



Punk Culture & View
Are Japanese societal standards necessary or unfair & outdated? Page 2

The Place of Woman at Work
There are many issues ranging from systemic discrimination to everyday harassment. Page 3

Future Fashion Designers
NUAS collection contributes to students' career development and creativity. Page 4

What Makes Art?
Explore inside the creativity of NUAS and NUS students. Page 5

Grading System to Adapt
Interviews in three countries highlight their educational characteristics. Page 6

Over-Tourism Prevents Authentic Experience

WHY LOCAL TOURISM MATTERS

By Celina KATO, Alice B. KWAAITAAL, Sena NAKAI, and Tadan M. SHINGOOSE

Japanese culture is world-renowned, making the country popular among tourists. Yet, due to the popularity of certain tourist attractions, over-tourism has become an issue. Focusing only on famous tourist attractions might mean missing out on a deeper, more authentic cultural experience. Additionally, an increased stream of revenue for smaller attractions can go further toward uplifting the local community. To better understand these potential benefits, we spoke with two small galleries to hear their views on how supporting smaller tourist attractions is beneficial.

Mr. Masumitsu Hiramatsu is the CEO of Oriental Entertainment and an alumnus of the Nagoya University of the Arts. He founded Auto Galleria LUCE in 2004 to share his passion for automobiles and art. In addition to his rotating gallery, he hosts several car-related events in Nagoya throughout the year. The gallery itself has a warm and inviting ambiance that directs attention to the exhibits and reflects the director's enthusiasm.

For Mr. Hiramatsu, the gallery is more than a display case. Auto Galleria LUCE is designed to educate the public about the automobile's role in Aichi Prefecture's development and in Japanese culture overall. Mr. Hiramatsu said, "The backbone of Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture is cars. Sometimes we do not realize that we are being supported by automobiles and transportation. They have become a necessity of life. My goal is to share my knowledge and passion for cars with everyone."

It is true that Aichi Prefecture owes much of its economic success to the transportation industry, since it is where Toyota is located. Consequently, the prefecture is awash with passionate car enthusiasts, such as Mr. Hiramatsu. When asked about the potential advantages smaller galleries have over larger ones, he highlighted the intimacy between visitors and the exhibits: "Users can easily visit and become interested in small attractions because of their casual feeling."

Above all else, the gallery seeks to emphasize the automotive industry's significance to Aichi Prefecture and its contribution to the local

community. "I believe that this exhibition is a big step toward change in Nagoya City," said Mr. Hiramatsu. "The gallery and car exhibition's purpose is to assist the Aichi automobile industry. Nagoya City also supports our events."

Fostering a symbiotic relationship between communities and their tourist attractions reduces the risk of losing important cultural touchstones. It also allows for new opportunities for local residents, as we found during our visit to the Meito Art Museum.

One of the first characteristics you notice when visiting the Meito Art Museum is the soft lighting and the quietness, creating a peaceful and relaxing environment for visitors. The paintings have plenty of room between one another, giving their elegance ample breathing space.

Larger pieces are placed in an area with taller roofing, offering improved lighting for an enhanced viewing experience. Their presence almost fills the whole room, giving the space a unique atmosphere. The museum is located in Nagakute City and exhibits many Japanese artworks.

We discussed with the curator what the benefits are of having an art museum in Nagakute City. While the number of visitors and artworks on display are much smaller than those at larger art galleries, the Meito Art Museum leverages this to gain unique benefits. The curator went on to say, "It contributes to the local people and visitors. For example, it is easier to give an opportunity to local school children to learn about and be interested in art. It also gives an opportunity to local art university students in Nagakute to exhibit their artwork in the Meito Art Museum."

Additionally, the size creates a comfortable atmosphere for visitors to enjoy the exhibits in greater detail. The Meito Art Museum moved from Nagoya City to Nagakute City hoping that the new location would feel more relaxing for patrons who can enjoy looking at the exhibits in tandem with a Japanese garden. The curator said, "The museum displays a quantity of artworks that is neither too much nor too little, so visitors won't be tired while they are looking at the artworks."

Additionally, the museum hosts events where the curator explains the exhibits, allowing visitors an opportunity to learn in greater de-

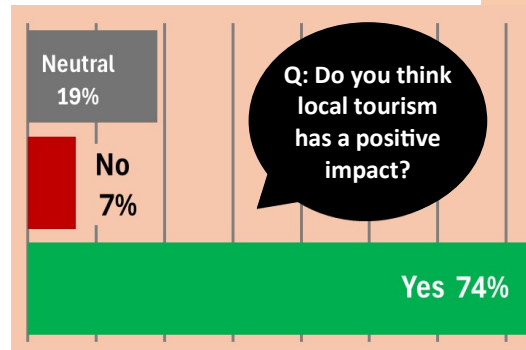


Above: Mr. Hiramatsu poses for a photo in his car gallery "LUCE," in Nagoya City. He emphasized, "Even small attractions can be of interest." **Left:** Japanese garden *Karesansui* inside the Meito Art Museum, Nagakute City, Aichi Pref.



Students Have Positive Outlook

Based on responses from NUS students regarding local tourism, respondents generally had a positive outlook, recognizing the benefits of supporting it. Despite some concerns from respondents about over-tourism, most students argue that tourism is important to the economy and showcases the culture and history of individual prefectures, while also preventing issues such as depopulation in rural communities.



tail. From this interview, it can be said that having the museum in a smaller area helps prevent over-tourism. The curator thinks that this is a big problem in Japan. There is an increasing number of people coming to smaller art museums to avoid the drawbacks associated with over-tourism.

Local tourism can be defined as activities and experiences that are available to tourists in a specific geographic location, such as a city or prefecture. Local tourism benefits the economy of the region and supports the livelihoods of residents. Locals share their culture and heritage which builds pride and identity within the community and broadens visitors' understanding of a destination through cultural exchange. This form of tourism offers an authentic, memorable, and immersive travel experience. Specifically, in Japan tourism is the second-largest export industry. According to The Japan News by Yomiuri Shimbun, international visitors spent approximately 4.8 trillion yen in Japan in 2019, which is about 1% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP).

Recently, over-tourism has become an emerging issue at popular destinations such as Kyoto and Tokyo. As a potential solution, in 2020 the

Japanese government established the Cultural Tourism Promotion Act, which aims to revitalize underrepresented regions to encourage culture-driven regional tourism.

Diversifying tourist attractions by investing in local attractions presents important opportunities for small business promotion while preserving regional cultural practices. Travelers often seek unique specialties such as cuisine, crafts, souvenirs, and historically significant items. Additionally, famous products like Nagasaki castella or Kobe beef are synonymous with the cities they originate from, revealing the strong connection between regional identity and local gastronomy. Osaka's *takoyaki* and *okonomiyaki* and Nagoya's *miso katsu* are also known as unique icons of the two cities.

By prioritizing these distinct offerings, communities can strengthen their economies and offer visitors an immersive experience that goes beyond mainstream tourist hotspots. This holistic approach will help Japan preserve its distinctive cultural heritage, support sustainable tourism methods, enhance economic development, mitigate over-tourism, and offer genuine, enjoyable travel experiences.

Society

By Sadie BRUCE, Husnain S. A. MOHAMMED, Beau S. P. MORGAN, and Ikumi NAKAGAWA

“Japan is often admired for its harmony, but at what cost?” For those who stray from societal norms, like those in punk subcultures, conformity can feel stifling and unfair.

