



**Individuality Can Do It**  
Entrepreneurship transforms Japan's collectivistic corporate culture... Page 2

**Front Line of Hotel Recruiting**  
Is year-round recruitment a miracle solution? Companies have begun changing methods. Page 3

**Myriad Slang on SNS**  
The experimentation between language and social media in Japan Page 4

**"Kokoro no Tomo"**  
One song unites Indonesia and Japan. From lyrics to the heart... Page 5

**LGBTQ in Japan's Fashion**  
Challenging norms with authentic self-expression and cultural movements Page 6

## Breaking Through the Haze: Is Japan Too Soft?

### DECODING TOBACCO MARKETING TECHNIQUES

By Alana V. GRIMES,  
Amelie M. TURNER  
and Kaylee M. THOMAS

Imagine, amidst crowded streets, towering skyscrapers, and blinding neon lights, you are finally in the bustling heart of Tokyo. But amongst the cacophony of competing advertisements, billboards, and screens lining the streets, a symphony of captivating images intrigues you. Unlike overly assertive advertising in the West, Japan's nuanced and aesthetic imagery, inspired by its unique history and culture, introduces a new approach to marketing. This new form that has completely revolutionized marketing is known as "soft sell marketing." It is encountered every day during life in Japan, and we all consume it. So what is this phenomenon?

Unlike traditional marketing, a more assertive counterpart known as the "hard sell," "soft sell marketing" refers to a sales approach prioritizing subtle language and non-aggressive techniques. Companies have increasingly recognized the importance of building a relationship with the consumer; the nuanced strategy of "soft-selling" emphasizes the creation of this connection, often incorporating elements of storytelling and aesthetics. These elements play an important role in not only the advertising campaigns themselves, but also product packaging. This approach aligns with the emphasis that Japanese culture places upon customer care and hospitality.

Japan is globally renowned for its hospitable and courteous culture. However, a curious contradiction occurs when considering "soft sell marketing" in the context of a controversial industry such as tobacco. The contrast between such meticulous etiquette displayed in everyday situations and the taboo image that smoking tobacco poses seems to highlight a divergence between traditional courtesy and evolving societal norms. The practice of smoking tobacco displays an interesting paradox of how Japanese society combats contemporary challenges within the Japanese social fabric.

We received a professional perspective from Mr. Atsushi Isogai, a media manager responsible for decision-making processes for the Japanese advertising agency, SANTSU.

He shared information about advertising campaign techniques and how "soft selling" is implemented in contemporary advertising. When asked about current consumer trends, he described that famous actors used to be in cigarette advertisements to make smoking "look cool." This tactic is utilized greatly in "soft-sell marketing" to divert attention from the negative aspects of cigarettes, such as their negative effects on health, which would dissuade potential consumers. Mr. Isogai explained that the advertising of tobacco products is no longer allowed in Japanese mass media, but he believes that people start smoking because of the influence of their surroundings, dramas, and movies.

"The Health Promotion Act," a legislation that aims to discourage tobacco usage and promote public health, is displayed front and center on Japanese cigarette packets. Interestingly, the packaging does not encourage the discontinuation of smoking tobacco products for personal health benefits, but rather for the consideration of the general public. This approach can be seen in posters by Japan Tobacco International, which promote better smoking manners.

Mr. Isogai presented a Japanese advertisement for American Spirit tobacco that illustrates soft-sell marketing in the tobacco industry. This technique is realized through linguistic and multimodal elements. Translated from Japanese, the question is proposed of how a truly pure tobacco flavor can be achieved. It claims that sustainable farming methods, friendly to the earth, are the best way to achieve flavor. A nurturing image of two hands tenderly holding the product serves as the backdrop. These word and image choices encourage the reader to purchase the brand's cigarettes out of consideration for the earth, therefore utilizing emotional appeal.

On the other side of the world, a conflicting approach comes to light. The packaging that houses tobacco products in the UK includes a fascinating design choice to try to deter buyers of the product. This is through the deliberate use of the color Pantone 448C, which is dubbed the "ugliest color in the world." The British Government's Department of Health and Social Care has implemented a "Tobacco Packaging Guidance" for retailers,



An illustration of marketing techniques that advise against the use of tobacco, drawn by Alana V. Grimes.

An example of the grotesque cigarette packaging designs required by the government of some countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia



Interview with Mr. Atsushi Isogai, media manager of SANTSU(right) =Nagoya City, Aichi Pref.

distributors, and manufacturers. One of the most defining features of British tobacco packaging is the combined health warning, including a grotesque photo and a message such as, "smoking causes lung cancer," or "smoking clogs your arteries." Similar to the American Spirit product packaging, language is used harmoniously alongside imagery to create a particular effect. While Japanese tobacco products and advertising emphasize the importance of considering one's surroundings, British products focus on the negative impact that cigarettes have on the buyer.

We conducted a survey to hear from Japanese and international students on their impressions of tobacco packaging. They had to select the best description for the presented images, and decide which one they would be more likely to purchase. The survey gained thirty responses, with 10.7% of participants being Japanese and 89.3% of participants being any other nationality. Less than 8% smoke, leaving a substantial 92.9% of respondents classified as "non-smokers." We asked the respondents which word best describes their first impression of British packaging and Japanese packaging. The words ranged from "negative" descriptors to "positive" ones. Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of 57% of voters opted for "disgusted" towards British packaging, compared to 7% for

the Japanese packaging.

Navigating the subtle art of persuasion is a skill imperative for all aspects of life. Language and communication are deeply rooted in society, and the interplay of cultural nuances, design, and language in advertising beg many questions about our own psychology and how we consume the world around us. The tobacco industry's economic success in a world that promotes health and wellbeing more than ever before shows that the marketing of their products has had a significant impact on societal perceptions and consumerist patterns.

It is widely recognized that smoking tobacco products can have detrimental health effects, and tobacco companies around the world do not hide this fact. The UK, for example, addresses the audience directly with unappealing designs in alignment with government legislation. In Japan, the soft sell approach to marketing cigarettes has cleverly repositioned negative health warnings with messages about consideration towards one's surroundings, ultimately rebranding the Tobacco industry. To what extent do we perceive the product as the product, without all of the frills? Next time you go to a store or look at a billboard, think back to this. Are you a victim of the soft-sell?



By Rico B. ILAG, Takeru SASADA and Hans H. W. A. URDAHL

In the dynamic landscape of Japan's workforce, an intriguing topic emerges: finding individualism within a collectivist work environment. This article aims to explore how individuals can break away from traditional company culture norms and carve their own unique paths. By highlighting the experiences of those who have embarked on their own career journeys, we hope to shed light on the alternative options available to Japanese youth and inspire them to maintain their creative license.

First, we will delve into the prevailing culture of Japanese companies, which is deeply rooted in collectivism. This tightly-knit work environment often poses challenges for individuals seeking to pursue their passions. However, we will also highlight the evolving landscape, where winds of change are blowing, encouraging a more open and flexible approach to work life.

Japanese work and company culture has an infamous reputation for being extremely intense and overwhelming. The pressure to conform coupled with a stressful work environment can cause employees to suffer from extreme mental and physical health problems. While some of these issues still persist today, Japan has been trying to mend a lot of these problems by adding new laws that protect workers rights. The Work Style Reform Law is a prime example of this push. Before this law was instituted on June 29th, 2018, employers were allowed to work their employees for an unlimited amount of overtime hours. This law, however, now limits the amount of overtime hours that an employee can receive. Another change that is starting to happen in Japan is a push for a more individualistic work culture. Some are trying to break out of the cultural norms and pave their own career path.

During our research process, we were able to establish contact with an associate professor at the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Mr. Masayoshi Matsumoto. Mr. Matsumoto is affiliated with the Department of Global Business's Faculty of Contemporary International Studies and has a master's degree in economics.

