

AJET

CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

APRIL
2016

DON'T STOP THAT K-POP
MIKANSHU, I CHOOSE YOU
KICKBOXING IN KUMAMOTO
WORKOUT THE WORKOUT GEAR
CONCERT CULTURE COMPARISONS



The Japanese Lifestyle & Culture
Magazine Written by the International
Community in Japan

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NATIONAL AJET COUNCIL 2016-17 ELECTIONS

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This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can be found online at AJET.net here. Read Connect online and follow us on ISSUU.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello! Welcome to the April 2016 edition of Connect magazine.

Spring is here and surrounding us with beautiful shades of pink. Definitely an image many people relate with Japan. But for many of us, it is also the mark of a new working/studying year. The beautiful flowers are always a great way to start the year, however fleeting they may be.

What have you been up to of late? Feel free to show us! As an avid photographer myself, I enjoy looking at our submissions, and knowing that there is massive talent within these communities. So please continue sending us updates on your lives through our social media channels.

Talking of art in all its forms, 'C' The Art Issue will be hitting your dashboards soon, so please do keep an eye out! We've had some wonderful submissions, and I'm so excited to see how the Art team have put it all together.

A few stories from this month: the collective effervescence of K-Pop festivals; pumpkin piers and art islands; upping your liquor game with a Mikanshu recipe; a collection of wonderful photos from the famous snow festival; the various cultural barriers we're faced with in Japan; plus tons more!

Last month marked the five-year mark of the devastation that occurred throughout Japan on March 11th. From the various conversations I have had with those who were high up in these mountains, it will reside as a memory in the hearts and minds of all the people in Japan. Despite the tragedy, it is important to know that the worst hit areas are rebuilding and creating a livable, happy environment. The strength of people is shown by how they can react in adverse situations, and sometimes it's wonderful. Let that be some inspiration for your month ahead.

As always, have a wonderful month.

Rajeev Rahela
Head Editor
2nd-year Gifu ALT



**PHOTO
SUBMISSIONS**

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IN SUBMITTING A
COVER PHOTO FOR
THE NEXT ISSUE?
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INFORMATION AND
TO SUBMIT YOUR
PHOTOS!**



NEWS & EVENTS

NEWS EDITOR

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Margaret Pickard

Enkai, sleep, enkai, crack open the windows for the first time in 6 months. It's truly spring.

EVENTS EDITOR

connect.events@ajet.net

Jennifer Sanchez

"ANYTHING can be solved with rock-paper-scissors. Anything." - A certain first grader.

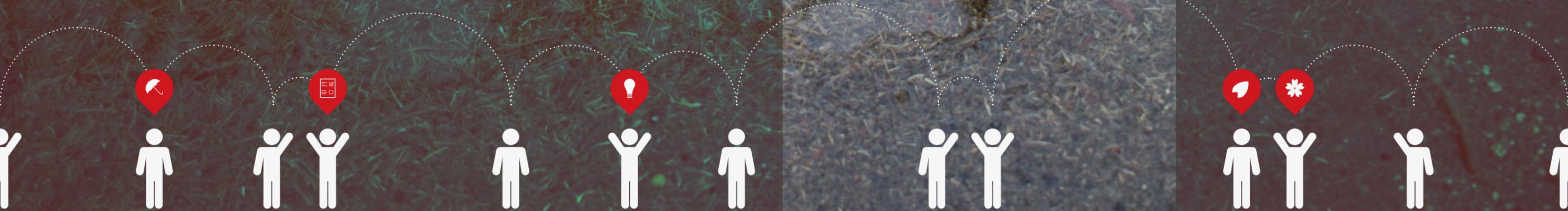
 *Illaura Rossiter*

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JAPAN AND KOREA'S "COMFORT WOMEN" DEAL

CHRIS SANTOS (HOKKAIDO)

평화 비

일본군 위안부 피해자에게 정의를!

일본정부는 일본군 '위안부' 피해자에게 공식사죄

일본정부는 일본군 '위안부' 피해자에게 법적

정당 인정, 올바른 과거 청산을 통해 함께 평화를 만들어 갈 것을

의회

아스쿠니 참배
일본 전범

On the 28th of December 2015, Japan and South Korea announced a groundbreaking agreement to settle the controversial and provocative issue of “comfort women”, a euphemism for the sex slaves used in WWII (1). It has remained a key issue in the two countries’ continued rocky relationship, even 70 years after the dissolution of the Empire of Japan.

The agreement was announced just before the 50th anniversary of Japan-South Korea diplomatic relations and seems at surface level to benefit the governments of both nations. For South Korea, they can present a final resolution to the remaining 46 comfort women (known as *halmoni* in Korea, an affectionate term for grandmother) whilst using the cash injection from the Japanese government to aid and memorialise them. For Japan, the most beneficial part of the deal is the end to international mudslinging regarding the use of sex slaves. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has stated, “Japan and South Korea are entering a new era...we should not drag this problem into the next generation.” (2)

However, reactions in both countries reveal dissatisfaction with the agreement. In Korea, activist groups expressed bitter disappointment that the deal lets Japan simply accept “deep responsibility” without admitting to the systematic sex slavery enforced by the Japanese government during the war. The most poignant reactions came from the

1910 – AUG 22

Japan annexes and occupies Korea.

1931

Japanese Military begins to use local comfort women.

1937

Comfort women system institutionalised after the Nanking Massacre.

1941 – DEC 7

Japan officially enters WWII.

1945 – AUG 15

Japan officially surrenders.

1945 – 1953

Division of Allied controlled Korea, Korean War, Division of Korea.

1951

South Korean government demands compensation for everyone involved in the Japanese occupation. They eventually settle on a 10-year soft impact loan.

1973

Kokou Senda publishes his controversial book “Military Comfort Women” in what is thought to be the first postwar mention of comfort women.

1991 – AUG 14

Kim Hak-Sun, former comfort woman, gives a public testimony about her experiences, shocking South Korea into addressing the issue.

1991 – DEC 6

Kim Hak-Sun and two others file a lawsuit against the Japanese Government.

1992 – PRESENT

“Wednesday Protests” begin, outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul every Wednesday.

TERMS OF THE DEAL

- Japanese government pays 1 billion yen (\$8.5m, £5.6m) to South Korean administered fund.
- Japanese foreign minister issues public apology.
- Japanese prime minister offers private phone call apology to South Korean president.
- Japan accepts “deep responsibility” for the issue.
- South Korea will consider the issue “finally and irreversibly” resolved.
- South Korea will “look into” removing a controversial statue.
- Both sides will stop criticism over the issue.

former comfort women themselves. Lee Yong-soo (88) stated, “I wonder whether the talks took place with the victims really in mind. We’re not after the money. If the Japanese committed their sins, they should offer direct official government compensation.” (1)

The subject of compensation and how it is issued has long been a bone of contention for the victims. Previously from 1994-2007, Japanese citizens operated and administered the Asian Women’s Fund for former comfort women. This fund was made up entirely of private donations from Japanese citizens and did not come directly from the government (3). The new deal sees money coming from the Japanese government via the South Korean government who, according to the deal, is unlikely to give cash payments to the former sex slaves. The victims have long campaigned for direct and official compensation as well as personal, individual apologies from the Japanese government, neither of which they are getting in this “final and irreversible” deal (1).

In Japan, the reaction was also muted, though some of the press expressed dissatisfaction with Japan’s concessions. Journalist Nobuo Ikeda tweeted, “Japan pays 1 billion yen and our PM apologises but South Korea will ‘consult about the girl’s statue’—that’s not a diplomatic negotiation.” (1) Indeed, the statue outside the Japanese consulate in Seoul in 2011 has irked Japanese pundits since it was erected. The statue is

of a young girl sitting on a chair, representing Korean victims of sex slavery. Every Wednesday since 1992, protesters gather opposite the consulate to protest Japan’s non-admittance over comfort women. The wording in the deal seems intentionally vague, stating that South Korea will “look into” its removal. Japan has previously taken issue with San Francisco over a similar memorial.

Internationally, the reaction to the agreement was also mixed. The Taiwanese government was happy with the move and called for Japan to reach a similar deal with them (4). Although negotiations started in January 2016, the Japanese government stated that it is not looking to make any further deals at this time. In China, the government held a press conference regarding the agreement and stated they were taking a “wait and see” approach. The Chinese media was damning about the deal, saying it did not go far enough (4). They also called Japan’s sincerity into question (4). In the Philippines, former comfort women sought the help of their government to strike a similar deal, but it fell on deaf ears, and now the women are looking to take legal action against the government (5). The Obama administration applauded the deal in the USA (6), whilst North Korea condemned it and accused the USA of conspiring to strengthen their allies in Asia against the hermit kingdom (7).

What the future holds for this

deal is uncertain; the comfort women issue was “solved” for one month before Japan rocked the boat by denying its involvement with sex slavery in a U.N. report in January. South Korea warned Japan it was endangering the agreement, but they stopped short of taking any action (8). It’s unlikely that this issue has been truly laid to rest, but we will likely look back on the 28th of December deal as a milestone in Asian politics, one way or another.

Chris Santos is a 3rd year JET in the horse-breeding town of Shizunai, Hokkaido. In his free time, he watches far too much ice hockey to be healthy.

SOURCES

- (1) [*Japan and Korea Agree on Deal*](#)
- (2) [*Japan Says Sorry*](#)
- (3) [*General Timeline*](#)
- (4) [*China, Taiwan Apply Pressure*](#)
- (5) [*Filipino Comfort Women*](#)
- (6) [*US Welcomes Japan, South Korea Deal*](#)
- (7) [*North Korea Derides Agreement*](#)
- (8) [*Seoul Criticizes Japan’s UN Report*](#)
- (9) [*Wikipedia Comfort Women*](#)

 [duggadugdug](#)

1992 – JULY 6

Japan publishes its first report on comfort women, admitting their use but denying coercion.

1993 – AUG 4

Kono Statement – Japan admits coercing women into becoming comfort women. Wording and lack of a full admission of fault causes further friction in coming years.

1994

Asian Women’s Fund set up by Japan, money comes only from private Japanese donators.

2007 – MARCH 1

Japanese Government makes a cabinet decision that “no evidence was found that the Japanese army or the military officials seized the women by force.”

2007 – MARCH 31

Asian Women’s Fund dissolved.

2011 – DEC 14

Comfort women memorial erected outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul.

2014 – FEB 20

Yoshihide Suga (Chief Cabinet Secretary) suggests the Japanese government may reconsider the Kono Statement.

2014 – MARCH 14

Shinzo Abe confirms the government will not alter the Kono Statement.

