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32 Articles // April 2019 // Issue 8

KOMABA *times*

Photo by Dhriti Mehta

ACADEMIC LIFE

Let's not make a waste of Todai students and professors

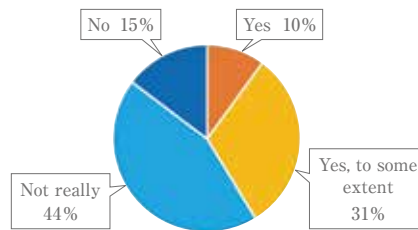
By Sayumi Take

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The professor's voice drones on via the microphone. The boy sitting 4 seats away is obviously finishing up his homework for Chinese class. The index finger of the girl in front of me is scrolling the Twitter feed on her phone. Another classmate is lightly snoring away. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The professor must lecture for another hour before class is dismissed.

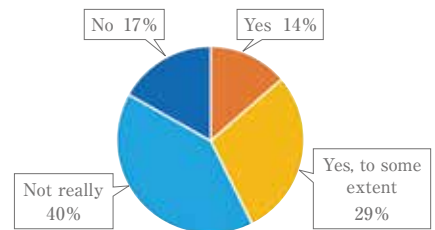
Such classroom scenes were the norm in about half of the classes I signed up for in my first year at the University of Tokyo (UT). A not-so-small number of classes offered to April-entry students are centered on lectures, and require close to zero participation. Students are graded solely on how well they do on the end-of-term exams or papers, and so there are usually a steady amount of people who receive credit without showing up for class at all. In such lecture-based classes, all we really do is sit there and take notes, even though we are in a classroom with other learners and a professional of the field. According to the results of an online questionnaire conducted by UT in March 2018, to which roughly 15% of targeted students answered, 58.7% did NOT think they acquired the ability to discuss and debate with others. Also, 57.2% answered that they did NOT think there were enough opportunities for students and professors to communicate.

For me, the 105 minutes of class was almost a completely passive learning process. When I had a question, I would go up to the professor after class, but other than that, I might as well have been at home, watching a video of the professor talking. If I had had the guts to raise my hand in class and speak up, a class discussion might have started and paved a way to an interactive, engaging class. But in a huge lecture hall of 100 students, or even in a classroom of 20 students, the students (not all, but at least some) ready to listen and take notes for 105 minutes, and the professor all set to speak non-stop for 105 minutes, I just couldn't sum up the courage to do so.

Do you think you acquired the ability to debate with others?



Do you think there are enough opportunities for teachers and students to communicate?



The results of an online questionnaire conducted by UT in March 2018. Created by author, based on data from the UT website (<http://www.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/info/about/assessment/deguchi17.pdf>)

In Japanese universities, it is still uncommon for a part of students' grades to be based on class participation. As far as I know, in UT such evaluation criterion is applied mainly in PEAK classes and some seminars for April-entry students. It seems that the criterion is yet to be recognized as an important, legitimate one, and perhaps this is why the majority of classes offered at UT are lecture-based that allow uninterested students to be inactive.

However, at the end of the year, the classes that influenced me the most were the few seminar-like classes that I squeezed into my weekly schedule. These classes valued the participation of each student, and were full of interactive discussions and student presentations. For instance, in one PEAK philosophy class, every session started with a group discussion on the assigned reading material, followed by a class discussion and follow-up lecture by the professor. In another English class, the professor assigned one student each week to research and present about the assigned text, and take ample time for a Q&A session after the presentation. These classes resulted in closer ties between everyone in the classroom and a deep, multi-dimensional understanding of the class material. I had to sacrifice a lot of my time outside of class on a daily basis, but was rewarded with

intensive, lively, eye-opening discussions that required me to not only take part in the class but also, in a way, partially take up the role of teachers and lead the class.

The origin of the word "university" comes from the latin word *universitas*, meaning community --- a united community of professors and students. Ideally, classes at universities should be a place where the members of the academic community communicate with *each other*, not just a pipeline where the professor stands at one end and pour out knowledge for the students to receive on the other. Today, UT is still believed to be one of the top universities in Japan, with intelligent students and professors who are first-class scholars in their academic field. If such students and professors came together to share their knowledge and thoughts on numerous themes, something unpredictable and wonderful, whether it be an eye-opening insight or a revolutionary idea that could save the world, is bound to be born out of it. Lecture-based classes are incapable of bringing out the full potential in each member of UT, and will kill such precious opportunities. Therefore, I am confident that increasing the number of seminars and classes like the ones mentioned above as an alternative to classes based on one-way lectures, would lead to an overall energization of UT's academic activities.

The JEA Identity Crisis

By Lisa Buckland

International students undoubtedly always have trouble identifying themselves within their university and I am no stranger to this problem. As a student enrolled in the Japan in East Asia (JEA) programme, I have had to explain my degree to almost everyone I talk to, back home in the UK, in Japan and even in my university to April-entry students. What is “Japan in East Asia” and why do we struggle with it?

The PEAK website describes it as a programme that “aims to provide students with a wide range of social science and humanities courses to develop an advanced understanding of Japanese/East Asian politics, economy, society and culture in a global context”. I found I wasn’t alone in needing to reread that multiple times. The PEAK website is the primary source of information that prospective students have when making their university degree selections and there is surprisingly little information about what JEA *actually* is. The words “global”, “international” and “interdisciplinary” are floated around the website, but Mimi, a first year JEA student, says when she arrived she didn’t have “much idea of what exactly [she] would be studying”.

Unlike other Todai students, PEAK students join

the university with a predetermined major, either JEA or Environmental Science (ES). I wasn’t alone in being confused in initially thinking we were “JEA students” from our first year. In fact, first year PEAK students are not “JEA” or “ES” students but students of the College of Arts and Sciences in the Junior Division.

There seems to be confusion over what the degree is, so, what did people think they’d be studying before arriving? Sarah, a JEA student, thought she’d be studying International Relations “with a broader perspective, *not* narrowed down to Japan”. It seems this emphasis on being “global” influenced many in my cohort and Mimi, Sarah, Tom, Sally and Alice all call it “International Relations” with a focus on East Asia. I’ve also found it easier to rename my course when talking to friends or family and we’re even encouraged to do so in our Japanese class where our teacher taught us to call it “*kokusai kankei* [国際関係]” (International Relations). Sarah and Tom both say they don’t even tell anyone they’re studying “JEA” so they don’t have to explain it.

It’s no doubt easy to get stuck in this existential rabbit hole of what our programme really is and

how we identify ourselves within it, particularly when we’re in the midst of summer finals, a heat wave and almost a year into our degree. It also seems non-US-background students who aren’t accustomed to liberal arts degrees find this even more challenging, as the alternative would have been a university degree specialising from year 1. Professor Fusako Beuckmann, Head of the PEAK Junior Division, acknowledges these difficulties and emphasises the University of Tokyo’s unique liberal arts structure even within Japan.

In 1949 the first dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Tadao Yanai, emphasised the merit of this liberal arts system, arguing “by possessing this strong foundation of knowledge, [students] will be less prone to bias, and will be encouraged to cultivate a boundless enthusiasm for the truth”. Arguably the liberal arts foundation provides a broad basis of knowledge, preventing bias in a certain field and allowing for interdisciplinary approaches to both the junior division and future studies. Professor Shiho Maeshima, Director of the JEA Senior Division, points out that defining one’s degree in the junior division is not a problem unique to PEAK students but one shared by most juniors in the College of Arts and Sciences.

PEAK Life: Expectations vs Reality

By Alexine Castillo Yap

No matter which corner of the globe you might be from, you’re likely to have your own set of expectations about what university life could, or *should* be like. Maybe you expect lots of par-

ties, or more opportunities to take a wider range of classes, or dramatically meet your soulmate whilst they’re dining alone at the university cafeteria or whatever--the point is, you already have

a set of preconceived notions about what will transpire in your university life.

But I’m here to tell you that whatever image you have of university is most likely not going to be the same as what you might expect, especially when it comes to PEAK--and I’m certainly in the same boat. There are even things you never would have thought would happen to you, but definitely would (convenience store runs at 2:47 AM, for example). Here are three expectations I had about university that the realities of PEAK have debunked.

Expectation: I’ll be attending classes with hundreds of students in huge lecture halls.

Reality: One of my classes this semester only has 5 students signed up to it, and in most of my other classes we’re lucky to have 10.

If you’re like me, you’ve seen one too many American movies or TV shows that happen to be set in a university, where class sizes can be huge and consist of dozens or maybe even a couple hundred students--the first episode of *How to Get Away With Murder* really made an impression on me, for example. Plus, many of the Japanese films I’ve seen or books I’ve read have depicted university life as composed of classes in lecture halls. My parents, who went to university in the Philippines, also had a similar experience, and many of my friends studying all over the world do, too. Thus, I thought that in my classes, I would just be one insignificant student in a sea of dozens.

A fairly accurate representation of how I look whilst trying to sign up for courses. Image taken from Pixabay.



Perhaps the ambiguity and wide range of courses we take provide us with the task of defining our course for ourselves and shaping it to our own ends. This is emphasised through the scarcity of required courses for JEA junior division students. Although this can lead to a sense of aimlessness with no clear goal and often the feeling that we are being introduced to a subject, enjoying it and then receiving no follow-up courses, it also means we are able to explore a plethora of fields and change our preconceptions on what we wanted to study.

If you would have asked me what I wanted to study last year I would have told you “International Relations” and if you ask me now I’m not entirely sure. Perhaps this feeling of uncertainty can be disconcerting but it’s also a part of the reshaping that the liberal arts programme strives to do. Through taking so many different courses we gain an insight, and an interest, into so many different fields. Not being able to narrow down our interests or degree, “defining” our knowledge becomes even more challenging and rewarding.

We begin our university careers with a set of expectations and often with an idea of what we’re



The PEAK website page on JEA - most likely a prospective student's first impression of the JEA programme.

truly interested in, what we think we’re going to study, and sometimes even what we want to do after our undergraduate degree. There’s no denying that the degree has an ambiguous title, maybe it does need to “come clean about the fact that it’s a humanities and social sciences course in general” at least in the first two years,

as Alice argues. Our foundations are varied and perhaps not of great depth, particularly compared to undergraduate degrees that specialise throughout, but maybe the importance of the degree is that it unroots our preconceptions. It allows us to reform our interests, and frame and shape the degree however we want.

But the truth is, PEAK is an extremely small programme with only about 30 students per year, so the classes are basically distributed among what little there is of us, plus a few local students here and there. I did go to a high school where class sizes in certain subjects were quite small, so it wasn’t much of an adjustment for me personally; however, I didn’t expect that it would be the same in university. Ultimately, though, I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad thing, because in this way the professor and students can develop better rapport.

Expectation: I can go to class in my pajamas without anyone judging me.

Reality: Sure, I can go to class in my pajamas, but not without receiving odd looks.

Having come from a high school where we were expected to wear uniforms every day, university is a breath of fresh air because I no longer have to wear the extremely uncomfortable and tragically unfashionable blouse-skirt combination that my high school imposed on me. Compounded also with the fact that I’ve seen too many American movies and have friends who study abroad telling me about their experiences, I also thought that perhaps this would be the perfect time to do what I’ve always wanted to do: come to class without having to change into anything too sophisticated, without really having to think about how I look that day.

However, even though there isn’t a dress code in place, I’ve found that the opposite has actually

happened to me: now more than ever I’ve become more conscious of my fashion choices and makeup. I’m not that surprised, though; Tokyo is one of the fashion capitals of the world, and maybe walking around fashionable places like Shibuya and Harajuku has finally managed to rub off on me.

Expectation: I can sign up to whatever classes I want, including art classes.

Reality: I haven’t seen a single art class in the course catalogue.

I’m not the most academically-inclined person, and have always wanted to take more creative classes, like visual arts or creative writing. I thought that university was going to be the perfect place to try these out, especially since we’re in a university that has a two-year liberal arts programme. Whilst that may be true for other places, it certainly isn’t the case here if you’re in PEAK. Every semester, the university releases an extremely thick course catalogue in the form of a book that contains all the courses on offer for Junior Division (there’s also a catalogue for Senior Division), and precisely because of its thickness, no other document can demonstrate just how narrow the selection of classes for PEAK is in comparison. Whilst the local students have an incredibly wide choice of classes that number the hundreds, PEAK classes are relegated to an extremely thin section at the back of the book. It’s a bit defeating to look at, but now that I think of it, it’s not all that surprising that we have a narrow selection considering how small PEAK

is. As much as I would love to take a course on marketing or a digital design course, it just isn’t possible within PEAK (at least, not yet). That does force me to look for these activities outside of school, though, which could probably be a good thing.

This isn’t the only issue I’ve faced when signing up for classes. It can also be frustrating to try and sign up for language classes. I tried signing up for an intermediate-level French conversation class, and it was the only one offered at that level in the Junior Division course catalogue. Unfortunately I was told by the PEAK Admin Office that I couldn’t take it for credits because it was a Senior Division course; thus, I have to wait until the spring semester of my second year (when students are allowed to begin taking Senior Division classes) to take it, by which time I probably would have forgotten most of the French I already know. Oh well, maybe it’s a sign that I should be focusing on my Japanese instead. That being said, do make sure to inspect the course catalogue very carefully before signing up for classes.

To conclude, it’s probably best to approach university life as a PEAK student with a bit of thick skin especially if you have any starry-eyed, idealised visions of what university life should be like. It may turn out drastically different from what you expect, or not at all—but either way, it won’t be like anything you or your friends would have experienced before.

Diversity without Inclusivity

By Yuki Takahashi



Interaction between international and domestic students at Komaba. Photo courtesy of The University of Tokyo, PEAK Admissions Office.

"The University of Tokyo (UT) accepts international students from more diverse countries than Princeton University, but UT fails to integrate them into the community of domestic students," writes Professor Jin Sato, who teaches at both UT and Princeton University for a semester each, every year. In his book comparing UT and one of the most prestigious schools in the U.S., he notes that UT falls much behind the U.S. top schools in integrating international students.

This notion is true when I consider my own campus life. For me, as an April-entry student, the only ways to interact with international students, especially PEAK students, is to take PEAK classes, join Lunch Time Discussions held at the Komaba Writers' Studio, or to participate in the TGIF Lunch held every Thursday. However, making friends by taking PEAK classes is difficult, since it means that I have to join the established community. I cannot help but feel that there are two separated groups on campus: a group of international students who have conversations in English, and a group of domestic students, who seemingly do not know how they should interact with the other group.