In an exclusive interview, we spoke with Mr. Mune Kato, owner of the punk bar ‘Red Dragon’ and the man who brought Hells Angels to Japan. We discuss his opinions on this matter and his justifications of why certain aspects of punk elements need to adhere to societal standards, and the elements of punk and lifestyle that he believes deserve respect. This led us to further our investigation by surveying Japanese students to gather their opinions on whether Japan’s standards are unfair and outdated, or whether these societal standards are a necessary function to maintain harmony in Japan.

Appearance plays a significant role in maintaining this sense of harmony. Modesty and professionalism are often seen as non-negotiable, shaping everything from school uniforms to corporate dress codes. Straying from these norms can lead to social repercussions. Societal guidelines govern behavior and appearance, reinforcing traditional values.

Many individuals feel compelled to follow conventional routes—pursuing stable, corporate roles, even when these choices conflict with their personal ambitions. While these norms help maintain a sense of social order, they can also create tension for those seeking alternative paths. But what happens when someone refuses to conform?

For members of alternative subcultures, such as punk and rock communities, breaking away from these rigid expectations isn’t just a choice; it’s a statement. Often misunderstood and judged for their appearance, these individuals face unique challenges from discrimination in public spaces to missed opportunities in the workplace. Their stories offer a powerful lens through which to examine the broader question: Are Japan’s societal standards too strict?

In a small punk rock venue nestled in Japan’s urban sprawl, Mr. Kato has spent over a decade curating a haven for alternative music lovers. Eleven years of experience running the venue Red Dragon, designing a clothing brand, and participating in the Hells Angels motorcycle group, he stands as a symbol of resistance to Japan’s strict societal norms.

When asked about the evolution of the punk subculture, Mr. Kato was candid: “Most of my regulars are older now. I don’t see many younger people coming through.” This observation highlights a potential generational shift, as societal standards continue to prioritize conformity, leaving less room for youth to explore alternative lifestyles.

Despite the apparent decline in younger patrons, Mr. Kato remains

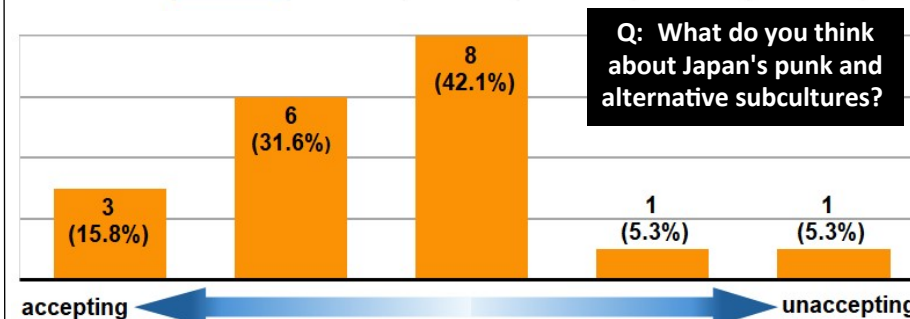
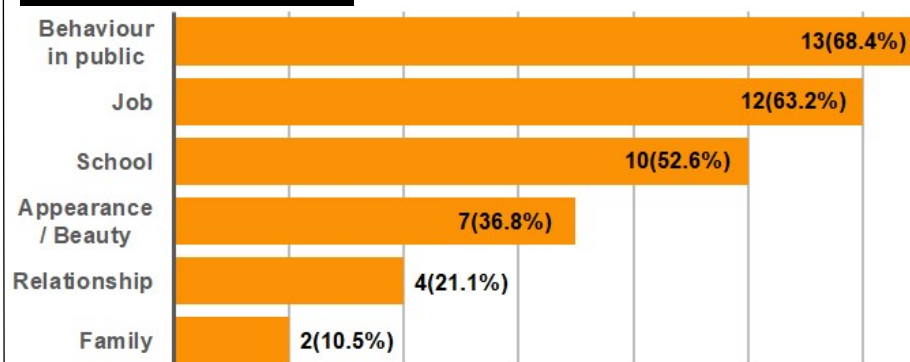
Are Japanese Societal Standards too Strict?

PUNK CULTURE & VIEW



Interview with Mr. Kato (at the back), the owner of the punk bar ‘Red dragon’, Nagoya City, Aichi Pref.

Q: Which part of life do you think has the most societal expectations? (pick as many as you want)



steadfast in his belief in preserving subcultural boundaries. “Societal standards exist for a reason,” he said. “They create structure. If everyone tried to be alternative, it wouldn’t be alternative anymore—it would lose its authenticity.” For him, the integrity of the subculture depends on its separation from mainstream acceptance. “In a society where everything is integrated, distinctiveness would disappear. Subculture needs to remain separate to preserve its strong individuality and pure features.”

Mr. Kato also offered advice for navigating employment as a member of an alternative subculture. “If you want to have socially unacceptable styles like ‘weird’ hairstyles or tattoos, you need to acquire some skills to make a decent living with your strong individuality,” he said. This reflects a practical approach to blending personal expression with societal realities. “Life will be hard, but it’s important to stay true to who you are.”

As a member of the Hells Angels,

Mr. Kato has been featured in alternative and motorcycle magazines, cementing his role as a prominent figure in the scene. But his experiences go beyond Japan’s borders. His travels to European countries introduced him to global issues such as immigration and discrimination. These experiences, coupled with friendships in the punk community—many of whom grew up in single-mother households—deepened his awareness of societal struggles.

This awareness spurred Mr. Kato to action. He began volunteering and organizing charitable events, such as the Christmas Bash Toy Run, which provides gifts to orphaned children during the holidays. For Mr. Kato, punk is not just about rebellion but also about building a better society.

In reflecting on Japanese societal expectations, Mr. Kato acknowledges their influence but critiques their rigidity. “I think there are still many Japanese people who act in order to meet social expectations,”

he explained. “Everyone is not yet strong enough to show their individuality. If you are strong, both mentally and physically, you make space in your mind to be kind to others.” Through his work and passion, Mr. Kato provides a space for those who feel out of place in Japan’s rigid social structure, highlighting the importance of subcultures like punk in offering an alternative path, one where individuality can thrive and social consciousness can flourish.

We also conducted our own survey, sending it to Japanese people to gather information on how they feel about the societal standards they face firsthand, as well as their views and opinions of punk subcultures and tattoos. Notably, 62.3% of respondents chose “Job” in answer to the question “Which part of life do you think has the most societal expectations?” One participant explained, “I had to dress up really formally as a candidate, which I felt was a strong societal pressure. I felt there was an atmosphere where I was not allowed to express my personality through appearance and was forced to be like every other candidate.” Referring back to our interview, Mr. Kato emphasized that if you look aesthetically against the societal norm, you should expect to be treated differently and must be innovative in creating your own opportunities to live with this “strong individuality.”

Another question we asked the survey participants was their level of acceptance toward Japan’s punk and alternative culture, with 41.2% indicating a “middle-of-the-road” stance. This neutral outlook suggests that modernism and bolder visual expressions are becoming increasingly accepted. Furthermore, 89.5% of respondents were between ages 18 and 24, implying that the youthful attitude of Japanese students may be softening traditional societal standards. Although Mr. Kato stated that he observes fewer younger patrons engaging with the subculture, our findings reveal a quiet shift in perspectives, with younger individuals showing greater openness to alternative lifestyles than appearances might suggest.

