

# The NUFFS Times

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## Pottery in Japan: An industry doomed to fail?

Unique insight into the tradition of pottery from the ‘Harry Potter’ of Japan

By Harry Davis and  
Kento Hiramatsu

Pottery remains the strongest connection we have to our ancient past. It has held a substantial role in Japanese society for centuries and provides humanity with a gateway into ancient traditions, with the earliest Japanese ceramics being from the *Jōmon* period. Pottery has stood the test of time because, after firing clay at over 1100 °C, it becomes one of the most durable materials at our disposal. Although the ceramics themselves have long since shattered, extensive collections of fragments still survive today. From funeral ware during the *Kofun* period, to elite tableware during the *Nara* period and *Heian* period, the role of pottery in Japan has continued to change and evolve. Japan's ceramic legacy stands strong in the test of time.

Due to its ubiquity and versatility, pottery remains a highly prized profession in Japan—the crafting of the earth is a sacred tradition, and the potter, an exemplified role. Take for example the *Takatori* potters (Fukuoka prefecture) in the *Edo* period. These potters were held in such high regard that despite being craftsmen, they held pseudo samurai status as *goyō saikunin* (craftsmen at the lord's behest). Potters enjoyed the same rice stipends and rights received by the rest of the warrior class. Moreover, the pottery industry was so lucrative that the patron daimyo of the *Takatori* potters had the 7th largest income of all the daimyo. The influence of pottery can be seen in traditional pottery cities such as Seto, home of one of the six ancient kilns. Innovative architects have even used leftover clay from the kilns for foundations, creating stunning architecture and a city truly rooted in pottery.

Alas, in the modern era, Japan's historically monumental pottery industry faces problems that threaten its very survival. The influx of cheap mass-produced ceramics makes handcrafted pottery a tough sell [1]. Combined with this, the declining birth rate in Japan and general apathy among younger generations has led to a struggle for pottery masters to find successors. This problem is not unique to Japan: in the historic pottery capital of the UK, the ceramic industry and handmade pottery risks extinction.

We had the unique pleasure to



interview 69-year-old potter, Shozo Michikawa, about the problems facing the pottery industry today. According to Mr. Michikawa, Japanese pottery remains highly prized overseas, even being employed to create parts for vehicles. Moving forward, pottery is not as doomed as it first seems. The renowned titan of modern-day Japanese pottery, Mr. Michikawa is currently works in the historic pottery city of Seto in Aichi prefecture. Dubbed the ‘Harry Potter’ of pottery and hosting lectures at Oxford and Harvard university, his ability has been recognized the world over. His creations can be found in prestigious collections across the globe, from the Victorian and Albert Museum in the UK to the Crocker Art Museum in the US.

**Q:** What are the largest problems that the ceramics industry faces today?

**A:** The advent of the mass production of ceramics is problematic: new ceramics are constantly being produced at lower and lower prices. This leaves traditional potters in a difficult situation, as they can't afford competitive price ranges. Due to difficulties in income, some professionals have been forced to take part time work on the side. As potters struggle to break into a machine-dominated market, schools with longstanding ceramic departments have also closed.

Due to the lack of secure income, successors have also become difficult to find. Traditionally, pot-

tery would be passed down from parent to child, but recent generations have begun leaving their hometowns for jobs in the city. Despite this, just as I came to Seto, some people will leave the city to carry on the tradition in more rural areas. Just as I did, others are seeming to feel disenfranchised with office life, wanting to pursue more creative avenues of work for themselves. Cities such as Seto, which possess strong pottery traditions, will continue to attract successors.

**Q:** How do you promote and sell your work, so that you can live as a full-time potter?

**A:** In the past, there was no internet, so people had to take their ceramics to galleries and exhibitions to sell them. Nowadays, methods of selling ceramics continue to diversify. The most successful potters have become famous on social media, selling their craft both domestically and abroad in fashion boutiques and select shops. To stand out from mass-produced potters, they emphasize the artistic side of pottery, rather than its practical use. A common misconception is that we only sell in galleries, but this isn't true. For example, sometimes we collaborate with sake makers to create cups. Pottery is also made for more practical uses in the form of what we call ‘new ceramics’: heat-resistant components of cars, aero planes, and rockets.

**Q:** You have been highly successful in gaining international recognition.

Top: Interview with Mr. Shozo Michikawa (left) by Davis (center) and Hiramatsu (right), Seto city, Aichi prefecture.

Why do you think this is?

**A:** Western aesthetics are focused on symmetry and perfection, with all the cracks and chips painstakingly removed from the ceramic. My pottery acts as an antithesis to this, exemplifying the *Wabi-sabi* aesthetic style. The *Wabi-sabi* style sees the beauty of imperfection and fleeting nature of our creations. Because of this, under a Western eye, my works are thought of as unfinished with cracks and chips. Japanese traditional crafts and artworks have a close relationship with nature and tend to prefer asymmetry and spontaneity, rather than perfectly designed objects. Speaking personally, I also create colored clay to achieve a more natural color than paint. I was given the ‘Harry Potter’ nickname due to how magically fast I produce peculiarly shaped ceramics. The international recognition I've received is important to me. Being highly appraised by multiple different cul-

tures means that my creations must be good!

[1] Marc Day, John Burnett, Paul L Forrester, John Hassard, Britain's last industrial district? A case study of ceramics production, International Journal of Production Economics, Volume 65, Issue 1, 2000, Pages 5-15, ISSN 0925-5273, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0925-5273\(99\)00086-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0925-5273(99)00086-9). (<https://>



## Gendered Japan

By Chole Boyson and Miu Nomura

In a world where “gender equality” has been the buzzword for decades, some forget just how far we are from achieving true equality between genders. Hiroshi Sasaki’s sexist remarks at the Tokyo Olympics opened both Japan’s and the world’s eyes towards the lingering seriousness of sexism in Japan. What kinds of struggles are women facing in Japan, and how are companies rectifying the issue? Local surveys and interviews with Japanese companies illustrate current gender-inequality issues, as well as possibilities for a gender equal future.