"I interact with April-entry students only for a few hours, maybe less than 8 hours, in a week," confesses a PEAK student. For her, classes and clubs are the only opportunities to interact with domestic students. She believes that the language barrier is the main reason why she

and most of the PEAK students cannot interact with domestic students very well. Since she is not able to speak Japanese so fluently, she is only left with a choice to join clubs that does not require much talking, such as sports clubs, and it results in lack of deep and meaningful conversation with domestic students. Another international student from South Korea who is very fluent in Japanese, in contrast, told me that he mainly spends time with domestic students in Japan and do not interact so much with his fellow international students. "I sometimes feel that I am even treated as a domestic student," he talks.

So are language barriers the only reason for the lack of interaction between international and domestic students? It does not seem true. I have seen many scenes where an international student who speaks Japanese is alienated from a conversation, maybe because of cultural differences. International students sometimes interrupt conversation when Japanese people will not, or talk in a louder voice than Japanese do.

An increasing number of domestic students in PEAK classes does not directly mean the increase of interaction between the two groups of the students. In the PEAK classes I have taken so far, I found that domestic students tend to gather with other domestic students, probably because they do not know how to chat with international students. Cultural differences are

another main factor behind the lack of communication.

What can we do to improve the situation? As Professor Yujin Yaguchi, the Director of the International Education Support Office, claims, interactions among students cannot be cultivated by a top-down approach, but depend on what students do voluntarily. I agree that it is true, but I also believe that the university can do more. A PEAK student points out, "The university should acknowledge both groups equal and give the same opportunities to both groups instead of drawing the line and keeping the groups separate." Indeed, April-entry students have to take permissions to take the PEAK courses, and cannot live in the International Lodge Komaba, where most of the PEAK students live. "Putting international and domestic students in one dormitory together might be one way to facilitate interactions," suggests Professor Sato, too. In most of the universities in the U.S., international students live together with the domestic students in dormitories.

Of course, the U.S. is a country of immigrants, and people there tend to be more used to different cultures than people in Japan. However, as Professor Sato insists, it would take hundreds of years to make differences if we wait until the Japanese culture changes. In classes and daily lives, the university can do more to help both groups to interact with each other.

The Reality of Being a Todai-joshi

By Yisac Park

Finally! After years of studying hard, you got into your dream school, the University of Tokyo (UT). Bouncing with excitement on your first day, you see numerous posters and leaflets about club activities, lectures and information about the university as well. You check some of them and find something weird. A few posters have phrases such as “Club for men”, “Female students only”, “Recruiting managers”.

Some students might not care about this at all or may not even notice what is “weird” about it. To be honest, this situation felt awkward and uncomfortable for me. I could not believe that this was and still is happening at the so-called “best” school in Japan. As a Korean, I’m very interested in feminist movements, which are very active in Korea recently such as the #MeToo and corset-free movement.

The #MeToo movement is an international movement to reveal the problems of sexual violence. Women who were sexually harassed or assaulted have come forward to share their stories through social media. The corset-free movement is a movement that helps women liberate themselves from social oppression. Women have been forced to fulfill the standards of beauty defined by society which can be uncomfortable and sometimes threaten their health. Inspired by these recent movements, I thought it necessary to question these issues.

I want to start by sharing my experience as a female student of UT (a.k.a. Todai-joshi). First, advertisements which limit opportunity based on gender can be easily found at UT. For example, women cannot join the American football team as players. It is not explicitly said but it is tacitly understood by everyone. They must join as a “manager” or staff member to be part of the team. Staff members are in charge of training, marketing, managing and assistance. Male students can also be staff members, but in reality, most of them are female students. Why do female students have to be the manager? Why is there no team for women in the first place? To solve this, female students can create a team themselves. Moreover, some club activities have few or no clubs for female students to join even though male students have a choice of more than 10 clubs of the same activity. In 2016, the Student Support Division of UT posted a notice on the university website that UT acknowledges the existence of gender discrimination and urges student organizations to comply to the University Charter. However, there is no punitive action by the University at this moment.



Restroom sign. Photo by Sam Howzit | Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/aloha75/14789540916/in/photostream/>



Advertisement of the UT Sweetheart Pictorial Book. Photo taken by author

Next, there is a book called “UT Sweetheart Pictorial Book” (Todai Bijo Zukan). It is a picture book of UT female students which has been sold in UT festivals by a circle called “STEMS” since 2014. A pictorial book or field guide is a book that illustrates plants, animals or objects. Female students are being consumed as an object in this book. According to the website, this book tries to change the current image of UT female students, which is negative. It is generally believed that female students of UT are not “attractive”. The idea is that by putting photos of “pretty” and “cute” Todai-joshi, their image may improve among the public. Instead of focusing on looks, the image may be improved by portraying intelligent, capable and academically excellent women. Furthermore, there is no male student version of this book.

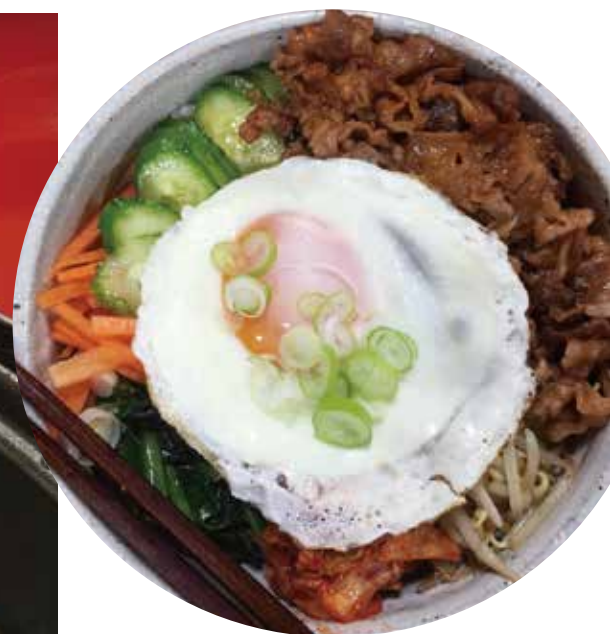
Have you heard of the term “joshi-ryoku”? It means “girl’s power” in Chinese characters, but it is used for describing the feminine level, usually of women. Having a high “joshi-ryoku” means being good at cooking, fashionable, capable of

doing makeup, or able to take care of other people. It is believed that women who have a high “joshi-ryoku” are attractive and an ideal type of woman. This term is often used among young Japanese women. They praise each other by having a high “joshi-ryoku” and generally want to achieve that. It feels like the word itself is forcing woman to have an idea that women should be pretty, and that femininity is the most important thing for being a woman.

Approximately 20% of the student population are female at UT. I remember when I went to the information session for freshmen, one of the professors said that female students should be careful about their speech and behavior since there are less female students at UT. To this day, I don’t understand what this means, and I am not so sure I want to find out. If it implies that women should not cause any problems, that is ridiculous. It is time for us UT students to think about these issues. Mahatma Gandhi said, “We must become the change we wish to see in the world.”

Eating in University: Bonding through Dinner

By Taishi Nakamura



Eating something we all took part in together makes it more than just a delicious dinner. Photo by Riku Negishi.

ner with a bunch of mates was so much more exciting and valuable compared to just eating “Conbini” food, alone in my quiet room. As a Japanese, our family placed a lot of emphasis on eating together as a family – and to lose that aspect of life did make me feel lonely at times. But these kinds of occasions truly help me overcome such loneliness and prevents homesickness.

Now, up to this point it might sound merely like a normal get-together. However, we began doing this regularly, up to the point where we decided to make a fully functioning ticket system. We calculated the cost of an average meal to be about 300 yen, and made “one ticket” worth 1000 yen, for 3 meals. Every time we eat a meal from our chef, we keep note until our ticket runs out, then we pay 1000 yen again to top up our tickets. I really thought this system created a win-win situation as our chef can learn and be encouraged to cook, and the rest of us can enjoy a nice, hot homemade meal for only 300 yen. Variety is another selling point to consider. Places like conbini and the cafeteria might restrict you to only eating certain dishes, but homemade cooking has virtually no limits – Bibimbap, Beef Stew, Nimono, to even a chef’s original. You may not believe this, but I personally even found washing the dishes entertaining. Talking about our future, or just complaining about the workload we have – all of these conversations help us relieve our stress, deepen our friendship and gain a sense of belonging. So, it’s a pleasing experience from the preparation right through to the normally dreaded cleaning up.

So, I want to suggest to you this alternative cooperative - a highly enjoyable way of eating as a university student living in a dorm. At first living in a dorm away from your family may be scary and lonely. At time like this, keep in mind this great way to bond with your friends, and something that truly makes you feel a sense of family inside our small community of PEAK.

Before I came to Japan for university, my mum used to cook for our family. The sudden transition of needing to think of what to eat and preparing it was simply a pain for me. There are various choices when it comes to eating as a university student in Japan: Cooking your own food, eating at the cafeteria, using the convenience store and so on and so forth.... But how about, eating the food that your friend cooks for you?

Yes, this actually is one of the ways in which a

fair percentage of my food intake happens now. It’s sad to say, but I can’t cook at all. However, there is one friend who is a real cook – and loves to do it (whom I will call “chef” from now onwards). One night we decided to have a get-together of about 5 people in our year group. The non-cooks helped with the dishes and transporting the food, while our chef cooked for us. When we all ate together in the lounge of our dorm, I felt a kind of nostalgic feeling – it was like eating with my family. I felt that eating homemade din-

Vegan in Tokyo

By Maja Liechti

'What, you are vegan? Man, that must be tough here in Japan!' is a phrase I hear more often than not. But what is veganism all about and why all the fuss about eating plants? Is it impossible to stay vegan in Japan?

Veganism was coined in 1994 as 'the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products, particularly in diet' (Donald Watson). The major reasons for people to go vegan are not only ethical (the rejection of animals as a commodity product), but also environmental. According to a report in 2006, the UN calculated that 'the combined climate change emissions of animals bred for their meat were about 18% of the global total – more than cars, planes and all other forms of transport put together' (UN, 2006). The report did not just count the methane released by livestock but also the use of energy and water for meat production and transportation.

While the availability of vegan products in Europe and the US has been growing with the 'vegan trend' in the last decade, the idea of rejecting all animal products is still fairly uncommon in Japan. But is it impossible? I'd say no for now. Being vegetarian for ten years and vegan for six years, following a vegan diet has become second nature to me and I do not find myself struggling as much as people would assume. However, I must admit that it might seem far more difficult for either someone who is used to buying ready meals or for vegans that are used to be surrounded by alternatives for their favorite foods. Despite the fact that Japan has a wide variety of soy and almond milks with flavors such as *vanilla ice cream* and *apple pie*, prepared Vegan meals or meat alternatives are scarce. How can you survive as a vegan then? Well, I can assure you that you do not have to eat just leaves.

The solution is simple: cook for yourself. By cooking I do not mean spending hours in the kitchen to create a five-star vegan menu using fancy ingredients. Personally, I try to keep it simple, tasty and healthy. In Japan my diet consists of approx. 50% vegetables, 25% fruits, and 25% starch, protein, nuts and seeds. However, especially in Japan, vegetables and fruits seem to be pretty expensive at first. As a student with a limited budget I had to find a way around it, and here is what I do in order to not go bust:

- I buy fruits and vegetables at an affordable supermarket in Shimokitazawa (15m from the dorm in Komaba)
- I check out stores in the evening for sales.
- I buy frozen fruits and vegetables, such as blueberries, since they are comparatively cheap while maintaining a high quality! You can find them in most convenience stores.

Whenever I fancy vegan cookies or meat alternatives, I buy them in Mega Don Quijote, a department store with many import goods which can be found in Shibuya. As for healthy snacks I recommend going to 'My Basket' or 'Lawson', where they have nuts and dried soybeans.

However, the remaining difficulty peculiar to Japan comes about with social eating, since eating out is a popular social activity while vegan options are scarce. The major obstacle to a

joyous dinner with friends for a vegan is mainly the fish stock *dashi*, which is used in a variety of dishes. But don't give up! It is possible to ask for a dashi-free version depending on the meal and restaurant. Another possible solution is to make exceptions for social eating if you're not too strict with your diet. Also, don't be sad if you don't want to compromise on your diet. Compared to my last stay in Japan in 2013, the number of vegan restaurants has increased quite a bit, so if you feel like having a vegan burger try out *Ain Soph Shinjuku* or *Mr. Farmer*. As for conventional restaurants, there are unfortunately not many vegan options apart from salads. Therefore, I recommend having something before you go out. Soba, udon noodles and (cucumber or

natto) sushi however, are usually vegan. When you buy processed products, it is important to read labels. Some useful Kanji are: 卵 (egg) and 乳 (milk).

In the end, people think being vegan in Japan is harder than it actually is. It is for sure possible if done correctly. What counts is the mindset and some preparation before coming to Japan. Especially with the coming Olympics in 2020, the options for people living on a plant-based diet available in Tokyo will eventually increase. In the end, whether you decide to go vegan or just want to incorporate more plant-based meals into your day, I hope that the tips shared in this article can be useful to you.



The solution is simple; Just prepare your own meals. Photo by author.

Settling Down: A Guide When Moving into Komaba Lodge

By Kazuma Nakano



Komaba Lodge B Dorm: The boys' dorm. Photo by author.

Settling into a foreign country is no easy task. Here are some tips of what and what not to do when you first arrive at Komaba International Lodge as an international student.

1. Do get a bicycle

Although Japan has some of the most efficient train systems in the world, for those small errands that are a tad too far on foot, a bicycle is the perfect companion. The basket-wielding *Mamacharis* are great when shopping, though a road bike or cross bike will make your travels

a tad faster. I recommend purchasing a bicycle secondhand, at Yoyogi Recycle Garden (7 minutes from Yoyogi Station). Having a bicycle may be just what you need to get to class on time.

2. Do Not dispose everything in the same bin

Japan is very particular when it comes to sorting garbage. There are two standard groupings, *Moeru Gomi* (combustible) and *Moenai Gomi* (non-combustible), on top of other classifications designated by the local ward. Here in the Komaba

Lodge we also dispose of glass bottles, cans, and cardboard boxes separately.

