

The NUIS Times

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies
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This No.4 edition is the collaboration of JSC903 exchange students and domestic students.

PICTOGRAMS: Wordless Communication

What do people think of these practical pictures?



Pictograms in practice - Fujigaoka Station, Subway Higashiyama Line. (Nov, 10, 2019)

from a distance thanks to the pictograms.’

A notable discussion was the frequency of pictograms and signage in general throughout Japan. While many students and tourists who had spent time in Japan had noticed the various signage in larger cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto, it was different for those who visited smaller locations, where signage is minimal at best, and pictograms are hardly seen. Despite the great changes so far in the capital and major cities, the system of pictograms has not found a place in the whole of the country.

The development of pictograms attributed to the coming Olympic Games is not something new to Japan or the rest of the world. This dedicated drive to streamlining the signs has been seen plenty of times before, notably in the lead up to the 2012 Olympics in London. The city introduced a series of new pictograms into the city – some to be representing the Olympic sports, and others to be incorporated into regular signage. This too was done in preparation for the increase of tourism for the country and to better accommodate the increase of visitors. The same is happening in Japan. With the current trend, this focus of making navigation easier for foreign visitors may be seen again with the next Olympic Games set for Paris 2024.

While the current developments are a great step in the right direction, it would be beneficial to see a push for these small quality-of-life adjustments outside of the exclusivity of a large world event. As it stands, pictograms are a useful aid for visitors but have yet to be fully realized in their application.

Pictograms or ‘pictographs’ are useful pictures resembling some physical objects or actions. They are the small images that accompany the various signs for bathrooms, bus stops, and various other public services. They convey the image quickly and easily, being recognizable at a glance. One can recognize an image of a bus, bathroom or bank with ease, almost subconsciously. As a result, pictograms can allow for ease of access for signage, notifying the meaning without a necessary translation.

By Yuki Hata and Oliver Pinder,
Quentin Payet, Alexandru Visan

It is not the easiest transition for a tourist coming into Japan. If one is not familiar with the language, they may find themselves at a loss when it comes to reading signs, notices or directions. Without the ability to read the language, tourists would have difficulty, especially for non-English speaking tourists.

This is where pictograms are most useful. With the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games on the way, Japan is working towards making the country more accessible to the world. The use of pictograms has developed over the past few years, to better serve the increasing number of tourists coming into the country. The aim is to overcome the language and cultural gaps. Such measures include:

- Introducing a new series of pictograms specifically for the Olympic games;
- Expanding the list of existing standardized pictograms to be used across the country;

-Replacing existing pictograms with those more in line with internationally recognized systems.

Even with these advancements, Japan’s current pictograms are not without flaws—with some inconsistencies or anomalies within their application. For example, the general pictograms for ‘bathroom’ are mostly consistent. However, those used within the various appliances, sinks, and toilets are inconsistent between manufacturers, causing difficulties for both residents and tourists alike.

We took the time to ask for the opinions both international students and Japanese domestic students. We asked about their views and experiences with pictograms in Japan or further afield.

Most were familiar with what a pictogram was, having seen and encountered them in their daily lives, while not always paying attention to them. However, some were not wholly familiar with the term ‘pictogram’ from the beginning.

We found that people were not usually very reliant on pictograms in their home country – a

mindset also shared by Japanese residents when discussing Japan’s use of pictograms. A common point between all involved was that an understanding of both the language and the country, in general, lessened the reliance on signs and pictograms. However, it was noted that in some instances, the text is completely missing in place of pictograms for some facilities like public transport, so recognizing the relevant pictograms is useful.

One international student commented: ‘I don’t notice pictograms on signs much at home because I know my way about, but when I travel abroad, I find myself needing to rely on them if there is not always an English translation’.

There was a drastic increase in the level of reliance when asked about Japan. The international students we asked expressed how they found pictograms to be very useful when traveling around Japan, especially when they are not familiar with the Japanese language.

A Japanese student commented: While tools such as translator apps and maps are available for tourists, they can spot the destination like a subway or bus station

An example of the series of new pictograms created for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. This one represents Athletics.

The previous Japan Standard pictogram for ‘First Aid Station’ (left) and the current international standard pictogram (right). The ‘Green Cross’ is a symbol that is recognized worldwide as a representation for First Aid.



Japanese Education System

An Outdated Approach, Unhappy Students?



To get a better understanding of the way things are done, and how people feel about it all, interviews were conducted with several high school teachers and their students. When it came to the students, they agreed with each other on most things. First of all, they really enjoy working on special events for the school. Plus, school is the place where they can meet and socialize with their friends. And although they disliked doing homework, they did really care about their grades and wanted to enter a university. On the other hand, a common complaint about the homework the students have to do is that it is too hard and also that they could not spend the time studying something they actually care about. The amount of homework also seemed quite excessive with several of the students mentioning sleep deprivation as a result.

Generally speaking, school regulations are also quite strict in Japan, and some of the students that were interviewed brought this up. Things such as the complete restriction of the use of mobile phones on school grounds; even during school events, or the regulation against any kind of dyed hair.

The teachers were asked about the curriculum, such as whether they were satisfied with the way things are done, and how they felt about how things are done in general.

When asked the question: ‘Are you satisfied with the Japanese system?’ it quickly became evident that indeed they also had foreseen some problems with how it all functions. A commonality of the answers was that the students could not develop themselves well individually, since the curriculum is tailored towards

all students. This puts everyone on an equal standing, but also halts the progress of individual talents that might otherwise develop.

The answers for questions about the effectiveness of the system and the amount of homework required for the university entrance exam were really short and general: “It depends on the student”, “It depends on the course”.

