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KOMABA *times*

Photo by Prakhar Misra.

STUDENT LIFE

Class of 2019: Lost in transition

By Yu Yu Phua

In the 2015-2016 academic year, the University of Tokyo implemented a large-scale university-wide educational reform, with the aim of improving its quality of education and competitiveness with other top universities worldwide. One of the most controversial reforms to the junior division students was the change in the admission system to the senior division (i.e. proceeding to specific majors in our 3rd year). However, with the system for the class of 2019 being discontinued only after one year, it seems that we will be a year forgotten in history.

With the first term of 2016 almost complete (at the time this piece was originally published), a number of trends had emerged for how 2nd year students had planned out their timetable. Some had tried to fulfill all the junior division graduation requirements in their first year and thus have had a front-heavy timetable. For the Natural Sciences students, this would leave them with only required classes in the 2S1 term, and nothing in the 2S2 term. For the Humanities and Social Sciences students, they did not have required classes in their second year, which effectively meant that they were potentially able to have a 9-month break from January to September.

This was seen with much envy from students who still have unfulfilled requirements, but being self-motivated students of the University of Tokyo, many people without classes in 2S1 and 2S2 spent their extended break effectively, with many still showing up to classes, albeit without enrolling in them.

In the new system applicable to the class of 2019, the grades of all classes carry equal weightage. In contrast, in the prior system, results of any classes enrolled beyond the junior

division graduation requirement have only a 0.1 weightage. This has had a huge impact on not only which classes students enrolled in, but also when they enrolled.

The change in enrollment patterns and behaviour should not come as a surprise. In a competitive environment, where a hundredth of a point can determine whether or not you get admitted into the department you want, it has had the unintended effect of students attending classes without enrolling in them. It has also created the bigger problem of students enrolling in classes that are graded leniently, while putting off enrolling in classes they are really interested in till 2A semester, when the grades would not affect admission to senior division. In addition, in the previous system, students tended to take more classes than necessary so as to increase their average score, but in the new interim system, there was no motivation to take more classes than necessary to graduate.

All these contradict the purpose of the junior division education, which aims to provide a broad-based liberal arts education. The academic affairs division acknowledged the problems of having all results carry equal weightage, and has once again revised the senior division admission system for the class of 2020. The system for the class of 2020 as a whole aims for students to explore a wider range of subjects, instead of striving single-mindedly to get as high a score as possible. For example, in order to reduce students' obsessions with every hundredth of a point, some faculties have come up with a GPA-like scale, and grades up till 2S semester will be taken into consideration. Also, more faculties will employ a holistic approach to admitting students at an earlier stage, through interviews and essays for the class of 2020.



Senior division admission guidebooks

It is unclear if unintended negative effects will similarly arise from the new senior division admission system for the class of 2020. The class of 2019 unfortunately got stuck in the transition between systems and were more risk averse in course selections. However, those without classes in S semester or S2 term have set their sights away from classes and many are looking for learning opportunities beyond the classroom, such as summer programs abroad or locally. This exploration beyond classroom walls sounds right in line with what junior division education is supposed to be about. Ironically, these opportunities were gifted by the very system which the academic affairs division thought stifled exploration into a wide variety of subjects.

Glossary:

Junior division, senior division: The first 2 years of the undergraduate years are known as the junior division while the 3rd and 4th years are known as the senior division.

Each academic year is divided into 4 terms, namely S1, S2, A1 and A2.

S1 and S2 combined is called S semester, A1 and A2 combined is called A semester.

The number before either S or A refers to the school year, so 2S1 refers to S1 term of second year.

Want to be a GO Tutor?

By RongXuan Tan



GO tutors and students hanging out together

Ever been to the KOMCEE basement and seen a big group of students – both Japanese and international – hanging out outside the Globalisation Office (GO Office) and seemingly having a great time together? These students are a mix of GO tutors, other University of Tokyo students, and exchange students.

For international students - be they PEAK stu-

dents or exchange students - one of the first groups of people they get to know and become close to are the GO tutors. GO tutors are regular University of Tokyo students, and usually, a few GO tutors at a time can be found at the tables right outside the Globalisation Office during and after lunch break. As the name suggests, GO tutors provide assistance in school work, but they also try their best to help those who are having

trouble in other matters, such as in administrative matters pertaining to school or living in Japan in general.

Jennifer leong, a 1st-year PEAK student, visits the GO lounge at least four times a week and has had close interactions with the GO tutors. GO tutors mostly help her by looking over and correcting her assignments for Japanese classes but beyond that, she has also become friends with several of them. In fact, just recently, she went for a karaoke session with some of them and had a very good time. "GO tutors are very friendly", she enthused.

There are around 20 GO tutors in total, and their main role is to be the bridge between foreign and Japanese students and assisting international students in settling down and fitting into Japan, especially those who are not fluent in Japanese and require some help. "Even in Komaba, there is a big international student bubble that is difficult to penetrate into and out of, and GO tutors try to facilitate interaction for international students to know

more about Japanese students and vice versa", explains Bryan Kuek, a 4th-year PEAK student who has been a GO tutor since 2013.

The name 'GO tutor' might cause some students to think that the particular area in the GO lounge is reserved for tutors and those in need of tutoring, but Bryan assures that anybody is welcome to drop by. School work is just one small part of

Undoukai: Another Passion of Todai

By Hye June Seo

What is an *undoukai* (運動会)? In Japanese, *undoukai* refers to a big yearly sport event in schools, where students compete with each other in various sports. The University of Tokyo uses the word differently, referring it to an association of sports teams. Whereas other universities use the word *taikukai* (体育会, athletics association) instead of *undoukai*. Apparently Todai is the only university that uses the term in a special way. The official name is Athletic Foundation of the University of Tokyo (東京大学運動会). Currently, there are 46 clubs and teams in this foundation.

Japanese university students' extracurricular club activities are mainly *circle* (サークル) and *bukatsu* (部活). The main difference between *circle* and *bukatsu* is its freedom of commitment and the atmosphere of the club. People who get in circles are mainly to enjoy the club and also be able to do other activities like studying or working. On the other hand, *bukatsu* is more strict about commitment and its main goal is to leave high scores for the school. Also, all *bukatsu* are conceded by the university, meaning they are supported financially.

Each team has different activity hours, but most of the teams practice more than two days per week. The teams considered major sports like baseball or football team practice five or six days a week. There is the *seikiren* (正規練), the official practice where members should be attending, and *jishuren* (自主練), an optional practice depending on the member's own will. Many students take part in *jishuren* to get better, so it's actually more semi-obligatory hours on top of the *seikiren*. The practice in the morning is called *asaren* (朝練), while the one in the evening is *yoruren* (夜練). Some really tough scheduled teams have their practice in the middle of the night called *shinyaren* (深夜練). It may seem a little complicated, but as an example, my fencing team have practice 3 days a week after school around 6pm, so it becomes a *yoruren*.

Another unique point about *undoukai* is the *senpai-kouhai* (先輩-後輩) culture. Of course in any area, Japan's society is strict with this issue, but it's more obvious in *bukatsu*. Not to mention the greetings or the attention to use respect-

ful language, but also *kouhais* putting away the equipment after every practice, or even cleaning the *senpais'* clothes.

The most important and ultimate goal of the members is to win at the competition. It's not about just enjoying the sports, the goal is to leave a good record for the school, to gain fame. Regarding that, any competition is valuable to the members. Mostly, competitions are held on the weekends or during breaks, but still some are on the weekdays. The situation where members have tournament on class day is a dilemma. But still, a lot of them will choose to go to the tournament because members consider *bukatsu* a priority. This was what surprised me at first, that even Todai students, would place *bukatsu* above classes.

So why, are students so passionate about getting into *undoukai* even with all the busy schedules and *senpai-kouhai* culture?

"The atmosphere and *senpai-kouhai* culture is

it; there are those who go there for help in school work, but there are also those who drop by to ask miscellaneous questions about life in Japan, and some who just want to chat. As a frequenter of the GO tutors' table myself, I can safely say that although many of us do our homework there, at the same time, we talk to each other, and soon become friends.

The Selection Process

Selection of new GO tutors has just ended, and those who frequent the GO lounge and the GO tutors' table would have realised that there are five more tutors. How are these five selected?

Twice a year at the beginning of each semester, the GO Office calls for applications, requiring applicants to submit their CV, academic results, and an essay (usually asking about the applicant's intercultural experience and what they have learnt). Applicants' academic results and essays are then perused, and candidates are shortlisted. In the second round, interviews are conducted to select the students who will ultimately become GO tutors. Every semester, around 3 to 6 students are selected, depending on how many tutors left to go abroad on exchange programs or graduated.

Generally, the GO Office looks for students who will fit with current tutors, are helpful, willing to communicate, and friendly with international students. According to Mariko Osawa, lecturer at the Globalisation Office and one of the people in charge of GO tutors, there are students who wish to become a tutor to improve their English through interaction with international student. However, "that is not a good attitude" she says.

"The priority should be on helping international students and not how you can benefit from it".

Compared to just two or three years ago, it is now much easier to find tutors. The GO tutor program started merely three years ago, and at the beginning, nobody knew about it. As such, the GO Office had difficulty finding tutors, having to rely on students who had returned from exchange programs abroad. Now, the problem is finding good tutors, especially for mathematics and science. "It is difficult to find students who are good in the sciences and are also able to speak English fluently", says Professor Osawa. "Many of those who can speak English fluently are from the Humanities side".

For those interested in being a GO tutor, Professor Osawa has some advice. The first thing to do would be to improve one's English, especially for those who might not be so fluent in the language. In addition, it would be helpful to take part in events organised by the GO Office and actually interact with international students before applying.

Yusuke Sakurai, project lecturer and another person-in-charge of GO tutors, would also like to encourage those who were not chosen to be GO tutors previously to not be discouraged and reapply during the next round. GO tutors are also selected based on what the tutoring system needs, and for the recently concluded selection, the GO Office were looking for students majoring in the sciences. As such, although the GO Office received many excellent applications from students in the Arts stream, they had to turn them away. "It's just bad luck", says Professor Sakurai.

"Next time it might be the other way round, so for students who failed this time, please try again".

Being a GO tutor

One of the main worries students who wish to become GO tutors have is not being able to cope with the added commitment of being a GO tutor. However, Bryan assures that trying to juggle GO tutor duties and school work is not as difficult as one might think, reason being the GO Office allows tutors to choose their work hours. "It really depends on how committed you want to be more than anything", he says.