3. Do purchase some furnishing

The rooms at the Komaba Lodge, or most Tokyo apartments to be fair, are by no means large and spacious. To make the most out of your space, it is wise to purchase a few shelves and cupboards to store your belongings. Additionally, an extension pole will be handy for hanging your laundry, and a rug will make the tiled floor easier for your feet.

4. Do Not rely completely on your credit card

Although credit cards are accepted at most large supermarkets and shops, Japan is still a cash-based society. Do not fall into the trap of bringing just your credit card, and be sure to exchange more cash than you think you will need.

5. Do explore the neighborhood

It is important to venture out of the comfort of your room, and explore the surrounding neighborhood of Komaba. As well as the essentials such as locating your nearest Konbini, Supermarket, or Post Office, you may find some quirky shops or cafes that might become your new favourite! There is also Komaba Park, located 5 minutes from the dorms, which offers a breath of fresh air, surrounded by the green wilderness.

6. Do get to know your senpais

Last but not least, do make an effort to get to know your senpais! Some of the best perks about living in Komaba lodge is that your senpais will be readily available to help you settle in. From subject selection, dining, and cool places to hang, don't be afraid to reach out to ask for assistance.

Keeping in contact with your family during an earthquake

By SoHee Park

The Japanese archipelago is famously one of the most seismically active regions. It is also home to some of the most advanced technologies against earthquakes such as early warning systems on mobile phones and quake-resistant construction. The Japanese government has continuously developed and implemented ways to minimize potential earthquake damage.

March 11, 2018 marked seven years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that caused the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident. Fukushima and its neighboring regions are yet to be recovered from the impact of disaster. And much to our dismay, Japanese experts estimate that an earthquake as big as the 2011 disaster may strike again the northernmost region within the next 30 years. Japan's Earthquake Research Committee predicts a 70% chance of a magnitude 8 earthquake to hit Eastern Hokkaido.

In the midst of this heightened risk, it is highly

recommended that international students studying in Japan be prepared for a crisis. There are many ways for you to get prepared, such as buying or making your personal "Go Bag" or checking in advance where the evacuation shelter nearest to your residence is located. But above all, it is crucial to confirm methods of showing your safety in Japan with your families living in and out of Japan.

During the 2011 Earthquake, social media such as Twitter and Facebook served as a lifeline for families to keep in contact with the affected individuals. On the other hand, the commonly used messenger app such as KakaoTalk for Koreans did not work, and LINE, an equivalent messenger app in Japan, came into existence as part of the disaster response.

First, let your families know the location and the phone number of the designated shelter near your school or house. In any case you become

unreachable, your families will know where to find or contact you. Visit the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Disaster Prevention Website (<http://www.bousai.metro.tokyo.jp/foreign/english/index.html>) and check the shelter nearest to your residence. The nearest evacuation shelter near school and the Komaba Lodge is the Komaba Elementary School, located right next to the lodge building. The school or the housing office will be giving instructions for evacuation but just for your reference, make sure and check the place on your way to or from school so that you can evacuate calmly in any case of a disaster.

Second, make use of the safety confirmation services provided by communication businesses. When a large-scale disaster such as an earthquake, tsunami, or volcanic eruption occurs, it may become difficult to contact families due to the sheer number of people using the communication network. In the event of such a situation, communication businesses including SoftBank,

Drinking Culture in Japan: Info & Tips

By Taishi Nakamura

You may be aware that drinking plays quite a large role in Japanese culture, even in how the Japanese society functions. According to writer Kay Sakamoto, the drinking culture stems from the traditional lifetime employment and unique working culture in Japan. Working with the same coworkers and bosses for the rest of your life, but not being able to talk “shigo”, or having private talks with them – this paradox required a situation in which you can form personal relationships with colleagues and bosses. This was when drinking party, or 「飲み会」 (Nomikai) came to be the primary way to bond relationships outside the strictly regulated workplace. As the existence of the word “nominication” (combination of “nomu” meaning drinking, and “communication”) suggests, drinking was always at the center when conducting casual and private talks between company members outside the office.

University is no different, and the drinking culture might be quite prominent – but this depends on how you choose to spend your university life. As the Japanese say, 「お酒は飲んでも飲まれるな」 - always drink responsibly and don't get swallowed up by alcohol. Although drinking may be an entertaining way to spend with responsible mates, any incident being swallowed up by alcohol is no light topic and might become a reality if you do not act responsibly. In fact, acute intoxication of alcohol has been a problem over the years, especially in Japanese universities. According to the Tokyo Fire Department, over 40% of the number of ambulance transport caused by acute intoxication comprise of people in their twenties.

The legal drinking age in Japan is 20 years old, so any drinking before then is prohibited. Therefore, as rule number one, do not drink before you reach this age. Like many others, I too have been

through the experience of where alcohol was available, and noticed a few characteristics of potentially “dangerous” situations:

Here are some tips on how to avoid any serious, and potentially fatal mistakes with alcohol:

● Choose your circles/ clubs carefully

Irresponsible behavior in circles is the primary situation in which over drinking occurs. Don't just choose your circle without doing any research / without going to their Shinkan (Welcoming) events. Similar to how circles of a similar genre (e.g. soccer) can differ massively in atmosphere, the expected amount of drinking involved also vary according to circles.

● Know about responsible drinking beforehand

Remember small but important factors like *not* drinking all at once (which the Japanese call as 「イッキ飲み」 Ikkinomi), or not drinking with an empty stomach, can potentially save lives. Most incidents involving university students and alcohol occurs in the first two hours of the nomikai.

● Surround yourselves with responsible people

This should be quite an obvious factor when it comes to alcohol. Do not surround yourself with people that force you to drink. It is equally as important to make sure you are not the one forcing



Drinking culture of Japan may be a little different to your culture. Image by conan_mizuta | pixabay

– do not force others to drink under any circumstances.

● What to do if your friend gets alcohol poisoning

According to the Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan, if you see any conditions such as:

- Unconscious (doesn't respond even if you shake them)
 - The whole body is cold
 - Abnormal breathing patterns
 - High volume of vomiting (food or blood)
 - Bubbles from mouth
- ...call the ambulance by calling 119.

Keep these factors in mind when coming to a Japanese university. The unique drinking culture and perception towards alcohol may shock you at first – but don't be scared by this. As long as you are responsible, it should not be a problem. I hope you all have a safe and enjoyable university life.

au, Y!mobile, NTT DoCoMo and NTT East provide disaster message board service. Here, users of the respective mobile phone company can post their safety status as text which can be checked from mobile phones and computers. Users can register their status on the board with their phone number. The message will then be sent to J-anpi, a portal site where families living in and out of Japan can search for the status of affected individuals through their phone number. Google Person Finder provides the same service as J-anpi and both websites can be accessed in different languages. Access this website (<http://www.bousai.metro.tokyo.jp/foreign/english/bousai/2000010/index.html>) to check disaster board message provided by your communication provider and add it to your Favorites so that you can make a use of it when necessary. Also make sure to let your families know your Japanese phone number so they can confirm your safety.

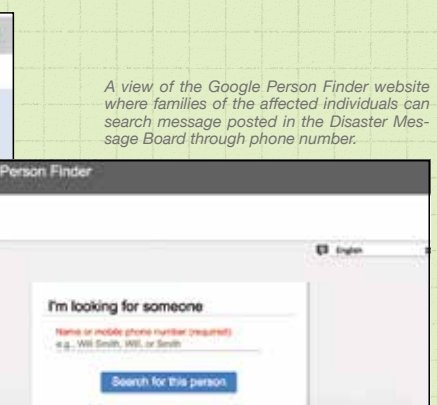
And lastly, social networking systems can also be

useful during the disaster for you families to confirm your safety. Talk with your families ahead of time and establish several means to contact each other. Making a new Twitter or Facebook account for your parents can be one of the many ways for you to keep in contact during emergency. And in

case the internet service falls short due to traffic overload or infrastructure damage, designate a certain bulletin board at school or near your house so when you become unreachable, your parents will be able to check your safety by referring to the note you put on the board.



A view of the Disaster Message Board website operated by NTT East and NTT West. Individuals affected by disaster can post their status on this message board.



A view of the Google Person Finder website where families of the affected individuals can search message posted in the Disaster Message Board through phone number.

3 Hidden Gems by Prominent Architects on Campus

By Yuki Takahashi

When deciding on an university, the atmosphere of the campus might be one of importance to you. The two older campuses of the University of Tokyo - Hongo and Komaba - are basically a

mix of quaint gothic architecture and post-WWII buildings. People tend to focus on old magnificent buildings, but among the new buildings on the campus, there are actually many remarkable

ones designed by globally-known architects.

Here I introduce several of those amazing buildings and how to enjoy them.



Institute of Industrial Science. Photos by author.

1. Institute of Industrial Science

Located on the Komaba II Campus, the main building of the Institute of Industrial Science is designed by famous architect **Hiroshi Hara** ('59). He is known for his masterpiece of post-modern architecture, Umeda Sky Building, which was selected as one of the Top 20 Buildings around The World by British publishing company Dorling Kindersley.

In the Institute of Industrial Science, you will find a large void space penetrating the cuboid and some curious objects sticking out of the wall. You may feel as if you were in a concrete jungle. This composition of the building is similar to another masterpiece of Hara's works, Kyoto Station.

In the building are a variety of laboratories. If you want to get to know cutting-edge science research, I recommend you visiting there on Open Campus Day held in June every year.

2. Fukutake Hall

Fukutake Hall is located on just the left side of Akamon Gate in Hongo Campus. It was designed by **Tadao Ando**, a Pritzker winner who designed the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in the US and the Shanghai Poly Grand Theatre in China. Ando is one of the most well-known architects in the world today.

Fukutake Hall hosts UT Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies (III) and Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Studies (GSII) and has many facilities for students of those schools. The design of the building is remarkable, as the concrete wall with two long slits constructed in front of the hall, which is called *the Thinking Wall*, captures the view and shows us the hall itself and the campus from a different angle.

There is also UT Café, which is open to anybody on the campus. You may enjoy drinking coffee and chatting with your friends there.



Fukutake Hall

3. The Daiwa Ubiquitous Computing Research Building

Walking through Kasuga Gate into Hongo Campus, you will see an interesting building with numerous small wooden panels. The Daiwa Ubiquitous Computing Research Building, which is also a facility for III and GSII, is designed by current UT professor **Kengo Kuma** ('79).

He won the competition for the New National Stadium and is a leading figure of the younger generation of Japanese architects. His works are characterized by their use of wood as material. You may have seen his architecture, since he designed many characteristic works incorporating Japanese traditional style, such as the Nezu Museum and the new Kabukiza Theater.

In this building, you can enjoy excellent *wagashi* (Japanese sweets). *Kuriyagashi Kurogi*, a Japanese sweets restaurant run by a luxurious Japanese cuisine restaurant *Kurogi*, tenants on the first floor. Collaborating with Sarutahiko Coffee in Ebisu, it provides a nice combination of coffee and traditional Japanese sweets. There is sometimes a long line of people waiting to get in.



The Daiwa Ubiquitous Computing Research Building

There are several other buildings designed by outstanding Japanese architects on Hongo Campus. The campuses of the University of

Tokyo itself can be called a museum of architecture, as it exhibits both historical and contemporary buildings. If you are interested in architec-

ture, a stroll around Komaba and Hongo will not disappoint.

Got your summer plans ready?

By SoHee Park

Getting ready for summer is exciting. Booking a ticket back home, arranging time to meet your friends and families and getting just a nice, long rest. After spending your time in the lecture hall and the dorm for a year, it is time for you to start planning for your summer to get the most out of it. If you are struggling to find something different and new, here are a few lists of summer programs offered by UTokyo for you to look into.

Short-term Summer Study Abroad

The University of Tokyo has partnerships with many universities around the world and offer students the choice to study abroad during the summer. The Short-term Summer Study Abroad Program is jointly organized with partnering universities. In 2018, 9 programs were offered by universities in 9 different countries. Lists of programmes offered in 2018 can be found below.

The summer program universities are the same universities that are partnered for six month or a year-long University-wide Student Exchange Program (USTEP). Therefore, for students who wish to gain first-hand experience of the university they wish to do a longer exchange, the summer study abroad program offers the best opportunity. For those who feel the burden of studying abroad already as an international student in UTokyo, a one to two months long summer study abroad program can offer a great chance to experience new culture and meet students from other universities who has the same academic interest. More information can be found on the Go Global website (<https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/adm/go-global/ja/program-list-short.html>).

Hands-On Activities

Hands-On Activities is a program that started in 2012 and consists of various programs such as volunteer work, international experience, on-campus lab experience, and nature-related activities. The program takes place both in and out of Japan. Within Japan, programs offer students to work in accordance with various departments such as Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Agricultural and Life Sciences. (A full list of activities offered in Japan can be viewed here: https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/stu01/h21_j.html)

1. Outline

These Guidelines give an overview of the application procedures for the following Short-term Summer Study Abroad Programs. For individual program details, see their respective Program Sheets.

- ① Peking University, Tsinghua University and University of Tokyo Joint Summer Program (Code: PTU)
- ② HKU-UTokyo Joint Summer Program @ Shun Hing College (Code: HKU)
- ③ Seoul National University and University of Tokyo Joint Summer Program (Code : SNU)
- ④ University of Sheffield Summer Program (Code : SHEF)
- ⑤ University of Indonesia Summer Program (Code : UI)
- ⑥ University of Warwick Summer Program (Code : WAR)
- ⑦ Chulalongkorn University Summer Program (Code : CU)
- ⑧ King Mongkuts University of Technology Thonburi Summer Program (Code : KMUTT)
- ⑨ Stockholm Nobel Summer Program (Code : STO)

Complete list of 2018 Short-Term Summer Study Abroad Programs. Photo by The University of Tokyo GO Global website.

The activities last in ranging length from a couple of days to a few months. Students interested in several different activities can take the advantage of joining many different activities during the summer and learn about new cultures and sets of values. Activities held abroad are not limited to Asia but also in Europe, North America and the Middle East, providing students with the chance to expand their horizon across the world. (A full list of activities offered abroad can viewed here: https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/stu01/h20_j.html)

As this is not a credit-bearing course, there will be no burden placed on the students of being evaluated. Rather, students will be able to have the chance to deeply consider what they would sincerely like to learn by experiencing off-campus education through these hands-on activities.