While the ambiguity of opinions and the ever-evolving social landscape make a definitive answer elusive, our interviews and survey have shed meaningful light on the issues of Japan’s social standards. Younger generations, as evidenced in our results, increasingly embrace neutrality toward alternative lifestyles. Yet, the weight of societal expectations continues to pose challenges, particularly in professional settings and public perception.

The punk community, represented by Mr. Kato, offers a powerful example of individuality flourishing under rigid norms, reminding us that self-expression is possible even in a society where strict expectations prevail—and that those who stray from the norm can still be valued members of society. As Japan evolves, there is growing hope for more versatile and inclusive societal standards.

Steady Progress, Yet Much to be Done

WOMAN AT WORK IN JAPAN

By Sylvie L. CHAPPELL, Fei-Yang ZHENG, and Ella S. LEPORINI

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, in 2024 Japan is ranked 118th out of 146 countries. In a country where one might expect progress and modernization, gender equality still does not seem to be improving significantly.

How do these inequalities impact the workplace in Japan? For women like Ms. Hanako (pseudonym), a board director at an educational institute, navigating Japan's male-dominated workplaces means confronting issues ranging from systemic discrimination to everyday harassment. However, it also highlights women's resilience and determination to overcome these barriers.

Ms. Hanako's early work experiences were marked by harassment. As a university student working part-time at a movie theater, she encountered persistent, inappropriate advances from a customer. "A *yakuza*-like thug kept coming to the theater and asking me to marry him every time I had a shift. I was so disgusted by this that I quit the part time job dishonestly," she recalled. This incident would not be the first, nor the last, in her career. Later, she would experience sexual harassment from men in the business world, in places where alcohol was involved, including one man who stroked her thigh. "I took these incidents as lessons to keep my guard up at all times."

She also notes the gender differences in how she was treated in the workplace. As a saleswoman, some men would attempt to extort her: "If you stay with me for two nights, I will place a large order." These were the types of remarks they would make. She said that her manager took control of these situations and blocked those customers. The support and attention of a manager are crucial in such circumstances, and Ms. Hanako expressed appreciation for her manager's response.

According to the graph **Fig.1**, 39.5% of 7,780 companies had consultations regarding sexual harassment reports. To add to this, according to nippon.com—using data from Shikigaku of 2,204 respondents—only 36% of the respondents who had experienced harassment in the workplace had reported it to their company. For this reason, you could argue that the statistics in the graph only represent a fraction of the amount of harassment in Japanese companies. The reasons for not reporting harassment can vary, but 59.4% of the respondents who didn't report it felt that doing so would achieve nothing. These fears are justified: among those who did re-

port harassment, 47.2% said that the company took no action in response. This work culture forces victims of harassment to become self resilient rather than rely on others to deal with their harassers.

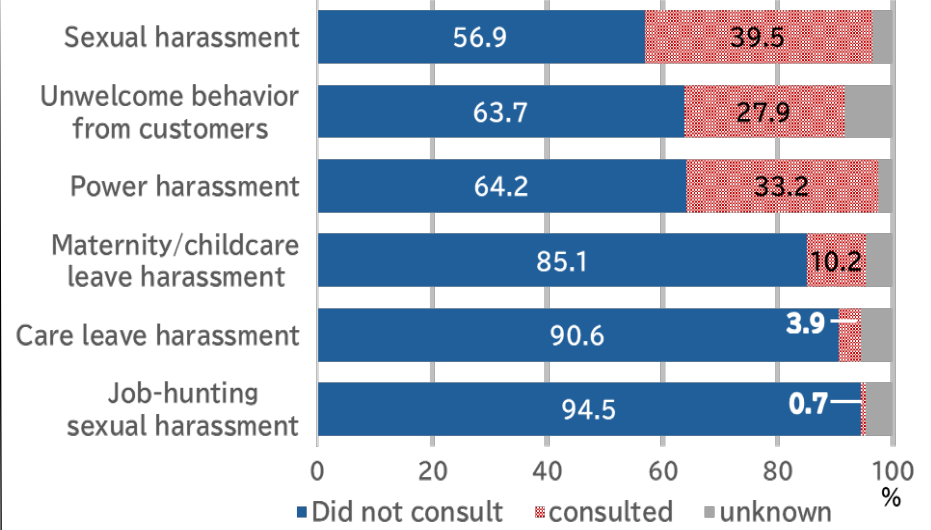
Sexual and physical harassment are not the only consequences of gender inequality in the workplace. Ms. Hanako also points out that remnants of male-dominated thinking from the Shōwa era reveal areas that require further effort. For example, male supervisors in her company say things like "our girls" when referring to the women in their department. There is an attempt to escape an outdated mindset, yet they still cannot fully shed the Shōwa mindset. Older male executives from the Shōwa generation often perpetuate a male-dominated workplace culture, preventing women from being heard.

That is why Ms. Hanako believes "if there is a mood in the company that gender is not a concern, women will feel comfortable taking the first step forward." She also mentioned, "male bosses tend to be too preoccupied with harassment issues, which makes it difficult for them to effectively manage female subordinates." In such situations, Ms. Hanako steps in to mediate. Having both men and women as bosses helps to diversify the mindsets that bosses have and leads to a more inclusive and egalitarian company culture. McKinsey's "Women in the Workplace" report emphasizes how women in leadership roles can influence the overall gender climate in an organization, particularly when top management prioritizes diversity.

Ms. Hanako acknowledges the challenges of sexism in the workplace but also points out how, as a woman, she has found some advantages. During her time as a salesperson, she did not view being a woman as a disadvantage. In fact, she mentions that some customers became so supportive of her that they bought products they didn't need just to help her. She reflects, "There is a saying in Japan that 'women are charming,' and there are still some advantages to being tolerated because you are a woman." She also explains her approach to handling difficult situations: "I was lucky to have realized that 'winning by losing' (respecting the other person with humility) is not a win-win situation, even if you settle with words like 'women are charming.'" This shows that while women may face discrimination, they can also turn these challenges into opportunities.

During Ms. Hanako's lifetime, Japan has made significant progress

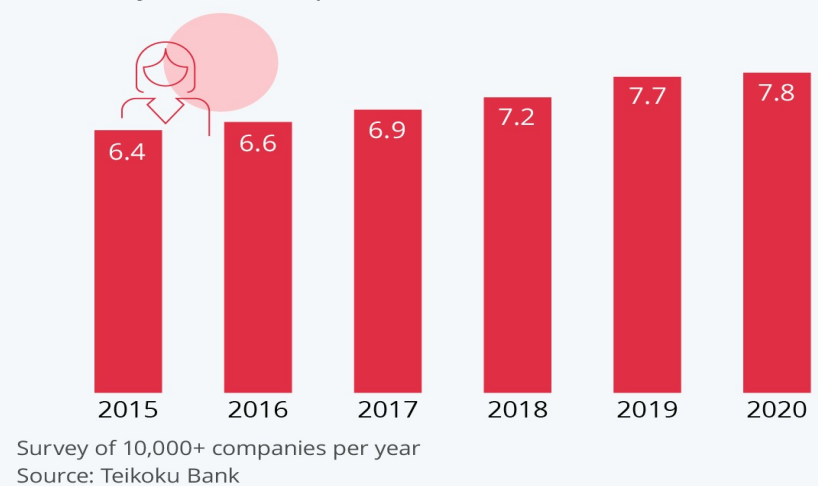
Fig.1 Consultation on harassment in the Past 3 Years (By Type of Harassment)



Source: Report on the Survey on Harassment in the Workplace 2023 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

Women in Leadership Roles Remain Scarce in Japan

Share of management positions in Japanese companies held by women (in percent)



Survey of 10,000+ companies per year
Source: Teikoku Bank



in the workplace, particularly in supporting women's career advancement. Maternity leave was institutionalised in Japan in 1947; however, it only mandated 14 weeks of leave. In 1992, a childcare leave law was mandated, stating that employers should aim to provide up to a year of leave to either the mother or father at 40% of their pay or more, in addition to maternity leave. In 2022, a paternity leave law was mandated, which allows men to take up to four weeks off within an eight week period after the birth of the child. This enables both men and women to take paternity and maternity leave, promoting shared childcare responsibilities instead of placing the entire burden on women.