However, that is not to say being a GO tutor is all fun and games. After all, students do approach GO tutors for help, and GO tutors have to be equipped to help them. As such, tutors have to figure out how best to help and adapt to what other students need. Bryan mentions how due to changes in the PEAK mathematics syllabus recently, there were topics he did not cover previously, and he therefore had to self-study so that he can assist those who ask him for help in mathematics.

Despite these challenges, or maybe even because of them, being a GO tutor can be a very fulfilling job. When Bryan successfully helps a student, he feels a sense of satisfaction. The fact that "the job itself is fun, and the overall atmosphere is very lively" also adds to the perks of the job.

Bryan hopes that more students will visit the GO tutors' table. "It doesn't have to be for work, just hanging out to chat is fine". Next time you're in the GO lounge, do drop by to say hi!

not strict at all so I can enjoy the bukatsu at full. Plus, because the practice is three times a week I can do other things and never thought of it hectic since my middle/high school bukatsu was five times a week. Above all, I love saber and nothing's gonna stop that!" (Hiromu Sasaya, Fencing team)

"Although it may be true that the practice schedule is strict, I can lean on my senpais and friends on the team. Since we practice together until the senior year, it's really all about *nakama* (仲間, friend on your side). I enjoy lacrosse, but more than that, I love my teammates." (Miku Sano, Women's Lacrosse team)

This year, University of Tokyo is the host school of the 55th annual *nanadaisen* (七大大戦), the competition between the seven old imperial schools in Japan. As the host school of the main event, it seems that members of each team will put in effort to organize the competition thoroughly, but will no doubt aim to leave with the highest scores ever.



Moment of the perfect Touché | Photo by Mohiro Ito.

Senpai (先輩)

By Abhishek Gupta



Senpai and Kohai relation through cooking and eating together, having trips and teaching each other.

Students around the world have different perception about their seniors as they face the world firstly under their seniors, and then developing a closer relationship with their seniors. In Japan, seniors are generally called 'Senpai.' The kanji (chinese characters) for senpai is 先輩 in which the kanjis literally means the person or fellow who is ahead of you or a superior elder. Being taught by senpais about what to do and what not to do, the meaning of senpai has begun to change for me. Having senpais who act like the

well of wisdom was awesome. But while I was amused, I realized my Japanese friends had different and varied experiences of senpai and kohai (Junior, 後輩).

So this urged me to think deeper about this relation of senpai and kohai. Fundamentally I realized that there are no big differences between these relations anywhere in the world. The difference in the relation depends on the situation, place and environment you belong to. It also depends

on the viewpoint of the person. There are many roles of senpais at different places like high school, university, circle, bukatsu and other places. Generally in high schools, senpais are very strict and even in some high schools the kohai have to greet their senpais and use 'Keigo' (honorifics) whenever they see them. However, apart of academic help, the senpais in high schools give lots of advices about the courses and how to study for getting into the university.

Once in university, the senpais are generally not very harsh like in high schools, but the relation becomes more like a teacher-student one. In one's major, the senpais may help with various type of advices about the courses and inside the circles they teach their kohai various sports and other co-curricular activities. One of my friend from Kyudo (traditional archery) club told me that, "Kyudo is a Japanese traditional sport so, we have many rules regarding behaviour in the field. We can enter the field only after we acquire the series of behaviours." She also added that they had a lot of tests regarding the behaviour as they had a total of ten phases of behaviour which are tested by the senpais. Therefore, here the relation between senpai and kohai is similar to that between a teacher and a student.

It is refreshing to know so much about things which are totally different from one's perspective. Also senpais in PEAK are really kind and generous and very different from other senpais. They help in almost every things and also teaches us life hacks so that it's easy for us to enjoy our lives. This relationship between senpai and kohai is a general example of mutual understanding between people.

A Window into Todai

By Kyle Smith

On May 14th and 15th, 2016, the University of Tokyo's 89th annual May Festival, *Gogatsusai*, was held at the University of Tokyo's Hongo campus.

The two-day event featured booths, performances, and competitions run by the University of Tokyo's many clubs and associations, called "sakuru", or circles. According to the event pamphlet, this year's May Festival included over 230 student-run attractions, not including their even more numerous scheduled events and performances.

Attractions ranged from sporting events to food stalls to information booths to event stages. Circles used attractions like these to promote and fundraise for themselves, offering entertainment, cultural insight, and unique festival foods to attendees.

Students played in and cheered on sports, put their hearts into musical performances, and dedicated their time to long shifts at festival stalls, with some students volunteering to staying almost all day both days doing several such tasks. Students dedicated to their circles didn't seem too phased by long hours, with one U. Tokyo student calling their time volunteering at the May Festival "exhaustingly fun".

Among the sporting events shown was a nail-biting match between The University of Tokyo and Waseda University's women's lacrosse teams. U. Tokyo's team, "Celeste", emerged victorious by one point, cheered on by U. Tokyo's very own *oenbu* (pep band).

The festival was not a quiet one, with stages dedicated to U. Tokyo's talented musicians and dancers. Visitors were greeted by a cappella performances at the iconic *akamon*, Hongo campus' huge red gate, and further inside the campus were able to see a large scale dance-battle—if they could see over the enormous crowd.

International circles shared their culture with food, drink, and demonstrations, with such fine examples of Russian alcohol samples and a wonderful interactive display of Indian dance.

Massive crowds dwarfed those seen at Komaba campus' Komaba Festival last year, filling the sprawling Hongo campus to the brim with foot traffic. Most attendees of the May Festival were students from U. Tokyo and other neighboring universities, with many parents and siblings tagging along to see the great efforts put into the event.

The May Festival also acted as a "window into

Todai", where high school students may catch glimpses of university life. "Onakura" or same year students, students were also able to see what their classmates' interests are outside of the classroom.

Relationships were a key part of a good festival experience, helping event-goers choose between the literal hundreds of options present. Festival attendees made sense of navigating the large campus by settings courses for the booths of friends and family.

One might have also make choices based on *mauriken* (presale tickets), which were sold in the weeks prior to the festival, offering festival goods and services at a discount. "You have to make sure you know the right people", said one student volunteer, advising festival goers to save money by limiting purchases to *mauriken* and those benefitting friends.

Many circles put booth proceeds towards *uchiage* closing parties, where volunteers are able to rest and celebrate a job well done.

And a job well done it was. This year's *Gogatsusai* offered endless amusement thanks to the commitment of many dedicated U. Tokyo student volunteers.

A musical performance on the main stage at the University of Tokyo's May festival (Photo credit Xuan Truong Trinh)





Participants and Teacher-in-charge of the workshop

Today's Very Own Movie Premiere

By RongXuan Tan

Although there was no red carpet and no flashing cameras, there was a sizeable crowd of students and professors as some of Today's student filmmakers presented their very own self-directed and self-produced documentaries. The screening of the two documentaries was the culmination of seven months of hard work by a group of six students, who – other than one person – have had no prior experience in film production.

These six students were specially selected after a rigorous application process to participate in the film production workshop. As part of this workshop, the students not only planned, directed, and produced a twenty-minute documentary all on their own; they also went to Los Angeles to conduct the necessary interviews and to film.

Since for the majority of the students this was an entirely new experience, they had to learn from scratch how to go about making a video. "Most of the skills required to produce a film, for example cinematography and editing, was self-taught. We watched videos, which were very

helpful," explained one of the participants in this workshop. Beyond the technical skills, the students also gained other valuable experience. "We learnt a lot from filming the documentary," said one student. "My group interviewed some Japanese-American couples to see how they split the housework and child-raising, and we realised that the situation was more complex in America than we initially assumed".

The documentaries are titled 'Gender Roles: Who Should Raise the Child' and 'The Timeliner – LA Theaters'. Gender Roles gave the audience a look into three Japanese-Americans households in Los Angeles, focusing on how the husband and wife divide household chores and child-raising duties. This documentary was created in response to the gender 'problem' in Japan, and to get people to think about childcare. This documentary successfully went beyond simply criticising the 'Japanese way' and praising the 'American way' and holding it up as the ideal for Japanese parents. Instead, it reflected the complexity and difficulty of reality, and the issues

brought up by the families interviewed – those that they had to navigate when deciding how to split the job, and those that they are facing now – are what many couples, not only in America or Japan but around the world, are also dealing with or will have to deal with.

The Timeliner – LA Theaters explored the movie culture in Los Angeles – the home of the U.S. film industry and Hollywood – and showed viewers a cinema, movie-going culture that is vastly different from those in Japan. Movie theatres, or rather, palaces, are grand architectures, built in an attempt to elevate movies to an art form and movie-going to a cultural experience, much like the opera. Instead of multiplexes showing digital films, there are still many single screen cinemas showing films on film. Through interviews with managers of cinemas and movie-goers themselves, this documentary delved into the history, the decline, but also the innovation of movie theatres in Los Angeles in response to competition from YouTube and other streaming sites.

Welcome to UTTF!

By Yuka Fujiwara

Walking around Komaba Campus, have you ever stopped your feet at the athletic field near the back gate? The University of Tokyo Track and Field (UTTF) club members spend hours on that athletic field devote their time to be stronger and faster for themselves and for the team.

Approximately 160 members belong to UTTF, including myself, which is one of the biggest clubs at UTokyo. We belong to the second league of the *Kanto intercollegiate* now, practicing hard to be in the top league. Each member belongs to a particular section, which focuses on a particular event, depending on their ability and preference. The sport "track-and-field", is one word literally, though it contains several events based on human basic movements, running, walking, jumping and throwing.

Established on those skills, UTTF has six sections:

- 1) Sprinting: 100m, 200m, 400m, hurdles and relays
- 2) Jumping: Long jump, triple jump, high jump and pole vault.
- 3) Throwing. Shot put, discus throw, javelin throw, and hammer throw
- 4) Race walking. They compete through walking, a movement we cannot live without. The rules on how you walk are very strict. For example, one foot always must be on the ground. A member of the walking section mentions that "it is a very tough event. You need a strong mentality to win."
- 5) Middle distance running: 800m and 1500m. Karube Satoshi, the chief of UTTF-middle distance claims that 800m is attractive to him because you can compete with people throughout the whole race. "Sprint events are

too short, you never move from your lane, and long distances are too long for me," he says.

- 6) Long distance running. Those competing in this section run more than 5000m. *Ekiden* is something that is very special to this part, especially the very famous *Hakone Ekiden*, which is held every New Year. In October, selected members run 20km at the *Hakone-Ekiden qualifying race*, which is a qualifying match for the real race. The chance to compete in this event is based on the total time of the ten fastest runners in each university team, and only ten universities ultimately make it to the real race. The aim of UTTF-long distance is to participate in the race. Kondo Shuichi, who was selected to be in the *gakurensenbatsu-team* (a team for those who ran at a good time, but whose university wasn't able to make to the top 10) says, "I'm obsessed with Hakone Ekiden, it's my dream."