We began our search close to home, surveying students from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies regarding gender expectations. 57% of our female participants agree that women feel pressured to choose between raising a family and pursuing a career. Citizens of Nagoya City reflect this sentiment. Surveying 4000 people from Nagoya (2000 men and 2000 women), the “Ninth Basic Survey on Gender Equal Participation” reveals that 29.5% of respondents believe women should quit working after childbirth—only to resume once their children have become adults. These same gender expectations echo across Japan, highlighting national issues regarding unfair social expectations towards women.

Traditional gender expectations stipulate that women are wholly responsible for childrearing and homemaking, ultimately restricting their job opportunities, identity, and community involvement. Unfair expectations further impact women who choose to balance raising a family and pursuing a career. They end up bearing the burden of both the housework and full-time employment, resulting in unmanageable workloads.

Professor Toshiko Ellis (Photo: Left), a professor of comparative literature at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, speaks to this reality. Alongside working as a full-time professor, she commits an additional five to six hours every day to household duties. In an interview, Professor Toshiko claims, “as long as you’re willing, it’s possible to do both,” but nonetheless recognizes the strain involved in balancing work and home. Doctor Lucy Glasspool (Photo: Right), an associate professor of pop-culture, echoes this statement: “as women, we have to work so much harder.” Heavy workloads restrict women’s ability to pursue both a family and a career. Presently, women must commit to a life of overwork, or face the hard choice of sacrificing either a family or a career.

Professor Ellis shares that, in her experience, gender expectations are more than an external force, often resulting in internal struggles and self-infliction. While working at the University of Tokyo, Professor Ellis felt the need to hide her pregnancy, changing her workplace behaviour to act as calm and unintrusive as possible. As the first staff member to become pregnant, she felt the need to set a precedent for future employees, overstraining herself to avoid hindering others. External social pressures had fostered a deeply rooted gender-bias in Professor Ellis, wherein she self-imposed a hidden gender-curriculum upon her daily activities. In hind-

sight, Professor Ellis expresses that she regrets acting in such a way, wishing that she had been more proactive during her pregnancy. When external expectations began to exert both conscious and unconscious pressure on Professor Ellis’ work and personal life, it also hindered what she could achieve.

Sharing her story, Professor Ellis wants others to tackle gender norms and break free from internalized social expectations. How do we achieve this on a systematic level? Exclusive interviews with Sompo Japan and E-able Nagoya suggest that work-style reforms are key to improving the situation.

Recognizing that unnecessarily long work hours impede women’s ability to balance life at work and at home, Sompo Japan has begun

down expectations that childcare is a women’s role, Sompo’s actions ultimately reveal how equality for women is also equality for men. Equal participation means that women can more freely pursue a career; and that men can more freely spend time with family.

Alongside Sompo Japan, the Nagoya City Gender Equality Promotion Centre, E-able Nagoya, is also taking concrete steps to improve gender equality in the workplace. E-able Nagoya has placed information access at the centre of its battle for gender inequality: the association promotes women’s counselling and study programs, providing information regarding rights and support systems for those who might need it. Through its “Women’s Active Participation Company Certification” system, E-able Nagoya also certifies companies that are actively improving gender equality. For companies to be certified, they must promote a healthy work-life balance and encourage active participation by women. The system encourages companies to tackle gender inequality in the workplace, making them more attractive to prospective workers.

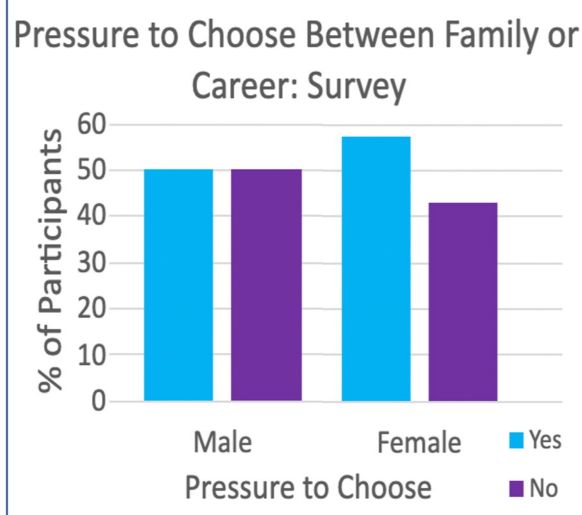
Dr. Glasspool notes, “laws and reforms are not enough to resolve the current gender equality issues because, in practice, not all reforms are properly implemented.” She continues: “The Equal Employment Opportunities Act is an example of this. Even though it exists, there remains a large gender gap in Japan’s working world, especially regarding positions of power.”

If we cannot solely rely on laws and reforms, then, we must enact change at a deeper level. Schools and places of education become key to tackling disproportionate gender expectations at their foundation. Schools can sometimes promote gender biases by not only teaching sexist values, but also guiding women into gendered career paths. Dr. Glasspool refers to these as “softer career paths,” which reflect and reinforce women’s traditional role as homemakers.

Education can change people’s mentality for better or for worse, creating new foundations for societal opinion. Breaking down preconceptions about traditional gender roles could be a long-term solution to decreasing the conscious and physical pressure faced by women such as Professor Ellis. Tackling gender biases in our minds, at their very foundation, may also increase the efficacy of company reforms, such as those from Sompo Japan and E-able Nagoya.