The students and teachers then, seem to agree on one thing. There is still room for improvements. However, Japan as a nation scores considerably high on global ranking lists measuring education, so whether or not much will change, only time will tell.

By Mai Yen NGO, Rogier Frederik ZAPPEIJ and Nao YAMAUCHI

When looking at the Japanese education system, there seems to be a very drastic difference in how it is viewed within Japan and outside of it. Outside of Japan it is often praised, yet within Japan’s borders what is mostly heard appears to be critiquing the system.

No system ever made has been flawless, but the disparity in opinions regarding this in particular is quite curious. The Japanese system is quite old, it originated in the Meiji era and was purely focused on academic results. The optimal way to achieve these results was deemed to be memorization of facts. Now although most educational systems around the world work in a similar fashion, when one combines this method with the Japanese collectivist approach, and pressure for results that many Japanese students feel, one can begin to see why in Japan they might feel differently about it than those looking from an outsider’s perspective. Especially around the final terms of high school when students are busy studying

Above: English class of a normal day at Tajiminishi High School, Tajimi city.
Below: Students' practice writings from calligraphy class.
Photo: by Nao YAMAUCHI on October 18, 2019

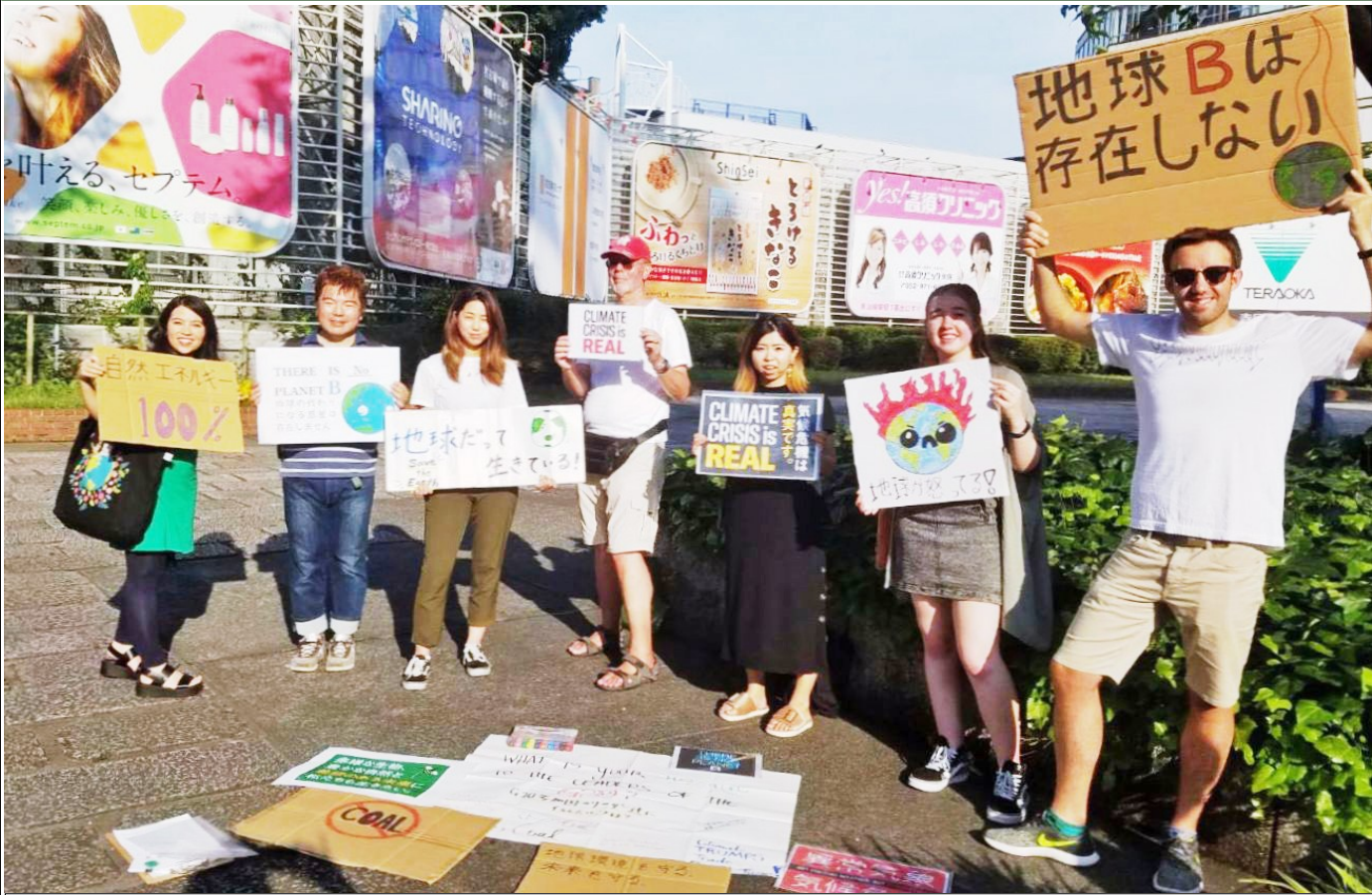


for university entrance exams, where their days are filled with trying to memorize all they need of their long list of subjects one can see the peak of why, at least the students themselves, are unhappy. Every subject on the long list that students have to study for, is claimed to be essential for the development

of their personalities, and there can be no doubt that many of these are important. But are they really courses for the development of the student personally? Something that can help them achieve exactly what it is they desire?

Most textbooks are perfectly generalized, require no critical thinking nor are any kind of worthwhile analyses required to be made. Can such a curriculum and way of studying really be considered a “success”?

