we have all likely seen at least one mysteriously enticing headline from the news aggregation site Upworthy, which has recently seen a rapid increase in popularity. As it turns out, these headlines play an integral role in how the Upworthy team seeks to increase its “shareability,” which Upworthy’s editor Adam Mordecai claims is one of the site’s primary goals.

The basic premise behind this strategy is simple. Because nobody knows exactly what people find “share-worthy”, the Upworthy team searches for content that is meaningful in its eyes and repackages this content to arouse curiosity (through an ambiguously enticing headline), increase its visual appeal (through pictures/graphs/videos), and simplify the issue for the viewer. Upworthy

also spends a fair amount of time optimizing its sharing compatibility with social media websites like Facebook and Twitter to provide an environment where optimal levels of sharing can occur.

When a person believes in something with a strong enough conviction, he/she will often go to certain lengths to reinforce that belief through whatever means necessary. To relate this problem back to Upworthy, the team tends to simplify its content for two main purposes: to make it easier for a wider audience to understand and to align it with its progressive/leftist ideals. A possible consequence of this simplification could manifest itself in the form of people using the content to “cherry pick” or employ the use of selective evidence to attempt to substantiate his/

her beliefs. Prospective Upworthians must keep in mind that the website does hold biased opinions on many issues and that the way they are portrayed are not necessarily as cut and dried as Upworthy would like you to believe.

That is not to say that all of the content is like this. The first video that I viewed on this site, an eloquently narrated animation that spoke out against bullying, was the one that sparked my interest in Upworthy and ultimately inspired me to begin writing this article.

A team of people looking to relay their set of ideals to the world in a peaceful manner are well within their rights to do so; just be sure to follow up their claims with research of your own.

## Prestigious University: A Path to Money?

By Chae Yeon Kim

When posed the question “Why did you decide to attend your university?” to a student who goes to a so-called “prestigious” school, a handful of students will simply answer— “to make good money.” The assumption that degrees from selective universities will lead to well-paying jobs is an influential factor for students in choosing which university they should attend. However, recent rankings have shown that students who graduated from certain less-known schools have higher salaries than students who graduated from the elite and prestigious schools.

PayScale, one of the largest salary profile databases online, recently ranked universities in terms of highest average salary\*. Surprisingly, schools that are generally perceived as “dream schools” such as University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University ranked #27 and #54

below schools such as Babson College (#5) and State University of New York Maritime College (#14) that are generally less heard of. Similarly, Princeton University, which was ranked as the most prestigious National University by US News (2014) was ranked #6. The school that was ranked first with the highest average salary was Harvey Mudd College, a liberal arts school on the West Coast that is ranked #16 under Liberal Arts Colleges on US News (2014). These rankings may come across as quite shocking for some students who strive to attend good universities for well-paid jobs.

Why would this be the case? Shouldn't prestigious universities obviously lead to better salaries? A study by policy researcher Stacy Dale and economist Alan Krueger offers a possible explanation. Their studies show that students

who attended selective schools do not earn more than students who were accepted to schools of the same stature but attended schools of lower “rank.”

From this research, it can be assumed that students with enough drive have the capacity to reach the same level of earnings as students who actually attend the prestigious university and receive

a “quality” education.

The salary ranking from PayScale as well as the conclusion of the research by Dale and Krueger puts forward a controversial yet important point that students should keep in mind while striving for a “high-quality” education for well-paid jobs. Whether the student has attended a prestigious university does not necessarily have an impact on the student's future economical standing. But rather, having a positive mindset to aspire for a better future through the means of a distinguished university is what seems to be the main factor for earning money and so-called “success.”

Elitist schools offer an education based on abstract ideas and liberal arts rather than hands-on practical education like those offered by most lower-ranked schools. Students usually attending “prestigious” schools also wish to continue their education career and gain practical knowledge from degrees after undergraduate school. This may be a reason why students who graduate from less-known schools earn more money than “elite” undergraduate students.

So, as the application period for schools around the world approaches, as well as for the University of Tokyo, and the rejection letters come flying in, we can now tell those disheartened students that going to a less-known school is not a big deal after all and that they will not be missing out on much—at least not on money.

\* calculated by averages of starting salaries and mid-career salaries



Widener Library, Harvard University. Photo by author.

## American Festivity

By Marina Kondo

With Halloween just behind us, the year is rapidly coming to an end. Coming from America, I noticed a significant difference in the way some holidays are celebrated in these two cultures. Here is a brief look at the way two holidays are celebrated in the northeastern part of the United States.

### Halloween

The celebration of “All Hallows Eve,” as the Americans know it, begins the night of October 30. Children around the age of fourteen ~ eighteen roam around the streets with all sorts of “weapons” to vandalize the neighborhood houses. Toilet paper and “silly string” are used to demolish the trees and bushes, while raw eggs are the perfect weapon of choice to throw at windows and doors. Extremist may go as far as putting shaving cream in mailboxes, imagining the reaction of the residents who will blindly reach in to grab the mail the next morning.

The celebration continues throughout the next day, when students of all ages are allowed to, and almost obligated to, wear costumes to school. Months ahead of this day, friends coordinate costumes together to become superheroes or zombie kittens or whatever is popular that year.

Classes are attended in costumes as teacher themselves come dressed in some of the most creative apparel. The frenzy continues into lunch when the best costumes in the entire school gather to impress and dominate the votes as costumes contests are held in cafeterias and gymnasiums. After school is a time for the younger children to take a trip around town “trick-or-treating,” going door-to-door collecting treats. Meanwhile, older adolescents have the option of going trick-or-treating or going to a house party to celebrate the night. Halloween spirit isn't contained in one day, as parties and celebrations are also held on the weekend before or after the holiday.

Personally, Halloween is one of the most important holidays that requires every adult, adolescent, and child to celebrate, bringing the whole neighborhood together. Celebrating my first Halloween in Japan, I found it to be a bit of a disappointment but also interesting. The lack of interest by many elders and by even some of the younger generations makes Halloween a secluded holiday, celebrated by only a minority. Yet, I was intrigued to see that minority take the Halloween celebration out onto the streets of towns such as Shibuya at night. In a way, it was

exciting to see that even on the other side of the world, Halloween still brings people together.