Internship

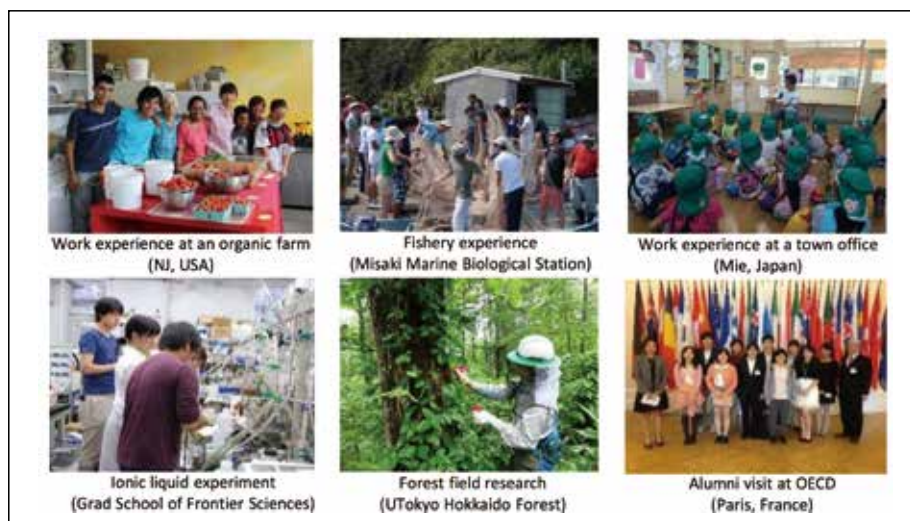
The Learn, Live, and Intern in China (LLIC) programme was founded by The University of Hong Kong (HKU) in 2008. Students attend a seminar series offered in English at HKU for a week and participate in 8-week internships offered mainly at Shanghai and some in Ningbo or Shenzhen. (Detailed list of companies can be viewed here: <http://www.aal.hku.hk/summerinstitute/llic2018/llic-companies-list/>.)

Half of the participants are students from HKU and the other half are students from top universities of the world. Past participants include students from Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Cornell, Pennsylvania, Yale, Cambridge and Oxford. It is an exclusive programme with up to three undergraduate students given seats to participate from the University of Tokyo. Tuition, housing and airfare from Hong Kong to your internship location will be covered by The Victor and William Foundation. As LLIC companies do not require

students to have Chinese language skills nor previous field experience, any UTokyo students interested in gaining practical working experience

in China should apply without hesitation. In 2018, the program was held from June 17 to August 18.

Global Praxis



Pamphlet for Hands-On Activities in the University of Tokyo official website.

Out of all, probably the most accessible ways of gaining an interesting overseas experience would be the Global Praxis program. It is a course that started with an aim to encourage students to cultivate a global perspective as a global citizen. Activities include collaborative work with local students, research in Japan with students from overseas, and etc. For 2018 S semester, courses were offered in Germany, France, Italy, Korea, Finland and Japan (Kashiwa and Yamanashi). The biggest merit of this program is that it is a credit-bearing course in which students are guaranteed to obtain credits after completing the course requirements during the break. As it offers credits, some courses require students to attend

lectures before going abroad. Students however, should be aware that the Global Praxis course may begin before the end of the academic year. It is therefore recommended to plan ahead of time to consult with your academic advisor to fulfill your credit requirements and minimize the impact of missing lectures.

Couldn't Find Your Match?

Bookmark the Global Komaba website (<http://www.globalkomaba.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/>) and check often to gain information on any new programs offered by the school. Plan ahead of time and get ready to make the most out of your summer experience!

Tongue-tied and Culture-shocked

By Alexine Castillo Yap



The author's attempt of reminding herself how to say 'help' in various languages. Photo by author.

I'm in a bit of a language rut. I'm forgetting bits and pieces of languages I already know, including my mother tongue, Tagalog. At best, it's only caused a few embarrassing hiccups whilst Facetimeing with my best friend from back home; at worst, it has led to more than just a few late-night identity crises¹.

This would have been a bit easier to take had I been doing well in my Japanese classes--I could then at least tell myself, 'hey, at least you're doing okay with *this*'--but I, unfortunately, have seemingly accomplished the opposite, despite my best efforts. The results of a recent progress test have not been very promising, and throughout the semester I've progressively found my bed more and more inviting compared to going to class. Furthermore, being told that I am not eligible to gain credit for an intermediate-level French class that actually suited my French language ability has not helped at all in quelling my language-related frustration.

It looks as if I'm *regressing*, and for some odd reason--perhaps in a misguided attempt to reset my brain, or as an exercise in escapism--I've even begun, rather counterproductively, trying to learn *another* language (please don't ask me why I picked up *Teach Yourself Colloquial Arabic* from Book Off the other day). It's also come to the point where I've already considered giving myself a serious intervention by booking an appointment with a Berlitz language school outside the university (which, I've discovered, is not only a time-suck, but also wildly unaffordable).

Is there something wrong with me? I've tried chalking it up to a host of different explanations, all with varying degrees of ridiculousness, starting from 'Maybe I just need more sleep' to 'Maybe my brain is, at the ripe old age of nineteen, already getting too old' through to 'I've been cursed by a

Being A 'Pure Japanese'

By Yuki Takahashi

The last summer of high school, when I was supposed to study and prepare for college admission, I read Mizumura Minae's *Private Novel from left to right*, taking a precious three hours of the critical period. I somehow could not stop reading it, possibly because by reading that book, I could vicariously experience how a person who uses more than one language thinks and feels. The novel, which was about the life of the author who moved to New York City from Japan when she was 12, was written in two languages, Japanese and English. She was at the opposite extreme from me, who had spent his whole life in Japan.

People like me, whose nationality as Japanese is straightforward and who have never lived abroad, are called *Pure Japanese*, or *Junjapa* (純ジャパ). Unlike people who have moved around the world since their childhood or who were born to parents marrying internationally, I've never en-

countered an identity crisis about which country I belong to. I have no reason to be skeptical about my identity as a Japanese, because I cannot use other languages as fluently as Japanese, and I am comfortable with Japanese culture the most. Having a solid national and cultural identity may seem an advantage to those who do not have a clear identity and feel lost, but I always have been jealous of people with multicultural background. In the current globalizing world, living in a monolingual and homogeneous environment is a huge drawback.

No one opposes the idea that being able to speak several different languages enhances one's opportunities. Recently, the demand for multilingual people in the job market is increasing. But it is not just that. The most crucial point is that people living a multicultural and multilingual life can think deeper and be more creative.

"Students should relativize their own values and perspectives through their college life," states the President of the University of Tokyo, Gono-kami Makoto. I personally believe that relativizing one's thoughts is an essential step to become a person who thinks in the true meaning. If a person never has doubts about his own values, he never develops his opinion on his own; he just internalizes social values and obeys it. At this point, people with multicultural background are advantageous, because they are forcibly exposed to more than one cultural value and must ponder how to deal with them.

Indeed, the most capable and intellect people I have met so far were mostly returnees, who had spent several years abroad and came back to Japan. Those people are more aware of social issues than people who have spent their whole life in Japan, maybe because their values de-

wrathful language deity (or *kami*, in Japanese) as divine retribution for all those times I said *hajime-mashite without a yoroshiku onegaishimasu*'.

It's been said² that the most important part of solving a problem is to accept and admit that you have a problem, and, quite importantly, to identify and study the root of said problem. I've been stashing the language problem away at the back burner of my mind for some time now without confronting it, causing it to fester. Though yes, more sleep would definitely help, and no, I've not been subjected to the curse of a language *kami*, I also need to see the language problem as, arguably, part and parcel of the wider culture-shock problem that it is situated in, and that which I've been mentally avoiding for months and months now.

Canadian anthropologist Dr. Kalervo Oberg is often credited for being the first to describe culture-shock as the 'occupational disease'³ that it is for people who have moved to a different country. He formulated a theoretical model, a series of 4 stages, that may describe one's experience when living abroad:

1. The Honeymoon Phase: also known as the tourist phase, one might experience initial excitement, euphoria and high motivation to learn new things, and would engage in activities that only superficially engage with the culture.
2. Culture-shock phase: a period marked by crisis, one might feel frustration and irritation as the novelty of the new environment starts wearing off; coupled with homesickness and isolation, one might blow minor problems out of proportion and even develop prejudicial attitudes and stereotypical ideas about the culture.

3. Adjustment phase: marked by increased familiarity and comfort with the new culture and environment, this phase does have periodic highs and lows, but is also characterised by recovery: a return of one's sense of humour and of 'deeper' learning and engagement with the culture.

4. Adaptation phase: the new country is no longer as 'foreign' or 'novel' as before, as it feels like another home, and one begins to have the ability to be both appreciative and critical of multiple aspects of the culture, whilst being able to live and work to one's full potential

As you can imagine, I tick all the boxes with regards to the 'culture-shock' phase. I'm the poster child of someone going through culture-shock--and it's taken me *months* to accept this.

Full disclosure: I'm not exactly a newbie to the whole 'moving to a completely different country' schtick. I've been through this exact same cycle of ups and downs before, having lived abroad in Vietnam during my teenage years, even though I wasn't fully aware that there was an entire theoretical model describing the experience. I want to say that I'm a culture-shock veteran--but really, I'm not. It is most probably *precisely* due to my assumption that if 'I've already been through it, then I shouldn't be finding this so hard' mentality that's made it so difficult for me to accept that I am going through culture-shock here in Japan. But the fact is that I *am* in a new country, which would logically demand its own, unique adjustment process.

And though the four aforementioned theoretical stages seem clear-cut and ordered in a somewhat linear, progressive manner towards the coveted fourth stage, Oberg and many others do acknowledge that in reality, it's far more compli-

cated than just a smooth transition from A to Z. That 'gradual adjustment' phase, in particular, is a tumultuous one, punctuated with highs and lows--something like experiencing mini-culture-shock crises every now and then.

So the fact of the matter is: it is, and *will* be a roller-coaster ride, but it's also *completely fine* and a normal part of the process--for *everybody*, including people who think themselves 'used to' the culture-shock experience. The one thing I do know, though, is that just like my past experience living abroad, things can and will get better, if given time and effort. I'll just have to hit the books a bit more and make that language school plan work out somehow (and maybe put *Teach Yourself Colloquial Arabic* on hold). And of course--I should learn to seek help when I need it, that there's nothing shameful or burdensome about it.

I also need to remind myself that everyone will have a different 'culture-shock curve' from each other--so whilst it may seem like one person is 'better-adjusted' than the next, it's probably just because they have different highs and lows at different points of time, with different issues, whether it be language barriers or homesickness or something else entirely. Bottomline is: admit you have a problem, and do what works *for you* in order to fix it.

Hopefully, in acknowledging my issues and thereby finding solutions and help for them, I'll be going through an 'up' phase sometime soon, and hopefully without the need to battle a vengeful language *kami*.

¹ A PEAK student specialty, it seems.

² By essentially every philosopher we've read for First Year Seminar.

³ Oberg (1960) Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments.

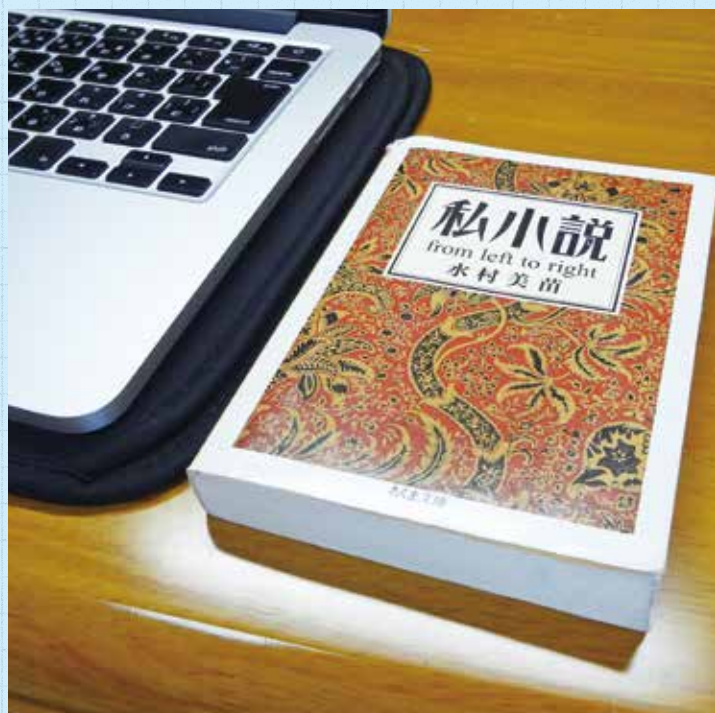
veloped in other countries often in conflict with those of Japan. To tackle social issues, they take actions even when they are in high school. They are social, motivated and seem good at finding their own interest, in contrast to my old friends from high school who appeared struggling to find what they wanted to do after graduation.

Mizumura could not write masterpieces of Japanese contemporary literature unless she had been to the US and longed for Japanese literature to confirm her identity. Absorbed in a different culture, she could realize the beauty of Japanese novels, which most of ordinary Japanese people today do not appreciate.

In the era of immense transition, people who can think outside of the frame of the established social value will lead the society. Society will naturally need people who went through multicultural

life. For 'Pure Japanese,' who happened to be born in a peaceful country where they can avoid interacting with people with a different background, it will be more and more difficult to become a leader of society. As one 'Pure Japanese' myself, I sometimes want to complain about this disparity of opportunity, but all I can do is to put myself in a challenging environment where I face variance of value on my own.

The cover of Mizumura Minae's *Private Novel* from left to right. Photo by author.



Let's Talk about Politics: Is Initiating Political Conversations a 'no-go' in Japan?

By Maja Liechti

Different experiences show that it is not within the range of a newspaper article to make generalized conclusions about the willingness of Japanese citizens to talk about politics. In fact, it would require a whole set of academic sociological research. However, this article shall reflect my experiences as a foreigner from a country where politics is discussed on an almost daily basis.

Being someone with a strong interest in politics, who likes to initiate conversations about politics and to ask questions, I have come across awkward situations with Japanese nationals when trying to initiate a conversation about politics.

