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# FALL 2015 EPOK STUDENT FORUM

2015 年秋期 EPOK 留学生フォーラム

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**FEBRUARY 10, 2016**  
**@ KOKUSAI KORYU KAIKAN HALL**

**EPOK (EXCHANGE PROGRAM OF OKAYAMA)**

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CENTER FOR GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS & EDUCATION

**OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY**





2016年春、EPOKを修了するみなさん、修了おめでとうございます。  
岡山大学での留學生活の中でみなさんがしてきた経験や出会いのすべてが、これからの人生の宝になることと信じます。

岡山大学のEPOKプログラムはみなさんが参加することによって、その経験を通じてより生き生きとした力強いものになってきました。この留學を通じて、岡山大学がみなさんにとっての学び舎のひとつになったことを光榮に思います。

皆さんの未来に祝福あれ。

Congratulations on your completion of EPOK at Okayama University.  
All of your experiences and encounters in your life in Japan will be indispensable treasure in your life.

It would be our great pleasure to share a part of your treasure. I am also pleased that you have made a part of the EPOK history which will continue to grow.

Best wishes for your bright future.

February 10, 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yoko Yamamoto".

山本洋子 (Yoko YAMAMOTO)

Director

Center for Global Partnerships and Education

Okayama University

## 祝 EPOK 修了！

2015年春期および秋期EPOK生のうち10名が、2016年2月岡山大学での留学生生活を修了します。それぞれ、日本語学習に取り組み、日本社会や文化について教室の内と外から学び、新しい友をつくり、自らのリミットに挑戦する経験を積みました。EPOK修了エッセイでは、そうした学習経験の中から最も興味深かったテーマについて成果として残すものです。

EPOKを修了するみなさんは、慣れ親しんだ日常、家族や友と離れて、「日本」という未知なる異なる世界の中で暮らすかけがえのない経験を通じて、新しい世界と新しい自分に出会ったことと思います。そのなかの良いことも、困難なことも全て合わせて、個人として、より強くたくましくなった自分に誇りをもってほしいと思います。

この留学生活の中で新しく得た自分と友達が、なによりの宝になることでしょう。

みなさん、修了おめでとうございます。

In February 2016, the ten of 2015-Spring and Fall students are completing EPOK program at Okayama University.

In this EPOK Essay collection, the students share their individual research interest, findings and analysis as their final EPOK project. The compilation of the writing whose topic was chosen by each student shows a good variety of the student's interest in studying "Japan."

In the course of EPOK these students have well achieved their own goals by strengthening *Nihon-go* and intercultural communication skill as they furthered the understandings of society and cultures of Japan through own experiences. The experience of living in a foreign land and culture, which could be both joyful and hard, has helped the EPOK students expand their horizon and grow stronger, I believe.

With all the achievements, we are very proud of YOU. Wishing you all the best.

February 10, 2016



大林純子 (Junko OBAYASHI)

EPOK Advisor

Center for Global Partnerships and Education

Okayama University





\* **EPOK 2015 – 2016** \*

◇◇ **2016 Fall Completing Students** ◇◇

◎ **2015 Spring**



**Harley Harrer**

ハーリー

**University of Adelaide**

◎ **2015 Fall**



オーブラ

**Aubra Bulin**

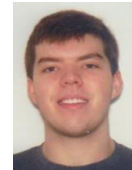
**Dallas Baptist University**



ダン

**Daniel Chen**

**California State University,  
East Bay**



ダニー

**Danny Hinton**

**Dallas Baptist University**



**Adam Aguilar**

アダム

**Dallas Baptist University**



アディソン

**Addison Zody**

**Dallas Baptist University**



**Tiffany Brown**

ティファニー

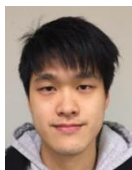
**University of Western Australia**



**Miranda Hewett**

ミランダ

**University of South Australia**



ダニエル

**Daniel Tsang Chi On**

**University of South Australia**



**Jamie Wadsworth**

ジェイミー

**York St. John University**

**2015 Fall CompletionEPOK (2015-2016) Student and Project theme**

No.	Student Name	Home University	Home Country	EPOK Duration	EPOK Essay Theme
1	<b>Harley Harrer</b>	The University of Adelaide	Australia	H27/4/1 - H27/2/29	<b>The Okayama Mind and Japanese Society as a Foreigner in Japan</b>
2	<b>Daniel Chen</b>	California State University, Montrey Bay	U.S.A	2015/10/1- 2016/2/29	<b>Modernistic Traditionalism- The Cool Japan Way</b>
3	<b>Aubra L. Bulin</b>	Dallas Baptist University	U.S.A		<b>Climbing the Mountain: The Practice of Pilgrimage</b>
4	<b>Danny Hinton</b>	Dallas Baptist University	U.S.A		<b>Japanese way of life: The honor and polite culture</b>
5	<b>Adam Aguilar</b>	Dallas Baptist University	U.S.A		<b>An investigation of the reasons worshippers visit shrines and the significance of temples in Japan</b>
6	<b>Addison Zody</b>	Dallas Baptist University	U.S.A		<b>Over Sexualization of Young Japanese Girls</b>
7	<b>Tiffany Brown</b>	University of Western Australia	Australia		<b>平安時代</b>
8	<b>Miranda Hewett</b>	University of South Australia	Australia		<b>Kurashiki</b>
9	<b>Daniel Tsang Chi On</b>	University of South Australia	Australia		<b>JAPANESE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND LIFE</b>
10	<b>Jamie Wadsworth</b>	York St. John University	U.K.		<b>Elementary School in Japan</b>

## The Okayama Mind and Japanese Society as a Foreigner in Japan

Harley Harrer

The University of Adelaide

**Summary:** As a student majoring in Japanese and East Asian Studies, I've gained a heavy interest in Japanese culture and society. When faced with the task of selecting which Japanese university to study abroad at, it was not by chance that I chose Okayama. I looked first at the list: Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya were some of the options. But so was Okayama, a prefecture and city I never even knew existed. I did some research and quickly found out Okayama was the smallest and most *inaka*-like of all the options. This was perfect for me. My reason for wanting to study abroad in Japan was not only to fully immerse myself in the Japanese language, but to also immerse myself in the culture, people, and Japanese way of life. This cannot be as easily achieved in much larger, more globalized cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, which is exactly why I chose Okayama as my destination. When I tell people this, a common response is "Okayama?! Why would you choose Okayama? There's nothing there!" To which I would reply "Exactly! It's great!"

There is much to be learned from smaller cities in Japan such as Okayama, which in my opinion are far better representations of 'real' Japan compared to the larger cities. With this, Okayama served as the perfect place for furthering my studies about Japanese culture and society, particularly in relation to the Japanese mind, concepts and ideas existing in Japanese society, how Japanese people act toward foreigners in Japan, and how this relates to globalization as a whole. This EPOK research essay is a good opportunity for me to summarize my discoveries and realizations after one year of living in Okayama.

In my prior years of study before coming to Japan, I had the opportunity of learning about many customs and concepts existing within Japanese culture and society. One of these concepts, *uchi soto*, literally meaning inside and outside, is a Japanese social custom in which Japanese people divide relationships with people into in-groups and out-groups. This custom can be seen in almost every aspect of Japanese life and is also reflected within the Japanese language itself. There is no sure way to define exactly which relationships are *uchi* and which are *soto*, however it is often said that family and very close friends are *uchi*, while everyone else (acquaintances, workmates, strangers) are *soto*. But even within those circles, there are many elaborate hierarchical rankings and situations that dictate which group people fall into, and these also can change. Like many of the Japanese societal concepts, *uchi soto* is quite perplexing and hard to conceive for a non-Japanese native. From *uchi soto* stems many other customs, such as ambiguity in Language, obligatory gift giving, *honne* and *tatema* (true and false intentions), and a strong conformity to groupism. It is concepts like these which seem to define Japanese society, shaping it into the unique enigma that it is. It is also what shapes the behaviour of Japanese people, in particular towards foreigners, which I've very much come to realize during my time here in Okayama. It's often said in studies by academics of Japanese society that foreigners in Japan are always and will always be *soto*, i.e. outsiders, and are thus treated as such. This means that while Japanese people will look upon foreigners with an air of respect, and if asked upon, often go out of their way to help them, they will



almost never reveal their true feelings (*honne*) or relax their guard. Such is the role of *soto* relationships in Japanese society. Since coming to Okayama I've realized this partly to be true, however it does not apply to all Japanese people. I've met only a handful of Japanese people in Okayama who will interact with me normally as if I were a close friend, but it's interesting to find that these people are the ones who have had extensive experience either travelling, studying, or living in overseas countries.

