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# KOMABA *times*

*Image by Mudi Wang.*

## UNIVERSITY LIFE

### The Good, the Bad, and PEAK: How I Discovered the Secret to University Life Through Movie Magic

**By: Paul Namkoong**

**There wasn't a single moment when I didn't think about it.**

Everything in my life had led up to this opportunity. I followed what I saw on TV and the news. I picked out the targets, staked them out, and planned out all of the enthralling details. It didn't come easy, to play god over whom I took and whom I spared. But I fell in love with the power it gifted me. I closed my eyes and envisioned what would slip out of their lips, the unnatural movements they would make under my gaze. Many will see, and many will learn.

Then I did it. It was even better than I expected. But the time I spent after, cutting and dicing so

that the originals became unrecognizable, was all the more appealing:

Spending 50 hours on creating a tiny, 3-minute advertisement for our fledgling PEAK program turned out to be one of the most life-changing experiences I've ever had.

Film is murder, and I am its (terrible) executioner.

I like shooting movies. I like watching them. I'll occasionally film pigeons in an empty parking lot and label it art. The moment that made me fall in love with creating movies, however, was very different from the experience I had shooting the PEAK promotion. That's not saying that I didn't

like filming it — in fact, I became even more attracted to movies because of how different the method of production was.

From the short experience I've had working on set, I remember getting hypnotized by the teamwork and organization of each individual contributor. I once saw them as nobodies, mere scrolling words upon scrolling words in an endless stream of movie credits. But when I saw the key grip coordinate with the cinematographer, who waved him off while stealing yogurt from the lactose-intolerant director's chair, who had to rush to the bathroom after an intern gave her yogurt (out of all the foods to give to a lactose-intolerant person), I couldn't help but fall in love.

The "magic of cinema", or any other term you want to assign it, came to me not on the screen, but from what lay just behind it. You never for a second consider or appreciate the hundreds of people who collaborate in unison to make the moving art that you consume; it's almost as beautiful as the finished product.

So when I was asked to make this promotion, I panicked. How could someone who likes movies for their invisible teamwork possibly make a likable movie with an invisible team? I had doubts about both the PEAK ad and PEAK itself. However, this process of drafting, interviewing, filming, and editing, as I'd learn, flipped my entire outlook on school and how to seize opportunities.

When I first started mapping out whom to shoot for the production, I thought I would lack content.

I planned to feature two students in our class and showcase their hobbies and dreams. The usual university promotion. I only kept the main club activities in mind when I looked over my list of friends to choose from. *Oh, she does tea ceremonies? Super traditional and flashy. He plays Amer-*

*continued on next page*

*Image by author.*



ican football? That's the last thing you'd think of when you think of Japan... Great! I wanted to paint a picture of PEAK that, frankly, didn't feature a lot of PEAK.

I was worried that the people I covered wouldn't make for enough entertaining clips to fill the timeline, and that I had to insert copious amounts of horrible narration to fill the gaps.

Getting to know the subjects better, on the other hand, helped me to see these doubts in a different light. It started from the interviews: *why'd you come to this school? What does your average day look like? What do you hope to achieve here?*

The questions might've been basic, but the answers were anything but. Following them around raucous meetings for the most esoteric of clubs, football games attended by middle-aged Japanese *obaasans* who didn't know the rules, and packed river-lantern festivals with evil lanterns that sprinted downstream and away from us, helped me to understand how liberating PEAK actually was. My worries quickly shifted to cutting down months of video into a final draft that ran for less than four minutes.

Like my misunderstanding of people on film sets, I was equally mistaken about university life. Maybe my anger came from some cognitive dissonance between this program and my American college fantasies, with their dreamy lecture halls and jungles of student clubs.

Producing the PEAK video helped me to break my assumption that PEAK limited my chances, when it was the complete opposite that was true. The opportunity that I managed to carve out made me realize the hidden boon of a program as young as ours: if you're missing something, go and make it yourself. An outlet to make movies? A student publication? Some class hoodies? It's all out there for you to seize, and nobody else.

The great college programs are the cumulative result of continuous generations of students: they came in and built the things they desperately wanted but could not find, founded the clubs people had interest in but had no clue whom to share it with, and pushed for change and growth in institutions that may have once looked as small and rigid as ours. I'm now excited to take part in building our program from the ground up. Call it overoptimism, but as I once said, life is more exciting when the cheese doesn't have holes; you have all that unsullied space to dig and claw and search for the gold within the cheese.

So go stake out and murder your university experience. Be the first to strike cheese gold in PEAK. Hopefully, along the way, you'll find a more professional metaphor for this concept than I did. *Bon appétit.*

## Free-Style, Feminism, and Focus: in Conversation with Riho Sato, Editor-in-Chief of UmeeT

By: Alexine Castillo Yap, Riho Sato



Screenshots of the UmeeT homepage.

"I just really love listening to people's stories."

**Riho Sato**, a third-year student in the Area Studies department majoring in Chinese Politics, is the current Editor-in-Chief of UmeeT, an online web media publication organised by UTokyo students, which she joined in her freshman year. At the time of the interview, Riho had been involved with UmeeT for three years. I had the honour to hear about those years and learn from Riho's myriad inspiring, informative experiences in developing, marketing and editing a student publication.

### By Students, for Students

According to Riho, the UmeeT philosophy is "to introduce interesting topics and interesting people to UTokyo students and also to people outside of campus". Their tone is refreshingly casual and laid-back, and a quick browse through the homepage, revealing their most recent articles, shows an eclectic and exciting range of topics: from a samurai club on campus, to a digital reconstruction of *Shuri-jō* (Shuri Castle), to a card game made by *Todai* students, and even to love advice on campus.

For Riho, it is important to write about what she is interested in, and judging from UmeeT's content, it seems that her fellow writers and editors think the same way. "I like listening to the stories of people I'm interested in," Riho says. "And because I choose the interviewees, their stories are always interesting to me." The same goes for her fellow UmeeT members' writing, whose articles, she says, she also loves to read.

According to Riho, UmeeT's management team consists of only 4 or 5 members, with flexible membership to allow for members to focus on their other circles or job-hunting. Even though they do not meet too frequently (citing the logistical challenges of transport for a team made up of Komaba and Hongo students), they're backed by many UTokyo student writers who contribute consistently to the publication. And though

UmeeT is not a newspaper-style publication like the *Todai Shimbun*, they pump out articles quite frequently: about 4 or 5 times a month. Before, they even published at least once daily, back when "their focus was quantity, not quality", so as to attract more readers. They're also connected with *biscUIT* — a women's print publication distributed for free around campus — with whom they often share resources and information.

### Marketing a Nascent Student Publication

Despite being a relatively new student publication — having only begun a year before Riho entered UTokyo — it has become one of the most well-known student publications on campus, perhaps second only to the *Todai Shimbun*. In fact, Riho was involved in producing a *Humans of NY*-style tweets which kickstarted the beginning of UmeeT's popularity: they interviewed students, and their friends then retweeted their posts, thus allowing people to find out more about the publication.

Though Riho stated that the series of tweets was not *exactly* her cup of tea, she could not deny that it gave them a lot of visibility on social media, particularly on Twitter, and inevitably launched the publication in the public consciousness of UTokyo students. Since then, they have had many other popular articles, including an interview with Professor Ueno Chizuko that Riho herself conducted.

### Fighting for Feminism at UTokyo

Riho cites her interview with Professor Ueno Chizuko as one of two of her absolute favourite articles that she has ever written for UmeeT. She'd "always been interested" in writing about feminism, and particularly speaking out against the (many) sexism issues on campus, starting with the notoriously egregious male-to-female ratio<sup>1</sup>, which Professor Ueno Chizuko addressed in her (in)famous commencement speech.

The article eventually became one of UmeeT's most popular articles, and even went viral



amongst many feminist scholars whom Riho follows and deeply respects. She was amazed by the encouraging comments that they left on her article, which was a breath of fresh air from her previous experiences with sexism at UTokyo. According to Riho, sexism is the biggest problem she has encountered at university: "I really like studying, and I have a lot of friends here, even friends from high school — sexism has really been the only problem."

The biggest issue about sexism at UTokyo, to Riho, is that "you can't really talk about it, because nobody would understand." She also confesses that she initially disliked her university experience because some people in a freshman class were still using homophobic terms as jokes. However, she believes that despite all her previous distressing experiences, she was still able to write the article "because society has changed, and the university in turn has changed a little bit."

Nevertheless, she also thinks that a deliberate change of environment probably also helped: "Possibly it's also because I changed the people I was hanging out with."

"In the first year I really hated the university, and even wanted to transfer to a more international and liberal university like ICU (International Christian University) — I really hated the people around me!" She recounts, laughing. "But writing about feminism really healed [my relationship with the university], and definitely made me want to contribute to the university and its students a little bit more."

### Writing and Healing

It seems that getting involved with UmeeT, which allowed Riho to help ameliorate biases at UTokyo, was in turn helpful in improving her experience at the university. When she started discussing Professor Ueno Chizuko's speech with a UmeeT co-member, she had full trust that they "weren't going to dismiss me: my fellow UmeeT

members are really good people and very self-aware. Their reaction to the speech was way more than I expected, and in response to my article, they never said I was too sensitive."

One male UmeeT member who was present at the actual speech, and who emailed her about it, later sent her a LINE message to thank her for sharing her article. Riho was impressed that he even went as far as following up and correcting his initial text because he realised his word choice was not politically correct. She was happy that people "were also trying to be on the minorities' side", willingly aiming to raise their own awareness of the issues, and choosing to be more sensitive about women's issues at the university.

Her favourite part about writing? "I love the readers' reactions the most." Citing her other favourite article she's written, in which she interviewed the official student organisation for so-called *ronin* (entrance exam retakers) at UTokyo, Riho noted how "cool" it was that she got such positive feedback. In fact, a freshman who had retaken the UTokyo entrance exam and eventually passed even reached out to her, which, to Riho, was "heartwarming".

Student feedback to her article with Professor Ueno Chizuko was equally encouraging: "The happiest thing was when some of my female friends gave their reactions." She says that one of her friends even cried when she was reading the article. "They told me they were encouraged by it."

Finally, to her, the whole process is therapeutic. "Being able to put what I've been feeling for years into words is healing, but to know that people were on my side, and to get support from people close to me, was even more healing."

### Free-style, but focused

Despite UmeeT's casual style and free choice of topics, Riho emphasised the importance of having a goal and structure prior to conducting an interview or writing an article. "You have to clarify your philosophy because you always need a guideline for yourself when writing," she stressed. "As for interviews, they're the most important part — but also the most difficult. Writing itself is not as difficult, but interviews are the most difficult part of the process."

She adds, "With your interviewee, you need to develop a reliable relationship to try to get as much information as possible. It's not just a conversation — you should try to build a friendship," as well as exercising "basic human relationship skills: you don't just talk about yourself." What's extremely important, she says, is "to show yourself as the person who's interested in the interviewee." But in order to get there, she emphasises the importance of having a goal in mind. "It feels safer to have a structure."

"Also, you've got to be smart — you've got to dig in, build up your logic."

**The Trials and Tribulations of Trimming**  
Riho is really fond of her fellow UmeeT team members, and when asked about any challenges she has faced when running an online student publication like theirs, she said she couldn't find any. "It's not really a busy job," she says. "Also, a lot of *Todai* students bring their ideas to UmeeT, and especially before Komaba-sa!" (the annual student festival held around late November every year at Komaba campus). What she does find troublesome — as any writer would — is editing.

"I've been writing articles for over 3 years now, and I still run into this problem," she says, lamenting how she sometimes "loses direction" when writing. She especially laments having had to cut down certain parts of her interview with Professor Ueno Chizuko, since she had to meet the word count. Ultimately, however, it helps with clarifying the direction of her article. "Lots of topics come out when interviewing, and the article itself, which was in Japanese, had to be within a 10,000-character limit, but the memo from the interview was 20,000 characters!" She exclaims. "Interviewing is fun, but picking out the important statements is always hard."

Despite that, Riho seems to enjoy the challenge. "I elaborate on the give-and-take aspect of interviewing. I try to say as much as I can to dig out what the interviewee wants to say, and what I want the readers to understand," she says, highlighting the importance of the interviewer's role in mediating between the reader and the interviewee.

"You've got to establish a personal relationship between yourself, your reader, and your interviewee."

### The Importance of Collaboration

Riho says that she intends to focus more on her graduation thesis and job-hunting soon, and is beginning to let the newer, younger students take the rein of the publication. As for changing UmeeT's format, she thinks that its current form as an online media platform is powerful: "I've seen what online articles can do," she says, citing the success of their viral articles. However, she hopes that UmeeT can collaborate with other student-run publications, like *biscUIT*, more intimately.

"Female students especially should help each other, considering how we're such a small community in Japan and in UTokyo. We don't yet have a reliable platform to talk about our own experiences as female students and thoughts on them and the specific situation at UTokyo. I want to leave such a place for current and future students here."

<sup>1</sup> recent statistics from UTokyo indicate that amongst undergraduates, there are 11, 290 males enrolled compared to 2, 734 females, thus making for a 4:1 ratio. Source: "Enrolment", in *About UTokyo*, University of Tokyo <https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/about/enrollment.html>

## How I Went From JLPT N5 to N1 in Under a Year: 5 College-Friendly Tips

By: Jay Ha



Image by author.

When I first came to Japan last September, I could barely write *hiragana*<sup>1</sup> and could not even read *katakana*<sup>2</sup>. After a year and 2 months living in Tokyo, I now take classes conducted in Japanese and fortunately passed my JLPT N1 exam. Here are some free, actually-helpful methods I used to learn the Japanese language over the past year:

### 1. Join a circle or *bukatsu*<sup>3</sup> (extra-curricular activities)

What helped me a lot with my Japanese were the extra-curricular clubs that I joined at the beginning of 2019. As a PEAK student, I was always around people who could speak English, but what I needed to do was step away from the language entirely. I joined two groups – the UTokyo orchestra and a student-led cultural exchange

group called “FICS”. I had a common interest in classical music and instruments with the people I met in orchestra, while the members of FICS were willing to make a Korean friend. Spending over 10 hours a week with Japanese friends obviously played a significant role in terms of language improvement, and these experiences allowed me to pick up several expressions that I couldn’t learn from classes and textbooks.

### 2. Watch Japanese TV shows and movies; Listen to J-pop

To improve my listening skills, I started by watching any Japanese movies I could find on Netflix with Korean or English subtitles. When I liked a certain movie, I watched it again with Japanese subtitles, and if I liked it a lot, I would watch it again with no subtitles. I could understand the storyline as I watched it before, which allowed me to concentrate more on the actors’ use of language. While watching a lot of TV series and movies, I started to like certain actors and directors, and, thus, I ended up watching more and more. One of my favourite Japanese actors is called Masaki Suda, who is also a popular J-pop singer. I started listening to his songs while studying the lyrics; I learnt some poetic expressions and the differences between written and spoken language while enjoying Japanese pop culture. Trying to simultaneously read through the lyrics while listening to the song hastened my reading speed, too.

This is a great way to learn the language as you can really enjoy the learning process.

### 3. Take classes taught in Japanese

When you realise that you are good enough to carry out a daily conversation in Japanese, try joining some classes targeted for the April-entry students. I started out by taking a course, “Design Thinking”, taught by a British professor. The course was conducted basically in English, but most of the students there were Japanese, so it gave me a chance to get to know more Japanese students. When it was not about the class, we talked in Japanese, and after seeing myself being able to understand most of the conversation, I gained more confidence in the language and was further motivated to continue to study it.

This term, I decided to take two domestic students’ courses – one about fine arts and one on filmmaking. Both are conducted in Japanese, but for the fine arts course, I am allowed to write my final essay in English, whereas the filmmaking course is a thematic, pass-fail course. Thus, I decided to take them, knowing that the language barrier would not affect my grades. I’m currently having a lot of fun in those courses and I am thinking about taking even more.

### 4. Twitter

The social media platform that UTokyo students

use the most is Twitter. I started using Twitter when I joined the extracurricular activities to get closer to the people I met in the clubs. I can assure you that a number of April-entry students in Today tweet a lot. Their tweets are mostly light daily talks of one or two lines, so there is zero pressure trying to read them. If it comes to JLPT readings or class readings, they are long, with lots of difficult *kanji*<sup>4</sup> and complicated grammar compositions. Twitter was a good way to start to enjoy reading in Japanese. Furthermore, I could learn the language – outside of textbooks – used by college students in their daily lives through their tweets, and also learn the latest school gossip and drama.

### 5. Go to school (outside of school)

Before coming to university, I used to go to cram school a lot, utilizing the holidays to get better grades at school. And I thought, why not apply this to learning Japanese? When you don’t use the language, you forget it. And I definitely didn’t want that to happen. Thus, I registered to a Japanese language school in Korea for a month, which made my language skills improve a lot as a result. While I also have to focus on other courses during the semester, I could focus solely on learning the language during the holidays. I could come back to school next term with improved Japanese, which also allowed me to take more domestic students’ courses and to communicate better with my Japanese friends in my *bukatsu*.

These are the five tips that I can give if you want to catch the language quickly. I started off by watching movies with subtitles, reading short tweets online, and taking English-conducted courses with Japanese students, step by step, I challenged myself while trying not to give myself huge pressure – by watching the same movie, starting to write short sentences on my own Twitter account, and taking Japanese-conducted courses which allowed for assessments in English. Surely, the learning methods vary for every single individual, but what I considered important was to enjoy and not to stress out too much on learning the language.

<sup>1</sup> One of the Japanese syllabaries or *kana* meaning “simple syllabary”. Usually used for native Japanese words.

<sup>2</sup> One of the Japanese syllabaries or *kana* meaning “fragmentary syllabary”. Usually used for foreign loan words, emphasis, and other purposes.