Is Japan aware our house is on fire?
A glimpse into climate change activism within Japan.



Protestors at a recent climate change rally in Nagoya.

By Cagle Su OZBEK, Mairead Danielle TENNISWOOD, Rodion SOSNAand Mirai AKAHORI

“We’ll go to school when the Earth is cool” screamed protestors on the streets this year during a Fridays for Future protest.

Fridays for Future is an organization which was started in August of 2018 by Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swedish girl, who has galvanized millions in taking a stand against climate change. The movement’s aim is to have governments around the globe follow the goals outlined in the Paris Agreement rigorously. The impact of the Fridays for Future movement seems to have erupted in Europe and America, but can the same be said for Japan?

Japan, like many countries, started to hold larger protests in its biggest city, Tokyo. At the latest protest in September 2019, it is said that approximately 2,800 people

participated. However, when this is compared to the masses that have been seen in places such as London, New York, Berlin, and Melbourne; One should ask is Japanese climate change activism lacking? Why should Japan join the protest?

Concerning the latter question, it has become evident that the issue of global warming is a universal threat not only to the biodiversity of life but will also start to interrupt daily life and will cause severe economic implications. According to a climate change report issued in 2018 by the Japanese Ministry of Environment, the global mean surface temperature has risen by about 0.72°C in the last 100 years. In Japan, the mean temperature has drastically risen by 1.19°C in the last 100 years. The effects of this radical rise in temperature can be seen when looking at the increasing number of natural disasters such as typhoons and storm surges and the quality of rice and crops drastically degrading.

So, should Japan be more worried about our house being on fire?

In order to get a sense of what the Japanese populace think of cli-

mate change activism we conducted a survey, and out of 101 people, 52.5% of the participants were interested in the topic of climate change activism. However, only 31.7% of the participants were familiar with the organization Fridays for Future. Furthermore, 66.7% of the participants hold the view that the climate change protests are not doing enough to accomplish a concrete change. Surprisingly, 91.1% of the participants have never attended a demonstration regarding climate change and 44% of them have no intention to.

To gain a better understanding of these results and why, perhaps, climate change activism is not generating enough attention in Japan we interviewed Kanae Hasegawa. She is a member of the Nagoya branch for the Fridays for Future movement within Japan, agreed to talk to us about the movement and climate change activism.

Ms. Hasegawa, a newer addition to the FFF movement, started her climate activist journey three years prior.

It was while working on Peace Boat, an organization that aims to

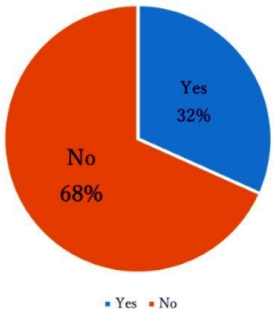
bring more attention to various topics around the world, that she became more aware of climate change and its effects. Ms. Hasegawa was, at first, mainly concerned with the amount of plastic pollution in our waters. However, as her awareness of climate change grew so did her activities to help battle climate change.

On the 20th of September 2019, people all over the world including people in Nagoya held a march in protest of climate change. However, Ms. Hasegawa expressed her disappointment that although 160 people joined the march, a large number of the participants were foreigners. “While marching in the street, on-lookers were really not doing anything. People were taking pictures and we were telling them to join the crowd, but no one was, they were all very hesitant and distant.” she said. Although participation was limited, Ms. Hasegawa understands that strikes, even though powerful, are not the only way to achieve new positive climate change policies. She believes small changes in individuals’ lives can have a huge effect on companies and the government. Ms. Hasegawa admits the Japanese government needs to make climate change their priority.

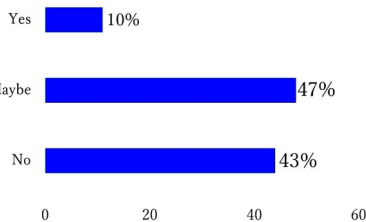
However, Ms. Hasegawa feels that even in Japan, “Fridays for Future is not only about climate change but about being a part of a global community that is trying to do something good for the future. People who are a part of the group will feel more united with the world”.

Ms. Hasegawa has confidence that if the Japanese people were to unite and fight together against climate change that they would be powerful enough to garner change. The strength of the united Japanese people has been seen both after the tragedies of 2011 (Great East Japan Earthquake followed by the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima) and more recently after typhoon Hagibis and the effort to help Chiba prefecture. Therefore, if the Japanese people were to become more proactive in the fight against climate change then perhaps, they could be a leading force in the fight against climate change.

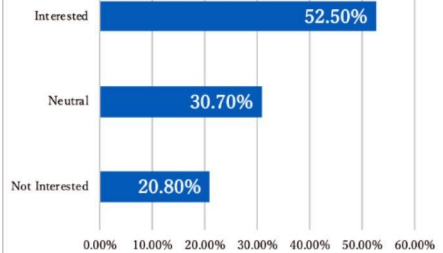
Have you ever heard about Fridays for Future movement?



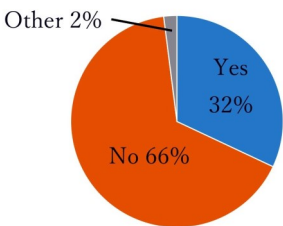
Would you participate in a climate change demonstration?



Are you interested in climate change activism?



Do you think climate change protests in Japan are doing enough in regards to getting change?