Because of Okayama's extreme lack of globalization, it's very easy to notice common patterns in Okayama Japanese people's behaviour. For example, the first thing one will notice as a foreigner upon coming to Okayama, is the constant staring from Japanese people no matter where you are. It should be noted I'm talking purely from personal experience here, and not all foreigners in Japan are treated with the same kind of reaction. My Korean and Chinese friends for example are treated with a completely opposite attitude by Okayama Japanese. For them, when interacting with Japanese people, they are almost always assumed to be able to speak Japanese, and are in general not paid any special attention to. On the other hand, my friends from Western countries and I are often treated as some kind of mysterious alien which has never been seen before. Even just walking around the university campus it's impossible to escape the constant staring, but when going to a restaurant, store, or anywhere closer to the centre of town, the staring becomes even worse. From this alone it starts to become clear that Okayama Japanese people are not used to seeing foreigners at all, and that Okayama has a very long way to go before it becomes a globalized city in the slightest. When discussing this with Japanese people, even the friends who have had extensive experience in overseas countries, they all seem to agree that indeed it's unexpected whenever they spot a foreigner in Okayama. They themselves even claim to be guilty of staring sometimes.

Thus the question of will Okayama ever become a globalized city or not is raised. For a presentation in my Japanese class, I chose the topic of Okayama's globalization, and was tasked to interview several Japanese people living in Okayama on their opinions about globalization. I began noticing the same pattern I've noticed before between Japanese students who have lived or studied abroad, and those who have not. The people who had never left Japan seemed to be quite unsure about the topic. They gave vague answers, blamed English education, or didn't really care about globalization or Okayama's place in Japan. The students who had travelled abroad, however, had much more to say. They said Japanese people in Okayama are very narrow minded thinkers, and it will take a huge effort before Okayama ever becomes globalized. They said because they travelled abroad and were exposed to other cultures, other nations' people's sense of values, and had many experiences with non-Japanese people, they were quite easily able to notice how closed-minded Okayama Japanese can be when thinking about the world. They said even in comparison to people living in larger, more globalized cities in Japan, such as Tokyo or Osaka, an extreme difference in people's values and opinions can be noticed. Since talking to so many different Japanese people coming from many backgrounds, who have had various international experiences, I think Japanese people can be ranked into two categories: "Globalized Japanese" (those who have been abroad, know about the world, or have foreigner friends) and "Non-Globalized Japanese" (those who have never left Japan, are seemingly ignorant about

other countries, or have no foreigner friends). This is nothing but a personal observation of mine, but after spending enough time living in Okayama, I soon came to realize just how little the people here are accustomed to outsiders. Most cities and prefectures in Japan with a similar amount of exposure to outsiders can be compared to Okayama. If it isn't a largely globalized city like Tokyo, one can assume that your presence as a foreigner will not easily be ignored.

Why is it that Japanese people from Okayama and other cities have such little exposure to foreigners and other cultures, and thus seemingly have a narrow sense of values and way of thinking? As well as the poor education system in Japan which stifles individualistic thinking, I think many of the previously mentioned concepts and customs in Japanese society are a large contributing factor. I often look at Japan as a box surrounded by one-way mirrors. As an onlooker from the outside, it's easy to look at Japanese systems and pinpoint certain problems and behavioural factors unique to Japan. But for Japanese people, it can be hard to escape the box and widen one's own views, as everybody is merely unconsciously acting out their roles in society. Because Japanese systems are built on group consciousness and by nature homogenous, I find that Japanese society is somewhat of an inescapable cycle in which Japanese people become trapped. When talking with the previously mentioned "Globalized Japanese" people, just based on their opinions and way of thinking, one can notice a different and more advanced way of forward thinking. It's as if they have to some extent 'escaped' the cycle of Japanese thinking. But even those Japanese people are not without their extreme Japanese side. When talking to me, or other foreigners, they have a relaxed nature and seem to be able to openly talk about most topics. However, in a group of other Japanese people, I've witnessed them put on a completely different personality in order to comply with Japanese social customs. *Aimai*, *uchi-soto*, *honne* and *tatemae*, these are the concepts which to me, would appear to be holding people down, but to a Japanese person, are nothing but a natural unconscious behaviour in order to stay safe and not stand out from the rest of the group. The Japanese proverb “出る釘は打たれる” or “A nail that sticks out will be hammered down” is one that I always remember and to me represents the epitome of Japanese society's group consciousness.

In concluding my observations, I just want to reiterate that this essay is by no means a highly academic analysis but merely a summarization of some of my observations and opinions formed after living in Okayama for one year. I may have come off with a negative vibe about Okayama and Japanese society by expressing some of the more negative criticisms, but I think it's from these points that I take so much interest in studying Japanese culture and society. In summary about Okayama, it seems quite clear that it has a far way to go before becoming a globalized city. Certainly there are many students here at OkaDai studying abroad from other countries, which is one of the main driving factors in Okayama Japanese becoming more used to foreigners. Furthermore, there are quite a few cultural events and opportunities for Japanese people to mingle with foreigners from other countries. However, without a huge surge of international exposure, the globalization of Okayama seems almost futile. Naturally, becoming more global is a step forward in the development of any Japanese city, but as for me, I don't mind at all if Okayama never becomes globalized,



because I think that's what makes it such a charming city. Being treated as and stared at like an alien is something which can only be experienced in a city like Okayama, and almost nowhere else in the world. And while Okayama Japanese people have varying personalities, sense of values, and levels of openness, I've found that almost every person here will treat you with kindness if you make the effort to be open and friendly. Interesting and mysterious, my experience with Japanese culture, people, and society in Okayama has only perpetuated my interest in the topic. The enigmatic puzzle of the Japanese mind is something that I'll definitely continue to have an interest in after leaving Okayama, and an interest I'll no doubt pursue in the foreseeable future.

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### **EPOK Reflections**

I can confidently say this past year in Okayama, up until now, has probably been the best year of my life. I've formed so many close relationships with Japanese students and students from many countries across the world. It's such a warming feeling to know I can travel to many different countries now and have a close friend waiting there to welcome me. And the experiences I've had here were amazing and unforgettable. I not only had the great chance to travel all over Japan, but also explore every small facet in the city of Okayama. And it's only when you start exploring deeper that you realize the unique quirks and traits that Okayama has to offer. In that sense it really is like no other city in Japan. There are many so stories to uncover in Okayama when you start talking to the locals. The encounters I had were uniquely Japanese: I've met many so many bizarre, interesting, funny, and cool Japanese people. Looking back on my experiences, it often seems easy to say "Something like that could ONLY have happened in Japan". As far living purposes are concerned, Okayama was by far the best choice, at least for me. It's the perfect place to experience the four seasons of Japan, and nature is abundant here. For anyone who is thinking of doing exchange in Okayama, I can highly recommend it over the more populated Japanese cities.

I think the biggest realization I've had is just how much I've changed and grown as a person since coming to Okayama. Comparing my old self to my current self, the changes are immense. Before studying abroad in Okayama, I had zero expectations of what would happen or what it would be like. But I'm glad to say I've had nothing but positive experiences since coming here and very much hope to return sometime in the future.