<sup>3</sup> Intensive clubs on campus, which usually demand more regular and consistent commitment or attendance, as compared to circles, which tend to be less demanding regarding attendance.

<sup>4</sup> The system of adopted Chinese characters used in the Japanese language, meaning “Han characters”.

## The Annual “Miss” & “Mr.” Contest Is Sexist and It Needs to Go. Here’s Why.

By: Yuka

“Miss” & “Mr.” contests are not unusual sights on campus festivals in Japan. Currently, around 80 organisations from different universities that hold “Miss” & “Mr.” contests are registered to “Miss Colle”, a website that allows quick online

voting to choose Misses and Misters for each campus. UTokyo is not an exception, and it has been held almost every year since 1997. This year, as a freshman at this university, I decided to start a protest against this event, critiquing

how it enforces and even praises existing gender norms. Below is the English version of what I wrote on the statement that I handed out during Komaba-sai 2019.

Why is the “Miss” & “Mr.” Contest held every year? Is it because it’s fun for everyone? At least we don’t find the contest amusing at all. The contest bases itself innocently on the norms that restrain and abuse us on a daily basis, aiming to decide who fits “norms” the best.

“Women (meaning people who are treated as women)”, are evaluated by a standard of how “beautiful” they are on a daily basis. We often hear remarks like “who is cute” and “who is ugly”, and constantly encounter messages that order women to “be aware of their appearance”. This applies not only to appearance but to behaviour as well. Messages such as “be humble”, “be naive”

and so on. And when women argue against it, they will be oppressed by narratives like “don’t say silly stuff” or criticized for being “emotional”.

“Miss” and “Mr.” contests are a representation of the oppressions existing today. Finalists are judged based on their appearance throughout the process. Furthermore, meeting the wishes of the audience, who also contribute to the reproduction of the norms, is a big factor for the result of the vote. The norms that Miss and Mr. contests compel to people do not solely affect “women”. That this event is split into two contests, “Miss” and “Mr.”, is based on the short-sighted understanding that it is possible to classify every individual into two categories. When the result of the contest is announced, the

finalists of “Miss” and “Mr.” contests go on the stage as a “pair”, with the triumphant “Miss” wearing a wedding dress. This also sends the message that we are expected to be heterosexual, wanting to get married.

The reason why we focus especially on this event and the “gender norms” it enforces is because these gender norms have been created as a result of a huge asymmetry within society. The “majority”, who command more social power, has decided, in their favour, about the way in which the “minority” has to behave. We hope to stop “Miss” & “Mr.” contests from being held, and to break down the norms that the contest bases itself on.

The paragraphs might give you the impression that I am a hardcore feminist who has been against sexism ever since I can remember. However, that is not the case. I was not interested in feminism, or worse, an anti-feminist until I entered

university. Spending my adolescent time abroad at international schools where sexual harassment was not in any way accepted, I was protected, and was unable to understand why feminism was even needed. As far as I remember, no one

expected me to perform less, no-one valued my opinion less, and no one objectified me based on my gender. At the same time, I was a sexist myself, somehow believing that my happiness entirely depended on whether I could get married

or not, or who I was going to get married to.

However, when I came back to Japan and entered Keio University, this naive perception of the world collapsed completely. Sexual harassment suddenly became an everyday reality, and I was expected to play the role of a “freshman girl” who would praise whatever older male students said. Thanks to the repeated debate on sexism that I had heard in high school, which I managed to ignore at that time, I realised that what I was facing was sexism, and soon learned how to use feminist language to fight against it.

After a year of *Kamen-Ronin* (studying for the university entrance exam even though you already belong to one), I entered the University of Tokyo knowing I was a feminist. To my eyes, the situation here was even worse than the one at Keio University. I was speechless looking at classrooms full of male students and professors, despite knowing the gender ratio before entering the university. Many of the students graduated from boys’ schools and seem to have an idealistic and unrealistic image of “cute girls”, which I did not at all fit. When I faced sexual harassment during *Ori-Gasshuku*, an unofficial orientation camp in which freshmen are expected to participate, no one was there to stand with me. Instead, I got cold stares from my classmates for fighting back, and was immediately labelled as a

“girl who gets angry over nothing”.

What is missing from this university, in my opinion, is a shared perspective to criticise gender norms and oppression. A moment to think about the meaning of enforcing “what seems normal” on other people. Of course, there are many people fighting against this culture, but their voices are not heard.

Let’s face it. This university has a culture that is predominantly male, cisgender and heterosexual. People who are not male, cisgender or heterosexual are ignored, judged, and despised. As a member of this society, we need to rethink the ways in which we can create a space that is

comfortable for everyone. And that is why I have, and continuously will, criticise the “Miss” & “Mr.” contest at this university.

Image credit: geralt [Pixabay]



## Against All Odds: An Oral History of PEAK's Komaba-Sai

A roundtable talk by Ricky Negishi, Minghao Xu, and Eriko Yamada in 2019.



Images by Eriko Yamada.

## The students:

**Ricky:** Third year ES<sup>1</sup> student. In charge of the PEAK<sup>2</sup> booth for Komaba-sai<sup>3</sup> in the year of 2018.

**Eriko:** Second year JEA<sup>4</sup> student. In charge of PEAK booth in the year of 2019.

**Minghao:** Second year JEA student. Worked alongside Eriko for PEAK booth in the year of 2019.

## The talk:

**M:** Why tornado potato last year?

**R:** There were a lot of restrictions on the food items. For example, you can't use dairy products or cut ingredients at the booth due to health concerns. Out of all the options, tornado potato seemed to work best as a base to add flavors from different countries. In the end, we had eight. I think this year's *youtiao* (Chinese churros) is also similar since you can customize it with other toppings.

Last year I was trying to have fun and get the PEAK community to get out and about. So, a lot of people did come to our booth. I hope people, both within and outside the university, got to know a little more about PEAK. I know this year you guys had PEAK quizzes, right? How did that go?

**E:** I think the questions served the purpose of letting people know more about PEAK. I think people also enjoyed answering them and it added some fun to the ordering process. Plus, you get a discount if you answered correctly.



Tornado potato

## PEAK QUESTION EXAMPLE:

Which of the following is NOT a student club or organization founded by PEAK students?

- A) Bi
- B) D. P. Theater at Komaba
- C) Komaba Times
- D) All of the above are founded by PEAK students.

**R:** Last year, we did encounter some problems. One is that I had zero funds to begin with. And so, we held a fundraiser by selling PEAK themed T-shirts. We also simply asked for donations, which would not be possible if the PEAK community wasn't as strong as it was.

**E:** One of the most stressful things in organizing the whole thing was the expectation to earn money. I didn't realize that was our main goal. At first I just knew that we had a budget of 140,000 yen from last Komaba-sai, and not that it took so much hard work to get! So, when I was planning, I planned to the scale of the budget we had and did not plan to save any money because we wanted to advertise PEAK as much as possible, which created some problems during planning.

**M:** Nevertheless, this year, we had four flavors: Chinese Plain Flavor, Thai Syrup, Chocolate and Sugar Frosting, and Parmesan and Oregano. They are all there for a reason. The first flavor is how you would normally find it in China. In our research, we found people in Cambodia, Thailand, and many other East and Southeast Asian cultures also eat *youtiao*, hence the second flavor. We also read about scholars theorizing that *youtiao* inspired churros, so we have the third option, which is basically doing *youtiao* in the churro style. The final option is actually the most popular flavor from last year's potatoes, which we took as a "PEAK legacy."



**E:** We also intentionally tried to be more sensitive to cultural appropriation with the menu this year. We avoided using country names in our menu if no research or evidence justified such usage. We initially had country names for the last two flavors but decided to take them out because when we think about what we are trying to represent, we feel it is hard for us to attach a country to a kind of food and say, "this is it," while it might not be the case. And I guess it can be hard for customers to grasp such nuanced aspects of cultural prejudice, so we thought the best solution was to not have the country names when they are not duly deserved.

**M:** One thing we also did was to avoid making the PEAK booth too much of a "Chinese" or "Asian" one. We also wanted to be inclusive and not exclude a large chunk of the community. Thus, I came up with the idea of selling snacks handpicked by PEAK students from their home countries. I always believe that diversity works best when it is an organic process for everyone.

**E:** I do think selling the snacks is a good idea in terms of inclusivity, but one problem was that when we were advertising, many people were confused about what we were selling. We were saying that we had Chinese Churros, and then that we had snacks, and that we also had the quizzes. Sometimes it did feel like our booth had too much information.

**M:** It could've been worse! (laugh) In the very beginning, we had this idea of selling a few more fried food items alongside *youtiao*. I even messaged an upperclassman on how to make Filipi-

no Fried Banana! (laugh) However, it didn't work out for us because in the second meeting held by the Komaba-sai committee, they told us we could only sell one main food item. Sometimes the rules can be a bit confusing especially when we were not made aware of them in the very beginning.

**E:** I think there's a discrepancy between some of the rules and how they are applied. For example, on the set-up day, we waited until the time on the manual they gave us to pick up the equipment. When we got there, we found out that some booths in our group had already claimed their equipment. I guess it really depends on experience at the end of the day.

Another thing is that at first, I was trying to order a lot of things through the committee because I thought that was the thing we were supposed to do. At least the manual made it sound so. Later on, I figured out it was actually expensive through the committee, so we switched to the wholesale supermarket called Hanamasa.

**R:** Oh yeah, last year when we bought the potatoes and oil, we also opted for Hanamasa. It was just considerably cheaper and easier for us without the paperwork.

**M:** Besides the rules, I think another factor we didn't take into consideration was the rain. It just poured so relentlessly on the first two days and only stopped midway through the last day. In a weird way it felt like a sweet finisher to reward all the hard work and everyone who weathered with us all the way through.

**R:** I felt last year we got a really bad location, so I was actually surprised when you chose the same location. If I could do it again, I would choose somewhere more to the center where there is a lot more food traffic.

Regardless, I do like to think we've achieved something quite remarkable. A lot of upperclassmen have moved out of the dorm and they don't get the chance to meet many first years. By helping out and sharing the space together, people do get to bond with each other even if many are only meeting for the first time.

**E:** Going off Ricky, one thing we realized was that using Facebook or other social media platforms for advertisement is not enough. It works a lot better when we do it face-to-face. Even for people who know each other, I guess spending time together helps create bonds.

**R:** Last year, PEAK professors also came and helped at one point or another, be it buying T-shirts or stopping by and purchasing the potatoes. Professor Woodward was really heartened by the fact that we got a booth going as a group. It was quite moving that both students and faculty can and do get involved in the process.

**E:** This year, it's really funny how we just started singing naturally. There was always someone with a speaker, and there was always someone willing to sing or dance. Maybe this is a PEAK

thing since no other booths were basically silent? (laugh)

**R:** You know, things go wrong on the day. You gotta innovate and work out the kinks. I think that's the beauty of it.

**M:** And that got us sales! It also made the whole experience a lot more fun and showed the school our PEAK spirit, pun intended.

**E:** I think the message was duly delivered. And it was not only people in the university, or what we call the "Todai community," but we'd like to believe we are doing our part to connect people regardless of where they come from.

**M:** This one guy who was born in China but grew up in Japan and was working at the booth across from ours came every morning for a *youtiao* and we actually got to talk quite a lot. In the end, we exchanged contacts. I'd like to think that through Komaba-sai, I got to build relationships with people I would not be able to meet otherwise.

**R:** Since PEAK is centered at Komaba, I wanted to open a booth specifically at Komaba-sai. I think the fact that we continued the booth this year in itself is a legacy that I like to think I created, and I hope through Komaba-sai and all the events leading up to it, we can encourage interactions within and between year groups.

**E:** Speaking of legacy, I think selling fried food itself is a legacy I deliberately tried to continue. (laugh) I felt that since our *senpai* started with fried food, I didn't want to suddenly switch gears and do something entirely new. So instead, we built upon what we did before.

By the way, I do want to let whoever is going to work on the next Komaba-sai know this: the actual experience will be a lot better after the stressful preparation that does drag on. Once you meet people and have people doing this together as a group, it's much more fun. So please look forward to the actual experience. Don't lose hope because there will be people helping you.

**M:** Finally, what are you guys most proud of?

**R:** I'm actually really proud of Eriko for stepping up and continuing the booth! Komaba-sai really is a wonderful experience when all is said and done. So, I really do hope it continues and becomes a tradition for the PEAK community.

**E:** Thank you. I think I'm proud of PEAK as a community. I feel very fulfilled and grateful for everyone who came and shouldered the load together so that we got to represent our amazing community. There was one YouTuber who came to interview our booth. At the end of the interview, they said something like, "Wow! This booth can speak any language!" I was quite moved by that. In a way, it shows that we really ARE an amazing community.

**M:** For me, I'm most proud of being part of the process from the beginning through the end. You don't get to work on projects like this often. It's the people, the obstacles, the laughter, the all-nighters, the hugs, the music, the dancing, the handshakes, the heating patches, the glow sticks, the food, and ultimately the love we have for one another that made every moment something we'll treasure for life.

<sup>1</sup> ES: The Environmental Sciences program in PEAK.

<sup>2</sup> PEAK: Programs in English at Komaba. The only English collegiate programs offered at the University of Tokyo.

<sup>3</sup> UTokyo has two school festivals: The May festival at Hongo Campus and Komaba-sai at Komaba campus.

<sup>4</sup> JEA: The Japan in East Asia Program in PEAK.



## Interning at the OECD: in Conversation with Lauren S. Power, 2nd year M.A. (GSP) Student

By: Alexine Castillo Yap, Lauren S. Power

**Interview with Lauren S. Power, second year M.A. student in the Global Society Program (GSP), specializing in Advanced Social and International Studies.**

### About Lauren

Lauren's research is based on original comparative ethnographic fieldwork targeting expatriates in Singapore and Tokyo. In her first year at UTokyo, she was accepted to present her own research at 3 international academic conferences in Bangkok, Tokyo, and Rome. She has also served as a committee member for 2 other academic conferences. She will speak at the European Sociological Association Midterm Conference in April 2020.

Lauren agreed to an interview with UTokyo about her OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) internship experience in Paris. She approached us because she wants to spread the word and encourage other students to apply. Requirements to become an OECD intern include top-quality English proficiency, but the working languages are English and French.

The internship is open to people currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree program, although many interns are current graduate students. The duration of an internship is a 2-6 months and it is a full-time job. Sometimes, some overtime might be required. For an internship at an International Organization (IO), according to Lauren, it also pays relatively well!

### What was your approach as a master's student?

I did most of my coursework during my first year at UTokyo. I wanted to undertake that so that I could be ready for an internship or have time for more fieldwork in the second year. So, luckily, I did not have to take a leave of absence to do my OECD internship.

### What's your advice for balancing between academic work and a full-time internship?

Just have foresight and plan ahead! Front-load your schedule to make sure you can do what you need to do, as well as what you want to do, to graduate in good standing and on time.

### Can you tell us a little more about OECD's recruitment process?

OECD used to do only biyearly batches, but now they recruit on a rolling basis. That means that you can submit your application at any time throughout the year. It is a 4-6 month-long recruitment process with a lot of different screenings to pass. I had to apply first and answer screening questions. Then, I did a video interview and took a written test. After passing all that, I did a 45-minute panel interview over the phone with three OECD staff members in Paris.

### How did you prepare for the process?

I actually had no idea that the process was so



Images by author.

ing to be so long or complicated. Every time I passed one screening, I thought, "Ok, that's that last thing", but it turns out it wasn't! It was a little concerning to have so many screenings, but I kept telling myself that if I had another test to pass, it meant that I was still in the running. Later, I found out that's the process everyone has to go through to enter the OECD.

### What different positions are available?

Each internship is completely different and depends on where in the organization you are placed. The OECD departments, called Directorates, are subject-specific (e.g. EDU Directorate focuses on education and skills, and ENV focuses on environmental issues), so you should try to tailor your application to the research and past works associated with your target Directorate.

### Can you tell us more about the assessment?

The OECD is trying to recruit top talent, but also cares about diverse perspectives. They try to screen applicants to see if they have enough skills and experience that they can bring to the teams and projects. They value adaptability and quick learning.

When you apply, you can choose what kinds of subjects you are interested in and which fields you already have experience in. The recruiters try to build a bridge between your interests and the needs of the organization when they offer you a role. The OECD has many specialized areas or Directorates, and you should have some experience and technical competencies to be able to contribute to the areas you indicate interest in.

They also want to make sure you're the kind of person who'll fit into the culture of the OECD, which is actually super friendly and very collab-

orative. Candidates should be well-rounded and have good social skills, like teamwork or leadership experience. The OECD really values people who can work well with a team. When you apply, try to choose fields of interest that are close to your own research background or that you feel passionate about, but try to keep an open mind about what sort of work the OECD might suggest for you too.

### This seems like an amazing opportunity for international students.

Absolutely! International students have so much to offer on these metrics. To be able to move abroad, be on your own, and commit to an international program, you have to be adaptable and know how to think quickly and make connections with a new community quickly; you're already being tested on a lot of skills that organisations like the OECD desire.

More broadly, even as an international student at UTokyo, if you come from Asia, you can represent that diversity of perspective in a region primarily based on European perspectives — you can bring that voice in. It was surprising to me to be around so many people who had never been to Asia before or who had only visited on vacation once or twice.

### Tell us more about your experiences as an intern!

Maybe many people have a preconception of an "intern" as someone who just makes photocopies or serves coffee... absolutely not the case in the OECD. Interns are definitely working right alongside the full-time staff. They have important responsibilities, substantial workloads, and they are expected to bring their own knowledge and skills to the table, and leverage those in their deliverables.

I work in the Executive Directorate, and my work is 80% projects and research, and 20% administrative support. It is a good mix to have the admin support because if I had no such interaction, I might just sit at my desk doing research and not speak to anyone most of the day.