Mr. Matsumoto explained to us that the collective nature of the labor environment in Japan does not stem solely from Japanese people's preference for group activities. The concept of creating things in Japan was born out of necessity – natural resources like oil and gas were scarce, and the climate is unsuitable for winter agriculture. In order to sustain lives, it became imperative to create something and sell it abroad. The underlying principle was not just about producing things collectively, but also repeatedly crafting high quality products. As a result, the idea of working together in a group emerged, driven by the

## Startup Spirit Transforms Japan's Corporate Culture

### FROM COLLECTIVISM TO INDIVIDUALISM



**Above:** Former Mr. Matsumoto's partner company that makes strings located in the textile town of Ichinomiya, Aichi. pref. (a work from the photo exhibition "Nokogirinokodo" by Hideki Hayashi)  
**Left:** Mr. Wakameda, the CEO of Tokai HR co  
**Below:** Interview with an entrepreneur, Mr. Matsumoto (right)



need to compete globally through collaborative efforts.

Mr. Matsumoto further explained that Japan's collectivist workplace aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Initially, the focus was on survival. After losing the war and facing extreme poverty, people flocked to companies that offered financial support and good pay. Companies, in turn, brought people together to produce goods and sustain livelihoods. Even without specialized knowledge about the company or industry, individuals were taken in, guided, and taught by the company. It was a collective effort for survival. Remarkably, this approach led to innovations such as those seen at Toyota, where individuals unfamiliar with cars collaborated, sharing ideas to create excellent products.

The second stage was seeking a secure environment. Despite lower wages compared to other places, people valued the possibility of working at the same company for an extended period, prioritizing stability of their lives. The Japanese system of lifetime employment, born in aligning Maslow's hierarchy of needs, worked well for Japan.

Mr. Matsumoto decided to start his own business because, in Japan, it had become challenging for a single

company to create a product, make profit, and maintain competitiveness. In contrast, global success stories like Apple and Tesla emphasized the power of cross-company alliances, where companies collaborated, contributing their respective products to create something even better.

Mr. Matsumoto's goal was to bring together the best offerings from different companies to create exceptional products. Instead of each company spending significant resources on a single product, the idea was to pool expertise in different areas, producing high-quality products at a lower cost. Each company is responsible for producing a part of the product, with Matsumoto's company taking on the responsibility of the collective creation. Traditional companies, stuck on the idea of everything being done internally, often faced stagnation in recent times. His company aims to blend the strengths of Japanese and foreign companies, creating an organizational structure where individuals shine within a collective effort.

We also had the pleasure to interview an entrepreneur from NUFU, Mr. Daiki Wakameda, about individualism and the collectivist work environments he experienced. Mr. Wakameda is the prime example of

a young Japanese citizen who made the decision to pave their own career path. He started his journey in university as a writer, making online economic newspapers that specialized in Nagoya's venture businesses, and publishing them on his digital platform, Nagoya Startup co. At the time, digital media was in its infancy and competition was scarce. However, as the competition grew with time, Nagoya Startup co could not keep up and was disbanded. After the company's fall, Mr. Wakameda went on to found Tokai HR, a company that helps long-established, traditional companies in Aichi make new profitable products.

Since Mr. Wakameda started his entrepreneurial journey during university, we asked him if he believed that it was a good choice to start so young. In response, Mr. Wakameda explained that these days, there are a lot of people who start their own business when they are young or students. He says that if you are young, there's sufficient time to make up in case you fail. Young entrepreneurs have more room for exploration.

When asked about his experience with Nagoya Startup co and Tokai HR, Mr. Wakameda talked about the pros and cons that come with being a solo entrepreneur. When Mr. Wakameda was at Nagoya Startup co, he stated that it was a great time for him to get his name known. However, he also said that it is very hard to get anywhere without proper connections. When Mr. Wakameda founded Tokai HR, he was able to make the connections he needed to create products that can be competitive on the global scale. However, he mentions how tiresome it can be dealing with politics and making negotiations with other companies. In essence, both individualism and collectivism are important for success. Mr. Wakameda's company, Tokai HR, is a good example of this balance. Mr. Wakameda is his own boss, which at the end of the day allows him to make decisions for himself. With this bit of individualism, he is not confined to the rules and policies that come with working for a company. However, Mr. Wakameda still has a team that helps him achieve his goals. Here's a word he quoted from an African proverb: "If you want to go far, go together."

Lastly, Mr. Wakameda left us with some advice to share with those who have a passion for entrepreneurship: "one should find games that they can win." By this he means that one should conduct a self-analysis to identify the specific things that they excel at and build their business around those skills. Mr. Wakameda also adds that taking on challenges is crucial. In this era, almost everything can become a business. Even creating something on your own and selling it on platforms like Mercari can be considered entrepreneurial experience. In an age where you can monetize your strengths, it is beneficial to set aside time to contemplate ways to make money.



# Redefining Recruiting Methods

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JAPANESE HOTEL RECRUITMENT PRE AND POST-COVID

By Manon L. DUFOUR, Kathy H. VO and Yuuki SAHASHI

Throughout history, Japan remains one of the most reserved countries when it comes to its culture and traditions. For example, when the pandemic happened, Japan was one of the last countries to open its borders to tourism, whereas its Western counterparts, such as Europe and America, opened their borders quite early on. Therefore, we found it quite unexpected for Japanese society, well-known for upholding its traditions and collectivistic values, to start moving towards a more individualistic hiring method and expand the hiring season to be year-round. The objective of this article is to analyze and compare Japanese hiring practices in the hotel industry pre and post-COVID, examining how these shifts impact both current and prospective job seekers in the industry. Given that Japan leans more towards collectivism, societal and financial pushback from rival companies could occur, specifically due to the desire to maintain the traditional hiring period that starts in April. Moreover, the potential extension of the year-round hiring process will be fraught with challenges if the public remains unsupportive.

The Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) has officially announced an agreement with universities to expand its hiring season for new graduates starting in April 2019. Japanese companies such as Hoshino Resorts, with around 55 different locations spread throughout Japan and across the world, were also beginning to vary their recruitment method to recruit the best students. In an organized Zoom meeting, we met with Ms. Reia Hotta, the current general manager at the Kai Beppu Hotel located in Kyushu, who began to work at the hotel amidst the early period of the pandemic. Our interview initially encompassed a broad overview of her background, subsequently progressing towards more intricate inquiries about her perspectives on the recently initiated hiring processes. She joined the hotel industry as a new graduate in April of 2015, having originally graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Japanese language.

Hoshino Resorts, which has been in business for over 109 years, did not start incorporating the year-round



**Ms. Reia Hotta** General manager at the Kai Beppu Hotel in Kyushu

processes until the scale of the company grew. According to Ms. Hotta, "It wasn't until after 2001 that we expanded our facilities outside of Karuizawa. As the company expanded, the hiring methods underwent a significant transformation." However, she acknowledges that the nature of Hoshino Resort, being a large company, makes the transition to year-round recruitment more challenging. Smaller companies might have an easier time transitioning to a year-round system. She posits that the benefit or detriment of year-round recruitment could depend on a company's size.

She also explains how methods of communication with job seekers have changed significantly, saying, "Before the COVID-19 outbreak, we conducted Skype interviews for candidates studying abroad. However, due to the pandemic, we transitioned from traditional interviews to video screenings." As the pandemic unfolded, reliance on video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom, increased as physical office visits were no longer feasible.

In addition to Ms. Hotta, we were also able to interview two NUFs senior students, Ms. Kanako Tsuchiya, a senior student from the Department of World Liberal Arts, as well as Ms. Miyuri Nadai, a senior student from the Department of Global Business. Their goal is to work in the hotel industry and they have agreed to take part in our interview to discuss their experiences when it comes to the Japanese hiring process in Japan. Both Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai have taken part in several recruitment campaigns in different hotels.