For example, one time when I was strolling around Shibuya, I was asked by a stranger what interest regarding Japan made me come here. Considering his surprised reaction to my answer, followed by apathy and disinterest, I assume that he must have expected an answer like 'culture' or 'anime'. And you can guess what my answer was: 'Politics'.

In fact, this has not been the first time that bringing up politics has brought my Japanese conversation partner in distress. When I guided a Japanese tourist (around my age) around in Switzerland, I received a similar reaction when I inquired about what he thought of some of the LDP's policies.

Learning more about Japanese culture, I eventually realized that asking these kind of questions might seem insensitive or sometimes even disrespectful to make the other 'reveal' one's own political position (if it is not apathy). However, this was a new perspective to learn, since in Switzerland, discussing politics is part of mature and intellectual conversations as well as casual

conversations, aimed at sharing information and views. Difference in views are accepted and do only in extreme cases affect the relationship between individuals.

In Japan however, talking about politics seems to necessarily include one's personal affiliation with a party. In an interview I conducted I was told that politics is discussed when it affects the daily life. However, it is only discussed about with people one either knows well or who have similar political positions to oneself. If one knows that the other person has other values, one does not talk, as for example Yoshiko* says 'I am afraid of conflict because I may make the other person angry or offend him/her'.

In fact, most of my friends I met before coming to the University of Tokyo seemed reluctant about engaging in political conversations, dodging questions and changing topics. Maybe because they did not know me as well or because just in general, they were not interested in politics that did not affect them? At the University of Tokyo however, I have encountered people with strong opinions about certain policies of the government, mainly regarding Article 9 and nuclear policies. Hence, the appetite for such conversation might vary depending on the setting and context.

When I asked my circle friends including students from other Universities, I was told that 'politics is not being talked about in daily conversations, since it might lead to conflict or offend the other person, or even harm one's relationship with the person'. The only place where politics is discussed is mainly in a classroom setting or within the family. But where does that come from?

The close tie between private life and one's politi-

Discussing politics with your friends while attending the University of Tokyo May Festival? Probably not. Photo by author.



cal stance might come from the traditional *kouenkai* system. *Kouenkai* are local support groups affiliated with a respective politician. In the past, politicians who wanted to be elected into the national parliament fostered group activities within their own constituent support group to gain popularity and assure that they are being voted for. As a result, a close group affiliation and personal relation to a party, the rest of the supporter group members and the respective politician was built. As a result, there is a personal and emotional affiliation with a certain party or politician. Therefore, coming out as a member of the rival's supporter group member might turn out to be harmful for the relationship between these individual – since there is a direct emotional association with the other's political position. Or at least, that used to be the case. Now the *kouenkai* system is not existent as such any more after electoral reforms in the 90s. However, the practices and group affiliation might have prevailed.

In conclusion it can therefore be said that it is not the lack of free speech or its suppression in Japan which makes individuals reluctant to discuss politics. Rather, taking politics as a personal matter might be a legacy of the *kouenkai* system. The 'anxiety' about conflicting opinions might also be part of the will for harmony maintenance. It would be otherwise too unfortunate if a personal relationship is affected due to different political views.

#MeToo Movement in Japan

By SoHee Park

On October 2017, when American actress Alyssa Milano used the hashtag #MeToo to show support for her friend who had been sexually harassed, the social movement on gender went

viral. Spreading from the entertainment scene to politics and national to a global scale, the #MeToo movement is gaining greater support from more countries worldwide and from more women. In the wake of the worldwide exposé, female journalists and reporters in Japan also spoke out and broke the silence.

When *Shukan Shincho*, a Japanese weekly news magazine, reported that Japan's Administrative Vice Finance Minister Fukuda Junichi had allegedly sexually harassed female reporters, the #MeToo movement gained attention in Japan. Fukuda denied the allegation, claiming, "I don't recognise that I made sexually harassing remarks that would make female reporters feel offended." The government officials also belittled the scandal and responded to the matter as a trivial matter. Senior ministry official Koji Yano questioned whether the incident actually took place on the first place, making a remark that denounced and

caused a secondary pain to the victim who had taken the courage to speak up.

The Japanese public also showed a mixed response. While there were supporters, many people were apathetic and even critical of the women who stood up for a topic considered too taboo to be discussed in public. Astrayed from a stereotypical victim who remains silent, the victims suffer from an unexpected backlash.

Although the #MeToo movement is gradually spreading in Japan, it is lagging behind other nations. To explain the speed in which the movement grows in Japan, the *Japan Times* call it "the quiet movement" blaming the Japanese government on not taking any actions in the national scale that can draw people's attention for a change. A second-year female UTokyo student mentioned that she had seen Fukuda's case on the news but was unaware of the #MeToo move-

Discussing Hate Speech

By Yisac Park

“Koreans go home!”

A Korean BJ (Internet streamer) called “BJ Min-seong” travelling Japan was live-streaming on YouTube while waiting for the train at Osaka on October 2017. Suddenly a man passing by started insulting him. At first, the BJ tried to ignore him, but the Japanese man continued. This was not the only time he experienced unpleasant experiences. When he visited one of the Izakaya

(casual Japanese pub), just by entering the store, the owner kicked him out saying “Fxxking Korean go out!” Likewise, in 2016 at Osaka, a Japanese man attacked a Korean family without any reason, hurting a 13-year-old boy. As a Korean myself, sometimes I fear being a Korean in Japan.

These are examples of hate speech. Hate speech is public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation according to the Cambridge Dictionary. Hate speech is not just the speech itself; nonverbal depictions, photos, video, and symbols are also included. In Japan, one of the target groups is Japan’s Korean minority population (Zainichi Koreans), or Korean residents. Before coming to Japan, I had never heard about hate speech.

Many Koreans visit Japan every year. Particularly, Osaka is popular among Koreans. However, when planning to visit Japan, recently lots of people stop and wonder, “Is it safe to visit Japan?”, “What if a hate crime happens to us?” Every day the question arises more and more. How has it come to this?

In 2006, Ichiba Zushi, a Japanese sushi chain restaurant in Osaka, served inedible amounts of wasabi in food to foreigners according to *The Korea Times*. This “Wasabi terrorism” continued for two years. Furthermore, a Japanese ticket ven-

dor wrote “Kim chon” on Korean customer’s bus ticket. “Chon” stands for “chosenjin”, which is a highly offensive way to call Koreans.

“The Act on the Promotion of Efforts to Eliminate Unfair Discriminatory Speech and Behavior against Persons Originating from Outside Japan” or Anti-Hate Speech Law was enacted by the National Diet and put into effect on Friday, June 3, 2016 according to The Ministry of Justice. This act states unfair discriminatory speech and behavior should be eliminated. According to this law, the act of hate speech is “to be eliminate” and “will not be tolerated”. Nonetheless, the act has no power to criminally penalize such behavior. This leads us to believe that hate speech is not completely forbidden by law. In addition, the measures to eliminate hate speech are described as “responding adequately” or “giving necessary advice”, rather than “prohibited”. Overall, it concentrates more on prevention such as awareness-raising activities than punishment.

A group known as “Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi” (Zaitoku-kai for short) is responsible for most of the hate crimes of this nature. Zaitoku-kai believe that Koreans have “privileges” or “merits” simply by being part of Japanese society. However, Kenichiro Ito (2014) described that this is not true. As for the economic support by government, it does not exist. Furthermore, he noted that Zaitoku-kai desire disorder and are likely to think themselves as a “chosen minority” who know “the truth”, that is the “Korean privilege”.

In a globalized era, any kind of discrimination cannot be tolerated. Ultimately, for a better future, it is important to build peace. Albert Einstein once said, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”



“Stop! Hate Speech” poster. Image from The Ministry of Justice website.

ment. As such, the movement does not even get a lot of coverage from the Japanese press, stopping people from learning what is actually happening.

Feeling helpless with no support from the government and the public, the victims of sexual harassment and assault decide to remain silent. Such circumstances aggravate the “quiet movement” to persist. According to Global Journalist, Nobuko Kobayashi, a partner in the Tokyo office of consulting firm A.T. Kearney, explains this phenomenon of concealment to be part of the “[Japanese] culture of shame” in which people do not come out to make accusations that makes the victim herself and her family to feel ashamed of breaking the social harmony with a taboo topic. Japanese people place great importance on maintaining social harmony. Therefore, for the Japanese society, to see a victim of sexual harassment and assault being vocal of such

taboo topic is considered an act that causes social chaos and be looked down on.

Ironically enough, the Japanese media portrays a different manner in which the topic of sex is consumed in Japan. The size of the porn industry and the frequency of encountering TV shows with provocative topics and scenes indicate how much sex-related topics are normally consumed in Japan. Therefore, the duality in the way how sex is considered taboo but prevalent in the public space adds question to the way how an exposé of a sexual abuse is treated in the “[Japanese] culture of shame.”

To explain the slow progression of the #MeToo movement in Japan, Makoto Watanabe, an associate professor of communications and media at Hokkaido Bunkyo University, points to the male-centeredness of the Japanese society in her interview with media company Deutsche

Welle. She argues the need for a change in male-dominated politics and media that creates an environment for women to feel suppressed and helpless. One second-year male student in UTo-kyo also agreed with Prof. Watanabe, describing Japan as a “slow society” that does not change quickly as a conservative nation that values tradition.

For women who have been continuously suppressed, the #MeToo movement is revolutionary in its aspect. In early May, 300 people gathered to protest against sexual harassment and the social atmosphere that force silence. The movement that burst opened with the accumulation of oppression and discrimination is likely to continue. Japan is finally entering the moment and the movement will hopefully provide Japan the opportunity to improve the deeply entrenched suppression of women. As Frederick Douglass says, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

Homelessness in Japan

By Maja Liechti

Tourists who visit Tokyo for the first time might not be aware of the meaning of the cardboard boxes and used-up luggage trolleys they might encounter in the corners of Tokyo. In fact, these cardboard boxes are not just a pile of garbage, but serve as shelter from the cold for those who cannot afford a roof over their head: the homeless. Hence, don't be surprised when you see the inside of the box moving or hear someone coughing behind a used-up trolley. What brought these people onto the street? I investigated by conducting some research and joining the volunteer group *Tokyo Spring Patrol* on one of their volunteering rounds. However, let's look at the facts first.

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare counted 25,296 homeless in Japan in 2003, of which 95% were elderly men with the average age of 57 years. Even though

the number of homeless has fallen to 13,124 in 2010 and even further to 7,508 in 2014, some of the issues causing the problem still prevail. According to the newspaper *Japan Today*, the numbers can be explained as the burst of the bubble economy in the early 90s, which caused many male workers to lose their jobs and end up on the street. Sulejman Brick, the main organizer of the volunteer group for homeless *Tokyo Spring Patrol*, says that there are also cases of people who eventually got dismissed from work because they were unable to continue working after a major illness. 'Many of the people here are left by the government and survive through the collection and selling of recyclable cans and voluntary food distributions by people like us or our Japanese counterpart *Soup no Kai*'.

Sadly, when I joined Tokyo Spring Patrol I had the impression that no one apart from the volunteers

really cares about the homeless. We left for our patrol at night and went to Ueno Park, and the number of people having to sleep on the ground or benches was shocking, as usually there is no trace of their presence during the daytime. So what do locals think of their homeless? According to a patrol member, most people 'don't want to have a connection to them, don't know they exist, or are just occupied with their own lives'. However, I could not find out whether that statement really reflects the sentiment of the general public.

In this context it might be important to point out some of the structural reasons for homelessness as well as to recognize the government's attempts to improve the situation. First, insurances are usually provided through the worker's company to the core worker and his or her family. In addition, citizens get access to a national health insurance. However, for the reception of

Why is it difficult for some people to say no?

By Hiroshi Hashiguchi

One time in high school, a friend asked for my help with his assignment and I was unable to decline his request even though I was busy and wanted to.

In Japan, most do not refuse someone's invitations, offers or favors and often turn to say yes, being unable to say no.

It is extremely difficult to say no to the requests from friends or senior students because you feel pressured considering the relationship.

A number of the people I know expressed that they have undergone such experiences. One student said, "I was not able to turn down a dinner invite even though I wanted to." She said, "I didn't want to be considered as a cold person." Another student said, "When I was asked to take on the role of a class committee by a classmate, I was not able to say no because the classmate was a close friend." He said, "I was being considerate."

Even when people think they're disliked by others, they can sometimes be hesitant to say no. This can make them feel uncomfortable and anxious because their doing it is against their will. Let me call this a "psychological problem."

What can be done to solve this "psychological problem" then?

Here are a few tips that can help you overcome this. First, you should try to change the way you think. Do not think that you would be disliked by



When you want to say no. Photo by author.

one action which is to say no. If a friend refuses your request, would you no longer consider him or her as a friend? Of course, not. The same applies with you.

Let's think of more concrete ways to help you say "no."

- 1) Start practice by refusing with tiny matter. For example, you can refuse a grocery bag when you buy things at a supermarket.
- 2) When someone asks you to do something, you might be able to say "I cannot answer

right now" and then later you can refuse him or her by email.

- 3) Learn how you can politely decline someone's request. You can learn to say no politely. For example, instead of just saying "No, I cannot", you can say "I am sorry but I cannot because I have another plan already. But maybe next time."

Keep in mind that you can find ways to decline requests and this can relieve your stress or pressure that you might feel from being in the dilemma of being unable to say no.

both insurances, a job and a permanent address are necessary. Due to Japan's rigid 'long-term employment system', it becomes very hard or nearly impossible to find long-term employment after one has been dismissed for the first time, and hence to receive financial support by the government. But what about part-time jobs? As long as one has an address, small part-time jobs can be found. However, with the meager income from a temporary job, no one can afford an apartment for long. In addition, wife and children often leave the "male breadwinner" behind when he is no longer able to provide financial security. Ashamed to ask for help amongst relatives, eventually, the unemployed lose not only their address, insurances and job opportunities, but are completely left to themselves. For women, the situation is even harder if they end up on the street. Fortunately, the number of female homeless is relatively low, as women in Japan are of-

ten economically supported by their husbands, or seek help within the family if they are in need.

Finally, the recent decrease in the number of homeless might come from the government's implementation of a "self-reliance law" in 2005, under which national and local governments share costs to construct shelters for the homeless, so that they can find a permanent address and re-enter the labor market. However, although the law succeeded in reducing the number of rough sleepers, Japan can still not claim that it has solved its "homeless issue".