There are comprehensive internal initiatives going on right now in my division, so it was a perfect time for me to join. Data-collection on a major project had just completed, so I joined in time for data analysis and visualisation, presentations, and report-drafting on a large-scale. I was able to leverage my own experience and research background to support to the team. It is really special to be given a space in which to express your own analytical views, as an intern, especially at an organization like the OECD. It is even possible that, if you perform well and bring value to your projects, your internship might transition into a consultancy, temporary position, or an offer to become an Official within the OECD, so that you can continue your work. So, any aspiring interns should know that, if they come to work at the OECD, they can expect to learn and grow a lot!

### What led you to focus on your area of specialisation?

I was born in the U.S. and had my childhood there. I've lived abroad in London, Singapore, Japan (twice), and now Paris. I haven't lived in the U.S. for over 10 years, so I have been feeling kind of distant from that culture. I have become more connected with expatriate culture through living outside of my origin country, and my experiences have driven my research interests. In particular, I want to understand why there are such differences between the way expatriate communities interact and integrate with their host country societies and what causes these differences. I want to explore the intersection of the issues of government immigration policy, migration, recruitment and employment practices, and social structures.



The study of expatriates is connected with studying highly-skilled employees as a global supply chain of human mobility, which is why my internship and research work in the OECD's Human Resource Management Division was a great fit for me.

### Tell us a little more about what it's like to work at the OECD! Any perks of working there?

At the OECD, there are a lot of different community organisations that make it really easy to feel connected if you want to get to know your fellow workmates better. For instance, there is the Interns' Circle, which is an active group where members attend after-work drinks and lunches together. There are always so many different events and activities going on... guest speakers, wellness initiatives, a gym in-house, yoga class, pilates, cultural workshops, book clubs, and free or low-cost language classes held on-site. There is also a Staff Association with more events. Moreover, intern events happen on and off the OECD campuses regularly. The OECD holds daily conferences with world leaders and thought leaders, and as an intern you can sometimes get permission to join these! In my case, my Supervisor has been generous... she's always given me permission to join the events I want to join, as long as I submit my work on time!

Oh, and the OECD is a gorgeous place to work! It is a world-class facility with open-concert offices, relaxing break rooms, and lots of green spaces and gardens. OECD campuses have a lot of green initiatives too, so you can feel good about being environmentally friendly at work. Interns are provided with work laptops and our own desks. We have lots of support staff to help us make sure we have everything we need to be able to focus on our work outputs. I usually buy my lunches onsite and eat with colleagues at our beautiful canteen or cafeteria.

Another benefit for OECD interns is paid time off! We are entitled to 2.5 days leave for every month worked at the OECD. Also, you can opt for teleworking which, for me, has been especially helpful during of France's current strikes.

### Any reflections on the OECD experience?

It's an incredibly enriching experience for anyone, and rewarding from a personal standpoint because, in addition to getting the chance to experience another culture and see some gorgeous sights, I became very close with fellow interns and other colleagues. I have not had one day when I've had to eat lunch alone. Everyone has been really welcoming and kind.

Professionally, the benefits are huge — you get exposed to a working style and an environment that's literally world-class and at the forefront of a number of fields. Overall, it's a great experience for building real skills and professional competencies, even for those who have no intention to enter academia or continue working at an IO.

### That being said, do you have any advice for anyone hesitating to apply?

Maybe you are worried that you can't get in, or that you don't belong there. But don't let such worries stop you. If you don't apply, you certainly cannot get in. Don't put awesome opportunities like this up on a pedestal... be confident and grab them!!

### Any advice about liaising with and getting permission from UTokyo?

Anyone who has tried to apply for an internship outside of Japan will know that UTokyo's school vacations do not align with most international opportunities. We have our big holiday in February and March, with only about 6 weeks of vacation in late summer. Many summer internship opportunities want interns in June and July, so it can be tricky to find something that works with your schedule.

The OECD can be a little more flexible in its intake because of its rolling recruitment policy. Also, you should not hesitate to talk with your administrators and advisors about your wish to try a professional internship. The earlier you do, the more support they might be able to give. There are admin procedures that are required in advance that you must allow plenty of time for, and you must take responsibility for your own visa applications to France, as well as your own apartment search, etc. The OECD does provide some guidance on these things, but it is ultimately up to you. So, it is better to prepare yourself.

In my case, my UTokyo administrators, my professors, and my department were all so supportive in finding a way to allow me to remain enrolled and earn credits (so I can graduate on time), while also doing this internship for 6 months. You have a chance to be an ambassador for UTokyo in Paris and an advocate of the OECD in Japan! It is a win-win for everyone! I hope more UTokyo students will apply!

## What can I do about climate change in Tokyo? Turns out, a whole lot!

By: Amishi Agrawal



Image by Nick Breeze.

"Good morning and welcome! Today, you're going to hear from 15 speakers or organisations, and the only three things all of us have in common is that we are young, are passionate about combating climate change and are Japanese nationals or residents! While our similarities brought us together, it is our differences that make us interesting - some of us are high schoolers, others dedicated Ph.D students, some are activists and others very niche researchers or leaders of student clubs. We come from different parts of the world and of Japan, but are united in our desire to significantly contribute to the global and local effort to combat climate change!"

What you just read was the beginning of an exciting journey, one that started on the morning of 11th December, 2019 at the biggest conference for climate change — COP25 — in Madrid, Spain and one that needs **your involvement** for what is to come next. Lilian Ono and I hosted a session at the Japanese government's pavilion titled "Youth in Japan in Action" which featured 15 diverse students and youth organisations from Japan. We organised this session because our passion for climate action makes us cross paths with different kinds of activists and initiatives in Japan — all of them equally inspiring, and amazingly divergent in their approaches — and also many individuals who understand the urgency of climate change, and would join some initiative if it matched their interests and skills. We want to connect these two sides; by unifying our voices — the voices of the youth in Japan — we can achieve a lot. Our voices won't just add to each other, but will amplify our collective impact. This session was our first step in this direction.

### The stories of some of the youth organisations in Japan

**Fridays for Future Japan:** Starting with the elephant in the room, we were all surprised by what Minoru — one of the founders of FFF, Japan — had to say. FFF organises youth-led peaceful strikes in different parts of the world, and is easily the most recognisable youth organisation. But in Japan, their first strike in February 2019 attracted only 12 people. The journey since then has been slow and steady, and now they have over 2000 supporters. One clear aim of FFF Japan is to garner the attention of the public for climate change. When it comes to FFF Japan, you

could simply follow them on Facebook and join the next protest, or join the team and help design and plan what comes next!

**Spiral Club:** Although they were our first remote speakers, their video message was warm and loving — just like their community. An open community from Japan, they give people from all walks of life space to talk about the environment. They publish articles on anything and everything under the sun, such as zero waste, circular economies, and individual stories. They organise workshops, events, cooking parties, book exchanges, and would also love to organise an event around any idea that you might have. Also, they are easily the group you will have the most fun with!

**Global Alliance of Universities on Climate:** I was overcome with a strong feeling of pride when four of my co-delegates from UTokyo — Emma Saraff, Kotone Kagami, Gen Hayakawa and Jelena Aleksejeva — took the stage. They personified the idea that research must be socially engaged and introduced us to another intriguing organisation — the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate, which consists of 12 universities, including our own, from 6 continents and encourages collaboration and research among many other avenues. Emma introduced us to **Climate Action Japan** — an English language volunteer group, that aims to support grassroots climate activists and make research more accessible and Jelena works with the **National Institute for Environmental Studies** — a central research institute in Japan which also organises annual public symposiums in Kyoto and Tokyo.

**No Youth No Japan:** This group from Tokyo alone has 150,000 followers, and their goal is to connect the youth in Japan with the climate crisis. Their vision includes transitioning to renewable energy and increasing political discussions and understanding of climate change. By working with them you could significantly contribute to adding critical content to public opinion and reach a wide audience!

**Students and Clubs within UTokyo:** A number of efforts through clubs and individual students are currently underway in UTokyo. There are at least three exciting student clubs on campus — **First Access, SUS+**, and **Echo**. From providing solar lanterns to children studying in rural Africa,

to collectively understanding climate science and organising our university's delegation to COP every year, their list of activities is endless! Equally laudable are the efforts of students such as Chris Clayton, who works with the **Wakuro Foundation** and wants to organise a simulative learning event for the SDGs in Tokyo, or Mahi Patki, who has extensive experience on tackling the issue of plastic consumption within educational institutions and would be an exciting partner to work with for something similar within UTokyo! All of these clubs and individuals are buzzing with energy and joining or working with them would be the experience of a lifetime.

### SO WHAT COMES NEXT? What can I do?

In case you found any initiative/individual even remotely interesting to you, send me an email at amishiharrypotter@gmail.com. It doesn't have to be formal, and I will just connect you to the right person. Second, this article is the first step in a longer process of information sharing and collaboration; if you're aware of other initiatives working on climate change related goals, or could feature an article such as this in your publication/ on your social media handle/on your website, do contact me. I also want to launch a website to consolidate information about the plethora of ingenious civil society initiatives in Japan for climate change. We will need all kinds of collaborators — from video-makers and translators to individuals willing to find out about and reach out to different initiatives and groups! If any part of the project sounds slightly appealing to you, email me. Your email does not have to be serious at all — just tell me your name and your initial thoughts, and we will see how it goes from there.

As a final message, I will say that one of the most heart-warming aspects of the youth climate movements is our genuine desire to impact climate change. This means that we are not in it for the media attention this issue has, or for the money. We are not just open to the possibility of collaboration, but are more than willing and eager to do so. So with our new spring semester starting soon, if you believe you've found your calling with any of these organisations, send me an email and jump on board. All hands are needed and welcome on deck; we are all in the same boat anyway. Working together is our best bet, and we hope that this article plants the seeds for just that.

## It's Time for Some Veggie Talk in Komaba

By: Avalon Akashi



Noodle options at one of the cafeterias at Hongo Campus. On the bottom right is Cream Sauce Vegetable Udon, where the sauce is made from soy milk. Images by author.

I remember when every option in the cafeteria was an option for me. I never snuck a peek at the pictograms of cows and chickens on the ingredient labels. The only criteria for choosing meals was 1) being cheap and 2) tasting good. I always told people that there was lots of fried meat in the cafeteria, but little did I know that meat or seafood was present in almost every dish. How I came to know this was by going vegetarian last July.

I have not been alone in facing the challenges of cafeteria dining: vegetarian and other-tarian exchange students seem to be in bigger numbers this semester than ever before. Two pescatarian USTEP students mentioned that they hardly ever eat in the cafeteria. Hopefully I never tire of the first floor's vegetable curry, because then I will have exhausted my only real option.

The cafeteria is full of hidden traps for vegetarians. I stopped eating all noodles because of dashi, the base broth made from *kombu*<sup>1</sup> and *katsubushu*<sup>2</sup>. After a period of disbelief with occasional denial, I also had to accept that many innocent-looking vegetable dishes, well, are not vegetarian after all. I had turned a blind eye to their ingredient labels for months, never suspecting that mackerel and chicken might inhabit my spinach.

The cafeteria's second floor is not any safer. In the curry section, where you get two curries and *naan*<sup>3</sup>, the staff told me that I could not swap one of the chicken curries with vegetable cur-



Soy meat zaijiangmian, a vegetarian menu item from collaboration between the Co-op and Table for Two - UT at Cafeteria Wakaba, Komaba.

For some reason, Hongo's cafeteria has greater hospitality towards its vegetarian students. Take, for example, the creamy soy-based sauce and vegetable udon that has not worked its way into Komaba. Also, bright yellow signs in the buffet clearly label potato, eggplant, and tofu dishes "vegetarian." Meanwhile, Komaba once seemed to be progressing with soy meat *zaijiangmian*, which was the result of a collaboration between Co-op and the student organization "Table for Two - UT". Unfortunately, it turned out to be a short-term item and disappeared from the shelves after two weeks (I will be waiting for its return.)

Image by Yuko Itatsu.



Vegetarian options at one of the buffet-style cafeteria at Hongo campus.

One evening, while I was contemplating all of this, I happened upon my professor, a veteran vegetarian of 30 years. Over his vegetable curry, we discussed the future of a vegetarian-friendly cafeteria. He pointed out that improvements can be made easily through simple substitutions. Take the curry, with its small chunks of beef swimming around in the sauce. "Why not make it into a meat-free curry with meat toppings at an extra cost?" (My friend later brought up the point that many Japanese curries use meat in their original ingredients, so we may need a different solution.) With "yasai dashi"<sup>4</sup> now appearing on store shelves, why not buy a vegetarian replacement for the *katsubushu* in dashi<sup>5</sup>? The point is that we don't need to create a new menu if we can integrate vegetarianism into the existing one.

When I brought up these points to Co-op, I didn't expect change to be easy nor fast. But as early as this April, students in Komaba may be walking into a cafeteria that has been diversified for vegetarian students (and indeed, for all students). As my friend put it, "Vegetarian food is for everyone." And it seems that I, other students, and the Co-op have decided that the time for veggie talk in Komaba is here.

<sup>1</sup> kelp  
<sup>2</sup> smoked tuna flakes  
<sup>3</sup> a type of flatbread found in many Asian cuisines.  
<sup>4</sup> vegetable soup stock  
<sup>5</sup> broth or fish stock used as base for many friendly soups in Japanese cuisine

# PERSPECTIVES

## Sexism in the Age of the “Shining Woman”

By: Emi Yasuda



Image credit: [Adobe Stock]

In the sticky heat of early August, I sat in front of the TV, watching the flash of press conference lights. On the screen was a familiar image: corporate men bowing deeply, their faces parallel to the table in front of them. In Japan, this is the procedure of public disgrace. Last summer, an investigation uncovered sexist admissions processes at one of Japan's most prestigious institutions, Tokyo Medical University (TMU). For

over a decade, the school artificially lowered female applicants' entrance exam scores to keep women's enrollment below 30%. Amidst vocal condemnation, nine more Japanese medical schools confessed to their own unfair admissions processes.<sup>1</sup> These revelations and their aftermath dominated headlines as I began my year as an exchange student at the University of Tokyo (UTokyo)<sup>2</sup>. They foretold experiences

that developed my understanding of how, in a country that claims to support women's empowerment, sexism remains deeply rooted.

Last summer's admissions scandal sparked widespread condemnation, but in a Komaba classroom less than thirty minutes from TMU itself, I could scarcely hear these cries of outrage. During a lecture on Japanese politics, my professor opened the floor to opinions on the scandal. Accustomed to the left-leaning attitudes of students at my Canadian home university, I expected little debate: Someone would condemn TMU, the rest of us would offer words of agreement, and the lecture would quickly move forward.

Contrary to my expectations, the first student to speak argued in favor of the policy. He stated that medicine is an ill-suited profession for women, whose primary duty amid Japan's demographic crisis, is motherhood. He argued that women inevitably leave medicine for child-rearing, exacerbating Japan's labor shortage, and placing an unfair burden on male doctors. As he spoke, my hand shot up in disbelief at someone my own age expressing such antiquated ideas of a woman's place in society. I disputed his thoughts on women's maternal duties, stating that limiting women's access to a medical career is a counterproductive solution to the labor shortage. At the root of the issue is not that women are unfit for medical careers, but rather that they are pushed out of the profession after becoming mothers and face barriers to resuming their career after maternity leave. I addressed the inflexibility of schedules for Japanese doctors in a culture of overwork and the severe shortage of childcare providers in Japan.

After speaking, I felt shaken. Coming from a school where few people consider themselves conservative, I was unaccustomed to defending my opinions. But regardless, I was confident that I made the strongest points, though perhaps too passionately. This self-assurance quickly dissi-

ated when the next students to speak, classmates from both Japan and abroad, agreed with the first student. While several disputed his ideas of women's roles, they agreed with TMU's policy, asserting that accepting more female doctors would be unfair to hardworking men. I felt alone in my outrage, and a growing understanding of why Japan ranks 110th of 147 countries for gender equality.<sup>3</sup>

The TMU scandal underscores the hollowness of Shinzo Abe's “womenomics” policy, which strives to make Japan a “society where women shine.” The sexist admissions standards that shocked the world did not shock Japanese women, who, for over a decade, suspected a double-standard in medical school admissions. However, the Japanese government investigation that finally uncovered this policy stemmed not from suspicions regarding the elite school's disproportionately male enrollment, but instead, from an admissions bribery case involving a politician's son. In spite of the Abe administration's expressed goal of increasing women's workforce participation, women's voices evidently remain unheard. While action from the bottom-up is essential for social progress, the government also holds a responsibility to foster an environment in which change is possible. If the Abe administration's “womenomics” policy moved beyond rhetoric, implementing affirmative action and accessible childcare, it could catalyze the equality it purportedly desires.

For my classmates at UTokyo, perhaps the TMU scandal hit too close to home. In an era where women's university enrollment is rising above men in many countries, 77% of UTokyo undergraduates are men. This skewed ratio is readily apparent when class lets out, and women are few and far between on the crowded campus walkways. Regardless of the cause of women's lack of representation at Japan's highest-ranking university, these statistics bode poorly for women's careers in Japan, where the name of the uni-

versity you attend is a major factor in aggressive corporate recruitment processes.

Last fall at a networking event, I benefited firsthand from the UTokyo name. Pushing beyond my usual introversion, I tried to “work the room.” Exchanging *meishi* (business cards) with new contacts, I kept in mind the smattering of Japanese business etiquette I crammed before attending. Nervous but prepared, I found myself in conversation with an executive from one of Japan's biggest companies, who told me about new internship opportunities. Impressed with the UTokyo logo on my business card, just one week later, I found myself in a state-of-the-art office building so towering that my ears popped as I approached its upper floors. The executive gave me brochures and pamphlets, explained his company's mission, and took an interest in my resumé and portfolio. I walked away from the impromptu interview hopeful and eager for the internship opportunities we discussed.