Photo of UTTF

The main activities of UTTF

Practice happens every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (some parts have practices on Sunday, too) at the athletic field in Komaba campus. Though practice schedules are largely decided by the upperclass students, everyone on the team thinks about the purpose of the practice, how to make it better, discuss their opinions and finally come up with a completed practice schedule. The schedule is literally made by the "team". What to do on non-practice days is completely up to individual members. Karube says coming up with one's individual schedule is very enjoyable and is a nice feature of UTTF.

Track and Field is a sport marked by individual records. Members endure hard practices to run or walk faster, jump or throw further. To show this they take part in track and field meets. Because

these events are about personal bests, one might think it's all about the individual at UTTF. But this is a big mistake. In the Interscholastic games, we fight for the team.

The Interscholastic games are competed by the total points of each universities and points are given to the high placed athlete's team. Who will participate in which event is decided by analyzing athletes on other school teams and understanding the strengths of our own team athletes, and is all about strategizing to get most points. In the middle distance section which I belong to, we think of how to run, what pace to run or how to control the race. Shall we lead the race right from the start, or let other teams lead and take over later? We consider not only the way one can win, but also how to make our teammates win as well. And of course, we never know what will happen on the day, so we need to change our

strategy at real time.

Interscholastic games are special for the team. "I get nervous, but I love the match," says Karube. He went on to say that good records are meaningful because that means his win contributes to the team. And the joy achieved by playing an active part of the team makes him want to run as fast as he can. Indeed, it is all about "all for one, one for all".

For me, UTTF is my family. I run and wish to become much more competitive because I want to share the joy with them. I can endure hard practices and enjoy running because I'm not alone; UTTF members are with me, cheering me on. Karube states, "If one has something they can devote themselves to other than studying, one's life will become much richer. I would be happy if that thing is track and field."

Secret Relaxing Places on Komaba Campus

By Yuya Nagata



Wakan-ura. Photo by author.

Memories of Komaba Dormitories

By Naoki Mizutani

Have you ever wondered why Komaba campus does not have dormitories on campus? They evidently existed until 15 years ago.

Komaba dormitories derive from the first high school under the pre-WWII education system, in Japanese, “*ichiko*”. The first dormitories of *icchu* (the predecessor of *ichiko*) were built in 1890 at Mukougaka, where the Faculty of Agriculture is currently located, and not at Komaba. At the opening of dormitories, the principal at that time gave students four principles; –prudence, affection, self-effacement, and cleanliness. All *ichiko* students had to live in the dormitories, however, students were authorized self-governing, legislation and administration system, which was inherited by Komaba dormitories.

In 1935, as part of the reconstruction that occurred after the 1923 Kanto Earthquake, the dormitories moved to Komaba. The new dormitories’ buildings were designed by Professor Uchida, who also designed the first building in Komaba, Yasuda auditorium in Hongo, and many main buildings in University of Tokyo. The solidly built

dormitories were used for over 60 years.

After WWII, *ichiko* became the College of Arts and Sciences in accordance with the postwar education reform. Female students were permitted to enter UTokyo, but not to live in the dormitories. Living in the dormitories became optional, and students themselves conducted selection of students who could reside. Shortly after WWII, around 1000 people were living there. Because dormitories had common rooms, it was opened for all people, even for strangers. Not only individual students, but also many clubs used the dormitories as their rooms.

“The typical image of Komaba dormitories were old and dirty” says Hirofumi Matsumoto in his book ‘The Story of Todai Komaba Dormitories’ (Kadokawa, 2015). Three or more students lived in one room, and the use varied widely. Some were distinctly separated to individual spaces with bookshelves or plywood, others were not.

Dormitories had their own dining hall, which provided plenty and inexpensive food for resi-

dents living short of money. Food was such a serious matter for students that they organized riots against employees of dining hall complaining about the taste of meals before WWII. Wide space of dining hall played an important role as the space students made free use of, such as for theater, for party revenue.

The dormitories’ festivals were held every summer and autumn. Each room created booths and attracted many people. Once, a club stand sold grilled meat of a stray campus dog. This incident was strongly criticized, but became one of the famous events in the history of festivals.

Protests by students against the school authorities were also held frequently. They protested about social issues, tuition increases, and disuse plan proposed one-sidedly in 1991. The university was planning to build new accommodations in Mitaka and abolish Komaba dormitories. The chief reason of this was deterioration of dormitories.

While the students protested to maintain the dormitories, the university executed their plan.



It is very important for students to find comfortable places to relax in campus. When you want to relax in Komaba campus, where do you go? You may choose the library, cafeteria or KOMCEE. When it comes to relaxing, however, these are the worst places to go, as seats are hardly available, fresh air is limited and the buzz of lively chatter can keep even the heaviest sleeper awake.

So are there any places where students can relax free of people and noise? In search of the perfect hiding spot, I interviewed a couple of students on where they go to relax. On the basis of the interviews, I would like to share three places to relax.

First I recommend the terrace deck of second floor cafeteria Dining Icho. With a great view of the beautiful courtyard and sky, this place is suited for relaxing, reading and enjoying the scenery. Moreover, relatively less people are in this space than downstairs. It is often quiet, especially after the lunchtime rush hour so you can find seats more eas-

ily. However, it's outdoors, so in the summer you may not be able to stay there for a long time because of the heat, and in the winter you probably have to endure the cold. So I recommend using this space in spring or autumn.

Second I recommend "Wakan- Ura" (the place behind the Japanese style house). This building is next to the Komaba Communications Plaza and near the Komaba pond. The porch area is called *engawa*. The *engawa* is like a porch attached to the building made of wooden floor that stands along the room side and extends to the outside of the room. Around this place there is rich greenery and few people so you can enjoy reading books, listen to music or take a nap in the silence, and take in beauty of nature. But you have to be careful when you relax in this place, because in the summer there are a lot of mosquitoes!

Finally I recommend the First Year Activity Center. This building stands between the Komaba museum and Yanaihara Park. Not only first year students but also other students can use this facility. This building is small but few people use this facility so you can find a seat more easily than in the cafeteria or library. In addition, you can consult with peer advisors, who are third or fourth year students or graduate students, about various things related to academic life. In addition to studying there, students are allowed to talk with friends or take a rest.

Other than those above, there may be some nice places to relax in Komaba campus. Enjoy finding your own favorite places.

In 1996, the authorities declared Komaba dormitories condemned. The dormitories' electricity and gas supply was cut off, and the demolition started while, students continued living in the buildings. The university trustees resolved to take legal action. In the court, execution of the surrender was decided.

Ultimately, on August 22nd 2001, the day typhoon was approaching, the evacuation was executed. Students did not resist. People remaining on the site of the dormitories were also evicted in 2002. Dormitories were absorbed into Mitaka International Hall of Residence.

Now, at the site of Komaba dormitories stands Multi-purpose Hall, Communications Plaza, and Library among other things. The monument of the dormitories is left quiet in a corner of the garden.

It is easy to say the disuse of Komaba dormitories was historically inevitable. However, we shall not forget the dormitories existed and many students lived on Komaba campus.



The monument of Komaba Dormitories

Explaining the Inexplicable: Urban Legends in Todai

By Angeli Rambukpota

“Life is so much more interesting with monsters in it” says folklorist Mikel J. Koven to LiveScience.com. “It’s the same with these legends. They’re just good stories”.

Urban legends - almost everyone has one to share. From the Loch Ness monster to Bigfoot, the world is filled with stories of questionable authenticity. With a rich history and prestigious background, University of Tokyo has cumulated its fair share of urban legends. Here are some of the popular tales circulating in the university:

1. The Gingko legend

This one’s regarded a classic. Almost all freshmen upon entering the university are warned about this one. Based on the gingko tree avenue, the legend goes that if a female student does not get a boyfriend by the time all of the leaves fall off, you won’t get a boyfriend for the next four years at university. What’s interesting to notice is that this only applies to heterosexual women. Sakura legend, in comparison, suggests that boys who fail to find a girlfriend before the end of sakura season/spring won’t have a lover for a year. Thus the discrepancy between the consequences illustrates the unfairness of the gingko legend, as the repercussions are comparatively dire for women.

2. Ichi-nirou Lake

Commonly known as 一二郎池 (*ichi-nirou* lake)

legend, many students believe that visiting the lonesome lake alone will bring dire consequences on the viewer’s academic life. For instance, university applicant would fail the entrance exam while current university students would delay graduation by a year or two. The nickname is said to be derived from Hongo campus’ very own 三四郎池 (*san-shirou* lake) where upperclassman who visit the lake are allegedly cursed to stay an extra year. While its seclusivity offers a serene lunch spot under the luscious trees, perhaps one should avoid the area, especially if their academic life is on stake.

3. The Twin theory

Since the dawn of horror movies, twins have inspired phobias amongst those who already have a fear of the unfamiliar. In Todai, there is a legend that twins are accepted into university more easily than normal children. This is apparently because the university specifically recruits twins to become test subjects for their experiments. According to a graduate, there is a “special twins-only admission section”, in order to “the workings of a child’s mind while they attempt different studying styles”. Therefore, the doctor states that the reason they choose twins is because “it makes the experiment more reliable if they use twins that share similar genes” (*mainabi*). This story, however, is unlikely to be true as the entrance exam to Todai is done anonymously. Thus, the likelihood of finding a pair of twins amongst the sea of test scores suggests that this legend

is merely a rumor.

Given the unreliable nature of these tales, people continue to spread, believe and even form conspiracy theories based on urban legends. So why does this happen?

“Urban legends form where common logic lacks”, suggests a Todai student. “They explain the inexplicable”. Like many myths and folklores, people often tell stories as solutions or explanations for phenomena that occur beyond our understanding (eg. ghost stories with simple solutions)

These stories also reflect the socio-cultural background as they reveal beliefs and fears of the general public during the time. Examples include the “Sewer Alligator” stories that originated around the 1920’s and 30’s, after multiple “sightings” in New York city. The theory is said to have formed after cases of owners flushing their pet reptiles down the toilet once it became too big to handle. Additionally, urban legends owe their popularity to their mysterious and fun nature; ‘word-of-mouth’ nature of most tales makes it hard to trace the original version, thereby adding to the fantastical element all great stories possess.

Oral traditions have long been responsible for the beliefs and traditions we uphold in society. Whether they are actually true or not, legends have and will continue to enthrall its listeners with its claws of mystique.