Has this article sparked your interest in volunteering for homeless in Tokyo? If so, then you can either join one of the mentioned volunteering groups or gather and distribute donations yourself, as even just sharing your sweet bread could improve someone's day for the better.



Tokyo has plenty of people in need. Photo by author.

Physically Close but Psychologically Distant: Japan and Korea

By Yeonsoo Song

There is a famous phrase in Korea: "If you make a mistake in a foreign country, say Sumimasen and pretend as if you are Japanese". Also, whenever there are international competitions such as the Olympics or the World Cup, Koreans say, "We don't care about our rankings and scores as long as they are higher than Japan's". These jokes are meant to be funny, but when we think of them, they connote the antagonism Koreans feel towards Japan.

Meanwhile, Japanese' antagonism towards Korea is often sensed as well. In October 2016, a sushi restaurant in Osaka was accused of deliberately putting more wasabi when Koreans ordered sushi. Koreans claimed that these restaurants wanted to give them pain and that they laughed at Koreans sufferings after they had taken a bite of sushi. This incident, known as the 'Wasabi Terror', triggered boycotts on traveling to Japan among Koreans. In March 2018, near a park located in Tennoji, Osaka, a Korean man was injured by a Japanese man who attacked him with a knife. The police said there is a high possibility that it was a hate crime against Koreans. Furthermore, it is known that there is a 'Kenkan' [嫌韓] (anti-Korean sentiment) section in Japanese bookstores, and some of the bestseller books are those that criticize Korea.

Though these two countries are geographically close, have hosted the 2002 World Cup together, have been actively trading with each other and have vast interaction of tourism, hatred towards each other can be found frequently. Korea and Japan share a tragic history, which is 35 years of Japanese colonial rule in Korea from 1910 to 1945. Based on this, it is not really a surprise why the two countries often show animosity towards each other. More than 75 years have passed since the colonization has ended, but anti-Korean and anti-Japanese sentiments strongly

remain in both countries up to this day.

There still are unresolved conflicts from various fields between Japan and Korea that add up to the antagonism. For example, 'Liancourt Rocks dispute' is a territorial dispute in which both Korea and Japan are claiming sovereignty over the island 'Dokdo/Takeshima'. This dispute started in 1905, and continues till this day. In Korea, there is even a song called 'Dokdo is Korean territory' and is taught to children in elementary school. Starting from a young age, Koreans are naturally enforced upon with the idea that Japan covets our territory. Additionally, the Japan-South Korea Comfort Women Deal has not met a proper negotiation. In 2015, the Japanese government transferred 1 billion yen to the Korean government, demanding for the removal of the comfort women statue in Seoul. Though Korea accepted the money, they are asking for a sincere apology and adequate reparation. Japan argues that at the moment Korea accepted money, the deal had been done. These conflicts seem to make reconciliation between the two countries nearly impossible.

However, it is not only hatred that exists between Japan and Korea. Recently, more and more Japanese are visiting and have interests in Korean culture due to the

influence of K-pop and Korean food. As a Korean student in a Japanese university, I encounter many Japanese students who approach to me and profess their interest in Korean culture. Some of them ask me to teach them Korean, and to take them to authentic Korean restaurants in Japan. Many Koreans love Japanese culture as well, especially food and anime. According to the Korean Educational Development Institute, 60.3% of high school students choose Japanese as their second foreign language. Among 317 high schools in Seoul, 85.5% of them (or 271 schools) provide Japanese courses. According to statistics released by Korea Tourism Organization, Japan has been ranked as the most visited country for straight 33 years, from 1984 to 2017. Surveys show that Koreans do not genuinely hate Japanese people and society; it is the history of colonization and Japanese government they feel uncomfortable with.



A Japanese book that criticizes Korean society. Photos by author.



A Japanese book that criticizes the characteristics of the two Koreas and Koreans.

The Olympics: Closer Than You Think

By Yeonsoo Song



Komaba Track and Field Stadium. Photo courtesy of Komaba Museum.



Yahiko Mishima, Photo provided by Wikimedia Commons.

There are around 200 countries in the world, but only five nations have the bragging rights to present themselves as hosts of the world's biggest four sporting competitions: the Summer Olympics, the Winter Olympics, the FIFA World Cup and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships. Those five countries are France, Germany, Italy, South Korea and Japan. Japan has the honor to host the upcoming 2020 Summer Olympics once again, followed by the 1964 Summer Olympics. Most Todai-sei will be unaware of the fact that The University of Tokyo (UT) has quite a close relationship with the Olympics. Before cheering on Olympians and getting into the Olympics spirit, it is definitely worthwhile to know how our school was associated to the Olympics in the past, and to predict UT's future involvements in the upcoming Olympics.

To begin with, the first Japanese Olympian was a student at the Tokyo Imperial University, which is the current UT. His name was Yahiko Mishima and he participated in the 1912 Stockholm

Summer Olympics as a track and field athlete. Though he majored in law at Tokyo Imperial University, his interests laid in sports such as baseball, judo, sumo, and was an active sports person in college. Mishima did not win any medals in the Olympics, but the fact that UT had produced the first Japanese Olympian ever is quite meaningful. Starting off with Mishima, UT sent Olympians to the 1936 Berlin Olympics and 1960 Rome Olympics from the University Rowing Club and Football Club.

During the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, UT generously lent its university athletic facilities for practices and venues for games. The Kemigawa Athletic and Sports Grounds, which are located in Chiba City, feature sports facilities such as soccer, rugby, hockey and cross-country. The grounds served as the cross-country venue for the modern pentathlon. The Komaba Track and Field Stadium, located in the Komaba Campus, is well known for continuously hosting many sports events such as the Japan Championships in Athletics, and has functioned as the practice facility for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Through these methods, the University of Tokyo has been one of the major pioneers of the nation's sports development and has been nurturing its ties with the Olympics.

In May 2016, UT established The University of Tokyo Sports Science Initiative (UTSSI), a research program dedicated to promoting sports and health sciences in order to foster a healthier Japanese society. One of UTSSI's main and urgent goals is supporting the trainings of athletes during the 2020 Olympics, with special focus on Paralympians. UTSSI will work in cooperation with the Japanese Paralympic Committee (JPC). Another connection for UT is that Masanori Aoyagi, the chairman of the Culture and Education Commission in the upcoming Olympics is a UT Emeritus Professor. Based on these facts, it is expected that UT will once again demonstrate active participation in the Summer Olympics.

UT President, Makoto Gonokami, emphasized the significance of sports during his address at the 2018 Seoul National University matriculation ceremony. Upon congratulating the success of 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, he commented, "During the PyeongChang Olympic Games, people from all over the world watched athletes' performances and shared their excitement in real time ... Sport, like scholarship, has the power to bring people together across all divisions and boundaries."

EXPLORING JAPAN

Genderless Subculture in Japan

By Taishi Nakamura

You may all be aware of the two main aspects of beauty standards: the fact that it changes with time, and that it varies across different cultures. After living in New Zealand then suddenly becoming connected to Japanese culture, I have noticed the uniquely distinct beauty standards of Japan. One of the aspects which highlighted this contrast was Japan's current and famous 'Genderless' phenomenon, which I will explore here.

First of all, what is "Genderless"? The "Genderless-kei" (ジェンダーレス系) is a type of subculture in Japan which refers to males or females (although mainly males), who cross gender boundaries. For example, men wearing makeup, incorporating feminine fashion and aiming for a pale, slim and petite body; a genderless person in this case would neither be gay nor transgender. They may be attracted to women, or may not feel any affection towards women at all. These "Genderless Boys" have been a hugely growing trend in Japan, mainly among social networking services such as Twitter and YouTube, and among the fashion industry in Japan. They have also started to be featured in numerous television programs.

For example Kondo Yohdi (こんどうようぢ) is a popular *genderless kei danshi* (genderless type boy), having more than 280,000 followers on Twitter, releasing songs, and having his own fashion brand 'Ding'. These "Genderless Danshi" are especially popular on the streets of Harajuku, where all the current and popular trends concentrate.

But these Genderless phenomena were more than just a simple trend; they highlight a deeper aspect of Japan. Firstly, they show connections with the current cultural practices in the Japanese entertainment industry. For example, according to Jennifer Robertson, Japanese studies scholar, one example would be the Onnagata (the female cast), which is used in the traditional Kabuki play, where the man dresses and acts like a woman. The opposite is also practiced in the Takarazuka play, where the females play men's roles as the Otokoyaku (male casting parts). Both are known to have a very large audience base, which comes to show there were certainly the practice of gender-

blurring. These gender-blurring practices are also famous on the streets of Japan, such as the cross-dressing clubs in Japan. This is said to be mainly frequented by middle-aged, straight salary-men, which may have links with the stress society Japan has – the businessmen have the opportunity to release their stress by crossing gender boundaries and becoming "feminine". The current genderless trend may be connected to these culturally unique phenomena.

Also, throughout history, Japan has had practices illustrating the existence and norm of gender-blurring and plural sexualities - people had the history of not necessarily living under the fixed cultural conventions of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. As illustrated by Robertson, this phenomenon was seen in Japan through the "moga" girls (short for "Modern Girl" モダンガール), who were "westernized modern girls". These people went against the traditional Japanese cultural conventions of women wearing Kimonos and transformed themselves into wearing Western-style clothing. They went against the traditional

gender norms and conservative Japanese standards set rigidly by society, and bravely dressed across these boundaries.

Just as all of these examples face, despite the fame, the Genderless culture have received backlash from society. In a blog by Toman (とまん), another famous genderless-kei, he revealed that he has people say that he is "disgusting" and "girly". In response, Toman responded that he is "doing what [I] wants to do" and that he "haven't once considered himself as a genderless-kei". The fact that these genderless boys unconsciously do and aim for what is considered "genderless" by society, and that it is so widespread and famous among society, comes to illustrate the difference in beauty standards. Could you imagine the same trend happening in your countries anytime soon?

Overall, highlighting this current Genderless phenomenon makes it possible to observe the links between history and today, and the changes in Japanese aesthetic conventions.



Twitter@yohdiworld

Beauty standards and definition of gender in Japan is quite unique compared to western standards... Are there similar trends in your country?
Image by こんどうようぢ | Twitter @yohdiworld <https://twitter.com/yohdiworld>

Hafu what?

By Lisa Buckland



In Japan the word ‘ハーフ’ (*hafu*) is loaded with connotations; no doubt a Japanese person would have a certain image in their minds. It is such a strong word that it seems to form a sense of one’s identity as a *hafu* in Japan. As a child I didn’t understand the label and thought it meant half, as in half a pint of milk, half. Growing up half-Japanese, half-British in the UK I’ve often felt this notion of ‘otherness’, particularly where I grew up in a predominantly white neighbourhood and school. Therefore, I have never encountered labels in regards to my race and ethnicity such as the notion of *hafu*. The very existence of the word is a foreign concept that I have now encountered many times since moving to Tokyo.

Hafu is a label which emerged in the 1970s and is used to describe those of mixed Japanese ethnicity. Derived from the English word ‘half’ it indicates a sense of foreignness. An earlier term

referring to half Japanese people was *ainoko* (間の子) meaning a child born of a biracial relationship. In the 1940s, the term developed into a derogatory word associated with the negative treatment of *hafu* in Japan. The word *konketsuji* (混血児) followed it in the late 1950s, meaning “child of mixed blood”. This word soon, too, became associated with discrimination and illegitimacy and gave rise to a new word, *hafu*. A central theme to all these labels is emphasis on impurity and seems to emphasise a sense of otherness and dissimilarity.

This begs the question, why are *hafu* not simply Japanese?

Hafu often experience a sense of differentiation in Japan; Alice, a *hafu* Todai student, talks about how her American side seems to dominate others’ perceptions of her, who consider her to be

foreign. Although many *hafu*s are no stranger to this sense of dissimilarity with their other nationality too, it seems this is amplified in Japan. Georgia, another *hafu* Todai student, says that although she’s called ‘*broni*’ (foreigner) in Ghana, she feels less of a distance, socially, in Ghana than with fully Japanese people in Japan. She says, ‘they don’t really make anyone feel foreign’, whilst in Japan there seems to be a clear ‘gap between foreigners and native Japanese people’. She believes that *hafu*s are treated in the same way as other foreigners and in Japan no distinction is drawn between the two groups.

Ella, a *hafu* UCL student, says that she ‘feels like much more of a foreigner and I feel very British’ in Japan, more so than feeling Japanese in the UK. She thinks this is because of her lack of language skills and cultural knowledge compared to fully Japanese people raised in Japan. This sense of distinction between natives and *hafu* seems to be a bidirectional relationship, of feeling not entirely Japanese. But the existence of such a word in Japan and the ethnic homogeneity of Japan enhances this sense of otherness; in England there exists no such concept of being *half English*, although words such as mixed-race or mixed-heritage do exist. The foreign-born population of Japan is just over 2m compared to over 7m in the UK, which has a population just over half of Japan’s 127m.

The legal aspect of being *hafu* in Japan also adds to this sense of ‘otherness’; the 1984 amendment to the Japanese Nationality Act denies the right to dual citizenship beyond the age of 22. Today 1 in 30 Japanese born have mixed parents and increasing internationalisation means that this ban of dual nationality is increasingly obsolete. Many other countries, such as Canada, Thailand and Australia, allow dual nationality, accepting that belonging to two nations and cultures does not compromise one’s loyalty to those countries.

Someone once told me I was a ‘lucky *hafu*’ as I apparently look more foreign. This is something I had never considered before and it seems that there exists a racial hierarchy within the *hafu* community. The documentary ‘*Hafu*’ (2013) highlights the varying levels of treatment of *hafu* with different ethnicities. *Hafu* with a Korean or black parent tend to have the toughest time in Japan, whilst western looking *hafu* are often idealised. Growing up, Alice said that she often felt ‘lucky’ to be a *hafu*, that her ethnicity was an asset in Japan, being considered attractive and ‘exotic’. She also points out that all the ‘celebrated *hafu*s’ she grew up with had a Caucasian/Western mix, and that the term *hafu* seems to neglect other ethnicities in the image of *hafu*.

Although there are aspects of discrimination, the *hafu* experience in Japan seems to be more one of differentiation and a sense of otherness, both inflicted by the Japanese, but also created by *hafu* themselves. With increasing globalisation and immigration in Japan, it will be interesting to see how attitudes towards *hafu*s changes and how the meaning of the term itself develops.