2015 – DEC 28

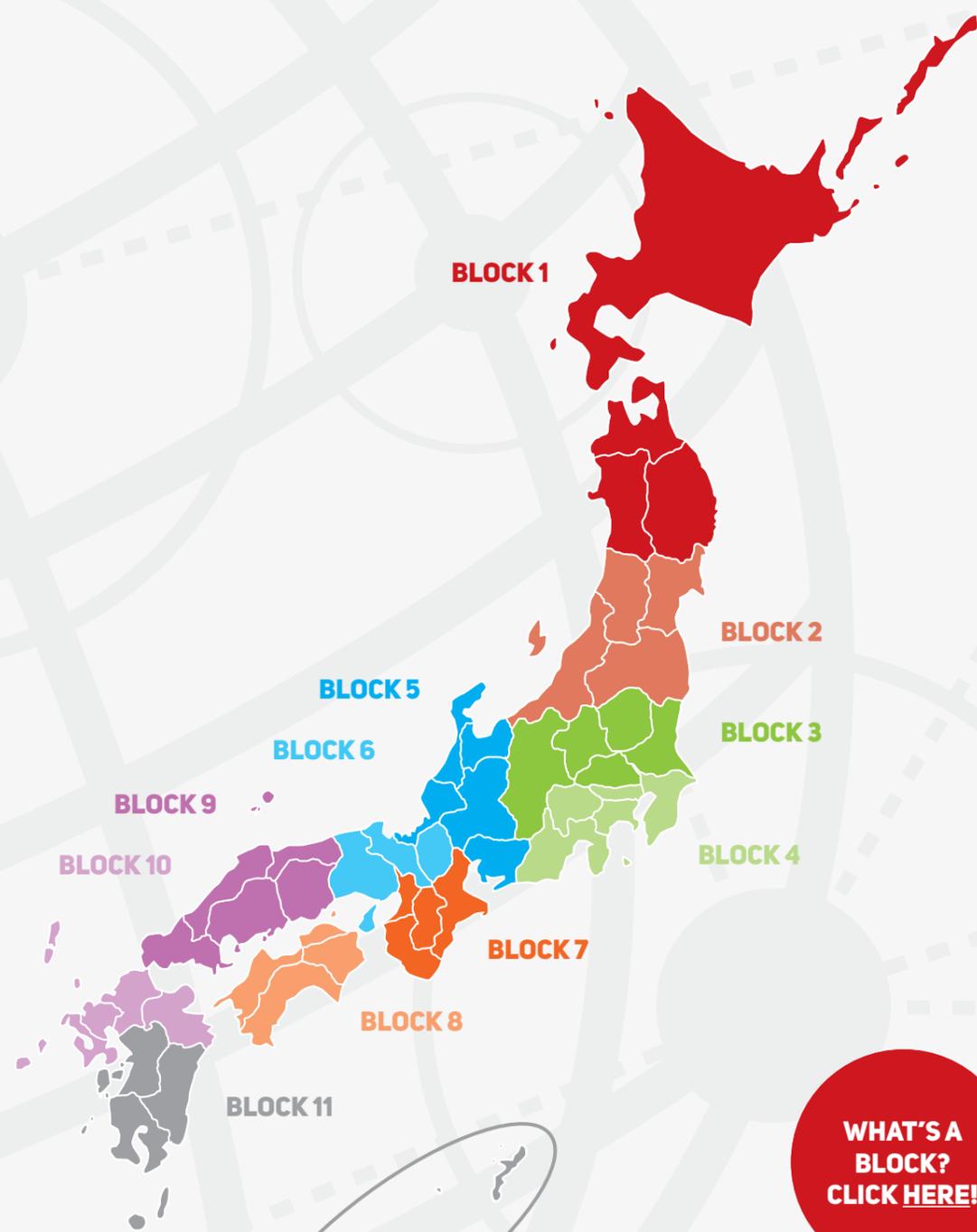
Japan and South Korea announce an agreement “settling the issue.”

2016 – JAN 31

Japan responds to a U.N. committee, denying its use of comfort women. South Korea responds, warning Japan that it is endangering the Dec 28 agreement.

EVENTS CALENDAR

March



BIFUKA TOWN'S AINU BIRCH FESTIVAL

23 April (Seminar) - 24 April (Festival) 2016
Around Bifuka Town, Hokkaido
[Website](#)

HIROSAKI SAKURA FESTIVAL

23 April - 05 May 2016
Hirosaki Castle, Hirosaki City, Aomori
[Website](#)

HITAKA HIBUSE FESTIVAL

28-29 April 2016
Mizusawa-ku, Oshu City, Iwate
[Website](#)

CHIAKI PARK SAKURA FESTIVAL

Mid to Late April 2016
Chiaki Park, Akita City, Akita
[Website](#)



OBASAMA FESTIVAL

03 April 2016
77 Kannariobasama Sanjin, Kurihara City, Miyagi
[Website](#)

YONEZAWA UESUGI FESTIVAL

29 April - 03 May 2016
Uesugi Shrine, Yonezawa City, Yamagata
[Website](#)

TENDO SAKURA FESTIVAL AND NINGEN SHOUGI

23-24 April 2016
Maizurusan Sancho, Tendo City, Yamagata
[Website](#)

TANAGURA CLAN FESTIVAL

18-19 April 2016
Tanagura Castle, Higashi Shirakawa-gun, Tanagura cho, Fukushima
[Website](#)

TAKADA CASTLE SAKURA FESTIVAL

01-17 April 2016
44-1 Takada Park, Joetsu City, Honjo-cho, Niigata
[Website](#)



HITACHI DANCE FESTIVAL

09-10 April 2016
Bikku Center, Hitachi City, Ibaraki
[Website](#)

ASHIKAGA FLOWER PARK FUJI MONOGATARI

16 April 2016 - 22 May 2016
607 Hasamacho, Ashikaga City, Tochigi
[Website](#)

KAZAMI KAGUYA

03 April 2016
Osugi Shrine, 744 Kazami, Shioya-gun, Shioya-cho, Gunma
[Website](#)

RICE PLANTING FESTIVAL

04 April 2016
Chichibu Jinja, Chichibu City, Saitama
[Website](#)

UEDA CASTLE SENBONZAKURA FESTIVAL

06-17 April 2016
Ueda Castle Park, Ninomaru, Ueda City, Nagano
[Website](#)

WHAT'S A BLOCK?
CLICK [HERE!](#)



NARITA TAIKO FESTIVAL

09-10 April 2016
Mt. Narita Shinshouji
Temple, Narita City, Chiba
[Website](#)

**EDO YOSHIWARA OIRAN WALK
& ASAKUSA SAKURA MATSURI**

09 April 2016
4 Asakusa - Senzoku
Asakusa Komatsubashi
Street, Taito-ku, Tokyo
[Website](#)

58TH KAMAKURA FESTIVAL

10-17 April 2016
Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine,
Kamakura City, Kanagawa
[Website](#)

**MAIZURU CASTLE SAKURA
FESTIVAL**

Until 17 April 2016
Maizuru Castle Park, Kofu
City, Yamanashi
[Website](#)

IWATA GRAND FESTIVAL

23 April 2016
Iwata City, Shizuoka
[Website](#)

28TH FUCHU KOKUSUI-EN

10 April 2016
5692 Nagasawa, Fuchu
Town, Toyama
[Website](#)

DAISHOUJI SAKURA FESTIVAL

09-10 April 2016
Daishouji, Kaga City,
Ishikawa
[Website](#)

FUKUI SPRING FESTIVAL

09 April 2016
Fukui City, Fukui
[Website](#)

**THE 40TH KAKAMIGAHARA
SQUARE SAKURA FESTIVAL**

02-03 April 2016
Kakamigahara City Public
Park, Gifu
[Website](#)

INUYAMA FESTIVAL

02-03 April 2016
Inuyama Castle, Inuyama
City, Aichi
[Website](#)

**TSUBAKI SHRINE YABUSAME
EVENT**

03 April 2016
Tsubaki Shrine, Kokacho,
Shiga
[Website](#)

**12TH KYOTO SAKURA
YOSAKOI**

02-03 April 2016
Umekouji Park/Okazaki
Park, Kyoto City, Kyoto
[Website](#)

HOJO SEKKU FESTIVAL

02-03 April 2016
Sumiyoshi Shrine, Kasei
City, Hyogo
[Website](#)

TOBAHARU FESTIVAL

09-10 April 2016
Oyama Zumi Shrine,
Tobahau Shrine, Mie
[Website](#)

**62ND IKEDA SATSUKIYAMA
SAKURA FESTIVAL**

02-03 April 2016
Satsukiyama Park, Ikeda
City, Osaka
[Website](#)

**EMPOR JIMMU 2600 YEARS
FESTIVAL**

03 April 2016
Kashihara, Kume-cho, Nara
[Website](#)

**KAMIATAKI SHRINE SPRING
FESTIVAL**

29 April 2016
Kamiataki Shrine,
Hidakagawa Town,
Wakayama
[Website](#)

SAKURA FESTIVAL

10 April 2016
892-1 Kotohira-cho,
Nakatado-gun, Kagawa
[Website](#)

**MATSUYAMA SPRING
FESTIVAL**

01-03 April 2016
1, Marunouchi, Matsuyama
City, Ehime
[Website](#)

DORONKO FESTIVAL

02-04 April 2016
6600 Nagahama, Kochi City,
Kochi
[Website](#)

**PILLAR FESTIVAL OF SUWA
SHRINE**

17 April 2016
Suwa Shrine, Chizu-cho,
Tottori
[Website](#)

MATSUE WARRIOR FESTIVAL

02 April 2016
Matsue Castle, Matsue City,
Shimane
[Website](#)

TSUYAMA SAKURA FESTIVAL

01-15 April 2016
134 Yamashita, Tsuyama
City, Okayama
[Website](#)

ONOMICHI MINATO FESTIVAL

23-24 April 2016
8 Higashigosho-cho,
Onomichi-shi, Hiroshima
[Website](#)

MINE SAKURA MATSURI

01-03 April 2016
326-2 ominechogigashibun,
Mine City, Yamaguchi
[Website](#)



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ARITA CERAMIC FAIR

Arita, Saga-ken
29th April - May 5th
[Website](#)

BEPPU HATTOU ONSEN FESTIVAL

Beppu, Oita-ken
April 1st - April 3rd
[Website](#)

THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT ILLUMINATION

Huis Ten Bosch, Sasebo,
Nagasaki-ken
Now - April 18th
[Website](#)

FUKUOKA CASTLE SAKURA FESTIVAL

Fukuoka Castle Ruins,
Maizuru Park, Fukuoka
City, Fukuoka-ken
March 25th - April 3rd
[Website](#)

We apologize for the lack of Block 11 events this month. If/when we get them, we will update the issue.

In the meantime, if you have any events to promote for Block 11, please let us know by contacting us [here](#).

**GOT AN EVENT
TO PROMOTE?
LET OUR EDITOR
KNOW [HERE!](#)**

IN THE NEWS

February - March

FEBRUARY 26

Fears of a major population decline are confirmed as Japan's population falls for the first time since census records began in the 1920s. Reports have foreseen that low birth rates and a population living longer will continue to contribute to the country's rapid aging. The UN predicts Japan's population will shrink from its current 127 million to 83 million by 2100. The population has decreased by nearly 1 million people (0.7%) since 2010, with the decline hitting rural areas such as Tohoku especially hard. Experts say that, in order to maintain the current population, an average of 2.1 births per woman must be achieved.

[Source](#)

MARCH 7

Japan's Olympic Stadium woes continue as criticism mounts over an apparent oversight in failing to include a place for the Olympic cauldron in the newly selected design. A place for the iconic flame, which is a required feature of every Olympic stadium, may be difficult to find as the proposed design uses a large amount of wood. While organizers claim that they were merely keeping the location a surprise, architect Kengo Kuma blames the government for not specifying the need for a cauldron. This is not Japan's first incident

in trying to decide upon a design for the 2020 Games: the previous design's space-age look and ballooning costs caused uproar before it was eventually scrapped.

[Source 1, 2](#)

MARCH 8

A recent split in the yakuza, Japan's organized crime group, has led police to beef up efforts to combat a potentially vicious war brewing between gang members. Based in the western city of Kobe, the Yamaguchi-gumi splintered after 13 subsidiary gangs were ousted following their leaders' complaints over a new yakuza don, Shinobu Tsukasa. Police fear that the fracture may lead to a chain reaction of gangs forming new alliances and battling over territory, potentially rivaling the bloodshed seen the last time Yamaguchi-gumi split in 1984. That conflict left 25 people dead and over 70 injured, including passersby and one policeman.

[Source 1, 2](#)

MARCH 9

The U.N. releases a report detailing Japan's joshi kousei industry and urging the country to ban the business. Also known as "JK business", teenage schoolgirls are paid up to 5000 yen an hour to go on dates with customers. JK companies claims these

dates are restricted to simply spending time together and are not sexual in nature. However, U.N. human rights official Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, who came to investigate joshi kousei last fall, argues that girls are often coerced into providing sexual services to clients for more money. Because victims range in age from 12 to 17, Boer-Buquicchio claims Japan still has a major issue with the sexual exploitation of children it needs to address. Abe's administration rebutted that the report is not "based on objective information".

[Source](#)

MARCH 14

The US and France pledge to partner with Japan in developing technologies to cleanup the Fukushima nuclear disaster site. Five years after the accident, which was triggered by a tsunami that swamped the reactors, radioactive material still lays pooled in the ruins as scientists lack a safe method to tackle the monumental task of removing it. The project is expected to take as long as four decades to complete, with decommissioning expected to begin in 2021.

