

The NIFS Times

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A Land-Mine Style Ready for the World Zooming in on *Jirai-kei* fashion

By Beatrice KING, Georgina F. BRIGGS, and Eiko KOJIMA

Weaving our way between a maze of alleys in Osu, filled with candy-pink clothing stores and bubble tea stalls, we notice an overlapping theme: the *Jirai-kei* fashion boom has spread everywhere. It's hard to pass a minute walking through the streets without seeing a girl dressed head to toe in *Jirai-kei*, with a dusty pink short dress, twin-tail hair-styles tied in a myriad of lacy black ribbons, and a backpack to match the look.

It's not exactly a new fashion trend, having emerged within the past three years, though it's unlike the bright and colourful trends before it. *Jirai-kei* literally translates as 'Landmine Style,' a former mockery of emotional girls prone to dramatic behaviour and violent breakdowns turned aesthetic and life-style.

The style originated in the streets of Kabuki-cho, Tokyo, a district known for adult orientated nightlife, rock performances and host clubs. It's almost hard to imagine such a cutesy style juxtaposed against the electric background of the city, but *Jirai-kei* has spread across Japan, even attracting dedicated followers overseas.

There's no short supply of tutorials on how exactly to dress *Jirai-kei* either – mannequins display the latest looks, and magazines provide detailed instructions regarding cute makeup styles that pair well with the fashion. Accessories sell for as cheap as ¥100, so it's really no wonder that the once adult-orientated style has found its way into the wardrobes of teens and young women alike.

However, *Jirai-kei*'s sudden entrance into mainstream fashion has been met by widespread social prejudice, directed towards those who wear *Jirai-kei* and their lifestyle choices.

One common stereotype surrounding *Jirai-kei* and other alternative fashion styles, such as Yami-kei, is that people interested in the style are *menhera*, a Japanese slang term referencing people with mental health struggles. Due to negative stigma around such struggles, the term can have derogatory connotations.



Jirai-kei, a fashion style that is cute at first glance but harbors a darker personality on the inside, continues to gain popularity.

Illustration by Beatrice KING

We asked students at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies what their impressions were regarding people who wear *Jirai-kei* fashion. 67% of respondents answered that they find people who wear *Jirai-Kei* hard to approach and talk with. One interviewee specified: 'I associate *Jirai-Kei* with people who are a little sick or *menhera*. This makes me nervous to talk to them—their personalities seem cold or distant.' Another claimed: 'I imagine *Jirai-kei* people as being surrounded by a dark atmosphere. They seem scary when I talk to them.'

Despite social bias, in recent years, fashion subcultures have pushed to transform negative stigmas around fashion and *menhera*,

reclaiming the term to raise mental health awareness.

Bearing this stigma in mind, we head to Osu to investigate. In front of a fashion store lining the street, which boasts an impressive range of fashion pieces in entirely pastel pinks and black tones, we find two girls browsing for clothes. Matching black sweaters decorated with brightly coloured bears, neon-coloured contacts, and highlighted hair to finish off the look—their style is just as impressive as the store they're browsing. What inspires their looks? And why are girls on the streets choosing these styles to express themselves?

'What I'm wearing today would probably fall under the label of Yami-kawaii fashion,' one of the girls shares. Yami-kawaii is a sister style of *Jirai-kei*, trading *Jirai-kei*'s signature ribbons and lace for a fearless, bold look.

"I was initially influenced by my friends, who had been experimenting with the style, and after seeing more and more on the internet, I decided to give it a try. Before I knew it, I was dressing like this every day. It just represents my personality," we're told by the pair.

"But sometimes people are easy to judge and think it's hard to communicate just because of your fashion choices, especially when the style is darker and edgier. When you wear this fashion, people might think you're crying out for attention. But, when it comes down to it, I think the effect that clothes have on your life depends on who you are as a person."

No matter what negative perceptions society may have regarding alternative fashion styles like *Jirai-kei*, wearing clothes because you truly love them and want to express yourself seems important.

Next, we head to our main destination, Spinns, a store that has acted as the hub for various alternative fashion trends in Japan. The store invites us into rows of black lace and chains. Under labels that identify *Jirai-kei* and illustrations of twin girls in matching *Jirai-kei* outfits, we find an abundance of hair-clips and key-rings, featuring various motifs from cute cat characters to pill shaped medicine.

'Fall into darkness'; 'Afternoon nap-time'; 'Magical girl'; 'Great job for staying alive' – the messaging being sold is clearly scrawled on the products in Japanese. The wording expresses an intimate relationship with one's feelings—the desire to live freely and express oneself, even if that makes one a dangerous and unstable 'landmine' in the eyes of society.

The Spinns staff are incredibly helpful, guiding us through the pieces anyone would need to pull off a *Jirai-kei* look. "For people who are getting to know the style," the staff advises, "gothic lacy collars, loose socks and chains are an easy way to transform a regular look into *Jirai-kei*." Cute mascots also add to the style's unique atmosphere. 'Kuromi and My Melody are popular mascots of *Jirai-Kei*,' the staff adds. These two Sanrio characters are synonymous with Japan's 'Kawaii' mascot culture, themselves receiving a *Jirai-kei* makeover for a recent series of original products marketed to young girls.

Continued on Page 6

Sexual Minorities in Japan

The deficiencies and possibilities of same-sex marriage support

By Connor L. GIBSON, Ellie MCELWAINE, and Haruna KOMATSU

“I feel that many people don’t realize that same sex marriage isn’t recognized. That’s why it makes me depressed. I’m still underage and I don’t have a partner, but I want partnerships to be recognized and discrimination to be reduced. I want to be treated the same as heterosexual couples.”

A member of a local LGBTQ+ group in Nagoya shared these struggles, lamenting the lack of marriage equality in Japan. Many same-sex couples are unable to have their relationship legally recognized, hindering their ability to pursue a future as a family. The heartache and frustration our interviewees express regarding marriage inequality remind us exactly why an official structure is necessary to support same-sex couples in the LGBTQ+ community.