The Nooks and Crannies of Tokyo

By Kazuma Nakano

Shibuya, Shinjuku, and Harajuku. If you are living in, or even just visiting, Tokyo, I'm sure these places ring a bell. However, what's lesser known are the hidden gems and neighborhoods, which are equally fascinating to explore. Here are my recommendations of the top 5 best kept secrets in Tokyo.



Red Torii Gates at Nezu Shrine. Photo by Author.

1. Yanesen (Yanaka/Nezu/Sendagi)

Referred to as Yanesen by the locals, this area encompasses the three neighborhoods of Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi. Located northwest of Ueno - and very close to Hongo Campus - it is known for its old fashioned specialty stores, with many buildings having survived the Great Kanto Earthquake and the WWII Fire Bombings.

I recommend visiting Yanaka Ginza, a shopping arcade with some great Mont blancs cakes, and Nezu Shrine, an oasis of green with traditional torii gates.

Access: Nishi Nippori Station (3 min), Nezu Station (1 min)



Second-hand book store. Photo by Nick-D | Wikimedia

3. Jimbocho

Jimbocho can be found within walking distance from a number of prominent Japanese universities such as Meiji University, Hosei University and Chuo University. Known as Tokyo's bookworm, Jimbocho has one of the world's largest collection of used and cheap books, most in Japanese but some in foreign languages. Rare and unusual books, magazines, and manuscripts can be snatched for as little as 100 yen. Even if you aren't novel hunting, the retro bookstores are a sight of its own, and there are many cheap dining options catered towards university students - many offer special discounts so don't forget your university ID!

Access: Jimbocho station (1 min)



A yokocho (side alley) of Koenji. Photo by Aleister Kelman | Flickr.

4. Koenji

Koenji is a great place to visit at night if you are looking for a traditional Japanese *izakaya* experience. Located 10 minutes west from Shinjuku, it avoids the hustle and bustles of tourist hotspots and allows for a more local experience of Japanese nightlife. You will find drinks and dishes to be reasonably priced - a beer could go for as low as 100 yen. This is a fraction of the price of similar establishments in the well-known Golden Gai or Omoide Yokocho districts of Shinjuku. During the day, Koenji is also known for its hippy fashion scene and cheap thrift stores. Go grab yourself a bargain!

Access: Koenji Station (1 min)



The slope of Kagurazaka. Photo by Author.

2. Kagurazaka

Kagurazaka is located East of Shinjuku, and is famous for its French influences. During the Edo period, this area was a prominent entertainment district, with numerous restaurants and Geisha houses, some of which can still be found today. In addition, a number of French schools and speciality stores are scattered across the district, with French melodies playing along the main street. This creates a unique fusion, found nowhere else in Tokyo. Find yourself strolling the streets with a Taiyaki in one hand and a Chocolate croissant on the other.

Access: Iidabashi Station (2 min)



A banner reading Oku-Shibu on the main shopping street. Photo by author.

5. Oku-Shibu

The last place, Oku-Shibu, is located a pleasant 10 minutes walk from Komaba Campus. Oku Shibu (奥渋谷), meaning 'Inner Shibuya', was once overshadowed by the Hachiko Statue and Neon Lights of downtown Shibuya, but has recently gathered tremendous attention for its quirky cafes and trendy boutiques with a bohemian vibe. Shibuya Publishing Booksellers is a personal favourite - numerous English texts can be found and the store also publishes its original content. The Flat Whites, which actually taste like those from New Zealand (my home), petite handcrafted burgers, and Kakigori (shaved ice) are also not to be missed.

Access: Shibuya Station (15 min), Yoyogi Koen/Yoyogi Hachiman Station (5 min)

NFAJ: Traveling through Time with Movies

By Yisac Park

Have you ever seen a black-and-white movie? Do you think that black-and-white movies are old and non-accessible? If you are interested in classic movies or the history of film, you may have wondered about where to look. The National Film Archive of Japan might be the perfect place.

The National Film Archive of Japan (NFAJ) is the one and only public institution dedicated to cinema in Japan, located in Kyobashi, Tokyo. It functions as a promoter of film culture via the preservation, research and distribution of movies. The NFAJ started in 1952 as the Film Library,

as a part of the National Museum of Modern Art. In 1970, it changed its name to the National Film Center. Recently, it became independent from the National Museum of Modern Art and is established as one of Japan's six national museums of art.



NFAJ, a view from the outside. Photos by author.

The NFAJ holds a variety of exhibitions and film releases. Movies are grouped into themes, with each theme being shown for a certain period, ranging from 2 weeks to 6 months. Two to three movies are shown per day in two dedicated theatres. Examples of current themes include "Inaugurating NFAJ: Meiji Period in Films" (2018.4.24 - 9.2), "EU Film Days 2018" (2018.5.26 - 6.21).

Since the schedule is irregular it is best to check the film schedule at the homepage. Furthermore, you can watch films at a cheaper price when compared to commercial theatres.

Price*	¥520	¥310	¥100
Visitor	Adult	High school University College students Seniors over 64	Elementary Junior high school students

*Fees differ for special programs

Exhibitions are held at the 7th Floor Gallery. The permanent exhibition, "Nihon Eiga: The History of Japanese Film" guides visitors through the history of Japanese Films from the 1910s to the 1960s. Talk events that analyze and explain certain films are also scheduled throughout the year.

The NFAJ also provides a lot of different activities. The library houses books and articles related to film. You can also get copies of the materials in collection. Educational activities such as lectures and symposiums, Film class, Kodomo Eiga-kan (Kid's Cinema), World Day for Audiovisual Heritage entices repeated visits. For the further information, visit the NFAJ homepage.

At the permanent exhibition, various short films are being shown along with the descriptions of history. In one part of the exhibition, the brief history of films was introduced by an old projector. Here you can get a taste of how movie watching was back then. The most noticeable part was the noisy projector, which sounded like a construction site or machine gun fire. While it is hard to listen to the narrator, the atmosphere of old films can be experienced firsthand. Since Japanese animations are famous worldwide and I was curious about the advent and its history, my favorite part was the animation section. To make one short animation, which is about 5-minutes length, more than 10 thousand drawings are required. Even small changes must be repainted and redrawn.

At the special exhibition "Kurosawa Travels around the World: The Masterworks in Posters from the Collection of Toshifumi Makita", numerous posters of Kurosawa's movies are displayed. I heard a lot about Kurosawa's movies but had never actually watched them before. The posters mesmerized me with their vivid colors and varieties. The exhibition convinced me to watch his films.

University of Tokyo students can enter for free due to the National Museum of Art Campus Members system.

Koni Camera from the permanent exhibition.



Manpaku 2018: A Foodie's Paradise

By Lisa Buckland



A fun (and filling) way to spend a day in Tokyo. Photos by author.



The no.1 ranked dish - raw fatty beef rice bowl (牛とろ丼).



The food leader board - be sure to try some of the most popular dishes



The tender beef cutlet (牛かつ).

Summer's arrived and everyone knows what this means in Japan: *omatsuri* (お祭り) season! Where better to be than Tokyo? Tokyo is known for making a *omatsuri* for everything. From German Christmas markets to Japanese beer festivals to Aloha Festivals, Tokyo has it all. As a self-professed foodie I regularly scour TimeOut for new food festivals and restaurants in Tokyo, which led me to the *Manpaku* (まんぱく) food festival.

The 8th annual *Manpaku* festival was held from 17 May to 4 June in *Showa Kinen Park* (国営昭和記念公園) in Tachikawa, Tokyo. Although it's a little further out than Yoyogi Park food festivals for example, a 1 hour train ride from Komaba, it's definitely worth the trip and a nice get away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Unlike many other food festivals it doesn't spe-

cialise in one food type or cuisine and with 10 different sections, such as for meat and desserts, there's something for everyone. The best food festival hack I have is to go in groups; I went with three friends so we could try different foods and even then we weren't able to try everything we wanted to!

Food hack no.2: Do your research. Although all the food is most likely to be amazing, it's good to know what to look out for and try some recommended dishes. Before going, I looked up the menu on the official website and the beef cutlet (牛かつ) instantly caught my eye. Additionally, upon arrival I spotted a ranking board of the most popular dishes at the festival so you can seek out the best dishes. We made sure to eat the no.1 ranked dish, the raw fatty beef rice bowl (牛とろ丼) and the tender, sashimi-like texture was definitely worth it.

If you're a thrifty university student I'd also advise visiting during the week - most food festivals which charge entry give concessions for weekdays. My friends and I visited on a Friday on a university holiday and saved ¥300 (entry is ¥800 on weekends and ¥500 on weekdays). Also, you'll beat the crowds of the weekend. Even though it was a Friday it was already quite packed. However, *Manpaku* caters for the crowds with waiting times listed in front of every stall, like an amusement park for food lovers, telling you how long you can expect to wait for your food. Additionally, the site is designed to seat 6,000 with most seating underneath tents, shielding you from the intense summer sun.

The festival is held annually at *Showa Kinen Park* and I'll definitely be visiting *Manpaku* 2019.

Shikoku: Japan's Forgotten Island

By Kazuma Nakano

Shikoku is Japan's fourth largest island but is often left out of one's typical itinerary when visiting Japan. Each of the four prefectures, Tokushima, Ehime, Kochi and Kagawa, has much to offer, allowing one to explore a different side to Japan: a rural atmosphere where life is a little slower and warmer. With my grandfather residing in Tokushima, I have had a chance to visit Shikoku on a number of occasions. Here are some of my top recommended spots.



The Kazurabashi of Tokushima, with the river flowing beneath it. Photo by author.

Tokushima

Shikoku can be a little difficult to access, admittedly. Tokushima, however, is the perfect gateway city, located only a 2.5 hour drive on the expressway bus from Osaka. This region is famous for its beautiful natural features: particularly Uzushio and Kazurabashi. The Naruto Uzushio is a remarkable phenomena, where colliding currents have created a whirlpool in the straits between Awaji island and Shikoku. The Iya Kazurabashi, a historic rope-bound bridge on top of a large valley, was built by the fleeing Heike Clan during the 12th century so it could be cut off when needed. Tokushima is also famous for its sudachi (cross

between Japanese lime and lemon) and Awa-odori (a cultural dance festival which attracts over 1.3 million visitors every year). This is held in mid August every year, so if you're a dancer, I suggest you visit during the summer!

Ehime

Ehime, the prefecture of oranges, is located in the north-western section of Shikoku. One activity I particularly recommend is cycling the Shimanami Kaido, a 70km track starting in Imabari City (Ehime) and spanning 6 islands along the Seto Inland sea to reach Onomichi City (Hiroshima). This route has been named of the world's

most scenic cycling roads, with many power spots such as the blue waters, and the multiple temples and shrines on each of the six islands. Although I personally missed out on this activity due to bad weather, I'll definitely be back to give it a go. Besides cycling, the Dogo onsen, located in Matsuyama City, is another attraction: it is one of Japan's most oldest onsen (public bathhouse and hotspots) with ties to historic figures such as renowned author Natsume Soseki.

Kochi

Kochi is the southernmost prefecture in Shikoku. The city played an important role during the Meiji Restoration, with Sakamoto Ryoma becoming the prefecture's hero. You can check out his statue at Katsurahama Beach, a scenic sand beach with other attractions such as an aquarium and the Sakamoto Ryoma Museum. During your visit to Kochi, indulge in the many seafood dishes this coastal prefecture has to offer: Katsuo-no-tataki (lightly seared bonito) is not to be missed!

Kagawa

Kagawa is Japan's smallest prefecture. It has some of the best Udon noodles in Japan. Sanuki Udon, noodles with square shape and flat edge in *dashi* (fish broth), has been a speciality in the area since the Edo period, with each shop offering a slightly different richness of *dashi*. Besides Udon, Kagawa is also famous for its hone-tsukidori (seasoned chicken thigh cooked on the bone). Historical spots, such as Ritsurin Garden (a damiyo garden created in 1745) and Kotohira-gu Shrine (one of Japan's most famous shrine, with an astonishing 1,368 step staircase to reach the top), should also not to be missed.

Here was my little introduction to each of the four prefectures. Why not for your next trip, avoid the typical tourist destinations, and travel around the beautiful island of Shikoku?

Delving into the Tokyo Underground @ Shimokitazawa's Basement Bar

By Alexine Castillo Yap

If you had asked me to describe Tokyo before I started living here, I might have replied by reproducing what a cursory trawl through Google Images might spit back: images of dazzling neon lights, hectic pedestrian crossings, and charming (yet annoyingly fleeting) cherry blossoms in the spring. To the casual tourist and observer, that's all that seems necessary to know about the Japanese capital. However, anyone who has lived in Tokyo long enough knows that much of the city also involves the subterranean—of the underground spaces that, despite their tendency of staying out of sight, make up an important component to such a huge, multi-layered, bustling city.

Should Godzilla ever come to Tokyo, you can rest assured that Tokyo's indie music scene would survive relatively unscathed; much of it

takes place in the oft-painted-as-enigmatic world of the Tokyo underground. As a semi-regular (I say this since I am, as of writing this piece, still bitterly shackled to compulsory 8:30am classes) patron of 2500-yen indie rock concerts in smoky, dingy basement-level live venues, this is a reassuring thought, and one which I keep in mind every time I descend a staircase into a chaotic underground rock concert.

Shimokitazawa's Basement Bar, located a little ways off the more animated heart of the famous hip youth town, is fast becoming one of my favourite haunts in the city. Well-known for the quality indie rock acts it regularly hosts, both local and international, going there is something that any Tokyoite should experience at least once. There's something sublime about the intimacy of a bar venue when it comes to live music;

no wonder the other famous basement venue for indie rock music, UNIT in Daikanyama, also operates under a similar underground-music-bar format.

Recently, I attended an indie rock event at Basement Bar with a spectacular line-up featuring five different bands, including my favourite local indie rock band, an all-girl group called TAWINGS (who, mind you, can play some really slick post-punk/surf punk). I may have only gone to the event specifically for them, but in the process, I discovered four other bands that I'm now also beginning to play on repeat, including the headliner act, Peach Kelli Pop, another all-girl group, this time hailing from California.

Whether you're at the front row within spitting distance of the lead singer, or further away at

Reaching for the Peak is a Climb, but Well Worth It

By Sayumi Take



Mt. Fuji from the peak of Mt. Kintoki. Photo by author.