### New Year's Eve & New Year's Day

Quite the opposite of Halloween, New Year's Eve is only celebrated the day of. To be more specific, the celebration for New Year's Eve and New Year's Day combined only occurs from the night of the 31st to the morning of the 1st. Many spend the night at parties decorated with glitter, sparklers, and other shiny party favors. Around the New York area, it is custom to watch Time Square's “New Year's Eve Ball Drop” on television. The massive, illuminated ball is slowly lowered in the last seconds of the year until it finally reaches the bottom with the arrival of the new year. Just as the ball hits bottom, it is also tradition for couples to kiss each other to welcome another blissful year together.

But unlike Japan, the celebration ends the next day, as everyone begins to dread work and school on the 2nd. New Year's Day does not hold a historical or cultural significance in America as it does in Japan, so I've always been fascinated by the traditional Japanese customs during this time of year.



## Aruki-sumaho, A Walking Disaster

By Sherry Zheng



Image: Don LaVange | Flickr.

Of the thousands of people crowding the streets of Tokyo, many, standing or walking, have their eyes glued to their smartphones. However, this nationwide epidemic has caused more than just the daily inconvenience of slow walkers or loss of eye contact during conversations, it has even caused the loss of lives, in more than one way.

As reported by Japan Today in the middle of last year, a 10-year old boy, having been distracted by his mobile phone screen, fell onto the train tracks before an incoming train. This fifth-grader was lucky to escape with minor injuries. However these shocking incidents are not scarce, as

according to MMD Research Laboratory, 1 in 5 people admit to aruki-sumaho and having experienced injury or an accident as a result.

NTT Docomo termed this problem “aruki-sumaho” (literally, “smartphone walking”) in their print campaign in Shinjuku station. Their campaign warns more than 3.5 million commuters each day to avoid the habit and to take more notice of the danger they could inflict. However, just as the print ironically admits, culprits of aruki-sumaho probably wouldn’t even notice the warning.

In reality, aruki-sumaho is part of a much bigger problem; a nationwide screen-addiction. According to recent findings by a government-funded research led by the Ministry of Health, 518,000 teenagers are clinically considered to be ‘addicted’ to the Internet. With a great deal of technology being marketed towards the younger generation, there is growing concern for young addicts and the future of our society.

In 2007, *The New York Times* reported on China’s drastic measure of running Internet addiction camps to rehabilitate sufferers of the “disorder”.

A “military-style boot-camp” claiming a 70% success rate aims to strengthen patients, usually male adolescents, both mentally and physically. Even in a country of 137 million Internet users, this method seemed outlandish, costing parents of the patient more than \$15,000 for a year’s stay (meanwhile tuition fees for an MBA at top-tier Tsinghua University only reach up to US\$10,000).

This extreme tactic is no longer something that happens “only in China”. Japan has latched onto the method with treatment centers particularly counseling the internet-addicted, and even the Ministry of Education seriously proposing “fasting” camps that provide internet-free zones for adolescents to assist in purging them from their bad habits. Could this plan be Japan’s way out?

The issue that remains however is the diagnosis of the affected. What can be defined as clinical Internet addiction? How can you treat those who reject their addiction? In developed countries, where people of all ages wake up to newsfeeds in the morning and would admit to Internet dependence, whole nations could be considered addicted.

## To “Like”, or Not to “Like”

By Sherry Zheng

Like. Unlike. Comment. Share. Post. Upload. Tag.

These days, social networking sites such as Facebook are overflowing with functions, designed to help us share more of our lives with our families, friends and future bosses.

Colleges are becoming increasingly stringent of students’ social media activity, with one particular college in the U.S. dismissing the application of a prospective student who was discovered to be making profane ‘Tweets’ about fellow attendees during an information session. Such incidents are only the tip of the iceberg.

Not only colleges, but also companies have recently begun to reveal their interest in running social media background checks on prospective employees, in addition to the more familiar criminal and credit background checks. With more jobseekers likely to have a Facebook account than a terrible criminal record or debt history, more jobseekers may be looking to face greater rejection as employers are able to access anything from hangover photos to excruciatingly embarrassing *frape* posts (“Facebook rape”).

So, what can we do?

Many students appear unconscious when it comes to considering the consequences despite such incidents, warnings and the obligatory, lengthy Terms and Conditions that forewarn users prior to every move. When interviewed, Tokyo University students’ responses to these new social media background checks included, “I believe it is possible, but I’m not too concerned,”

and “I’ve never really considered it before”.

Anonymity has become increasingly difficult to retain online as more and more functions such as ‘tagging’ and ‘sharing’ by friends link individuals to unwelcome photos, videos or pages that they themselves may not wish to display on their own profiles.

Furthermore, particularly in Japan many student users have moved from more closed sites such as *mixi*, where only users with Japanese cell phone numbers and invitations from existing users could join, to infamously public networking sites including Facebook. Until only a couple of years ago, Japanese *mixi* users who were predominantly accustomed to adopting aliases online were introduced to Facebook after it garnered much popularity overseas. Nowadays it is becoming accepted as the norm, even in Japan, to disclose your real name and personal details including location, education, marital status.

Of course Facebook provides security settings that allow users to personalise their privacy level, however what Facebook does with our information remains unknown to us, the average user. Though many students admit to being concerned about these settings, few have neither the time nor patience to test the strength of these privacy settings; “I have my settings on private, except I’ve never really gone to check what

it’s like on another person’s account before.”

In the end, the lesson to be learnt here is that whilst society considers it the norm for college students to do regrettable things for we will eventually grow out of such tendencies, the Internet will not move on so easily. Though our parents’ generation were easily forgiven, and were lucky enough to destroy all evidence of anything that could attract embarrassment, in this day and age where Facebook, Twitter and even Instagram (...the list goes on) thrives, this generation is not so fortunate. We unconsciously track our own idiocies, so that even when we’ve moved far beyond this all twenty years down the road, the inevitable remains; our digital footprint from today will last forever.

Indeed, we should not panic and think of our career crashing and burning when we see a stupid photo of ourselves appear on our newsfeed, might as well live, laugh and *untag*.



© Pressureua | Dreamstime.com



## Your Very Own Starry Comfort Zone: Starbucks

By Chae Yeon Kim

Take a visit to Starbucks in Mark City, Shibuya. A long line of people waiting to get a seat in the already excessively crowded store is a common sight to see. Just a few seconds down the corridor are few other cafés where one too many seats are available for seating. Why is it that Starbucks, and only Starbucks is so popular? How did Starbucks become a worldwide sensation? What is Starbucks doing that others aren't?

When you think about a café, you would most immediately think of a warm and cozy place with plush sofas where you can quietly listen to music and read books or even chat with a friend and stay for hours. The cozy and relaxing image you get about cafés today was first wildly spread and

established by, believe it or not, Starbucks.