Ms. Hanako's experience mirrors this shift: "Returning to work, with shorter working hours at the request of employees, and returning to the department where they worked before taking leave, have now become the norm." Men are also starting to take paternity leave, and she believes this shift will expand over time. The government is running initiatives to support employees taking care leave, including subsidies for small and medium enterprises if they pay assistance benefits to colleagues who cover the workload of workers on childcare leave or reduced hours.

Ms. Hanako remains hopeful for the future, especially as organiza-

tions adapt to societal changes. She recalled a TV show in which two women shared management positions on a rotating basis. While such an arrangement may present challenges, she sees potential in experimenting with innovative solutions.

Ms. Hanako's experience highlights the still unequal position of women in Japan's workforce, yet it also demonstrates her resilience in overcoming barriers and building a successful career. Her story proves that despite persistent inequality, women can thrive professionally.

According to the Global Gender Gap, "the share of women in legislative, senior official, and managerial roles [has] increased by +1.7% from 2023 and +4.6% since 2006," reflecting the growth of women with successful careers in Japan over the past 20 years. The government supports this progress through various initiatives in the Basic Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women 2024 report, such as "developing female human resources who will participate in policy making and planning processes in every sphere."

Ultimately, although there is much work to be done, recent improvements and policies indicate that Japan is making steady progress towards a more inclusive and supportive workplace for women and others.

Fashion

By Mohamed H. QUZAH, Krista C. VAN BAAL, Ada S. ÜNLÜ, and Aoi SAKAEDA

Fashion shows are a vital part of the learning process for students aspiring to enter the fashion industry. From concept development to execution, these events serve as a platform where students can explore their creative limits while gaining essential skills needed in the professional world. We heard from three third-year students and one teacher from the Department of Fashion Design who participated in a fashion show at Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences (NUAS) on October 26, 2024. Their responses reveal how fashion events contribute to further career development, creativity, and a deeper understanding of the industry's demands.

One of the core themes emerging from students' responses is the significant impact that participation in a fashion show has on their career aspirations and professional growth. We asked the students via a survey: "Do you want to pursue a career in fashion after graduating from university?" Out of 15 answers, ten students affirm they do and hope they can pursue a career in this field, while the remaining five students are still considering it. The fashion world is notoriously competitive; it's either you make it or you don't, and this uncertainty is a shared concern among our respondents.

The planning and execution of a fashion show, from initial concept to final presentation, mirror real-world challenges in the fashion industry. Students learn how to translate abstract ideas into tangible designs and see them come to life under strict deadlines. As one student noted, the ability to manage both the creative and logistical aspects of a fashion show—whether it's costume design, production, or event staging—prepares them for the multifaceted nature of working in fashion. This experience of creating something from scratch under pressure builds confidence, enhances problem-solving skills, and strengthens students' communication abilities in collaborating with individuals from different backgrounds. Event production, team collaboration, and time management stand out as crucial skills developed during the process.

The challenges students face during production extend beyond the creative process. For example, the struggle of balancing high-quality design with budget limitations is an inherent part of the experience. Despite these struggles, students expressed how working within constraints to achieve a professional result taught them resourcefulness. One student mentioned that a particularly strict deadline forced her to be both efficient and quick.

Students also emphasized the importance of teamwork in organizing a fashion show. According to Professor Kazukuni Uchida from NUAS,

Fashion Show Shapes Future Designers

FOLLOWING THE DAYS OF NUAS STUDENTS



"By creating a fashion show from scratch, students can gain exposure to a variety of jobs and subjects, broadening their horizons for the future." He implied that organizing such an event as a team would be beneficial for the students—even for those who ultimately choose not to work in the fashion industry.

Organising a fashion show requires collaboration across various departments, from design and lighting to sound engineering, as well as cooperation with models, production teams, and photographers. Working as part of a team mirrors the industry's need for designers, stylists, and other professionals to work together to bring a collection to life, offering students valuable insights into their potential future roles in fashion production.

Bridging the Gap Between Classroom and Industry

While knowledge gained in the classroom forms the foundation of a student's education, the live fashion show experience offers valuable lessons that can't be learned from textbooks alone. According to the Professors of NUAS, the transition from concept development to a finished runway piece is a learning curve that sharpens students' understanding of real-world fashion production. They must deal with the unpredictability of live events and respond to last-minute challenges.



Above: Interview with NUAS students, Ms. Maho Miyagawa, Ms. Yume Takayama, Sana Matsuda by Ada, Mohamed and Krista (in order left to right)
Left: Presentation of the group with the concept titled "Flottants chouchou"

Participating in a live fashion show also allows students to experience the pressure of presenting their work to an audience. The emotional and technical preparations—such as rehearsing model movements and selecting music—teach students the importance of precision and professionalism.

Thinking Beyond Conventional Boundaries

When asked about sources of inspiration, both students and teachers emphasized thinking beyond conventional boundaries. One teacher encouraged students to explore opposing ideas—examining things people typically avoid or overlook—and find beauty in them. This approach fosters an experimental mindset that motivates students to create pieces challenging current trends.

The six concepts featured in NUAS' 2024 fashion show—ranging from sustainability and human/animal experimentation to natural phenomena like diamonds and snow—demonstrate how fashion shows can become platforms for innovative storytelling.

Diversity and Inclusivity

A significant theme in modern fashion is inclusivity, and universities are gradually weaving this subject into their curricula. The Universal Fashion Association, founded by Professor Uchida, has played a pioneering role in reaching individ-

Right: The leaflet of NUAS Collection 2024
Below: Presentation of the group with the concept titled "Diamond Dust"



uals of all abilities, illustrating the program's commitment to breaking barriers and making fashion accessible to everyone.

By encouraging students to consider size diversity, adaptive clothing, and universal design, the program challenges narrow definitions of beauty and fashion. The importance of creating clothing that fits all bodies and abilities is a key component of the program's philosophy.

Preparing Students for the Industry

As the fashion industry evolves, so too does the curriculum of fashion programs. The shift towards sustainability, ethical production, and diversity is reflected in the collections students create. They are encouraged to use innovative materials, explore sustainable production methods, and question traditional approaches. Teachers also strongly guide them in launching their own fashion brands, emphasizing creativity, business management, and resilience against industry challenges.