Animation

Animania: Global Appeal of Anime

Entry point learn more about Japanese society



By: Esme (Xenon) Elizabeth Kelsey TYNER, Henrik DIELS and Yumeka MATSUYAMA

Anime: Where *kaidan* meet vampires and medieval knights meet feudal *samurai*. Where a Victorian mansion stands amidst the marshlands of Hokkaido. Where the sensibilities of *Nihonga* painting are meshed with European-American comic artistry, all ornamented with the eyes of Betty Boop.

Stories set in Düsseldorf, set in Paris, set in London and set in the magical world of Jewel Land, and, of course, all over Japan. Stories derived from Japanese folktales, Russian literature and American films, with some German and French philosophy thrown in for good measure. Anime: Where European and American cultures mesh with Japanese culture, creating something foreign... but not too foreign, and very accessible.

Since their humble origins in the 1960s and 70s, international audiences of anime have exploded in number - today, fans on every continent come together to discuss and display their passion for it. It can be hard to understand why, though - many anime are deeply rooted in Japanese cultural norms that may at first glance appear alienating and uninteresting to foreign audiences. But talking to inter-

national students at NUFS, who are fans of anime, can begin to shed some light on this question.

When asked how they first became interested in anime, many students pointed to anime exported to their home countries and dubbed in their native language. In these interviews, students made reference to watching anime on television as children, sometimes with influence from older siblings. Some of them pointed out that they never acknowledged what they were watching as a unique, culturally specific type of television. Instead, they viewed these shows as cartoons comparable to other animated series produced in their home countries or elsewhere in the world.

The regional localization of anime, then, is a large part of what got people interested in anime. But these dubs can both hinder and help people's understanding of Japan. On some occasions, foreign networks have been known to censor and replace information related to Japanese culture. In one controversial example, 4Kids Entertainment's dub of Pokémon often had voice actors refer to *onigiri* as donuts or popcorn, and on one occasion replaced an image of *onigiri* with that of a sandwich. However, subtitled anime is not typically edited in this way, and can even help to aid in international audiences' understanding of Japan. As Italian student Elettra Di Gaetano said, "in many anime, there are subtitles with some notes about the cultural aspects. Just reading that, I can

Above: Collecting goods featuring their favorite characters is one way fans show their love for anime.

learn more about Japanese culture, and after that it's not that confusing."

As to why they'd rather watch anime than a show produced in their home countries, many students stated that they simply enjoy animation over live action television and pointed to its unique art style and diversity of genres as selling points. Fans appreciate that anime is able to explore darker topics, something uncommon in Euro-American countries, where animation is often viewed as inherently childish.

The diversity of stories that are told in anime makes it appealing to many audiences internationally. Interviewees from various parts of Europe and North America agreed that anime is now very popular in their home countries. As one potential explanation, Gaetano said, "nowadays there's this tendency that nerds and nerd culture is okay... so many more people become interested in this culture. For example, with the Marvel movies, they watch these movies, and then they read the comic books. I think that thanks to

these movies, there is this tendency to love this nerd culture, and also anime and manga." Because of this popularity, there's no reason for anime fans to stay quiet about their love for it, so they express their fandom in a variety of ways. NUFS students reported attending anime conventions, wearing cosplay, writing and reading fanfiction, and consuming others' fan works as ways they participated in anime fan communities. Some students even took the opportunity to cosplay their favourite characters during Halloween events here at NUFS!

For international anime fans at NUFS, anime is an aspect of Japanese culture that they love - but they're sure to make it clear that it's not the only aspect. While many of these students cite anime as their first introduction to Japanese culture, they agreed that it was only an entry point into learning more about Japanese society. Anime is what first got some students interested, but it wasn't until they had done more of their own study that they made the decision to come to Japan. They were sure to value what they had learned in academic settings above cues taken from anime, but this sometimes had surprising results for them. British student Lincoln Scott said, "having already studied Japanese quite a bit, I already knew that there was a big difference between what you see in anime and how Japan was. I was actually more surprised by certain things that I have seen portrayed in anime that actually are very similar to how they are in Japan."

All this information combines to paint a clear picture - anime allows people all over the world to foster a love for Japan's rich culture and history, while offering a small window into Japanese daily life. Rather than confusing viewers, the prevalence of Japanese culture in anime is a big part of what makes them love it.

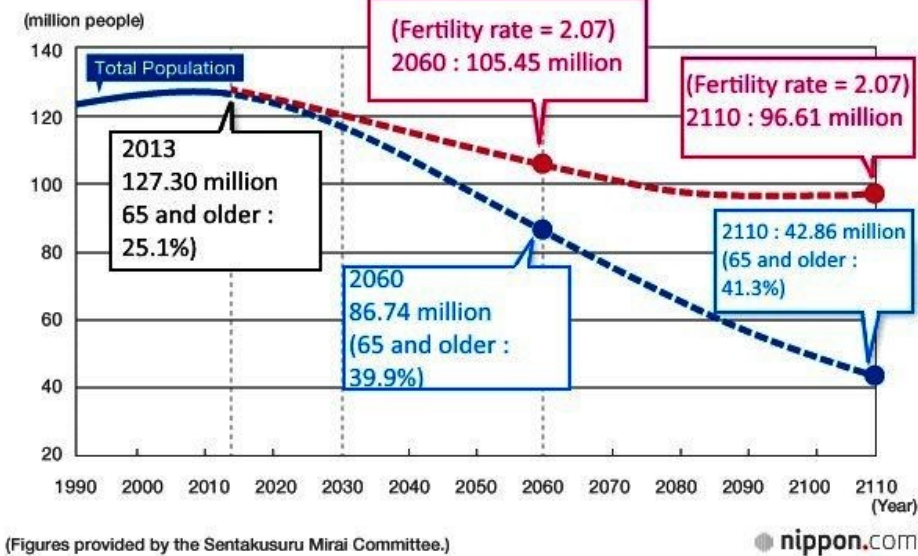
Below: Cassandra Virtue showed her anime fandom by cosplaying Umaruchan from *Himouto!* at the NUFS Global Village Halloween party.