Society’s tolerance to difference has fluctuated throughout history, which is especially prevalent when looking at LGBTQ+ rights, where stories of discrimination and oppression remain a constant concern. Exploring current affairs at the forefront of Japanese national news, it becomes clear that the subject of LGBTQ+ rights and the many struggles and concerns that LGBTQ+ communities face are not adequately addressed and discussed in Japan.

One problem that LGBTQ+ communities across Japan currently face is the lack of marriage rights. Many same-sex partners find themselves unable to live a normal, happy life like their heterosexual peers, due to the non-existence of same-sex marriage legality in Japan. Some cities in Japan have implemented a same-sex partnership system over the years to tackle this issue.

Certain cities in Japan have implemented same-sex partnership systems, sometimes referred to as partnership oath systems, which offer certain marital benefits to same sex couples. Partnership systems ease some of the emotional and physical ramifications that same-sex couples suffer due to the illegality of same-sex marriage.

The first partnership system was introduced in 2015 by the council of Shibuya Ward, Tokyo. Since then, the same system has been implemented by 233 municipalities, which constitutes approximately 62% of the population.

Operating in local governments, partnership systems issue certificates that recognize same-sex relationships as equivalent to marriage.



This certificate grants access to various social services, which had previously only been granted to married heterosexual couples.

Some benefits of the system include: familial hospital admission privileges, the ability to apply for public housing as a family, the ability to designate one’s partner as a life insurance beneficiary, and private family discounts. These benefits make partnership systems incredibly important for LGBTQ+ people throughout Japan, who are unable to achieve marriage under the law.

While the introduction of same sex partnerships marks a milestone for the LGBTQ+ community, many issues remain unsolved. For instance, if one partner dies, the surviving partner cannot inherit any property in the name of the deceased. Moreover, if the deceased has a biological child, the surviving partner would not be considered a legal guardian. It is also difficult to adopt children because adoption may require the parents of the child to be married.

Despite this, partnership systems mark a large step in the direction of marriage equality. Encouraging discussion about further legal and systematic improvements that can grant same-sex couples the same rights as their peers, partnership systems improve the prospect of marriage equality in Japan’s future.

To gain further insight about the opinions of the Japanese public regarding this topic, we interviewed participants for their thoughts regarding the introduction of same-sex marriage. Most respondents stated that they agree with the implementation of same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, some remained impartial, and others expressed worries that it might affect the declining birth rate.

Participants waving rainbow flags in a parade in Sakae, Nagoya (Partially modified image)
Photo: Provided by the Chunichi Shimbun on May 14, 2022.

The responses we received correlate with a national survey conducted in Japan in 2019. The results revealed that 87.9% of women and 69.2% of men are in favour of legalizing same-sex marriage¹. Our interview responses from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies suggest that students are supportive of same-sex marriage and same-sex partnerships, and agree that partnership systems should be implemented in Nisshin City and Japan as a whole.

Curious about the status of partnership systems in Nisshin city, we directly interviewed Nisshin City Hall to clarify their stance regarding same-sex marriages and partnerships.

Nisshin city undertook research in the 3rd Nisshin City Gender Equality Promotion Plan (April 2021-March 2031) to explore the possibilities of a partnership oath system in Nisshin. The city plans to introduce a partnership system for residents, however, city hall must complete multiple steps before implementing the system, beginning with partnership surveys. After this, city hall will establish an implementation policy and create an advisory council for the promotion of gender equality. Finally, they will conduct research and study other municipalities, conducting an exploratory meeting².

Nisshin City Hall has a promising action plan to implement a partnership system in the area, which will be open to anyone who meets the requirements, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Cities like Nisshin could jumpstart the spread of partnership systems

in the rest of Aichi prefecture. In fact, Nisshin City stated that plans to introduce partnership systems are currently being considered in Nagoya. Given the size of Nagoya, this plan could have a wide-reaching impact on the LGBTQ+ community.

The actions of city hall and other governmental organizations is key to implementing partnership systems and granting more rights to same-sex couples and the LGBTQ+ community. However, without public support, fully mobilizing same-sex rights and marriage equality will be difficult. Though the Japanese public exhibits a positive attitude toward same-sex marriage, their knowledge of the partnership system is minimal.

When we interviewed Japanese students on campus regarding their knowledge of same sex marriage and the partnership system, all the participants knew that same sex marriage was illegal in Japan, while only half were aware of the partnership system. Participants were also unable to clarify what partnership systems may entail for LGBTQ+ communities. Moreover, all participants were unaware of future plans to introduce same sex partnerships in different municipalities.

Our survey results suggest a general apathy towards the subject of same sex marriage, marking one of the reasons why same-sex marriage may remain illegal in Japan. If there existed more public mobility, a stronger force pushing for LGBTQ+ rights, then partnership systems—and, in the future, improved marriage laws—may develop more rapidly and widely.

Without a structure like the partnership system, same-sex couples face many limitations. The emotional and physical ramifications of not being able to marry has deep implications for how same-sex couples carry out their future lives, and their freedom to pursue happiness. Nonetheless, unable to offer the full benefits of marriage, the partnership system is only a temporary solution, with the end goal being complete marriage equality. Greater public support might offer the mobility required to make this a reality in the near future.

¹ YAMASHITA, TOMOKO (2019) Survey: 78% of Japanese in 20s to 50s favor legal gay marriages, The Asahi Shimbun. Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/cjw/articles/13053805> (Accessed: November 13, 2022).

² <https://www.city.nisshin.lg.jp/departament/seikatu/kyoudou/3/12/plan/11305.html>

Digital Spaces in the Real World

Exploring AICHI IMPACT

By Zoe A. HOPWELL, Nicholas T. SULLIVAN, and Shion TA-KATEYAMA

More than half of Japan’s population plays some sort of video game, with Japan’s video game industry bringing in close to 22.1 billion USD in 2022. The attraction of large cash prizes has turned esports into a billion-dollar industry and interest is constantly growing. Hooked by the boundless innovation of gaming, Japanese gamers have developed a rich gaming culture, both online and offline.