Building a brand requires more than just designing clothes—it necessitates an understanding of the market and connecting with audiences. Planning and executing a live fashion show offers students a practical opportunity to gain experience they can leverage when launching their own labels in the future. In university settings, fashion shows merge creativity with technical skills and real-world business experience, introducing students to concepts like inclusive design, sustainability, and critical thinking.

In the words of one teacher, "If you think of something that no one has thought of before, you will come up with something new."

By Seoyoung OH, Zania M. PELZER, and Rike SONNTAG

What Inspires their Artistic Creativity?

SECRET OF NUFS & NUAS STUDENTS

What makes art? What inspires creativity? What motivates those creations? Especially in Japan, students studying visual arts or participating in performance clubs like dance and music often pose these questions out of curiosity. Yet it seems that traditional influence is a major factor for most young artists in Japan. How does traditional influence play such an important role in motivating these students?

Many people argue that contemporary art in Japan is grounded in older, more traditional forms as a source of inspiration for young Japanese art students pursuing careers in art. Techniques from ancient Japanese art—such as painting, calligraphy, and certain methods of sketching—continue to find their way into modern works. For instance, older sketches and drawings used charcoal on paper scrolls, often featuring figures occupying most of the scroll with heavy, dark outlines. Traditional Japanese art was once defined by Britannica as an “exquisiteness of form, together with simplicity.” The subject matter frequently included nature and harmony, drawing on “the use of nature, religion, and East Asian philosophies.” Waves, mountains, plants, and flowers appeared prominently in these traditional media.

Ms. Akiho Kokaji, Japanese student at Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences (NUAS), seems strongly influenced by traditional Japanese aesthetics, especially the works of Japanese artist Kai Higashiyama, drawing inspiration from nature and their own personal emotions. Many traditional Japanese works feature scenes of nature, and Ms. Kokaji’s own focus on natural elements clearly reflects this. She states, “I am satisfied with my work (Afterwards, I hope someone else will be moved by my work...)” revealing what some might call an “old soul” approach. This outlook on creativity underscores her belief on the emotional impact of art.

Another Japanese student at NUAS, Ms. Yuna Tomori, finds significant inspiration in works from China—a source that also influenced certain traditional Japanese art forms. She admires “fine, delicate lines and realistic expressions” and believes art is “a visualization of the momentary energy of the people living in that period.” In her view art becomes a time capsule, capturing the essence of the artist’s era and preserving it for future audiences.



<Works and Creators>
Above: Flower arrangement, Akiho Kokaji
Middle: Love and jealousy to fill up, Yuna Tomori
Left: Flyer for Jigoku festival in Noboribetu, Hokkaido, Miku Matsuoka



Ms. Tomori also contends that art has the power to “move people, to inspire them, and to influence someone or even some non-human creature,” suggesting a possible *Shinto*-inspired perspective, wherein even nature or animals can be affected by art. Citing artists like Akira Uno, Takato Yamamoto, and Miwa Kon-do, she points to dark, fine lines in their works as having traditional influence.

Ms. Miku Matsuoka, another young Japanese artist at NUAS, holds differing opinions about what art represents. She believes that art “gives form to one’s arguments, desires, and worldview,” emphasizing how emotions can drive artistic production. “Art brings excitement to life, and that excitement ripples out into new excitement,” she explains. “A world without art would be an unstimulating and very boring world.” Ms. Matsuoka’s approach indicates that excitement is a key motivation for creating art, and her bold contour lines and vibrant color choices demonstrate the emotional energy she invests in her pieces.

Interview with Ms. Katsuragawa (right), singer in a cappella circle of NUFS, Nisshin City, Aichi Pref.

Performing arts, such as dance and music, also played significant roles in ancient Japanese culture. Many modern Japanese musicians still integrate traditional instruments and rhymes into their songs and performances. Popular artists like Kenshi Yonezu and Sakanakushon are known for fusing these traditional elements with contemporary music.

Students participating in performing art clubs at NUFS and NUAS offer diverse perspectives on what art means to them. For example, Mr. Ryutaro Hijikata, who has been playing in a wind orchestra for seven years, was initially inspired by watching a marching band. He states, “Everyone has to work together to produce music, even with people you do not get along personally. However, we need to tune in and match our sounds. I hope we can produce more music in which we can convey our hearts and souls to the audience.” This mindset aligns

closely with traditional Japanese performance arts, like *Noh* or *Rakugo* theater, which also emphasize collective harmony and emotional expression.

Mr. Hijikata further asserts music has the power to “bring equality to the world,” reflecting his belief that music unites people under a shared purpose, transcending individual differences.

A NUFS Japanese student, Ms. Tsumiki Katsuragawa, has participated in an acappella circle since her second year of university. She credits her interest in acappella to the American movie, *Pitch Perfect*. This parallels older historical exchanges between Japan and Western countries, where external cultural elements influenced Japanese art. Ms. Katsuragawa believes that music “enriches our relationships and gives us a lot to think about.” She also thinks that music “creates connections between people.” Her statements reaffirm the unifying power of music and suggest that cross-cultural inspiration can enhance and redefine traditional art forms in Japan.

Ultimately, traditional art remains a major motivation for many young Japanese artists, but each individual’s interpretation of art shapes how it appears in their work. Ms. Tomori and Ms. Kokaji both emphasize nature and humanity’s emotional core, while Ms. Matsuoka focuses on strong human emotions. In the realm of music, Mr. Hijikata centers on shared emotional expression—akin to traditional arts—while Ms. Katsuragawa integrates western music elements, much as some traditional Japanese artworks once absorbed Western influences.

The NUFS Times

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
+
DOMESTIC STUDENTS

This English-language newspaper, NUFS Times, is produced with collaborative teamwork of international students and domestic students. All students take the class Global

Japan Studies Course (GJSC) offered by the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies’ International Institute for Japanese Language Education (IJLE).

All themes are decided by team discussion and should cover Japanese society, economy, culture, education, etc. The students interviewed to collect real voices in the field to understand realtime Japan. It is full of exciting work!

Please check our back issues!

- <12th Edition>
- Japanese Advertisement—Its Techniques
- Startup Spirit and Corporate Culture
- The Fukushima Water Release
- <11th Edition>
- The Debate in Japan on Custody
- The Life of Idol “Wotas”
- “Hikikomori” in Japan



Education

By Alyssa M. FOULKROD,
Sayaka HAYASHI, and Kyle W.
SELESHANKO

Across the world, schools use grades to communicate to students how well they are doing in the classroom. These grades can impact how students perceive themselves due to the many factors involved, such as university options, future job opportunities, and scholarships. A student's own mental health also seems to be linked to the kind of grades they receive, suggesting it may be time to ask: Why are grades so important to a student's life in shaping their long-term success and well-being?

Imagine being back in high school: university is around the corner, and all that matters is getting a high enough grade on your math test to be accepted into the school of your dreams. You study for weeks and invest hundreds of hours, making the test all you can think about. This anxiety and stress, driven by the fear of grades, may have been controlling you for some time. The question is: Why do grades have such a massive grip on students' lives?

Methods differ

between countries

Countries like Japan, the USA, and Canada each have different grading systems, with pros and cons that affect their students in different ways. Comparing how these countries handle grading can give us a better understanding of its impact on students.

Canada uses the A-F grading scale, assigned through projects, assignments and tests throughout the school year. On average, universities require a B for acceptance into their programs, meaning that anything lower can create stress for students whose desired careers require a university degree.