Companies like Sompo and E-able Nagoya are optimistic for the future, hoping that positive reforms will grant women more active roles in society. Where popular sentiment suggests that gender equality has already been achieved, our survey, alongside Professor Ellis and Dr. Glasspool’s remarks, reveal a different situation. We currently stand on a tipping point: our actions might diminish any progress towards gender equality, or improve the power balance between men and women. Sompo’s child-care support schemes and E-able Nagoya’s certification system signal a step towards diminishing the pressures women face at home and in the workplace. Moreover, they show how gender equality for women helps everyone, giving men the opportunity to spend time with family, just as it gives women the opportunity to pursue their goals.

## Gender expectations and company solutions for a fairer future



shortening work hours for pregnant workers. Their new system allows pregnant women to reduce their hours until their child reaches third grade in elementary school. The company has also established an in-house nursery centre, “Sompo Kids Park,” giving workers day care options so they do not have to stay at home. Through these reforms, Sompo Japan makes it easier for women to continue pursuing their profession even while raising a family.

Sompo Japan has also begun implementing reforms that encourage men to play a more active role in the household. While stay-at-home husbands do exist in Japan, the percentage remains low. Sompo seeks to bridge this divide by promoting paternity leave, illustrating men’s significance and importance in childcare. Currently, the company aims to achieve 100% male participation in childcare leave. To actualize this goal, Sompo personally contacts the superiors of target workers, providing the necessary information to encourage paternity leave. Breaking



# The Future of Literacy

## A look into Japan’s modernizing readership

By Yulia STRELKOVA and Ryuma MOCHIDA

Many people would say that reading books remains one of the most important activities in our lives. For centuries, books have served as valuable sources of information, as well as popular entertainment. However, in the wake of the wide use of computers and smartphones, reading books is no longer a daily activity. Nowadays, information can be easily obtained from Internet resources, and people have a lot more kinds of entertainment content than they did a few decades ago. In this digital era, what is reading culture like among Japanese youth?

The modern book culture of Japan originated in the Meiji period (1868-1912), when Japan, embarking on the path of modernization, began actively importing foreign books and technologies. This period includes the birth of modern newspapers and the creation of the first children's literature. Book printing was now aimed at a mass readership. The modern school system, introduced in the 1870s, emphasized reading and literacy as an essential part of becoming a modern citizen. After World War II, new technology and better distribution channels made books and magazines cheaper and more accessible, which resulted in a publishing boom. Late post-war society preserved the notion that reading is a social good, functioning as a method of self-improvement and acquiring an identity. However, the reading culture itself has undergone significant changes. Today, Japan produces a huge number of printed materials, which include translated works from all over the world. Manga readers and other reading communities have emerged. The Internet and other forms of technological innovation have led to new forms of reading, through the creation of e-books and digital libraries.

The loss of interest in reading among young people and shift away from books, especially from fiction, has become a very controversial topic in modern Japan, prompting us to delve deeper into this issue. To analyze how frequently young Japanese people read books, we collected data from NUAS university. We asked how much students read literature in any format—whether printed or electric—excluding manga, visual novels, or magazines. The results of the research are remarkable. According to our data, about 75% of NUAS University students do not read books for more than 1-2 hours a week. At the same time, about 46% of those surveyed do not read books at all.

A noticeable loss of interest in



Top: Mr. Kawabata (left) and Professor Oiwa in an online interview.  
Below: Books selected by students who received Reading Award from NUFS & NUAS Library.

reading among young people can have many causes, such as a change in reading formats and how students approach reading, or the education system and an information overload. In order to better understand this topic and how modern youth feel about it, we decided to talk with students from NUFS University.

Interviewed students provided two main reasons for not reading. The first reason is a lack of time: students do not have time to read because of assignments, part-time jobs, and long commutes to university. About 90 % of NUFS students take part-time jobs to earn a living, hang out with friends and buy what they want. Students usually work twice or three times a week. The average working day on weekdays is four to five hours, with even longer hours for weekends. What's more, students who live far from the university spend one to two hours traveling. Many students also shared that they become tired from the large amount of homework.

The second reason is that students prefer to use the Internet and modern technology as a source of information and entertainment. Although students may use books for study, in general, students no longer feel the need to read entire books to receive information. As for

entertainment, some students said: “When watching videos and movies on Netflix, we feel excited and fulfilled, and at the same time it does not require us to expend too much mental energy.” Moreover, young people nowadays are also immersed in SNS. Instagram, TikTok and Twitter are not just entertainment, but also the center of international communication. For people born in a digital society, this is an integral part of life. It is expected that in such a rhythm of life, students are selective in what they devote their free time to. Studying at university, doing assignments and part-time jobs requires a lot of effort and concentration, leaving students unwilling to devote any free time to reading—when young people have free time, they want to pick up a phone, not a book.

To look at the issue from a different perspective, we decided to talk to people directly connected to the book industry - Mr. Kawabata, editor of NUFS’ publishing department, and Professor Oiwa from the NUFS Press. Based on his experience, Mr. Kawabata said that about 50 % of students do not read books at all. When recommending a book at a seminar or in graduate school, one should be prepared for the fact that, unfortunately, half of the students will not read it, he added. On the other hand, the average reading time of students is increasing. This means that there is a polarization between students who read and students who do not read at all. For some people, due to upbringing, reading books is a habit for which they do not need any mental push or additional motivation. However, most students lack this ingrained motivation to read. When such students enter colleges and universities, no one forces them to read any-

more, creating the potential for a polarized gap between reading and non-reading students.