## Modernistic Traditionalism- The Cool Japan Way

**Daniel Chen**  
**California State University, Montrey Bay**

**Summary:** Often times we see the two terms “traditionalism” and “modernism” as two ends of the social or artistic spectrum. Traditionalist, as the word implies, want to hold on to traditions and values they feel hold immense significance and deep attachment to the old ways. Whereas Traditionalism could be likened to a stone- immovable and unchanging- Modernism can be likened to water; modernists are ever changing in their ideals, morals, and trends. Modernists are more open to change and experimentation while traditionalists focus on a strong sense of duty and practice to uphold their traditions. Thus it is quite shocking to see that here in Japan there is such a seamless blending of such two differentiating philosophies. In many cultures and societies we have seen the rise and fall of traditions and the emergence of new practices replace those so called “lost traditions.”

Japanese society has developed a very unique way of incorporating modernistic ideology into their traditionally oriented culture. Rather than simply assimilating other practices and even languages, Japan takes all forms of philosophy and theory and in a reassigns them to create a new “Japanized” version to create something altogether new and unique. We can see examples of how Japan is able to do both hold on to their traditionalism while instilling a new sense of modernism to evolve and pass on their traditional values in many of their most well-known traditions: Ikebana (生ける), Taiko (和太鼓), and Chado (茶の湯). When we look at these traditional practices of the Japanese people we garner a deeper sense of understanding and respect of how Japanese society stands apart not only from western nations, but even to their fellow Asian counterparts.

Not simply about the arrangements of a few flowers in a pot, ikebana is much more a disciplined artwork form in which nature and humanity are brought together collectively. Contrary to the concept of floral association as a group of particolored or multicolored association of blooms, ikebana often emphasizes different regions of the plant, inclusive of its stems and leaves, and draws emphasis towards shape, line, shape.



Even though ikebana is an innovative expression, there are still predetermined guidelines governing its form. The artist's aim at the back of each arrangement is shown via a chunk's coloration mixtures, herbal shapes, graceful traces, and the usually implied meaning of the floral arrangement.

This traditional form of Japanese flower arrangement is still prevalent in Japan, however new forms of Ikebana have sprung up not only in Japan but throughout the world.



Artists like Junko Miura, a Japanese second generation floral practitioner based in New York, attempts to infuse a new sense modernistic artistry into her floral creations.



Traditionally used during war time, Taiko became a popular instrument during the new cultural movement in 1192. Many original art forms were born under the feudal Japan, spurned from the Chinese and Korean cultural influence. The taiko drum became an essential instrument in Noh plays during the Muromachi era (1336-1573). They were also part of Kabuki which quickly gained popularity in the Edo era (1603-1867) as well as Nagauta. Taiko's role in the Japanese art movement resulted in the evolution of the drums to various sizes and shapes. Moreover, the development of other instruments



such as Shamisen, Koto and Shakuhachi also influenced the shaping of those art forms now categorized as traditional. The methods of taiko playing have been inherited through generations under the iemoto system (the system of the teaching of a traditional Japanese art by a master). Although a traditional art form, the influence of western influences has also transformed Taiko both within and without Japanese borders.



Taiko is one of the traditional practices that have undergone a radical transformation from its traditional roots. New modern performances and routines completely break the traditional mold of traditional Taiko.



Taiko has even evolved so far as to become the immensely popular video game, Taiko: Drum Master, enjoyed by people of all ages around the world.

Even Chado, one of Japan's most strongly upheld traditional practice has seen a metamorphic iteration of the traditional tea ceremony. Other than acquiring skills in the practice of war and abiding by the Bushido code, the upper/Samurai class of feudal Japan became deeply intertwined with the arts of the chanoyu, Japanese for tea ceremony. In many ways, it reflected the samurai



ideal as well as Japan as a whole. The ceremony typically induced an atmosphere of tranquility, contrasting the qualities of strength and aptitude possessed by each samurai.



The art of chanoyu was a form of artistic expression that aimed to develop a sense of natural and simplicity, to experience reality in an utmost disciplined manner. Under the guidance of renowned tea master, Sen no Rikyu, the ceremony became known as chado, or the way of tea. Contrary to popular belief, the samurai did not practice chado to alleviate their everyday burdens of violence, chaos and life on the battlefield; the samurai were able to intently focus on what is and isn't and clearly notice the interactions on and off the battlefield in a direct confrontation in which the samurai were able to gain a critical insight into life and reality.

Traditionally performed by men Chado gained popularity among women and in recent years the number of practitioners is now primarily performed by women, but still follow the traditional rules outlined by their male predecessors.



New practices have also emerged that attempt to push the bounds of Chado.



Practitioners such as Souryou Matsumura from Yokohama, Japan have even incorporated modernized scrolls, utensils, and even a rapper to his performance of Chado.

Time and again we see that rather than letting go of tradition, Japan has found new ways of bringing new life to old traditions. While, some hardcore traditionalists may see this as heresy, these new forms may be superficially changing, but the core values these practices represent are still a part of these contemporary adaptations.



Whether it is a reiteration of a long held Japanese tradition or the Japnaization of a new trend or idea, Japan has achieved style and a sense of coolness that can be enjoyed by foreigners and Japanese alike. This fusion and evolution of ideas is quickly pushing Japan to the forefront of the global pop culture and art movement.

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## **EPOK Reflections**

Choosing to participate in the EPOK program here was an undeniably wonderful experience. While I was here I was able to interact with people of all ages and gain invaluable insight into Japan. My time here in the EPOK program has increased my appreciation of the Japanese culture and people's way of life. I always looked forward to those times where we would go out and interact with the community members. They always welcomed us and treated us with great love. I also enjoyed the times I spent with the kids and high school students. They were always enthusiastic about chatting with us and sharing their love of both cultures and their ideas. These moments of cultural exchange brought about a new sense of understanding for me not only of Japanese culture, but at the same time I was also able to see how another culture viewed Americans from an external perspective.

Though there were times where things got tough for us, the faculty and support staff of EPOK was always there to look after us. Through this program I was able to create a lot of memorable experiences here in Japan that I never would have been able to have otherwise. The only regret I have was not being able to stay for a full year to experience more of what this program had to offer. There is still plenty of room to grow and improve the EPOK program here at Okayama and I hope that you will all endeavor to improve the program here for new EPOK students.

## **Climbing the Mountain: The Practice of Pilgrimage**

**Aubra L. Bulin**

**Dallas Baptist University**

**Summary:** Japanese people still take time to explore mountains, shrines, and other natural places with their families and friends. As a foreigner these places are often the most popular sightseeing areas and make for wonderful photography. This essay explores the history and interesting aspects of five mountain sites. Most of the sights are easily accessible from Okayama and each contains its own unique aspects and history. Japanese history shows how the Buddhist Monks of ancient times helped to establish the practice of mountain climbing or hiking as a religious pilgrimage. As one climbs mountains they are reminded of these ancient times and the practice of self-reflection. The essay contains brief commentary on the philosophical implications of mountain walking that are still applicable today, such as what can be learned from Mt. Unzen, Mt. Zozu, Mt. Mizen, Tomonoura, and Okunoshima? The sightseeing is interesting, but the struggle to climb the mountain builds the character of all who accept the challenge. And the challenge is rewarded at the summit where one can enjoy the view and feeling of all they have accomplished. There is no replacement for climbing a mountain, and as this tourist found out, you will reach the summit healthier and wiser than when you first began. The mountain climb was an effective part of my experience as an exchange student and it helped me to grow in ways I never thought of before. My hope is that other foreign exchange students will also take and master the challenge to climb the mountain.

The Japanese society is a walking society. While each city has very simple and accessible public transportation, it is not uncommon for Japanese people to spend their day walking from place to place. On weekends families often spend the day walking together in national parks, to temples and other sightseeing areas in nature. It is also quite common for each park or sightseeing attraction to have its own hiking trail up a mountain to a summit where the ultimate selfie picture can be taken. Sometimes there is a shrine or temple near the mountain or even on it. Just in the few months that I was in Okayama, I visited 5 sites: Mt. Unzen, Mt. Zozu, Mt. Mizen, Tomonoura, and Okunoshima.

It is easy to see the lasting impression of Buddhist ascetic pilgrimage on the Japanese society today reflected in their commitment and desire to engage in these mountain hikes. One of the most famous pilgrimages that still exists today is the Shikoku Henro where people walk through the island of Shikoku to visit 88 different sacred places that were visited by the Buddhist monk, KuKai While others may simply be walking, the application of the term pilgrimage implies a religious journey or at least deep intrinsic examination of one's existence. In the case of the Japanese, it seems that the term would also imply the need for an exceptional amount of effort to complete the task of hiking up and down so many mountains in one's life time. The following are the profiles of 5 mountain summits that I completed during my stay in Okayama.