The USA shares a similar system to Canada but

In order to better understand the situations, we interviewed a teacher from each country to learn how their grading methods work and why they are used from the perspective of someone currently in the field. Each teacher was asked the same set of questions for comparability.

All interviewees have taught or currently teach high school students in their respective countries. Ms. Brittany Foster from the US teaches grade 11-12 English, Ms. Jennifer Gakis from Canada formerly taught general high school courses and now supervises her district, and Ms. Naoko Yogo from Japan teaches English to Grades 1-3 in high school.

Both Western teachers give students a quiz once a week or so. In the US, grades are determined by mastery of the given topic, whereas in Canada both mastery and application of knowledge are considered. The grades students receive determine whether they can progress to the next course and also influence

Education System to Adapt: Western or Eastern?

COMPARING GLOBAL GRADING METHODS



Through interviews with teachers in three countries, the characteristics of each educational system were highlighted. Left: A high school in Canada

Comparison of grading systems

Grade Value	Japan	Canada	The United States
90-100%	A	A+	A
80-89%	A	A	B
70-79%	B	B	C
60-69%	B	C	D
50-59%	B	D	F
Below 50%	B-C	F	F

with a higher threshold for each letter grade, making it slightly harder for students to earn top marks.

Japan has three level based on achievement

Lastly, Japan's grading system uses letters A-C. Instead of showing degrees of success, an A is considered successful, a B is considered satisfactory, and a C is equivalent to a fail.

which degrees or programs they can apply for in university. In the US, teachers aim to align grades with students' performance and provide encouragement. In Canada, emphasis is placed on how well the class understands each topic: do they need a review or can they speed up?

In Japan, tests are given out based on the level of difficulty. Grade 1 classes receive no tests, while Grade 3 classes have tests every session to show mastery of more advanced material. These assessments gauge how students are able to "think, judge, and express themselves." Each aspect is assessed differently: thinking through performance and debate, judging through discussion, and expression through attitude and homework.

Although teachers guide how their class learns and is tested, the students themselves must do the work. Most students intend to attend university: in the US, about 70% plan on doing so, while Ms. Yogo notes that in Japan, almost all students

consider university but not necessarily a specific career path. In Canada, with more trade programs available, the percentage is slightly lower.

Of the five US students interviewed (all in Ms. Foster's Grade 11-12 English classes), three see themselves in college or finishing a degree within five years, which requires them to score higher grades. On the other hand, two state that they do not need degrees for their professions.

Although students receive many grades, this may affect their perception of school. In the US, Ms. Foster states that "some students have become dependent on the grade rather than what the grades actually mean." In Japan, Ms. Yogo hopes her grading encourages students to "love English, study by themselves, and know how to use the dictionary, because it is useful for students in the future."

Canadian students are seeing increasing test anxiety over the years.

High-stakes exams like final exams for diplomas especially affect their mental health, leading to re-assessment policies and accommodations nationwide. Ms. Foster agrees that "testing is exhausting—mentally and physically," even adding that some tests do not reflect future careers or social relations. Students in the US react similarly to bad grades. In the West, students' grades are never posted publicly; Ms. Gakis states, "They should never be made public; as in my opinion it would just increase anxiety." While most Japanese schools used to display grades, Ms. Yogo says that Grade 1 students often cry when faced with tests that

are harder than their junior high exams. Increasingly, students skip school out of depression or fear of low grades. She also notes, "grades have privacy problems, so in this school it is never posted."

Parents and their expectations further influence students' stress around tests and grades. In the West, parents play a major role in determining educational and career paths. Ms. Foster sees students follow in their parents' footsteps, while Ms. Gakis in Canada sees that "some students want to please their parents and in some cases don't know what they want, so they will choose the path their parents have set out for them." Japanese parents are likewise integral to students' choices, as students often have limited knowledge about jobs and universities, making parental guidance crucial.

Given all this information, what adjustments should be made to the grading system as a whole? A reassessment policy could reduce student stress, allowing them to retake tests and thus easing the burden of having to ace them on the first try. However, there is a risk that some students may not put in maximum effort if they know a second chance is available. Moving toward more portfolio-based and assignment-focused learning may be the way forward, allowing students to demonstrate knowledge application without the constraints of time-limited exams—a model that aligns better with Japan's emphasis on thinking, judging, and expressing. As with any new system, further experimentation must be done to ensure that changes function as intended.

Students' time in school can be filled with happy memories and unforgettable friends, but the demands of academic life weigh heavily. One way or another, grades significantly impact the classroom experience. The question remains: Should schools worldwide adopt a Western or an Eastern approach to grading, or does the grading system need a complete overhaul?

By Jean F. R. DES ARCIS,
Yukihiro SENDA,
and Monika TAKADA

THE BEAUTY OF WAGASHI

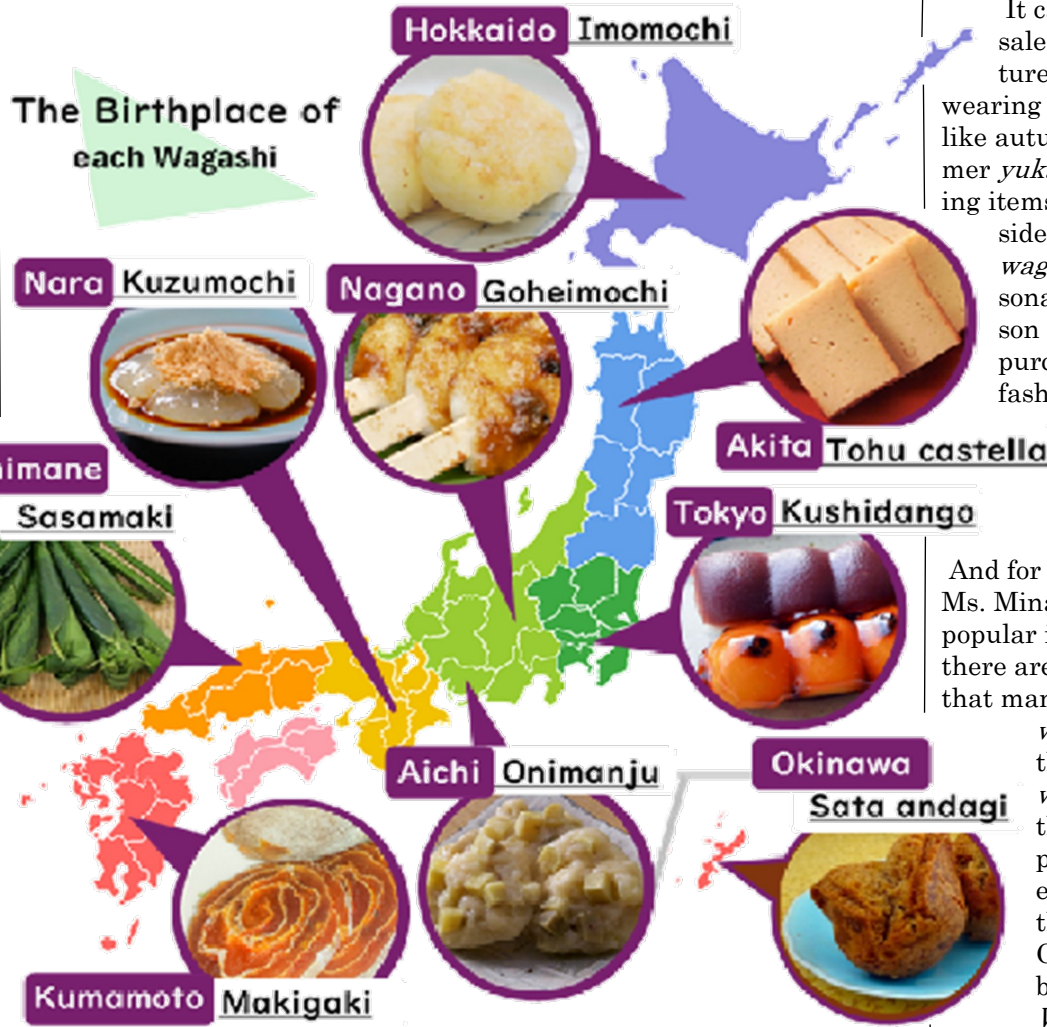
Combining Art, Tradition, Seasonality, and Hospitality