When the CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, travelled to Italy, he realized that cafés were not only places where people just drop by to get their morning dose of caffeine, but a place where people held business meetings and talked to each other -- a sort of mechanism that held the Italian society together. Inspired by this view, Schultz persuaded the leaders of the company to transform Starbucks into such a place where friends can meet up and stay. Here, he added luxurious sofas, dimmer lighting, and jazzy music to the background. The café became somewhere people can get a premium traditional cup of espresso drink and relax.



The Starbucks experience. Photo by author.

This is the main marketing strategy Starbucks is based on. Rationally thinking, a small cup of coffee should not and cannot cost 500yen (about \$5 USD). Starbucks can get its customers to pay such amounts of money because it not only sells its "premium" espresso drink, but the café experience itself. The customers get the feel that they are able to purchase the warm relaxing and somewhat sophisticated experience of the café atmosphere as well as the simple cup of coffee.

The first Starbucks to ever open outside of North America was not in some random town in Eu-

rope or neighboring Mexico, but in the high-end area of Ginza, Tokyo-- right behind the famous Matsuya Department Store in 1996. The company leaders seem to have speculated that the people who visit Ginza, Tokyo, the richest city in the world, are able to afford and are willing to pay for the modern coffee experience.

Likewise, when Starbucks expanded to different continents and cities, the leaders of Starbucks altered their marketing techniques according to the cultures of each location. For example, when Starbucks expanded to China, they found out that the peak time in China was not 7am to 10am like most other countries, but at 4pm to 6pm. Food preferences were also taken into consideration. For example, the holiday Yorkshire pudding was for the customers in UK, not New York.

A friend once said, "Japanese people have something for marron." That was true. The 2013 holiday season drink consisted of the Crushed Marron Pie Latte. And in the Sakura season of 2013 came the Sakura specials, consisting of Sakura flavored espresso drinks, cakes, cookies, and accessories such as mugs and tumblers-- only in Starbucks Japan. Starbucks does a splendid job of tailoring the universally relaxing and warm coffee experience to the local needs of the people.

So the next time you see a long line of people trying to get a seat at Starbucks, instead of tut-tutting at them, remember that they are not only getting 'overpriced' coffee but the coffee experience, perfectly catered to their location and nationality.

## The Power of a Hundred Yen Coin

By Hyeyoon Sung

Do you hate carrying around those clanking, heavy coins in your purse that you somehow can never get rid of? Would you believe it if someone tells you there's a place where you can bring some of those coins and that would be all you need to buy necessities for your daily life? Amazingly enough, it's true. Unbelievable, you say? Welcome to Japan, the land where the usefulness of coins are highlighted more than people might think. In Japan, having extra coins is very handy, since in many situations, coins can actually be of use. There is no such thing as a useless coin, as even 1 yen coins are frequently needed. Many products are priced with very specific numbers, often down to the units digit. Perhaps this is because in Japan, one coin's worth is quite big: the value of a 100 yen coin roughly equals that of one paper bill in the US dollar.

Therefore, many Japanese people use coin purses. Some even carry only their coin purse, while some others carry both wallets and coin purses. In fact, there even is a place where bringing your coin purse seems like a must-do-- Hyakuen shops.

'Hyakuen' means 100 yen. Its name roughly sums up what you can do there; in Hyakuen shops, you can buy almost anything with your trustworthy 100 yen coins. From stationery and small toys, to silverware and even food, for people living in Japan, there is no shortage of items needed in real life in Hyakuen shops.

Why Hyakuen? Actually, including tax the items sold in Hyakuen shops aren't exactly 100 yen, but 105 yen. But why are these stores named 100 yen shops? Perhaps it is simply that the idea of buying useful things with a single coin is pretty attractive to many thrifty housewives and students living alone. Living in Japan, or rather, in Tokyo is pricey and everyone knows it. Even though the actual price might not exactly be rounded down to 100 yen, the symbolical meaning of being able to buy things with just one coin rings the heart, and hence is the catchphrase. Also, even with the tax included, the fact that Hyakuen shop goods are simply much more affordable than pretty much anywhere else in Tokyo is undeniable.

Even if you are just a tourist and do not necessarily need anything from the Hyakuen shop, I would strongly recommend that you at least give it a try. It is quite something, and you can take a closer look at Japanese people's daily lives. So if you have never been to a Hyakuen shop, why not try stepping into one today?



What to do with all of these coins? ©Claudio Jule



## Jimbocho Bookworm

By Wang Lu

For book lovers, Tokyo is no doubt a fascinating place for exploration. It is a rare sight for me to see so many passengers still holding paper books on train; small, unique bookstores decorate the busiest commercial street; second-hand bookshops are concealed in inconspicuous corners. Among these, Jimbocho is by far the most amazing place I have discovered. Surely for bookworms, this bookstore street always offers a fresh experience.

Alighting at Jimbocho Station of the Hanzomon Line, taking the no. 1 exit, will be the western end of the bookstore street. It is estimated that there are more than 180 bookstores in Jimbocho. Here you can find normal bookstores, such as Sanseido and Shosen; but the more unique feature is the abundance of specialized second-hand bookstores. These bookstores are usually very small, simply decorated; bookshelves fill almost the whole space, leaving only a narrow passageway for customers; books pile up toward the ceiling. Most of these second-hand bookstores are very specialized: western literature, visual arts, philosophy, etc. Jimbocho is the best choice for people looking for specialized books at a lower price or simply for book lovers to spend a leisurely afternoon.

Bunkobon must be a unique feature about Japa-



Bunkobon. Image by snogglethorpe | Flickr.

nese books. They are a type of pocket-sized books that are usually cheaper than the hardcover editions. Normally, the price is between 800-1000 yen. These Bunkobons are usually easier to categorize, therefore are the most abundant in bookstores. Readers are able to find books easily through author and publishers.



Jimbocho, Tokyo. Image by perks | Flickr.

In Jimbocho, I could not help but ponder what has maintained Japan's prevalent second-hand book and publishing industry in today's digital information age. A substantial amount of readership should be indispensable. The 180 bookstores in Jimbocho is a cultural phenomenon, but they are also inevitably profitable businesses. Japanese people's ardour about reading has supported Jimbocho's continuous prosperity. When we are amazed by the unique cultural ambience of Jimbocho, we should also think about the national culture that is represented here. When materialism is engulfing the world, whether we could keep being ourselves and enrich our spiritual pursuits is something we have to think about.