[Source](#)

 Sterling Diesel

ARTS & CULTURE

CULTURE EDITORS

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Rayna Healy

In overdrive to cross things off the bucket list this spring: sumo, Tokyo, and convincing my 63 year old Japanese teacher to party with me are up next.

Joyce Wan

New school year, new batch of first graders to ask me whose mom I am.

FASHION EDITORS

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Elena Galindo

Erica Grainger

April means hanami season and I'll be pretty in pink under the sakura!

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

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Timothy Saar

Weird how Spring Break in JET means the same thing as it did in college: road trips and video games.

Sabrina Zirakzadeh

Moving to the big city means I get to check out more shows, more exhibits, and more cool events than ever before! Hooray!

 *Illaura Rossiter*

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HALLYUMANIA

The “Korean Wave” Sweeping Japan

LILLY GRAY (FUKUOKA)

In April of 2011, I told my host mom I was staying at a friend’s house and went to sleep in the park with 300 strangers. My friends and I wanted to stake out a spot in the growing line of people waiting overnight for a Korean Cultural festival on the Osaka Castle grounds. We weren’t there for the

traditional drums or *hanbok* demonstration: every single one of us was desperate to get close enough to see or, god willing, be seen by our favorite K-pop group.

My first K-pop (Korean pop) fan experience was marked by over 20 hours of standing in what felt like four seasons’

worth of terrible weather, complemented nicely by omnipresent drums. Girls bent double to protect their carefully made fans; we all sank several inches into a slurry of mud and ramen-stall runoff. When the five perfectly styled boys of SHINee finally appeared onstage at the event’s culmination, their

entire performance, which we expected by then to be a full discography and dance battle, lasted for a grand total of 10 minutes.

We all agreed: it was *amazing*.

The “Hallyu Wave” swept over Japan in the early 2000s, bringing with it dramas, fashion, and K-pop. K-pop took off and continues to gain popularity. Queens KARA was the first female foreign group to play Tokyo Dome (1). This year, senior group Big Bang completed their sixth tour and is currently the highest earning foreign

group in Japan (2).

The music and the pretty faces might grab you, but it’s the fan experience that has kept me and many others coming back for more.

“The excitement that everyone shares is just as important as the performance itself,” says Melody Tsukahara, an ALT in Toyama who has been to several concerts in Japan. She shares my experience of fans as welcoming, supportive, and enthusiastic.

“I’ve never felt like anyone at a concert was trying to be cooler or impress anyone else, they’re there for the

excitement and want to share it with everyone there.”

Pre-concert is primetime for beginning this exchange. Fans dress up for concerts, arriving in color-coordinated pairs or era-specific outfits of their favorite member, some so convincing they draw confused crowds. Sometimes the whole family is involved. There is a mutual exchange of pictures and compliments, a comparison of group faves and outfits.

Becca Scheiris, another Toyama ALT, saw Big Bang in Osaka with me, dressed as G-Dragon in a stunning red fur coat. She says she likes



...I told my host mom I was staying at a friend's house and went to sleep in the park with 300 strangers.

how “encompassing” K-pop is, and how joining a fan club—she’s a VIP, the name for Big Bang supporters—makes you feel instantly connected to the performer.

Japan’s fan culture is very organized. Fan club membership is a serious matter that determines access to tickets, fanmeets, and swag out of reach of the *hoi polloi*. There is an official fan club name, color, light stick, chant, and symbol for each group. Fans proudly display their accumulated badges and straps and towels; they bestow each group member with a nickname and cute animal; they make the most elaborate signs and take the most pictures. There’s a pretty deep appreciation, or understanding, of fan power held by the idol groups: this year’s VIPs got Swarovski-studded bracelets as a thank-you from Big Bang.

Being an “official fan” isn’t the only way to be a fan, but everyone seems to be having so much fun that you *want* to join. I gave in, and about \$70 later un-ironically became a member of the “SHINee World” in Japan, which isn’t exactly something I want chiseled on my headstone, but it has been one of the happiest concert-going experiences

I’ve ever had. It’s collective, sincere adoration, free of irony. Definitely not exclusive to K-pop, but invaluable to me as the first place I’d felt that since I was a child.

K-pop deals strictly in arena venues and big-budget productions, and these enormous shows have been carefully crafted with the fans in mind.

“Whether it’s a second stage, moving platform, or crane to bring the performers closer to the audience, it seems like the performers and organizers are dedicated to making sure everyone has a good time,” says Melody.

Because of this, the energy is unreal, even before the idols come onstage. At the concert I attended, everyone was on their feet and screaming to the canned pre-show music. This excitement is contagious, and singing or waving your light stick with the crowd amplifies the fun. Of seeing Big Bang, Jonathan Cosgrove, a new K-pop fan, says: “I think overall I was immediately struck by the unspoken but immediate bond everyone had... before I went I wouldn’t have expected to have the feeling that ‘yes I am so happy to be a part of this’ but

I did in fact feel it, and it just happened naturally.”

A good example of this is the encore chant that Japanese VIPs use to get Big Bang to come back out on stage. I was taught it by an older fan, and it’s a moving thing to experience firsthand. After the very last song, when the only light comes from the flickering light sticks, slowly, every single person in this huge space begins to sing lines from “Heaven.” It echoes, sweet and endless, until it fills the entire dome.

“It still gives me goose bumps to think about it,” Melody says.

Lilly Gray was a JET in Toyama prefecture for 3 years. She currently lives in Fukuoka City in Kyushu and spends most of her time writing, staring into the ocean, and consuming as many different kinds of omiyage as possible.

REFERENCES

- (1) [Kara Become the First Female Korean Artist to Hold Concert at the Tokyo Dome](#)
- (2) [Big Bang Closes Japan Dome Tour, Breaks Ticket Sales Record](#)

📷 Melody Tsukahara

NOW SHOWING

Staff Movie Picks



ヘルタースケルター (HELTER SKELTER)

Trailer

The first film I saw in theaters when I moved to Japan, rented twice, and watched on Netflix countless more. Helter Skelter shows how far some will go for success. The lead role was made for the infamous, and one of my all-time favorite Japanese personas, Sawajiri Erika. The breathtaking visuals (thanks to Ninagawa Mika) wrap you in the glamour of fame and fortune, throwing you down the dark pit of self-destruction, eerily mirroring Sawajiri’s actual career.

Patrick Finn
Head of Graphic Design and Layout

📱 iTunes



風が強く吹いている (FEEL THE WIND)

Trailer

I don’t watch a lot of Japanese movies outside of Ghibli, but I had one of my advanced classes write about their favorite films and why someone should watch them. One that stuck out to me was “[i]Kaze ga Tsuyoku Fuiteiru[i]” (Feel the Wind), about Japanese college students running Hakone Ekiden without ever having trained before. My student says it’s a movie about never giving up and having true friendship. I will definitely watch this movie based on my student’s recommendation, and you should ask your students for theirs!

Becca Simas
Sports Editor

FACES IN FASHION

Nigo of A Bathing Ape (BAPE)

KOSTADINA SACHINIS (KAGOSHIMA)

AGE

45

OCCUPATION

Designer, DJ, record producer, and entrepreneur.

LABEL

BAPE

“A Bathing Ape,” or BAPE, is an urban clothing line created by Nigo. It caters toward men’s, women’s, and children’s fashion. Bape clothing is bold, edgy, and colourful. The striking designs give basic T-shirts and hoodies a trendy feeling, without looking sporty. Bape’s distinct logo and fun image sets it apart from other brands. Thus, Bape’s popularity among teenagers striving to be fashionable isn’t surprising. The collaborative pieces are well designed, and all pieces are unique, making them a *must-have* for fans. If you want to be cool and get noticed, Bape’s the brand for you!



CLAIM TO FAME

Nigo began selling Bape T-shirts and camo prints in Harajuku back in 1993. Since then, his brand grew in popularity. There are 19 stores in Japan alone. There are international stores located in Hong Kong, New York, and Seoul, to name a few.

Nigo has since been involved in other fashion ventures. His clothing adverts feature prominent celebrities who enjoy his brand, like Pharrell Williams, Snoop Dogg, and Kanye West. Bape frequently collaborates with popular media, such as The Simpsons, Star Wars, and Spongebob SquarePants.

The designs are extremely popular and each collaboration is different while still maintaining the consistency of the brand.

Official Website

Kostadina Sachinis is a Greek South African from Johannesburg. A food and animal lover with an avid fashion, J-pop, and gaming obsessions. Captivated with Japan and its pop culture scene from a very young age, she joined the JET Program in 2015 and lives in Kagoshima. She studied Journalism at the University of Johannesburg and is a big fan of Japan’s ViVi Magazine. She has a keen interest to travel around Japan and experience more of what it has to offer.

 Wikicommons

ROCK OUT WITH STYLE

LILLY GRAY (FUKUOKA)

So, you got your Johnny's ticket in the mail. Or maybe EXILE's in town, and you're looking forward to pumping out your slick Running Man in time with a crowd of thousands—but what do you wear? Take your cues from the joyful faces around you and prepare your ensemble based on these go-to concert outfit items, chosen by fans like you.

1. MAKE YOUR FACE POP

Some bands have their own temporary tattoos, which are ideal, or you can choose a pattern that expresses what you love about your favorite idols. These are usually applied to your cheek.

TIP: For a shining face that really pops, invest in stars, gems, glitter, and cell-phone jewels from Daiso!

2. RHYTHM AND HAIR-DOOS

This isn't just any outing; try hair as big as your love for the band. Popular go-tos for those of us with a longer mane are high "Mickey Buns", but high pigtails and a little spray-in color are always popular. If you're a last-minute person, save time, follicles, and effort with a wig. Then, match it to your outfit, or favorite member's signature look.

TIP: Debut your dream hair with your new, concert-going persona.

3. BE A GLAM FAN

Got a towel with their name, face, symbol, last tour, and blood type emblazoned on it? How about pins with hi-definition photos of their faces? Necklaces, rings, hairbands, bags, pants, socks with the insignia or maybe a commemorative burger wrapper? Use whatever works best for you. A huge hoodie with ONE OK ROCK on the back is now a statement piece, with an elbow-deep pile of plastic wristbands collected from their show.

TIP: Show your devotion through your costume, and be bold or go home!

4. MAKE IT A DUET!

Find a friend and get color-coordinated. They're green; you're purple. Do each other's hair and buy matching tutus, matching bow ties, suspenders, bandanas, socks, stockings, or shoelaces at the 375en shop. If your Twin Day during high school spirit week never came, now's the time to be part of a picture-perfect pair.

TIP: Choose your twin carefully, or you might regret it.

5. HARMONIZE WITH THE WHOLE HOUSE

Use the band or artist's distinct style or use replicable looks from one of their albums, and choose any aspect (color, shape, motifs in the MV, anything goes) and build your look around it. For the Popcorn-era of ARASHI, the best outfits mimicked the old-timey red and white stripes of a popcorn box and the fellas' vests. Red suspenders, red bows, yellow tops, and white tights: cute enough to eat.

TIP: Don't go half-way—it's all or nothing!

Lilly Gray was a JET in Toyama prefecture for 3 years. She currently lives in Fukuoka City in Kyushu and spends most of her time writing, staring into the ocean, and consuming as many different kinds of omiyage as possible.

 Lilly Gray

REMEMBER THE PHALLIC LIGHT STICKS

An Interview

PATRICK FINN (TOYAMA)

THIS SENO SISTER KNEW HOW TO PUT ON A SHOW!

Chrissy and I have known each other since the decline of Ayumi Hamasaki's career, bonding over our love for Japanese music and all things tragic. When she was finally able to come to Japan for the first time this winter, it was the perfect opportunity to expose her to the concert culture here.

We ended up going to three very different shows during her stay: a small live featuring せのしすた あ (Seno Sister), アカシック (Akasick), and ベッド・イン (Bed In), Tomoko Kawase's (better known as the brilliant green, Tommy heavenly⁶, and Tommy february⁶) TOMMY ★ DARK CHRISTMAS ★ DEADLY NIGHT 2015, and Ayumi Hamasaki's annual countdown live.

What was the biggest difference from shows in America?