What do you imagine when asked “What is the most beautiful food in Japan?” It could be *sushi*, *tempura*, or *sukiyaki*. *Wagashi* is one of the most iconic examples of beautiful food in Japan. People are captivated by its sophisticated sweetness, smooth texture, and unique appearance. In particular, the attractive appearance of *wagashi* has become famous worldwide via the internet, and both Japanese and foreign audiences enjoy it. Recently, *wagashi*-making lessons have become popular among foreigners. Some *wagashi* shops even offer lessons in English and Spanish. What is it about *wagashi* that fascinates so many people? Let’s explore the world of *wagashi* together!

Wagashi, as we know it today, differs from its earliest forms in ingredients, visuals, tastes, and target audience. The first appearance of *wagashi* in Japanese history was over 2,300 years ago. These early versions were shaped like balls or biscuits and made from nuts, but they did not taste sweet because sugar did not exist yet. Over time, Japan had cultural exchanges with many countries, especially China and Portugal, which significantly impacted *wagashi*. Chinese sweets inspired *wagashi*’s beautiful appearance, and Portugal introduced Japan to western cooking equipment, such as ovens, allowing for greater variety in *wagashi*. This cultural amalgamation shaped *wagashi* into the colorful, fancy and beautiful forms people recognize today. Modern Japanese *wagashi* has gained worldwide popularity on the internet. Of course, viewers cannot taste it online, but the unique, interesting, and exciting appearance of *wagashi* is attracting viewers who have never tasted it before.

Just as the first *wagashi* in Japanese history was not sweet, the bean paste filling now considered essential to modern *wagashi* also was not sweet until sugar became available. Originally, red beans were salted rather than sweetened. After sugar was introduced from China during the Muromachi period, the prototype of today’s bean paste emerged. Many people think that *wagashi* always contains bean paste, but that is not always the case. Look at the map of Japan above. Some *wagashi* from different regions contain no bean paste at all. You may envision *wagashi* as only sweet items, but there are plenty of *wagashi* that make use of local ingredients and are eaten as everyday snacks—showing that *wagashi* is more diverse than many assume.

Just as taste has evolved, so has appearance—which we believe is a major attraction of *wagashi*. To find out whether visual beauty influences people’s interest in *wagashi*,



depending on region and shop tradition. In addition, since tea ceremony implements are chosen based on season, *wagashi* served at tea ceremonies must also be seasonally appropriate, underscoring the vital role of seasonality in *wagashi*.

It can be said that seasonal sales are influenced by the culture of anticipation. In Japan, wearing seasonal patterns early—like autumn maple leaves on a summer *yukata*—is acceptable, but using items past their season is considered improper. Similarly, *wagashi* shops stop selling seasonal *wagashi* once their season ends, encouraging timely purchases. This resembles fashion brands launching winter wear right after summer, highlighting how seasonality plays a key role in sales strategy.

And for our last question, we asked Ms. Minazuki why *wagashi* is so popular internationally. Although there are many reasons, she noted that many people are attracted by

wagashi’s appearance. For those who have never tasted *wagashi*, the appearance is the most appealing point. In particular, *nerikiri* sweets—easily shaped to depict themes like Halloween and Christmas—can be savored by appearance alone.

Wagashi shops’ desire to attract attention extends to exploring new forms of visual expression, making *wagashi* appealing to a broad audience.



One of our members, an international student, experienced the delicate process of making *wagashi* firsthand.

The student visited Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture. The city was the cultural center of the Kaga-Hyakumangoku clan and, along with Kyoto and Matsue, is considered as one of Japan’s three major *wagashi* hubs. Kanazawa hosts many long-established *wagashi* shops, and the workshop offers a rare chance to make handmade flower-, chestnut- and maple-themed *wagashi*. Shaping the dough proved difficult because it melts under the warmth of human hands, and care was needed to prevent it from cracking as it dried. Anyone would realise that creating these intricate sweets requires intensive skill and labor. As more people discover *wagashi* through hands-on experiences, the number of those captivated by this aspect of Japanese food culture will likely increase.



Japanese culture has long valued seasonal connections in food, clothing, and housing, and *wagashi* also embodies these influences. Products emerge from a cultural mindset that prioritizes seasonality. Looking ahead, *wagashi* will likely continue to evolve through creativity and novel ideas, adding color to our daily lives.



Interview with Ms. Haru Minazuki, a *wagashi* researcher, Nagoya City, Aichi Pref.



we conducted a survey among NUFs students. We asked, “What is the most important thing for you when you buy *wagashi*?” The results showed that 41.7% chose taste, 33.3% chose appearance, and 12.5% chose the season or event, indicating that appearance is a crucial factor—second only to taste.

Our survey confirms our assumption that people prefer diversity in the presentation of food. It can be boring to eat the same thing every day, especially if it looks like a dense, unappetizing bean paste. By shaping this dough differently and regularly changing it with the seasons, appreciating *wagashi* becomes easier. What do you think, dear reader?

We interviewed Ms. Haru Minazuki, a *wagashi* researcher, to get her expert opinion on *wagashi*’s appearance. According to her, *wagashi* became so beautiful due to the tea ceremony and its growing popularity as a gift. With the development of the tea ceremony, *wagashi* served as a sweet for tea ceremonies and as a way to impress others. Over time,

it also became a popular gift for celebrations and souvenirs, leading to greater emphasis on visual appeal as something to be served to others.

Wagashi’s beautiful appearance reflects its role as a product. To boost sales, shops focus on not only taste but also visual appeal. In summer, when hot weather lowers demand, shops create cooling, seasonal designs to entice buyers. For example, a *wagashi* shop in Kyoto sells “Hamazuto,” a clam shell filled with amber agar and miso-flavored *amanatto* (fermented soy), evoking a seaside feel in a landlocked city—and it keeps for a long time.

Wagashi is deeply connected to the seasons. *Kurikinton*, a *wagashi* made from seasonal chestnuts, is available only briefly, so many customers purchase it annually at that time. Limited-time products are more effective at boosting customers’ desire to purchase. *Wagashi* shops often present *kurikinton* in unique ways—shaped like a chestnut, roasted to resemble charred chestnuts, or mixed with white bean paste for a more affordable option—

By Maëlle V. M. CAUSSIMON,
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Cute? Fearsome? Mysterious? *Yōkai* are historical creatures originally created to explain mysterious phenomena—like eerie sounds in the night or shadows in the woods. Over time, however, the perception of these mysterious beings has changed, and they have become pop culture icons. The shift in how *yōkai* are perceived may provide “hints” that reveal how Japanese people and society have lived with the supernatural and mysterious phenomena, even today.