## What? Another Earthquake? Again?!

### Natural Disasters in Japan: Preparations, Concerns and Aid

By Lim Su Ching

I remember sitting on the fourth floor of our classroom in KOMCEE when the pillars of the building began to creak as they compensated for the tremors from the magnitude-4 earthquake beneath us.

Being the first intake of international students in PEAK, complete with a foreign lecturer who was equally unfamiliar with the situation, there was a mad dive for cover under the tables. Fingers fiddled over phones as people contacted their parents, siblings or significant others who were oceans away while the more tech savvy ones tweeted or broadcasted on Facebook about this foreign, and slightly alarming first experience. Meanwhile, in the room next door, with the exception of a few bemused glances in our direction, it was business as usual for the local students.

Japan is an island situated along three tectonic plates. Natural disasters that occur in the area include earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis and even volcanic eruptions. As such, from earthquake drills at primary schools to mandatory structural checks for buildings in Tokyo, a series of disaster contingent plans and safety measures are always at hand.

If the lack of table diving antics is anything to go by, the population itself has become accustomed to such occurrences and there is widespread education to prepare the people for emergencies. According to Haruka Funabiki, a 2nd year stu-

dent at Komaba, "Many (of the Japanese) people are quite prepared," and some people "have a few bags ready to take with us if some kind of disaster hits." Ever since the disaster of March 11, more people have become more conscious of disasters and have taken extra measures to protect themselves.

There was a strong agreement among the students that, factoring in frequency, earthquakes were the greatest cause of concern for the students living in Tokyo. However, volcanic eruptions rank first in severity, due to the difficulty of preparing against it, as well as the lengthy post-disaster recovery time. Komaba student Yuji Oka compares this to tsunamis and typhoons, which, 'pass relatively quickly.' Fortunately for us in Tokyo, volcanic eruptions remain quite rare.

When traveling around Japan, the type of threats faced from natural disasters differ according to the area. Landslides are a risk in the hilly terrain that runs through the countryside. When Typhoon Wipha struck last October, mudslides buried people and homes on the slopes of Izu Oshima in a matter of minutes. Yet, the strongest snowstorm in 7 years locked the capital down in January this year with over a thousand traffic accidents while trains faced delays. In an area with such a high population density relative to disasters experienced, the impact of each event is amplified. There is concern that should a major disaster hit the city, a similar paralysis might occur.

The current state of preparation is certainly less than perfect according to 6 second-year students interviewed at University of Tokyo. While most agree that preparations have been made for most major disasters, there remains room for improvement. As phrased by sophomore Yurie Yamada, "When a disaster of a magnitude beyond our expectation strikes, we instantly become as helpless as a beached whale... the government is slow in getting into action and providing help to the disaster area." Another student expressed her disappointment over the response to the March 11 Tsunami in a similar sentiment. To her, the event illuminated how the country could never be too prepared for large-scale disasters despite their meticulous planning. Two years after the disaster, 300,000 people are estimated to still be homeless or living in residential camps, and post-disaster recovery remains slow.

Despite this, the ability of those living in Japan to rally themselves together against the fury of nature should not be underestimated. Within Todai, students who want to help can join the school's volunteer program to teach the children affected by the Tsunami on weekends as well as a variety of other inter-college volunteer programs. According to another second year student, Takuro Ithori, there is no lack of volunteers or volunteer programs to help disaster victims. "As long as there is a strong resolution to take action, students will be able to help."

## Though Not as Expected

By Wang Lu



For someone who has never experienced typhoon before, it is hard to describe what to expect of a real typhoon, especially one that will be the largest in a decade. For me, who had never lived in the typhoon zone before coming to Japan, it remained a myth in my geography textbook until Typhoon No. 26 hit Tokyo on Oct.

15. Hearing the news, imagination started roaming in my head. Images of trees being uprooted, streets flooded filled my mind. My first reaction was, should I store up?

However, seeing is believing and imagination often deceives. In Japan, where tropical storms are seen as a norm every year, with excellent pre-warning system, it is nothing to be scared of. Media provides the public with detailed typhoon coverage as well as predictions for its paths. It turned out that my head-on confrontation

with Typhoon No. 26 was not a total defeat except for my sopping wet shoes. Inside the dorm, the storm was hardly noticeable. Indeed, the most palpable effect of typhoon was actually the transportation paralysis in Tokyo the next day, though this led to the well-received news of first class cancellation in the University of Tokyo.

Nevertheless, the implications of typhoons could extend beyond this. According to the Japan Meteorological Agency, in 2013, Japan has experienced 28 typhoons so far, well above the average. What becomes noteworthy is also the abnormally warm weather this fall. Meteorologists link these two events together. Typhoon occurs when the sea surface temperature is above 26.5 degrees and cumulonimbus clouds form. Moreover, they also tend to ride on polar jet stream which is a narrow, fast-flowing air current that meanders between 30-60° N. The region south of the polar jet stream is usually warmer while the region north of polar jet stream is colder. This year, the polar jet stream was further north than normal, therefore Japan experienced warmer weather and more typhoons.

After Typhoon 26, two more typhoons, number 27 and 28 landed almost simultaneously on October 26 and 27. I can now say that I am getting more used to typhoons, after all they are just heavier wind and rain. However, the abnormally warm weather deprived autumn of its golden leaves, snug scarves and nostalgic melancholy.

## “Ha-fu”: Neither Japanese nor Foreigner

By Nina Belova

1 out of 49 babies born in Japan today are mix-raced. Does this fact surprise you?

An interesting and original attempt is presented in a documentary film “Ha-fu”, which was screened in Japan in the autumn of 2013. The film focuses on “ha-fu” people; half-Japanese people whose parents are from different countries. It occasionally becomes difficult for “ha-fu”s to integrate into Japanese community because they constantly think of themselves as “outsiders.” This movie illustrates their hardship and how they managed to overcome the situation. The directors of the film, Megumi Nishikura and Lara Perez Takagi, are both “ha-fu” too, which made the film more realistic and meaningful.

Now, why being “ha-fu” in Japan is so exceptional? In fact, in most European countries or in United States, this “ha-fu” status means nothing. However in Japan, it seems that there is still a strong tendency to divide people into “us” and “others”. If you don't look Japanese, or if your name is not Japanese, you are an outsider, who should be avoided in order to prevent troubles. This makes “ha-fu” people reconsider their identity; If I'm not a foreigner, and not a Japanese, then who am I?