Gingko Avenue at University of Tokyo, courtesy of makitani | Flickr.



Little Children in Komaba -From the day nursery-

By Naoki Mizutani



The nursery on Komaba campus. Photo by author.

Have you ever seen the little children patrolling the Komaba Campus in a cart or toddling led by the adults? Or, some people might have seen the wooden house unusual for university at the end of the campus around the gymnasium. This is the day nursery in Komaba Campus. I conducted an interview with Ms. Ikemi, the director of the nursery. Here is what students should know about the nursery in Komaba.

There are a number of day nurseries in UTokyo, however, the characteristic of “Todai-Komabachiku-Hoikujo” (the official name for the nursery meaning Nursery for the Todai Komaba District, hereinafter referred to as Komaba nursery) is that nursery child’s parents are composed of not only the staff or students of the university, but also people living near Komaba campus. The reason of this situation lies in the form of nursery. Komaba nursery is an unauthorized nursery. An unauthorized nursery is not authorized by the government because the nursery is not satisfying the official requirements for establishing a nursery. However, it is often difficult for nurseries in Tokyo to satisfy the needs of dual-income families, which hope to leave their children in the convenient nursery for a long time. Therefore, Tokyo Metropolitan Government made a nursery

room system to support the unauthorized. Since 2001, the administration established the unique certification system and subsidize nurseries in Tokyo. When Komaba nursery made an application for the subsidy, the authority made it a condition that nursery should include children from both the university and local residents.

Komaba nursery was established in 1971, and was maintained mainly by the Faculty and Staff Association of UTokyo, not by the university. From 2003 to the present, a NPO corporation called “Todai Komaba Nursery Association” have managed the nursery. Komaba nursery is one of the institution of Office for Gender Equality, The University of Tokyo, and borrows a small property from the university. Ms. Ikemi says nature of Musashino (the old name for Western Tokyo) is well preserved in Komaba Campus, so the Campus is the favorite walking course for children.

The nursing policy of Komaba nursery is simple and somehow primitive, unlike other nurseries and kindergartens which give children special education. Komaba nursery thinks it is important for children to play by all their might with water, sand, and mud, eat natural delicious food, and come into contact with nature. The nursery is

comprised children from an infant to preschooler. At the age of 4 to 5, children in Komaba nursery climb Mt. Takao (599 meters above the sea), and children at preschool age experience harvest of rice in Sakae village in Nagano Prefecture. According to Ms. Ikemi, it is a good work off for restless children to play hard in nature.

About the advantage of nursery, Ms. Ikemi said “Unlike the kindergarten, day nursery is comprised of children from babies to preschoolers, and the relation of older and younger children arise. The older children help the younger ones in the nursery. Babies learn from the old children and when they grow up, they help the juniors as their seniors do. On the other hand, the older children feel relaxed touching the hands of babies. Occasionally, quarrel among children happens, however, a relationship of deep trust arise as they spend time in the same nursery for a long time.”

For us, how we spend our early age is an important matter for the cultivation of our character. Precisely for the reason that Japan has fewer and fewer children, reconsidering what preschool education should be is a significant question.

Komaba Shopping Street

By Abhishek Gupta

While going down the street from McDonalds all the way to the supermarket My Basket, one will come across many old shops and remains of shops which were closed recently or long time ago. While I used to think was that the decline of Komaba shopping street was directly related to the abolishment of the Komaba dormitory on campus, I realized that there are many more reasons to the notable decrease in the number of shops around Komaba campus.

Some of the major reasons for the decline of the street are the age of the owner and the abolishment of the Komaba dormitory. As most of the shops on the street were or are more than 20 years old. "If people are hungry, they will find something to eat, and life goes on," said the owner of MokMok bento shop which has closed now. She also added that, "Nowadays there are new shops in this area, they have a new bento service on campus, too. So it's probably time for us to take a break." As most of the owners and the workers are going into their 60s and 70s, it is hard for them to work long hours like they used to.

Yamate Ramen shop is not on this street, but is considered part of the Komaba shopping com-

munity as it is just behind the campus. Yamate Ramen shop is 25 years old and has seen many ups and downs, but the abolishment of the dormitory was one of the toughest time according to the owner. "The dormitory had around 400 people so it was the major source of customer for the ramen shop. Also most of the part time workers were students living in the dormitory," said the Yamate ramen owner. He added, "So when the dorm was abolished, our shop was affected, too, since there was a significant decrease in the number of potential customers." "The best thing about the shop is that it is just behind the university so it is really easy for us to have part time workers, as the students always drop by to applying for a part-time job."

There were many similarities as well as differences between the MokMok and Yamate Ramen. The similarities were mainly because the shops were very near to the university and catered to the university community. Nowadays there are many new shops which are more preferred over the old ones as these shops are more modern. This can be seen as McDonald is the favourite eating destination as many students prefer going there instead of other shops. Says the owner of



Entrance of Yamate Ramen shop (bottom) and MokMok bento shop (now closed).

MokMok, "it's time to move on and have a rest, and let others work hard just as we have been doing over the past 20-30 years."

A Food Review of the Cafeteria's Most Popular Dishes

By Marina Kondo

As the cherry blossoms begin to bloom, a new school semester begins. At the Komaba Campus of the University of Tokyo, students crowd the campus, classrooms, Communication Plaza, and most of all, the school cafeteria. As the clock hits 12, the "shokudo", as the school cafeteria is more commonly known as, begins to overflow with students forming queues to buy dishes from a variety of stations: noodles, bowls/curry, cafeteria, cold case, hot case, and the salad bar. For both newcomers and returnee students, choosing the right meal to eat for lunch or dinner can

be one of the most important and overwhelming decisions of the day.

To provide some help (and also as part of my personal interest), I've interviewed the Coop, the company that runs the first floor cafeteria, about their most popular* dishes, and decided to taste each dish myself.

*Based on sales

Here are the results:

1. Chicken Oroshi-Dare (Read *da-ray*)

Price: 300 yen

Calories: 353kcal

Comments: As simple as this dish may be, containing just French fries and boneless chicken with oroshi-dare, a soy sauce and grated Japanese radish based sauce, it kept me wanting more even after I was finished. At first, I was taken aback by the skin sitting on top of chicken, as I'm usually not a fan of chicken with skin, but the texture of both the skin and the chicken was a delightful surprise. The oroshi-dare sauce worked very well with the chicken, with only a hint of the Japanese radish flavor. The odd combination of French fries and oroshi-dare also worked surprisingly well – although it did leave my fries a bit soggy. The dish probably works best with a side of white rice and a cup of warm miso-soup.

Where to find it: Cafeteria station

Recommendation: I can definitely see why this would be a favorite! ★★★★★



2. Uma-kara Tofu

Price: 130 yen

Calories: 123kcal

Comments: At first, I was quite hesitant to try this dish since I have never liked tofu or bean sprouts, but this dish absolutely blew me away. The sauce made from spicy red chili peppers is the true winner that brilliantly flavors the tofu, bean sprouts, and shredded steamed chicken breast. But don't be fooled by the intense color – the sauce isn't as spicy as it looks. The spiciness is complimented by a tang of sweetness and the mellowness of the tofu. Every element of this dish works so well with each other, but I really have no doubt that this sauce could make just about anything taste a million times better!

Where to find it: Cold case section

Recommendation: ★★★★★





Photo: Xuan Truong Trinh.



At the Hongo Campus. Photo: Erika Nakayama.

All photos by author.



3. Kara-miso Ramen

Price: 360 yen

Calories: 791kcal

Comments: Unfortunately, I wasn't able to try this dish myself because it was sold out when I went, but it's definitely on my must-try list. According to the Coop, the kara-miso ramen may look extra spicy but the broth isn't as bad as it looks! Even if you aren't too fond of spicy dishes, it may be worth a try!

Where to find it: Noodles station

Recommendation: N/A



4. Curry Rice

Price: Ranges from 190 yen ~ 300 yen depending on the size

Calories: 585kcal

Comments: In Japan, the taste and ingredients of curry rice, a popular comfort food for many, usually varies depending on the household and restaurant. The curry rice at the cafeteria lacks uniqueness, but has the best cost-performance. The curry includes a few vegetables, probably carrots and potatoes, and comes with a side of rice. The flavor of the curry is quite standard, but you oddly never get tired of it. For an extra 160 yen to 170 yen, you can add a tonkatsu or pork cutlet.

Where to find it: Bowl/Curry station

Recommendation: A great go-to dish that keeps both your wallet and stomach happy! ★★★☆☆



5. Buta-miso Yakiniku-don

Price: Ranges from 320 yen ~ 460 yen depending on size

Calories: 764kcal

Comments: Another delightful surprise! This bowl, consisting of rice, onions, pork, and scallions really does an amazing job of filling you up. The miso flavor is not in any way overpowering as I had imagined it would be (which is definitely a good thing!), but you may become a bit bored of the flavor towards the end. (If that happens, I personally recommend pouring the leftover sauce from the uma-kara tofu to add a spicy twist.) The pork and onions seemed a tad bit oily, but the dish will definitely keep you satisfied until dinnertime.

Where to find it: Bowls station

Recommendation: ★★★☆☆

Discussing the Female Gender in Japan

By RongXuan Tan

Fly with beautiful girls from Todai! This promotional campaign by travel agency H.I.S in which rich travellers are offered a chance to be accompanied by a beautiful Todai girl on the plane came under fire recently¹. Such blatant objectification of women gratifyingly received widespread criticism from the public, but looking deeper, we realise that the girls participating in this campaign also appear in pictorial books of beautiful Todai girls released and sold by a Todai circle known as Todai Bijo Zukan, not only for internal consumption but for the public as well. It is said that they do so to show that Todai female students are not simply bookworms, but the question then is what is wrong with just being scholars and why is there a need to show that female Todai students can be beautiful as well?

This is just one manifestation of a larger problem in Japanese society: restrictive social norms regarding women and femininity which have been impressed upon girls since their youths and how most of the public ascribe to them, giving rise to a patriarchal and chauvinistic society, and choices made by Japanese women may just be a reflection of social norms.

It will come as no surprise for many to know that the University of Tokyo's ratio of male to female students is heavily skewed, with the female population comprising less than 20% of the entire student population². In contrast, the PEAK program has an almost 50-50 ratio of male and female students. Most prestigious

universities worldwide have roughly the same number of students of each gender. Why then, is the gender ratio so imbalanced in Todai? Are Japanese women just not as intelligent as Japanese men and are thus unable to gain admission into Japan's most prestigious university? Or is it simply the female high school students' choice not to come to Todai? And if so, how much of that choice is really a choice and free from social construct?