While acknowledging the huge impact social media has had on transforming Japan’s book culture, Mr. Kawabata and Professor Oiwa were skeptical of the notion that students do not have time to read at all. Certainly, we cannot completely deny the importance of having free time. The experience of the global pandemic has shown that quarantine conditions, by limiting people's activities and granting more free time, encouraged many to read more. But even under normal circumstances, students can make more time to read by decreasing the time spent on their phones. Thus, according to Mr. Kawabata and Professor Oiwa, despite the significant pressure of student life, in the end it all comes down to personal interest.

So, how can we increase student interest in books? Many organizations and companies are making great efforts to solve the problem. The NUFS library, for example, hosts an annual book review competition. Professor Oiwa believes that, when students recommend books to each other in this format, there is a good chance other students will feel motivated to read. In this way, the book review competition has the opportunity to popularize certain literature among youth.

In addition, it is necessary to change how students perceive reading. Many young people do not want to read books after graduating from an educational institution because they associate reading with something obligatory and boring. Young people must experience how it feels to pursue their own interests through reading, without outside pressure. Reading books should be a choice, not a duty—and perhaps freedom to choose what one wants to read should be incorporated in university curricula.

Loss of interest or refusal to read books is often attributed to illiteracy issues that are believed to accompany social media. However, Mr. Kawabata notes that, thanks to social networks, people are finding ways to convey information, creating novel forms of literacy. In our time, people even use social networks to compose fiction and develop new reading formats. Anyone who wants to write can do so and publish their work online; and anyone who wants to read can find a work to their liking, even if it is not a recognized masterpiece of world literature. The modern world is changing, and book culture, both across the world and in Japan, is inevitably changing with it.



COVID-19

Japan's Face Mask Industry

Will masks become the future “underwear for the face?”

By Adelaida SHCHIGIREVA  
and Hiroto OTAKE

Face masks have become increasingly established as an indispensable part of everyday life. This rise in popularity is due to the coronavirus infection that took over the world in early 2020. However, what awaits the mask industry in the future? Will face masks become such an everyday item on par with, for example, a smartphone? Or will the demand for them drop sharply after the end of the pandemic? What changes are already occurring in Japan's mask industry?

The history of Japanese face masks begins in the early Meiji era (1868-1921). The first main use of masks at this time period involved protecting people who work in coal mines from dust. However, due to the Spanish flu pandemic that began in 1918, masks started to attract attention as a preventative measure against infection. This was the first time that fliers asking passersby to wear masks were posted on the streets. A specific feature of these first masks was a brass plate sewn into the fabric, which acted as a filter. After some time, masks became a habitual part of Japanese life, even beginning to show social status. For example, leather masks served as a symbol of wealth and were very fashionable. The first prototype of the face masks we are familiar with only appeared only in 1973, the first time non-woman face masks were produced and sold in Japan.

Modern Japanese people use face masks not only as a tool for physical health, but also for psychological comfort of people. Indeed, some people in Japan wear face masks to protect themselves from unwelcome looks. Such behavior has several reasons. Firstly, some people might lack self-confidence, not wanting other people to look at them. Secondly, some people want to establish their personal boundaries with the help of masks, clearly drawing a line between themselves and society. Finally, face masks can express someone's fashion style or subculture, such as rock or punk movements.

To find more about the present and future of the Japanese mask industry, we decided to interview Ms. Tomoe Tezuka and Mr. Koshiro Adachi, the representatives of Miki CO., LTD, which had a mask design collaboration with Nagoya University of Art and Sciences (NUAS) students in 2021. Miki does not only make face masks, but also produce non-woven fabric requested by the



Top: Ms. Tezuka and her boss, Mr. Adachi of Miki CO., LTD.  
Below: Shchigireva and Otake interviewing.

government. There was a time when the company's sales were sluggish, but the face mask project helped them produce new products such as gowns.

**Q:** Why did you decide to collaborate on this project?

**Tezuka:** Frankly speaking, we wanted to help NUAS with their student assignment for the summer vacation. At first, Miki wanted to make new merchandise, using new functional material, but then we changed our intentions and decided to focus on face masks, which were in demand at the time.

**Q:** What was the most difficult part of the project?

**Tezuka:** Well, to be honest, it was hard for me to understand the company's needs. Everything was so vague, and the conditions, as well as recommendations for the work process and the expected result were only on paper. Moreover, I didn't know how to make the masks at all. So, I had to research it from scratch. Unfortunately, the students and I could not meet in person because of pandemic restrictions. We also had a limit on the number of masks we could produce, because we used a high-quality filter that protects from 99% of viruses and bacteria. If we started selling more of these masks, we would not be able to produce them in such large quantities.

**Q:** Do you think that the design of the face mask is important? Why?

**Tezuka:** Of course, especially when

we are talking about the business world. The masks must suit the business scene and not be too flashy. This was actually the demand of some companies that we produced for.

**Q:** What were the results of the project?

**Adachi:** Sales reached 1.5million~1.6million yen, so we consider this collaboration very successful. However, we valued student motivation for the project more than the sales. What is especially worth noting is that the students sewed masks by hand, while they are usually made by machine. Therefore, we especially appreciate their work and efforts.

**Q:** What did you learn from this project?

**Adachi:** I learned a lot of different things, and I am very glad that I was able to acquire knowledge regarding color regulations, industry terminology, and so on. This reflects our challenging shift to making masks during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, there were not as many masks sold in Japanese stores. I wondered what was happening there. Miki is not originally a face mask company, and we only have one plant in China. To beat others to the punch, we decided to produce millions of face masks, obeying the minimum rules such as hygiene. The more we made, the more it sold. You can draw an analogy with a bubble economy.