Japan’s gaming culture is at an all-time high, but as people’s lives suddenly transitioned online during COVID-19, gamers began to reevaluate the importance of physical spaces. Ranging from Pokémon Centers to arcades, Japanese players have a wealth of opportunities to unplug and enjoy games in person. Gaming conventions, in particular, offer gamers a chance to meet face-to-face, experience technology that they cannot normally afford, and immerse themselves in a community that cannot be replicated in an online world.

As one of thousands of people who discovered a love for gaming in the pandemic, I was excited by the opportunity to meet other fans and see what the gaming community had in store at my very first convention, AICHI IMPACT 2022.

AICHI IMPACT is a chance for gamers and businesses to come together and connect with one another without a Wi-Fi connection. Held every November at Aichi Sky Expo, the three-day event is free to enter and hosts teams that play popular games such as VALORENT, APEX, and PUBG. Approaching its third year, AICHI IMPACT seeks to promote E-sports and gaming across Japan by offering programming classes for kids, providing companies a public platform, and holding tournaments where students can compete and showcase their skills.

Hearing so much about the eye catching conventions Japan hosts for anime and manga, I decided to experience AICHI IMPACT for myself. Compared to similar events in the west, where gamers would arrive in full costume, watch fierce competitions, collect merch, and buy the latest tech, I was surprised to find only a few patchy crowds mulling around the event. Despite many brands and sponsors, attendance remained moderate and more laid back than I expected. I felt a little foolish wearing a cosplay jacket, which I had thought would help me blend into the crowd.

Located at center stage, the star of the convention was the Esports tournament, where pairs of teams



Esports team members participating at AICHI IMPACT look at the match results, 18-20 Nov. 2022, at Tokoname city, Aichi pref.

battled each other in front of a live audience. Esports is a type of competitive gaming where competitors challenge each other in organized matches.

Like any other sport, spectators flood to conventions, eager to watch their favourite teams compete. However, in recent years, due to the rapid rise of streamers, the main mode of spectating has transitioned online.

While it may be easier to access the competition through a streaming platform, to see it in person is a unique experience. Watching the teams in person, experiencing the oohs and aahs of the crowd—a palpable sense of comradery develops between fans. The excitement of seeing one’s favourite streamers live, just as when watching any other live sport, cannot beat that feeling.

Behind the main stage, in the shadow of the big screen, the event’s Novice LAN party transpires amongst a small row of computers. LAN (local area network) parties involve many people gathering in the same place to play games together offline. In the early days of LAN, gamers would lug their computers, consoles, and party snacks to a mutual meeting place to show off their tech. The parties have since evolved into a professionally planned event, where people meet to chat, share food, and most importantly, game!

This activity differs greatly from Esports. Kobayashi Kuno, a representative of Chubu Student Esports Association and organizer of the LAN event, explains: “Esports are for players who hone their game skills to compete in tournaments. LAN parties, on the other hand, are a type of event where players compete offline simply to enjoy the

game.” In fact, Kobayashi adds, “It is further said that the term ‘Esports’ was first coined by LAN parties.” While esports can seem inaccessible due to the large skill gap between amateurs and professionals, LAN parties welcome anyone to meet offline, in a more personal, interactive environment.

Kobayashi has been organizing LAN parties in Japan for 14 years now. “I can’t say that the scale in Japan is very large...It isn’t very popular in Japan, but it is popular among gamers in other countries, with some schools even having LAN clubs.” Kobayashi reflected fondly on how LAN parties have acted as a springboard for streamers, with many recent attendees using the events to build their own online careers. “I am working to make more people aware of LAN events, and I think we can increase their popularity by participating in local gaming, as we did this year with AICHI IMPACT 2022. We are also organizing LAN parties in various prefectures ... so that more people will be able to participate regardless of distance.”

So as the world rushes down the path of digitalization, why are local events like AICHI IMPACT still relevant? In an industry built and thriving online, what more can offline events offer?

Since the pandemic, online communities have become a crutch for millions, keeping the world interconnected and modern society turning. A recent influx of communication features in online gaming has opened many alternate routes for meeting people and playing with friends. With online social features becoming central to a games appeal, conventions and other offline spaces must offer something new if they want to achieve growth. People no longer need to travel to play games together, making it important for the offline community to tap into something that the online universe fails to offer.

Reflecting on the pandemics impact, Kobayashi said “...the LAN party world has not been able to evolve as much as we would have liked. Offline activities are the best part of our events, but we have not been able to hold them due to pandemic restrictions.”

The appeal of conventions is their relaxed nature. Conventions show the face behind the avatar and humanizes people, building a more positive atmosphere based on mutual passions without fears of being catfished, scammed or harassed. People can see behind the screens, challenge their preconceived ideas about who is online, and meet openly in a safer environment.

In contrast, online gaming can be serious, and players harsh. It allows for anonymity, a mask that can easily become a breeding ground for toxic behaviour, such as cyber bullying, making gaming unpleasant for some. Many players are afraid to use popular communication features online for fear of harassment.

But Japan and the surrounding world is transitioning towards a culture of convenience, and the ability to simply pick up a console and go has resulted in the loss of offline gaming communities. LAN parties, arcades, and other opportunities to play in person are powering down across the globe.

Walking around Aichi Impact, I was warmed by the potential the event represented. When the live games commenced, staff began handing out cheer sticks. People made noise to support the teams, chance acquaintances blossomed throughout the stadium, and face-to-face encounters overflowed everywhere I turned my head.

The unique atmosphere that conventions engender mark something special, and have the potential to become a part of Japan’s universally loved gaming culture. However, they have a lot to compete with, and to continue attracting players, they must capitalize on what sets them apart.

As esports finds its path in Japan, feeding off the increasingly digital nature of the world, it is hard to say how offline events will fair. The social, community building potential of gaming will always be an important factor in the market, but conventions will need to level up if they wish to achieve future success.