Attending a university 15 minutes away from the congested city of Shibuya can be exciting and fun day and night --- but nightmarish in the morning. Wading through the endless, rushing tide of expressionless commuters at Shibuya station for a transit, one cannot help but feel tiny and at loss for the warmth of even a smile. On such occasions, I encourage you to take a refreshing trip to the mountains, Japanese-style. Roughly 60 to 70% of Japan is covered in mountains, and there are several mountains near Tokyo that you can enjoy on a Sunday. Let me introduce you to one of them, Mt. Kintoki.

Mt. Kintoki is a 1,200 meter-high mountain between Kanagawa and Shizuoka prefecture, and is said to be named after a famous Japanese folktale character, Kintaro. From Tokyo station to the base of the mountain is a 2-hour train ride and then a 30-minute bus ride. Once you get there, check your shoelaces, secure your cap,

and off you go.

The path is steep and rocky, and there aren't many handrails or ropes you can hold onto for support. You may be gasping for breath in a matter of minutes, starting to wonder if you will ever be able to reach the top. But put those thoughts aside, and simply breathe in the green that's all around you. You can take all the time you want --- no train to jump onto, no class to run to.

The presence of other climbers is also a source of energy. Exchanging greetings with other climbers is a culture in Japanese mountains, and when people climbing opposite ways meet, they make small talk --- "Thank you for letting us through," "The peak isn't far away, so good luck!" "Be careful, the path is rather slippery down there." Even though the climbers are strangers, at these crossroads there is a special emotion that ties them all, as people aiming for the same goal.

If you start climbing around 10AM, you will probably reach the top just around noon, and have the luxury of eating lunch with a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan, and the area beyond. Mt. Fuji itself is a tourist attraction, and many foreigners challenge themselves to climb the 3776 meters - but I personally think admiring Mt. Fuji from elsewhere is even better. It allows you to really appreciate its beauty. It's not a high mountain compared to other famous mountains around the world, but it's located in the middle of a flat field, emphasizing its height and geometrically stunning shape. Eating your rice balls with the Mt. Fuji in sight, the breeze licking the exhaustion off your body, enveloped in pure happiness of succeeding at reaching the peak, is a rare treat. At the top of Mt. Kintoki, you feel free from your daily troubles. Realizing that the place you spend every day in and feel overwhelmed in is just a tiny section of the world, can sometimes make all the difference in the world.

The final and most exciting stage of the journey awaits you at the bottom of the mountain - treating your tired muscles to a long, soothing dip in the *onsen*, or hot spring. Mt. Kintoki is located near Hakone, a place popular for its many hot springs. Some *onsen* facilities allows you to take a bath for several hundred yen. Undoubtedly, you will be going back to Tokyo charged with energy and feeling ready to take on the busy city life again.

Comparing mountain climbing to life has become a cliché nowadays, but every time I climb a mountain, I always realize the truthfulness of the comparison. Whenever you feel down or face a problem you can't seem to get over, climb a mountain and remind yourself that the joy is in the climb itself.

"Life's a climb, but the view's great."

the back sipping a few drinks, there is certainly a sense of proximity between the artist and the audience which a larger, above-ground venue could not quite capture. It being underground further adds to a certain secretive 'let's keep this between us' appeal around which indie rock is so often centred. Though slightly intimidating at first, especially if you're going alone, it's also a great place to meet like-minded (like-eared?) people who have an affinity for fuzzy, distorted electric guitars (and, of course, the pretentious indie rock appeal of saying 'I bet you've never heard of this band before!').

To use an oft-quoted expression (or, let's face it, a straight-up *Transformers* reference), there is more than meets the eye in the city that is too often assumed to be completely destroyed whenever Godzilla wreaks havoc on land, and it

certainly pays to dig deeper. I'll be the first to admit that it's scary, going underground. The subway still intimidates me, and there's something about underground spaces that can inspire a creeping sense of claustrophobia (Exhibit A: the B2 floor of the University of Tokyo's Komaba Library). But if you've lived in Tokyo long enough, you'll know how important these spaces are, and especially as a fan of indie rock music, which is so intrinsically connected to the subterranean.

Peach Kelli Pop at Shimokitazawa Basement Bar, 1 May 2018. Photo by author.



Must Visit Places for Marvel Fans in Japan: Marvel Pop-Up Stores

By Yeonsoo Song



Marvel Pop-up Store at Shibuya 109. All photos by author.



The Spiderman statue from the Harajuku Pop-up store.



Marvel Pop-up Store in Shinjuku.

The fastest film in history to reach a worldwide gross of \$1 billion, first superhero film to gross over \$2 billion worldwide, and highest-grossing film of 2018. All of these fancy phrases describe Marvel Studios' film, *Avengers: Infinity War*. Based on the Marvel Comics, *Avengers: Infinity War* is a movie with a team of superheroes geared up to fight against the villain, Thanos, who wants to wipe out half of the universe. It has been 10 years since the Marvel Cinematics Universe released its first movie *Iron Man* (2008). After its huge success in *Iron Man*, the Marvel fandom has grown exponentially in the past 10 years. Nowadays, any film from Marvel Studios guarantee box-office success. The success in the ticket sales led to the birth of Marvel merchandise, which has become incredibly popular.

Starting in April of 2018, Marvel pop-up stores opened for several months in Tokyo. As a huge Marvel fan, I could not resist but visit every single one of these Marvel Pop-up stores, where all products – starting from bags, t-shirts, notebooks, pencil cases, tumblers, wallets, etc – had Marvel logos in them.

The first store I visited was in Shibuya 109, a shopping mall located in Shibuya. I could feel the popularity of Marvel in Japan, as the store was heavily crowded by Marvel fans. On the monitor in the corner of the store was the trailer for *Avengers: Infinity War*. What surprised me was

that there were many female customers as much as male customers, which proves that the 'superhero' genre is no longer a guy thing anymore. Most of the customers were men and women in their 20s, and there were a few children, imitating the trademark poses of some superheroes, and their parents watching them with a pleased smile. Products in Shibuya's pop-up store included daily necessities such as tumblers, wallets, and pencil cases to albums, pillows, and stickers.

The next pop-up store was at Toy Sapiens, Harajuku. Though it was quite a walk from the Harajuku station, the store was full of Marvel fans. Unlike the store in Shibuya, this store was mainly for taking photographs and looking around the store rather than buying products. As soon as I entered the store, a statue of the 'Hulkbuster' character greeted me. Along with the Hulkbuster, all of the main characters in the film had their own statues with their trademark poses. I could see people's eyes glittering, lining up to take a photo with their favorite characters. The adorable sizes of figures, dolls, and masks of the most popular characters were more than enough to grab the attention of Marvel fans.

My last destination was a small pop-up store in a department store in Shinjuku. Unlike the other pop-up stores, this store did not have much people, probably because of its size and it being in a department store. Most of the items they were

selling were towels and pillows, and were quite expensive compared to the previous two stores.

I had a chance to interview two people who visited the stores with me. First, Danhui Yang is a PEAK ES student who calls herself a huge Marvel fan. Her reason of visiting was first because she loves Marvel movies so much and second, it was *Infinity War* season. She loved how there were variety of products in different stores and the fact that the products are renewed each week, encouraging her to visit every weekend. She also said that many of the fans could make theories about the upcoming Marvel movies based on the design of the figures.

Minji Kim, another PEAK ES student has said that it hasn't been so long since she fell in love with Marvel, and that she doesn't know a lot about it yet. At first, she was hesitant to visit these stores because she thought it would require a lot of knowledge about Marvel. However, she claimed that even the lesser fans had things to buy and take a look in the pop-up stores and was very satisfied with her visit.

As a huge Marvel fan, there are no other words to describe this experience in the pop-up stores besides the word, 'Marvelous'. Meanwhile, Marvel Studios will be releasing new films this year from Marvel Cinematic Universe. *Captain Marvel* for this March, *Avengers: Endgame* this April, and *Spider-Man: Far from Home* this July.

The Botanical Garden of UTokyo

By Hiroshi Hashiguchi

Koishikawa Botanical Garden is one of the oldest gardens in Japan. It originated in Koishikawa Medicinal Herb Garden, which was established in 1684 by the Tokugawa Shogunate. This garden was where the modern scientific botany in Japan was born after the Meiji revolution.



Photos by Author.

Many universities have their own botanical gardens and Koishikawa botanical garden belongs to UTokyo. It is in Koishikawa, Bunkyo-ku, the same ward where Hongo campus is located.

"I like this garden because it has plenty of trees and flowers and I can experience the nature at the center of Tokyo. The size is quite large and I like it, too," says a student. It is a beautiful Japanese garden with an area of about 160,000㎡ and where 4,000 trees and flowers are grown.

A Free Ticket to the Heian Period

By Sayumi Take

Today, Japan is internationally famous for its anime and manga culture, but its classic literature is also a hidden treasure. Especially during the Heian Period, which lasted roughly from the 9th to 13th century, many distinguished classical literature were born. Here is a list of recommended Japanese classics of which the English-translated versions can be found in the library at the University of Tokyo. Flip through the pages and enjoy the free time travel as the poems and stories come back to life. Don't forget to hashtag your favorite!

●One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each

#百人一首 #Ogura-hyakunin-isshu #tanka
#LightRead

Hyakunin isshu can roughly be translated into "one hundred people, one poem each". The poems all take the form of *tanka*, a style that consists of 5 lines and 31 syllables. During the Heian Period, *tanka* was the main tool of communication between people, and people would express all kinds of emotions in *tanka*, from love and excitement to loneliness, anger and even sarcasm. Creating *tanka* was also a common pastime for aristocrats; they would have a poetry jam, or gatherings where they competed over who could come up with the best *tanka*. Because so many *tanka* were going around, renowned *kajin* (*tanka* poets), as well as emperors and political figures wanting to gain the support of the people compiled the best into a *tanka* collections. *Ogura Hyakunin isshu* is one of such collections, and probably the most famous, compiled by Fujiwara Teika, a distinguished *kajin* from the Kamakura Period (12-13th Century).

Tanka is a style of poems with numerous rules, such as having to follow the 5-7-5-7-7 tempo and needing to include at least one seasonal term. Teika's selection of 100 *tanka* created during the 7th to 13th centuries are simply outstanding in that they convey so much meaning even while they are being bound by the rules, and one cannot help but wonder how witty the ancient poets were. Moreover, the emotions woven in the 31 syllables are so vivid and strong that it seeps out from the words and into the readers' hearts.

It is not an exaggeration to say that every Japanese has read the 100 *tanka* in the *Ogura Hyakunin isshu* at one time or another. Memorizing the 100 *tanka* is common summer vacation homework for children in Japan. The 100 *tanka* are also used in a game of *karuta*, or Japanese card game, and *Ogura Hyakunin isshu karuta* tournaments are held throughout the year, with the final game being played during the New Year holidays. Go on Youtube and be prepared to be surprised at how the *karuta* plays out!

(*One hundred poets, one poem each* : a translation of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* / Peter McMillan. Available at Hongo, Komaba, Kashiwa)

●Tale of Genji

#源氏物語 #Genji-Monogatari #romance
#OldestInTheWorld #LongButWorthIt

The Tale of Genji is said to be the oldest novel in the world. There are many things unknown about it, such as who the author is or when exactly it was written, but one solid fact is that it is a superb story. It is a romance novel about Hikaru Genji, a beautiful godlike figure but with playboy qualities, and his emotional conflicts as he meets many women from all different backgrounds. There are more than 200 characters that come up in the novel, but the author succeeds in sketching every single one of them in his/her own light with such reality that readers come under the illusion that they know and have met the characters somehow. As it is impossible to keep track of who's who, a character map will come in handy while reading.

(*The tale of Genji* / Murasaki Shikibu ; translated by Dennis Washburn, available at Hongo. Or *The tale of Genji* / Murasaki Shikibu ; translated from the Japanese by Edward G. Seidensticker, available at Hongo and Komaba. Note: Many translations have been published, with Washburn's being published most recently in 2015. Seidensticker's is said to be relatively simple and easy to read.)



Just a few of my especially favorite Hyakunin isshu cards (used in karuta) Photo by author.

●Tales of Times Now Past

#今昔物語 #Konjyaku-Monogatari #folktales
#ShortButThoughtful

The largest collection of Japanese folktales, *Tales of Times Now Past* contains over 1000 short stories, many of which reflect Buddhist attitudes towards life. The title comes from the opening phrase of every story, which is similar to "Once upon a time...." Various characters appear in the story, from aristocrats, samurai, farmers and priests, to animals and monsters. Famous authors in the modern period have also been influenced by the tales, one of them being Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), a graduate of the University of Tokyo.

The stories are short and light, but the messages they convey can often be intriguing. For example, one story tells of a man who is forced to choose between saving his wife's life or his son's life. What did the man do? The story ends with the man making a decision, but the reasons given for his decision is surprising and shocking. Borrow the book and find out!

(*Tales of times now past* : sixty-two stories from a medieval Japanese collection / Marian Ury, available at Komaba)



If you go to the botanical garden in April, plenty of cherry blossom trees make a perfect spot for "Ohanami", which is a Japanese style spring picnic under the cherry blossoms. You will absolutely enjoy it while talking, eating and drinking.

If you go there in fall, you will definitely see the amazing autumn foliage such as those from Japanese maple trees.

Koishikawa Botanical Garden is located in Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, about 15 minutes' walk from Myogadani station. To get to Myogadani station, take the train at Komaba-todaimae station, go to

Shibuya and change to the Ginza Line towards Akasaka-mitsuke. Change trains to Marunouchi Line at Akasaka-mitsuke Station and the train will take you to Myogadani station. UTokyo students can enter for free while others are required to pay an admission fee of 400 yen.

You can enjoy the garden in different seasons and this place is worthy of visiting more than once! Invite your friends or classmates and have fun! Don't forget to check the website for more details before going there.

<http://www.bg.s.u-tokyo.ac.jp/koishikawa/eng/>



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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.

Over the years, scores of students have lent their voices to reveal the dilemmas and observations of being a student in our community. We hope students will continue sharing their insights for the betterment of our community.

We look forward to hearing from readers and students who'd like to join our endeavor.

KOMABAtimes

Issue 8 Publication date : April 2019

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Supported by Globalization Office and PEAK Program, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo

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