**Q:** Do you plan to make more collaborations like this in the future?

**Adachi:** No, I do not think so. The face mask trend is over. Some companies have a lot of inventory. Moreover, it is obvious now that the value of facemasks is declining (5yen

per week). Even if we had such plans, there would still be no sales unless some new pandemic occurs.

**Q:** What do you think about the future of the face mask industry?

**Adachi:** Previously, there were no laws nor strict regulations of masks. However, now the number of masks used and the volume of their production have increased enough to become a separate genre. In this regard, regulations are becoming increasingly strict, so it will be difficult for any company to follow them. For example, the sizes are so standardized that it is difficult to use materials in creative ways. Thus, many companies that produce masks will soon leave the industry and return to what they did before the pandemic.

We thank Ms. Tezuka, Mr. Adachi, and Miki for taking the time to interview. According to the interview, the demand for masks, as well as the supply, will continue to fall. However, perhaps everything is not as clear as it seems at first glance—though the movement to change the outdoor mask regime is spreading, wearing face masks has become commonplace due to the long-term pandemic. Moreover, the number of young people who are increasingly reluctant to show their faces is growing. To describe such a phenomenon, a new term has been coined: “underwear for the face.” Behind this somewhat funny and awkward name, in fact, there is a certain meaning. It means that some people are just as embarrassed to take off their face mask as they are to take off their underwear. This attitude to face masks and one's appearance can greatly affect a person's self-esteem, as well as make a person more vulnerable to public opinion.

To study this issue in more detail, we asked students: "Will you cease to use face masks when they are no longer mandatory?" The results of the survey were divided almost equally, with affirmative answers winning by a small margin.

This survey was conducted among both Japanese and foreigners. It should be noted that none of the foreign respondents gave a negative answer. The reasons why foreign respondents gave positive answers were as follows: the inability to breathe in hot weather, fatigue from the pandemic and from masks, as well as the fact that masks do not always help to prevent Covid-19.

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# The Voices of Socially Vulnerable

## More caretakers and more manageable workloads

By Maiven Okine and  
Nevan C Flaherty

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare(MHLW), in 2020, the estimated number of people with disabilities in Japan was 9.7 million, up nearly 3 million from their last survey in 2013. Alongside the average age of the population, this number will continue to rise. More and more people will soon be requiring some sort of care, meaning many families will become caregivers to their disabled and aging family members. Others will likely begin looking for facilities or, at the very least, personal caretakers so that the younger generation can continue to hold onto their jobs without having to worry. That being said, the number of caretakers is not quite at the same level as the number of disabled people, with MHLW surveys finding that, in 2021, there were only 1.8 million licensed caretakers in Japan. Not even a fifth of the current population of disabled people can receive the constant or frequent care depending on their motor abilities.

A labor shortage amongst caregivers, alongside a familial sense of duty, has resulted in an increased amount of families that provide all the care for their disabled loved ones. A 2017 survey from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications also found that nearly 40 thousand teens are having to adopt these responsibilities along with their schooling or work. This means that many people with disabilities will be taken care of by people that do not necessarily have the proper training. To make matters worse, current caregivers are starting to age: a 2012 study from Kobe university found that the average age of caregivers has now reached the mid 60s. Before the number of disabled people begins to eclipse that of caregivers, the Japanese government must take immediate action.

First off, we should know what exactly a caretaker is trained to do for their disabled employers and what they have been certified to do. A caretaker is supposed to take care of every aspect of a disabled person's life, from monitoring medication and keeping up with records and scheduling, to helping with everyday tasks, such as bathing and feeding. These are very important aspects of a person's life, and if they are not done on a regular basis, they can greatly affect a disabled person's quality of life. The caretakers are also trained to deal with all sorts of issues a disabled person might have, from mental disabili-



Top: A visually impaired person with a guide dog in Nagoya city, Aichi pref.

Below: A class for guide helpers, Ichinomiya city, Aichi pref. (Photos: provided by Mr. Toshiyuki Matsuzaki)

ties, like down syndrome and autism spectrum disorder, to physical impairments, like not having the ability to walk. In the end, having a trained professional is indispensable for most disabled people.

While having a family that does caregiving work might seem a bit more convenient than having someone live in a facility or have outside help come every day, there are many downsides. If family members lack proper training, the strain of the job can lead to depression and over tiredness. When certain family members bear the entire burden, mental and physical struggles might mean that the disabled person is not getting the attention they require.

Due to a shortage of caretakers, disabled people are suffering not only from any physical and mental problems they may have, but also from the inability to receive the help they need. This lack of help

can accompany difficulties in communication, and problems with accessing public services. Shin Hanazuma, who works at Nagoya city hall's office for disabled services, mentioned that even professional care-

takers face many stresses. Some of this is due to overwork: only 36 hours of off time can be taken per month by staff, and the pay from the government is very low. Sometimes the stress of the job is projected onto disabled workers, who must then deal with the caretaker's stress, and the stress of not having their needs always met.

Another issue disabled people face is the inability to allocate a proper amount of funding. This is because the federal government has set a limit on how much can be spent towards a city's welfare services. Without funding, nothing can be changed to better disabled people's lives without them being forced to seek non-government subsidized caretakers. With a lack of flexible funding and an even more restrictive working environment, we can see why few people want to work as caretakers. Perhaps the fix does just hinge on allocating more funds to departments, so they can provide more services and workers. Presently, however, the lack of funding creates problems that burden already neglected disabled people, making life even harder for them.