Kuzuhara, T. (2021, December 2) The Gamers Powering Japan's \$22.1 Billion Games Market: Consumer Motivations, Behaviour & Data, Newzoo. <https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/the-gamers-powering-japans-22-1-billion-games-market-consumer-motivations-behavior-data>

COVID-19

Rebuilding International Exchange

The education crisis of COVID-19

By Zeph S. M. HOLDEN , Na-
ho YAMAGUCHI, and Simon
P. R. LE GUAY

NUFS has been a dynamic university for many years. We see this in the university’s unique learning atmosphere, where international and Japanese students study together on campus, share experiences, and learn about each other’s culture and history. Many NUFS students share the same objective: to learn about the world and open their mind to other cultures.

The sudden appearance of COVID-19 has profoundly, if not completely, altered teaching and learning methods. To limit the spread of COVID-19, one of the first decisions enacted by many of the world’s countries involved closing borders. This decision had a profound impact on the global flow of people, preventing students across the world from studying abroad.

In a regular year, without the influence of COVID-19, NUFS boasts a very attractive exchange program for both Japanese and foreign students. Maintaining partnerships with 180 universities in 30 different countries and regions, the university offers scholarships to both inbound and outbound students. 30% of scholarships go to students who study abroad. In 2019, 973 NUFS students studied abroad, marking the highest number of students in the Chubu region and placing NUFS 5th in all of Japan.

However, like many universities, NUFS implemented online courses during the pandemic, and had to adapt to government directives, notably reducing exchange opportunities with partner universities. At NUFS, as in many universities around the world, the general quality of learning declined with the introduction of online courses. As a university of foreign studies, NUFS relies on its robust exchange program, and the reduction of exchange opportunities between Japanese and international students deeply affected the university’s unique atmosphere.

NUFS markets a unique campus atmosphere and opportunities for international exchange to attract students with an interest in foreign countries. In other words, many students apply to NUFS specifically seeking international exchange. One student claimed they stopped studying at NUFS precisely because it lost this unique atmosphere during COVID-19: "I felt it was a little bit of a waste of time, because the university lost half of its unique characteristics during COVID-19."

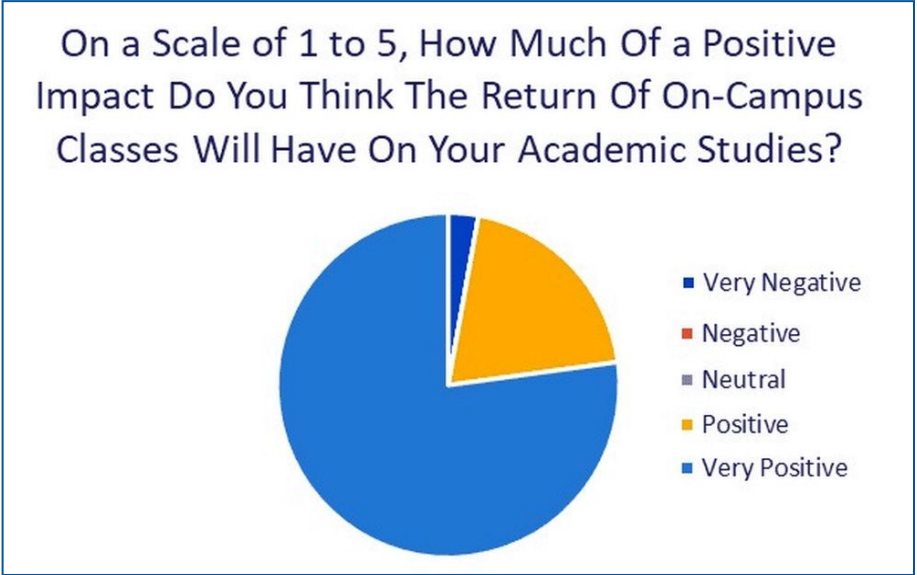
In addition to this international



atmosphere, students also lost the opportunity to study at partner universities. The lack of opportunities to study abroad have caused many students to drop out of NUFS. In fact, over the last three years, 275 students ceased studying at NUFS because they lacked the ability to participate in overseas university exchange.

NUFS stands out as an educational institution for linguistic and cultural studies, offering the ability to both interact with foreign students at home and study abroad. However, when the pandemic arrived, this ceased to be an option. For example, programs such as the Language Lounge, a weekly program that students attend to develop their language skills with native speakers, could no longer take place. In an interview, the Head of the International Office, Philip Rush, commented that the quality of student language development has greatly declined. NUFS students gain more confidence in language fluency by travelling abroad and interacting with foreigners and native speakers. In the wake of declining exchange, NUFS managed to provide a limited number of international students with online lessons. However, online courses cannot replace the unique experience of not only studying, but also living, in a foreign country.

To hear students’ voices regarding the issue, we conducted a survey towards 35 Japanese students at NUFS. We first asked students how important interaction with international students was to the development of their English language skills. 17.14% of students answered it was “important” and 82.85% answered “very important.” We then inquired whether the students think that COVID-19 negatively impacted their studies. More than three-quarters (77.15%) of the respondents answered positively to



Top: Japanese students enjoying English conversation with international students in NUFS Language Lounge.

Below: The graph is based on data from 35 NUFS students.

this question. Finally, we asked: on a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you think the return of classes to campus will have a positive impact on your studies? All students, except one, responded that it would have a “positive” or “very positive” effect on their studies. Students clearly value the in-person, international atmosphere at NUFS.

Professor Shogo Sakurai, a Japanese teacher at NUFS, stated that he was nervous at the start, but found online teaching better than he had initially expected. Professor Philip Rush shared this sentiment, stating that the first few months were difficult, but “online lectures worked reasonably well.”

In fact, student test results remained unaffected during the pandemic, thanks to the university’s high quality of online teaching. This allowed NUFS to offer limited exchange opportunities, where students could learn online at NUFS. Despite COVID, there was still some semblance of international

exchange, if not in the most ideal form.