A second year Todai female student explains that even she herself debated whether to come to Todai or attend a local women's university. Female Todai students are said to have poorer dating and marriage prospects as many Japanese men do not like women who are as or more accomplished than they are, and the alternative option of becoming a housewife - the "ideal job" for women propagated by Japanese society - and not working makes coming to a top university unnecessary. These reasons turn Japanese girls away from applying to Todai in the first place.

Looking at the wider Japanese society as a whole, restrictions on women's civil liberties have been eliminated since the end of World War II. In this society, women are theoretically free to pursue their dreams. However, gender equality in Japan still lags far behind. According to the 2015 study by the World Economic Forum, Japan remains near the bottom of the gender gap ranking with one of the worst gender equality in the developed world, coming in 101 out of 142

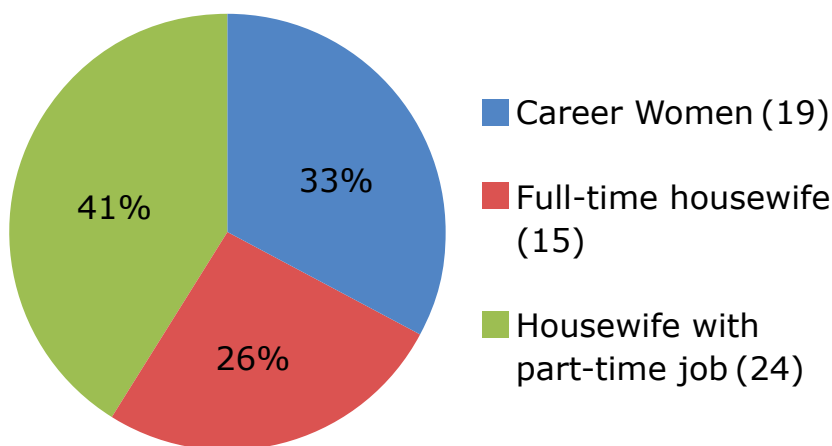
countries, even below less developed countries like Kenya and Bangladesh³. Female participation in the labour force in Japan is 63%, far lower than in other affluent countries. When women have their first child, 70% of them stop working for a decade or more, compared with just 30% in America; most of them do not return to the workforce⁴. Instead, they become housewives, looking after the house, taking on child-care duties and attending to elderly parents. One might argue that women have the freedom to choose for themselves whether or not to become career women or housewives or anything else, but similarly, how much does societal pressure influence these decisions or even restrict them?

Why then, do Japanese women not rise against such societal norms and pressures and overcome their subordination to men? One of the answers put forth by french philosopher Simone De Beauvoir is that women are unwilling to give up all the advantages this subordination brings. In exchange for their subordination, men provide women with protection, allowing them to avoid the risks of having to achieve things on their own. In other words, women are not simply oppressed by a patriarchal society but have an agency in their role as the submissive gender.

It seems that this applies to Japanese women as well. When the choice is between *sanshoku hirune tsuki* ("three meals and a nap") and the difficult life of an employee, it seems that it is no choice at all. A fourth year female Todai student who was interviewed said that she hopes to become a professional high flyer and indeed have already secured a job in a multinational Corporation, but she is the minority. The majority of female Todai students I surveyed would rather become a full-time housewife or a housewife with a part-time job. In Japan, it is not simply a case of chauvinistic men forcing women into a life of marriage and child-rearing; instead, women are choosing that lifestyle.

Shifting the focus back to Todai, it is an open secret that several circles restrict Todai female students from joining. What is more shocking is that some of these circles allow girls from other universities to join, just not those from Todai itself. While this kind of conduct is discouraged and has prompted the Executive Vice President of Todai to issue a circular commenting on it⁵, it is still largely accepted without question. The problem with the circles reflect a society that is still deeply patriarchal and chauvinistic, and what seems to be self-determination on the part of women may be nothing but an expression of societal standards that have been ingrained.

What do you want to be?



Survey of 58 female students on what they prefer of the 3 options given

¹ H.I.S. 'fly with girls of Todai' campaign crashes as travel agency assailed. (2016). The Japan Times. Retrieved from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/12/national/h-i-s-fly-with-girls-of-todai-campaign-crashes-as-travel-agency-assailed/#.VziYtpF96hd>

² Enrollment. (2015). Retrieved May 1, 2016, from <http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/about/enrollment.html>

³ Gender Gap Report 2015: Japan. (2015). World Economic Forum. Retrieved from <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR2015/JPN.pdf>

⁴ Japanese women and work: Holding back half the nation. (2014). The Economist. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21599763-womens-lowly-status-japanese-workplace-has-barely-improved-decades-and-country>

⁵ Comment on the Activities of Student Groups (2015). Retrieved from http://www.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/eng_site/zenki/news/kyoumu/2015/%28En-g%29gakuseishuchi.pdf

Tale of Being Famous

By Abhishek Gupta



My picture on The Asahi Shimbun (Courtesy of The Asahi Shimbun. This photo and the related article were published on December 12th, 2015.)

The tale begins with my acceptance by UTokyo for their PEAK program as an undergraduate student. It was the most unexpected part of my life because I was just aiming for the star but definitely landed on the sun. After my acceptance to PEAK my life has become a rollercoaster ride as my laughing face was on almost every national daily in India. The next stage of unexpected happiness was to know that international media, such as Daily Mail and New York Times reprinted my story.

Things happened so fast that just in a day most Indians knew that Abhishek Gupta was selected by UTokyo on full scholarship. The main reason of this fame was I being a part of the prestigious program in India called 'Super 30'. Super 30 gives special training to 30 talented students selected from all over India to pass the Indian Institute of Technology entrance exam. The founder of Super 30, Mr. Anand Kumar, has always been headline news for the media so being his first student from Super 30 to be selected by UTokyo

was just like icing on the cake for Super 30.

All my relatives were impatient to meet and congratulate me for this massive achievement as they were unaware about this acceptance and they were informed by my article in the regional newspaper. During that period my family was also interviewed which made me so happy because I was able to make my parents proud. So after all these events took place, all my friends and Super 30 staff started calling me "Japani Babu," which means "Indo-Japanese person."

After I came to Japan the legacy of giving interviews continued and in mid-December again my laughing face was on the front page of Asahi Shimbun which made me more popular this time among Japanese people. In class the professor posted a copy of the Asahi Shimbun article about me on the white board which was the best experience of my life as I became the star during the whole session. Recently I met an Indian student in Sendai who knew me as the newspaper

UTokyo student.

When I went back to India for vacations I was giving appointment to people so that they can meet me and present my story as an inspiration for their children. My story was inspirational for many students because I didn't have good education background as my father had been educated only till tenth standard, also my mother has been educated till high school. So, this is an extraordinary achievement for an Indian student like me.

The hardest part of this fame is when you talk to your friends and then they start abusing you by their harsh word for not talking to them very frequently. But there's also a bright part of this fame when you get to know that your friends boast about having a friend in UTokyo. Recently while talking to a friend she told me how she boast about having a friend on the front page of prestigious newspaper in Japan and getting attention which for me were heart touching words.

And Then There Were None: TV as a Graveyard for Queer Women

By Angeli Rambukpota



Roy Lichtenstein, *Crying Girl*, 1964. Enamel on steel (1923-1997), Milwaukee Art Museum. (Courtesy of rocor | Flickr)

Queer hearts alike were broken everywhere when a stray bullet pierced the abdomen of Commander Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey) of popular sci-fi drama *The 100* early March, leaving a trail of tears and anger in its wake. While the death was sad, it did what any TV show does: killed off a main character. And yet this particular death was met with a frenzy of angry emails and letters to the writers of the show, and many took to Twitter and other forms of social media to vent their frustrations as well.

So what made this death so special? This answer lies behind the increasingly popular tv trope: *Bury Your Gays*.

Bury Your Gays is a tv trope formed after countless lesbian or bisexual-identified women have been killed off on TV, usually following a happy event. While characters often die in fiction, it's important to note the difference from *Anyone Can Die* tropes in which death is part of the norm (eg. Soap operas, *Game of Thrones*), as audiences are more familiar with the fatal nature of the show. Queer mortality therefore presents an issue in shows that are not a part of the *Any-*

body Can Die trope, but in 'normal' shows where death plays a minor role.

According to LGBT pop-culture site *Autostraddle*, only 11% of the 18,000+ characters on TV are lesbian or bisexual, and of those characters, 65% are killed off and only 11% have a happy ending. In 2016 alone, 10 queer-identifying women have already been killed off on shows such as CW's *Jane the Virgin*, *The Vampire Diaries*, ABC's *The Catch*, and many more - in less than half of the year.

Queer women in TV often die after a happy event. In many cases, it's after they consummate their relationship with their implied love interest. In Jason Rothenberg's *The 100*, Lexa is shot by a stray bullet meant for her lover a mere scene after they sleep together for the first time. In Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Tara (Amber Benson) is again shot by a stray bullet shortly after being shown in bed with her on-off girlfriend Willow (Alyson Hannigan). And in Allan Heinberg's *The Catch*, Felicity is killed again with a bullet - this time intended for her - by a man she slept with after betraying information about his con-

artist sister (Sonya Walger), who she was involved with as well.

The list of dead queer characters in TV has reached 156 and counting.

"You always need drama", said a student from the University of Sheffield, "and death is a common way of creating that shock-factor". As a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the university student explains how Tara's death allowed for Willow's villainous story arch to take place along with furthering the plot for the straight main characters. "So as supporting characters, queer women are always killed off to 'support' and deepen the plotline of the main character.

After years of watching fictional women die in trivial manners, real-life women have started fundraisers and campaigns to promote awareness for the lesbian death trope. Movements such as *LGBT Fans Deserve Better* raised \$125,000 for LGBT suicide prevention and mental health organisation *The Trevor Project*, while more writers are beginning to instill the *Lexa Pledge* in attempts to reconcile and learn from the damages of *The 100*'s major character death.

The overwhelming amount of responses online has also forced major entertainment websites to report on the issues of queer women and representation in media, which has allowed for the

topic to become an issue that can no longer be ignored by society itself.

Stories have, and continue to, shape a fundamental part of human nature. Borrowing the words of the late great actor Alan Rickman, "stories are an ancient need" - a means to identify and understand ourselves. As minorities, queer women are rarely represented in TV, and in the rare chances they play a supporting or leading role, they are either killed off or punished for accepting their sexuality.