In Japan, *yōkai* have generally been described as having no human form and, above all, living separately from the human world. This notion was also evident in our survey amongst Japanese nationals at NUFS. When asked about the difference between ghosts and *yōkai*, the most common response was that ghosts are not living creatures but rather the spirits of dead people who return for revenge. On the other hand, many respondents said that *yōkai* “take the form of humans, animals, or objects.”

A *yōkai* that takes human form is *Futakuchi Onna* (two-mouthed woman). She is said to come and eat the resources of families—particularly those who are stingy—to punish them. A *yōkai* that takes an animalistic form is *Kappa*, described as a green furless creature with a plate rimmed by hair atop its head, a bird’s beak, and a carapace. One of our survey respondents defined it as “a monster that lives in the rivers of Japan [...] dragging horses and humans into the water and sucking their blood.” Physically, it has evolved considerably since the Edo period, and morally it has remained frightening.

Yet in our survey, some respondents described *yōkai* as cute. But how could fearsome *yōkai* like *Kappa* be considered cute today?

In an interview about *Kappa*, the chief curator of the Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of History, Mr. Masanobu Kagawa, explains that the *Kappa* became “cute” around the 1950s following the publication of the manga *Kappa Kawatarō*. This manga portrayed *yōkai* as endearing, allowing them to shed their frightening aura and become a key element of Japanese pop culture.

The manga and anime *Gegege no Kitarō* by Shigeru Mizuki (1960) focuses on the main character Kitarō, the last survivor of the ghost tribe, who attempts to unite the *yōkai* world with that of humans. Journalist Ms. Miranda Merrington explains that today the Japanese imagination of *yōkai* is largely shaped by Mizuki’s depictions. Although *yōkai* are no longer so frightening, thanks to science and rational explanations, this might clarify why most have become “cute” in Japanese pop culture.

Despite this, *yōkai* can still represent fear. In the article ‘Expert: *Yōkai* ghouls dwell in ChatGPT in

What Effect does *Yōkai* Have on Modern Life?

JAPAN’S ANCIENT BELIEFS ROAMING...



Above: Ukiyo-e drawing of the *Yōkai Kappa* (left). Imaginary scene of a man being surprised by encountering a *Kappa*, ‘Odawara Kappa : 53 Stations of the Tokaido’ by Utagawa Yoshikazu (Collection of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies)

Below: Mr. Gregory Rohe (centre), Prof. of AGU explains the *yōkai* exhibition, Nissshin City, Aichi Pref.



Makoto Hayashi,
Prof. of AGU



Naoko Kobayashi,
Prof. of AGU



modern times,’ Mr. Kagawa states that artificial intelligences presenting themselves as human are a modern form of *yōkai*. What makes them frightening is that they are indistinguishable from humans (Asahi Shimbun, 2023). According to him, *yōkai* no longer have a suitable habitat in our world, but they can survive thanks to the internet.

As seen with the *Kappa*, over the ages *yōkai* have evolved, and it is their partly immaterial forms that enable this. Mr. Kagawa explains that *yōkai* were a form of fear transmitted by word of mouth, and in the modern world he compares this to rumor. The creation of social networks have vastly amplified rumor-spreading, mirroring the *yōkai* realm. He adds that artificial intelligence—machines giving human-like answers—resembles *yōkai*, as our inability to distinguish them from humans creates fear.

To better understand the relationship between *yōkai* and the new generation, we interviewed several professors from Aichi Gakuin University (AGU): Prof. Naoko Kobayashi, Prof. Gregory Rohe, Prof. Makoto Hayashi, and researcher Yamato Sugita. They were unconvinced by Mr. Kagawa’s parallel

between *yōkai* and digital fear.

Prof. Hayashi defines *yōkai* as fallen gods, in line with folklorist Mr. Kunio Yanagita, meaning “the symbolism of the relationship between human beings and nature in the deepest psyche.” *Yōkai* were therefore not solely creatures to be feared; they could also be protectors, and the fear they create is just one facet. Mr. Sugita adds, “*Yōkai* were created to explain inexplicable fears. They were inspired by symbolic objects and animals that existed in the country.”

Prof. Hayashi explains that many *yōkai* stories circulate in school. He cited the *Kuchisake Onna* (slit-mouthed woman), believed to have appeared in Gifu Prefecture in the late 1970s. A man reportedly saw a woman standing with her mouth open as far as her ears. In ‘*Japanese Urban Legends from the Slit-Mouthed Woman to Kisaragi Station*’, Prof. Yoshiyuki Iikura of Kogakuin University explains that the rumor of this *yōkai* spread very quickly due to higher school enrollment at the time, worrying many children. *Kuchisake Onna* supposedly preyed on children who stayed out late, asking them if they thought she was pretty. Given her beauty,

the child would inevitably answer in the affirmative. She would then remove her mask. If the child reacted negatively, she would kill them with a pair of scissors. Mr. Sugita says that parents used her story to scare children into coming home earlier.

However, Prof. Hayashi believes that nowadays parents do not necessarily play a big role in *yōkai* education, but our research found that 68% of 18- to 24-year old respondents said their parents had used folktales to educate them as children. One person recalled being told about *Mottainai Obake* (Ghost of Waste). Although it wasn’t a *yōkai* in the strict sense of the word, parents would use this story to scare children into finishing their food, or else the ghost would appear and scare them.

Undoubtedly, in addition to rumor and word of mouth, *yōkai* have developed greatly through modern media such as anime, video games, and more. Media exposure has also changed how *yōkai* are viewed, from terrifying entities to lovable creatures. Prof. Kobayashi believes that *yōkai* are in a “second evolution,” no longer venerated as they were before the Meiji period, but instead treated mostly as entertainment. Indeed, as far back as the Edo period, Mr. Sugita explains that *yōkai* were written and drawn for amusement. Influenced by Shigeru Mizuki and other authors, he believes that *yōkai* have gained even more entertainment value, aided by new technologies.

The “*Yōkai Watch*” franchise, as explained by Prof. Kazuhiko Komatsu (former director of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies), launched a renaissance of *yōkai* in modern Japanese entertainment when they were perceived to be out of vogue. Today, *yōkai* appear in many pop culture series, such as the manga and anime ‘*Jujutsu Kaisen*’ by Gege Akutami. Indeed, the character of Sukuna is inspired by the *Yōkai Ryōmen Sukuna*, who, according to the historical records of ‘*Nihon Shoki*’, destroyed Empress Jingu. ‘*Dandadan*’ by Mr. Yukinobu Tatsu—another manga and recently aired anime—includes the likes of *yōkai*, *yurei* spirits, and aliens dynamically integrated into the same story. It includes modern *yōkai* and urban legends like Turbo Bachan (Turbo Granny) from Hyogo Prefecture, who would follow your car through tunnels while staring at you, and *Kuchisake Onna*, as previously mentioned.

The perception of *yōkai* has evolved overtime, shifting from being worshiped and feared beings to pop culture icons often seen as cute. Now many authors use *yōkai* to enrich their narratives. Because of this ongoing creativity, *yōkai* have endured from ancient times and keep evolving with Japanese culture. Rumors spreading in social environments such as school and parents’ stories have also helped keep *yōkai* alive, developing new *yōkai* that fit contemporary society.