It is important to note that NUFS continues to focus on teaching its students how to work, collaborate and communicate with people around the world. Having opened themselves to international trade and business, many Japanese companies operate on a global level and therefore seek to recruit people with an understanding of global systems, foreign cultures, and foreign languages. To meet the demands of this ever more interconnected world, many students in Japan feel it essential to learn foreign languages and understand the unique workings of different cultures.

As a university of foreign studies, NUFS may be attractive to students far and wide, but this is precisely what makes it vulnerable to global pandemics. To maintain its rich exchange program and robust population of on-campus international students, NUFS must not only overcome the lingering challenges of COVID-19, but also look ahead. How will NUFS tackle future situations differently and more effectively? This could be the key to become a leading model for universities of foreign studies across the world.

The Post-COVID Playbook: It's all about telework

This new work style allows the company freedom

By Teionnah N. MATHIS, Julius E. KLIEL and Mao AOSHIMA

COVID-19 involved extensive time spent locked inside houses and wearing masks outside. I also recall the many people who lost their jobs or began working from home. My mother, who works in an HR office, had to bring a company laptop home and sit in our dining room on zoom calls all day. This resembles the work life of many throughout COVID-19—stuck at home, blurring lines between work and personal life. However, it is only one side of the story: for many companies, the changes heralded by the pandemic represented new chances to work efficiently and freely.

Japan enacted many changes to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including mask mandates, immediate school closures, travel bans, and stay-at-home advisories. Throughout 2022, the government began to lift and relax such measures, but one initiative still lingers: telework. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promoted teleworking during COVID-19, and while it was voluntary, both the government and Japan's workforce saw it as an opportunity to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In my third year of university, I joined different company sessions for job hunting. In these sessions, I realized that companies were making great efforts to embrace telework in the pandemic, altering how they conduct business and reorganizing their work environments. CROSS PLUS, a Japanese apparel company that also began selling daily necessities during the pandemic, made great efforts to adapt to COVID-19 and foster a more flexible work environment.

To delve deeper into COVID-19 telework, we interviewed CROSS PLUS employees, Mr. Masaaki Arimura and Mr. Kazuhiko Sugimura. Mr. Arimura and Mr. Sugimura highlight that telework, while initially imposed to fight COVID-19, has nonetheless had an overall positive effect on the well-being of the company and its employees.

Mr. Sugimura mentioned that CROSS PLUS immediately switched to teleworking when COVID-19 cases steadily rose from April to May of 2020 and the government declared a state of emergency. The company worked hard to develop a non-location-based telework environment, providing mobile phones and new software for online meetings. To avoid close contact, they also limited the number of people able to attend in-person meetings. Further, employees were al-



lowed to flexibly alter their desired work schedule, or switch meetings from offline to online as they pleased.

Many employees benefited from the changes implemented by CROSS PLUS, gaining more flexibility at work. Mr. Arimura also mentioned that, before the pandemic, he visited offices and apparel production plants in other countries almost two times a month. Later, he realized that this kind of operation was not working, and implemented a web system that allowed them to hold meetings online.

With that being said, the changes implemented by CROSS PLUS did not come without their difficulties. The online switch required that all employees have access to stable internet connections. With such a rapid transfer from online to offline, the company did not have enough time to test and offer the necessary facilities. CROSS PLUS mentioned that providing devices and a stable, fast internet connection was difficult. Some employees resorted to "join[ing] meetings from convenience store parking lots just to get an internet connection."

Mr. Sugimura claims that this new work style allows the company freedom: workers can attend meetings without worrying about space limitations; the company can save money; and recruitment can spread beyond Aichi's borders. In fact, a

wider range of students, including those studying abroad, have been able to apply to CROSS PLUS. Online recruitment processes have made the company more accessible to those unable to apply in person. The only con, Mr. Sugimura notes, is the inability to detect physical and social cues, such as facial expressions and body language. These cues are important to managing human relations in any company, but are difficult to detect in an online environment.

CROSS PLUS changed their system of recruitment online in 2020. They decided against hiring recruiters and used the year to finetune their online recruiting systems, allowing students from around the world to apply online. In the end, CROSS PLUS decided that the final interview needed to be in person. While they are taking gradual steps to switch from online to in-person, the overall system has not changed between 2020 and 2022. Across this period, the online system has offered more flexible recruitment opportunities to the company and future employees. CROSS PLUS seeks to continue developing a management system that maximizes benefits for both employees and office workers.

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic only surfaced in the last couple of years, it will likely remain a part of our lives for many years to

Top: NUFF students interviewing Cross Plus employees. Clockwise from top left, Julius Klier, Mao Aoshima, Teionnah Mathis, Mr. Masaaki Arimura, and Mr. Kazuhiko Sugimura.

come. Many countries seek to return to a pre-pandemic normality, with Japan itself lifting regulations even as it continues to fight COVID-19.

What can we expect of the post-pandemic business world? Mr. Sugimura stresses that efficiency has been a focal point of the business world for time immemorial, and that the pandemic has only amplified this reality. The idea of attending meetings in person and traveling long distances for work already feels like something of the past. In the name of efficiency, companies may opt for a telework or hybrid work style, where employees can work flexibly from anywhere.

Japanese companies and their employees must deal with a new normal and a different working environment. This new normal might feel unpleasant for some, but it offers new possibilities with positive potential. As highlighted by CROSS PLUS, the new working conditions of COVID-19 have benefited the company's operations, leaving an indelible mark on its future.

An English-language newspaper born from the voices of students

A Japanese proverb came to mind when The NUFS Times published its 10th edition: "*Hyoutan kara koma*" ("a horse from a gourd"). It is used to describe the occurrence of something unexpected. The birth of The NUFS Times befits this saying.

Around the spring of 2018, in my second year of employment at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, I served as an advisor to the Mass Communication Industry Research Group. This group consists of students who are interested in working in the media industry, including newspapers, television stations, and publishing companies.

One of the students in this group approached me and said, "There are many international students on campus, but we don't have many opportunities to interact with one another." I responded with the suggestion that they develop an English-language newspaper with the international students—an idea from which blossomed forth this very newspaper.