The biggest difference was definitely the audience. At every show, it felt like the audience was programmed how to react at any given moment, whether it was the hand gestures, the audience participation choreography, the synchronized waving of fans and light sticks, or which parts you were expected to sing along to.

Everyone seemed as if they were dedicated fans, even if they were just playing the part. However, I know from movies and anime that people tend to research artists before attending a show.

On the other hand, despite people being seemingly united in their fandom at every show, they were

actually in their own little bubble and didn't interact as much with other fans, which is more common at shows in the US. Of course, that's just a microcosm of Japanese culture in general.

Hmmm, well the audio was horridly tuned at the small venue! Guess those budget venues don't hire sound guys anywhere.

Actually, now that I think of it, so many things were totally

My favorite was probably the low-budget live we went to in the middle of nowhere. I mean, are you ever going to forget the lead act sucking your finger?

Did you feel like the fans were more... social at the smaller venue though? Like, they seemed to know each other and weren't as cold to us. Oddly, even though we were out of place more so there in terms of not being Japanese, I felt more accepted somehow.

Yeah because they knew we had to know of the groups to even be there.

True.

There was no way we stumbled into that show!

Anything you found the same between American and Japanese shows?

different. Even how patient the audience was before the show.

Ah, everyone waiting outside to go in and have their ticket number called, right?

Yeah. Then again, it's a cultural thing.

It's nice that people are respectful at the shows though. Even when things got a little heated during that opening idol group's show, fans still apologized for running into me.

Yeah, that is so true. Once people started pushing and rushing the stage I thought it was starting to feel like a

real rock gig... until the fans were overtly apologetic. Then it felt bizarre again.

Anything that surprised you across the three venues?

I was slightly surprised how diverse Ayu's fans were, though I should have expected that having seen how diverse Cher and Madonna shows are. I think Ayu is a lot more like them than pop stars that came out the same time as her.

Tommy exceeded expectations since she was so much weirder than I had even imagined! Her characters are definitely real parts of her personality. They're not that exaggerated!

And even though you described Bed In to me, I wasn't expecting them to be so raunchy! Especially after seeing an 80s Hi-NRG idol group a few sets before.

Bed In ended up being amazing! The one could seriously sing and the other rocked that guitar!

Yeah! I wasn't expecting them to be such seasoned musical vets. They were obviously doing it for the love of music. The novelty was secondary, but still equally important.

How about when you saw Kyrary in LA? Do you feel she adapted to the audience?

Well, like you know, I'm fairly knowledgeable about Japanese and kawaii culture, but the great thing was that basically everyone else at the show was [aware], too. I don't think people within Japan

realize how important she is to kawaii and otaku culture outside of Japan. She's essentially a spokesperson and uniter for us.

That makes sense. Even when I went to Japan Nite years ago in Chicago, people weren't thrown off by the Japanese acts and their behavior.

I think they did a great job of giving an honest representation of her and J-pop shows in general. Even Yasutaka Nakata and Sebastian Masuda showed up to support her, which I appreciated because they are equally as important to her appeal. It was like having the whole trifecta there.

I read in the paper that she was worried that her performance might get lost in translation, either culturally or linguistically, but was presently surprised how well the audience reacted and adapted. She seemed almost overwhelmed about how enthusiastic we all were to see her, but it was a unique opportunity and we were just glad a big J-pop artist finally took the time to perform for us.

How about your experience before and after the shows here? You cosplayed for Ayu and had some interaction with fans afterwards.

That was a bit strange because, again, the bubble culture.

As a cosplayer I'm used to people constantly asking for my picture, but, in Japan, the rules are different. There are

CATEGORY IS:
AYU REALNESS



DEFINITELY
A NORMAL
LIGHT STICK.
YEP. YEP...



privacy issues, and you never want to disturb other people. In the US, there are basically no rules as far as most fans are concerned. If you don't want your picture taken, you don't dress up.

Well, that one woman did come up to you pretty much right after we got outside the Yoyogi venue and called you a "goddess" or something, right?

I found it funny that, that was the first word that popped into her head!

Personally, it was nice that people ask for photos because that gives you the chance as a cosplayer to give your best pose, instead of a candid shot where your overall look may be a bit off. On the other hand, I knew some people wouldn't ask for a photo because we were speaking English. You kind of have to ask people if they want a photo, which I don't normally have to do in the US. If I see a phone or camera pointed at me, I quickly try to strike my best pose! However, once the ice was broken, people seemed grateful for the picture, which was nice. They don't treat you like a photo prop and then walking away without a "Thank you."

Did you notice no one was taking photos at the Tommy show even though more than half the audience was dressed in their best Christmas goth attire?

Yeah, that was a bummer. Especially since I knew Tommy's show would be full of cosplayers when compared to others.

I would have asked for photos if I saw others doing it, but sadly that wasn't the case. Again it's a cultural thing.

In the end, what was your favorite show and why?

Even though I thoroughly enjoyed each show for their unique aspects, if I had to choose just one I'd say Ayu. That's a show I would have made the trip solely to see.

I'm surprised, and at the same time not.

She's literally my favorite pop star, so you could say it was the opportunity of a lifetime. I definitely had more of an emotional connection to the songs there than any of the other shows. Plus Ayu is my lifestyle idol.

I've seen all her live DVDs since the early 00s, so it was surreal finally being there. It was kind of a metaphoric microcosm of the trip: never give up on your dreams no matter how long they might take.

My favorite was probably the low-budget live we went to in the middle of nowhere. I mean, are you ever going to forget the lead act sucking your finger?

No, I think not! That show was such a huge highlight of the trip because it was a unique experience and definitely one incredibly few foreign visitors would have experienced.

That small live was nuts! The girl hanging from the ceiling, panty flashing, and questionable light sticks. I've been to a lot

of shows, but nothing like that.

That shady dive bar live is probably my most told story since I got back though. It's almost not believable.

Least favorite show and why?

I wouldn't say I particularly disliked any of them, but I liked Tommy's the least only because the setlist was chosen based on the show's theme: Dark Christmas. We didn't get many Tommy february6 songs and they were limited to her more melancholy ones.

Any words of advice for those visiting Japan that are interested in the music scene?

Definitely get a person that lives there to buy tickets! The process can be a headache, even for people that do it all the time, but it's damn-near impossible otherwise.

Secondly, understand that most seats and entry are determined by a lottery, so being the first person to bid does not guarantee a good spot.

Also, forums! People living here are willing to help. Make those connections!

Chrissy is a crap Cher impersonator that loves makeup and songs about wigs. Follow her sad life on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and blog, [TeamTragicTalks Jpop](#), if you're up for a good laugh.

📷 Patrick Finn



NAOSHIMA, TESHIMA, AND THE JOY OF LIVING

JOYCE WAN (HOKKAIDO)

Nearly 3000 islands dot the Seto Inland Sea, the water channel separating Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Historically a bustling transport route, the major sources of industry on the islands nowadays include fishing and industrial manufacturing. Like much of rural Japan, the area is struggling with shrinking population rates and economies. But since 1992, visionary plans to revitalize the island of Naoshima, which have spread outward to neighboring islands, have transformed them into something that may appear utterly incongruous: a hotbed of cutting-edge contemporary art.

I recently travelled to two of the major art destinations, the islands of Naoshima and Teshima.

Naoshima is where it all began. With a population of roughly 3000 people and a fistful of cats, taking a boat to this idyllic island is like travelling to Japan's past. Far away from the hyper-development of Japan's metropolises, sleepy fishing villages, beautiful sandy beaches, 400 year-old wooden houses and narrow alleyways under protruding tiled eaves characterize the island. The climate is mild and there's not much to block the light, which causes the scenery to metamorphose over the course of a day.

Place is perhaps the most important element in all the works of art found on Naoshima. Partially in response to the drain of contemporary culture in Japan towards the

massive whirlpool that is Tokyo, Naoshima's art scene is thoroughly bound to the local culture and community. Take the Art House Project, in which abandoned traditional Japanese homes are transformed into art pieces without altering the structure of the house. They're scattered around the port, and to access them all you traverse the town's quiet telephone wire-lined streets, interacting with the local community.

Teshima has a different feeling to it. With a larger area but smaller population, the island has space for terraced rice fields, natural-growth forests, and empty stretches of roads. The island feels beyond the boundaries of human civilization, let

alone any contemporary art scene, and the installations located there take advantage of this. The long journey is part of the experience.

The installations on Naoshima and Teshima are made by artists from around the world, and the sleek concrete and steel museum buildings seem nondescript enough that they could exist anywhere. Despite this, it's hard not to see the tangible presence of core Japanese aesthetics everywhere you look. These traditional artistic philosophies form the foundations for not only Japanese art and design, but also culture and life at every level. It's the expression of these ancient Japanese aesthetics that ties the stark

museum structures so closely to place. Nature is of central importance, making the scenic Seto Inland Sea region the perfect habitat for a uniquely Japanese art experience, in which the boundaries between nature and manmade culture disappear. With this in mind, let's take a look at how Naoshima and Teshima reflect three fundamental concepts in Japanese aesthetics.

MONO NO AWARE

Mono no aware translates to the "pathos of things", and refers to an understanding of the impermanence of all things (1). This inevitable passing of things heightens their beauty in the present moment. A simple example of this is Japan's fascination with cherry

blossoms. On Teshima, in a small isolated house that feels like it might be located on the edge of the world, you can record your heartbeats at *Les Archives du Cœur*. Walking into the pitch-black Heart Room, nothing can be seen until the sound of your pulsing heart booms through the speakers, causing a single light bulb in the centre of the room to flash on and off with the rhythm of the beats. Life and death strike you as being separated by a razor's edge, and both all the more profound for their proximity.

Feelings of *mono no aware* are brought about by encounters with nature, which the museums curate in innovative ways. James Turrell's *Open Sky*, in the Chichu Art Museum, is a room with a large square opening in the ceiling, allowing all of nature's light, sounds, and changes of weather

to enter and transform the space. Come after hours for the museum's night program, and watch as the colour of the sky changes during sunset. Sitting in complete silence for 45 minutes, you're able to appreciate each stage of the slow fading away to black; after it's all over, there is only the void left.

WABI-SABI

Closely related to *mono no aware* are *wabi*, simple and austere beauty, and *sabi*, the beauty of rustic patina. Over time, these two ideals have converged into one concept, representing the beauty of that which is imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete (2). Shadows and emptiness are key elements of the austerity in the wabi-sabi aesthetic, and they are also key in the work of Tadao Ando, the self-taught architect who

designed most of Naoshima's museum buildings. Most notably, the Chichu Art Museum relies entirely on the use of natural lighting to illuminate its artworks, including a collection of Monet paintings in an underground chamber. In some works light itself is the art, like the glowing circles cast by the holes in the Teshima Art Gallery structure.

Twin tatami-mat rooms stand in *Gokaisho*, one filled with sculptures of fallen camellia, the other appearing solemnly empty but hiding a secret artwork. Yoshihiro Suda's *Weeds* are wooden sculptures so realistic that it looks as if real sprouts are growing through the cracks in the Benesse House Museum's walls. Droplets of

water spring out of tiny fountains in the Teshima Art Gallery, continuously transforming the landscape of the floor. All these creations invoke wabi-sabi in a way that is intriguingly modern.

YÜGEN

This concept typically translates to "dim", "dark", or "mysterious". In opposition to explicitly given meanings, it alludes with subtle grace to the depth of the world we live in (3). As a foreigner, I feel that I collide with profound feelings of *yūgen* every day as I sit in the office, surrounded by proceedings of which I cannot make heads nor tails. That's a joke, but



frankly it doesn't feel that different from the experience of just wandering unguided around the art islands, often coming across art by complete surprise.

A perfect example is *Seen/Unseen Known/Unknown*, an installation of two large shiny spheres in a room mostly hidden from view under a hill, that I stumbled upon while searching for something else. In general there is very little information presented

about the works, leaving interpretation up to the viewer. Pushing open a heavy glass door in the Benesse House Museum leads you to *The Secret of the Sky*, two marble pebble-shaped sculptures surrounded by high walls—the focus of the piece is actually the empty space above the sculptures. To give away too many details about some of the more mysterious artworks would spoil their poignancy.