A beneficial solution suggested in the film is that it is impossible and unnecessary to choose one side. Rather, you should accept both cultures and values as yours, and become “dou-

ble” in stead of “ha-fu”. To do this, you have to know both countries well. If it is possible, try to live in both countries and acquire two languages. This makes you stronger, and also you can do good to the society by being a bridge between two different cultures.

Still, “ha-fu” people remain as a minority in Japan. They face difficulties in many fields. One example shown in the film is of a boy named Alex with mixed heritage of Japan and Mexico who was bullied in Japanese school, and gave him a speech impediment. Of course the dream is that the division between “us-Japanese” and “others-foreigners” will cease to exist. However, it seems that it will take a long time for the Japanese mindset to change. Then, what should “ha-fu” people do?

My friend, whose mother is Japanese and father is Pakistani, once said, “Being different is good, isn't it?”

Yes, being different is great! If we start to look at ourselves not with a hope of being the same as others, but rather with the sense of being unique, the difference itself becomes an important part of one's identity. However, our identity should not be dependent only around the fact that one is mixed-race. This will not work overseas where being mix-raced is of little significance, and it might also cause us to lose ourselves in unnecessary self-pity.

As a foreigner born and raised in Japan, this gave me a chance to think seriously about important factors when cultivating my personality. The film does not provide us with a clear answer, but at least it gives us a key. If you are a “ha-fu,” why don't you establish an identity as a multicultural and unique “double,” but at the same time, try to find out who you are beyond your differences from the community.



Website: <http://hafufilm.com/>  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/hafufilm>



## Smart Phones –Beneficial or Harmful?

By Yasuka Tateishi



A poster about the danger of Aruki Smaho in a train station. Both photos by author.

People use smartphones everywhere these days.

More and more people have come to use smart phones in recent years, but smart phones do not always benefit us.

Today, we often see people using smart phones in a train, in a classroom, and everywhere in Japan. Students are anything but an exception. Smart phones have become a part of our everyday lives. We can send e-mails or make calls as we could do with ordinary cell phones (in Japan, they are called Galapagos phones; for the way they have been developed without other countries' influence is similar to the evolution of plants and animals in Galapagos). In addition, we can browse the Internet and chat with groups of people. If we forget our smart phones at home, we would be upset for being out of touch with the world.

However, smart phones are dangerous if we use them too much. The term "Aruki Smaho", which means the act of using smart phone when walking, has become a popular word in Japan. If you concentrate on looking at the screen when you are walking, you may bump into people on the street. This *Aruki Smaho* becomes very dangerous if you do it on a platform of a train station. Accidents have been reported of people falling into train tracks because of *Aruki Smaho*.

Smart phones are not only dangerous for our action but also for our brains. In December 2013, Professor Ryuta Kawashima, who does research about the mechanism of the brain in

Tohoku University, announced that people who use smart phones for long hours received worse scores than those who use it less. He and his group categorized junior high school students three categories: studying at home for less than 30 minutes a day, 30 minutes to 2 hours, and more than 2 hours. They assessed the academic ability in each group and saw correlations with how long students use smart phones. Among students who studies more than 2 hours, the average score of those who use smart phones for less than 1 hour was 75 out of 100, while that of those who use smart phones more than 4 hours was 57.7. Also, among students who studies less than 30 minutes, the scores of those who use more than 4 hours was 47.8 and 15.3 points less than those who use less than 1 hour. As a whole, students who used smart phones less had better score than those who used it more. It is perhaps because smart phones have bad influence on brain, or simply because the longer you use smart phones, the less time you have to study. Please be careful with using smart phones too much. Smart phones do not make us smart; they might make us less smart!

Smart phones have two sides; beneficial and harmful. More and more people will have used them in the future, but please be careful to use them properly.

## Forever Alone: Social Isolation Linked to Early Death

By Yen Hyoung Cho

One of the most prestigious Universities in Japan— Kyoto University—has installed a new cafeteria seating for alone diners who wish to avoid awkward social interaction with unfamiliar faces. Known as "Bocchi Seki," with "Bocchi" meaning "alone (loner)" and "Seki" meaning "seat" in Japanese, has become a popular dining space for the engineering campus of this public school.

The seats consist of ten normal dining tables with 50-centimeter barriers in the middle, preventing eye-contact with others. It was designed for the convenience of busy students who want to avoid the pressure of having to socialize while eating; allowing them to have some privacy when surrounded by strangers and escape the embarrassment of eating alone.

Following Kyoto University's example, Kobe University has also recently installed the "Bocchi Seki," helping students to avoid awkward interaction. In short, encouraging unsocial behavior.

Recently in Japan, the entertainment and restaurant markets have begun to target consumers who wish to enjoy facilities alone. Services such as "Hito-Kara," a Karaoke booth for one person, have become a popular time-killer for solos who are too shy to walk into a karaoke parlor with no companions. Other forms of entertainment such as manga cafes have isolated rooms for single customers, and Ichi-Ran; a Ramen shop, has blocked their tables with boarders to protect the privacy of the diners while they eat.

The question is, however, how has this happened and what are the effects on society?

The "Hikikomori" phenomenon—the Japanese term for "people who are socially withdrawn" (to the point of locking themselves up in their room) has created this new culture in Japan. According to the government figures released in 2010, there are 700,000 individuals living as hikikomori with the numbers heading towards an increase. Although, Hikikomori may be the extreme case of enjoying one's privacy through isolation, there certainly are a proportion of individuals who values solitude. To support the increasing number of individuals who enjoy privacy, the market has come to adapt to it.

Looking at the current state of society, people-to-people interaction is decreasing, and it has become a norm to enjoy entertainment and goods in solitary. There is no social problem in enjoying these facilities alone, however the only down side to being antisocial is that social isolation is said to be linked to earlier death than the average mortality age.



Withdrawal from society continues to increase. What is the future of Japan? Photo by Misaki Hata.

According to the publications in the *Proceeding of the National Academy of Sciences*, when mental and physical health conditions were factored out, the lack of social contact led to death 10 years earlier than average among 6,500 men and women tracked over the past seven-years. Not only is loneliness a player in early death, but having no social contact also acts as the initiator to health issues such as higher blood pressure, intensified reaction to stress— and thus a lowered immune response due to poorer lifestyle choices.

Japan has been known as the country with the longest life-expectancy. But, with the population becoming more solitary because of their busy daily lives, the future of Japan does not seem to be too bright.

## Better be Careful with the 3Rs

By Wang Lu

Do you know about the 3R principles?