Just days later, my job hunt picked up speed when the executive extended me an invitation to a private business networking event. I couldn't believe my luck as I spent the evening exchanging *meishi* and making several trips past a table of hors d'oeuvre. Once the venue closed down, the man suggested we head to a bar. While back in Canada, I'd consider this a red flag, I understood post-workday drinking to be a mainstay of Japanese business culture. I agreed in the hopes that this would be the moment he finally offered me the internship we discussed. But not long after sitting down, our conversation veered outside of business territory. After a few drinks, the man, older than my father, began making sexual advances. My stomach churned as his clammy hands moved from the glass to my body, and he suggested we head to a hotel. I rushed onto the subway home, feeling deeply betrayed and misled. This man gave me every reason to believe that his interests in me were business-related, but I left cursing my own naïveté. I felt foolish for

daring to believe I had anything of value to offer to him or his company. He had my resumé, and we discussed internships, but that night at the bar told me everything I needed to know about where his interests truly lay.

Above all else, this experience left me with a profound sense of powerlessness. I knew that I was deliberately misled, and that there was little I could meaningfully do about it. I shouted into the Twitter void and gave my friends an earful, but at the end of the day, I had to pick myself up and continue on as though nothing happened. But that encounter ripped away my trusting naïveté. How could I trust opportunities, when elusive “internships” cloak malintent? How could I accept the mentorship of any man, knowing that for him, business may purely be a pretense?

While inappropriate and sexist treatment is far from an exclusively Japanese phenomenon, this experience personally reaffirmed Japan's continued struggle to empower women. For Japan to truly become “a society in which all women shine,” it must listen to the voices of all Japanese women, from those with experiences like mine, to those who spent years suspicious of unfair admissions practices. Institutional gatekeepers and predatory businessmen are alive and well, but women know that the system is rigged against them. Now, it's time for people to listen.

<sup>1</sup> A tenth school was accused of unfair admissions practices, but did not admit to wrongdoing. “Japan medical schools rigged women's results,” *BBC News*, 14 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46568975>.

<sup>2</sup> The University of Tokyo is unaffiliated with Tokyo Medical University.

<sup>3</sup> Aizawa, Yuko. “Gender equality in Japan remains bottom.” *NHK World Japan*, December 26, 2018. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/backstories/gendergap/>.

## The Games After the 2020 Tokyo Olympics: Rethinking Media Coverage of Para-sports in Japan

By: Sayumi Take

The first ticket lottery for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics marked history with a record number of 390,000 participants. Japanese people's interest towards the Paralympics seems to be high—but whether this means that in Japan, para-sports is widely acknowledged and deeply understood, or to take it a step further, a society where disabled and non-disabled people live as equals is fully established, is an entirely different issue.

Studies on Paralympic broadcasts have been conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute over the past two years, and the results show that the road to fostering an accurate, widespread understanding of para-sports

in Japan remains long and tough.

One of the biggest obstacles lies in the fact that people have few opportunities to learn about para-sports. Usually, the only chance people have of knowing the rules and fun of para-sports is if they actively attend events held for this purpose. Moreover, media coverage of para-sports other than the Paralympics is insufficient. The research results mentioned earlier introduces comments by disabled people, such as “The media should also broadcast para-sports tournaments other than the Paralympics” and “How many people know of the Deaflympics, anyway?”. When asked about the Paralympic broadcasts, respondents

left sharp comments such as “The chances of commercial broadcasting services featuring the Paralympics are extremely low” and “The Paralympics are just another exciting material for the media to fess about”.

Another reality revealed by the research results was the disabled people's strong resistance to “inspiration porn”. “Inspiration porn”, a phrase coined by journalist Stella Young, refers to the situation in which society objectifies disabled people for the benefit of inspiring non-disabled people. Comments such as “Paralympians should be portrayed just like any other ‘ordinary’ athlete”, and “Who has the right to gain

inspiration from hardworking disabled people?”, underline the fact that the means of spreading understanding of para-sports and disabled people must be chosen carefully.

It is delightful news that the 2020 Games are expected to be one of the most exciting tournaments in history. However, the Japanese people should bear in mind that this is not just a once-in-a-lifetime entertainment, but a one-and-only chance to rethink media coverage of para-sports and thus establish a society where disabled and non-disabled people live in harmony as true equals.

Image credit: [Pixabay, via Pexels]



## Darkest Day: The Oct 6, 1976 Massacre In Bangkok, Thailand

By: Pongadisorn Jamerbsin, Motoki Luxmiwattana

**[Content warning: graphic descriptions of violence]**

"The past 40 years, there's no single day that I didn't think about October 6. I was a second-year student, here at Thammasat University. During a demonstration I was always in charge of the speakers on the stage. We are part of the movement that brought down the dictatorship in 1973."

It was October 5, 2016. Professor Thongchai Winichakul was then a well-respected expert on Thai nationalism teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was interviewed by the BBC.

"The stage is [sic] made up of two levels of drums. I hid behind the drums, I keep talking for, I have no idea for how long, maybe an hour or so. People know, remember what I say because I keep saying the same thing over and over..."

At this point he was overcome by a violent episode of PTSD. Recovering quickly, he continued, with moist eyes.

"Begging the police to stop. We are unarmed. Please stop shooting, we are unarmed. Please stop shooting, we are unarmed. Maybe a hundred times. I don't know what else to say. I saw people lie down on the ground, near that building, I didn't know, I didn't realize until later that some of them were killed. I thought that they just, lie [sic] down."

TIME magazine says the official death toll is 46. In Chris Baker and Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit's "A History of Thailand", survivors said it is more than 100. According to the digital archive "Documentation of October 6", a project coordinated by Professor Puangthong Pawakapan, Ruamkatanyu Foundation staff who collected the bodies claimed it was 530. 3,094 students were arrested, 18 were held in custody for two years while they were court-martialed for communism and 11 other charges, including Thongchai.

Image credit: Valentin Salja [Unsplash]



It was October 6, 1976. Bangkok, Thailand.

TIME magazine calls it the darkest day in Thailand's living memory. To this day, no perpetrators have been brought to justice yet. It took until the year 2000 before a small monument was allowed at the university. It is not taught in Thai schools and is almost impossible to find in textbooks.

Since absolute monarchy ended in a bloodless revolution in 1932, Thailand has been ruled most of the time by military dictators for decades until the students took to the streets and drove them out in 1973. Trying to regain power, they called upon extremist right-wing organizations they established. Having previously controlled the education and conscription system, they had a big pool of indoctrinated individuals to easily call upon and radicalize. They mobilized them to physically assault the left-wing, and many activists got beaten up. A few were assassinated. They are the Village Scouts, the Nawaphon, and the Red Gaus groups. As Professor Puangthong R. Pawakapan wrote in her book, "The Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command in the Post-Counter-insurgency Period": "It is generally understood that the Thai military government — particularly its anti-communist political wing, the ISOC — was the primary facilitator of the organization and indoctrination campaign towards the radical right-wing".

During such turbulent times, the exiled dictators tried to enter Thailand as monks. The students and labor unions took to the streets again. The right-wing mobs swiftly organized a counter-protest and two protestors were lynched. Students at Thammasat University staged a play to commemorate this event. According to "Documentation of October 6," the army-run radio station and 260 affiliated civilian stations said that the students were not protesting against the exiled dictators, but committing *lèse-majesté* (defaming the sovereign) and were stockpiling weapons to prepare for a communist takeover, citing a photo of the mock-lynching in the Bangkok Post. The newspaper Dao Siam published an article describing the students gathering in Thammasat as committing *lèse-majesté* and communist sedition using that photo. Into the night the military radio and affiliated stations urged citizens to gather near the university to bring the students to justice. Krisadang Nutcharut, a survivor, told the Khaosod English: "The call was to come out and kill students."

As part of their basic education, they were indoctrinated with the idea that the Thai royal family was sacrosanct. They were later radicalized and organized into right-wing groups by the ISOC, and were taught anti-communist ideology, since, for them, communists kill royal families, and anyone who thought differently from them must be a communist. This later top-down radicalization and organization by the state, accompanied by the "red scare" of that time was the main reason they became violent and what set them apart from other Thais. To them, the mock-lynching of someone (allegedly) looking like the crown prince meant that the students wanted to destroy Thailand. A famous monk said something to the

effect that to kill a communist is not a sin. So, it was clear to them what needed to be done.

About 15,000 right-wing extremists gathered near Thammasat University. The military, now reassured by the people rallying behind them, deployed the police: Normal cops. The Thai FBI. The Thai SWAT. The Thai riot police. Border patrol police who can handle assault rifles. And even the infamous border patrol paratrooper police, trained by the CIA in irregular warfare, who had done black ops in Laos, special forces, police officers only in name. They were armed with pistols, shotguns, semi-automatic rifles, assault rifles, frag grenades. Many of them wore bulletproof vests and helmets. The paratrooper border patrol police also brought heavy weapons: grenade launchers and mortars, and even a recoilless rifle, a sort of man-portable cannon for destroying bunkers or tanks.

The police and the right-wing mob blocked all the exits. Police boats guarded the river. Then at 5:30 AM they started shelling the campus with grenade launchers and mortars. They then moved to the university fence and sprayed the campus with automatic fire. Thousands of rounds were fired that day. Then, they slowly advanced into the campus. The recoilless rifle team methodically shelled the classrooms one by one. They also threw frag grenades for good measure. The right-wing mob followed their lead and went in and beat up the students. Some of the right-wing mob also had pistols. Some photos show the right-wing mob violently attacking students even after they were taken into custody.

A few students had handguns just in case, but they stood no chance. Only two police officers died.

The paratrooper border patrol police were also trained in psychological warfare, US-style. They drove wooden stakes into corpses as if exorcising some "evil communist spirit". They made funeral pyres. They violated a female corpse with a wooden pole. Two or three students were lynched. A shoe was stuffed inside a mouth.

Of note is the gleeful nature of the whole operation. Footage exists, of them smoking and shooting, of the right-wing mob smiling and cheering as they whack a lynched corpse with a folded metal chair.

Later that day, the military overthrew the democratically-elected government. They used this event to justify their actions, claiming the students had an armory of weapons of war and were preparing for a communist revolution and regime. Books were burnt. Political parties outlawed. Freedoms suppressed.

As a result, more than 3,000 college students fled to the jungles to join the Communist Party of Thailand, as is inscribed on the memorial plaque at Thammasat University. At its peak, the fighters would number 10,000. This deadly civil war would result in an average of 1,000 dead per year during the bloodiest two years, according to Baker and Phongpaichit's "A History of Thai-

land." Among these college students, 548 are recorded as killed in the fight, according to "Documentation of October 6."

The 18 students held in custody, including Thongchai, were released two years later among agreements of impunity for all parties on October 6 for the sake of national reconciliation. And under the condition that he never takes part in any political activities again.

Thongchai went back to school and devoted the rest of his life to understanding what had happened on that fateful day.

Unfortunately, Thailand never learnt from that day. In 1992, the Black May Crackdown occurred, and in 2010, there was the Savage May crackdown. Thailand held its first elections since the 2014 coup in March 2019, in which the coup leader won, but it was widely seen as an unfair election.

Thongchai retired so he can finish his book about that day, which he has been working on for more than a decade. It will be published in March 2020. The title of the book is: "Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok".

### Further Reading

<https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/commemorating-the-thammasat-university-massacre-in-thailand/> Very concise summary of the key points of the incident in a video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1uvvsENsw> Thongchai Winichakul, BBC interview. The BBC interview mentioned in the text.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiGZy83rz4> Interview of the journalist who witnessed it firsthand and took Pulitzer Prize-winning photos.

<http://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2016/10/05/oct-6-massacre-photographer/> The journalist's memoir.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na1Xb-mGOL4k> Full interview of the journalist mentioned above.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/thailand-6-october-1976-massacre-anniversary-lynching-photo-3064629/> A recent article about the incident, in-depth.

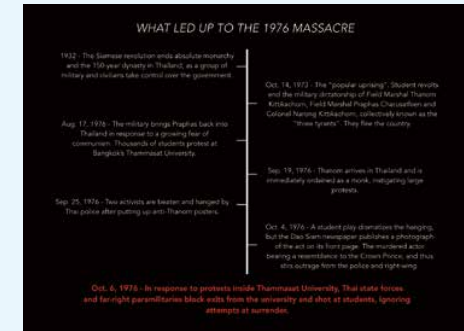
<http://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2016/10/05/will-remember-survivors-recount-1976-massacre-40-years-later/> In-depth accounts by survivors.

[https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/unforgettable-unrememberable-the-thammasat-massacre-in-thailand/#\\_ftnref10](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/unforgettable-unrememberable-the-thammasat-massacre-in-thailand/#_ftnref10) Detailed personal account of a survivor.

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1976/oct/07/fromthearchive> Newspaper article from that day.

The most comprehensive source (and the main source I relied on for this article) can be found on doc6.com. This is the official website for this massacre. It is an attempt to gather all the evidence, records, memoirs, writings, and research

about this massacre in one online archive. It is managed by Chulalongkorn University Professor Puangthong Pawakapan. Unfortunately, it is currently available only in Thai.



Infographic: By Gun Wongprasertkul | Graphic by Paul Namkroong

### A Brief Timeline of Thailand's Contemporary History

By Gun Wongprasertkul, Independent Scholar

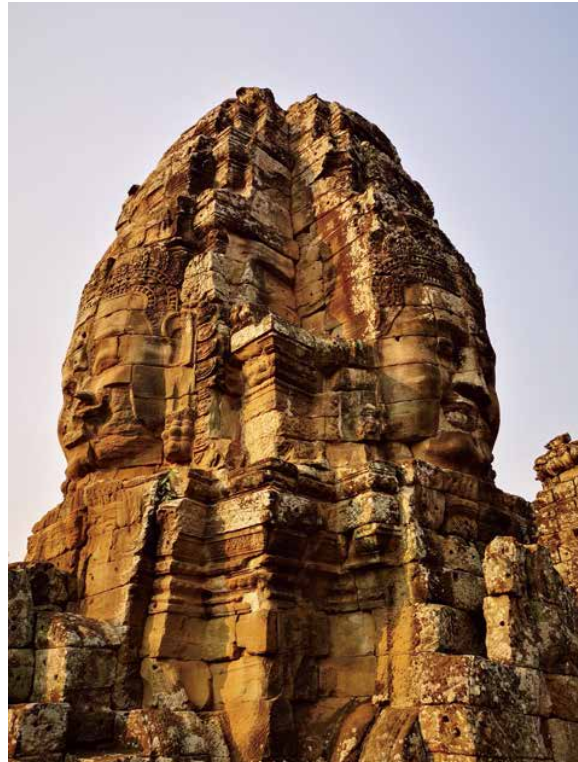
- 1932 : June 24. The Siamese Revolution of 1932 by the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party), end of absolute monarchy and the start of democracy in Thailand.
- 1933 : The Boworadet Rebellion, a counter-revolution. 17 died in armed skirmishes.
- 1938 - 1944 : Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram became prime minister. Ruled as an authoritarian, fascist dictator emulating Mussolini and the Japanese military government.
- 1945 : World War II ended and a brief period of revival of democratic rule began.
- 1947 : November 8, *Coup d'état*, an era of military dictatorship began, which would last for 26 years (1947-1973). During this period some coups erupted between different factions of the military in power struggles.
- 1948 : April 6, *Coup d'état*.
- 1951 : November 29, *Coup d'état*.
- 1957 : October 16, *Coup d'état*. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power. The United States supported dictators in Thailand as allies in the fight against communism.
- 1958 : October 20, *Coup d'état*.
- 1971 : November 17, *Coup d'état*.
- 1973 : October 8 to 15, Protests demanding a constitution escalated into anti-government, anti-military dictator protests. The military opened fire but only made things worse, and the military dictator Thanom Kittikachorn fled the country. At least 77 died.
- 1976 : The Oct 6, 1976 Massacre, paramilitary forces and right-wing groups attacked protesters in Thammasat University, 46 to 530 died. The military justified the attack as a preemptive strike against communist insurrection and justified their coup d'état as protection from communist threat.
- 1977 : October 20, *Coup d'état*.
- 1991 : February 23, *Coup d'état*.
- 1992 : May 17 to 19, the Black May Crackdown. Anti-government protesters were fired upon by the military. At least 52 died.
- 2006 : September 19 *Coup d'état*.
- 2010 : March to May, Cruel April or Savage May Crackdowns, or the 2010 Thai Military Crackdown. Anti-government protesters of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship were attacked by the military, at least 87 died.
- 2014 : May 2014 *Coup d'état*.
- 2014 -2019: Military dictatorship.
- 2019: March 24, elections widely seen as unfair. Coup leader won.



Cambodia: The Bittersweet Smile of Khmer

By: Mudi Wang

In the Temple of Bayon, at the heart of the ancient city of Angkor, there are 216 smiling faces of Avalokiteshvara<sup>1</sup> carved on the four-sided sandstone towers. The gargantuan faces, which some believe represented the great King Jayavarman VII<sup>2</sup> of the ancient Khmer Empire<sup>3</sup>, have been on numerous online and printed travel guides of Cambodia. They are now collectively known as “The Smile of Khmer”.



“The Smile of Khmer”. Images by author.

I opened my eyes wide and found my forehead wet with cold sweat. It was 2 A.M. in Siem Reap, and out of the hotel room I could see it was dark out. In my dream were countless smiling faces of Avalokiteshvara, stone-carved, titanic, just like those benign faces that I saw in Bayon; only, those in my dream were covered by dirt and blood, everywhere cut and bruised. They beamed bitter and crooked smiles – not of joy, but of numbness after too much suffering.

Yet why did such a nightmare occur to me? I closed my eyes tight, attempting to reconstruct an image of the previous day in my brain. But it was by all means a buoyant day at the temples of Angkor, some of the most majestic heritage sites of human civilization.