In *Minamidera*, viewers sit in complete darkness, both literally and figuratively, unaware of what they'll see until they see it.

Japanese aesthetics embody sorrow and suffering, but it's more complicated than that. A deep awareness of the mystery and transience of all things creates the conditions necessary for full appreciation of the beauty of the present moment. It seamlessly unites sorrow

and joy in a celebration of existence. The Teshima Art Museum's ticket states that it evokes the "joy of living". Much of what is written about the art islands expresses the same sentiment.

At the end of a pier in Naoshima sits the famous yellow pumpkin by Yayoi Kusama, an artist who's been tortured by hallucinations since she was a child. Her quote on the Benesse House pamphlet reads, "I followed

the thread of art and somehow discovered a path that would allow me to live". Pictures of the pumpkin sculpture never impressed me, but upon seeing the real thing in all its curvy and dotty glory, I suddenly felt inexplicably elated and I wanted to dance around it. After I had walked away towards the museum, I heard shouts from behind me. A group of people was jumping on the dock, screaming in absolute delight

over the pumpkin. Their euphoric shouts could still be heard as I kept walking up the hill.

The Setouchi Triennial, an art festival that takes place on Naoshima, Teshima, and other surrounding islands, is ongoing until April 17th.

SOURCES

- (1) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- (2) *Wikipedia*
- (3) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

📷 Joyce Wan



LIFESTYLE

FOOD EDITORS

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Leah Gray

The weather has gotten nicer, so I've been out and about more!

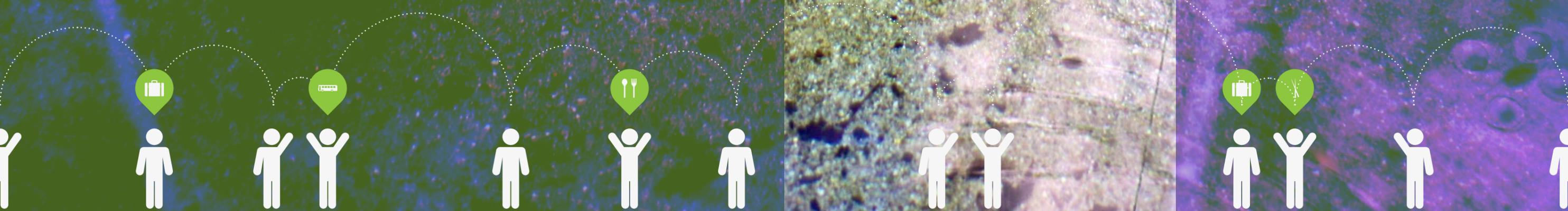
Pia Peterson

This month it's all about art, coffee, dogs and beer....you know, the essentials.

 *Rajeev Rahela*

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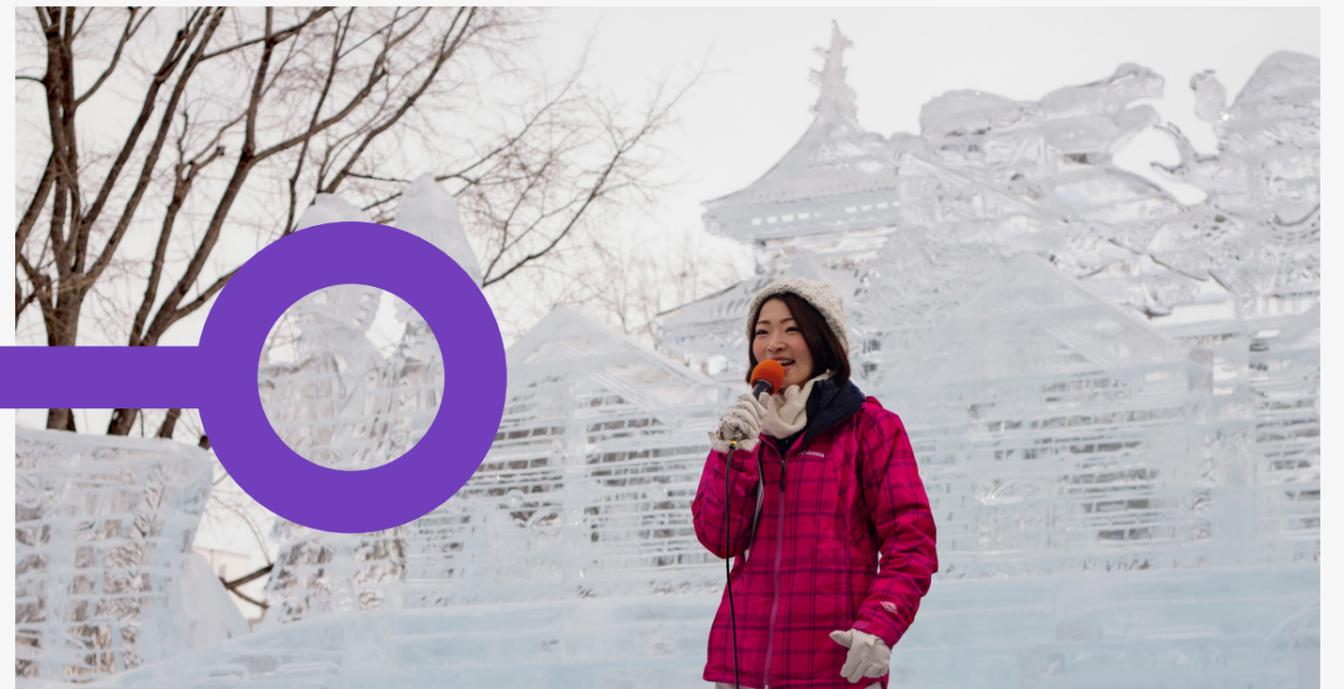
ILLAURA ROSSITER (SHIZUOKA)



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FOUR DAYS IN KOREA

AKA:

How to
Spend Too
Much Money
in Seoul

MIRIAM MATTHEWS (YAMAGATA)

I escaped to Seoul exactly when I needed to. After twenty-three years under the Californian sun, my first Tohoku winter was rough. Regardless of how little snow there is this year, three months of a cold grey sky and the onset of culture fatigue was giving me some serious cabin fever. Luckily for me, I had a buddy in Seoul and Peach airlines had a sale.

I had no goals for this trip. I could've spent my time in the Korean Folk Village, around Gyeongbokgung Palace or the DMZ learning about Korea's rich and often tragic history. But frankly, I wasn't in the mood. I wanted to drink, eat, shop, and get lost in Seoul's labyrinthine streets.

South Koreans dress too damn good for international flights. I was shocked and appalled at how bad I looked next to 85% of the passengers. If there's any country that emphasizes appearance and style above all else, it's Korea. My buddy picked me up at Incheon and we headed straight to Hongdae, a trendy university area with a plethora of bars, cafés, and cheap clothing shops.

It's here that I learned that shopping is cheap and easy, too easy. Tiny shops—stalls, really—were practically stacked on top of each other. The rows of stores sold the same stylish clothing at the same prices for what seemed like miles on end. You could get lost in the racks of pink sweaters and knockoff SUPREME hats. Music blasted as the stores vied for the attention of the hoards of university students stopping here and there to look at a beanie or to buy some street food. You had to fight through crowds to take a step in any direction, while steering very clear of overflowing trash cans and, in many cases, trash piles.

Finding good food in Seoul is not a problem. Hongdae hosts an excess of restaurants and food stands, each with their own twist on traditional food or offering trendy churros and waffles. Smelly street stalls offer food that's cheaper, greasier, and better than what you could get at any Michelin-starred restaurant. Here we hunted down the grittiest KBBQ we could find and ordered beer, soju and about six mystery items from the menu.

Holding back is not an option in Seoul. I found this out around midnight as I watched wasted office workers casually throwing up in the street next to a lingerie shop, only to straighten up and continue on with their night of debauchery at the next bar. Maybe not all that different from the after-hours of some Japanese salarymen, but a hell of a lot less composed and a lot more vulgar. It was the best start to the next four days I could've asked for.

Café culture in Korea is definitely a *thing* and I highly recommend exploring any place that looks cool. Trust me, there is no lack of good food or coffee. My time spent in the cafés is a blur. I enjoy pastries and coffee, but I'm no expert. Despite this, I think it's pretty safe to say that the café competition is strong in Seoul. Without doing any research on "the best coffee shops in Seoul," every place I went to had seemingly expert bakers and baristas. Regardless of how grand or inconspicuous the shop was, the coffee and food was consistently delicious everywhere I went. It was

refreshing and surprising to see standards held so high across the board.

I have to say, despite the incredible café Viennese, gourmet waffles, and pastries galore, my favorite "café" could hardly be considered a café at all. Bau House is two subway stops from Hongdae and hidden under an inconspicuous office building. And it's here that you'll find heaven in the form of puppy love. Buy yourself a drink and a pack of treats and the pups at this dog café will go crazy for you. If you've ever needed a fix for a bad day or a bit of homesickness, dogs are definitely the best cure. They have different sections for big and little dogs, where you can chill with both puppies and retirees so you're bound to find a new best friend.

If you've got a love for shopping, Seoul is the place for you. Clothes, makeup and beauty products, tech—whatever you want, you can find in the subway, down a shady alley, or on the paved-with-gold streets of Apgujeong Rodeo. The latter of which is a great way to spend too much money

buying things you don't need, but definitely want, in the West Galleria. There is also an East Galleria, but it's the kind of place where you feel like you're too broke to step foot in the door, so let's just focus on West, shall we?

Now, I love Japanese makeup and skin care, and Korean products are even better. But I wanted my Urban Decay, YSL, and Aesop favorites, and they are so hard to come by in Japan! The cosmetic section was heaven for my skin and hell for my bank account. After riding the escalator a few floors I found my other guilty pleasure—stupidly expensive lingerie. Though, truth be told, I feel *zero* guilt about liking these things. There's no shame in loving what you love.

Now, the Calvin Klein section wasn't too bad, my wallet didn't hate me then. But, man, was the L'Agent Provocateur section Dangerous with a capital D. In fact, it's probably too soon for me to admit what I bought and how much I spent there. Regardless of wherever your guilty pleasures lie, be sure to head to the basement where you'll find Gourmet 494, an incredibly cool grocery store/

confectionary/food court with everything from American chili fries to Korean delicacies. As long as you can resist buying the ¥5000 SPAM+Wine gift boxes, then anything there is good! And if there's anything that will assuage your buyer's guilt, it's some piping hot cheese fries.

Whether you want to learn about the past or look toward the future, Korea has something to offer. It's a country that, having few natural resources, has chosen to look only forward. They've advanced so quickly and have staked a powerful claim on the international platform. Watching the ups and downs of a country still growing and moving forward is an incredible sight. Despite this, its history can be found everywhere. It's in the food, the statues scattered around, and the occasional *honbak* on the subway. Wandering around the city at midnight you'll find street vendors, couples, and young performers trying to make their big break. It's a city that never stops to take a breath, and it's one that I can already hear calling me back.