3R stands for Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. These are the basic principles for waste reduction in Japan. Although the garbage sorting system could seem convoluted and even frustrating to a gaijin (foreigner) at first, considering the remarkable accomplishments Japan has achieved in solving waste problems that seem so intractable for many countries, it really merits attention from the world.

In Japan, garbage is not only sorted carefully into about eight categories, each category of garbage also could only be discarded on designated days. When the waste is sorted improperly or when the wrong category of waste is discarded on the designated day, the bag will be left on the curb, with a warning seal stuck on it. It could be embarrassing for all your neighbors to witness your careless mistake. So better be careful with the garbage!

When the waste is so meticulously sorted, with so many categories under the recyclables (5 categories), most of the waste will be able to be

reused in one way or another. For instance, the Container and Packaging Recycling Law, which was enacted in 1997, stipulates that container and packages are recycled by designated recycling business entities through public bidding. Amazingly, even for the combustible waste, after

being burned and treated, the remaining glass substance could be reused as road base materials.

However, when you have five or six different bags of garbage, it still gives you a headache when trying to figure out just which part of the cup noodle should go to which color of bag. Therefore, keeping the 3Rs in mind is also important.

Firstly, try to reduce the amount of garbage that you produce by refusing over-wrapping; buy just enough food to eat and try to bring your own bag. Moreover, try to buy refillable articles; make the effort to repair things before discarding them. There are also ingenious ways to recycle waste on your own, why don't be creative and make your own DIY?

The 3R initiative was proposed at the G8 Summit in June 2004. The ministers agreed about the Kobe 3R Action Plan, which aims at improving resource productivity and reducing waste on a global scale. I hope we will soon see changes in every country!



© Almagami | Dreamstime.com

## Tokyo Olympic Games

By Kohei Yagura

**“Tokyo.” The name of the city was announced by the International Olympic Committee, the IOC, on September 8th, 2013. The 2020 Olympic Games will be held in the capital of Japan. How will this affect our daily lives as people living in Japan?**

The main impact is that we will be able to watch the exciting games with our own eyes. People who are interested in watching the games will gather in Tokyo. This will be a big chance for us because we can see the Olympic Games with our own eyes without paying much time and money for transportation.

Another big effect will be on the economy. The Olympic Games will contribute to the Japanese economy in various ways, such as construction of new facilities, increase of consumption, development of the infrastructure and the tourism industry. These will surely stimulate the economy itself and lead to the economic growth. By observing the economies

of the previous host countries of the Olympic Games, we notice that they experienced a significant growth during the Olympic period in every country even if the scale of the economy was relatively small. According to this data, the Japanese economy will surely get better around 2020. If we make special mention of the effects to Komaba students, the Olympic Games

will make the employment situation better. The employment will increase by around 150,000 people, 80 billion yen in income. This means our life will get better, too!

Also, many changes will occur in the city of Tokyo. Many new facilities such as new stadiums that do not exist now will be built to prepare for the Olympic Games and highways will be newly rebuilt to avoid the congestion of cars. These drastic changes will transform our city from now.

However, we should not forget the negative impacts, too. It is estimated that the overall spending for the Olympic Games will be up to 240 billion yen. Since Tohoku is still in the process of recovery from the earthquake, some say this spending is ridiculous. The cost for the recovery is estimated to be 25 trillion yen. Another negative impact is the heavy traffic. The traffic is heavy enough as it is now, but it will be heavier when lots of people around the world gather in Tokyo.

These are the imaginable effects by the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Whatever the effect is, it is sure that the Olympic Games will make a huge impact to our daily lives. Maybe there will be unpredictable effects, too. Japanese society awaits the coming of the Olympic Games.



© Ffang | Dreamstime.com



## Around Komaba Campus: Shibuya Hang Out Spots

By Daiki Sugiyama

Komaba Campus is located in Tokyo, the center of Japan, and surrounded by many famous spots. Since we are students of this campus, we should learn about the neighborhood in order to enjoy our daily lives.

Let me introduce the nearest entertainment district, Shibuya. Shibuya is famous as the district of youngsters, and is one of the centers of Japanese youth culture. There are many ways to spend your leisure time by enjoying activities such as Karaoke, darts, bowling, or whatever else you like. Also, Shibuya Station has many railway lines, so if you wish to go somewhere far from the Komaba Campus, you must stop by this station.

Firstly, to enjoy Shibuya, you should remember two important meeting points. The more well-known one is the Hachiko statue, which is the statue of a dog in front of the station. This dog is famous for having waited for its owner in front of Shibuya Station for about 8 years even after the owner died. The other one is called "Mark Shita," which is on the 1st floor of the ticket barrier of the Keio-Inokashira line. Most Todai students use this one to gather.

Shibuya Scramble, the symbol of Shibuya, can be seen from both of these two meeting points. This intersection is crowded most of the time everyday, and surrounded by many big advertising boards and tall buildings. It is always lively and busy here, but on special days even more so. For example, on Halloween day, a lot of people dress up and gather. When Japan wins in world sports games such as the soccer World Cup or Olympic games, you can see many excited fans share the



Hikarie (left) and Shibuya Station (right) from the Shibuya Scramble. Photo by author.

joy of winning.

If you stand on the scramble with your back to the station, you can see the outstanding building, Shibuya 109, on the left hand side. 109 is read "Marukyu" and it has many popular clothing stores in it. Broadly speaking, the area behind 109 is Dogenzaka. You can walk to our campus in about 10 minutes through the Dogenzaka area. The right hand side of 109 is the central district called "Center Gai". There are a lot of restaurants, karaokes and bars in these two areas. You can enjoy until mid-night. However, there are also some shady areas, so be careful if you walk

there at night.

If you go out the station the other side of the scramble, there is a new big building called Hikarie built last year. It has expensive restaurants, clothing stores, and business offices. The view from the top is beautiful especially at night.

I only covered some very general and popular landmarks of this big and fascinating district. Why don't you try exploring by yourself to find more hidden spots, and share your findings with your friends!

## Around Komaba Campus: Shimokitazawa, Cozy Place to Ramble

By Daiki Sugiyama



Shimokitazawa, South-exit shopping street. Photo by author.

Shimokitazawa is another popular spot with Todai students following Shibuya. You can easily walk along the railroad tracks to get there on foot from our campus. It is famous for the drama theaters and fashion. The atmosphere is very casual. There are not many tall buildings and looks less urban. Streets around Shimokitazawa are very complex. It is difficult to find where you want to go even if with a map. However, rambling around itself is very interesting there. You will discover interesting places tucked away in the corners of Shimokitazawa every time.