What happens in fiction doesn't stay in a fictional universe but rather, has repercussions in reality. It's no coincidence that same-sex marriage became more accepted as more TV shows portrayed loving and healthy LGBT relationships. So when TV continues to massacre queer women, what does that say about society's message to LGBT people?

As the university student suggests, "It's ok to be gay, as long as you realise that life will be inevitably harder for you as a queer person. You should also probably invest in a bulletproof vest".

Pressure on Todai Joshi

By Yuya Nagata

On May 11th, 2016, H.I.S., a Japanese major travel agency, canceled a campaign which would provide to overseas-bound travellers a chance to fly with girls from Todai *bijo zukan*, a collection of beautiful girls at the University of Tokyo. This controversial campaign was that five female students of the University of Tokyo belonging to Todai *bijo zukan* would sit next to customers during the flight and talk to them. This campaign said that the customers could enjoy “witty and intelligent conversations” for example about architectures and history of the destination with these beautiful female students at Todai. The main reasons why this campaign invited strong criticism were that the content of this campaign was vulgar and might lead to sexual harassment, or that femininity was used as commodity.

However, are these reasons really right? Maybe feeling that this campaign is sexual harassment or vulgar is based on assumptions that the customers would be men but this campaign is not limited to male customers and this logic leads to that thought that jobs such as bar hostesses are also vulgar or not decent jobs. It is a fact that

femininity is used as commodity but there are some jobs which use masculinity or femininity as commodity like idols. I think this scandal resulted from biased images of “Todai-joshi” in Japanese society. So I would like to consider the meaning the word “Todai-joshi” has in Japanese society.

“Todai”, the University of Tokyo is probably the most famous Japanese national university in Japan. The University of Tokyo is generally considered the top university in Japan and produces a lot of famous politicians, bureaucrats, scholars, and so on. So many people have stereotypes such as “elite” or “smart” to the students of the university of Tokyo. I think that publicity of the University of Tokyo and existing biased image to the students of Todai made this campaign controversial. If other college students had participated in this campaign, it might not have been such a big problem.

Another point is that this campaign put emphasis on “joshi”(girls), precisely “bijo”(beautiful girls). Using the word “bijo” made a strong impression of femininity and beauty good-lookingness.

Moreover, limiting participants to girls made people assume that they would sit next to male customers, so many people felt that this campaign was sexual harassment. However, customers were not limited to men and there is no reason that they claim that this is sexual harassment because receiving customers is not vulgar thing even if customers are men. Moreover, this campaign assumed family customers for example there was an advertisement of this campaign that says one of the students would help customers’ summer homework. I think a part of people connected emphasis of femininity and good-lookingness appearance of the students with sexual harassment.

From two points I mentioned above, the word “Todai-Bijo” has a meaning that the girls are the University of Tokyo students but pretty or beautiful to many Japanese people. The stereotypes and biases images of “Todai” and “girls” made this campaign a big problem. Todai-joshi have difficulties between the two words in Japanese society.

From ABC to あいうえお

By Kyle Smith

Let me preface this by saying I am awful at Japanese. I’m the guy who doesn’t know what he doesn’t know in a conversation, and just says *hai* and hopes it moves the conversation along. I’m the guy who spends 5 minutes looking up a kanji character he’s used for over 3 years. I studied four years in high school before entering Japan and PEAK, so I thought my Japanese ability must have been hot stuff. “Yeah, sometimes I turn away from my subtitled anime and I still understand what’s being said, I’ve pretty much mastered this language”. Turns out high school isn’t the most intensive environment and watching *mameshiba* cartoons and Miyazaki movies doesn’t quite equate to hitting the books.

In the PEAK program, all students are required to take intensive Japanese courses their first year. These courses do it right-- essays, speeches, presentations, the need for flash cards and notebooks of the same character scrawled out a thousand times over. I learned more in one semester of intensive Japanese than I did in four years of high school. I want to continue learning Japanese, but now that my time in intensive Japanese has ended, it’s hard to find motivation to study. So, I’ve started to branch out, or at least broaden my definition of “study,” to find ways to use and improve my Japanese skills.

It is extremely useful to simply hear Japanese being spoken. For this reason, subtitled TV and movies are very useful. There are two ways of watching: actively and inactively. Inactive viewing is the non-Japanese learner’s case of simply reading subtitles and watching what’s on screen. Active viewing is where the viewer attempts to

simultaneously listen to Japanese dialogue and read translated subtitles. By doing this every line of dialogue can be treated like some algebraic equation waiting to be solved. “I know this means this, but what did that word mean? Or that grammar form?” This is where the active viewer uses the context of what they can understand in Japanese, and identifies and fills in the blank with knowledge gained from subtitles.

As far as reading goes, my personal demon is kanji (chinese characters)-- if a kanji is unknown, there’s no way to understand without help. I acknowledge the value of sitting down and practicing writing kanji, but I’m not disciplined enough to find time for it. This is where my personal hero, furigana, swoops in and shines a phonetic alphabetical light upon the dark forces that are kanji. Mixing study with play, I think reading manga and playing video games in Japanese can be helpful. Most manga will have furigana to show the pronunciation of kanji, and being comics they have pictures to help give context. Most kids games like *Pokemon* will have furigana or no kanji in the first place, so if others games are too difficult I recommend trying them. These mediums are similar to anime where new Japanese skills can be gained by reading context, but if you prefer gaming or reading over watching, and maybe want to chip away at their mountain of unknown kanji, you should give these mediums a try.

The best method I’ve found is actually, believe it or not, talking to people! Whether it is in person or online, talking to others will present you with a wide variety of topics to talk about, and friends



Those new to the study of Japanese might find themselves studying in a kanji workbook like this one (Courtesy Jackson Boyle | Flickr)

can adapt their language to your skill level. It’s good to have common interests to talk about, so joining circles with others with similar interests can help you build conversational skills around your interests. Reading and writing (at least typing) skills can then be honed by keeping in touch over messaging services like LINE. Messaging can also be practiced through online video games, and apparently Japanese Tinder is full of those seeking language exchange.

For new and old Japanese speakers alike, I think it’s important to find what works for you. Find ways to not even necessarily study, but expose yourself to the language in ways interesting to you. Whether it’s staring at characters in a textbook or characters in a book or on a screen, exposure is exposure. When we all learned our first language, it was new and exciting, and definitely not done through a textbook.

Brexit: What Youths Should Take Away from This

By RongXuan Tan



Voting (Courtesy of Justin Grimes | Flickr)

Remain or Leave? After months of campaigning, market fluctuation as pre-referendum polls to gauge voting intentions were conducted, a nation getting more divided, and a tragic death, the day of the referendum dawned on 23rd June. The British went to the polls, and Vote Leave won with a slight majority of 51.9%. This article is not to expound on the pros and cons of the United Kingdom remaining in or leaving the European Union (EU), but to raise the importance of youths - who are known to be politically apathetic - exercising their right to vote.

Immediately after the referendum result was set in the stone, British youths took to social media to express their anger and disappointment at the outcome. Sixteen and seventeen year olds also protested over the fact that they were not allowed to vote and had no say in this decision that would affect the rest of their lives. Many young people are calling Brexit a betrayal by the older generations who have less to lose and will not have to live with the consequences of leaving the EU for as long a time. Young people were overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the EU, with 75% of young people voting to remain in the referendum. However, they failed to turn up to vote in sufficient numbers; only an estimated 36% of 18-24 year olds voted. The poor showing among the youths allowed the older generation - the majority of whom supported Brexit - to seal their fate.

One lesson to take away from this for youths all over the world is that through our vote, we have a political voice, and this vote is something we should not waste and should instead wield actively when the time comes. We should not naively believe that everyone else will vote and the final outcome would be what we have hoped for, and thus there is no need to vote or that we can vote irresponsibly, nor should we be politically apathetic. Regardless of whether it is a referendum or an election, all this will affect your country and by default you. Being engaged in politics through a simple act of voting can help to ensure that the outcome and its consequences is something you have chosen for yourself and would be best for you - or even something that you have tried your best to avert - rather than having to bear the brunt of a decision made by someone else and regretting not having voted in the first place.

In Japan, the House of Councillors elections are round the corner, and the voting age has been reduced from 20 to 18 years old. Two and a half million 18 and 19 year-olds can now vote for the upcoming elections, which is especially important as a national referendum to amend Article 9 of the Constitution can be called if the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition secure a two-thirds majority. However, how many of these new voters - and young people in general - will exercise their right to vote? Japan's young voters are not particularly active, with less than 33% of those in

their 20s voting in the 2014 general election. In contrast, voter turnout for those in their 60s and over 70s were 68% and 60% respectively. The low turnout rate among young Japanese voters have led political parties to focus on older voters, but this is hardly beneficial to Japanese society as a whole. With political parties courting elderly voters with generous pension and other welfare benefits, Japan's national debt has ballooned as the country ages, and this debt is something young voters will have to shoulder in the future.

A Japanese friend I spoke to recently said he will not vote as he does not know enough to make an informed decision, and a recent NHK survey echoed similar sentiments among new voters. I say do your research, that's what Google is there for! Keep up with the news, look up party manifestos and what each party stands for, think critically to determine if the promises made are feasible - unlike in Brexit where people were lured by false promises - and ultimately decide which is the best choice. And in the absence of a choice you will willingly put your all behind, employ the minimax strategy and vote to avoid the worst outcome.

Our forefathers fought long and hard for democracy and for "one person, one vote". We, the youths, who will bear the brunt of any negative repercussions and who will be the ones at the helm in the future, should not let our right to vote go to waste.

Global Warming: Global warning to all

By Hye June Seo

T-shirts, short pants, ice cream, water parks... summer is coming. The scorching season is again without doubt on its way to us. Whenever it's summer, we unconsciously look out for clothes that expose more of our skin, or go into stores with strong air conditioning. According to NASA's global temperature data, 2015 was the hottest year ever and it's likely that 2016 will be replaced as the hottest year on record. Apparently, weather extremes are not a surprise anymore. I'm sure everyone knows the answer to the question, 'What's going on?' A warning often disregarded, global warming is getting closer to us accompanying more extreme storms or wild fires, melting sea ice, coral bleaching, and a plenty of other disasters.

I remember my first group project that I did in my 2nd year in elementary school. Our group was assigned a task to search about the polar bear and its relation to global warming. Until then, I hardly knew about polar bears and global warming. Thanks to the school project, I managed to know that the climate change is destroying ice on the Arctic Ocean and it is humans that are killing these cute bears. Even though this project was more than 10 years ago, I can still remem-



Tired-lone polar bear on melted iceberg (Courtesy of Smudge 9000 | Flickr)

ber it vividly because it was such a shock to an 8 year old. However, the circumstance has only gotten worse, and with the advanced camera technologies, more vivid and live photos are taken now, some capturing the harsh life moments. I felt helpless that there was nothing I did for them.