The NUFS Times has reached its 10th edition thanks to the help of many. I thank Dr. Hiroko Tokumoto, my co-teacher, who coordinates with international students. I also extend my gratitude to Dr. Masako Umegaki, who wrote the congratulatory note on this special page. Of course, the NUFS Times would not have come to fruition if not for the initiative of the students who took

part in the Mass Communication Industry Research Group.

The newspaper medium has been struggling around the world, with the number of readers decreasing ever year. "News vacuum areas," where no newspapers exist, dot the United States. In such areas, the heads of administrative agencies have increased their compensation to twice the president's annual salary. Indeed, when there are no reporters to monitor institutions of power, nothing but trouble awaits.

I conclude with a direct address to students. To create an edition of the NUFS Times, you become students of the world, imitating a reporter and writing an article. From such a small experience, you develop a strong grasp of current events. It is a small step, but it challenges your ability to see the world from multiple, critical angles, far and wide.

Your valuable experiences and contributions to the NUFS Times will surely herald a rich future both on and off campus.

Editor in Chief: Kazuhiko KOJIMA

Writing the World Hand-in Hand

Since its first publication in September 2018, The NUFS Times has been published every semester without missing a beat. As a faculty member, I am overjoyed to publish the 10th issue and even more proud of the students who have worked so hard to write their articles.

Looking back, five years ago, Professor Kojima, the advisor of the Mass Communication Industry Research Group, requested that I gather potential authors from amongst the university's international students, and I have been watching over the newspaper ever since.

For the first and second issues, I recruited international students to write articles, and undergraduate members of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies' Mass Communication Industry Research Group supported their interviews and research activities. Although it was not a class and no credits were given in return, both the international and undergraduate students found the experience very fulfilling.

The article regarding plastic environmental pollution in the Fuji-mae Tidal Flat, which graced the front page of the second issue, was covered extensively by TV and newspapers. The two international students who wrote the article even participated in a TV interview. Thanks to this, the newspaper received recognition from the university, and from the third issue, it was incorporated into a Japan Studies course, wherein both undergraduate and international students could learn hand-in-hand.

Students invest an extensive amount of effort and time to conduct interviews and write articles, making it a difficult task to keep them motivated. In addition, many of the international students who participate in this program lack fluent Japanese skills. Interviewing

Japanese companies and local governments requires not only Japanese language skills but also basic knowledge of the necessary field, and an even deeper understanding of what one wants to convey in their article. Put simply, this class is a high hurdle for both undergraduate and international students. Nevertheless, seeing the results of hard student work come to fruition in printed form never fails to instill me with a sense of pride. The newspaper is quietly gaining recognition, finding its way to entrance ceremonies, local government offices and even movie theaters in Nagoya station.

Although it has only been five years since the publication of the first issue, students' interests and awareness of issues are constantly transforming. It is extremely interesting how, even from such a small activity, one can feel the ever-changing pulse of Japan and the world. In their work, NUFS students synthesize a myriad of information, puncturing national boundaries and grappling with the intertwined nature of our globalizing world. The NUFS Times offers students the opportunity to collaboratively develop stories that, synthesizing international narratives, sprout from comparative analysis. We hope to continue this activity in the future, and together with our students, we will continue to enrich the distinctive educational activities available at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies.

Adviser: Hiroko Tokumoto



Cute Jirai-kei items.

From Page 1

The darker characteristics of *Jirai-kei* clothes and accessories suggest a sense of danger and rebellion, while pink tones and cute mascots maintain a 'kawaii,' girly presentation. This balance between dark and light, dangerous and sweet, cute and scary, is what completes a *Jirai-kei* look.

The staff in Spinns pull off their looks effortlessly, and one of them shares the start of her fashion journey. "I've been interested in alternative fashion since I was in middle school. I used to read Kera magazine a lot, but lolita style was always a bit too unaffordable, so I found other similar styles to emulate instead."

Kera magazine, a cornerstone of Japanese alternative fashion that was published from the late 90's to 2017, is synonymous with the rise of styles like Lolita, Gothic, and Japanese style punk and grunge. Alternative and street fashion in Japan

achieved international fame through such magazines.

Jirai-kei, however, finds its popularity in a different medium. The Spinns staff continues: "These days, a lot of our customers come here after being inspired by influencers such as Ano-chan and trends on tiktok." This comes as little surprise for a fashion style that is gaining popularity with young girls, who go to the app to search for their idols and their community. The hashtag #Jirai-kei (#地雷系) has been viewed over 342.9 million times on tiktok, and a quick search reveals a bustling digital community of girls sharing make-up tips and where to find affordable items related to the style.

Unlike other Japanese fashion trends—birthed forth from city streets and fostered in magazines like Kera—*Jirai-kei* finds its fame in online social platforms, increasing both the scope of its audience and its accessibility. This plays no small role in addressing the style's negative stereotypes. Onlookers can experience the style online, watching real people express themselves and their unique relationship to the fashion.

It's hard to miss the many arcades seen throughout Osu, and we decide to head in as the last step of our investigation. An incredibly popular pastime trending among Japanese youth for the last two decades, the back wall of the arcade is filled with purikura, or 'print club'

photo booths. In Japan, it would be verging on the impossible to find any girl under the age of 30 that has never taken purikura photos with her friends. These Purikura Photo booths are fronted by images of girls clad in *Jirai-kei*. It's here when we immediately realise that the *Jirai-Kei* trend has reached a ubiquitous level of popularity, where little has been spared of its influence.

It is clear that *Jirai-kei* style is beginning to shed its negative connotations, emerging as a form of fashion that accentuates the individuality of its wearer. Dressing how you like—on your own terms, unfazed by how society may label you—is at the core of *Jirai-kei*'s rise in popularity, leading it from the backstreets of Japan's red-light district all the way to an international stage.

From Page 8

Studio Ghibli's international and domestic popularity, however, Mr. Tanimura and Mr. Hiraiwa predict that Ghibli Park will attract fans and revenue from across the world.