The interview with Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai differed quite significantly from that of Ms. Hotta who has quite a long experience in the hotel industry. Our first question to Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai was about whether the recruitment period has remained the same throughout the hotel chains, and if any of the hotels that they applied to have adopted a long-term hiring period similar to the one at Hoshino Resorts. The companies that Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai had applied to varied in whether or not they adopted the yearly hiring. "Only two companies in Nagoya and Kyoto that I applied to had the yearly hiring but the rest were seasonal," says Ms. Nadai. "For me, I can't remember but I knew it was



**Ms. Kanako Tsuchiya** NUFs student

rare. Some companies in the other industries recruited all year round though," added Ms. Tsuchiya.

Ms. Tsuchiya further describes her job-searching experience: "There were entry sheets that had to be submitted in March and most interviews were held after the Golden Week holidays in May and then the companies would make job offers in June." With similar experiences as Ms. Tsuchiya, Ms. Nadai explains that, in her third year of university, her friends and seniors would often talk about job hunting, and she was often told that it was best to have a clear idea of job offers by June of that year. Third and fourth-year students like Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai often have similar experiences of pressure, deadlines, and stress, because it is difficult to concentrate on school and find a job at the same time.

Lastly, having been job hunting in the hotel industry in the past year, we wanted to know Ms. Tsuchiya and Ms. Nadai's overall opinions on whether or not it is beneficial to adopt the year-round hiring period. "I prefer year-round recruitment. At the moment, everyone is looking for a job at the same time. I feel like people might wanna do other activities or enjoy their final days of school during that time, so I don't think there will be a big difference in the candidates whether or not they are hired in spring or other times of the year," explains Ms. Tsuchiya. Ms. Nadai on the other hand, was more in favor of the annual hiring period in April, stating that "With year-round recruitment, smart students will start their job-hunting activities earlier than they

do now. I think that this may result in a job-seeking process that favors only a few outstanding students." This point is supported by her second argument: "Students have to start various activities in preparation for job hunting in their first or second year." These preparation activities would be complicated to set up if recruitment was accessible all year round. Students who do not require preparation activities would be at a distinct advantage, as they would be able to start their job search earlier.

Thanks to the opinions of Ms. Hotta, Ms. Nadai and Ms. Tsuchiya, we have a clearer picture of the evolution of recruitment in the hotel industry and the changes that COVID-19 has brought about. However, the question of how this shift to a year-round recruitment came about remains unanswered.

Indeed, in the case of large companies such as Hoshino Resort, or other hotels mentioned by Ms. Nadai, the transition has already been made via COVID, making it possible to popularize tools such as Zoom, which facilitate the transition to an annual process, as inter-



**Ms. Miyuri Nadai** NUFs student

views are only a click away. This facility suits both people working in human resources and future students looking for work like Ms. Tsuchiya. The stress and financial cost of interview after interview, and having to travel to different cities is solved just by owning a computer. As Ms. Tsuchiya pointed out, year-round recruitment also relieves the stress of having to find a job absolutely, at the risk of waiting another year before being able to work full time.

However, year-round recruitment is far from being a miracle solution. Firstly, as Ms. Hotta mentioned, it's complicated to set up in large groups, requiring a huge amount of administrative organization that some groups are unwilling or unable to impose on themselves. On the other hand, the well-established Japanese system is one that suits the majority. As Ms. Nadai pointed out, it provides good preparation for professional work and also allows them to concentrate on their studies outside of the hiring season. The hotel industry has begun changing its recruitment methods, which could have an impact on other Japanese industries in the future.

### Japan Business Federation

A comprehensive economic organization comprising of 1,512 representative companies in Japan, 107 nationwide industrial associations and the regional economic organizations for all 47 prefectures. It is devoted to bolstering the Japanese economy and enhancing the well-being of its citizens. The current chairman of the board is Masakazu Tokura, chairman of Sumitomo chemical Co. Ltd.





By Jack C. BALL, Kangmin LEE  
and Mana NAKAGAWA

Core part of humanity's collective development, language has always been vital to our understanding of both ourselves and the outer world. In the current information age, however, how we communicate through both spoken and written language has rapidly changed alongside the instantaneous spread of ideas through the Internet. Social media has greatly contributed to this change by accelerating the creation of new slang and generational trends.

A noticeable linguistic gap has been steadily growing between older and younger generations in Japan. Part of this gap is influenced by English, which became somewhat commonplace in Japan starting in the later half of the 20th century. In this article, we look back at how the Japanese language has changed as a result of several factors from social media, online messaging, and societal attitudes towards individual dialects. Furthermore, we conducted a survey to know what people think about new words and slang. Finally, we interviewed a professional in order to gain a better understanding of how and why this phenomenon has been a part of Japan's language and culture for the past few decades.

The Japanese language was not always uniform in its composition and use until the Edo period, when a notion arose to revitalize a single shared dialect that had supposedly existed long ago. As researcher Neriko Musha Doerr explains in her article, "Standardization and Paradoxical Highlighting of Linguistic Diversity in Japan": "This attempt to recreate a lost original, unitary language unfolded amidst a vast diversity of linguistic forms. Until the end of the Edo era (1603-1868) in the late nineteenth century, people from different regions and classes could not understand each other's speech, depending on geographical distance and class (Yasuda 2003). This was the context in which the standardization of language began" (392). After Japan opened its borders to the world, English became a hallmark of the educated populace. Moreover, English terminology became more common following the aftermath of World War Two.

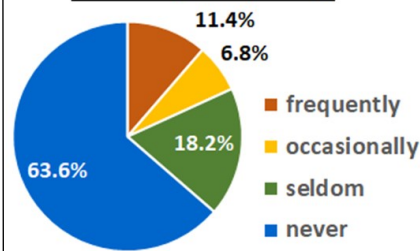
As social media platforms began launching Japanese versions of their sites in the late 2000s, the Japanese population swiftly transitioned from mobile web browsers and cell phone emails to social media, adopting to its features with relative ease. Certain platforms, such as Line and the video-sharing site NicoNico (which popularized the now common Japanese vernacular *www* as a version of "LOL") were created in 2012 and 2006 respectively.

These sites have remained popular by catering to Japanese sensibilities and placing a heavy focus on creating personalized content. Spurred

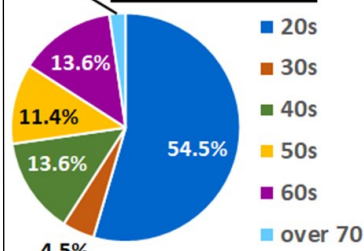
# Experimenting with Slang

## LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN JAPAN

SNS usage frequency



Age distribution



### < Research method >

We conducted street interviews on November 11th. Random questions were asked of people at a shopping mall. Questions included age and frequency of SNS use. Similar questions were asked using Google Forms. The total number of responses was 44.

on by the growth of dialect studies within Japan since the 1990s, and the returning popularization of regional dialects through TV and film, those who have wished to be more open about their individuality in a society where assimilation and group dynamics are the norm have tried their hands in creating digital entertainment with spoken dialects. Written content, places more of an emphasis on experimenting with characters (*hiragana*, *katakana*, *kanji* and the latin alphabet or a combination of all four).

One current trend in the Japanese language involves creating new Japanese words from English. We conducted a survey to measure the awareness of eight words that are representative of this trend.

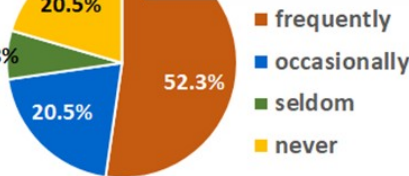
We asked people to guess each word's meaning. In total, 44 individuals answered the questionnaire.