### **Mt. Unzen, Shimabara Peninsula**



Mount Unzen is famous for a number of reasons. This area of Shimabara Peninsula has made good use of the mountain's volcanic heat through the development of hot springs. Unfortunately, the volcano is still active and experienced its most recent eruption in the 1990's resulting in many deaths and the destruction of surrounding towns. Mt. Unzen is also historically infamously tied to the Shimabara Rebellion of the Edo period where Christian peasants conducted an uprising against the Tokugawa government. Soon after, Christianity became illegal and Christians were persecuted, some of them even being thrown into the boiling hot waters of Mt. Unzen. Mt. Unzen has a few summits at which to take pictures but to those truly committed to going to the top, there is a rope way to a viewing deck where one can see all the way to Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyushu.

### **Mt. Zozu, Kotohiragu Shrine**



Kagawa Prefecture is famous for its udon noodles and also Mt. Zozu's shrine nicknamed, Konpira-san. The shrine is said to protect Japanese ships and sailors during their voyages. One of the iconic elements of this mountain pilgrimage are the 1,368 stone steps that lead up to the entrance of the shrine. Once at the main hall of the shrine, pilgrims can buy talismans and good luck fortunes before they return to the bottom of the mountain.

### **Mt. Mizen, Miyajima**



Mount Mizen is equally as famous as the Itsukushima Shrine that seems to float on the ocean when the tide comes in. Mount Mizen is affiliated with the great Buddhist monk Kukai who was said to have climbed it and reached enlightenment. The top of the mountain houses what is known as the “Miraculous Fire” that Kukai used for Zen training and has never been extinguished. Folklore says that water boiled at the top of the mountain with the miraculous fire can cure all kinds of diseases. This fire was also used to light the eternal flame at the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Museum. The mountain is part of Miyajima Island just a short distance away from Hiroshima City. Hikers can walk up the mountain to a summit where they can then take a rope way that takes them far up the mountain with clear views of the Seto Inland Sea and Islands.

### **Sensuijima, Tomonoura**



The pictures included for Sensuijima, Tomonoura are from two different mountain summits. The garden view of the island is from the famous Fukuzen-ji Temple that was deemed the most beautiful place in Asia by Korean Buddhist monks in the Edo period. Tomonoura is a port town that is known for its old world charm and has appeared as the setting for many Japanese dramas and even an American movie. The town is also said to have been the model town for the famous Studio Ghibli anime, *Ponyo*. A ferry takes pilgrims from Tomonoura to the island of Sensuijima where there is a walking trail around the island and up to a summit for a beautiful view of the ocean and surrounding islands. The picture of the sunset is the view from the summit on Sensuijima.

## Okunoshima



Okunoshima is another island just a short ferry away from the coast of Hiroshima prefecture. Okunoshima is now known as “Bunny Island” and allows hundreds of rabbits to roam free. The friendly creatures are as gentle as they look so feeding them is a treat. Food to feed the bunnies can be purchased at the ferry port. Although Okunoshima is now a part of the Setonaikai National Park system, it also has a sad and sinister past. The island was a former military production site for various poisonous gasses. Visitors can see mysterious ruins and museum that explains the previous life of Okunoshima. The island is now safe and has a beautiful view once you reach the summit platform.

Each of these places has a heritage, a history that resonates with not only the Japanese, but also with the world. As travelers seek out these places they become pilgrims on the road to understanding Japanese culture and themselves. As one climbs the mountain they see a goal far in the clouds that they set out to reach taking one step at a time. The road is often difficult and uneven but the pilgrim finds inspiration from inside themselves to press on toward the top. After much effort the pilgrim finally reaches the summit to enjoy the beauty and rest. Eventually, all good things must come to an end and the traveler walks down from the summit back into their regular life. This is the metaphor of the mountain.

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### **EPOK Reflections:**

The experience of participating in the EPOK Exchange Program has been priceless and challenging. As I wrote about in this society of mountains I often found myself climbing obstacles, reaching peace, then going back to normal. Sometimes the challenges seemed like mountains when really they were only hills. Other times a hill quickly turned into a mountain.

I also found that when faced with challenges or literal mountain climbing, its best to take friend to share the experience and help each other along the way. I think the other students in the EPOK program realized this very early on and some of us have become the best of friends through sharing our struggles and triumphs. The program has been instrumental in redefining

what friendship truly looks like to me. I hope I have also been an unexpected friend to many other students.

Finally, this experience as an EPOK Exchange student has taught me to live in the moment; take each step up the mountain one at a time. I can keep looking up and counting the steps I have left to get to the top but this might cause me to doubt my ability. Likewise, turning around and heading back toward the ground shows little effort. But each step is its own on the way up, and once you reach the summit you can enjoy that moment that you succeeded and rest. I also found that often as I went back down the mountain, I learned something new about myself so that I could face the next challenge. There is nothing like leaving your country to be challenged in a new one. I feel like I will return home fearless because of all the mountains that I mastered in Japan.

## Japanese way of life: The honor and polite culture

**Danny Hinton**  
**Dallas Baptist University**

**Summary:** My EPOK essay is about the Japanese way of life, and specifically about the honor and polite culture in Japan. Japan is a very interesting country with a culture of politeness and formality. People are very considerate of others and their time. There are also many aspects of the Japanese language that deal with formal situations. There are many examples that are used in restaurants and businesses such as “Arigatou Gozaimasu,” “Sumimasen,” “Omatase Shimashita,” and so on.

Each is an example of an extremely polite version of normal terms that we use in everyday life. “Omatase Shimashita” is used by employees and is used to apologize for having made the customer wait for something, even if there was not a wait at all. Employees are also sensitive to customer’s requests and if they are unable to fulfill those requests, the customer will most likely hear “Moushiwake Arimasen” which is literally “I have no excuse.” Customers are also called “Okyaku-sama” which is a highly elevated name.

All in all, customers and people are highly respected and there is equally as respected. This is important considering how the Japanese way of life is very dependent on time. Time is very important to Japanese people because of how things like mass transportation work, work schedules, lunch breaks, etc. If a restaurant makes a customer wait too long, it can cause a large problem for their schedule.

It becomes easier to see why so many formalities are recognized, considering the lifestyle of the Japanese people. Along with the formal speech comes things like gesturing and body language. Bowing usually accompanies an “Irrashimase” or “Arigatou Gozaimasu” to show gratitude or deference.

Here are some examples of the different terms and gestures:

>Irrashimase





>Arigatou Gozaimasu



>Omatase Shimashita



>Moushiwake Arimasen



>Sumimasen



To summarize this essay, it is important to take notice of people's time and to always be respectful when you are interacting with any of the Japanese people, as they will return the courtesy to you. Knowing important words like arigatou and sumimasen help greatly in various situations and can be used frequently without any problem. Be sure to be gracious as a customer as the restaurant or business employees are treating you the customer with a high level of respect and care.

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### **EPOK Reflections**

It has been an interesting 6 months in and around Okayama; I have been able to meet and learn with so many different people, and I have been able to greatly increase my level of understanding the Japanese language and culture and would like to continue learning and utilizing it in the future – even if I am home in Texas. Knowing all of the things I know from living here at Okadai, I can go home with a greater sense of understanding and sympathy for Japanese people living, learning, and working in America – a place that is vastly different.

If I meet any native Japanese people in America I will be sure to implement all of my language skills and knowledge to help and assist them as much as those here have helped me. All in all it has been a great experience and I will come away with many fond memories of my time here. On behalf of myself and my fellow DBU peers and on behalf of our university, I would like to extend a warm thank you to the Okadai faculty and students for facilitating our stay here and for fostering friendships and memories during our stay.

Again, thank you very much....