All of those problems compound into very real issues for disabled

people that rely on external help to live comfortably. In Japan, disabled people still face major issues with discrimination. In our interview with Aichi Prefectural Federation of Welfare Organizations for Persons with Disabilities, Satoko Kato-san, a clerk, said: "while social laws for discrimination certainly helped us tackle some of the issue, they weren't publicized enough to make a difference." Yasuhiko Eguchi-san, an executive director, also spoke on how Covid-19 has made it much harder for caretakers to safely visit those that they care for, especially those in their 70s to 80s. At the same time, they have many difficulties with communication, making it difficult for them to live alone and seek out the attention they need.

Aichi Prefectural Federation of Welfare Organizations for Persons with Disabilities wants to make the lives of the disabled easier and less anxiety inducing by discussing problems that they do not understand among their peers. All of this is under Toshiyuki Matsuzaki-san, the vice-chief of the organization, who himself is wheelchair bound and can empathize with the various needs of disabled people. He states: "The world is becoming difficult to live in because we are passive." We need to be more active, encouraging communal talk and reforms that might inform public awareness. The entire organization seeks to ensure that the disabled people of Aichi Prefecture are taken care of, and it is likely that other organizations have begun appearing in other prefectures as well.

Now, the question is: "Is there anything the public can do?" If you feel strongly about the disabled and helping them, then keep up to date on the laws surrounding them. Get out and vote for candidates that support them. Try to read the room, and reach out to help those you may see struggling. Many have issues with communication, and these issues can vary from person to person, so simply reaching out might be the help some people need.

The problems of disabled people directly relate to problems with them not receiving the care and attention they need. Sadly, disabled people are still not taken seriously by the public, when they should in fact be the first to be taken care of as the population continues to age and lose more and more of their motor abilities. More funding from the government can greatly increase the job opportunities for caretakers and make the job more manageable. More caretakers and more manageable workloads are vital to increasing disabled people's quality of life.





Photo:Mr. Shozo Michikawa using the potter's wheel and his artifact (below) at his atelier, in Seto City, Aichi pref.

automation, because highly skilled potters are necessary to craft hyper specific shapes that cannot be replicated by machines. Perhaps hand-crafted and machine-manufactured pottery can begin to survive harmoniously.

Despite the pottery industry's current struggles, Mr. Michikawa suggests that we have many reasons to remain optimistic of its growth. Japanese potters are creating a renaissance for the pottery industry, finding new and innovative ways to evolve in stride with the modern world.



From page 1

**Q:** Have your travels for exhibitions overseas influenced your work in any way?

**A:** For the most part, no. My inspiration mainly comes from Hokkaido where I grew up. My creations replicate the natural beauty there, which I have always admired. To mimic this natural beauty, I approach each project with no preconceived plan—a creation process that I encountered overseas. Instead, I pour my heart into whatever I'm creating so that every piece is unique and becomes a snapshot of

my emotion. Thus, the cracks and peculiarities of my work blossom forth in the moment. This style is popular overseas, because it makes my work stand out from more traditional Japanese conventions.

**Q:** Going forward, how can we preserve Japan's pottery traditions?

**A:** Japan's pottery industry is bursting with potential that hasn't been realized. As a country, Japan should market its pottery more overseas and invest in individual artists as it once did in the past.



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Towards deeper understanding

To tackle the multifaceted issues that they encounter in Japan, Muslims have been employing social media and university facilities. For example, on YouTube, "The Young Muslims Channel" provides fascinating insights regarding Muslim life in Japan. This works to not only break down misconceptions, but also provides Muslims in Japan with a means to connect with their religion. Moreover, Tsunagaru, an International Action Group at Aichi University, is currently working to prepare the 2026 Asian Games for Muslim tourists.

In this action group, members have begun planning the provision of prayer facilities, Halal food, and

even multilingual support.

At the basis of Muslim students' issues in Japan resides a lack of empathy. Japan may not be able to accommodate minorities because it still has the idea, "*Gō ni ireba gō ni shitagae*," which means "When in Rome do as the Romans do." However, following Covid-19, Muslims will continue engaging in Japanese society, whether it be through tourism, studying, or working. If Japan seeks to continue inviting foreign talent and tourism, should it not work to find a middle ground, empathizing with different beliefs and cultures?

This is a question Japan needs to seriously consider as its foreign and Muslim population continues growing.



Above: Members of 'Young Muslim Channel' who provide information over YouTube to promote understanding of Muslims living in Japan.

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On the other hand, Japanese respondents were more likely to answer negatively. The main reason being their fear of COVID-19. The respondents also gave the following answers: "I would be embarrassed without a mask," "I am used to a mask," "the mask hides the flaws of my face." The reasons for the positive answers of Japanese respondents were similar to those of foreign respondents: "it is very hot to wear masks in summer," and "masks are uncomfortable."

In the survey, we can clearly see the trend of "underwear for the face." For many students, masks curb feelings of embarrassment and a flawed appearance.

Face masks have a long history in Japan, undergoing changes in



both appearance and purpose. The pandemic had initially stirred up the mask market, providing great incentive to start producing masks.

Now, however, more than two years after the start of the pandemic, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the mask trend is passing.

Left: Mask "SUMICCO," which Ms. Tezuka designed (Photo: provided by Miki.,CO.LTD)

Many companies will have to re-purpose their production systems and return to pre-Covid activities. Nonetheless, the mask industry will not completely disappear, with many people still hoping to protect themselves from infection or hide their face. One thing is for sure: the pandemic has greatly affected Japanese people's attitude towards face masks, resulting in novel uses that might be here to stay.