From this data set, it is clear that *disuru* is the most well known word out of these options. This word first appeared in the 1990s among hip hop listeners. By the late 2000s, it became common as a piece of Internet slang. *emoi* appeared in the 1980s, but it was only used in the music industry. By 2007, it had spread to youths who were enamored by popular music and the artists behind their favorite songs. *rimuru* and *chirusuru* are the newest terms out of these four.

Of this quartet of words, *yuzane* is the most recent to appear. Even younger generations don't necessarily know the exact meaning.

We also asked people "Do you feel like you don't understand the meaning of words when you are talking to young people?" Surprisingly, over 70% of people answered they often or sometimes feel so. Even people in their 20's can't seem to understand the language of those only slightly

Do you feel like you don't understand the meaning of young people's words?



Word	Meaning	Correct Answer %
ディスる (Pron. "disuru")	disrespect + る (suffix word)	90.9%
エモい (Pron. "emoi")	emotional + い (suffix word)	86.4%
ハピバ (Pron. "hapiba")	Shortened form of "Happy birthday"	79.5%
リムる (Pron. "remuru")	remove + る (suffix word)	78.6%
チルする (Pron. "chillsuru")	chill + する	76.2%
パリピ (Pron. "Pripipi")	Shortened form of "party people"	70.5%
クリバ (Pron. "Kuripa")	Shortened form of "Christmas party"	70.5%
ユザネ (Pron. "yuzane")	Shortened form of "user name"	52.3%

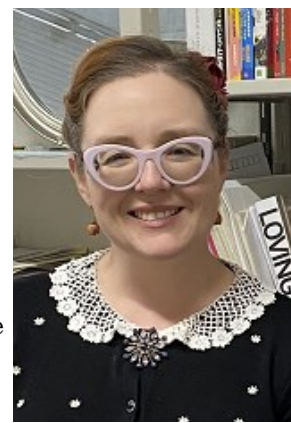
younger than them.

Lastly we asked their opinions about such words. A lot of older generation people have positive feelings about new words. They think such

a phenomenon is interesting, yet feel that it's important to choose appropriate words depending on the situation. Overall, those 60 years and older could not understand the slang of younger generations.

As an associate professor for the School of Contemporary International Studies at NUFU, Lucy Glasspool has long examined the linguistic background and overarching development of the Japanese language through the perspective of the country's pop culture. From the outset of our interview, she was very open-minded and friendly, and provided plenty to mull over as we discussed the matter of this contemporary topic. Although her work has been spread across a variety of subjects from race and gender studies to analysis of social classes and nationality, she has noted several characteristics that underlie certain popular terms for Japanese speech.

When asked about how specific lingo may come about and become relevant to contemporary speech, she replied that "they obviously are like *www* (equiv. to "lol"), they become widespread, but a lot of words within a given group get used within that group, yet they're unintelligible outside of the group. That's part of what makes them popular within the group. I suppose catchiness [is a



Ms. Lucy Glasspool,  
Associate prof. of NUFU

factor], or like Japanese in general, loves wordplay. So, if there's something clever about it, [that can lead to a spread in adoption]."

Of the examples she listed that adhered to such observations were *yoroshiku* which is sometimes written with the characters for four, six, and nine ("4-6-4-9") and *oshikatsu* which is a word for passionate fandoms for certain activities, media franchises, idols, and so on. As for the debate over whether or not the connection between Japanese language trends and social media can be considered a unique situation, she believes it to instead be part of a larger chain of continual refinement and change.

"I don't think it's unique, I think it just kind of expands on something that's been happening in [the] Japanese language [in an overall sense]. We can clearly see with historical trends that languages [in general] change in different eras because of class, and when Japan [especially] opened to the Portuguese when it was in its Warring States Period, Japanese started using Portuguese words and slang kind of came out of that.... I think the Internet is just one more iteration of, like, an opening of the linguistic space." In other words, the Japanese language is simply following a commonly shared path for all languages, and interactions online are another step in this constant evolution of linguistic variety.

In Japan, the digital era has orchestrated a profound renaissance in linguistic expression through social media. The survey findings revealed a marked disparity between generations, exposing a widening linguistic chasm. This divide, however, isn't merely about language; it mirrors deeper societal shifts and perceptions. Lucy Glasspool's insights shed light on the nuanced adoption of contemporary terms, weaving together catchiness and cultural relevance. This mirrors historical linguistic patterns, imbuing current changes with echoes of the past. The fusion of Japanese and English within this evolving lexicon is a testament to cultural exchange, highlighting Japan's delicate balance between tradition and global influence.

However, this evolution has created a palpable generational gap, prompting concerns and intrigue among different age groups. To bridge this linguistic divide, fostering intergenerational dialogue and understanding becomes paramount. It's a call to cherish linguistic evolution as a cultural treasure rather than a generational barrier. Embracing change doesn't mean forsaking tradition; it's an opportunity for synergy, where the past and present harmonize. In conclusion, Japan's linguistic journey on social media reflects a society grappling with the pace of digital evolution. Embracing this shift while preserving cultural heritage fosters a more inclusive society, one where every generation contributes to the vibrant tapestry of Japan's linguistic landscape.



By Yasmin A. TEGUH and Kayla F. YULFININTA

# 'Kokoro no Tomo' Unites Indonesia and Japan

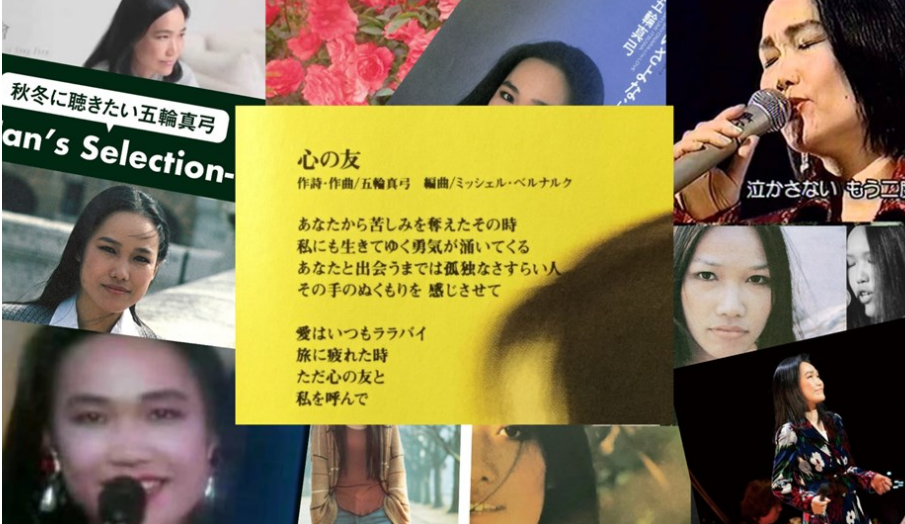
## FROM LYRICS TO THE HEART

**C**apturing someone's heart has always been a singer's main goal. However, it was never Mayumi Itsuwa's first intention. Mayumi Itsuwa is a Japanese singer who made her debut in 1972. She gained popularity through the single "Koibito Yo." Mayumi Itsuwa never expected her song, "Kokoro no Tomo," to become so popular. What was so surprising was that the song was not popularized in Japan, but rather in Indonesia.

Considering that the song's meaning is "Friend of the Heart," it is not surprising that so many people fell in love with it because of its mellow and soothing rhythm. The song was first released in 1982, yet it still stays in the Indonesian people's hearts for years until now. It gained popularity after a radio announcer from Indonesia attended Mayumi's concert in 1983 and heard the song during one of her performances. Touched by the music, he decided to broadcast it on the radio. That is how it all started.