If you are unfamiliar of Shimokitazawa, you should start by walking down the main street. It starts from the

south gate of the station and ends at Sangenjaya Station. Firstly, in front of the south gate, there are often some street performers, such as musical instrumentalists, calligraphers, and strange storytellers. Actually, Todai magic club members also sometimes perform and surprise pedestrians.

Nearby the station, you can find there are a lot of theaters which always hold fascinating dramas. For example, there is a small theatre in front of the north gate of the station which often holds free comedy shows. If you are lucky, you may be able to meet famous actors and directors.

Along the main street, there are so many shops such as clothing shops and accessory shops. You can search for your favorite clothes, shoes, and bags and compare prices of each shop only by walking. If you don't have much money, you can try to go to some of the countless used clothes shops. You can feel like a treasure hunter.

If you start to walk Shimokitazawa, I bet you will want to go down the narrower streets. By that time, you are already fascinated with this town.

## Halloween in Japan

By Hyeyoon Sung



Image by jomudo | Flickr.

Why are Japanese people so crazy about Halloween? When Halloween is near, you can easily spot people dressed up as witches, maids, vampires, and perhaps something even more wild and eye-catching in the streets of Shibuya. It is quite a sight to see young people, possibly in their 20s walking around wearing bizarre costumes.

But once again the question arises. Why is Halloween, originally a Western event, so popular in Tokyo? In Korea, no one is interested in Halloween enough to go through the trouble of dressing up. The only traces of Halloween you can find are in parades in several amusement parks, so I was very surprised to find Halloween so popular

here. Perhaps the reason Halloween could easily mix into the Japanese culture is because the co-splaying culture is already a common occurrence and also because some Japanese people have a very unique sense of fashion.

Furthermore, I was even more amazed at the fact that Halloween is celebrated more by college students than by small children. In Western cultures Halloween not only symbolizes a day for teens and young adults to party, but it is also a day for young children to go Trick-or-Treating. However, in Japan, Trick-or-Treating children are hard to find, while the relatively older people have all the fun. People often point out that it may be because Tokyo is a big city and apartments are more common than small houses. Unlike many Western neighborhoods with houses which allow for a very intimate atmosphere, people living in apartments have more privacy and might feel a bit more segregated; sometimes to the extremes of not even knowing who lives next door. Under situations like these, it may not be exactly convenient nor appropriate for children to start going about asking for candy. Though I do believe this also is a factor that contributed to the scarcity of Trick-or-Treating, I think this phenomenon has

more to do with the circumstances under which Halloween first started.

Halloween was introduced to Japan much later around the start of the 21st century as a Western festival. For people living in countries like the USA, Halloween might be considered a natural part of their culture in which children go around asking for candy. But for the Japanese, perhaps Halloween is still more of an unfamiliar yet exciting event that originates from a faraway country. When people from a certain cultural background embrace a cultural element alien to them, they go through a process of selecting which facet of the new culture to accept, and how to fit it into their existing lifestyle. It was not until recently that Halloween became known to the people, so it is not yet entirely part of their daily, no, yearly life. Maybe that could explain why people in their twenties enjoy it as a special, one-time occasion more often than any other age group.

Regardless of why Halloween is so loved by the young Japanese population, I believe this is a good way of having fun and enjoying oneself. So next year, when Halloween comes, don't be afraid to dress up and have fun!

## Farewell, 2013: A Gaijin's Recount of New Year's Countdown at Tokyo Tower

By Hyeyoon Sung

Every New Year's Eve, where do you go? I normally stay at home watching people shout out the last ten seconds of the year on TV and idly imagining myself going to one of those countdown places. In those fantasies, I would always be enjoying the company of a robust, cheery crowd. It would be quite something to say farewell to the ending year and celebrate the advent of a new one in the midst of a bunch of bustling strangers. Normally, these plans would just be at the back of my mind as I have always been too lazy to leave the comfort of my room. However, this year was no normal year, at least not for me. This was my first turn of the year after arriving at Tokyo, and I wanted to try something new. To celebrate the successful first passing of a year in Japan, I finally decided to put my usual day-dreaming to reality and went to Tokyo Tower, a place I had chosen among many candidates, for this year's countdown.

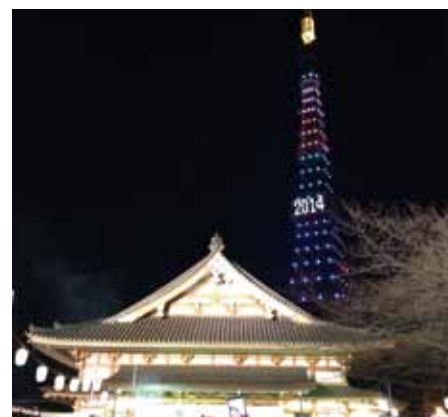
At 12 o'clock, even though there was no one in particular counting down the seconds, the Tokyo Tower changed its colors, and the numbers on the neon sign changed to 2014. The whole process was proceeded in a swift, quiet way as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and there was no shouting till right before the advent of the New Year. I do not know if this is a natural occurrence in Japan, or if there was some mistake and everybody in the crowd just missed it. Many people, mostly foreigners, looked confounded, but soon recovered and started enjoying themselves. My guess is that coming to the tower and gathering for the countdown on the last night of the year is, in itself, very memorable. Besides, there are so many other things to enjoy during the countdown event.

At the turn of the clock, the colors of the tower change, so if you want to find a nice place to watch, I suggest that you go to Zojoji, a shrine located near the tower. It is a nice tourist spot on other days as well, but on New Year's Eve, it turns into the best place for observing the tower. If you walk a bit down along the road, you will be able to find it soon enough.

During the countdown event, in Zojoji, there are many vendors selling food such as takoyaki, amazake, or okonomiyaki—which form the unique 'Matsuri', or Japanese festival, atmosphere. If anyone asked me to recommend a snack to eat while doing the countdown in Japan, I would say that the Toshikoshi soba is a must for a gaijin (Japanese word for 'foreigner'). For the Japanese, Toshikoshi soba is the food you would share with your family at the night before New Year's Day. It can actually be made out of any type of soba, and it also tastes just like any normal soba. But why would Japanese people have soba on such a special night? Why not ramen or udon?

Unlike ramen or udon, soba noodles are long and thin, which Japanese people associated with the yearning to lead a 'thin and long' life (which relates to the Eastern ideal of living a peaceful, long-living life). Plus, the easy-to-chew-off quality of soba noodles came to symbolize cutting oneself off from old troubles and getting over the hardship of the past year. In short, the Toshikoshi soba symbolizes a healthy, lucky new year.