Many fans eagerly await the chance to enter the park, however, tickets have been frequently sold out. Due to excessive demand, tickets are sold according to a lottery system, making access to the park difficult. The official Ghibli Park website provides information regarding raffle submission dates and times, so if you are hoping to visit

the park, be sure to refer to this ahead of time.

Though a hefty economic venture, Studio Ghibli fans and locals from Aichi prefecture have welcomed the park with open arms. Those who visit the park feel elated by the chance to see their favorite Ghibli movies come to life, appreciating the minute details recreated in the park. Fans that have yet to visit are just as excited to experi-



The writer (left) surveys visitors at Ghibli Park, Nagakute City, Aichi.

ence the secrets hidden inside, and are willing to wait as long as it takes to acquire a ticket. To ensure that it remains a welcomed addition to Aichi, the park has greatly considered the local environment and tourism industry. Ghibli Park will no doubt be visited by many for the foreseeable future, but only time will tell whether the venture will mark an economic success for Aichi prefecture.

Commemorative 10th issue

Post-Truth Era

The importance of critical thinking



Ikuo KAMEYAMA
President of NUFSTimes

This year marks the 34th anniversary of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS), and the university is on its way to becoming one of Japan's leading private universities in terms of international openness. The bonds of international exchange were temporarily shaken by the COVID-19 disaster, but since the beginning of April, 2022, they have been restored all at once, like the sudden flowering of cherry blossoms, and the campus has begun to regain its former liveliness. It may come as no surprise, then, that we express a renewed vigor towards the publication of The NUFSTimes, as one of the university's most outstanding projects.

Launched in 2018, at the initiative of Mr. Kazuhiko Kojima, a journalist for the Chunichi Shimbun, this English-language newspaper has steadily accumulated issues, reaching its 10th issue this year. Most gratifying is that this project has developed jointly through the cooperation of Japanese and international students, as part of their class activities. Last year, Professor Hiroko Tokumoto joined the staff as a new supervisor, and the paper has taken a step forward from being an internal bulletin to a publication that pursues a more universal theme.

Our world is currently in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, being hit by consecutive catastrophes. The COVID disaster, the war in Ukraine, natural disasters on a global scale, and the accelerating polarization of peoples are just a few examples. But perhaps most critical of all is the confusion and misuse of information, and the advent of the post-truth era. Every day, we experience the collapse not only of the once revered notions of right and wrong, but of the very

concept of humanity itself. The only way for us to avoid being affected by this lamentable collapse is for the younger generation to do their utmost in developing the critical thinking skills that will allow them to firmly discern the difference between truth and falsity. At the same time, let me add, critical thinking skills alone do not necessarily guarantee a rich life. In this age of "100-year lifetimes," critical thinking must be nurtured hand in hand with a sensibility for empathy.

The students who produce the NUFSTimes will likely become the leaders of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, training their capacity to confront the contemporary world and paving their way towards journalism. I sincerely hope, too, that through their engagement

and the results of their efforts are widely disseminated in English. Considering the fact that exchange students spend up to only one year at NUFSTimes, it is very precious that both exchange and domestic students, hand in hand, have successfully passed the writing baton to one another, maintaining the paper's high standards in a limited time period. I understand that all this has been made possible thanks to the tremendous support and guidance of Professor Kojima, editor-in-chief, and Professor Tokumoto, adviser to The NUFSTimes, to whom I express my deepest appreciation.

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies accepts approximately 200 international students each year. At first, the publication of The NUFSTimes was planned as part of the extra-curricular activities of the Mass Communication Industry Research Group, under Professor Kojima's tutelage, with the aim of promoting exchange between international and domestic students.

The first edition was published

(GJP)," launched in April 2019, where international and domestic students could study together. At this point The NUFSTimes was closely tied to one of the Japan Studies Courses (JSC903), one of the Category 4 (experiential courses) of the GJP. Thus, The NUFSTimes, since its third edition, became not only an informative medium for people on and off campus, but also an eloquent result of collaborative coursework.

Over the past five years, more than 60 articles have been published in The NUFSTimes. The articles cover a wide range of topics, from traditional Japanese culture to industrial structure and social issues. Students have published insightful essays on topics such as minorities and gender, film and anime, religion, environmental issues, and social welfare, all with a high level of awareness of the issues. But what is most impressive is the paper's ability to continue despite the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the front page of the fifth edition, we read: "the world

has changed completely" and "The NUFSTimes is not immune to its influence," with all the writing and editing sessions unavoidably held online. However, with the help of former exchange students and domestic students writing independently, The NUFSTimes has continued publication without a single break. Finally, in the 9th edition of 2022, the jointly-named articles returned, exactly as before the pandemic. I express my deep respect to everyone involved in overcoming these difficulties.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face communication has drastically declined, and we are unsure whether daily life will return to its former shape. Amidst this, people have become more and more uneasy with recent military conflict, economic problems, and an increasingly divided world. It is during such times that cross-cultural communication becomes essential. In this sense, the publication of The NUFSTimes and all that it represents is indispensable: students from various countries reach for the same goal, discussing and collaborating in order to produce novel information.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the students who contributed to the paper's publication, the editor-in-chief, and the advisors and proofreaders for their outstanding efforts and achievements in maintaining the spirit that has guided The NUFSTimes since its inception. We would like to congratulate you on the 10th issue of The NUFSTimes and wish you continued success in the future.



in the production of this newspaper, they will not only become the representative intellect of the student body, but also the leaders of a new generation, who can truly contribute to humanity's peaceful coexistence.

Ranging from traditional Japanese culture to industrial structure and social issues

60 articles published in 5 years

Congratulations on the tenth edition of The NUFSTimes. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have been involved in the publication of this newspaper. We truly appreciate the excellent articles that students have delivered to us twice a year for five long years. The NUFSTimes is unique in that domestic and exchange students cooperate to create articles,



Masako UMEGAKI

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in the summer of 2018. Around that time, the university decided to develop the "Global Japan Program

Reaching Beyond the Screen

The wonders of Ghibli in the third dimension

By Amy L. MORGAN, Karla MAYNARD, and SHEN Yun-chieh

Ghibli fans across the globe have dreamed of being a protagonist within the fantastical world of Ghibli. If not, they dream of tasting the magical world's delicious foods, basking in the sun on Totoro's huge belly, or flying on Kiki's delivery broom. All those aspirations, which once seemed impossible, have become a reality at the new Ghibli Park located in Aichi Prefecture, Japan. Ghibli Park aspires to stretch beyond two-dimensions and bring the world of Ghibli to life for its viewers.