Decreasing population in Japan

Are Government Benefits the Best Solution?

Figure 1 Projected Population of Japan



By: Efim SHILIN, Eliz YUSUF, Brice Franck Bertrand BENNEHARD and Karin HONMI

The decreasing population in Japan is one of the most significant and critical societal issues which has become increasingly worse over a number of years.

Causes of such phenomenon have already been well researched in addition to surveys with the local citizens who have been asked a number of questions, with the aim to obtain data from a first hand source. Key features and important statistics are vital to consider when reviewing the population in Japan.

The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has stated that only 941,000 babies were born in 2017 while the population in the same year had decreased by 1.3 Million. As of 2019, statistics suggest that Japan is losing more than 300,000 people every year. In addition to this, those that fit into the 65+ category represent 27.2% of the population which suggests that the elder population makes up a significant amount of the overall public. From this, several problems may arise and have already arisen. This includes the fact that there is an increase of the monetary spending which is put into Social Security.

In addition to this, with current statistics there is a high possibility that in the year 2060 there will be significantly less people included in productive class of the population, which will take a toll on the pensions system.

Japan has overall continued to decline in population for the eighth consecutive year. By 2030, the population is expected to decline in all prefectures and by 2045 Japan's total population is expected to reach 106.42 million (as stated by The National Institute of Social Security and Population Issues). It is expected that there will be a 30% reduction in rural areas. There are problems which may arise from this including the collapse of the social security system, shortage of full numbers in schools and a lack of careers. On the other hand some solutions may include improving work productivity and AI, in addition to accepting immigrants from abroad to increase the population.

While there may be advantages and disadvantages, according to statistics mentioned before, in future this may cause serious issues for the state prosperity. There are several amounts of research and articles which are dedicated to the decline in population, however it is also important to review the problem from a different angle, in order to understand it from the view of members in the Japanese community.

An example of this includes the ability to review first-hand source opinions. In order to do that, 39 local Japanese citizens were interviewed. Interviewees have been divided in two categories: young people (early to mid-20s) who do not have any children and adults (30 years of age or older) who do. Approximately 70% were female and the rest were male. It is notable that all of them are aware of this problem that Japan faces and this supports its importance in Japanese society. When asked about reasons for the decreasing population, the majority of interviewees referred to a lower fertility rate and, thus, decreasing the number of infants. They were given a number of key reasons for these issues: Different life priorities and lifestyles, personal problems with relationships and finally career preference. Furthermore, 16% of the responses reflected on the aging population and 16% also reflected on the decreasing number of married people. A significant number of interviewees considered large household expenditures being a possible reason. In addition to this, 14% of all answers suggested different factors such as inappropriate working conditions, health problems and a lack of awareness of those in a younger generation about the process of starting a family.

According to the data collected, Japanese people are currently concerned about the decreasing population in their country. Moreover, they put a great emphasis on the low fertility rate which has been caused by numerous problems. Despite this, people mostly stay optimistic and gave a variation of opinions of how these low fertility rates may be solved.

The majority of the answers reflected on the idea that receiving government benefits to bring up children for those with a lower income, which may be more beneficial for families who have or would like to have multiple children. The second highest position of replies is occupied by the 'marriage promoting' answer. While this may be con-

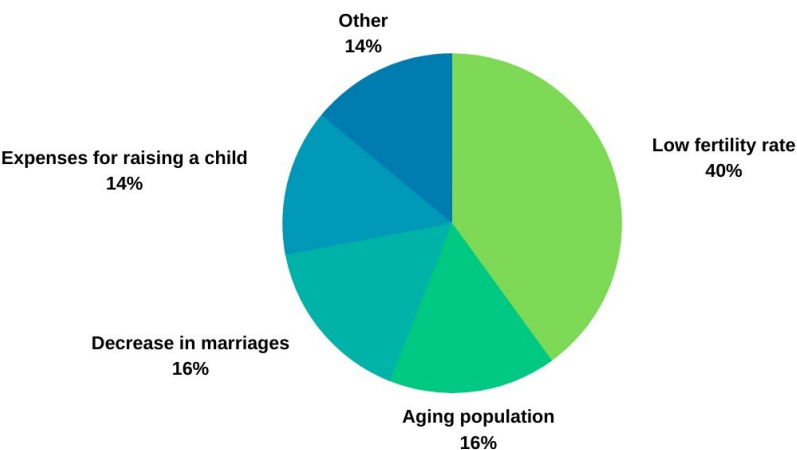
sidered as unusual for other countries, in Japan it might be an idea to promote marriage, to prompt young people to think about their future life and having a family.

Immigration as a possible solution, reached almost 16% and in fact fits with assisting other countries cases by solving immigration policy and making it easier for immigrants to migrate. Reducing household expenses and creating better working conditions were other popular responses and occupy about 18% of overall results. Furthermore, there were several other answers such as the idea of 'enhancing medical treatment of infertility' and 'laying taxes on people who do not have children'.