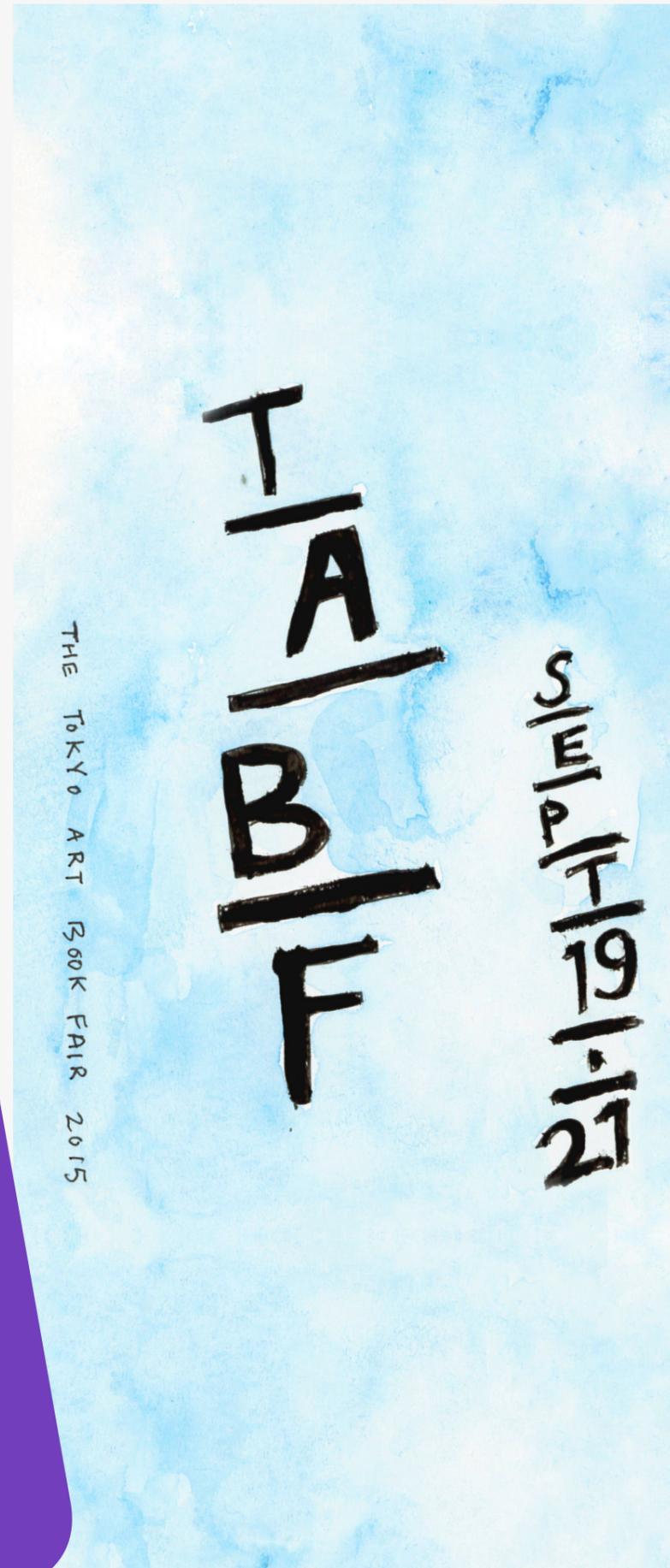
 Hannah Killoh



STUFF TO GET
EXCITED ABOUT

Tokyo Art Book Fair

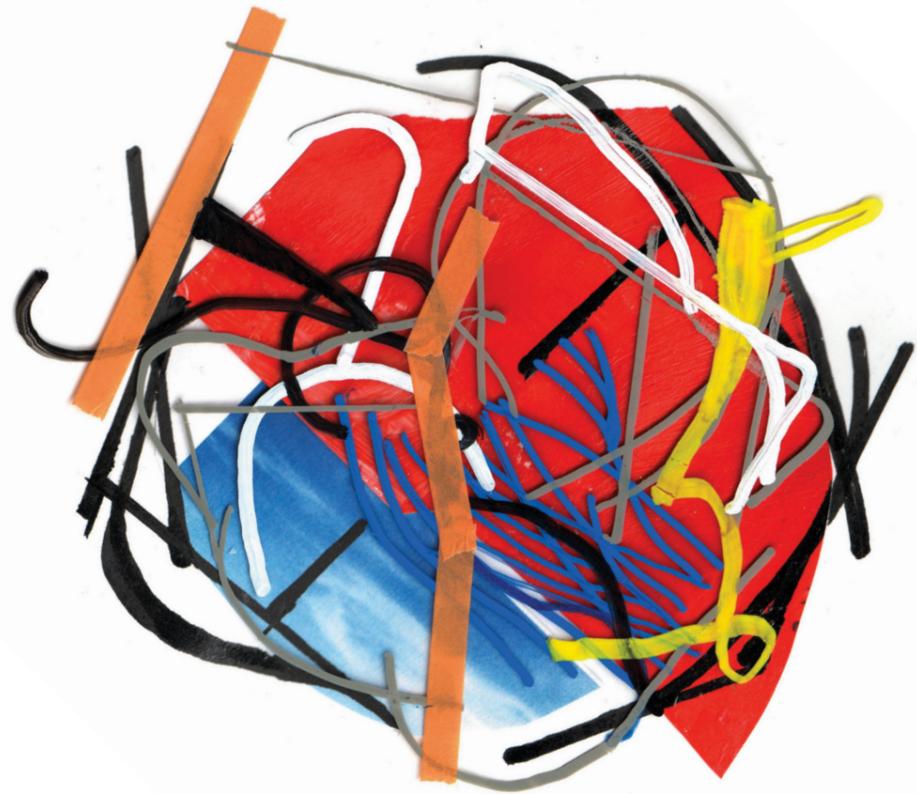
PIA PETERSON (YAMAGATA)



Since 2009, the Tokyo Art Book Fair has attracted illustrators, artists, publishers, and people who love books from all over the world. It's held over a weekend in September, and has, according to the website, about 300 artists and booksellers participating every year. The Art Book Fair showcases the work of independent artists, publishing companies, and famous book designers whose work you may already own without knowing who was behind the cover. While this isn't the kind of place to come to find English books, there are a lot of guides, zines, and other books that will draw you into their story.

It's a free event with all of the artists selling (or raffling off or giving away) things that they've made. Located in the center of the park at the Kyoto University of Art & Design Gaien Campus, you get a chance to stroll by families walking and people enjoying the beer garden next door. The fair features food and drink stands, as well as a chance to shake hands with your illustration heroes. Oh, and, of course, lots of opportunities to get that 'gram.

As a day out in Tokyo or an event to work a trip around, I highly recommend it. For more of a taste of what you'll find there, here's what some of the presenters and attendees at the 2015 TABF had to



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say about their experience and involvement in the fair.

GENEVIEVE HARNETT

- [Website](#)
- [Instagram](#)

“My friend Jacob and I exhibited our stuff with Lights + Music. We have a friend who works there, so they approached us about taking part. I couldn’t go, but it was a really enjoyable experience. It was the first time I’d shown

my work publicly in Japan. In Australia I exhibit my paintings but I’d never made a poster or zine before. Jacob my friend is a graphic designer so he put together the layout. The whole experience was really fun and I’d like to do something similar again, like making stickers. I was really excited when I found out I sold some of my work!”

JACOB KOWNACKI

- [Website](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [Instagram](#)

“I’m from Vancouver, Canada and moved to Japan in March of 2014. I’m an ALT and I work for a few schools in Hyogo prefecture. Before becoming an English teacher I was doing design and illustration full time in Vancouver. It was mainly



LYLE NISENHOLZ

- [Website](#)

“I’m from the United States, mostly California. I lived in Japan for 11 years. I’m a high school sketchbook doodler and wanted to draw like *Heavy Metal Magazine* and *Dungeons and Dragons*. However, somehow I earned a fine art degree from college. Mostly I sketch and draw images on paper; it’s like a diary of my feelings and ideas. (Taken from a 2014 interview with Lyle, full interview available [here](#).)

The reason I got involved in the Tokyo Art Book Fair was that I belong to an artist collective that was participating. We decided to join as a group and filled out the required material, share costs, etc. Then we each got a tiny space at the table and did our presentation. It’s not cheap! Most participants do not make enough money to recoup their expenses, we sure didn’t!”

web design, but I slowly started taking on a few more illustration projects.

I started doing #adrawingaday before I got to Japan in an effort to get my work out there and keep from being rusty between illustration projects. The main reason for sharing the work digitally (Instagram and Tumblr) was to be accountable to other people. Some of my friends kept track of my drawings and questioned

me if I missed a post.

After the first year I took some time off until the next #adrawingaday project. I wanted to be able to make more consistent and “finished” pieces throughout the project the next time around. I also wanted to have a loose structure to the subject matter. This led me to illustrate what was around me in Japan. I took a lot of information in daily and decided to process it

into illustrations. These started to evolve and form a collection of sorts. That’s basically how the zine came about.

I was stoked to put something together [for TABF] so I looked back on my work and noticed there was a strong theme and style connecting the works together in a handful of pieces: reflections of my experience in Japan. I collected the images and put them together in a

zine. I printed and bound them at home and sent them to Teshi, who organized

the table. It was a fun little project and it was nice to do something that was part of the art scene.

It was pretty fun to get something produced that I was proud of. It’s made me think more about creating multiple illustrations with the same theme to eventually collect them into zines.”

BE
SURE TO
CHECK OUT
EVERYONE’S
WORK!



Books & zines from Lyle available [here](#).

OTHER MENTIONABLES

- [Adrian Hogan](#)
- [Luis Mendo](#)
- [Papier Labio](#)
- [Sho Miyato](#)
- [Kabukigao](#)

📷 *Geneviev Harnett, Jacob Kownacki, Lyle Nisenholz, Pia Peterson*

BEHIND THE COUNTER

At a Ramen Shop

STEVEN CARRERA (KOCHI)



During this past winter vacation I took a solo road-trip around Kyushu. My main objective was to meet and create long-lasting friendships with the local Japanese people in each prefecture of Kyushu, which is part of my bigger goal to do this for all the prefectures in Japan (currently 25 prefectures completed).

The method that allows me to quickly integrate into the local community in each prefecture is couchsurfing. I have couchsurfed all over the world and it has allowed me to experience some amazing things, events, and festivals. More importantly, it has allowed me to create strong bonds with the locals. Now that I am living in Japan, I have continued to use couchsurfing to host travelers in my village and to keep creating amazing friendships and experiencing unique opportunities when traveling.

While searching for a host in Kagoshima Prefecture, I ran into the profile of Nobuyo Ikeda. She had almost no information about herself or anything at all. Usually

this is a red flag to disregard and keep searching for other potential hosts. However, what caught my attention and led me to send her a request to stay at her place were her four references. The references mentioned how awesome Nobuyo and her husband Kaname were. Multiple people mentioned how amazing her ramen was and that they would love to return to her place to enjoy it again. After reading this, I knew I had to surf at her place and experience this unique opportunity. She quickly accepted my request and I was set to arrive on December 28th and stay for two nights.

When I arrived at her place I was a bit surprised. Mind you, I did know she made ramen, but I had no idea I was coming to a very famous ramen shop that has been in business for over fifty years. Luckily, I was able to find parking, but I was greeted by a huge line that spanned all around the outside corner of the shop.

As soon as Nobuyo saw me, she knew I was her surfer

for the next two nights. Even though that was the case, she did not give me any special treatment (I like the fact she did not). She told me to wait in line outside, treating me just like any of her customers. As people came out of the shop, more people came and joined the line. It was literally running non-stop. When it was my turn to sit down, all I saw were people slurping their ramen in satisfaction. I ordered their special—the “very big bowl of ramen”—which was the best ramen I have ever had in my life.

Furthermore, the atmosphere inside the shop was very welcoming. I ended up making friends with an older woman sitting next to me (who I later found out used to work at the restaurant for Nobuyo’s parents) and we had a great time laughing on how big my bowl was.

After the ramen broth was finished, Nobuyo had to go outside and politely say sorry a couple of times to the people that had been waiting in line. After further talking with Nobuyo and spending the next two days with Nobuyo

and Kaname, I quickly found out that this was the norm. I spent the next day talking and interacting with Nobuyo, Kaname, their friends, and staff at the shop.

On the final day of my stay, I was invited to work at the shop for a day. Of course I could not decline this offer. Helping my new friends run their ramen shop for a day: priceless! I woke up at 8 a.m. to help prepare the shop for the massive amount of people expected for the day. The shop hours are from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., or whenever the ramen broth runs out (whichever comes first); usually the latter is when they close. From 8:30-10:40 a.m., I helped chop daikon and green onion, prepare the minced garlic, store pork slices in the fridge, arrange the plates and learn four basic phrases that I had to use when speaking with the customers. These phrases were basically used for welcoming the customers, asking if they wanted water or tea, asking their order and finally saying thank you when the customers would leave.

At around 10:30 a.m., people

started to make a line outside of the restaurant. At around 10:45 a.m., Nobuyo went outside and started taking orders. At 10:55 a.m., Nobuyo opened the doors, and in just seconds the shop was already full and people were still joining the line outside of the shop.