Polar bears may have been one of the first symbolic victims of global warming. However, plants and foods are also in danger. For example, everyone's sweet remedy "chocolate" is also on the threatened food list. In four decades, the amount of land available for growing cocoa has dropped 40%. In the next 35 years, the temperature in

Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, where 70% of cocoa is grown, is set to rise by 2 degrees Celsius, which will be too dry for cocoa. Plus, the world's super fruit avocado is at risk, too. Scientists from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory predict as much as a 40 percent decrease in avocado production over the next 30 years due to increasing temperatures brought on by climate change. Coffee, beer, beans, wine, apple are no exception either. It's sad, but it's the truth. We have to do something to stop, or being realistic, slower the process.

Amazingly, The University of Tokyo built a eco-facility in Komaba campus called 21 KOMCEE West. As the target facility of the 「Next Generation Energy-Saving Architecture System Verification Project」 launched by New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO), they have introduced an underground water circulating cooling-heating system, radiation panel system, photovoltaic power system and artificial intelligence energy managing system, and also with the cooperation of the The University of Tokyo's research institute of technology production, the building is playing its role contributing to the zero emission of carbon dioxide.

「TEDxUTokyo ~奇跡待つ静寂~」 (Quietness awaits miracle). Photo by Chia Yabui.



EXPLORING JAPAN

Shingeki no Gaijin: “Fitting In” to Japan

By Kyle Smith

Before leaving my home in the United States for Japan, my father gave me a piece of advice: “Make sure you don’t knock down any power lines”. Measuring at 193 centimeters, it’s only natural I find myself at the butt end of such jokes better suited for someone like Godzilla. When considering average heights for men in America and Japan, which are 176 and 170 centimeters respectively, the difference may not seem like much. But when one country has a history of diverse body types and one does not, major differences can be seen. It’s impossible to separate the norms of Japanese body image from Japan and its culture, and the relation is seen especially in architecture, fashion, and even social interactions.

Admittedly being tall has some perks. When riding Japanese trains, I find myself in my own private atmosphere above the commotion of any hot, crowded car. Another advantage is a bird’s eye view over any otherwise overwhelming crowd like those in Shibuya crossing. Such advantages are short lived and seem to disappear should I decide to quite literally duck into a store.



A head above everyone else

My presence at some of the more compact restaurants in Japan have been described as looking like a college student volunteering at an elementary school and having to sit at one of the children’s desks.

Within the halls of the aged Komaba Lodge B are where I count my blessing for not being any taller; the many low thresholds in this university dorm give me good reason to never test how much spring I can put in my step. More discomfort can be experienced in the lodge’s kitchens and bathrooms, where many a time I’ve stood up too quickly from tasting a dish and hit my head on the stove’s vent hood or brushed my hair on the ceiling of a bathroom stall. On the bright side, every morning I get a leg workout by lowering myself below the showerhead.

Needless to say clothes shopping is difficult. I’m lucky to have a relatively short torso, so everything waist-up is fair game for me in Japan. That relative shortness, however, just makes my legs an even bigger problem. Finding jeans my size in America was already tough, so in Japan it would seem even more difficult. Luckily, stores like Uniqlo which offer tailoring services carry pants with oversized inseams for their waist so they may be hemmed down to a shorter fit. Lucky for me said exaggerated inseam is just my size! Shoes are another story. So far I have found three pairs of shoes in my size of 31 centimeters in Tokyo, two of which are basketball shoes. Just my luck the one thing I need to bring to Japan takes up the most space.

Much like the clothing I buy or the accommoda-

tive architecture I appreciate, I am an outlier in Japan. It’s hard to separate the social struggles from those of a tall person and those of a non-Japanese person (in my case caucasian). The first social effect of height is the exacerbation of *gaijin* (foreigner) treatment. If someone was going to assume I’m a tourist who doesn’t speak any Japanese before seeing I’m a head and shoulder above the person next to me, they would after. It would also be lovely to have a conversation that doesn’t start with and revolve around “How many centimeters are you?”.

Second is staring. Since I can see above everyone in a crowd, everyone in the crowd can see me, too. People are very considerate and try not to, but after a while I’ve noticed I attract and hold people’s attention more than any of my friends. Last is something that I’m sure many tall people feel, but is very apparent in Japan: I take up space. I feel guilty standing in front of people at a performance or expo, sitting on the train and having my legs jut out, or being the last to get on a crowded train or elevator. Elevators are my favorite trifacta -- I can bump my head, get stared at, and take up too much space in one go!

Despite some child-sized environments, shopping troubles and awkward moments, I think Japan has treated me well. Being tall in Japan is not much different from being tall anywhere else, just a bit more extraordinary. It makes for some fun stories, some advantages, and some disadvantages, but in the end it’s another form of physical diversity that hasn’t been explored too much yet. And to some, in Japan especially, diversity has been a foreign concept.

Be careful of “Shigatsu-byo” and “Gogatsu-byo” in spring!

By Yuya Nagata

Spring is a beautiful season. It gets warm and you can enjoy seeing beautiful flowers like cherry blossom. But there is also sickness for especially college students that they must be careful of in spring. That is “Shigatsu-byo” and “Gogatsu-byo”.

“Shigatsu-byo” means April sickness. It is not an official illness but Japanese college students usually use this word as slang. The symptoms are you feel too highly motivated and tend to try something too eagerly. For example, a college student with April sickness will want to take many courses or make too many plans which he usually won’t be able to follow up on. April sickness is a little similar to being Manic. April sickness may be based on Japanese annual customs in this season. April is considered the start of new life to many Japanese people with entrance ceremonies, start of new semester or company entrance ceremonies. So many people, especially freshmen have big expectations or high motivations for the new stage of their lives.

April sickness often results in May sickness called “Gogatsu Byo.” This sickness is widely known but is not an official name. The symptom of May sickness is similar to that of depression.

If you get May sickness, you cannot keep high motivation or sleep well and feel weary. For example, a college student who was highly motivated and registered for many courses in April may gradually find the workload to be a burden and may not feel motivated to study hard.

The main reason why many students get May sickness is that they cannot adapt to the new environment and feel stress or tired and accumulate frustration or fatigue not only physically but also mentally. Moreover, the motivation of most students often gradually decreases from April to May but they have to continue their tasks or plan which they committed to in April. May sickness tends to develop from the second week of May. This is related to the holidays in Japan. There are four public holidays from the end of April to the start of May, so most college students do not go to college. After this short break, some students cannot revert back to the academic life and develop May sickness.

As you see, these two sicknesses are partly connected to Japanese custom. It may make these two seasonal symptoms interesting. However, people with May sickness may suffer from that

sickness for a long time and have trouble recovering from it. In order to prevent from getting April sickness or May sickness, there are several ways. It is important not to impose excessive burden or stress on yourself. You need to communicate with other people, sleep well and understand how much work you can do in the long term before committing to everything.



A depressed person. (Copyright Irasutoya)

Hello, Kitty: A Look into Cat Culture in the Digital Age

By Angeli Rambukpota

Cats are predicted to surpass dogs as the country's No.1 household pet, according to a recent study conducted by the Japan Pet Food Association.

That's right, surpass dogs; the longtime best friend of mankind. Just last October, cat ownership in Japan has reached 9.87million and is believed to surpass the number of dog owners, which has staggered at 11.5 million. As a proud dog owner of three years, I cannot begin to fathom the reason behind the growing obsession for these stone cold felines.

But if the rise in unusual cat paraphernalia (eg. Yankee Candle's delightfully exotic *Whiskers on Kittens* fragrance) is anything, cats are slowly taking the world by storm.

Just last year, the popular app game *Nekoatsume* (Kitty Collector) - a simple game in which the sole aim is to lure rare stray cats into the player's home and backyard through various incentives - was released and had quickly become an international sensation. While simple in concept, the game had surpassed 10 million downloads and was honored as one of GameSpot's Top 5 Mobile Games of 2015. Even for a game that allows you to become the crazy cat lady of your dreams, this statistic is still pretty insane.

So why the sudden surge in fixation? Like most

millennial obsessions, it started on the Internet.

Youtube might as well be a haven for weirdly endearing cat videos. With the rise of Internet and social based technology, people have been able to share pictures and videos of their cats. Apps and websites like Instagram and Tumblr acting as digital megaphones provide a platform for cat-enthusiasts alike to share pictures and stories of their beloved fur-children.

A lot of people also love having cats over dogs because they are relatively easier to take care of and they require less interaction with the outside world, not to mention the economic benefits of owning cats. People have less time for social interaction and pet care, considering the growing ageing population and stress on the working sector. Economically, cats only cost 70,000 yen for the duration of their lifespan, while dogs cost 119,000 yen in their lifetime.

Interestingly, there has been a reported increase in male cat-owners in Japan. "They're like children and girlfriends, rolled into one body," said Kyoto University student Jun Ito. "Even when you're feeling down, they keep you company by pressing up against your body. Since cats tend to have an image of elegance, my female friends often compliment me on my 'fancy' lifestyle as well" (ITmedia).



Screencap of International Sensation *Nekoatsume* (Kitty Collector). (Courtesy of Jason Pettis | Flickr)

The term *Neko-danshi* (Cat-men) also refers to a category of men who are considerably more selfish, self-invested and well - like a cat. While these labels extend to dog men/women as well, it's intriguing to see just how far cats have seeped into Japanese culture.

As someone who chokes back a sob whenever they encounter a dog, I am slightly ashamed to say that even I have a steadily growing stash of cat stationery. And yet, a part of me has also begun to admire the level of influence cats have worldwide. When will this cat-craze end? Will they leave their cold, unforgiving eyes and learn to love us? Why am I googling health care options for my non-existent cat? While these questions are daunting to say the least, for now, whether we love them or not, the cat craze is here to stay.

What's your relationship with your umbrella?

By Naoki Mizutani

How many umbrellas do you own? I have at least three or more umbrellas. According to Weather News' 2014 Global Umbrella survey by Weather News, Japanese people have an average of 3.3 umbrellas - which, surprisingly was the highest number of umbrellas to own among the countries surveyed. As for the reason, Weather News suggested that wet clothes do not dry well in Japan because of the humid climate, and the use of umbrellas is widespread among the Japanese public from Edo era. At that time, however, umbrella was a little expensive for public, so they used one umbrella carefully for a long time. The world average was 2.4 umbrellas, with China ranked fifth with 2.2, and England listed, eighth with 1.9 umbrellas. Naturally, countries that have many rainy days tend to rank in higher positions.