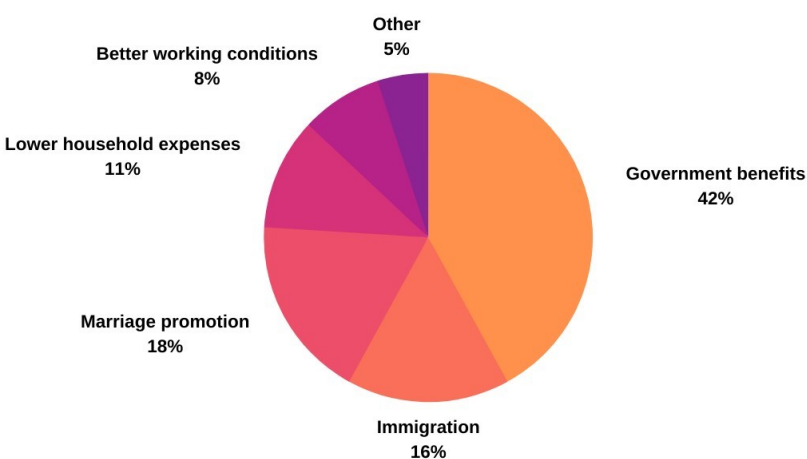
It is remarkable that the biggest part all of interviewed mature people had at least 2 children and the young people mainly said they want to have 2 children. It can prove the fact that decreasing population in Japan is not only about low birth rate, but there is a complex number of problems as young people have specific ideas about how many children they would like. Furthermore, it may be seen as difficult to rely on only one solution. The immigration solution is effective immediately, but it may be difficult to be used as on an ongoing solution. It is believed that subsidies are also effective, but small amounts will not continue to solve the problem. Moreover, longer policies need to be introduced. For example, depending on the number of children they have, they can get subsidies and material assistance from the government. Others include free schooling and reduced tuition fees.

However, it should be aimed not only at the market in Japan but also on new markets overseas with the increase in a population such as Africa and Asia. Moreover, it can be said that Japan, which has a high population density so far, may have an appropriate number of people in the future.

Reasons for the decreasing population



Possible solutions



Stray Dogs and Cats

Shops, Shelters, and Strays

Is adoption too great a challenge?



By Leah Salome BOGERT, Kira Taryn AINDOW, and Momoka KAWAAI

Above: The shelter is searching for new owners for their many stray dogs and cats. Adoption flyers are posted on this board just inside.
Below: One of the handful of cats at the Nagoya shelter that await adoption every day.

The *maneki-neko*, or beckoning cat, may be a symbol of luck in Japan, yet for many of the country’s stray cats, they are hardly fortunate enough to find new homes.

In 2017, nearly fifty percent of dogs and cats collected nationwide were killed. In this count, Japan’s Ministry of the Environment includes animals with both known and unknown owners, as well as natural deaths while in containment.

Although this number might seem disconcerting at first, it is actually an improvement from previous years. In 2007 and 2012, approximately 89% and 77% (respectively) of all cats and dogs were killed. From this, we’ve seen in the decade between 2007 and 2017 a significant decline in killings.

Despite this recent positive change, however, the question must still be asked: why are so many animals being killed in the first place? More pressing, why are cats the more frequent and major victims?

Of the fifty percent of killings in 2017, 80.1% were cats. This number is proportionate to the overall amount of cats collected compared to dogs, and yet, it is still cause for wonder why cats fill the majority (~62%) in that case as well.

More often than not, a visit to the mall or other major shopping center will give you the chance to see tiny, young kittens and puppies, either resting or bouncing about in



their individual box-like pens. Any one will take a break from their shopping to smile and laugh at the antics of the adorable, lively animals behind the glass wall.

And usually, these pet shops will only have a handful of puppies and kittens in total, each sold for no small price.

On October 20th, an event was held at a Nagoya City Animal Welfare Shelter, targeted on the adoption of the facility’s many cats. In comparison to these pet shops, there were easily ten times as many cats and kittens, awaiting to find new homes.

Yet, in both instances, the young kittens were by far the most popular.

On that day, many families with small children came to the center and crowded around the multiple tables where pairs and trios of few-month-old cats moved anxiously in their cages. On the second floor

as well, the visitors had the chance to hold and play with the cats who had captured their attention.

In a survey taken by Nagoya University of Foreign

Studies (NUFS) international and domestic students as well as visitors to the Nagoya shelter’s adoption event, 67.5% of the survey-takers bought or adopted their pets when the cat or dog was less than one year old.

“We vaccinate kittens two months after they are born and try to find them owners, but we usually cannot find a new owner for older cats,” explained Ms. Asano, a member of the stray cat rescue group *Ki-chanchi* and other volunteers at the recent adoption event.

As previously mentioned, the October 20th event was focused on the adoption of the shelter’s many stray kittens. Meanwhile, in an area just off of the main room, cats that are up for adoption at all times slept peacefully as people walked in and out, perhaps more accustomed to seeing visitors. Most of them are over ten years old.

Receiving older cats in need of

new homes seems to be related to the age and health of their owners. One of them, named Kuromame, came to the Nagoya shelter because her owner is being hospitalized. Similarly, a ten-year-old cat, currently in Ms. Asano’s care, was taken in because its previous owner began to suffer from dementia and could no longer look after it.

In an effort to understand if the number of stray animals collected and killed was linked to Japanese people’s perspectives on their pets, survey-takers were also prompted to describe their own pet-owner relationships. Overwhelmingly, they considered their pets as members of the family. Responders from other countries, including Australia, France, the U.K., and the U.S., instead described their relationships with their pets in terms of its nature (e.g. loving or affectionate).

Another survey, taken by people who have never owned a pet, commonly attributed the absence of a household pet to a lack of time and funds to care for an animal. Those who responded from Japan mainly expressed the desire to purchase a pet from a pet shop, with only one mentioning shelters as an option.