My duties were welcoming the customers, asking if they wanted water or tea, helping prepare the ramen bowls by putting slices of pork and adding a spoon-full of minced green onions to the ramen bowls, giving the bowls to the customers, transporting the dishes to be cleaned, refilling the box of pork slices and thanking the customers. The day was extremely busy with no breaks. I think I said “いらっしやいませ” (welcome) and “ありがとうございました” (thank you very much) over 500 times!

The menu at Tentenyuu (天天有) is fairly simple: regular bowl, big bowl, or very big bowl of their pork broth ramen, gyoza, and water or tea. Their broth-based ramen is prepared as soon as the shop closes (usually around 2

or 3 p.m.) and is cooked until the next morning. Nobuyo always tastes the broth every morning to make sure it is ready for the public. The ramen is handmade and cut in their machines about twice a week. This process and recipe has been passed down from Nobuyo’s parents who opened the restaurant a little over fifty years ago.

If you are ever in Kajiki, Aira, Kagoshima, definitely try Tentenyuu for some of the best ramen you have ever tasted.

Steven loves traveling for the purpose of learning through experience. Japanese culture, festivals, and traditions are what he’s mainly interested in right now.

 Steven Carrera

[CLICK HERE FOR A MAP OF THE SHOP!](#)



RUNNING FOR SWEETS

JASMIN LAU (SHIZUOKA)

Recently, a plethora of themed runs have gained popularity around the world, adding a dash of whimsy to what's usually an exercise

zakura on one side and the river on the other, it was the perfect warm-up for the feast to follow. As we neared the finish line, we could see

There was also a cake decoration activity, but only for elementary school-aged kids. Whilst I tried to argue that it would therefore be perfect for my matching level of Japanese language ability, perhaps the fact that I was three times the height of the average participant excluded me from eligibility.

There was a great mix of *wagashi* and Western-style cakes and pastries. There were some delicious *anko* (red bean) *dango*, *miso mochi manju* (what a tongue twister that one was!), delectable cheesecakes, macarons, brownies, fruit cakes... the list goes on. I've definitely found some new favourite cake haunts – perhaps my next personal run will be to jog to each location and eat anew! Click [here](#) to see whether there's one going on in your prefecture soon! Treat yo'self.

 *Jasmin Lau*

I eat to run and run to eat, so what better than an opportunity to combine the two?

in calf-numbing endurance. The Color Run motivates participants to run in fantastic costumes whilst being pelted by powdered chalk, and a recent Minions Run in Odaiba filled the Tokyo Bay area with be-goggled, yellow joggers.

However, we all know the real motivation behind any sort of exercise—**food**. I eat to run and run to eat, so what better than an opportunity to combine the two? This year, the city of Numazu did just that, inviting people to a スウーツラン (Sweets Run)—a quick calorie-burning jog followed by an excess of desserts that was sure to undo any of the exercise you had just done. *Perfect*, thought my gluttonous self. So did 800-odd local residents! Thus, early on a Sunday morning, we gathered to train our legs and stomachs as one.

The 2.5km run was mostly a brisk amble with some quick hops to avoid small, live speedbumps cleverly disguised as children. With early blooming *kawazu-*

the food tents just across the water, urging us to sprint to our prizes.

We each received a fair amount of participants' swag and, most importantly, our cake tickets. Twenty local patisseries and bakeries baked bite-size versions of their usual wares, which we could receive in exchange for a stamp on the cake tickets. We

Click [here](#) to see whether there's one going on in your prefecture soon! Treat yo'self.

were limited to seven stalls, and no stall could be visited twice, so we had to select carefully! The more strategic of us stalked the stalls like hungry lions, choosing our prey.

FOOD BABIES FOR ALL!



HOMEMADE UMESHU

ORRIN HEATH (KYOTO)



You know *umeshu*, right? It's a popular alcoholic drink to make at home in late spring. How about *mikanshu*? Maybe you have seen it in the supermarket, but did you know it is really simple to make at home? And you only have to wait a month or two to drink it, unlike *umeshu*, which has a waiting period of six months or more. Last year I found some recipes online, but it wasn't until this year that I got the time to make it!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- *mikan* - about 8 medium size
- rock sugar - 200g (to start; you might need more)
- white liqueur - 1.8 liters
- normal umeshu jar - 2 liters or more

INSTRUCTIONS

Before we start, sterilize your glass jar by using boiling water and then let it dry.

Wash your *mikan* and peel them (keep the rind). Remove any part of the woody stem. Cut the *mikan* horizontally. Add the *mikan*, rock sugar, and rinds to the jar. Finally, pour in the alcohol. Seal the jar and let it sit in a dark closet.

After one week, remove the *mikan* rinds from the mixture and return the jar to its dark closet.

Then, after a month or two, check up on it. At this time you can remove the *mikans*. If you want, you can squeeze the *mikan* in cheesecloth and add the juice to the mixture. Now all that's left to do is just sit back and enjoy your *mikanshu*.

At the one-month check-up, I tasted my drink and the liqueur taste was so overpowering that I decided to add some more rock sugar, about 200 grams more. Now, I will wait a little longer!

If you want to check out a video I made of the process, head over [here](#). And if you're interested in more recipes similar to this one, click [here](#) for some more unusual homemade fruit liqueur ideas.

Orrin Heath is a 5th-year unicorn—I mean, JET living in the northern region of Kyoto Prefecture with his wife and son.

 Orrin Heath

IS IT WORTH
THE WAIT?

THE
THREE
EMPTY JARS
AND I SAY
"YES"

COMMUNITY

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Even a fool has talents.

Becca Simas

I'm just so happy it's springtime in Japan!

COMMUNITY EDITOR

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Cameron Joe

Crawling out from the kotatsu in to the shade of the cherry blossom trees. Excited for the picnics, beer, and good company!

 Jasmine Lau

COMMUNITY

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HOW DO YOU RUN?

BECCA SIMAS (KAGOSHIMA)



In Japan, the month of April is a time of transition, and as the weather gets warmer, it's the perfect time to replace our winter boots with a brand new pair of running shoes for race season!

Before you lace up and head out for your first run of the spring season, it's important to ensure you're wearing the running shoes that work best for you and your feet. Whether you run 5ks or full marathons, make sure you choose a shoe that offers you the best support to prevent injury. And if you're new to running, all of the different options when it comes to choosing the right shoe can make your head spin.

We asked the JET community about their favorite brand of running shoes, workout gear, and where to buy them. This is what we learned.

SHOES

Q: When choosing a running shoe, what are the top three characteristics you look for?

- Proper support
- Lightweight
- Durability

Q: What is your favorite brand of running shoes?

- 40.7% Nike
- 22.2% New Balance
- 18.5% Asics
- 11.1% Other
- 3.7% Mizuno
- 3.7% Brooks

Q: What do you like about your favorite brand?

1. NIKE

"They're lightweight, they breathe well, and they have awesome support." Anonymous

"I supinate rather than pronate, so I like a light, flexible shoe with neutral support, and a reasonable amount of cushioning to soften heel strike. Shoes that dry quickly are also really important, since in the summer it can rain so impressively, and in the winter I run in snow occasionally." Rebecca (Hokkaido)

"Newest of the Flyknit series. It offers a close to barefoot running experience and is very lightweight. Personally I prefer running shoes with a flat sole." Anonymous

NIKE STANDOUT

Most trusted brand of running shoe for the JET Community – over 40% of responders said they prefer Nike to any other brand.

2. NEW BALANCE

"New Balance 1500s are my racing shoes so I wear them occasionally since they're

lightweight and not designed to endure frequent longer runs. I have New Balance fresh foam Zantes too, mainly for the novelty factor and the prints they leave in the snow." Anonymous

"Arch support, wide size, and cross-training for the gym and short runs." Anonymous

"My shoes ensure that my feet are covered and that I do not get rocks, nor scattered glass, nor cow dropping on my bare feet." John (Isen)

NEW BALANCE STANDOUTS

Suited for runners with wide feet.

New Balance 1500s were voted the 2015 Editor's Choice for best running shoes by *Runner's World*.

3. ASICS

"They have soles with good traction for off-road running." Anonymous

"I like a running shoe that is lightweight, yet durable and gives me enough support." Kasia Tomaszynska (Tokyo)

"They offer support sufficient for long-distance running," Nathaniel Hayes (Kagoshima)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Mizuno Wave Riders

"The wave plate makes them durable and I find they last longer than other shoes." Anonymous

"I enjoy the extra support, stability and traction that most Mizunos are built with and the Wave Rider 16 has been my all-time favorite. They are versatile shoes so I can wear them on trails

or roads. "Jenny Mortimore (Yamanashi)

- Hoka One One

"They have a bigger heel and offer good cushioning, which I think helps me run with better form on the long ones." Anonymous

- Brooks

"Brooks has a lighter line of shoes that offer support without inserts that I like to use for shorter runs." Anonymous

Q: Where do you buy your running shoes in Japan?

1. Nike Harajuku and Nike Outlets
2. ABC Mart
3. Asics Outlet
4. Shoe Plaza
5. Online

It's no secret that, historically, Japan's shoe sizes run small. If your shoe size is larger than 25.5 centimeters, you will likely have a hard time finding your size in store. Many JETs who have difficulty finding their size in Japan prefer to buy online because there is a wider selection of sizes. Other perks to shopping online: there are more selections and it's convenient, especially if you live in the *inaka* or on a remote island.

OVERALL

It's best to do your research before picking out a running shoe to figure out what shoe will give you the best support for your arch (or lack of an arch if you're flat-footed). Buying your running shoes for comfort

and support are always better than buying for looks.

WORKOUT GEAR

In the warmer months you will obviously sweat a lot more while running outdoors, so try to wear clothes that will keep you dry and cool so you can go the distance. Microfiber material is designed to wick sweat away from the skin and absorb into the fabric. It is superior to cotton because sweat clings to cotton and weighs it down. Microfiber work-out wear has grown in popularity in recent years, so if you run a race in Japan, the complimentary shirt you receive at check-in will likely be made of microfiber instead of cotton.

Q: Where do you like to buy your workout clothes in Japan?

1. Uniqlo
2. Nike Outlets
3. Sports Depot
4. SuperSport Xebio
5. Secondhand shops

Q: Do you have any general comments about buying workout gear in Japan?

"There is less to choose from for women!"

Anonymous

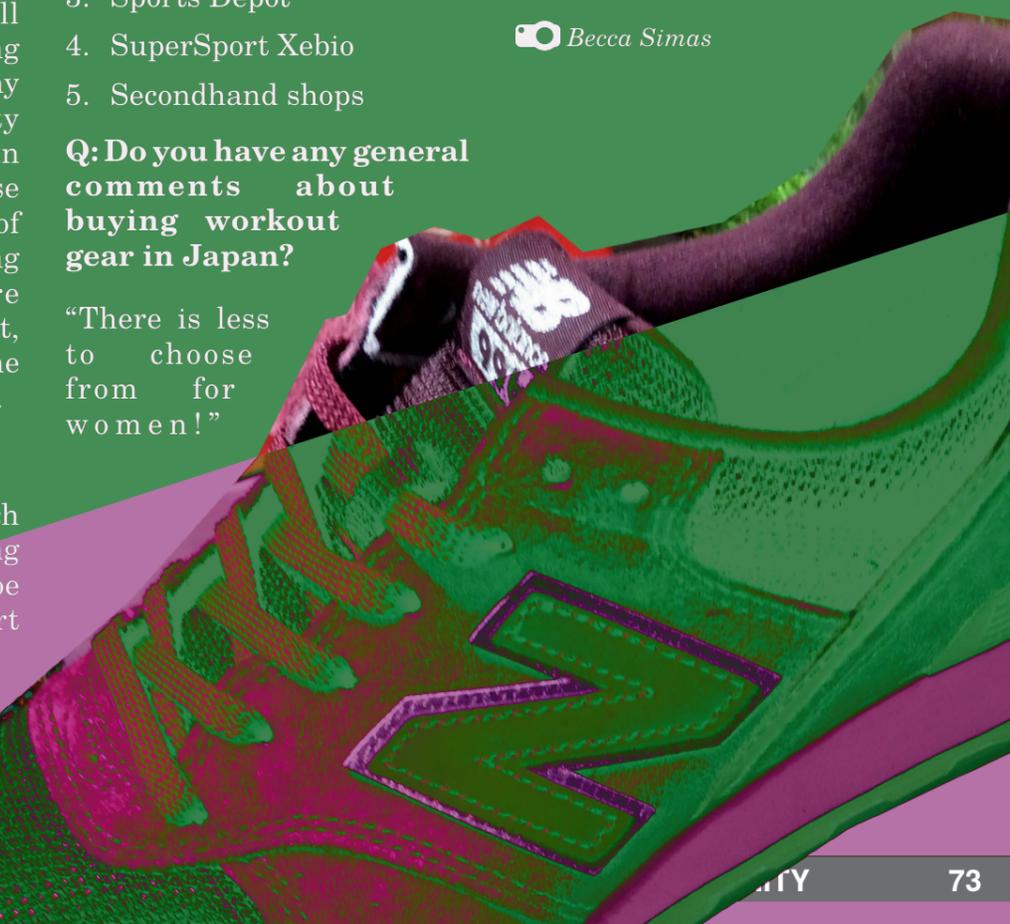
"It's hard to find a good running bra without padding from my experience here. I just want a regular running bra." Anonymous

"Japan has a great selection and amazing technology when it comes to running, hiking, and climbing. However, it's not always the style I am used to. I have never been fond of running skirts, wind breakers, or the like, but it is easy to understand how they are almost necessary sometimes." Anonymous

OVERALL

Buying brand name work-out clothes can be quite expensive. If you're on a budget, buying secondhand or last year's style may be better for you. It should be more about how you feel than how you look when you're running because you're just going to get sweaty anyway.