Although the reception in Indonesia wasn't very strong at first, it gained traction over time because of a variety of media exposure, including TV shows and music programmes in the late 2000s. The song's popularity was revived when it was reintroduced as a duet in 2005, sung with Indonesian artist, Delon Thamrin, to raise money following the devastating Sumatra earthquake. Furthermore, the Japanese Emperor and Empress paid a visit to Indonesia on August 19th, 2023. At the Bogor Palace, President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, and First Lady, Iriana, hosted a luncheon for them. The sasando, a traditional stringed instrument, was used to perform the song during the event. The song's words may not have been understood by everyone, but it nonetheless resonated with the memories and personal experiences of many. As one Indonesian said, "The song is very reminiscent of old Indonesian songs and it transferred very well into Indonesian." Another person recalled that it was featured in several TV shows in the late 2000s, creating a strong impression of Japan. The song grew popular in Indonesia through plenty of media exposure.

Looking back, of course, the key question is how "Kokoro no Tomo" gained traction among general Indonesian audiences. To answer these questions, we conducted an online survey among Indonesian participants ranging from 18 to 57 years old. Of the 59 respondents, only three had never heard of the song before. Most respondents think that the song's popularity is due to its soothing rhythm and how easy it is to sing, which appeals to the average Indonesian. Additionally, they stated that the song has indeed improved the relations between Indonesia and Japan because it deepens the awareness of Japan in Indonesia. "Kokoro no Tomo" was featured in a TV program in



Indonesia called "Kokoro no Tomo" POP! in 2014. The series is co-produced with Sony Music Entertainment as part of the Cool Japan strategy, a strategy used by the Japanese government to promote their country by showcasing diversity and appealing Japanese culture. In January 2018, Rina Katarhira choreographed a "Kokoro No Tomo Dance" to mark the 60th anniversary of Japan and Indonesia's diplomatic ties.

Participants expressed how old songs like "Kokoro no Tomo" bring back memories, with the younger generation in particular expressing strong thoughts of nostalgia. They claimed that the song "evokes nostalgia due to the song being released in 1982, when such a unique sound is rare in today's mainstream music. Many people turn to classic old tunes for a breath of fresh air." They then made lists of timeless music they still listen to, which included hits like "Stay with Me" by Miki Matsubara, "First Love" by Hikaru Utada, and "Plastic Love" by Mariya Takeuchi. The song's impact went above just music, too, as it sparked curiosity in Japanese films, traditions, and culture, increasing cross-cultural understanding between Indonesia and Japan, especially among younger people.

"Kokoro no Tomo" may be one of the first catalysts of Japan and Indonesia's international relationship, marking the beginning of a Japanese culture boom in Indonesia. The impact of this song on Indonesian youth demonstrates more profound cultural fascination and has since sparked more interest in Japanese culture among the Indonesian society. They have been increasingly drawn to various aspects of Japanese culture, especially pop culture. This is evident from the ongoing fascination Indonesia has with Japanese entertainment—for instance,

the songs, video games, and anime that gave rise to the *otaku* culture. This is all demonstrated by the way Japanese pop culture was brought to Indonesia through the publication of Japanese comics translated into Indonesian by PT. Elex Media Komputindo, a publishing subsidiary of Gramedia, the country's most well-known book store and publishing house. These comics included *Doraemon*, *Dragon Ball*, *Detective Conan*, and others. In the 1990s, anime began to air on television as well.

These days, cultural events serve as important hubs for the development of creative expression between Indonesia and Japan. For example, since COVID-19, these events have been resumed and Comic Frontier (ComiFuro) in 2022 drew over 20,000 visitors over the course of two days, and is becoming more and more popular. It is a vibrant celebration of Japanese pop culture, where visitors are able to view the creations of a variety of local artists, who produce diverse works. Not only can visitors engage in artworks, but also cosplay, a popular activity in Japanese pop culture. These festivities extend beyond events meant to celebrate Japanese pop culture, as the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo recently held a collection of activities titled, "Japan-Indonesia Friendship Day." This year it is meant to symbolize the 65th anniversary of both Indonesia and Japan's diplomatic relationship.

In Tokyo's Yoyogi Park some community groups also organized several Indonesian arts and culture festival events of their own from Janu-

ary to September, one of them being a festival that was held near Nagoya's Kanayama Station. There were shadow puppet displays, dancing, as well as traditional Indonesian musical instrument performances, such as gamelan. Another cultural exchange through music is JKT48 and AKB48. JKT48 (JKT stands for Jakarta) is the first AKB48 sister group (idol group) founded in 2011 outside of Japan. There were two members from AKB48 who joined the JKT48, this showed the unity between Japan and Indonesia in terms of music entertainment. In 2018, JKT48 sang the song "Kokoro no Tomo" for the JJC (Jakarta Japan Club of Embassy of Japan).

On the other hand, Japan's relationship with Indonesia has also been showing progress, as around 60 Indonesian restaurants are spread throughout Japan, such as Sama-Sama Nagoya in Sakae, Bulan Bali in Shinsakae-machi, and Dapoer Indonesia in Ōsu. These restaurants provide an introduction for Japanese people to Indonesian cuisine, which includes rendang (meat stewed in coconut milk and spices), nasi goreng (Indonesian fried rice), and sate (Indonesian meat skewers). The mutual cultural exchange enhances the relationship between the two countries, fostering a greater awareness and knowledge of each other's current influences and traditions, and helping Japanese people know the history between Indonesia and Japan. Food has the power to bridge cultural divides and promote understanding.

There is no denying the connection between culture and cuisine. Engaging in a meal together at a restaurant or dinner table might facilitate talks between individuals from different backgrounds. In this case, Japanese people can see the Indonesian cultures through what they are eating and hopefully they will understand more about Indonesia and become interested in it. The more Japanese people become interested in Indonesia, the more the two countries will work together in other projects.

Mayumi Itsuwa's 1982 song, "Kokoro no Tomo," is a cultural phenomenon that has sparked a fascination for Japanese culture among Indonesian youth. The song's mellow rhythm and heartfelt resonance transcend language barriers, fostering a shared sense of nostalgia across generations. Its influence extends to cultural events like Comic Frontier (ComiFuro) and "Japan-Indonesia Friendship Day," where diverse expressions of art, cosplay, and traditional performances meld into celebrations of cultural unity. The song symbolizes the enduring friendship between Indonesia and Japan, highlighting the transformative power of art, culture, and especially music worldwide. The song will always remain in the hearts of Indonesian people as it is a timeless song that has a lot of meaning for Indonesia and Japan. Both the elderly generation and the younger ones are listening to older music again for nostalgic reasons.



Japanese and Indonesian media coverage of Mayumi Itsuwa as well as the Empress and Emperor's visit to Indonesia



By Lynn M. FERRAGE, Chae-Un MOON and Hillary D. MORA

“Fashion is not about oppression, but about freedom.” This statement, endorsed by designer Issey Miyake, resonates as a guiding principle in the world of Japanese fashion, where the influence of the LGBTQ+ community emerges as a catalyst for change. The imprint of the LGBTQ+ community on Japanese fashion goes beyond mere garments; it evolves into a cultural movement. Their bold approach has injected a gust of freedom into an industry long governed by rigid standards, paving the way for a more fluid and inclusive expression. These pioneers have transformed the very perception of fashion, encouraging an aesthetic where gender fluidity and ambiguity are celebrated. Their creations have served as catalysts for deeper reflection on identity, helping to create a space where the diversity of gender expression is welcomed and celebrated. The LGBTQ+ community’s imprint on Japanese fashion goes far beyond fabrics and seams; it has paved the way for a more authentic, inclusive and innovative form of expression. Japanese runways thus become playgrounds for a diversity of identities, where traditional dress codes are deconstructed to embrace an aesthetic that encompasses the plurality of expressions.