Towards the end of our interview with Ms. Asano, we asked her what can be done to better address the number of stray animals in Japan, but she soon remarked on the counterintuitive implications of such a what-can-society-do type question. “It has no independence,” she said, suggesting that if “everyone is to rely on everyone”, change is not guaranteed. “‘Let’s work together’ may be a beautiful statement, but the location of responsibility is ambiguous.”

Ms. Asano is just one of five *Ki-chanchi* volunteers working to help rehome stray cats, but with their collective efforts from April to October of this year, 100 cats have been rescued. More importantly, their adoption process -- which includes a questionnaire to determine suitability between cat and owner, followed by a week-long trial period -- ensures that the cats that are eventually adopted are also finding permanent homes.

“If Nagoya can become a zero culling city,” she says, “I hope to influence the spread of similar action in surrounding areas.”

Nagoya City Animal Welfare Shelter
〒464-0022
2-106 Heiwa-Kouen, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya City, Aichi
Tel: 052-762-1515

Japan's Silence vs. America's Division

1 in 13 sexual minority/ 39% of Americans in opposition

By Madeline E. NEWSOME,
Brooke(Jason) S. MORSE, and
Asuka KAI

Japan is often regarded as one of the most developed countries in the world. However, LGBT rights have received little recognition in Japan, and progress has been mostly slow.

Currently, same-sex marriage remains unrecognized in Japan, with 1 prefecture and 26 municipalities offering legally non-binding “partnership certificates.” There is little in the way of an outward opinion on this topic in Japan, whether positive or negative. A quote from an anonymous student at NUFS who identifies as a lesbian states, “Many people simply do not care, they consider it to be an issue that doesn't affect them. They don't hate us, they just don't know us.”

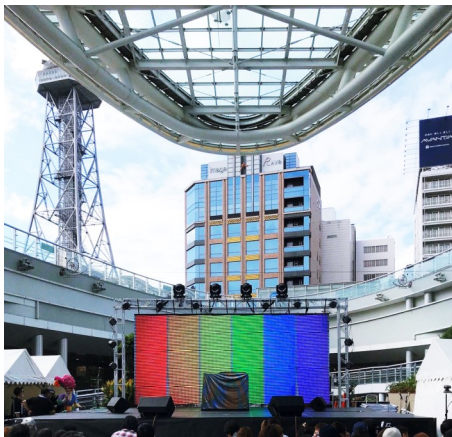
America, on the other hand, is a country that has had same-sex marriage legalized since 2015, and the American people have a loud and divisive voice on this topic. Until the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage in all states, each state had varying actions against or for same-sex marriage, some with no future in sight for its legalization. According to a poll conducted in 2019 by Pew Research Center, 61% of Americans support same-sex marriage rights. 31%, however, still oppose it. Additionally, hate crimes in America are still prevalent, rising and falling throughout the years as social positions change. From 2014-2017, 1,130 anti-LGBT incidents were reported by the FBI, most of which were targeted towards homosexual men. Additionally, in 2019 alone, 18 transgender individuals (many of whom were transwomen of color) have been fatally shot or killed.

Japan, a country where approximately 1 in 13 people are a sexual minority, has very few reported instances of anti-LGBT hate crimes. However, this does not mean that LGBT people living in Japan do not experience any negativity or discrimination in their lives. In the interview with the anonymous NUFS student, she claimed that while in high school, “people were generally supportive, but I felt like an outsider to some friends; nobody outright bullied [me] but it felt like I didn't belong.” Many relationships are also left hidden due to fear of societal opposition. A reporter who wrote about a lawsuit led by a pro-LGBT group, Marriage For All Japan, states that the partner of one of the plaintiffs keeps their relationship a secret to avoid societal



Above: A rainbow board where attendees of Nagoya Rainbow Pride in July could write messages expressing themselves.

Below : Performance stage at Nagoya Rainbow Pride.



discrimination and from his family from finding out. Even as the term “LGBT” becomes more widely-used and accepted, there are those who still would rather not openly identify themselves as such. Additionally, a member of NUFS faculty who identifies as a transwoman reported that, “I'll get the occasional problem at the sports club. Even though I've had my top and bottom surgery, every now and then some woman will come up to me asking, ‘What are you doing in this locker room?’” On more rare occasions, she will have security called on her; generally, security personnel take her side, something that occurs in America quite often for transgender individuals, though often without the support of the officials.

Due to laws regarding partnership, same-sex couples in Japan

face many hardships. According to Marriage For All Japan, same-sex couples, due to lack of legal recognition of their partnership, are often left in difficult situations after disastrous situations. The partnership certificates that have been introduced are not actually legally binding certificates like that of a marriage certificate. Since same-sex couples are not legally recognized, if one of the partners passes away suddenly without a will, their loved one could be evicted and left without their partner's possessions.

Additionally, same-sex partners in Japan are not permitted to be at a critically injured or ill partner's side, as they are not seen as a legal couple. Thanks to America's recognition of same-sex partnership, these problems can often be avoided in a legal-sense, though they still may face difficulty by openly biased staff members. Japanese same-sex partners are also not able to legally adopt a child together: that is, in legal terms, only one of these individuals will be the documented parent. If the legal parent has passed away without a will, this would mean that the “unofficial” parent will no longer be allowed to care for that child, and the child could potentially be sent back to an orphanage.