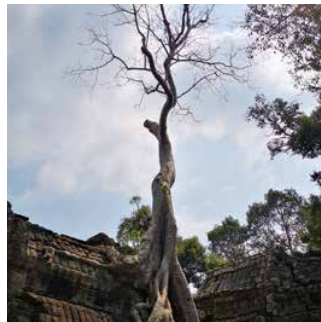
**A Day with Nothing Nightmare-Provoking, only Fascination**

All packed at 4 A.M., I was being (how astonishing) an early bird that day, for a time-consuming tour of the temples of Angkor, starting from the world-famous Angkor Wat<sup>4</sup>. Disturbed by the noisy groups, though, I spent barely an hour inside Angkor Wat before returning to the rented car and heading for Bayon. It was a few minutes past 7 A.M. when I arrived; the temple was in unbelievable tranquility. Climbing the stairs and wandering through the corridors, with scarcely a soul around, I felt as if I were exploring a labyrinth in a game of “Assassin’s Creed”.

When I glimpsed down from a high platform, I saw them. *The Smile of Khmer*. Those stone-carved faces, compared to which I was no

taller than a dwarf, somehow took away all the thoughts in my mind. The sole thing that possessed me at that moment was pure appreciation, of their life-likeness and stateliness. Benign and merciful, the countless smiles of Avalokiteshvara were in every direction I turned my eyes to. In a shower of the 7 A.M. sunlight, the scene brought about a spiritual, almost religious, catharsis.

After leaving Bayon, I saw a series of mind-bending sights in the other temples of Angkor: nature going wild at the jungle temple Ta Prohm (where the movie “Tomb Raider” was shot) as the roots of giant banyans grew into the stone bricks, devouring the temple complex; wide-eyed Grecoian-style columns at the ruins of Preah Khan, where the “holy sword” of the Khmer Empire was said to be kept; perfectly symmetrical corridors in Baphuon, seeming to lead visitors into a myth... but none of these sights were as equally breathtaking as the sight at Bayon.



Banyans devouring temple complex at Ta Prohm.



A corridor to a myth. At temple Baphuon.

**It was when I walked through a dark tunnel in the ruins of Beng Mealea that I realized what the nightmare of blood-covered faces mirrored.**

6 A.M. – four hours after waking up from my nightmare. The temple complex of Beng Mealea, one of the inspirations of Miyazaki Hayao’s celebrated animated film “Castle in the Sky” (天空の城ラピュタ), normally does not see many visitors at so early a time.

In a high-spirited mood for an Indiana Jones adventure, I was sauntering in the expansive ruins without set routes. The second I entered a random tunnel, though, the gaiety somehow vanished out of a sudden. It was pitch-black in the tunnel. Titters of birds faded away. What frightened me was how familiar and nerve-racking the surrounding tenebrosity was.

It was not long before I realized that the indescribable horror stemmed not from any experience in Beng Mealea or other temples of Angkor. It stemmed from a visit, just before departing for Siem Reap, to somewhere dark, narrow and uncanny – somewhere marked by terror and suffering.

**That “somewhere” was in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. Once a prison and torture centre, today it is called the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.**

The venue was formerly the S-21 Prison under the Khmer Rouge regime<sup>5</sup>, in power from 1975 to 1979, transformed from a secondary school. More than 17,000 prisoners were interrogated, tortured and executed in the prison; in early 1977, S-21 claimed an average of 100 victims a day (Lonely Planet, 2019). Between 1975 and 1978, some 20,000 prisoners – including women, children and infants – were taken to the killing fields of Choeung Ek for extermination and were buried in mass graves (Lonely Planet, 2019). It was said that the fields stank for years of rotten flesh.

The ubiquitous absurdity surrounding the S-21 prison is frightening. One regulation set by the interrogators reads, “While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.” The exhibited photographs reveal that most of the prison guards and interrogators were teenagers, even young children. The greatest absurdity yet lies in the juxtaposition of the ephemerality of the Khmer Rouge rule and the scale of its terror. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, at least 1.5 million Cambodians were killed and the country’s professional and technical class exterminated (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019).



Ruins of Beng Mealea.

**THE SECURITY OF REGULATION**

1. you must answer accordingly to my questions-Don't turn them away.
2. Don't try to hide the facts by making pretenses this and that. You are strictly prohibited to contest me.
3. Don't be fool for you are a chap who dare to thwart the revolution.
4. you must immediately answer my questions without wasting time to reflect.
5. Don't tell me either about your immoralities or the essence of the revolution.
6. While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all
7. Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet. when I ask you to do something, you must do it right away without protesting.
8. Don't make pretexts about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your secret or traitor.
9. If you don't follow all the above rules, you shall get many lashes of electric wire.
10. If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge.

Regulations of S-21 Prison.

**In one of the rooms, I saw countless black-and-white photographs of prisoners, number-boards on their chest and numbness in their eyes.**

It was those faces, as I realized in the tunnel of Beng Mealea a few days after my visit to the S-21, that were projected onto my nightmare.



Photographic records of prisoners.

On the iron grating of a cell, I discovered a *Plumeria* flower, already withered, possibly put there by some visitor for grief delivering. I gazed at it, and saw in it the withered dreams of tens of thousands of people, whose lives were so fragile and ephemeral in a time of terror, like flowers dropped to the ground by a malign thunderstorm.



A withered Plumeria flower on the iron grating.

A leather-covered notebook was placed on the table of one exhibition room, on the pages of which visitors could write their comments for what they had seen. I took a deep breath before I grabbed the pen. There was a lot to write about, but eventually I wrote down only one sentence.

“Before today, I never knew it was on the iron grating that the most beautiful flowers grew.”

The framed photograph of the *Plumeria* is still on my desk.

<sup>1</sup> Avalokiteshvara: the bodhisattva of infinite compassion and mercy in Buddhism. Japanese: Kannon. Chinese: Guanyin. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Jayavarman VII: born c.1120/25 – died c. 1220, one of the most forceful and productive kings of the Khmer (Cambodian) empire of Angkor (reigning 1181-c. 1220). Expanded the empire to its greatest territorial extent. Builder of Angkor Wat, Bayon and numerous other temples of Angkor. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Khmer Empire (802 CE - 1431 CE): a powerful state in Southeast Asia formed by people of the same name. Covered much of today’s Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and southern Vietnam at its peak. Capital city: Angkor. Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Angkor Wat: 12th century temple complex built by king Suryavarman II (reigned 1113-c. 1150). World’s largest religious structure, covers 160 hectares, and marks the high point of Khmer architecture. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Khmer Rouge: a radical communist movement that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 after winning power through a guerrilla war. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019.

## Learning to Write My Name

By: Erika Yamauchi

We grew up just half an hour away from each other, in places equally deserving of the label “the middle of nowhere.” But when it came to politics, he told me quite adamantly, “I can’t think the same way as you. I’m not *like* you.” We both came from communities that voted conservative for every election in waking memory. As kids, we spent a summer together at the same Christian day camp. But in his eyes, I was very different—a woman, a racial minority, and a lesbian — an amalgam of factors suggesting a perspective radically different from his own. In an identity politics world, the influence of gender, race, and sexuality on personal politics is often emphasized by people on both sides of the ideological spectrum. But in spite of being a minority, a belief in equality for all people, including those like myself, was not embedded in my genetic code.

As an undergraduate student, I’ve been taught how the principle of equality functions in a diverse world. Avoiding the deterministic assumption that history moves linearly toward justice, my professors have described the transnational development of a belief in the equality of all human beings. Amongst factors driving this movement, they suggest, is the advocacy of people who experience injustice. The reasoning behind this argument is self-evident, that people who face injustice will naturally advocate against it. But when we are taught that the world is just, learning to recognize injustice, even against oneself, is a complex process. My own fight against inequality began not on a picket line, but in my own mind, confronting the prejudices I held against myself.

Growing up in small-town Michigan, I “didn’t see color,” including my own. My mother was a recent Japanese immigrant, and my American-born father was *sansai* (third-generation Japanese). But through my eyes, Asia was an abstraction, as exotic to me as it was to my white peers. I wasn’t a poster-child for non-assimilationist “salad bowl” multiculturalism, but rather, the type of person for which the word “banana” was invented. Japanese was just the language my mother spoke on the phone, and the tongue my father never learned. Traditions, meanwhile, were like the calligraphy set in the basement, undusted and untouched.

Far-removed from my heritage, I felt like your average, all-American girl-next-door. I never faced racist bullying, making it easy for me to feel at home in the land I cut my teeth on. But as the only non-white kid in my grade for every year of my K-8 education, there was a natural curiosity about where I *really* came from. In good faith, friends asked if I could translate their names, or tell them about China. Their inability to correctly remember my ethnicity made little difference to me. To both myself and my friends, China and Japan were far-off worlds of which we knew little.

As I got older, my innocent lack of knowledge transformed into an outright rejection of my heritage. I wanted nothing to do with Japan. Through the Western media, I learned to think of Japan as a dying country, a place where niche sexual subcultures thrived while the birth rate plummeted. Smug in my Christian superiority, I saw Japan’s

decline as the consequence of its apparent lack of religion, an attitude that would appall me if I heard it today. I was further repulsed by the kawaii mannerisms and fashion choices of some Japanese women. I felt that their behavior constituted self-infantilization, undermining feminist victories for all women. This observation, in the context of reports on gender inequality in Japan, led me to blame Japanese women for their own subjugation. I further internalized the Western media’s hyper-fixation on the exotic and bizarre and saw the focus on *otakus*, *lolita*, and Japan’s legal child porn, not as outliers, but as representative of Japanese culture as a whole.

So, when my Japanese grandparents invited me to stay with them the summer after my senior year of high school, my answer was a definitive no. I already had plans: working at Baskin Robbins, going to field parties, and hunting through thrift shops for band t-shirts. But as it turns out, when the grandparents you haven’t seen in over a decade ask you to visit, no isn’t a socially acceptable answer. I soon arrived in Japan with a whirlwind of conflicting emotions. In the eyes of my friends, I’d been blessed with the graduation trip of a lifetime. But I struggled to feel grateful, for being in Japan meant acknowledging the heritage I preferred to suppress. Beneath the thin shield of my prejudices was a deep shame for knowing nothing of either Japanese language or culture. Feeling comfortable in this ignorance was easier when I could convince myself that the things I didn’t know about Japan weren’t worth knowing anyway.

Under the 40-degree heat of the summer sun, my pretenses of superiority quickly faded. My grandparents and I crammed like sardines into their one-room apartment. We communicated through a pocket-sized English-Japanese dictionary and an elaborate system of hand gestures. I expected them to berate me for my lack of Japanese knowledge, but instead, they became patient teachers. We pored through old photo albums, and I learned that our family descended from a long line of fishermen. While cooking breakfast with my *obāchan*,<sup>1</sup> she taught me that *dashi*<sup>2</sup> is the key to good miso soup. The TV was on twenty-four seven, and I soon found out that

my *obāchan* was a big supporter of women’s causes, who never missed a chance to yell at politicians on the screen. Meanwhile, desperate to communicate, I found myself memorizing a beginner’s textbook of Japanese vocabulary and writing. As I put pen to paper, my *ojichan*<sup>3</sup> hovered over my shoulder, correcting stroke order and character proportions. After learning katakana, I began to write my name. My grandparents were aghast. A name as Japanese as my own, Yamauchi, they told me, should never be written in katakana. Promptly they brought out the calligraphy set, and I learned how to write my full name, 山内遊木 (Yamauchi Erika) for the first time, in the *kanji* I never knew were chosen when I was born.

My grandparents’ willingness to share their world with me began the unraveling of my prejudices. I saw that embedded in my ideas of Japan were blatant falsehoods that devalued a group of people, which I came to recognize, I was a part of. While one trip away could not eradicate a lifetime of misconceptions, the experience sparked a long process of questioning my beliefs, both about Japan and about myself. I saw that it was possible to expand my self-concept to recognize my Japanese heritage, without mitigating my American identity.

This ongoing confrontation with internalized prejudice is why I reject the idea that as a minority in multiple respects, I am naturally imbued with progressive ideas of equality. Surely, many people are already cognizant of this reality or recognize that racism is capable of existing in minority communities. But my message is for my friend, who felt that his privilege precluded him from being able to see the world in a different light. While people of a different background naturally have different experiences, no one is born with a moral compass that is perfectly aligned. Living my life has forced me to expand my perspective to one in which I have value, but this process is one that everybody is capable of.

<sup>1</sup> Grandmother

<sup>2</sup> A common Japanese cooking stock

<sup>3</sup> Grandfather

Image credit: Green Chameleon [Unsplash]



## I am large, I contain multitudes

By: Alexine Castillo Yap

*Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

—Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (Part 51)

“Ice Queen”. “Dragon Lady”. “Too serious”. “Stone-hearted”. “Cold (+ the very rude pejorative that starts with the letter B).” These are just a few of the (admittedly resting on the more palatable end of the spectrum) names and descriptors I’ve been called behind my back, both by people who barely know me — much less heard me speak outside of a classroom or work-related environment — and people who have gotten to know me better, eventually. On the other, farther end of the spectrum are the people whom I’ve known quite well for some time now and understand me to be the opposite of whatever being an “Ice Queen”, “Dragon Lady”, or whatever other pejorative, entails. In fact, I’d probably be accused by some of them of the other extreme end of the spectrum: overly sensitive, emotional, capricious, unpredictable, and what have you.

In my freshman year of university, I once accidentally overheard someone call me the aforementioned “cold-plus-the-very-rude-pejorative-that-starts-with-the-letter-B” around lunchtime. Not even 2 hours later, I was being accused of being “over-emotional and sensitive” by another person. That evening, a friend then told me that everyone thought I came off as “too-serious” and unfriendly, because I was too focused on my schoolwork.

In short, just another day of existing as a woman in this world, I suppose.

You’d think that after having attended a co-ed school, an all-girls’ school and then an international school abroad, I’d have already gone through enough name-calling (in multiple languages too, at that) to have grown thick-skinned enough not to be hurt by whatever name-calling still occurs past high school<sup>1</sup>. I suppose anyone who’s been through some kind of schooling with a bunch of other tween-/teenaged peers have been subjected to some form of mean-spirited name-calling (and have probably taken part in some name-calling themselves). Luckily, you never really get to hear all the names, and it’s probably for the best, for your own sanity’s sake. But somehow — perhaps it’s just me — the ones you do hear always manage to be some of the most hurtful, and the ones that stick with you the most.

Going into university, I thought I didn’t really care anymore about petty things like name-calling, mostly because I also thought I had also already stopped caring about what other people thought of me. If I wanted to stay home all day and just do my schoolwork, why should anyone care? Conversely, if all I wanted was to go out and meet new people, I should be allowed to. All in a day’s work, right? I’m an independent woman, it’s the 21st century and I’m allowed to do whatever and be whomever I want, who even cares about societal expectations? (Cue “Truth Hurts” by Lizzo.)

It turns out, I cared about societal expectations. A lot.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most intriguing, not to mention personally relatable, concepts in sociology that I learned in freshman year was **role conflict**. Dictionary.com defines it as “emotional conflict arising when competing demands are made on an individual in the fulfillment of his or her multiple social roles.” Certainly, nobody is a stranger to this concept; we all have multiple social roles that we feel pressured to simultaneously fulfill, sometimes all within the course of less than a single day. And as someone currently juggling academics, extra-curriculars, and part-time jobs, on top of trying to keep a social life afloat, dating, and keeping in touch with friends and family from back home or abroad, I feel like the concept is especially relevant to me. I have to perform multiple roles and duties almost daily, sometimes to the point of confusion about who or what I really am.

Have all of that, plus the name-calling, and then slap on a huge dollop of “expectations of how women should act, think, and feel,” and you get a recipe for a potential meltdown.

Just the other day I had to really try to bite my tongue when I heard a professor say, “Women will save the world, because of their inherently caring nature.” Obviously a million thoughts were running through my head: *Why does he think women are inherently supposed to fill a caring, motherly role? What are the implications of this for women who choose not to or can’t fill that role, or don’t show those stereotypically feminine attributes? Why can’t men adopt this role as well?*

I contemplated either walking out of the class or debating with him on the spot, but decided against it when I realized I was, at the end of the day, the student in this situation, and should keep my mouth shut. But it also dawned on me that I was probably also just using that as an excuse not to come off as the “Ice Queen”/“Dragon Lady”/whatever version of the b-word to my fellow students, as well. God knows I’ve turned off enough potential friends and partners because of that, if the name-calling from freshman year isn’t proof enough.

What’s discomfiting is why this scares or turns off other people in the first place. Pressures on women to be both career-oriented and family-oriented at the same time are overwhelming, not to mention expose an unfair double standard since men aren’t seen or expected to be the same way. If a man is career- or goal-oriented at the expense of his personal life, people would admire him and see him as a role model, whereas if a woman did the same thing, they would revile her and, as has been done to me, call her an infinite number of hurtful pejoratives, without really knowing who she really is and what values mat-



Image credit: Jeremy Bishop [Unsplash]

ter to her. At the same time, were she to adopt a more “feminine mode” — less career-oriented, “friendlier” and more “sociable,” let’s say — she would then eventually be accused of not being serious enough, perhaps of being stupid, as well. It’s a lose-lose situation. It gets really confusing, tiring, and disorienting, and I don’t even know where I fall in the “cold-sensitive” spectrum anymore, even though as a human being of *course* I would exhibit both traits.

Walt Whitman — and all of literature and art, I suppose — to the rescue, thank goodness. At a particularly troubling time last semester I found solace in his work after being introduced to his poetry by my American Literature professor. “*I am large, I contain multitudes*,” he writes in his famous “Song of Myself”. What a refreshing, liberating thought: to be able to develop multiplicities and allow them to co-exist within oneself, and be at peace with that.