A word cloud of thank-you phrases in various languages. The central and largest words are "THANK" and "YOU". Other prominent words include "GRACIAS", "ARIGATO", "SHUKURIA", "TASHAKKUR ATU", "SUKSAMA", "EKHMET", "BIYAN", "SHUKRIA", "BOLZIN", and "MERCY". The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern around the center, with varying sizes and orientations. Some words are written vertically, such as "DANKSCHEEN" and "JUSPAXAR".

THANK YOU

GRACIAS

ARIGATO

SHUKURIA

TASHAKKUR ATU

SUKSAMA

EKHMET

BIYAN

SHUKRIA

BOLZIN

MERCY

DANKSCHEEN

JUSPAXAR

SPASSIBO

NURUH

SNACHALHYA

CHAL TU

YAQHANYELAY

WABEEJA

MATYKA

YUSPAGARATAM

WADEEJA

MATYKA

HI

DHANYADAA

ANHA

ATTO

UNALCHEESH

HATTUR GU

SIKOMO

MAAKE

MAKETAJ

GRAZIE

MEHRBANI

PALDIES

SPASIBO

DENKAUJA

NEMACHALHYA

UNALCHEESH

SIKOMO

MAKETAJ

MINMONCHAR

TAVTAPUCHI

MEDAWAGSI

GOZAIMASHITA

EFCHARISTO

AGUYJE

FAKAADU

KOMAPSUMNIDA

LAH

SIKOMO

MAKETAJ

MINMONCHAR

## **An investigation of the reasons worshippers visit shrines and the significance of temples in Japan**

**Adam Agustin Aguilar**  
**Dallas Baptist University**

**Summary:** This research project will focus on understanding why many people come to visit shrines and what they would particularly pray for at the shrines. This particular investigation focuses on the Kotohira-gu shrine in Kagawa, this shrine is known to be more welcoming to seafaring worshippers who seek good fortunes with sea-related ventures. Additionally, this study took a more focused approach by using a category system we were able to see what certain age groups came to pray for at the shrine. The data this system provided allowed us to analyze how each age group thought as far as what to pray for specifically and allowed us to compare this data with other age groups and gender. For example, younger age categories (10-20 years) prayed for good luck in school or work related matters. The mid-group category (30-50) there was many things this group prayed for and no particular trend was set, some prayed for romance, others for money and others for health. The category comprised of ages 50-70 we found that almost 100% prayed for good health. I believe that this study has allowed me to grasp a better understanding of the reasons why people go visit the shrine and how these reasons can be diverse according to age and or everyday life matters.

One of the main reasons why I came to Japan was because I had a high interest in studying the indigenous religions that were closely associated with temples and shrines throughout Japan. I soon found myself immersed in the study of these temples and as I began researching and understanding them I only became more and more interested. I believe more than anything that when it came to understanding the reason why people followed Shinto; I wanted to understand what the main purpose of the shrines were and what importance people believed they held. I soon found out that each shrine held a specific purpose or represented a certain deity to the followers of the religion. As stated before, the research that was conducted was done to take a more focused approach to better understand what age groups and gender were praying for.

To have the best results we constructed a table outlining the most common reasons worshippers would visit the shrine and asked respondents to place a colored sticker in their age category. Using this system we were able to collect important data about the visitors and the reason for their visit. Additionally, we asked respondents to draw figures of what they believed the God of the shrine to look like in the flesh. We believed that this method helped the respondents express what they imagined the God to look like without any pressure or outside input. However, one drawback of this method was that many participants still did not feel comfortable sharing what they believed the God to look like. Nonetheless this method provided important information. The information we were able to draw from our research. Through the data we collected we saw that many younger respondents under the age of ten visited the shrine to pray for good luck when it came to their studies and others would pray for their family. This shows high education is regarded in Japanese

society and how the youth regard it as being important enough to pray for. Additionally, the data on the table showed that the age group between 60-70 had visited the shrine to pray for good health and this was about 90% of the respondents who were in this group. From this data we can conclude that many of the elderly respondents placed more importance in their health after a certain age and came to the shrine to have continuance in health or better health. One of the limitations of our research was that we did not encounter a single person who was at the Konpiru-gu shrine to pray for anything related to the God of the shrine which was seafaring. However, I believe that as a foreigner the information that was collected can help better understand why people come to these shrines and the amount of importance they hold among the Japanese who follow Shinto.



While further investigating temples and shrines on my own I was able to learn more about their significance. When entering a shrine it is custom for a person to wash their hands and also rinse their mouths. At the entrance of the shrine there will be a small fountain with small cups that are used for this practice; this area is called the temizuya. It is common when visiting a temple that one make a prayer in front of the sacred object for that specific temple; this is done by throwing a small coin into the offering box and then making your short prayer. In Kyoto you can find many temples, many people believe that temples are the center or place of worship. However, this idea is wrong; the purpose of temples is to house and sometimes display sacred objects so that people can come and offer a small prayer in front of the object. One of the most famous temples I came across was Shimogamo-jinja shrine; this shrine is one of Japan's oldest shrines and resides in Kyoto. This shrine is dedicated to the veneration of Tamayori-hime who is closely associated with the spirit-inviting maiden. Kyoto serves as the center of many of the most elaborate and unique shrines and temples seeing as it once serves as the capital of Japan.



In conclusion, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are some of Japan's oldest religious sites and are a very significant part of understanding Japanese culture and the traditional way of life in Japan. Being able to visit many temples and shrines I felt a real peace and a sense of true Japanese culture by being present at these religious sites. Many of these locations are extremely beautiful and offer a scenic view and often times a beautiful garden to go along with it. One of the most invigorating looking shrine that I was able to visit was the Kinkakuju shrine in Kyoto, this shrine is set around a beautiful pond and garden and sits eloquently as its gold plated walls reflect a beautiful glaze during a sunny day.



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### **EPOK Reflections**

My experience as an EPOK student has been nothing short of great. I believe this program is a wonderful way to experience Japanese culture and history through classes but also from the surrounding environment. Being able to participate in this program has been a huge blessing, everyday was a new adventure and being to make friends from all over the world was another incentive of participating in this program. One of my favorite memories was when I was able to visit Himeji Castle for the first time, I soon found myself traveling around Japan every other weekend to visit castles or shrines. I came to Japan only knowing a little bit about the culture but now I leave having grasped a good understanding of the culture and how Japanese society works. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of this program. Thank you all who made it memorable. As for the future, I hope to come back to Japan one day and teach English.

## Over Sexualization of Young Japanese Girls

Addison Zody  
Dallas Baptist University

**Summary** : Japan is a country of all things cute, lovable, and adorable; otherwise known as “*kawaii*.” “*Kawaii*” is quality of cuteness in Japan and can be seen in almost all Japanese products like clothing, pop culture, food, toys, and even behavior/mannerisms. As soon as I entered the country I could see this quality of cuteness sprinkled throughout everything in one way or another. I knew even before coming, through countless Japanese anime and games, that “*kawaii*” was something that has very much become a part of Japan; so much so that the imagery one has when thinking of Japan always includes “*kawaii*” as one of the defining factors. Cuteness is not in and of itself bad in anyway. “Cute” and “attractiveness” is associated with something that is younger or has younger features, making them seem more vulnerable and in need of protection. This is why babies and puppies are cute. However, I have noticed that in Japan there seems to be an unhealthy obsession over cuteness, or “*kawaii*”, that has led to issues over the morality of some things that are “*kawaii*.” These moral issues seem to be grey when seen through the lens of a secular worldview as morality cannot be properly defied. It is probably not seen as immorality to some people, like the ones involved in it; however, to others it may seem immoral. The morality of this social issue must be seen through the lens of a proper biblical worldview if we are going to justly examine it. “*Kawaii*” is undoubtedly a very grey area topic in Japan. However, it has spawned some very black and white moral issues concerning young girls that has given fruition to even more immoral businesses and acts.