# The Extinction of Japan's "job for life" Mentality

## Business impacts and solutions

By GIRAUD Maui and  
SAKAMOTO Noa

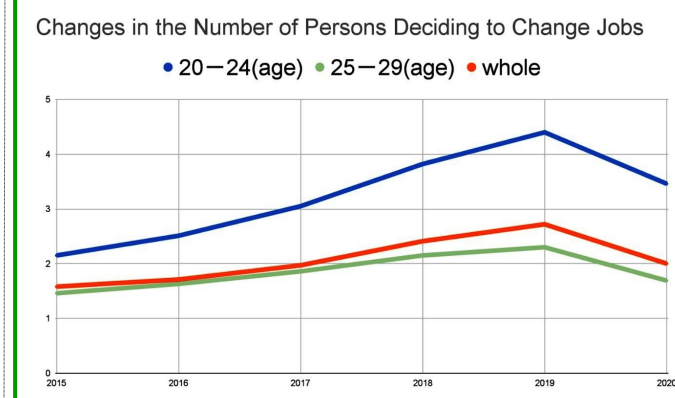
The Japanese labor market has been experiencing a change in employee behaviour for several years. The professional goals of the new generation are different from those of previous ones, and companies are struggling to keep up. Traditionally, in large Japanese companies, it is very rare for employees to resign before retirement age. However, more recently, this "job for life" mentality has loosened and people are no longer afraid to change jobs. Within this context, Japanese companies must begin thinking about how to avoid turnover. The negative effects of Japan's employment system have become more pronounced since the 1990s, when Japanese society was in the midst of a prolonged economic recession. Discussions to reform the system have taken place on several occasions and continue to this day.

### Who are leaving their jobs?

A growing number of young people in Japan are switching jobs mid-career, reflecting an increasingly active search for jobs in growing industries. An analysis of youth utilization by Recruit Agent, an employee placement service, found that in 2020, the number of workers aged 20-24 who found a new job mid-career was 3.5 times the 2009-2013 average, twice the average for all generations. In addition, 52 percent changed industries, 11 percentage points higher than 10 years ago. By industry, college graduates in accommodation and food services and bachelor's degree holders had the highest turnover rates. Career mobility also depends on the gender and status of the individual, for example there is a tendency for married women to stay with their company while unmarried women have greater career mobility.

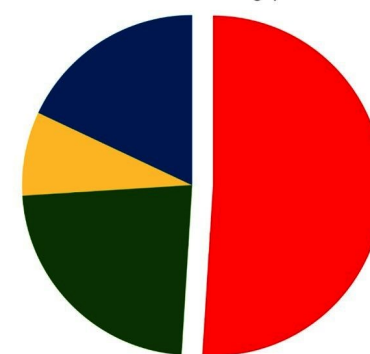
A study by Mr. Hiroshi Inoue, IBM Research - Tokyo, explains that about 30% of young graduates leave their jobs within three years of recruitment. In the same study, Inoue notes that a young worker must continue a job for at least four years before becoming fully autonomous. In other words, if companies must regularly recruit new employees to compensate for high turnover rates, their employees are never reaching full levels of autonomy and efficiency.

In an exclusive interview for The NUFs Times, Ms. Yuka Takashima, who works for a recruiting agency, provided more detailed information regarding the demographics of people changing



Status of Occupation Movement at the Time of Decis (20-24 age)

- Different industries×Different occupations
- Different industries×same occupations
- Same industries×Different occupations
- Same industries×Same occupations



Above: Changes in the Number of People to Change Jobs (left), Status of Occupation Movement at the Time of Decision (ages:20-24: provided by Recruit Agent)

Below: Work staff in NUFs

their jobs. Ms. Takashima first noted that the number of young people who have changed jobs is increasing year by year compared to other generations. This shows the growing number of people who have decided to change jobs. The light blue line is the transition from 20 to 24 years old. From this table, we can see that the number of young people who decide to change jobs is increasing year by year. The number declined across all generations in 2020, most likely because COVID-19 made it difficult to interview for new jobs. Ms. Takashima also emphasized that many people have not only been changing their occupation, but also their industry. This information is shown in the above pie chart, in red. In addition, many young people change jobs to companies that are new and growing. The tendency to transfer to new companies, Ms. Takashima notes, suggests that young people are seeking employment with a positive mindset. Whereas many people cite negative reasons for leaving a job, such as low wages, or poor working conditions, newer generations seem to want to expand their potential by working at emerging businesses.

### What can companies do?

This change in mentality and behavior in younger workers has repercussions for companies. Long-term employment encourages workers to stay and secure their future while contributing to the company's goals. Indeed, gaining experience through numerous job changes al-

lows workers to refine their professional abilities, but is costly for companies. Further, early retirement poses a huge risk to companies. Early retirement, combined with high turnover rates, means companies must invest more money into training new employees—money which may very well go to waste (August 23, 2019, mitsucari, what are the drawbacks of early rotation).

A healthy balance between employee well-being and employee involvement in the workplace could help reduce turnover. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare seeks to explain the relationship between well-being at work and work engagement. A worker who feels fulfilled will not seek to leave his job; and a satisfied employee is more productive at work. It is therefore in the company's interest to improve the working conditions of its employees in order to reduce turnover and increase performance.

According to a survey conducted by Gakujo Co., Ltd. on job motivation for people in their 20s, the percentage of respondents who felt that "their level of aspiration will increase" if companies implemented training and systems to support employee retraining (re-learning) was over 80%. More than 60% of respondents were aware of company retraining efforts in their career change activities. An increasing number of young people are attracted to companies that actively promote in-house human resource development, whether it be through

in-house training or the opportunity to be recognized and promoted for one's work. The survey was conducted over the Internet from March 18 to March 25, 2022, among users of a 20-year-old career development site operated by Gakujo. 216 valid responses were received. Just under 90 percent of respondents said they like companies that have training and career transition programs in place.