In terms of healthcare, quality is incredibly varied throughout America for LGBT individuals, particularly transgender people, often depending on the social progression of the area or the quality of the healthcare facility. For example, many transgender individuals

while medically transitioning are unaware of potential health risks due to a doctor not providing the information for their patient or because the doctors themselves are unaware. Additionally, the price of hormone treatments and surgery for those transitioning is quite expensive, as many health insurance providers do not cover gender-reassignment surgeries or hormone treatments. Despite poor healthcare, there are many doctors fighting for transgender people to receive the care they need at affordable rates. On the opposite side of this, however, are the conversion camps present throughout America where angry and abusive parents of LGBT teenagers and children send them to be “reformed” from being LGBT through what can be considered the practice of pseudoscientific methods. LGBT identity can be perceived by many people in America as a mental illness or detrimental condition rather than a state of being. In the 1950's, many LGBT individuals were lobotomized as an attempt to “cure” them, leaving them instead heavily disabled.

In Japan, healthcare for LGBT individuals is also lacking. When talking about her gender reassignment surgery, the NUFS faculty member explained, “Japanese doctors will not sign a health insurance form saying that this is medically necessary. That was the difference between me keeping or losing my job and my home.” So she went to Taiwan for her surgery. “I was getting my estrogen here [in Japan] for a while. When they found out that I wasn't going to get my surgery done in Japan, they immediately shut me out.” This was illegal, and she had to involve a lawyer.

However, not all is negative on Japan's side of LGBT issues. The lawyers working for Marriage For All Japan are forming lawsuits and fighting for LGBT rights within Japan. Despite the hardships and secrecy, the previously mentioned accuser in the Marriage For All Japan lawsuit was noted to look at his partner with love and support. Unlike in parts of America, where outward hate can vary throughout the years, many people seem to increasingly support and accept LGBT people over time in Japan. One of our interviewees states, “It's getting better, our treatment. My mother has recently come to a pride event and she is learning our terms so she does not sound ignorant. I think people want to be better, because it's becoming unacceptable to be ignorant of these issues in the large-scale world.” Even with that positive statement, however, she seemed uncertain of the future for both Japan and the world.

Why does Japan have a need for speed?



By Benjamin Richard COWELL,
Moritz Benjamin WEBBER, Iris NI-
JENHUIS and Nanae Ando

Walking through the streets of any city in Japan it is clearly visible that car tuning is a big thing in Japan, but why is that the case in a country that usually tries to stick to the rules and not stand out?

And what is car tuning? Mr. Yukawa, a mechanic working at GR Garage in Nisshin, Takenoyama, had answers.

Tuning a car is the act of installing upgrades that improve its performance and fitting bodywork parts that change the car’s appearance to make it look sportier. Mr Yukawa stated “People tune cars to drive fast, to look sportier; changing the wheels, bodywork, exhaust and engine parts.” The love for car tuning in Japan originated in the 1980’s according to Mr. Yukawa. “They started tuning cars as a way to express themselves and to rebel against social pressures.” Tuning was mainly used as a way to act out. Over the years, the reasons why people tune their cars have developed from a means of purely improving a car’s performance, to, in recent years, a method of expressing one’s personality and their taste in cars. Tuning is done as a

Above: Modified Toyota GT86 in GR Garage, Nisshin-City, Aichi prefecture.

way to personalize the characteristics that will distinguish the car for the hundred thousand other different cars from the same kind of brand that come off the conveyor as the same.

A big influence on the popularity of the tuning of cars was the manga that later became animated “Initial D.” This cartoon’s main character’s car was a Toyota AE86, which at the time, was a relatively affordable car that was easy to upgrade. This car’s feature in the anime lead to a trend of buying the AE86 and tuning it like they did in Initial D.

Other media that hugely influenced the growth in the interest in car tuning in Japan and around the globe were the well-known movie “The Fast and The Furious: Tokyo Drift” (2006) and the popular “Need for Speed” game series. These brought great attention to the Japanese sports cars and they caused the popularity of those cars to increase.

What is interesting, is that tuning is not only popular among young people but with many age groups. There is a difference between these age groups, young people tend to buy used sports cars because of their limited funds and tune those. Older people on the other

hand can afford to buy a newer or even factory new car and then they use those to tune.

Popular cars among all tuners are sports cars like the Toyota GT86, Nissan GT-R and the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution. Compared to western sports cars those do not appear to be expensive but with a price tag in the one hundred thousands they are not affordable for people that just started their career. Accessories though, both for interior and exterior, are very accessible and the selection is basically unlimited. This makes it very affordable to tune. According to Mr. Yukawa besides Initial D, the release of popular cars like the Nissan GT-R and Nissan SILVIA in ‘89 helped tuning become more popular and that is also a big contribution to why car tuning now is still very popular.

People who tune their cars have adopted some places to regularly meet with fellow car enthusiasts to enjoy their passion together. A notable example of this is Daikoku Futo Parking Area in Yokohama, where over the past 15 years, car tuners have arranged meet ups with hundreds of other enthusiasts; it has become its own tourist attraction due to its popularity in the global car culture.

In the 1990s, there was a mysterious street racing clan called “The Midnight Club”. Their name denotes that this small, select group



Above: Modified Toyota Supra Mk.3
The work which won the Grand Prix.
The design which emphasized S-curve is original.

of advanced drivers would venture out onto Tokyo’s Highways at midnight, to make the most of the quieter roads. The club was made up of a group of wealthy businessmen, who each owned a very fast modified car. Rumour has it, their common meeting place to begin their speed runs, was Daikoku Futo. Their legend has continued to draw car enthusiasts to this spot for more than 15 years.

This culture is still very popular among the young and the older generation in Japan: Tuning, occasional organized street racing and gatherings of like-minded car enthusiasts can be ways that people in Japan express themselves and enjoy a little bit of freedom.

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