Cuteness is harmless depending on what is being portrayed as cute. When the sexualization of the young female body is regarded as cute and attractive, harmlessness is replaced with immediate moral issues along with heightened potential for evil. When I first got to Japan I did not notice this problem immediately because I was so busy. However, when I got the chance to relax and look around I noticed the epidemic of short skirts. It was not so bad at university, only a few short skirts here and there. However, when I went to a more populated area, like a mall, I noticed that there were countless young girls, high school and below, walking around in skirts that were only centimeters short of showing something more than leg. As a foreigner this was very unusual and quite unsettling that girls so young were showing as much as they could. A skirt alone is something that can be dangerous in accidentally revealing some part of the female body that is supposed to be covered. And for men, this just encourages temptation and a wondering eye.

I thought that it was so wrong and perverted for Japanese schools to require their students to wear something so revealing, until I found out that the uniform skirts were actually much longer in most cases and that the girls like to roll them up to show as much skin as they could. It was shocking to me that girls at such a young age would want to show that much skin. It was as if they were trying to come off as “easy” to men around them. Contrary to my belief, the thought process for the girls is that it is cute or “*kawaii*” to wear short skirts and show off leg. So in an attempt to become something that Japanese culture values, they accommodate. But just where did the ideology that more leg and shorter skirts counts as cute come from?

### Japanese Pop-culture

Pop-culture pushes much of what is considered “*kawaii*” in Japan, especially in the realm of Japanese idols and anime/manga. “Beginning in the 1970’s during Japan’s economic recovery, *shojou* or young girls, became the face of advertising” (Chavez, 2014).

### **Idols and Jr. Idols**

Young girls in idol group are a big part of the “*kawaii*” world and are shaping what is cute for the rest of the girls in Japan. These idol groups are managed by corrupt men who know that in Japan “sex sells.” As a result, to appeal to men of all ages they have young girls dress up in skimpy outfits, like over sexualized school girl uniforms, to perform on stage and produce music videos in them. There are also much younger girls called junior idols, which are “within the ages of twelve or thirteen years old.” “These girls are pictured in bikinis and suggestive poses, displayed in posters and billboards across the mass media” (Chavez, 2014). As a result of these groups and groups like them, young girls are conforming to this style of “*kawaii*” in order to come across as attractive, and both older and younger men are being drawn to this as cute and attractive.

### **Anime and Manga**

Along with Idol groups, anime/manga is one of the most influential things in Japanese pop-culture that is shaping over sexualization of young girls as “*kawaii*.” In nearly every anime/manga since its birth has depicted very young girls in overly sexualized outfits. Most of these images are of girls in very short skirts (often times blown up by the wind revealing their underwear) and other outfits bordering on sexually explicit content (some of which actually display pornographic images). The producers of these anime/manga push and shape most of the “*kawaii*” agenda and because they have full artistic control of these young girls. They can make almost anything the characters do out to be cute, and anything they wear to be cute. Often times, no age is associated with these girls. However, from context clues like high school/middle school uniforms, one can see that the girls displayed in the images are very young. These anime/manga are very popular amongst both men and women, old and young. This creates the mandate for “*kawaii*” in how one should act, dress, and talk for young women, as well as create an attraction in men for this “*kawaii*” as it is often over sexualized.

### **Consequences**

As a result of young girls seeing short skirts and scandalous clothes as cute and desirable, older men have fallen prey to the attraction of sexualized younger women. Men now have this attraction to younger women and this attraction has led to very morally questionable acts and deeds, along with corrupt industries that profit off of the exploitation of young women. *Joshi kosei* (JK) is a Japanese phrase that means “high school girl” and because of the overwhelming sense of “*kawaii*” that JK has, businesses cater to the sexual needs of older men. As reported by Buren, “The 2014 report about Japan mentioned another related “JK business” called *joshi-kosei osanpo*, also known as “high school walking, where girls are offered money to accompany men on walks, in cafes, or to hotels, and engage in commercial sex” (2015). These JK businesses take advantage of run-away or mentally impaired girls, using them to satisfy the lust in older men’s heart for young “*kawaii*” girls. Some of these businesses lay in the grey area of illegal activities. For example, men paying to see “girls under the age of 18 sit open-legged, folding origami paper cranes or doing other crafts, exposing their panties to male customers” (Buren, 2014). Because of this unhealthy obsession, there has been an increase also in sex trafficking in the more underground JK business.

Many other consequences have come from the sexualization of young girls. One of these consequences is an increase consumption and attraction of child pornography. This is still a grey area for Japan, as it was “one of the last countries to officially ban the possession of child porn, its previous laws only focusing on distribution and production of underage pornography” (Chavez, 2014). Tabuchi writes in an article that, “Legal experts say that Japan’s anti-child pornography laws are lax by international standards,” seeing as it only just banned production and distribution in 1999 but also that “even now, unlike the US and most European countries, Japan does not ban the possession of child pornography” (2011). Along with child pornography, molestation of young girls on trains is an issue, as well as many other morally wrong acts done by older men to younger women like taking pictures up their skirts while sitting and standing. **Biblically**

This issue of sexualization with regards to young women is not a very new concept. What is new is the widespread reach and deep roots it has in this country along with the wide spread acceptance of it. Although a semi-new issue at hand, the root of the problem it is not something that the bible does not talk about and therefore can be examined through a biblical lens.

If we get down to what is driving this harmful “*kawaii*” movement, I think we will find that it is sprouting from pure human lust for one another. Regardless of age and regardless of what you do, the sin driving one to take part in any of this sexualization, boy or girl, is sexual lust. Through the biblical lens we see that the men and women eating up this sexuality is morally wrong, because Jesus says, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (English Standard Version, Mat. 5:28). However, I do think John is the one that categorizes this epidemic best in 1 John 2:16 saying, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” (ESV). All of the sin happening is desires of the world. We see that the people who love the sexuality of the young girls’ outfits are giving into the desires of the flesh and eyes. The girls take part in the pride of both themselves and their clothes, and the ones pushing this sexualization as “*kawaii*” agenda are seeking the desires of money.

Other sins are sprinkled in and around these desires. Some of them being: to desanctify human life, which is sex trafficking; to desanctify Gods idea of marriage/sexual immorality, which is sexual intercourse with someone that is not your spouse; going against government, which is breaking all sorts of laws, and many more.

### **Biblical findings from social issue**

My findings from examining this social issue all range in many degrees. What sticks out to me most is the need for something to fulfill our hearts. Naturally, we are all searching for something to fill that hole that we were created with. Some fill it with money, sex, attention, material possessions, or one’s self. God created us with this natural aching of the heart for something to fulfill us so that we would realize that we need Him and that there is something more to life. I also gained a deeper understanding in his purpose for us to make choices, that is, to have free will. How beautiful it is for us when we spend our lives searching for something to fill the hole in our lives and find that God who is the only one who can fill it completely. The last thing that I think stuck out to me most was that I gained a better understanding of how sin feeds sin. From one single, seemingly harmless thing, a whole world of sin slowly erupted and was the fuel to the others fire.



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## **EPOK Reflections**

My experience here in Japan and with the EPOK program was enjoyable. I met many different people from many different backgrounds and got to hear a little bit of their stories, some more than others. This was truly a blessing for me as through these friendships and exposure to different culture, my thinking has been broadened once again.

The EPOK program is beautifully designed as it is very flexible to adapt to the students wants and needs as they choose their courses. It is also very helpful that the work load that is given through this program is very small and most of the time enjoyable. As for me, I was taking a full semesters worth of classes online for my home university at the same time as I was enrolled in the EPOK classes. It was very stressful, however, doable because of the level of intensity that the EPOK provides.

I loved all the adventures that I got to experience with both EPOK classes and with my friends I met though my involvement in the EPOK program. I wish there was time for more and that travel was cheaper, but regardless, I think I got a very good cultural experience through EPOK even in this short time here. I hope to come back and visit Japan and Okadai as soon as possible.

## 平安時代

**Tiffany Brown**  
**University of Western Australia**

**Summary:** I wrote the following piece for a class called Japanese Studies. During this class we learnt about a variety of topics relevant to Japan from a variety of professors. These topics ranged from aged care in Japan to job-hunting and even how snow is formed. The topic that caught my imagination the most though was ancient Japanese history.