#### ***Fashion influence on generational voices***

After interviewing a member from the NPO ASTA, an LGBTQ+ association mainly active in Aichi and Gifu prefectures, several statements have been reported: “In Japan, the LGBTQ+ community faces stigma, with misconceptions around gay individuals being fashionable and labeled as ‘abnormal,’ leading to employment discrimination. Public fashion standards impose constraints, especially for transgender individuals, conflicting with their true gender expression. Fashion serves as a vital tool for LGBTQ+ individuals to authentically express themselves, transcending societal norms and registered genders. However, there’s no inherent link between one’s natural style and their queer identity. Self-acceptance liberates creative expression in clothing choices, challenging societal pressures of lookism prevalent in Japanese culture. Breaking free from these constraints allows individuals to confidently embrace their preferred styles, fostering empowerment through genuine self-expression and liberation from social judgment.”

Coming out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community is still difficult in Japan. However, with more people feeling empowered by representation in the media and the fashion industry, change is rapidly approaching. On November 18th, 2023, an event was held by Nijizu in Central Japan. The group supporting LGBTQ+ students was demanding freedom of choice re-

# The Myriad Voices of Fashion

## **EXPLORING LGBTQ INFLUENCE ON JAPANESE FASHION**



Interview with Lecturer Junko Nishikimi=Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences

garding what students wear to school. At the event, many members of Niigata Prefecture who are sexual minorities complained about the gender-based skirt requirement, recalling how stressful junior high and high school had been for them. They felt uncomfortable and overwhelmed, but their fashion choices outside of school made them feel represented and listened to.

Fashion lecturer Junko Nishikimi from Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences sheds light on the challenges and opportunities in Japan’s emerging genderless fashion trend. Recognizing diverse preferences, she emphasizes the importance of influential figures embracing these styles to reshape societal perceptions gradually. Lecturer Nishikimi underscores the role of fashion in fostering comfort and self-expression. She advocates for clothing to accommodate personal comfort, creating an environment where individuals can authentically embrace their identities.

Addressing the hurdles in gender-conforming fashion, Lecturer Nishikimi shares personal struggles, highlighting the scarcity of gender-neutral options in Japan. The impact of location becomes apparent, with school dress codes limiting expression, while places like Harajuku encourage full self-expression, showcasing the role of public perception in challenging gender norms. Can fashion truly transcend gender boundaries? Lecturer Nishikimi believes it depends on individual feelings and perspectives.

While creators can design boundary-defying fashion, the wearer’s outlook ultimately determines the success in challenging established gender norms. Differentiating between unisex and genderless clothing. Fashion styles, such as lolita and genderless fashion, have helped our youth bring change. Not only are they creating new and immersive styles, but they are also bringing awareness and validity to voices that have been around for years.

In terms of industry improvements,

Lecturer Nishikimi highlights the challenges of rapid obsolescence due to the pressure of annual releases. She advocates for solutions that strike a balance between creativity and survival in a competitive market. First of all, now we rarely discuss unisex clothing—rather, we discuss clothing that is gender-neutral, gender-nonconforming, or gender-inclusive. Lecturer Nishikimi explains that unisex designs cater to both genders, whereas genderless designs eliminate gender distinctions, allowing anyone to freely wear clothes. This distinction emphasizes the push for inclusivity in fashion.

While there has long been gender-neutral clothing on the market, it has typically been very specialized or high-concept. Thirty years ago, a relatively affluent clientele could purchase what was then referred to as “unisex” clothing from high-end designers like Yohji Yamamoto. Things have changed in the modern era. The brands that are adopting this style of dressing to celebrate gender fluidity are typically more mainstream and also have more color. Traditionally, unisex apparel has been both gender- and color-neutral, but the latest style of gender-inclusive apparel embraces the full spectrum of colors found on the LGBTQ+ flag. For example, in the last year, a new fashion style called “pop & block” has emerged, a trend that draws inspiration from the androgynous and gender-neutral movements of 2022. While it’s important to note that not everyone who wears these styles are members of the LGBTQ+ community, the trends were nonetheless started by LGBTQ+ individuals.

#### ***Fashion Subcultures***

In the ever-evolving landscape of fashion, the emergence of genderless fashion in the 2010s triggered a seismic shift. Beyond the runways and Instagram streams, genderless fashion serves as a rebellious anthem echoing the sentiments of a generation unwilling to be confined by societal expectations. This contemporary resurgence of genderless

fashion is, at its core, a continuum of Japan’s rich tapestry, bridging the gap between the past and the present. It’s a cultural reflection, a tribute to a heritage where gender boundaries have always been blurred, paving the way for a revolution that redefines the very essence of identity in the realm of fashion and beyond. “What I want to do is like what Jun from Undercover and I have been doing – variety, and a wider view. I want to widen the lens for people in the fashion industry. And I want to remove the wall like the one in Berlin. I want to deliver that kind of message through clothes.”

The eccentric and androgynous style of Visual Kei interlaces with LGBTQ+ artists and aficionados, conveying a bold and unconventional vision of gender. The codes of Lolita fashion, often associated with innocence and femininity, provide a playground where traditional gender boundaries blur. For many LGBTQ+ community members, this aesthetic offers freedom of expression, allowing each individual to challenge and redefine societal gender expectations, thus creating a profound connection between Lolita fashion and the influence of gender identity diversity within the LGBTQ+ community.

Within the realm of fashion subversion, a unique fusion called “Brolitas” has emerged, blending the worlds of “bro” and “Lolita fashion.” These individuals boldly embrace a masculine interpretation of the whimsical Lolita style. Their motivations for venturing into this distinct fashion territory are as diverse as the spectrum of colors in a rainbow, often arising from a desire for transformative and comforting escapism amidst the challenges of daily life. Furthermore, Danso fashion emerges as a symbol of acceptance, reshaping the future of style.

Following this exploration of fashion’s impact on self-expression, it is essential to remain vigilant about a concerning trend within the industry: the phenomenon known as “queerbaiting.” It is crucial to discern this exploitative practice from the genuine influence of the LGBTQ+ community on fashion, which is rooted in creativity, sincere self-expression, and the challenging of gender norms. The dynamic landscape of Japanese fashion reflects a broader dialogue on individual expression and societal acceptance.

The impact of the LGBTQ+ community on Japanese fashion transcends mere clothing. Japanese fashion subcultures have also provided a fertile ground for experimentation and creativity. They allow individuals to break free from societal constraints and express their true identities. Lecturer Nishikimi advocates for a nuanced approach to genderless fashion, stressing inclusivity, comfort, and the need to steer societal change. The dynamic landscape of Japanese fashion reflects a broader dialogue on individual expression and societal acceptance.



By Olivia G. HARBROW,  
Madelyn L. KINEMAN  
and Megan C. LANDMAN

# DEATH FESTIVALS

## A Celebration of Life Through Dancing with the Dead

**H**ave you ever danced with the dead? In many cultures, death is seen more as a “see you later,” not just *sayonara*. Though many cultures mourn their dead, others maintain strong connections with the dead by celebrating the memories of their lives through traditions such as death festivals. We spoke to two members of such cultures to ask about their experiences with dancing with the dead.

In New Zealand, the Māori community strongly connects with death through their connection to Atua (gods/goddesses). New Zealand has many tribes that celebrate Matariki in various ways. Our interviewee from New Zealand, Chyvaurne Tohou, is from the Ngati Ko tribe. She tells us how Matariki is celebrated on the 28th of June with a community of close-knit family and friends. This community festival is the Māori New Year because they follow the traditional Māori calendar rather than the solar calendar. Excitingly, it will be celebrated as a national holiday for the first time in New Zealand’s history. It’s a celebration to release the previous year’s built-up negative feelings, while acknowledging the death of their loved ones, which encourages their lost friends and family members to move on to the next part of their transition in the circle of life.