My being an ostensible “Ice Queen” on the one hand, and purportedly also “overly sensitive” on the other, I believe, extreme, if not unfair, labels on me. I can’t exactly blame people for wanting to categorize others into neat boxes, especially when we all have so many roles ourselves to manage, and perhaps it’s just human nature to attempt to simplify free-floating, complex beings into manageable categories existing within dichotomies and binaries. But I’d also like to problematize that, especially because, at the end of the day, these labels do hurt. I need to realize that these labels are not things but others’ not-so-accurate perceptions of who I am and, as has been proven, highly changeable since they depend on how a person knows me, and thus do not — should not — necessarily define me.

In the meantime, I’ll stay being your Ice Queen dragon lady who also happens to like fluffy things.

<sup>1</sup> In my senior year of high school, my friends and I formulated a theory that peak meanness occurs around 15 years old, after which point all the really bad names have already been used, and you will — or should — never get hurt ever again, because nothing could possibly ever be as bad as what your Year 9 crush called you when you were 14.

<sup>2</sup> Still do. I’m working on it.

# EXPLORING JAPAN

## 3 Must-Eat Cuisines in Komaba

By: Zhiyun Du

### ● Hishidaya:



Image by author.

The most famous restaurant in Komaba is, for sure, **Hishidaya**.

It's been introduced on TV programs, discussed among students, and even recommended by professors in lectures. Every lunch or dinner time, if you walk along the Komaba Shouten-Kai road, it would be unusual not to see a long line waiting outside the small restaurant, each person leaning to have a peek on the daily menu written on a blackboard.

The menu is reasonably-priced: for around ¥1300, you can enjoy the *teishoku*<sup>1</sup> set that surprises almost every first-time visitor. In the set, along with the main dish, rice and miso soup, my favourite is the small plate of pickled vegetables, the most refreshing appetizer you can imagine. Compared to the most popular dish, grilled pork with ginger, I personally prefer the set of stir-fried *maguro*<sup>2</sup> with scallion the most. The *maguro* is packed with flavor and very chewy, combined perfectly with the scallions that are zesty yet not overpowering.

The restaurant always fills up quickly, and the service doesn't really match the quality of the meals, but it would be nice to snag a table and enjoy a filling dinner with your friends. (Watch out, in case you haven't finished your report for your professor yet: you may also find them lining up outside for a seat!)

### ● Tiramisu Homemade:



Image by author.

When talking about tiramisu, you may imagine something mushy and saccharine, only tasting like a conglomeration of artificial cream and sugar. Yet **Tiramisu Homemade** is anything but!

The marshmallow-y cream has a smooth texture, and forms a great balance with the cocoa powder on the top. The delicious taste progresses from bittersweet to purely sweet to tart. Bonus point: after having the desert, you can also bring the small glass container home as a gift. Bonus *bonus* point, just next to Tiramisu Homemade, there is another dessert shop, IL Bigné, that sells great *gougères*<sup>3</sup>.

### ● Le Ressort:



Image by Alexine Castillo Yap.

Everytime I pass this bakery, the smell of croissants from the window always makes my mouth water. My favourite bread is the earl grey-flavored one with chocolate chips embedded inside. Though a little bit pricey, sandwiches there are also excellent choices for lunch.

Other than the above three, there are many great restaurants and shops hidden in the street corners of Komaba. There is a tiny café which I cherish as my own secret garden and am not willing to divulge here in fear of letting too many people know. So, if you are a gourmand, or just want to kill some free time, tap the restaurant label on your Google Maps app while wandering the streets next time; there may be some concealed delicacies waiting to be discovered by you.

<sup>1</sup> set meal

<sup>2</sup> Japanese term for tuna fish

<sup>3</sup> cream puffs

## What's the weather in Tokyo?

By: Alyssa Castillo Yap

One of the things I was disproportionately anxious for when I stepped into the admissions interview for PEAK was the possibility of any questions about weather to come up — specifically, about the four seasons. That is to say, despite studying the names, chronology and images of the common four seasons prior to my interview, I found myself paralysed in the middle of a fancy Hanoi hotel, feeling as if all the nerves in my body were maniacally failing to shoot the right signals. I realised two minutes before the interview, blood pumping in my ears, how unaware I was of such a basic fact. I hadn't known weather outside the semantic field of "sun", "rain" and "degrees Celsius". The gears in my brain were racing. Summer follows which season? Is winter in December? Or was it spring? I never even had a definition for weather that went further than 10 degrees, give or take, from the 30 degrees Celsius I had grown up with; it was the stuff of fiction.

In the first three months of living in Tokyo as a student from Southeast Asia, it actually terrified me to observe how regularly Tokyoites checked the weather forecast on their phones, in the trains, from the television channels, on smart watches and so forth. This behaviour, to me, seemed as if there was always a new storm coming or a heat wave approaching when it was simply a slight fluctuation in the numerical degrees of temperature that fuelled the eagerness or obsessive habit of the Tokyo busy bees to check the weather. This is an observation which at the time, I considered to have really adversely affected my rather happy-go-lucky lifestyle.

Growing up in the Philippines and Vietnam, I never found any use to look at the weather forecast. I would only check the weather updates if I knew there was a tropical storm ahead. For instance, unless wind speeds would go beyond 150kph, I would find it no use to equip myself with an umbrella or to wear special attire for the day. To me, walking knee-deep in the floods was occasional, and ankle-deep entirely expected. So, at first, I thought it was just due to the fact that Tokyo was a much more developed city with well-established drainage systems that floods never came. Hence, with the recent Typhoon Hagibis, I sincerely thought that the announcements were blown out of proportion. That is, I honestly saw no need for such stressful announcements or precautions to have been made when the winds did not even cause for my windows to dance!

On the other hand, I also realised that Tokyoites are as indifferent to earthquakes as I was to storms. So, what bothered me wasn't the shock factors of news coverage or the advanced national disaster information systems in Japan (like the sirens and loudspeakers in most neighbourhoods, warning everyone of the coming disaster). Instead, considering the obsession with checking forecasts that I had so far observed in Tokyo, what really bothered me was the culture of believing that we could predict, prepare for, and perfectly adapt to changes in the weather. I thought, that's an entirely different thing.

Sitting in my dorm room in Komaba during Typhoon Hagibis, I noticed how much I longed for the days where no matter the weather, I was unfazed. I didn't mind the chaos. In fact, I sought for the old thrill of 8-year-old me, clueless as to whether or not today was the day our roof was going to fly off to Manila. I had never sought reports online or forecasts on tiny screens to dictate how my day, week or month was going to go. This is why I began to dislike my life in Tokyo — I was constantly looking forward to *knowing* how my moods, activities, food or conversations would be dictated beforehand by *AccuWeather* reports. So, this past year, I concluded that I was bothered by what we quite fondly call "pathetic fallacy"<sup>1</sup>. We all seem to find some kind of literary beauty to this term, and I thought the obsession with pathetic fallacy manifested itself in Tokyo's relationship with weather. I thought: "You can't control your life via the forecasts, Tokyo!" Where is the thrill of human life if we're looking to live as if we are the non-living elements beyond our

control? Then, like a candle on a birthday cake being blown out for a wish, I realised with a blink of an eye that Tokyo inspired me precisely because it lives in this eternal love-hate relationship with pathetic fallacy. "Will it rain today? Will it be cloudy? Or sunny? Cold, warm or sweltering? I am not the one to tell, *but*, I will adapt." In Tokyo, I found a strange kind of living and looking back, I find now that it is all the more important for me to familiarize myself with the forecasts because we are only really "out of control" as much as we allow ourselves to be.

Tokyo taught me four seasons as opposed to just hot or rainy days. Reality really struck me down hard the first time I stepped out into what for me used to be fictitious, single-digit temperatures. Cavite City to Ho Chi Minh City to Tokyo: I was bothered by the drastic and crippling gap between affluence and scarcity, expectancy as opposed to providence, childish cluelessness turned into sense and sensibility — this city taught me that in this world, some people might never know what it means to live beyond the temperatures of life that they have been acclimated to. I may not understand the technical jargon surrounding weather, but that's not what this weather-craze is about, is it? In the end, I still ask myself if I'll ever adapt as well as the Tokyoites do.

<sup>1</sup> According to [literarydevices.net](http://literarydevices.net), pathetic fallacy is defined as "a kind of personification that gives human emotions to inanimate objects of nature, for example, referring to weather features reflecting a mood."



Image credit: Finan Akbar [Unsplash]

Today: Clear Skies. Tomorrow: Snowing

By: Choi Jiwoong

The video looks like it was filmed on somebody's iPhone 3G with a cracked screen. The grey walls are unpainted and the ceiling is unfinished. It's a concert, but there is no stage. Instead, there's a single rug for the drums on the cement ground, where the crowd and the performing act huddle under the only lightbulb in this dinky basement. Cans of IPAs precariously dangle over amps as Vans-clad feet avoid the wires on the floor. Hands try not to get cut on cymbals. Guitar headstocks swing a little too close to heads. Arms latch onto the pipes along the ceiling, wrapped around pillars and each other, constantly threatening to fall into and swallow up the band.

At the center is the singer: his T-shirt has ripped at the shoulder of his skinny frame quite some time ago. With his weapon of choice, a bass guitar, he too has to jostle and fight with the crowd, especially since his job is to sing into the mic, which at the moment is occupied by five other

guys also singing along to the song. "And what did you think I would do after you left?" they screech in unison. "Would I stay sober? I think it'd be much worse. I cut my arms off. I CUT MY ARMS OFF." It looked like the most fun thing in the world.

About ten years ago, I spent the prime of my pubescent adolescence posting on weird online message boards with other fine, fellow-minded individuals, arguing about who listened to more obscure bands and best understood cool and smart black-and-white movies. It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. Out of this curiously little pastime arose a band that I didn't actually have to pretend to like: a group of four Miller Lite-chugging, bathroom-crying, drunk-driving youths from Philadelphia who called themselves **Snowing**. Led by John Galm, they played a mix of Midwest Emo Revival, 4th Wave Emo, Emotive Hardcore, and "hardcore screamo" music with

the intricate, twinkly guitar work and irregular time signatures of maths rock.

Galm's guttural and whiny voice crying out his rambling, run-on lyrics, far outside any semblance of a verse-chorus-verse structure, about manic episodes, break-ups, and drinking too much<sup>1</sup>, is impossible to decipher among the backdrop of feedback and crashing of the instruments. This serves no problem for the fans, however. In the culminating climax of "Important Things (Specter Magic)", a girl actually pushes Galm away from the mic so as not to ruin the special moment of a hundred-or-so drunk and lonely losers screaming "Why can't I see the sunspots in your eyes?" All the while, Ross and Nate twinkle away on their guitars, with JR's drum fills and licks spilling over the music while still holding everything together in blistering rhythm. The sheer speed and intensity of the music as it skips and jumps at random, from clean-toned melodies to monstrous walls of

distorted fuzz, all contained within short bursts of 2 minute-tracks, leave no breathing space.

By the time I started listening to Snowing, they had already been broken up for two years.



Image by author.

Something drew me to these four Americans who had nothing to do with me, whose lives were incomparable to mine. I was a chubby, 14-year-old, sheltered Asian kid; the first time I tasted beer was when my dad let me have a sip while eating outside with the family and I thought it was gross. The biggest worries on my mind were maths and how Manchester United was doing under Moyes. But I thought maybe one day, I would relate to these songs about wasting college years away, drinking in the basement of a "Slovak Center", dragging everyone else down, or plunging headfirst into a car accident. Maybe I even looked forward to it.

So when I learned that for some unknown reason, nearly a decade after their breakup, they would be reuniting for one last tour all the way across the Pacific Ocean to a dinky basement just about 2 subway stations away from my place, I was shocked. Galm's hair had somewhat straightened

out with age. He had put on some weight and looked like he should be picking up his kids from daycare. Ross was a woman now and went by Willow. Nate had a cool moustache. JR looked pretty much the same. As for me, I had more than football to worry about now. I'd had my fair share of dragging people down, and I loved beer.

This would be the second music concert I ever attended. My first was Taylor Swift's RED Tour stop in Singapore in 2014... I think I'm going to like this one a lot more.

<sup>1</sup> "Melissa, I f\*cked up. I won't cut my arms off / that won't keep me warm at night" from the song "So I Shotgunned A Beer And Went Back To Bed" on their first album serves as a follow-up of sorts to his previous declaration that he would, in fact, cut his arms off in "Pump Fake" from their earlier released EP.

7 Do's and Don'ts of Beating Creative Block in Tokyo

By: Alexine Castillo Yap

I am currently the not-so-proud owner of a fancy-schmancy, B4-size Winsor and Newton watercolour pad from Tokyu Hands that's still flat and uncurled from not having any watercolour grace its cream-white 270g/m<sup>2</sup> pages. I received it from some friends for my birthday last year, and I wish I could tell you that I've done more than just stare at it and wait for a painting to magically transpire in the 14 months that have passed since. I am loath to admit that I have done not just that (clearly having failed at transferring magic psychic powers onto the paper), but also that the only other time I used the sketchbook was as an impromptu dinner placemat. For delivery food, too, no less.

So, what happened? For over a year, I chafed it up to artist's block. More broadly, creative block, or the dreaded experience that anyone who ever tried to do anything creative has faced: feeling like your best efforts will result in nothing remotely good or skillful. It's hard enough to turn nothing into something, and even harder to ensure that this "something" is something you actually like. Creative block prevents you from starting, for fear of creating something you hate. It ensures that you never take a step beyond this

vicious cycle of self-defeating thought, and that you and your watercolour pad are barred from reaching your true potential: you as an artist, your watercolour pad as an art supply (and not a dining tool).

In a busy, bustling city like Tokyo, I find that it's actually not that difficult to dislodge creative block. I am battling it as I type this article, so don't think that I'm some kind of maestro in overcoming it. However, the fact that I've written this much so far probably counts for something. Here are 7 ways that I managed to beat creative block in the time that I've been living here:

1) Get moving.

If you're not already regularly involved in some kind of sport or activity that requires you to sweat or stretch or lose your breath, then do so! Go jogging, hiking, swimming (check out the community swimming pools around your neighbourhood — there's one right here in Komaba at Komabano Park!), hit the gym, join a yoga/martial arts/dance class, or just walk outside. I won't pretend to be your doctor, but nobody would argue that the lack of circulation that comes with sitting at a desk for hours on end in true sedentary-lifestyle fashion does anything for one's innovative or artistic capabilities. (Scientists<sup>1</sup> overwhelmingly<sup>2</sup> agree<sup>3</sup> that<sup>4</sup> exercise<sup>5</sup> improves<sup>6</sup> your<sup>7</sup> creativity<sup>8</sup>.) And if that still doesn't convince you to get moving...

2) Immerse yourself in other creative work around the city.

Tokyo is one of the world's greatest art capitals. Say what you want about this city, but if you tell me that you're not creatively inspired by it, I'd beg to differ because that just means you aren't exploring enough (or Googling hard enough). I can't even count how many art museums there

are in this city, not to mention other countless lesser-known art galleries and exhibits, many of which are free. And let's not forget Tokyo's artsy neighbourhoods, with their revolutionary fashion, music scenes, dance halls, and all the impossibly photogenic spots (sights bemoaned in Harajuku for gentrifying the neighbourhood but cherished in Harajuku for, well, gentrifying the neighbourhood<sup>9</sup>). If you live in Tokyo, you have basically no excuse to be uninspired! Get out there with an empty notebook and take notes from your fellow Tokyoites. Around these parts, there's always something to be inspired by.

3) DON'T Compare your work to others'.

A former US President spilled some serious truth tea when he said that "Comparison is the thief of joy." While taking inspiration from others' works is important, it shouldn't make you feel like your own work is inadequate. Balance is key, and I've found that as soon as I start comparing rather than being inspired, it's time to stop and reassess. Comparison makes me feel unfairly bad about myself and my work. Go at it at your own pace, and be content with the work you can produce! Nobody else can do you like you do.

4) DON'T Be too hard on yourself.

No overworking! Overworking is CANCELLED. When you feel your best, you will do your best, so make sure to take care of your physical and mental health. I don't mean to sound like your mom, but sometimes we have to be reminded to eat healthy food and get enough sleep! And don't be afraid to: say no to things that will only tire you out, split up your work into manageable bites, and start small — there's no need to throw yourself 100% on the first go. If you're creating visual art, you can just do some quick warm-up exercises or little sketches here and there until you feel ready to take on a bigger project. Also,

try to meditate — with just a quick search on the App Store, you can find tons of free apps that can help you relax.

5) Try something new.

Check out a music genre that you've never tried, visit the cafe that you've always said you wanted to check out, try out the always-ignored-for-your-favorite menu item, visit a part of the city that you haven't been to before. There's always something new to try whether or not you even live in Tokyo, and that includes things you might be taking for granted and thus don't even think of as something new. A few more ideas: Watch that show on Netflix that your friend recommended to you 10 months ago. Download a new wallpaper. Switch up your route to campus or work. Check out your *Discover Now* playlist on Spotify. Hang out with a new crowd. Just make sure it's something that you haven't done or experienced before — you'll be surprised at what you can get out of a change of scenery!

6) DON'T Be afraid of failure.

Where would we be if everyone gave up just because they messed up once or didn't achieve their desired result? That's right — nowhere, in boring-land, and with decisively fewer "Star Wars" prequels (a win for humanity). If you mess up, that's okay. Just pick up your pencil, paintbrush, and start again. The world's not going to end just because you messed up some anatomy or smeared up the background or unwittingly spilled ink over your canvas. The beautiful thing about art is that you can always try again!

7) DO.

To borrow Nike's slogan, *Just Do It*. Now. It's as simple as that.

The creative process is decadent and depraved.

They say it's like chasing an unrequited love<sup>10</sup>: the odds are stacked against you, there's no guarantee of success, and it could very well end in agonising failure. All the while, you're going to have to put in all the work yourself, and before you know it, you could have wasted all of your turpentine, carmine, Prussian blue and phthalo into a monstrous creation that stares back at you only to mock you. But you tried! Here's a gold star for Making An Attempt.