According to a survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, turnover rates also change according to company size. A company with five employees has a very high rate, while larger companies, such as Toyota Motor Corporation, tend to have lower rates. As discussed earlier, perhaps this is because Japanese people want to work for big companies that have the resources to promote and improve employee wellbeing, resulting in higher work engagement and satisfaction.

The mentality of the Japanese labor market is changing—long-term employment, once a pillar of the Japanese employment system, is gradually losing its relevance in the minds of 21st century workers. Various data and interviews illustrate that companies which support internal retraining (job changes by employees) are favored by young job seekers. In addition, both companies and employees benefit from creating a more flexible environment in which employees can thrive. This makes it easier for companies to recruit and retain employees, reducing their recruitment costs and turnover rates. While Japan still remains a long-term employment society, younger generations are beginning to value fulfillment at work over the security of a job they do not like. How will Japanese companies tackle the future of work culture, helping new generations find value in their jobs?



Religion

Muslims in Japan: To Understanding and Cohabitation

By Reina Takahashi and  
Victor Mencia Santiago

The Muslim population is growing in Japan, but Japan does not seem ready for it. According to the Japan Muslim Travel Index 2017 (JMTI), published by MasterCard and Crescent Rating, the number of Muslim travellers to Japan was expected to increase from 150,000 in 2004 to 1.4 million in 2020. Moreover, according to data provided by the Ministry of Justice, there are 121,709 foreign residents from countries with a high Muslim population, ten times more than in 1990.

The Muslim population in Japan is clearly becoming more prominent, however, social and cultural policies for integrating minorities do not reflect this reality. According to a survey conducted by students at the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, most young Muslims come to Japan for academic or family reasons. 70% of surveyed people think that living in Japan is difficult, citing various reasons, including the inability to find a sense of belonging and acceptance from others. What struggles is Japan’s Muslim population facing, and how can we tackle these issues?

Hardships as Muslims

One of the prominent issues that Japan’s Muslim population faces centers on dietary restrictions. Muslims can only eat “Halal,” which literally means “permissible” in English. Halal is based on Islamic dietary laws and is prepared according to certain guidelines, one of which is the exclusion of alcohol. Hasan, who is currently studying at Nagoya University of Commerce & Business (NUCB), identifies halal food as the main thing he would like to change about Japan. “My university promised to offer halal food” he states. However, after contacting the university, we confirmed that they still have not taken any action. Another interviewee, Hisham Khan, says that “access to ‘halal’ food is extremely difficult.” It is difficult to find halal food for Muslims because they must avoid food including chicken and beef extracts, such as lard, gelatin, and animal shortenings. Genetically modified plants are considered haram, which means “prohibited.”

Moreover, for those who do not understand Japanese, it is tougher to discern what is edible. In some cases, the labels do not provide enough information to determine whether the food is halal or not. While Nagoya University does not directly respond to Halal dietary requests, it tries its best to adjust to the student population. At the university, Halal food is currently



Top: Praying in the Nagoya Mosque at noon

Left below: Interview by Takahashi (left) with Ms. Sarah Qureshi, the director of the Nagoya Mosque, Aichi prefecture

planned, prepared, and served by students. However, unless there exists a high proportion of Muslim students at a university, it is not common to offer halal food, making Japan a very difficult study abroad location. Hence, Muslim students are unlikely to insist on halal food—and even if they do, they are unlikely to be taken seriously.

Another important thing for Muslims is to pray five times a day. With increased Muslim awareness, the number of prayer rooms has increased year by year. You can find them in the Aeon Mall Nagoya-Chaya, and the highway service area, Hamanako. However, prayer locations can only be found in Japan’s largest cities. Accordingly, more than half of the interviewees are concerned about having a place to pray.

Some of the struggles occur at a more foundational, cultural level:

doctrine says “take care of your neighbours more than you take care of yourself.” Through these cultural differences, some Muslims, such as Misa Inoue, find it difficult to practice their religion. The director of the Nagoya Mosque, Sarah Qureshi Yoshimi, explained that “it is easier to develop your beliefs in an environment where one can naturally become a Muslim.” Access to halal food and prayer locations are indispensable for Muslims in Japan to feel closer to their religion in a largely non-Islamic society.

Tackling Xenophobia

Another issue for Muslims in Japan arises from xenophobia and a lack of understanding. Hisham, another student from NUCB, stated that Japanese people have a “stereotype of Muslims,” so they treat Muslims differently depending on how westernised they appear. Other Muslims say that

discrimination in Japan is very indirect. Ali Aqlan from NUCB, says that he does not blame the Japanese even if they do not something offensive because they don’t know about Islam—accordingly, 83 % of Muslims in our survey feel that Japanese people do not know very much about Islam. Whether or not Japanese are aware of such xenophobia, stereotypes and discrimination towards Muslims is a very real issue, with 33.7 % of surveyed subjects feeling discriminated against.

Every Muslim in our survey stated that, to tackle this xenophobia and lack of understanding, Japanese need to be taught more about Islam. By this, respondents do not mean that Islam should be indoctrinated in Japan’s youth, but rather introduced in a curriculum that encourages the acceptance of diverse beliefs and cultures. Citing instances of Islamic extremists in Japan, Sarah Qureshi Yoshimi strongly supports the application of this idea in school education. Lots of people dismiss Islam or Muslims because they automatically associate them with extremists. This tendency to criminalize Islam, relating it to terrorism, does not only occur in Japan but also throughout the world. If Japanese people become able to recognize that extremists are not representative of the Islam religion, then discrimination issues may decrease. Through education, Japanese people should take a more nuanced and open-minded approach to people of different religions.

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