**“This is the acknowledgment that our culture actually deserves.”**  
*Chyvaurne Tuhou*

Chyvaurne further explains to us how this celebration revolves around the star cluster Matariki, which is kaitiaki, their guardians (Seven Sisters, Subaru- In Japan’s sky) in the festivities. This cluster holds a lot of meaning to the Māori people during the time of the Matariki festival because it connects them to their ancestors. She says that during this time, the spirits of the dead are led by their ancestors to Cape Reinga, the tip of New Zealand, where they dive off into the depths of the underworld and reunite with their kaitiaki (guardians), tīpuna (ancestors) and Atua. Then, they are released into the stars.

**“We acknowledge them, we think about them, we talk about them and then that acknowledgement allows them to release their spirit and they go back up to the Seven Sisters.”**  
*Chyvaurne Tuhou*

Chyvaurne mentions that throughout her childhood, she used to call the stars the teapot stars due to their resemblance to a teapot before learning about their true meaning. Chyvaurne realized the importance of teaching the younger generation about their history. She mentioned how important it is for her to celebrate with her immediate family and to teach her children the importance of Matariki through various activities, songs such as the Matariki Song (see image) and talking about the Seven Sisters. Learning about the meaning of Matariki al-



**Above:** Interview with Prof. Naoko Kobayashi (right) by Olivia Harbrow =Aichi Gakuin University, Nissin city, Aichi pref.  
**Below:** Matariki song lyrics



**Right:** Chyvaurne Tuhou and her Marae, Ngāti Kō Tribe, Enderley, New Zealand

release of ancestors into the stars and a continuation of the circle of life into death. Professor Kobayashi told us how the main goal of *Obon* is to ensure the spirits of family members are able to briefly visit the living, but also to make sure that when they leave again, they can go

to paradise and not hell. *Obon* welcomes ancestors home time and time again, whilst Matariki assists those who have passed to move onto the next world and remain there amongst their gods and the stars.

Both Matariki and *Obon* are times of harvest and celebrating food; Professor Kobayashi explains how, for *Obon*, “vehicles” for ancestors are made from

cucumbers and eggplants in the shapes of horses and oxen, with the cucumber horses helping spirits to come home quickly. The eggplant oxen take them away slowly, prolonging their time here. She showed pictures of both of these horses and oxen in people’s homes and in the popular video game “Animal Crossing,” where players can decorate their homes with them.

Food is often placed on the altar as offerings. One picture we were shown of such an altar had pizza on offer. When we asked about it, Professor Kobayashi explained that it was the first year after the grandmother of the household had passed away. As she loved pizza, they had placed some on the altar for her.

While *Obon* is about offerings, Matariki occurs during the harvesting season. A ceremonial offering is made in the hope of a prosperous harvest for the year to come; once the harvest is collected, they cook the food in the hangi and celebrate and share the food. Dancing is an integral part of both festivals, with the *Bon-odori* (A traditional dance) performed in parks and open spaces to welcome spirits back home for *Obon*. Matariki has dancing and traditional arts such as weaving and carving. Both festivals also utilize singing and chanting to help guide the spirits of their ancestors and emphasize dancing with those you love.

Death is a universal human experience - it is the circle of life. But not everyone celebrates the dead and death in the same way. For instance, in Tibet, Buddhist funerals last for 49 days, during which the family gathers to grieve openly as a community. In Bali, crying is discouraged, and the grieving process is brief. There is no “correct” way to cope with loss, but it is something we all must do. In this respect, do you think festivals that celebrate the dead rather than mourn them are helpful? Does normalizing death in life and focusing on the person and not their passing allow us to grieve less and enjoy life more?

**“It’s a cleanse for us. And it’s really just a time to reflect on the past and those we have lost, and then we celebrate with those who are still here with us.”**  
*Chyvaurne Tuhou*

lows the younger generation to reflect and acknowledge their dead and their ancestors, thus encouraging them to move on to the next part of the transition.

The Māori tribes celebrate and acknowledge Matariki with their family and in their tribes in different ways, such as Kapa haka festivals, star observations, fireworks, hangi, and concerts. Chyvaurne mentions how her tribe, the Ngāti Kō, and her family will head to the Marae - A sacred place belonging to the Iwa (tribe) that holds equivalent importance for their tribe as a *Shinto* shrine or a Buddhist temple to Japan’s religious systems to celebrate Matariki. Māori people gather in their Marae for spiritual and social purposes, to come together to perform traditional songs and dances and pursue traditional arts such as Harakiki weaving and Kairou for carving. Matariki is a time of acknowledging the dead and releasing negativity while encouraging the spirits of the deceased to be released up to the stars of the seven sisters. Matariki is a time of acknowledgment and thankfulness to the Gods and a time of harvest and feasting.

In some aspects, *Obon* and Matariki have similarities and differences in their customs. Though *Obon* is not a national holiday, many return home to spend time with their families. During this time, it’s essential to spend time together in terms of welcoming the spirits of ancestors home and strengthening connections among the living. When asked

what she believed was the most important aspect of *Obon*, our interviewee, Professor Naoko Kobayashi (PhD), stated that she believed gathering with family and the relationships it fostered were the most important. She elaborated that it was through *Obon* that she first met her grandmother and grandfather, further highlighting the festival’s importance to family.

**“What is your favourite thing about the festival?” “Maybe the gathering of families... eating gorgeous food... it’s very enjoyable.”**  
*Professor Naoko Kobayashi*

As an expert in Japanese religious studies, Professor Kobayashi told us about the *Obon* festival, both from the perspective of a scholar and a participant. It is said that on the first day of the month, when the *Obon* period begins, the lid of the cauldron of hell opens, and the spirits of the ancestors come out. Like Matariki, *Obon* welcomes the spirits of ancestors back home for a brief time. But Matariki acts as a final

**Matariki**  
Matariki  
E ara e

Te Mātahi o te tau  
Te kohinga whetū  
I te uma o Ranginui

E piātaata mai ana  
Whakaataata i te rangi  
E tohu ana  
I te tau hou Māori e

Ko Tupuānuku  
Ko Tupuārangi  
Ko Waitī, Waitā  
Waipuna ā rangi  
Ururangi e

Ko Pōhutukawa e  
Ko Hiwaiterangi e  
Matariki e ara e

Te Mātahi o te tau  
Te kohinga whetū  
I te uma o Ranginui

E piātaata mai ana  
Whakaataata i te rangi  
E tohu ana  
I te tau hou Māori e

Matariki  
Matariki  
E ara e

**Matariki Song**

**Translation:**

First month of the maori year  
The collection of stars  
in the chest of Ranginui  
Shining bright  
Reflecting in the sky  
indicating the maori new year

Tupuānuku  
Tupuārangi  
Waitī, Waitā  
Waipuna ā rangi  
Ururangi e  
Pōhutukawa  
Hiwaiterangi

Matariki rise



By Finley D. CHADWICK-O'LEARY, Eunwoo JEONG and Mone V. B. REID-WRIGHT

## Polarized Global Perspectives

### THE FUKUSHIMA WATER RELEASE

The international community has been witnessing a polarized debate surrounding the release of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant, stemming from the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake that caused a nuclear disaster. Despite numerous scientists asserting that the water is safe for consumption, skepticism persists, fueled by political maneuvers and selective concerns from various governments.

In the wake of the Japanese government's third release of Fukushima treated water between the 2nd and 20th of November, the discourse surrounding its potential environmental impact has sparked extensive commentary. Despite this discourse, experts in the field, such as Professor Jim Smith of the University of Portsmouth, and Professor Ichiro Yamamoto of the Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences, assert that the tritiated water, chemically identical to regular water, is virtually impossible to separate. Professor Smith emphasizes that the released water is "less than 1% of the Japanese limit for discharge," highlighting the stringent measures employed. At less than 1500 Becquerels per litre (Bq/L), the water's tritium levels fall over 6.67 times below the World Health Organization's (WHO) drinking water limit of 10,000 Bq/L.