But it's always worth a shot because it could also very well end in success. Somehow as creators we still manage, time and time again, to work our magic onto these blank sheets despite the innumerable failures we encounter along the way.

That's probably why they also say that artists are a lot like scientists (STEM majors please don't kill me for this bad analogy). I don't remember what exactly they meant by that, but I think it's reassuring to know that scientists, much like artists, also don't really know what to expect half the time — what matters is trying something new and just going for it, despite the lack of guarantee of a desirable outcome. The process that helped Marie Curie discover and define radioactivity and improve x-ray machines — by maybe factoring in that variable with that other one, or that one, ad infinitum — probably has some similarities with the process that resulted in Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning "The God of Small Things", and with the process that eventually helped Vincent Van Gogh conjure up the "The Starry Night" (so good that it's been copied just about a million times by painters in numerous Saigon art streets). Artists of all kinds over the centuries took the decisive step to courageously tackle those blank sheets despite whatever failures preceded them, and the world is so much better for it. So go shoot your shot, and good luck!

<sup>1</sup> Steinberg, Hannah, et al. *Exercise enhances creativity independently of mood*. British Journal of Sports Medicine. Vol. 31, pp. 245-245. 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ramocki, Stephen P. *Creativity interacts with fitness and exercise*. Physical Educator, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 8-17. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Gondola, Joan C. *The Effects of a Single Bout of Aerobic Dancing on Selected Tests of Creativity*. Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, Vol. 2, Issue 2, pp 275. 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Blanchette, David M., et al. *Aerobic Exercise and Creative Potential: Immediate and Residual Effects*. Creativity Research Journal, Volume 17, Issue 2-3, pp. 257-264. 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Oppedo, Marily & Schwartz, Daniel L. *Give Your Ideas Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking*. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1142-1152. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Colzato, Lorenza S., et al. *The impact of physical exercise on convergent and divergent thinking*. Frontiers in Human Neuroscience. 02 December 2013 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2013.00824>

<sup>7</sup> Donnegan, Kathleen, et al. *Exercise and Creativity: Can One Bout of Yoga Improve Convergent and Divergent Thinking?* Journal of Cognitive Enhancement, Vol. 2, no 193. 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Román, Pedro Angel Latorre, et al. *Acute Aerobic Exercise Enhances Students' Creativity*. Creativity Research Journal, Vol. 30, Issue 3, pp. 310-315. 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Namkoong, Paul. *Google Docs comment*. 2019. (Shout-out!)

<sup>10</sup> And all too often chasing an unrequited love could be exactly what is needed to catalyse the creative process. Some of us just happen to be unfortunate enough to be far more acquainted with this phenomenon than others.



Image credit: Yu Kato (@Unsplash)

## Sexism Towards Victimized Women The Reality of Restrictions on Women in the Name of Protection

By: Jimin Park



Image credit: Free-Photos [Pixabay]

Sexual violence, such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse, refers to a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely-given consent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). The offenders and victims could be of any gender, but in many cases, men are the offenders and women are the victims. About 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced sexual violence and about 120 million girls worldwide have experienced forced sexual acts (UN Women, 2017). However, patriarchal societies restrict women to behave in certain ways in order to prevent sexual violence, rather than trying to eradicate the actual cause: the offenders. For example, there are claims that women should not wear short dresses and walk around late at night because they might be targeted for sex crimes.

This argument may seem plausible because it seems as if it is trying to protect possible victims of sexual violence; however, such a perspective may lead to shaming on women when they are victimized, as if they are the ones responsible for the crime. This paper focuses on how perspectives which claim that women should be more careful and take responsibility for oneself are actually oppressing rather than protecting them. Firstly, the paper examines the conservative view towards victimized women and how it still has its influence until today. Secondly, the paper analyses the factors of being the victim of sexual violence and whether victims should really deal with responsibility. Lastly, this essay states the

nature of sexual violence and victim-blaming and the real prevention of them. Certain restrictions on women in the name of preventing sexual violence is a way to oppress women's freedom and rights because such restrictions are based on the premise that victimized women are the cause of the violence, not the offenders themselves.

### Conservative views on victimized women

In patriarchal societies, there have been discriminatory perspectives towards women, as if they were inferior to men. Especially, the society's view towards victimized women in sexual violence was even crueler. For example, in the US, during the British colonial era, the rape of a virgin was considered a crime against her father, rather than a crime against the victim herself. Also, when a sex crime occurred, women had to be dependent on the courts and community, which consisted of men. Therefore a woman had to comply with male standards for her behavior by proving non-consent through verbal and physical resistance. If she could not prove non-consent, she was punished for assault. In the 19th century, women were praised for their purity, therefore a woman who got involved in sexual intercourse even against her will was considered to be a "fallen" woman and was blamed for the man's crime and socially criticized as a result of the attack. In the 20th century, the psychological approach to sexual crime started, but most theories concluded that the offenders were mentally ill, therefore reducing the offender's responsibility

for his actions since he was considered uncontrollable. In addition, society's perception of the victim also changed. Also, female nature became sexualized, therefore female victims were viewed as if they contributed to their own victimization (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992). By examining the example of the United States, it is clear that women's choices and decisions about their lives and bodies were highly restricted, and their dignity was ignored.

Even though gender equality is now considered as justice and women's rights have improved compared to past centuries, sexism towards women still exist which leads to victim-blaming, especially when the victim is a woman. For example, Judge Lindsey Kushner QC has been criticized for commenting that women need to protect themselves against the threat of being involved in sexual assault while drunk. The campaign group 'End Violence Against Women' condemned that such comments blame the victims for rape and remove responsibility from the male offender (Rawlinson, 2017). The contributions of social stereotypes and negativities on victimized women lead to victim-blaming and to rape itself. Addressing problems of victim-blaming would be more effective than worrying about what women wear or how they drink until the morning.

### Is it really the victim's fault?

Because of such negative perspectives, myths on sexual violence exist, such as "most sexual violence are committed by strangers," and

"women should not walk alone at night." However, they are nothing more than myths.

According to the 2001 British Crime Survey, women are most often sexually offended by men they know. About 8% of rapes were committed by strangers, while 45% of rapes reported to the survey were committed by offenders who were partners of the victims at the time of the incident. Also, the highest proportion of sexual assaults were committed by "acquaintances" which comprises 28% of the reported sexual assaults. This research proves that sexual violence is often committed by someone close to the victims. Almost three-quarters of rape incidents reported involved physical force or violence and over a third resulted in physical injury. In addition, 46% of sexual assaults involved the use of physical force, 14% resulting in physical injury. Myhill & Allen suggest that violent threats were present in 75% of rape incidents and 46% of sexual assaults. As seen from the research, it is obvious that the victims were threatened, which is probably the reason why the victims failed that resistance, or even try to resist.

Furthermore, 74% of incidents involving partners happened in the victim's own home and 16% at the offender's home. Among them, 55% of victims were raped in their homes. This fact refers to that keeping women from going outside is not a real solution to sexual violence, because it is often committed in their homes (Myhill & Allen, 2002).

The "What Were You Wearing?" exhibition that started at the University of Arkansas in 2014, which has spread to universities worldwide, displays the clothing the survivors were wearing at the time of their assault. This exhibition debunks the myth that victims could have prevented the assault if they had worn clothes that are less revealing (Vagianos, 2017). The outfits include a bikini, a boy's shirt, a sun dress, and a T-shirt and jeans, inferring that victims' outfits are not the cause of sexual violence. Therefore, this refutes claims that women need to be more cautious with what they wear in order to prevent sexual violence.

### True way of preventing sexual violence and victim-blaming

Throughout history, men and women have been socialized differently, as different gender roles

were assigned. As a result, these roles impact our behavior and beliefs towards others. Males are generally socialized to be more dominant and initiate sexual interactions, while women are socialized to be more passive. Therefore, sex role socialization provides the explanation for why men are sexually aggressive and why the act of sexual violence is normalized within society. Beliefs in traditional gender role stereotypes, and sexism have resulted in negative rape victim perception. Thus, victims of sexual violence are the victims of the injustice of our society. Sexism plays a big role in victim-blaming. Hostile Sexism is a prejudice that women should be punished for going against traditional sexual roles. In this case, a woman who wears provocative clothes or drinks too much will be responded with a form of hostile sexism. Benevolent Sexism claims that women who are traditionally feminine should be rewarded. Therefore, a woman who goes against such expectations may no longer be considered worthy of protection by men. Victim-blaming is a result of high hostile and benevolent sexism (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Instead of policing women's behavior, educating people about sexual violence and victim-blaming is much more effective at preventing sexual violence and further victimization. For example, one study showed that after an hour of education on sexual assault, men were less likely to believe wrong myths about rape or consider being sexually forceful (Foubert & Marriott, 1997). Also, conservative views on women and victims of sexual violence must be rethought and reeducated in order to eliminate blaming on victim, who need care and attention. Consequently, the most effective prevention of sexual violence is reeducating factors about sexual violence and stopping further victim-blaming.

### Conclusion

There have been negative perspectives towards women in general but particularly female victims of sexual violence. Although gender equality is considered justice in today's societies, conservative perspectives still influence how people view the victims. From such perspectives, restrictions on women have been justified even though they are not effective prevention to sexual violence. However, such myths that put responsibility on women are debunked by statistics and other evidence. It is also proven that the actual cause of sexual violence and victim-blaming comes from sexist perspectives of the society. Sexism that

has been encroaching in patriarchal societies for centuries still has its influence in the modern world. Nonetheless, it is proven that just a little bit of education on false beliefs can change conservative thoughts and unconscious sexism. Therefore, education about sexual violence, sexism, and victim-blaming is the key to preventing further sexual violence and further victimization.

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Every year, the Komaba Writers' Studio supports first year students' English academic writing in the College of Arts & Sciences' ALESA (Active Learning of English for Students of the Arts) programme under the Center for Global Communication Strategies. The best works that year are featured in the annual ALESA publication, *Pensado*. We chose two of our favourite works from the

2019 issue which we felt expressed a strong voice and reflected some of the most pressing issues that UTokyo students are most concerned with. For more information about ALESA or the other Active English language classes, please visit [http://ale.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ale\\_web/index.php](http://ale.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ale_web/index.php).

## Did the Incorporation of National Universities Improve Their Academic Level?

By: Mai Tamura

### Introduction

In 2004, the Japanese government carried out a big reform on universities' governance. Accordingly, public universities, which were a part of the national government and were directly operated by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) transformed into so-called National University Corporations (NUCs), and the autonomy is left at the discretion of university presidents (Hanada, 2013). MEXT reported that the reform brought desirable effects in terms of financial efficiency leading to research progress (2017). On the other hand, the reform is opposed primarily by the Japanese Association of National Universities and the National Union of Higher Education Staff (2017). They claimed that, for the majority of NUCs, the reform caused financial difficulty and downsizing in university control over quality of education, which Westerheijden, a senior research associate at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) of the University of Twente, called "academic self-governance" (2018, p. 210). These problems bring up the question whether the reform has helped improve the academic level of Japanese national universities in today's highly competitive world.

This paper sheds light on the relationship between the policy and university autonomy. It will argue that the outcome of the reform has been contradictory to the initial aim; not only are the universities now struggling more with budget gathering from private sectors, but the universities are also having to lean towards the MEXT's preference when choosing which field to invest the research money into. These situations may result in a decrease of their academic power. This paper will first examine the initial aim of 2004 reform. Secondly, it will discuss the financial and "academic self-governance" problems

resulting from this scheme. Lastly, it concludes by suggesting the necessity of the reform review and the governmental support for the NUCs now facing managerial problems.

### The aims and the contents of the National University Corporation Act

The 2004 incorporation of national universities is said to be a turning point in Japanese educational history in that it reflected the policy changes aiming at the new public management. In this section, this paper will explain the initial aims and the contents of the reform. Although the proposal of incorporation itself was seen just after the establishment of imperial universities in Meiji era, actual changes had been restricted to slight budget restructuring (Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015).

However, as various efficiency-oriented reforms were carried out during the Koizumi administration, the idea was raised again that universities should be incorporated in order to make operations more efficient and to catch up with top global academic standards in highly competitive environments generated by globalization (Mok, 2010). The idea was considered to conform with international trends called new public management in which the public sector should adopt the managerial method of the private sector and the market mechanism in order to enhance their administrative ability and the efficiency (Westerheijden, 2018). Based on new public management, the incorporation brought four changes related to university autonomy.

First, each university was transformed from a part of the governmental organization to a corporation. This enabled NUCs to operate independently as autonomous public institutions. Second, NUCs realized top management because they adopted a board system and introduced man-

agement methods of private sectors. Third, each president was in charge of personnel management based on non-civil servant style in which faculty staff were paid according to their ability or accomplishments. Lastly, NUCs accepted evaluations from third parties, which were reflected in resource distribution among universities. That is, each NUC has to submit an annual report to MEXT its progress in terms of achieving the goals of its medium term (6-year) plan (Kaneko, 2009). Therefore, according to Christensen (2011), a researcher of university governance: *NUCs have more control over its own property than before the reform. University employees are no longer civil servants. There is a united leadership and more power for the President. There are more external experts and representatives on university bodies like boards and councils* (p. 131).

### Results of the reform:

#### From financial and academic self-governance perspectives

Although 14 years have passed since that reform, the results seem to contradict the initial aims represented above; many NUCs have problems in both finance and academic self-governance. From the financial aspect, a survey conducted in 2006 to analyze some of the consequences of the NUC Act showed that many NUCs have difficulties with financial management (Christensen, 2011). First, this paper shows the problems regarding operation costs which represented 47.7% of the total revenue of all the national universities (Oba, 2007).

According to data from the Japan Association of National Universities, operation costs have been reduced 10 % within 10 years after the 2004 incorporation (2017). Figure 1 shows 1.241 million in 2004 was reduced to 1.158 million in 2010

(MEXT, 2017). This has suppressed universities' management despite their efforts in improving efficiency, saving money, and increasing self-revenue. There has been an actual case where a number of professors have presented their concerns to the Japanese government. More specifically, the Japan Association of National Universities claimed in documents on budget requests that reducing the operation costs led to a decrease in the number of full-time faculty members, or young teachers in order to cut the cost of labor. As a result, it has become harder for young researchers to be employed in national universities. Moreover, it also created the serious problem of fund deficit for repairing aging facilities on campus. A considerable number of facilities established in the 1970s are in want of repair because they are likely to trigger accidents, decrease international competitive power in terms of conducting innovative research, and lead to inefficient operation systems, with energy loss as a consequence (Yamagiwa, 2017).

Secondly, in terms of competitive funds, NUCs have difficulty collecting such funds. Science research subsidies which contribute to generate new industry is lacking. Although the number of applications for the subsidy is increasing, the acceptance rate is decreasing during these 5 years. As a result, fund sufficiency of some research fields is under 70% (Yamagiwa, 2017). In addition, some NUCs cannot cooperate with companies because they fail to propose applications based on long-term plans. Thus, only few specific fields are allowed to raise funds.

Next, from the academic self-governance point of view, it could be argued that the reform undermines NUCs' autonomy. This was something of a paradox considering that the priority objective of the reform was to increase universities' autonomy. Nevertheless, NUCs have been robbed of their planning and policy functions because each NUC must submit an annual report to MEXT after the reform; NUCs have to accept inspections and conform to the goals suggested by the ministry's evaluation committee (Christensen, 2011). For example, when MEXT required public comments of NUCs in order to decide the distribution of special budgets, 85% of them submitted comments relating to MEXT (Amano, 2004). This means each of the top NUCs indicated their teachers to make comments in ways that will conform to the preference of MEXT.

For these reasons, current circumstances in major NUCs regarding research funds are too unstable to survive in today's highly competitive world. They are not able to collect sufficient funds for improving the quality of their institutions such as faculty members and facilities, and for doing various research. What is more, the intensified influence of MEXT on decision making has prevented free academic self-governance of NUCs, which might lead to restricted environments for research.

#### The effects of financial and academic self-governance problems on research competitiveness

Although the majority of the NUCs certainly

failed to rationalize their governance, it could be claimed that some NUCs achieved the initial aim of the reform. According to some data which use variables representing decision-making power in a board of directors and president leadership as indicators of NUC governance (Akai & Nakamura, 2009), some NUCs whose presidents exercise greater leadership could succeed in achieving the intended goal of acquiring independence.

More specifically, these data show that the more the presidents exercise their leadership, the less the degree of dependence on operations costs provided by the government there is. Moreover, they suggested that greater command of presidents decreases labor costs and education expenses per student; on the other hand, it increases research expenses per teacher (Akai & Nakamura, 2009). However, in spite of these positive effects of the reform, there are clear negative aspects; the reform has created a kind of "survival-of-the-fittest" system. According to Christensen (2011): *The financial provisions of the NUC Act have had a differentiating effect on the financial capacity of NUCs. The former imperial universities, medical colleges and post-graduate schools, the majority of them in Tokyo metropolitan area, are doing best, because they are able to counteract the financial pressure by successfully competing for research resources. The other NUCs often try to survive by focusing more on teaching, albeit not always successfully* (p. 132)

Other data indicate that only the major NUCs collect more than 60% of the external resources, and the circumstances in other local NUCs became worse, forced to make efforts only to survive (Oba, 2007). As a result, NUCs failed to enhance their academic level. According to figure 2 (MEXT, 2017), the number of journals published by NUCs has decreased. Therefore, it could be argued that the benefits of the reform have been limited.