This survey was conducted in June 2014, and 37,663 weather reporters from 35 countries cooperated with Weather News to investigate the world umbrella conditions. Details of the survey can be found on their website¹.

Just how many umbrellas do Japanese people use per year? Japan Umbrella Promotion Association(JUPA) estimates that roughly 120 million to 130 million umbrellas are used annually, which is approximately equal to the population of Japan. It is said that this consumption

amount is the largest in the world, and more than half of which are plastic umbrellas. Generally speaking, plastic umbrellas are not used carefully compared with colored fabric ones. For example, if you take a walk in the city after a typhoon, you will find many broken plastic umbrellas thrown away on the streets. They are hard to disassemble, and often buried without taking to pieces.

Furthermore, many people tend to misplace or forget their umbrellas. According to a press release issued by JR East in 2006², a remarkable 270,000 umbrellas were delivered as lost property to the train company in 2004. Although station staff repeatedly remind the passengers to pay attention to their umbrellas on rainy days, umbrellas continue to be the most frequent item on the lost-and-found list. What happens to the lost umbrellas kept long time in station or police office? Of course, they are disposed of, even if they are still usable.

How should we improve this not-eco-friendly situation? Project "SHIBUKASA" attempts to tackle the issue through providing an umbrella-sharing service in Shibuya. This service is an umbrella sharing system around Shibuya. Collecting the contributions of lost plastic umbrellas from offices, they make them suitable for partnership stores like hair salons, cafés, and apparel shops



Shibuya Scramble Crossing on a rainy day (Courtesy of Seemann | Morguefile)

around Shibuya. When it suddenly rains, these plastic umbrellas are lent to the shoppers caught without an umbrella. This project aims to create a sustainable community with kindness and connection between people.

I think how Japanese people treat umbrellas reflects the modern Japanese attitude toward goods. Would you like to reconsider the relation between you and your umbrella?

¹ English version
<http://sunnycomb.tumblr.com/post/90373669845/global-umbrella-survey-results>

Japanese version
<http://weathernews.com/ja/nc/press/2014/140724.html>,
http://weathernews.jp/smart/umbrella_survey/result/

² https://www.jreast.co.jp/press/2006_1/20060502.pdf

Wagashi -our savior, anko and kanten-

By Yuka Fujiwara



anmitsu (a popular Japanese sweets made by kanten)



mizu-youkan (a popular Japanese sweets made by kanten)

Traditional Japanese meal “washoku” is famous for its healthiness and it has been added to the World Intangible Cultural Heritage. But did you know that not only Japanese meal, but also Japanese sweets, “wagashi” are sweets known for being less of “guilty” eating? Wagashi is said to be better for those who are on a diet than western sweets. Why is that?

One big reason of the healthiness is hidden in the ingredients. Fat has the highest calorie compared to protein and carbohydrate. “Western” sweets, represented by cakes, pies, waffles are made with a lot of butter, eggs, fresh cream and all of these include much fat.

On the other hand wagashi represented by anko (sweet bean paste) and dango are made with azuki-beans and glutenous rice. Compared to the ingredients of Western sweets, these include little fat and are low calorie. Especially anko, a main character of wagashi, is not only low calorie but is also good for beauty. Specifically, containing iron and polyphenol, it helps prevent anemia and keeps our skin beautiful. Also, azuki-bean, the component of anko, contains vitamin B1 which changes sugar to energy in our bodies. So, after eating your fatigue may be lightened. Furthermore, wagashi goes well with green tea, which contains tea-catechin. This encourages the burning of fat. Wagashi and green tea are

best buddies and work best together.

The other miracle ingredient that makes wagashi diet-friendly is *kanten*. Kanten was born in Japan in the Edo era, and is one of the main ingredients of many wagashi. It is mainly made of tengusa seaweed with plenty of dietary fiber and has almost no calories. Thanks to dietary fiber, kanten lowers blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, preventing obesity. Needless to say this is much healthier than those using sugar and

fat. Kanten itself has no flavor, which means it can be any flavor by being cooked with various foods.

For example, with fruit it becomes fruit jelly. Kanten has no colour and is translucent, so

using many kinds of fruit, it not only tastes good, but also looks good. If you cook with anko with kanten, this is *mizu-youkan*. These two examples show kanten can be used for both Western and Japanese sweets. And the great thing is that, kanten is so easy to cook. Basically all you have to do is boil, mix and refrigerate.

Generally sweets are thought to be a big enemy of those who are on a diet. Though, at the same time, sweets have the positive effect of making us feel happy. Most people have the dilemma of not being able to live without sweets but also not wanting to gain weight. Maybe wagashi can be a savior for us all.

Unusual ways of eating cheese

By Yuka Fujiwara

As a student living alone in Tokyo, I have to prepare meals for myself to live. Being a food lover, I wish to eat many kinds of food. However, there is a big problem-I cannot finish eating entire packages. Say I wished to eat plenty fruit, and bought apples, oranges and strawberries. Few days later, they change colours and get bad. Like this, if I buy many types of food, it goes beyond the amount for one college student. This is completely a waste of food and money. Therefore I can only buy one type of food and keep eating it until it ends. Needless to say, it is easy to get bored finishing a package of something.

My experience living alone in Tokyo and my persistence in eating many kinds of food has made me invent a few recipes. Here I introduce my special cheese recipes, my favorite food with many nutrition.

They can be made easily, and above all, they are a bit different from the conventional way of eating this dairy product.

Recipe 1. “Kireteru cheese” (sliced cheese)

Normally *kireteru* cheese is eaten as it is from the package. This food is famous, but I guess not many people know that by putting it in the microwave, it changes dramatically.

I guess some of you have experience getting tired of the the cheese at the end of the package

as you keep eating. Enters here the microwave. All you need is a plate and some parchment paper. Place the parchment paper and *kireteru* cheese on the plate. Then microwave it for about 1.5-2minutes. That’s it! Take it out from the microwave and viola! *Kireteru* cheese has changed its appearance to something completely different! The soft clean rectangle has disappeared. It tastes and looks like a cheese cracker.



Kireteru cheese before microwaved



Kireteru cheese after microwaved

What You Should Know about Matcha

By Seo Hye June

I remember hesitating which ice cream to order during my very first stay in Kyoto. In the menu, there were photos of three flavors including vanilla, green tea, and a mixed one. Written *Matcha* ice cream on the menu, I thought it was the exact Japanese word meaning *green tea*, which was a little different. It seems a lot of people including some Japanese, don't know the difference between Matcha and green tea. So what's so special about Matcha?

Put it simply, Matcha is one type of green Tea. Including Matcha, Sencha, Gyokuro, and Bancharui, there are four types of green Tea. The most popular green tea drink in the market is Sencha. The major difference between Matcha and Sencha, is the way of cultivation. Before 2 weeks of harvesting the tea leaves, Matcha is grown in a tea field covered with shade to evade the sunlight. However, Sencha is grown at a field exposed to sky. Adding to that, Matcha is ground powdered green tea while Sencha is a ground leaf. Because it requires a lot of care during the process, it is expensive than the normal green tea. Due to its umami (savory), Matcha is normally used in traditional tea ceremonies of Japan, and desserts like snacks-cakes and drinks.

Including Matcha, Japan's green tea has outstanding health benefits. Matcha is especially known for being rich in theanines and catechins. Theanine relaxes those who take it in and has a effect of soothing one's feelings. Catechins are compounds of polyphenol that contains many effects like diet effect and antioxidant effects.

For those who find Matcha too bitter, Matcha sweets could be another way of enjoying Japan's most revered tea. Any foreigner can easily find

many snacks and sweets using matcha in Japan. Almond chocolate (Meiji), Meiji Rich Matcha biscuits, Otona Puchi Chocosand Uji Matcha (Bourbon), Oreo Premium Noukou Matcha Milk Cream, and Starbucks Discoveries Kyoto Matcha Latte. These make for a great gift to family and friends overseas; reasonable and distinctly a product of Japan.

Matcha drinks, Matcha sweets are indeed a unique culture of Japan, which is also why it is so popular.

Near Komaba, there are two places prized for its Matcha drinks and sweets. Both two stations away from Komaba Todai Mae, one is in Shibuya and the other in Shimokitazawa. Located on the 5th floor of Shibuya Hikarie, Zenkasyoin (然花抄院) provides customers with sweet Matcha castella and ice cream. On the 2nd basement floor of Hikarie, people can buy Matcha, the powder itself and enjoy it at home. In Shimokitazawa, you can find Shimokita chaen Ooyama (しもきた茶苑大山), a store known for its shaved ice with Matcha syrup on the top.



Matcha full of savory



Photo: Xuan Truong Trinh.

Recipe 2. "Cream cheese"

Cream cheese is another popular product. The mild and sweet taste goes very well with bread and crackers and is the ingredient of many sweets. Many people hold off on consuming large amounts of cream cheese because of the high calorie, even if they love the taste. Here is a recipe for those who are health conscious and want just enough to fulfill your sugar crave.

First, are bread and crackers the only things we can put cheese on? Definitely no. In my special recipe, you spread cheese on Tofu (I strongly recommend mascarpone cheese); the silky tofu are particularly good for this.

You can put any jam you like. (Daredevils may find sweet bean paste to be a good match it, too.) You might have difficulty imagining how it tastes or even don't feel like trying it, but this is really good.



Tofu with mascarpone cheese and blueberry jam

And it is low calorie! This tofu and cheese will be a hero for those who are on a diet, but also want to eat sweets.

Thanks to these special recipes, I am able to

enjoy the satisfaction of finishing packages. Not only good for my purse and environment, but also it is very fun thinking and trying them out.



Editor's Note

Komaba Times is an English-language newsletter written by students at the University of Tokyo. Our goal is to create a place for students to voice their opinions to the university community as well as to the wider world.

This year we are fortunate to have a small group of dedicated student volunteers who have asked to be involved more heavily in the production of Komaba Times. Their enthusiasm will no doubt have a positive impact on the newsletter, as the newly improved website has proven.

Komaba Times is happy to celebrate its continued cooperation with *Todai Shimbun*, which is the official student newspaper at the University. Some of the stories from Komaba Times have been translated and reposted on *Todai Shimbun* for their digital content.

We are delighted that these alliances among our young student journalists are being forged, especially in an age where critical engagement with society has become increasingly crucial.

We hope to hear from readers as well as students who would like to join our endeavor.

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