In this essay I give a brief overview of the Heian era and its society, culture, politics and the lasting effects that it has had on Japan. Much of what we know about the Heian period is derived from documents and artwork produced by aristocratic women; as a result there is often a romanticized image surrounding the time. The Heian era was a time during which Japanese culture, literature and religion flourished. Japan developed their own writing system known as kana, which is still used today. In addition a prevalent Japanese painting style known as Yamato-e gained popularity, and what is often thought to be the first ever novel, The Tales of Genji, was written. Due to these significant changes the cultural foundations of Japan were formed thus creating the unique image that Japan portrays to the world today.

日本には、長く面白い歴史があります。実際、大昔から日本に人類が住んでいた証拠も見つかっています。これらの歴史もっと分かりやすくするために、歴史は時代ごとに分けられました。おそらく明治時代や江戸時代や昭和時代などは世界でも有名な時代でしょう。しかし、私は文学や伝統的な文化に興味があるので、この論文では、「平安時代」について書こうと思います。

平安時代は794年から1185年まで開かれました。その時の古文や美術や貴族層などはまだ有名です。794年に桓武天皇が奈良から平安京(京都)に都を移してから、平安時代が始まりました。この時代は、中国の影響を受けずに、日本独自の経済や政治を始めました。その時に侍や仏教はより大切なものになりました。そして、平安時代にたくさん美術や文献が作られたので、平安時代は、「日本の文化の最盛期」と呼ばれています。

平安時代には3つ社会階層がいました。貴族と公民と賤民です。しかし、後の時代に比べて、この社会階層はあまりきびしくありませんでした。住民は違う社会階層に入ることができたのです。最高位は桓武天皇で、奈良時代と同じで、中国に基づいた社会階級を使っていました。792年には、徴兵制度を排除し、侍と呼ばれる、より高いくらいの兵士を設けました。

桓武天皇が死んだ後に、息子が天皇になりましたが、藤原という家族に権力が移りました。藤原家の娘たちは、天皇家と結婚し、藤原家の男性陣に権力ある仕事を与え、子供達を藤原家によって育てさせるようにしました。藤原家は1068年くらいまで、大きな権力を持っていました。



貴族、とりわけ位の高い貴族は美しい物や色や儀式が大好きでした。きれいになるために女性は着物を着たり、髪を長くしていました。貴族の女性は字が読めるし、色々な科目も勉強しました。例えば書道や音楽や詩などは人気でした。平安時代には初めてかたかなとひらがなが使われました。そして大和絵と若という詩は人気がありました。紫式部の源氏物語という本は平安時代で一番有名な書いた本です。日本で初めて書かれた小説だと言われています。源氏物語は貴族の生活や美を描いています。それにこの本には、平安時代の理想的な男はやさしく、文芸もできる人だと描写されています。このアイデアは中世のヨーロッパととて

も違います。

平安時代の人たちは美しい物が好きなので、とてもきれいな寺を建てました。例えば平等院鳳凰堂は998年に建てられました。現在の10円硬貨に刻印されています。平安時代には仏教はより人気になったので、日本らしい仏教が作られました。



平安時代はかなりの安らかな時代でした。この時代は、文化や美術は栄えだし、仏教もよりひろがりました。平安時代は、疑いもなく日本という国のアイデンティティーを形成した時代で、このアイデンティティーが、外国人が想像する日本でしょう。

このテーマを決めた理由は歴史に興味があるからです。実は休み時、お父さんと一緒に歴史的な所に行くのが好きです。しかし日本に対して、オーストラリアの原住民は物を書く手段を持っていなかったなので、たくさんを学ぶのが難しいと思います。この理由から、世界の歴史に興味をもらいました。それに、この時にはヨーロッパより日本人女性のほうが人権が持っていたから、平安時代は面白いと思っています。

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## **EPOK Reflections**

Before coming to Japan I had three things that I wanted to achieve. 1) Improve my Japanese language ability.

2) Learn more about the local Okayama culture and lifestyle

3) Eat lots of sushi

I think I can now say that I have defiantly achieved all of my goals. I have gained the confidence to talk to people in Japanese, even though sometimes the topics we talked about were a little strange! I also managed to learn more about life and culture in Okayama than I ever could in a classroom. Trips to local landmarks such as Korakuen and Kurashiki showed me a traditional side of Japan that I have fallen in love with. And I have defiantly managed to eat my fill of sushi!

However the aspect that I'll treasure most from my time in Okayama is the friendships that I've made with people from across the globe. From Japanese students to other EPOK students from countries including England, America and Thailand, the moments that we shared together have become some of my most treasured memories. From losing a travel buddy while exploring Hiroshima Castle, to falling off my bicycle after a night of too much fun my first week here, I want to thank everyone for making my time in Japan so enjoyable. Everyone has taught me so much about their own countries and cultures I feel I have already travelled the world.

## Kurashiki

**Miranda Hewett**  
**University of South Australia**

**Summary :** Kurashiki is one of Okayama Prefecture's most visited sights. The original buildings that with stood the brutal destruction of World War II paired with the traditional Japanese scenes bring thousands of visitors to the historic streets each year. During our field trip to Kurashiki we were able to explore the push and pull factors of both modern and historic Japan. A demographic assessment revealed that Kurashiki is visited by both international and domestic tourists mostly all aiming to taken in the picturesque surroundings. A key to any successful tourism spot is the quality and prevalence of food available. A focal point for us when we were in Kurashiki, we discovered that there were some variety in cuisine however most restaurants served local delicacies. Although many tourists visit Kurashiki, the lack of English and other languages used may deter many foreign tourists. Kurashiki is a beautiful city, rich in history and culture. Although the city lacks a variety of English information, the cities authenticity and beauty is one of the main reasons the riverbanks are lined with people all year round.

To the average tourist, Kurashiki allows one to step back in time and experience authentic structures from the Edo Period. Unlike many cities in Japan, Kurashiki's buildings were not bombed during World War Two, thus allowing the original buildings to still hold their place alongside the picturesque Kurashiki River. Popular travel guides such as *Lonely Planet: Japan* describes Kurashiki's historical Bikan Quarter as "an area of old historic buildings by an old willow-edged canal, where a picturesque group of black-and-white warehouses have been converted into museums" (Lonely Planet 2013). Similarly many respected websites highlight the historical Bikan quarter. In particular Japan's National Tourism Organization website states "Scenery of the old days is still mostly preserved, with white earthen-walled warehouses and villas lined up along Kurashiki River, weeping willows swinging their branches over the river, and stone bridges" (Japan National Tourism Organization 2015) As Kurashiki is presented to perspective tourists as a chance to explore an authentic segment of Japan's past, the cities target consumers is seen to be both local and international tourists. The sensory experiences that Kurashiki offers create a assortment of pull factors that can entice both young and old to this historical city.



*The scenic riverbanks of Kurashiki*

Although Kurashiki is targeted at both international and local tourist, the majority of tourists visiting were Japanese residents. The large amounts of domestic tourists seen in Kurashiki were seen to be visiting with family or friends for the weekend or just for the day. Other domestic visitors to Kurashiki were visiting for events such as weddings, meetings or conferences that were being held in the Bikan quarter. Many young couples were wandering the streets, tasting the popular soft-serve ice cream or taking photos together showcasing their beautiful surroundings. Although it was obvious that the majority of tourists were Japanese, there were a small number of international visitors who were pulled to Kurashiki by the serenity of the historic Bikan quarter. Most international tourists were exploring Kurashiki in groups accompanied by a Japanese-speaking leader. As October is not within the peak tourist period these result may differ to that seen in time of peak tourism.



*Local visitors enjoy the scenery*

Kurashiki provides a myriad of aspects to attract both first-timer and repeat tourists from both inside and outside of Japan. For a Japanese tourist visiting for the first time, Kurashiki offers arts galleries featuring works by Monet, Picasso and Cézanne. Something different than traditional Japanese art works found in most art galleries around Japan. For returning visitors, different seasons bring a new river side scene. For example the blooming cherry blossom trees line the riverside in April creating a completely different view to the riversides trees auburn leaves in October. Due to the ever-changing scenery Kurashiki provides a different experience every time allowing for returning visitors to be ever satisfied. Similarly to the pull factors that attract local tourists, International tourists are attracted to the individuality of Kurashiki. However the lack of English signage available may deter some international visitors. Major tourist attractions within Kurashiki do have English signage but mostly the cities signage is prominently Japanese. In the global world that we live in accessibility to the English language plays an integral part in attracting international tourists. Due to this, many international tourists may not be satisfied with their experience to Kurashiki merely due to their inability to understand signage, information or maps.