We interviewed members of the public to gather their perspectives on Ghibli, Ghibli Park, and how it met their expectations. How has Studio Ghibli gained its prominence in the animation industry and why are its works so loved worldwide?

Since Studio Ghibli's first debut in 1985, with *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, the franchise has achieved success domestically. On the other hand, because Studio Ghibli prioritizes high quality production over advertising, it was not until the twenty-first century that Studio Ghibli gained international praise for its work. For instance, *Spirited Away* was awarded an Oscar for Best Animated Feature in 2003, the first non-English movie to be recognized for this achievement.

Even though Studio Ghibli states that popularity is secondary, their name has always suggested the intention to cause a stir. The word Ghibli comes from an Italian saying used during World War Two, which means "hot wind blowing through the Sahara Desert." In the same manner, one of Ghibli's creators, Hayao Miyazaki, intended Ghibli to blow a sensational wind into Japanese animation. This reality gradually came to fruition as Ghibli gained worldwide recognition. Part of the franchise's success is thanks to its relatability: Ghibli tells stories that explore the depth of human emotion and deal with real life issues.

The Ghibli Park provides a sense of nostalgia for its viewers, children and adults alike from all over the world. Some of the franchises most popular films, including *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Spirited Away*, and *Howl's Moving Castle*, have been incorporated into three separate attractions. The first attraction, Ghibli's Grand Warehouse, covers several films and, according to the park website, positively "bursts with Ghibli." Surrounded by a vast forest, the second attraction focuses on the renowned film, *My Neighbor Totoro*, including a five-meter tall Totoro, and a fully functioning replica of Mei and Satsuki's home. The park's final attraction, standing as a world emporium and antique



Top: Students (right), Mr. Tanimura (left) and Mr. Hiraiwa (second from left) discussing Ghibli Park at the Chunichi Shimbun office, Nagoya city.
Below: The Ghibli park's renowned elevator tower surrounded by nature at Nagakute city, Aichi.

shop, dedicates itself to the film *Whisper of the Heart*.

With more attractions already in the works for the upcoming year, such as Witch Valley and *Mononoke* Village, the park will only continue to grow. We conducted an interview with Mr. Yuji Hiraiwa and Mr. Takuya Tanimura, the editor and deputy editor of the Chunichi Shimbun's Cultural Section, to get a close look at Ghibli, its future intentions for the park, and its collaborative efforts with Aichi Prefecture.

According to Mr. Tanimura and Mr. Hiraiwa, Ghibli strove to "create a park where visitors can explore and immerse themselves in a Ghibli-esque environment of whimsical fantasy." Ghibli's whimsical, fairy-tale-like attributes grow hand-in-hand with other long last-

ing values that set the franchise apart from its competitors – of these, a general appreciation for nature. In fact, Ghibli, an avid supporter of environmental awareness, rejected amusement park plans that required deforestation. Thus, while Ghibli Park will never become a "theme park" in the traditional sense, its appreciation for nature engenders a unique whimsicality, and a special immersive experience for park visitors.

Alongside its appreciation for whimsy and nature, Ghibli has also never shied away from issues of social justice. In the 1980s and 90s, during the franchise's inception, women's rights movements in Japan had been gathering wide social attention. In response, Studio Ghibli asserted that "women and Ghibli will move forward together," pro-

ceeding to create impactful female protagonists in films such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*. These social efforts have not gone unnoticed. One visitor of Ghibli Park told us: "While other animations portray female protagonists in superhero or princess roles, [Ghibli] portrays the life of real girls outside of their traditional roles." This ability to go against the social grain contributes greatly to Ghibli's popularity, and we hope to see the same courageousness reflected in the park's operations.

We surveyed the public to see how they view Ghibli. 96.1% of participants found Ghibli personally important to them and Japanese culture, many describing the Ghibli franchise as offering a "sense of comfort," and "a nuanced portrayal of nature, love, and Japanese culture." The key responses to our surveys and interviews situate Ghibli as a representative of Japan, and Japanese culture. Mr. Tanimura and Mr. Hiraiwa of Chunichi Shimbun added that, while Ghibli films are "influenced by many countries, ... [they] can only be created in Japan." Ghibli, indeed, seems to have become the "Disney of Japan" – catered to a diverse audience, it offers a gateway into Japan itself.

Nevertheless, will the park be able to cater to the vast intentions, nostalgia, and curiosity of a diverse audience? Enjoyed by fans of different age groups, Ghibli Park must find a way to entertain both adults and children. Our interviewees describe how the park has done so. One park visitor stated that certain areas cater to adults by capturing the subtle details of different Ghibli movies. The Hill of Youth exhibit, they added, portrays intricate details from *Whisper of the Heart*, but lacks entertainment for children. On the other hand, the park boasts a section for children known as Children's town, which "is a mini replica of the Higashi-Koganei Train Station." Adults and children from around the world should be satisfied with their visit to the whimsical world of Ghibli.

Creating a park for such a unique movie franchise and a diverse fanbase was no small feat. The cost of creating Ghibli Park currently stands at 34 billion yen, a large amount of which has been invested into artisans, who use their expertise to add a touch of magic and whimsy to the park atmosphere. Mr. Tanimura and Mr. Hiraiwa claim that this is ultimately an investment in the region, as the park is expected to generate a large amount of revenue, and also place Aichi on the map outside of the business and industrial sectors. Previous attempts to improve the tourist industry in Aichi have been unsuccessful, with projects such as Lego Land failing to attract a substantial number of tourists. Due to

Continued on Page 6