### Conclusion

Though the reform in 2004 was aimed to enhance universities' international competitiveness, the result has seemed to be the opposite, given the recent situation of Japanese public universities. Research competitiveness appears to have deteriorated after the reform (MEXT, 2017). This decline was certainly caused by financial and academic self-governance problems. In other words, universities have much more difficulty in improving the quality of research institutions or collecting research funds on account of budget deficits. Moreover, NUCs are more susceptible to MEXT preference because MEXT imposes a mid-term report on them. It is true that a few NUCs in the metropolitan area have received the benefits of the reform. If we consider other indicators which measure the extent of the NUCs management, we cannot clearly say the reform was a failure. To explore this problem further, it might be required to examine the problem in a wider context. However, it is clear that overall the current situation regarding university governance is problematic as the majority of the NUCs are forced to restrict the range of research. Considering these situations, the efficiency-oriented re-

form should be reviewed. To keep the academic level of Japanese universities, the government should take some measures which will relieve financial restrictions. Furthermore, greater academic self-governance should be given to NUCs by changing MEXT evaluation methods or promoting projects in collaboration with academia, industry, and the government which might facilitate innovative research.

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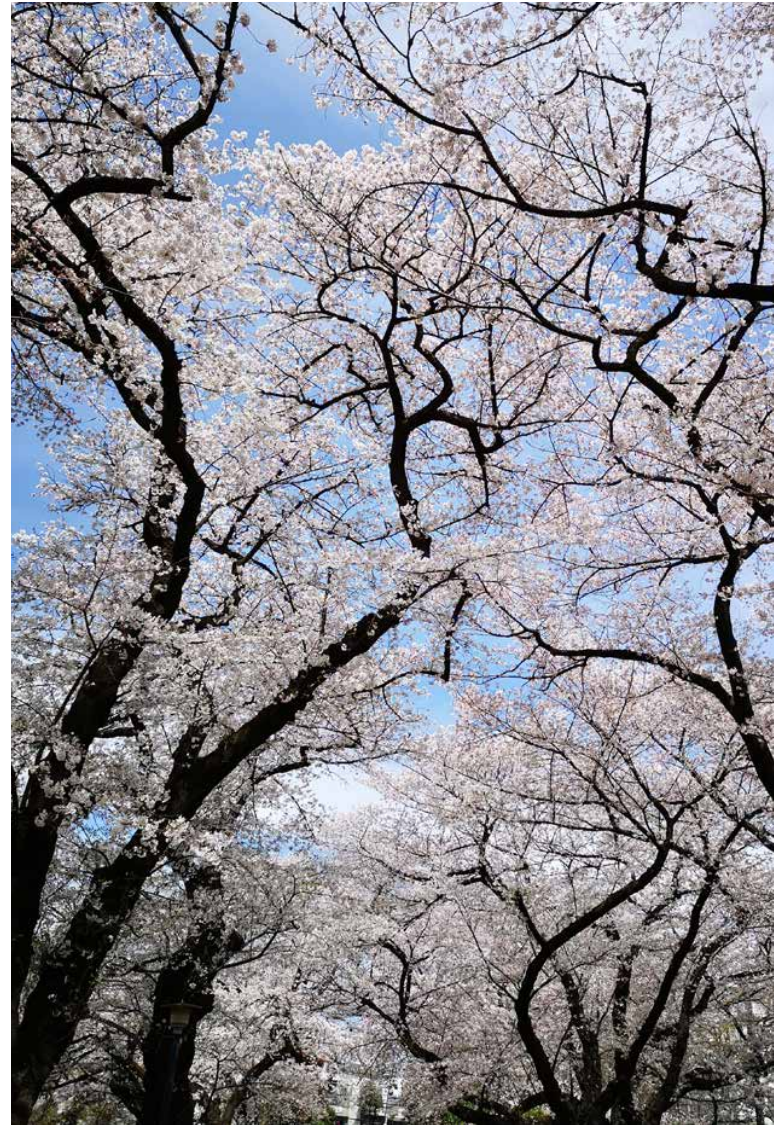
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Image credit: 猪俣 [Pxaboy]



*image* Mudi Wang



*image* Mudi Wang

creative  
**駒場**  
 KOMABA



illustration Jade Hwang



by Ran She  
 illustration Jade Hwang

I'd been waiting now for an hour.

The first ten minutes was nothing. I didn't even notice it. I didn't even notice ten whole minutes had gone past standing outside in the cold. Ten minutes, what's that?

The next ten minutes, too, was nothing at all. In fact, it was probably I who was mistaken and had come out to wait at 2pm instead of 2:20pm. That's right, we probably had agreed to meet at 2:20pm instead of 2pm. As people do. It was my fault, so so stupid. Anyway, that was nothing at all, too. Nothing at all.

And then the third ten minutes came and went. And the time became 2:30pm. Thirty minutes, that was un-unnoticeable. Thirty minutes is half of an hour, and hours make up the day. Days make up the months, and months make up the years. Sometimes, a year is a long, long time. But mostly, as you grow older, the years become shorter. Have I grown older, standing here out in the rain? Who decides that over a year, I grow older, but over a minute I don't? Am I not now thirty minutes older than I was when I first came out to stand outside here?

Forty minutes. When I was in high school we had twenty minute periods, and so the shortest classes lasted two periods: forty minutes. I could have had a whole biology class by now. The trendy joke nowadays is that instead of learning useful, applicable things in high school, you learn that "the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell".  
 Huh.

Fifty minutes. My left toe is wet. In a greatly misfortune sequence of events, I, pacing from curb to street, street to curb, up and down, down and up, having miscalculated one particular step, in a brazen attempt to stride over a puddle collecting over a hollow in the concrete, with a great small splash, you can figure the rest out yourself. And now my left toe is wet. It's not getting any drier standing out here in the rain and the cold and the wind and the clouds and the grey and the rain. And the cold.

One hour. Still waiting.



# Sausages

by Ran She  
illustration Jade Hwang

Ph—ew, he whistled, quietly. Look at that one.

There was a woman walking across the street. She had a short skirt on and her skinny legs spread in sheer stockings were shimmering in the sunshine. Behind her sunglasses, she pretended not to notice the two men on this side of the street.

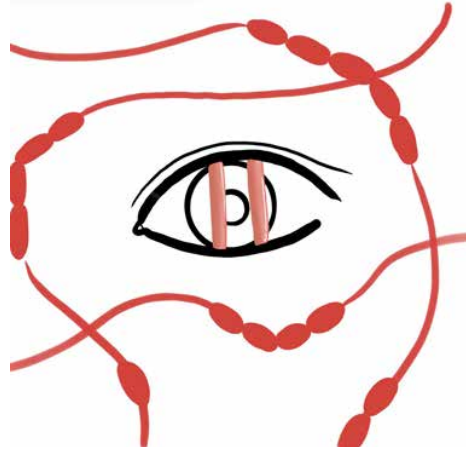
Looks like sausages. The other man sounded dismissive.

No way. Those are great legs. He insisted.

Eh. Sausages.

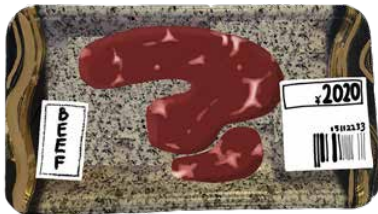
What.

The second man wasn't thinking about her legs really. He was more hungry than horny.



# Beef

by Ran She  
illustration Jade Hwang



A piece of beef is a piece of beef, if you will. And a slab, well that's a slab. No matter what you do with it. You can fry it, boil it, grill it, bake it, steam it, whatever you can do with it it's still a piece of a beef. It still came from a cow, you know? Unless it's one of those vegan beefs, then it didn't really come from anything.

never did I think that  
i would land up in a place  
where my tongue isn't the same  
as yours.  
where even your face tells a different story than mine.  
i hear  
but i can't listen  
i try, but i don't understand  
every time  
breathless.  
helpless.  
i was just trying to buy bread  
i try, you still don't understand  
you want to  
i want to.  
i watch us struggling,  
understanding has some borders,  
in a world where  
expressions are limited by a line of control  
the limits that  
we want to break apart  
in the world where I can only smile and laugh  
when you do-  
but still not understand why  
we are doing what we are doing  
further separation  
alienation  
i'm sure it's hard for you too.  
but now we are trying  
to accommodate each other  
into our little worlds.  
bit by bit, piece by piece  
i string some of your words into mine  
and understand you better  
with every passing day  
as you become we  
and i become us.  
i think we'll be okay  
aren't we learning every day?  
in fact today  
i bought bread on my own  
for us."

by Dhriti Mehta

日本語なし

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\*Nihongo 日本語 is the Japanese word for 'the Japanese language'.

# Theater the Ineffable

by Minghao Xu  
image Minghao Xu

**"BELIZE:** If anyone who was suffering in the body or the spirit, walked through the waters of the fountain of Bethesda, they would be healed, washed clean of pain.

**HANNAH:** Right. The fountain of Bethesda will flow again. And I told him I would personally take him there to bathe. We will all bathe ourselves clean."

—Tony Kushner, *Angels in America Part II: Perestroika*



Words fail.

Whenever I see a play, I can't help but feel the urge to write something about it. Be it a general comment on the production and elements of it, or rumination on themes and ideas that the play touches, there is always this spontaneity for "joining the conversation" or "being part of the story." Little by little, I've also grown accustomed to flaunting my saggy bag of SAT words. "Blisteringly valiant!" "Incandescent and scintillating!" The form calls for it, I reckon. It is as if I've mastered the art of writing for pull quotes you would find on mailers of upcoming productions. Yet, more often than not, there are feelings for which I can't find words or have no clue where I can begin to describe. Even the almighty Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary can't give me a hint. Gradually, I find myself being led to the word "ineffable." "Ineffably beautiful," "ineffably moving," "ineffably brilliant" and so forth. It paints a picture of the initial reaction but acknowledge how abstruse the inner workings are.

Lazy writer, I know. Still, I can't help but marvel at the ineffable beauty of "ineffable." By definition, it describes something too great, too powerful, too beautiful to be described. In a sense, it is a literal symbol trying to decipher the indecipherable, beat the unbeatable. Yet like Sisyphus, who pushed the rock unabated every time it rolled down, the word never surrenders. It refuses to give in to the impossibility of the task.

Trying to search for the answer to what makes me once and again go back to the theater as if it's a daily pilgrimage is indeed a Sisyphean task. The searching always leads me to the five or ten minutes when, after the performers took their bow and the curtain dropped, I stand alone in front of the theater, discomposed or amazed with a heady mixture of jumbled thoughts and feelings occupying my consciousness, not ready to return to reality. I tried to see it through Aristotle's eyes. Although it focuses on tragedies, in his notion of catharsis, the play first arouses emotions and then cleanses them, from which one's soul is uplifted.

Yet I feel there's something more profound than emotions. Many times I feel my life is forever changed by my theater-going experience. I saw the final performance of the recent Broadway revival of *The Color Purple* before I departed for Ghana, setting my foot on the African continent for the first time. I was, and still am, haunted by the show. This one line touched my soul — "it's like black seeing black for the first time." There's something so pure, so honest about our humanity in these simple words. It might be the storytelling, the stagecraft, the live performance, or the dedication from the stage and the audience, but I had a religious experience that day, an experience that continues to inspire me to be faithful and true to myself and people around me.

**continued p. 35**



# UTokyo Go Global!



銀杏の季節 / Season of Ginkgo Sun Shuai

Every year, the Go Global Centre at The University of Tokyo holds a Photo Contest open to all University of Tokyo students at all levels. For this issue, we picked a couple of our favourite photos from the 2018 round. The themes for the 2018 round were *A Day in UTokyo* 東大での日常 and *My Favorite "Nippou"* 私の好きな「ニッポン」. For more information on the Go Global Photo Contest, check out: <https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/adm/inbound/en/life-interact-events.html>

Of course, going to the theater is a financial and time-consuming investment, but I've come to realize that it demands a lot more from the audience than just money and a few hours. I once waited in the cancellation line from 8 in the morning till late afternoon on a freezing New York winter day in hopes to get a ticket to Hamilton (Spoiler: I failed). I also remember this one time after a late class in which I had only 20 minutes to go all the way from the campus to a theater in Shibuya. I hopped on the train, blazed my way through the rush hour subway crowd, and ran from the station to the theater as if my life depended on it. The joy of finally having my butt on the cushioned seat was truly ineffable. It is magical to make it to the room where it happens. It is magical to be in the room where it happens. And then it happens.

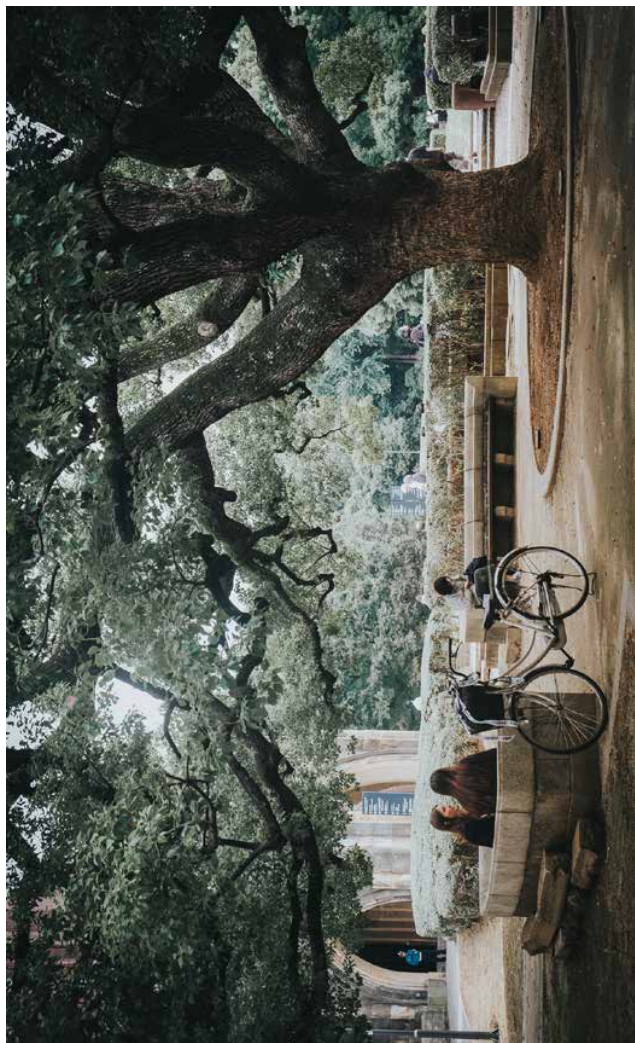
What is "it"? Is it a brilliant vision through a multitude of discussions, trials and errors, and ultimately sacrifices finally being realized on stage? Is it performers living their dreams by pouring their hearts and souls out eight times a week? Is it backstage staff working indefatigably with attention to every detail so the show runs smoothly like a well-oiled machine? Is it people from every imaginable background coming together sharing the same journey as an audience? Or perhaps, is it all of the above?

This is a community. Whatever your role is, you make it happen. Everyone is bonded by sharing the human experience in one way or another. The interaction is often without words; sometimes just a smile. Yet it is resounding and powerful. One of the plays I always go back to is *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* by Tony Kushner. The play consists of two parts, spanning nearly 7 hours in total. I saw it on a two-part day. The first part started at 1 pm, and when the second part ended it was already approaching 11. There was a lady in her forties sitting next to me. She was also seeing both parts. When the curtain closed and people were ready to go, our eyes met. We both smiled. Even if we might never meet again, we both know that someone was there for you and went through the journey together. We don't need words for our appreciation; the smile says everything already.

We are social animals. We yearn for the real connections. As Kushner puts it, "the smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction." In the theater, we build a community. Through the community we confront the naked humanity together, pain together, heal together, and eventually grow together. The community is like the fountain of Bethesda, we bring people we love and bathe us all clean. Our spirits rise.

And that's something truly ineffable. •

curated by Mudi Wang



Ray of Hope Natdanai Kodchamonsamphan

## When Horror Met Art: Art Circle Bi 美 Hosts Its 12th Event

by Juliette Scholler (美 head)

As a sombre black tinted the Komaba sky on the night of October 28th, 2019, UTokyo's English-language art circle "Bi (美): A Series of Creative Talks" opened the doors to the Campus *Wakan* to host its 12th talk event, "Art + Horror." To fit the Halloween-esque theme, we invited three guests, Samantha Landau, Ph.D, Michael Rhys, and Hiro Usuda, to share with us their equally-terrifying works.

The event opened with **Professor Samantha Landau** presenting her academic work on Gothic spaces. She explored how locations are used as motifs to define the eeriness in Gothic literature, and how they are key elements in instilling fear and an air of unsettledness in both the characters and the readers. As in the works of Emily Dickinson and Shirley Jackson, she questions how a place becomes haunted: does the mind affect the space, or does the space affect the mind?

Next was **Michael Rhys**, a voice actor and storyteller, who shared a story he had prepared for a monthly poetry reading event, "Drunk Poets See God". He read us his version of the legend of a leprechaun who awaits at the end of the rainbow — one you would never want to encounter, as he is in fact a demon that brings all but good luck.

He then closed his speech with a message to us all: to reflect on how we all self-censor when it comes to creative creation, and to let ourselves free for self-expression. It was an experience that surely made us all sign up for Audible's free trial right after and download all of the books he narrated.



event poster Juliette Scholler



image Alexine Castillo Yap



*image* Alexine Castillo Yap

Lastly, **Hiro Usuda** presented her graphic works in Konami's horror game series *Silent Hill*. "Sit back and relax," she said, as she opened her PowerPoint presentation on her work on *Silent Hill*, which was inspired by the film *Jacob's Ladder* and the Stephen King book, *The Mist*. "It won't be scary," she said. However, the visuals she showed were enough to bring goosebumps on top of goosebumps.

To the artist's delight, the audience resembled a plucked flock of geese.

Her other works showed her versatility as an artist, from illustrating trading card games to drawing manga. Despite the variety in her art, she kept a fantastical and mythic touch unique to her style.

Many thanks to the guests who have kindly given their time to give such amazing talks. •

**美: A Series of Creative Talks will be waiting for you in its next event "Chapter 13: Art + Superstition" in Spring 2020. (Come for a semester of good fortune!)**