 Becca Simas



KAIZEN FIGHTER

GREG RAMMIT (KUMAMOTO)



After arriving in Japan from New Zealand, I played the same contact sports that had taken my interest back home. I became disillusioned with these sports for various reasons that could be used as a prequel to this story and found myself searching for a new sport to keep me busy. I had never been interested in the traditional martial arts and as I had come from a low socioeconomic area the rougher martial arts were not appealing because of the various stories heard from friends who had won their fight in the ring and lost soon after in the parking area.

Now that I was in Japan, I found—through a connection with a friend—a kickboxing gym. I observed a class and joined soon after. The coach spoke no English, but with most sports, and in particular impact sports like kickboxing, you catch on quicker than usual as a matter of survival. My coach was an old-school type, he wasn't going to let me fight until he felt that I was completely ready in terms of my preparation and conditioning. After what seemed an eternity I was finally allowed to fight in my first amateur fight. I had to lose three kilograms to make the 80kg limit and it was the hardest part of the training journey. I learnt a lot about nutrition and in particular how MY body functions. It's all well and good to look on the Internet to see the amazing results that someone else has achieved, but by not being able to see their entire story means that there are large gaps in their journey.

...I had a broken knuckle which was suffered during the fight and ended up needing x-rays and a cast...I took home \$5 after gas and highway charges...

After I had cleared my weight I immediately dug into the chocolate and melon *pan* (bread) that I had been deprived of for the last month. I spent the next hour sitting on the toilet as the chocolate and melon *pan* did a number on my insides and were looking for an escape route out. I recovered and started the fight with aggression. A common rookie mistake was that I held my breath in the first minute and almost passed out. I was lucky enough to win by a first round KO from a jumping punch that I had found on YouTube. Fast forward today and I am able to monitor my weight and lose five kilograms to make my weight grade easily when required.

Kickboxing and MMA has become increasingly popular since I started. This change seems to mimic the popularity felt around the world. As usual, with the popularity comes an attraction with the underworld scene.

My first professional fight was for the IMU championship belt in the Kyushu *yakuza* stronghold of KitaKyushu. I was seen as an easy beat as I had struggled with the fitness aspects of having to fight

opponents 20kg heavier than me due to the lack of fighters available in my weight class. This was compounded by the fact I had injured my shoulder while playing rugby two months before. I didn't know that I was a part of the main event and it was only when the crowd of fighters slowly thinned out in the changing rooms that I realised I was the sacrificial lamb.

Probably the hardest part for me was deciding what music I should have used for my entrance music. I chose AC/DC "Thunderstruck" to remind me of my Australasian upbringing.

With my fitness below par, I decided to concentrate on striking with my knees. This is because there is a limit in the number of strikes you can do in amateur matches. It worked and I won the fight in the first round by knockout. There was a deathly silence and my coach wasn't overly jubilant. I had to ask him to make sure that I had won. He said 'yes' and we got our stuff and left the silent arena because the *yakuza* was angry and wanted to extract some revenge on the three guys from Hicksville Kumamoto.

To sweeten the deal I didn't actually get to keep the belt that I had won, I was told that I could purchase it for \$500 USD. On the drive home I told my coach and trainer that I would pay for everything with the winnings from the fight. I opened the envelope to see \$30, which made me wonder what was in the other guy's envelope. We celebrated in the drive thru of McDonalds and we found out, as we were on the highway, that they had left the meat out of one of the Big Macs.

What made things worse was that I had a broken knuckle which was suffered during the fight and ended up needing x-rays and a cast. That meant that I took home \$5 after gas and highway charges. The life of a rookie professional fighter!

Greg Rammit is an individual with many talents in many pursuits in particular sports. When he is not pursuing his sports he is writing comics, looking after his three kids and people in the international community, and of course being an ALT.

 Greg Rammit



WHEN CULTURE IS THICKER THAN BLOOD

MIKA THORNBURG (CHIBA)

As JETs and foreigners living in Japan, we are constantly confronting cultural barriers. Whether it's in our professional lives at our jobs with our students, colleagues, and supervisors, or in our personal lives with our communities, friends, and significant others, it's something we all have to constantly face, negotiate, and hopefully overcome as we seek to create relationships and community.

As a multiracial *Shin-Nisei* Japanese American living and working in Japan on the JET Program, I too have navigated these complex hurdles. Before coming to Japan, I prepared myself for culture shock and cultural barriers like most JETs. However, there was one relationship in which I didn't anticipate these barricades. After all, I believed that blood was thicker than culture, that family was family no matter what. This is a story of my reconnection with my Japanese family, the joys and the pleasures along with the unforeseen.

I've known them my whole life. I remember sneaking up to my aunt's room on the second floor of her house in Saitama and catching her smoking at her vanity. At age five, I would lecture her about how smoking was bad in my own special *Japanglish* language. I remember sitting at that same vanity and trying on all the jewelry neatly laid out in its drawers, my aunt watching me in the mirror and fixing my ponytails. I remember crying the night before my cousin returned to her home in Kanagawa

(where she lived at the time), her vacation over, and me fretting that I'd never see her beautiful face again.

Up until the age of ten I visited my family in Japan every year. I've known them and they've known me, but only through these memories. As time passed, the fibers that held us together began to weaken and unwind. I grew up in San Francisco, California, and my Japanese got rusty. I became enveloped in the teenage American lifestyle and as my school schedule got busier, family vacations got less and less frequent. These people, who were once so important to my childhood, became mere passing thoughts of years past. They were always there in the background, a message transmitted through my mother, a *nengajou* and *otoshidama* every January, but I had very little contact with them in the interim before I came to Japan on the JET Program.

By the time I was about ten, I had learned to become embarrassed. It was at this point that I stopped speaking in Japanese. I didn't want to try for fear of saying the wrong thing. I didn't understand that trying led to failing which led to learning, which led to practicing, which eventually led to success, as I so often try to teach my students now (mistakes are OK, guys!). But, as a shy, self-conscious child, it felt safer to not try. After all, my mom was standing right there. She was an interpreter by profession, and she was translating for my dad anyway. Thus, my mother always bridged the

relationship I had with my aunts and cousins.

Fast-forward 13 years. I arrived safely in Japan and started working at a junior high school in Asahi, Chiba. Before I met my aunt and cousin for the first time on my own, I was stirring with ambivalence, both scared and excited. Without the fundamental piece of my mother, the fragile Jenga tower of our relationship might all come crumbling down. But on the other hand, maybe my mother wasn't so essential after all? Maybe I could just slide her piece out and the tower would be as strong as ever?

To be honest, I don't really remember the first time I met them. I'm sure it was a bit awkward at times, and there were some *if-I-just-say-this-English-word-with-katakana-pronunciation-maybe-they'll-understand* communication moments on my part. However, that memory has been eclipsed by the countless other times I've seen them that mean far much more; times where we delved more deeply into our histories and talked more intimately about the different twists and turns our lives had taken.

They opened their home to me and offered to help me with whatever I might need. They showed me old family pictures of my grandfather, who I never met, and my mother at age seven dressed in a *kimono* for her *Shichi-gosan* (七五三) ceremony. They told me stories about their childhoods and warned me of the health problems that run

in the family. I learned that, like my aunt and cousin, I sneeze when I'm cold, a trait my friends in America always thought was weird. It was wonderful. It was everything I wanted. The branches on my envisioned family tree were finally full of faces and meaning.

And then I was awoken from this idyllic dream where definitions and categorizations didn't exist. I assumed, because they had known me from the time I was small and because the family connection was so obvious, that assumptions some Japanese people have about foreigners would not

"Actually, I like vegetables."

"But, you don't really like Japanese food, right?"

Don't you know that I grew up eating Japanese food made by my mother every night until I was 18? Where were these questions coming from? They certainly weren't reflective of what my life actually looked like.

I had miscalculated, and because of that, the realization hit me hard. I didn't get to just walk through the *gen'kan* and become one of them; in their eyes, I was still undeniably American, in ways I actually wasn't. I mean

were rather harmless in the grand scheme of things; especially compared to the love and support they have given me. But I would be lying if I said it didn't hurt: to not be seen as yourself, but rather as a fallacious caricature of a stereotype by family—people who are linked to you in ways so strong you can't explain.

Creating community is not always easy, even when the path is laid out clearly before you. But working through the barriers—analyzing them, understanding the reasons for their existence, and then finding forgiveness for them—are all important steps in achieving what we

...their questions were rather harmless...But I would be lying if I said it didn't hurt: to not be seen as yourself, but rather as a fallacious caricature of a stereotype by family...

apply to me. I thought that maybe because they knew my dad—the American man their sister and aunt chose to marry—and had been to America, they might see this whole situation differently. Maybe with them I could be just Mika, the niece and cousin who grew up in America? Not Mika the foreigner, which my face signals to everyone else in Japanese society.

"You don't like fish, right?"

What? I'm confused; didn't we just have fish last night, and go out for sushi the month before?

"You like meat, right?"

don't get me wrong: I like burgers as much as the next person, but I would rather eat *natto* because that tastes like home. I had prepared myself for these kinds of questions before I got to Japan. I knew that my multiracial Japanese American identity would not be apparent on my face. I guess I just wasn't expecting these stereotypes to pop up in a place that felt so intimate. I guess, sometimes, culture is thicker than blood.

I don't fault them for making these assumptions. We all are socialized to think in certain ways and I, too, have made incorrect assumptions about others in the past. Additionally, their questions

are all doing here, in one way or another: bridging the world through our relationships and interactions. My experience is not unique, and it is far from the saddest or hardest one out there, but it taught me an important lesson. Although these moments can be painful, their existence does not hinder the creation of strong and (hopefully) lasting relationships. Breaching cultural barriers is never easy, especially the most intimate ones, but every obstacle I hurdle makes me stronger and more prepared for the next one.

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Connect is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of Connect, Rajeiv Rahela, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

ARTICLES

Write about something you're doing. Write about something you love. Tell us a story.

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Tell us about someone in your community who's doing something neat and noteworthy. Cooks, collectors, calligraphers—we want to hear about the inspiring people around you.

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All of Connect's photos are provided by the community, from the cover to the articles and everything in between. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Patrick Finn, at patrick.finn@ajet.net.

HAIKU

Each month Connect will feature haiku from our readers. Haiku are simple, clean, and can be about anything you like! If you're an aspiring wordsmith with the soul of Basho, send all of your haiku along with your name and prefecture to connect.editor@ajet.net.

COMICS

You asked for it, and now Connect features comics. Whether you're a desk doodler or a published artist, we want to see your panels and strips about life in Japan.



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