Both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and independent scientists have assessed radiation doses to be remarkably low, negating any detrimental environmental impact. Professor Smith underlines this, stating, "There is more natural radiation in the fish than chemical." Despite the widespread media coverage and local concerns, the data suggests that the treated water poses no significant threat to the oceans' ecosystems.

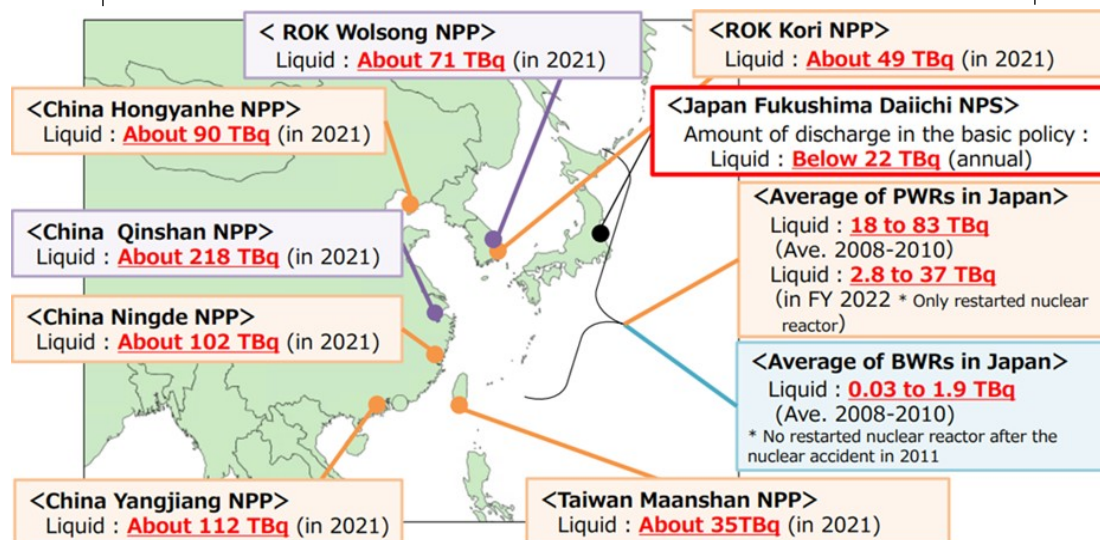
In comparison to other countries, Japan's approach to releasing tritiated water appears notably cautious. Remarkably, these releases have not resulted in any discernible environmental impacts near the respective discharge areas.

The overarching message is clear: the Fukushima treated water release adheres to rigorous standards, and the scientific evaluations assert no discernible impact on the environment. It becomes imperative to discern the scientific reality from the political rhetoric surrounding the issue, emphasizing the need for an evidence-based approach to understanding and addressing concerns related to the Fukushima treated water release.

Despite criticism from home and abroad, the Japanese government has made consistent assurances that the release of the treated water from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is safe. Professor



Interview with Prof. Ichiro Yamamoto=Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences



**Above:** Levels of discharge from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and other Japanese power plants compared to others in East Asia **Right:** Comparison of tritium concentrations (Both graphics from Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry materials)

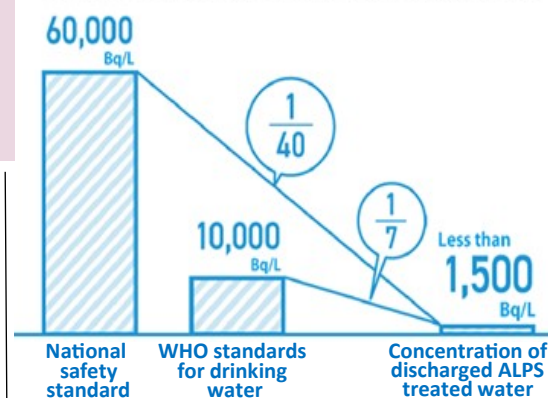
Yamamoto, the chairperson of the Subcommittee on the Handling of the ALPS-Treated Water, told us that the water was tested by both the Japanese government and the IAEA and was found to contain less than 1500 Bq/l of tritium. This is only 15% of the WHO's level for safe drinking water and is only a fraction of the national safety standard's 60,000 Bq/l limit.

However, amidst these scientific assurances, the political game surrounding the Fukushima treated water release is increasingly evident. China, a vocal critic, condemns the discharge, with its customs agency expressing concerns about the "radioactive contamination of food safety." China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin stated that the act of releasing the water is an "extremely selfish and irresponsible act," suggesting that the treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi NPP is more dangerous than the water that is released by the Chinese nuclear power plants, and therefore requires a different response.

China's condemnation extends to its ban on Japanese seafood, citing scientific concerns about water contamination. Hong Kong authorities claim that the seafood ban against Japan persists because they can not be sure that radioactive substances, other than tritium, are not present in fish that is caught in Japanese waters.

The hypocrisy deepens as China

#### Comparison of tritium concentrations



accuses Japan of being a "saboteur of the ecological system and polluter of the ocean," while failing to address its own practices. The IAEA, after a two-year review, supports Japan's plans, deeming them consistent with global safety standards and asserting a "negligible radiological impact to people and the environment." In response, the Chinese foreign ministry expresses regret over the IAEA's "hasty release" of its report and warns Japan to bear the consequences if it persists in its course.

Professor Yamamoto says that before the release process, the Subcommittee on the Handling of the ALPS-Treated Water called on the Japanese government to continuously measure and monitor the tritium levels of both the seawater and sea life. The results of this monitoring and measurement are still being shared with the IAEA. The government insists that the water is not going to impact the local fishing industry. Japan's Prime Minister was so adamant in his belief in the water that he even ate *sashimi* made from fish caught in the waters of Fukushima. However, the government understands that the release of the treated water will still

cause issues to the fishing industry as its reputation will take a hit. The government has promised that any financial impact on the fishing industry will be reimbursed by the national government.

Japan's Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida has promised a high level of transparency. Leaflets, television broadcasts and internet campaigns have been a few of the many ways that the government has been keeping the Japanese population informed about the situation.

The Japanese government has tried repeatedly to change public opinion in countries which denounce the release on the world stage. The state media corporations of China and Russia often use "buzz" words to interest readers and draw attention to the article. They use words such as "toxic" or "irresponsible" when discussing the release of the treated water. This has made the general public feel worried about the safety of the water, and anger towards the Japanese government.

Chinese state-run media outlets ran multiple paid advertisements on social media, which denounced the discharge of the treated water, in multiple countries and languages. In China the public were furious at the Japanese government. Multiple Japanese schools were vandalized and shops in Japan were pounded with spam calls. These actions led to the Japanese government calling on a Chinese diplomat to try to calm the situation.

In the future, Japan should try to improve their international relations by collaborating with the countries that

have criticized them by writing joint standards for the release of nuclear by-products or by inviting inspectors from these countries to oversee the release of the treated water. After the meltdown of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Pripjat, Ukraine tried their best to improve their public perception. They did this by allowing collaboration of multiple countries in order to help with the cleanup effort and development of nuclear safety standards. On the contrary, Japan has taken a defensive approach to criticism from other countries. Despite the allegations and hypocrisy, Japan may need to collaborate with these countries if they wish to improve their public relations with them. This would undoubtedly diffuse some of the tensions and anger directed towards the Japanese government and people. Offering to work with the Chinese government to collaborate on standards for the release of nuclear by-products would be a win-win for Japan, because it would restrict the Chinese release of nuclear waste water. However, if they refuse to work with Japan, then they will be seen as hypocritical for condemning Japan but not working to fix the issue.