In the midst of the vendors, on one side of the Zojoji grounds there is a fire event in which people burnt last year's items. It is quite interesting



Zojoji and Tokyo Tower, 2013.12.31. Photo by author.

to watch the temple people throw things into the fire as tourists gather around for the countdown. Other than that, there used to be an annual balloon releasing ceremony at Zojoji in which people could write their new year's resolutions or wishes on balloons and let go of them as the clock struck 12. They did not hold the event this year, but some people brought their own balloons anyway and as the number on Tokyo Tower changed to 2014, freed it in the air. Even though it was not on a big scale as the real event would have been, it felt as if a part of myself for the past one year had also flown away with the balloons.

On December 31st, Tokyo Tower opens till 2 am and the trains operate throughout the night, so for foreign tourists this is a perfect place to celebrate New Year's Eve. So, in short, if you have plans to visit Tokyo around the end of the year, and if you wish to do the countdown in Japan, Tokyo Tower is a good option!



## Survive Winter in Tokyo with Little Goods

By Masashi Mark Sato

Winter is cold, and Tokyo is no exception. It might not be as cold as other countries like Norway or Russia, but it can still make students shiver and want to stay in bed. Therefore, I would like to introduce to you some items that Japanese students use to help them survive the winter.

### 1. Kairo (disposable heating pad)

This little pack of sand is magical. After opening the package, it will start getting warm as you shake and squeeze the pack. Once it gets warm, keep it in your pocket and it will stay warm for a good eight to twelve hours depending on the brand. When your hands are cold, you can just put your hands in the pocket and feel the warmth even if you are outside. There are also different types of kairo. For example, the popular type of kairo has a sticky side, so that it can be stuck on your inner cloth to keep specific parts of your body warm. Kairo is sold at any supermarket or convenience store for a reasonable price. It will surely keep your hands warm during finals.

### 2. FREE Pocket Tissues

Winter is the season of sickness. Many people catch cold or flu due to the drop in temperature.

Even if it is not severe, you might find yourself sneezing or having a runny nose. At such times pocket tissues will come in handy, and amazingly, in Tokyo you can get pocket tissues for free! In Japan, pocket tissues are often used as a tool for advertisement, and in places like Shibuya and Shinjuku in Tokyo, there is always someone handing out pocket tissues with an advertisement for free. However, be aware that some pocket tissues might contain inappropriate advertisement. And most importantly, it might not be a good idea to go ask for one. Take one only when they hand it out.

### 3. Canned Hot Drinks

While kairo can warm up one's body from the outside, hot drinks helps people warm up from the inside. In Tokyo, there are many business men who spend every morning at a café, holding a cup of coffee in one hand and newspaper in other. For students, though, café is considered too expensive to go often, and many would prefer to either have it on the go, or bring it to their morning classes. Because of this, hot canned



Winter survival techniques. Photo by author.

drinks are quite popular among students. It is wallet-friendly, and you can find it anywhere in Tokyo; during winter, almost all vending machines sell hot drinks. Additionally, cans are really warm (almost too hot to hold), so you can use it like a kairo to warm your hands up before drinking.

These items might be small and cheap, however it will be a good idea to just have them in your pocket. There will be a time when that little pack of sand or can of coffee will help you get through a cold day. Or who knows, a handsome guy or pretty girl might ask you for tissue!

## Why so late, Hollywood?

By Chae Yeon Kim

The Japanese people could not join the worldwide sensation of Lionsgate's "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" this past Thanksgiving season, due to its release at the end of the year on December 27th.

Table 1: Hollywood Blockbuster movie release dates in USA and Japan

Movie	Release Date in US:	Release Date in Japan:
Red II	19 July 2013	30 November 2013
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	22 November 2013	27 December 2013
Thor II	3 November 2013	1 February 2014
The Hobbit II	13 December 2013	28 February 2014

International students who are used to strolling down to the movie theaters to watch a Hollywood Blockbuster movie during opening weekend are giving out cries of frustration on the late release dates of Hollywood movies in Japan. To those international students who are shouting "Doushite?" ("Why?" In Japanese), here is a short and sweet article to relieve the stress of not knowing why.

Japan has the third largest movie market for Hollywood movies. This in other words, means that when a movie is not successful in the box office, the losses are quite devastating. Therefore, before Hollywood releases its movies in Japan, they often make a full analysis of how the movie does in the US market and decides from there whether it will be successful in Japan. Only after a significant time analyzing and thinking comes the decision of, first, whether or not to release the film, and second, how to market it in Japan.

Also, because of the size of the Japanese film market, the film industry tries to increase its gains by releasing films during the holiday season. This is true in almost all countries, however more so in Japan. Taking "The Hunger Games" as an example again: "The Hunger Games" was released right before the Thanksgiving holiday season in the United States. This was most likely intentionally timed. Even if other countries around the world do not share the American Thanksgiving, the film was released worldwide almost simultaneously. However, Japan's release of the film is on December 27th, right before the beginning of the Japanese New Years Holiday.

The need for dubbed versions of Hollywood movies is another reason for late releases in Japan. Japan is the third country in which dubbed movies are becoming the norm (after Italy and France). It was found that Japanese people of all demographic groups prefer dubbed versions of Hollywood movies to subtitled versions due to various reasons.

First of all, subtitles tend to direct the audience's attention more towards the writing than the actual action on screen, which disturbs audiences from concentrating on the movie. Also, as 3D movies become more popular, the 3D glasses become a

hindrance to reading the subtitles properly.

Cultural differences also come into the picture. Since the subtitles are translations of the direct screenwriting, there tends to be a difference in levels of humor in the subtitles. For example, there are some jokes that are hard to directly translate from one language to another. When a movie is dubbed, and the dubbed screenplay is written, the translators have time to consider the cultural differences and therefore, deliver a movie that easily appeals and connects to the Japanese people.

So if you are a new international student living in Japan, who is expecting to watch a movie during its worldwide premiere, you have come to the wrong country. However if you have patience, and can wait for the movies to be finally released, you will know that it was detained for a good set of reasons that include economical and cultural aspects.



Photo by author.

## Editor's Note

Komaba Times is an English-language newsletter written by students at the University of Tokyo. Our goal is to create a place for students to voice their opinions to the university community as well as to the wider world. We grew significantly in size this semester with 16 writers all pouring their hearts into their stories. We hope to hear from readers and students who'd like to join our endeavor.



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