*Maps offered in English and Japanese*



The topic my group focused on was food. Kurashiki is a haven for food lovers from both Japan and overseas. To experience the food of Kurashiki my group and I wandered the streets and compared the different types of food available to visitors. There were many Japanese establishments serving sashimi and curries as well as the local sardine-like fish that is supposed to force the eater into an uncontrollable binge. Also offered to visitors of Kurashiki are multiple western options such as Italian and Indian restaurants. We decided to eat a ramen eatery that was a chain with multiple locations around Japan. The chairs were made of denim to represent the local jean manufacturing industry and the menu offered a dish honouring the local sport team. After lunch we decided to walk around Kurashiki in search of the local delicacies known as Murasuzume. During our walk we tasted a lot of locally made snacks such as ice-lollies made with local fruit, handmade crackers and even soft-serve peach ice cream. We also noted that many visitors were enjoying tasting and purchasing local delicacies to take home to family and friends. The local pancakes and the variety of differences seen within the food of Kurashiki allows both local and international tourist to taste a different aspect of Japanese cuisine. Due to this it can be noted that the food of Kurashiki is a major pull factor that brings people to the city.



*Italian Restaurant with English menu*



*Indian Restaurant in Kurashiki*



*Hishio Ramen with denim chairs*



*Murasuzume*

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## **EPOK Reflections**

My time studying at Okayama University has been both rewarding and eye opening. I came to Japan knowing very little Japanese and little knowledge of the Japanese culture. Now five months on, my Japanese language skills have progressed and I have a deep appreciation for the Japanese way of living and the traditions of this historically rich country. During my time here I have experienced so many amazing events. One experience that was a highlight was speaking to Japanese people about Australia at the Okayama International Center with a fellow Australian. We were able to share our country with Japanese people as well as share our experiences in Japan and discuss interesting aspects of Okayama that we would have otherwise not had to opportunity to discuss. Another highlight was spending a night with a host family in Kojima. I was able to stay in a traditional Japanese house and share a traditional Japanese meal with their family and friends. During my time at Okayama University I have made so many good friends through my Japanese classes and my EPOK classes. I now have so many friends all around the world that I aim to remain in contact with for the rest of my life. My time at Okayama University has been life changing. I have grown as a person due to the experiences I have been offered and I believe my experience here has helped shape the rest of my university life and future career.

## JAPANESE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND LIFE

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**Summary:** The Japanese School system has many different qualities in which make it unique from other countries. The History of the Japanese school system dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century from Buddhist and Confucian teachings however has changed greatly into the current school system that Japan employs now. American occupying forces set up the current Japanese school system to eradicate Japanese militaristic teachings and to democratize Japan. The Japanese Uniforms have also been adopted from European style sailor uniforms. These uniforms have become a part of Japanese pop culture as a fashion trend, whereby students may often wear their school uniforms on days in which they will not attend school. The common custom in Japan to take off shoes has also been adopted within schools. Students will take off their shoes and place them in a shoe box called a geta bako, they will then wear a slipper called uwagutsu, which will only be worn within the school buildings. This is a method used to keep the schools clean and to show respect. Japanese schools also provide students with the opportunity to join either sporting or culture clubs. These clubs can be very intense, whereby students may find themselves training every day. It is also here in the clubs where students will be exposed to and learn about the Japanese hierarchy system.

The Japanese school system is a very unique system that differs very much so than that of the Western systems. It has developed its own systems and cultures which may seem foreign to others. However, the school system is not the only part of a typical school student's life within Japan. Other factors that make up Japan's unique schooling experience may include after school clubs and the uniforms that the students wear.

Formal education in Japan began with the adoption of Chinese culture, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. Buddhists and Confucian teachings as well as sciences, calligraphy, divination and literature were taught at the courts of Asuka, Nara and Heian. Scholar officials were chosen through an Imperial examination system. But contrary to China, the system never fully took hold and titles and posts at the court remained hereditary family possessions. The rise of the bushi (warrior), the military class, during the Kamakura period ended the influence of scholar officials, but Buddhist monasteries remained influential centers of learning.

The current Japanese school system may have originated from the occupying forces after World War 2, however it still holds true that it is unique in its own Japanese way. After the war, the fundamental law of education and the school education law were set in place in Japan. One of the main goals of the occupying forces when setting up Japan's educational reform/system was

to try and eradicate all forms of militaristic teachings and instead enlighten the students with a democratic style of teaching, hence democratizing Japan. This school system that was made is still in place today with the 6-3-3 system. This means that Japanese students will attend six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school, and three years of high school. After this time the students will have the choice to be able to attend a higher level of education such as university, which will typically run for two to four years. Prior to elementary school, children may attend either kindergartens or day care centers for their education. Both public and private day care centers will take in children from the ages of three to five. The educational approach at kindergartens varies greatly from unstructured environments that emphasize play, to highly structured environments that are focused on having the child pass the entrance exam at a private elementary school. Schools usually run five days a week from Monday to Friday, however there are some schools which have adopted a six day school regime whereby students also attend school on Saturday.

The Japanese class system may also seem restrictive at times as students may not have the opportunity to meet other students outside of their classrooms in the same year level. The Japanese class system is one of efficiency, whereby the teachers will move from class to class instead of the students. In high school, Japanese students will study Japanese language, English, Mathematics and science. In each class there will often be two class representatives, one female and one male. These roles are often elected by the students within the classrooms, however at times the homeroom teacher will also simply elect the class representatives themselves.

The school uniform for Japanese students holds as an integral part of school life in Japan. The Japanese junior and senior-high-school uniform traditionally consists of a military style uniform for boys and a sailor outfit for girls. These uniforms are based on Meiji era formal military dress, themselves modeled on European style naval uniforms. The sailor outfits replace the undivided hakama. While hakama is still in use, many schools have moved to more Western-pattern parochial school uniform styles. These uniforms consist of a white shirt, tie, blazer with school crest, and tailored trousers (often not of the same color as the blazer) for boys and a white blouse, tie, blazer with school crest, and tartan culottes or skirt for girls. All schools have also a summer uniform. For male students, it usually consists of a white dress shirt and trousers, whilst for the females it may be a tartan skirt and tie. For the male students, it is common to wear the gakuran or the tsume eri. This is the typical uniform for male students during middle school and high schooling. The Japanese school uniform has now become a fashionable piece of clothing where girls will often wear their school uniform outside of school. This includes the days in which school is not on.

Japanese schools do not employ janitors or custodians, the students themselves clean the school and it all starts with taking their shoes before going in the school. The purpose is to teach them responsibility and respect. When students arrive to the school they remove their shoes and place

them in a small wooden shelf called a geta bako and then put on their uwagutsu, which are indoor slippers. The shoe box or geta bako is used to store your shoes but can also function as an informal letter box the student use to leave messages to each other. Students in Japan do not have lockers and these boxes are the closes thing they have to it. These uwagutsu are worn by all students and staff including teachers.

Another aspect of Japanese schools is its clubs. Club activities take place after school every day. Teachers are assigned as sponsors, but often the students themselves determine the club's daily activities. Students can join only one club, and they rarely change clubs from year to year. In most schools, clubs can be divided into two types: sports clubs (baseball, soccer, judo, kendo, track, tennis, swimming, softball, volleyball, rugby) and culture clubs (English, broadcasting, calligraphy, science, mathematics, yearbook). New students usually are encouraged to select a club shortly after the school year begins in April. Clubs meet for two hours after school each day and many clubs continue to meet during school vacations. Sports club activities can be very intense as students can train for up to six days a week. Schools that have developed a sporting reputation may train even longer than usual. These schools often generate future sports players that will play in the major leagues. Club activities provide one of the primary opportunities for peer group socialization. Most college bound students withdraw from club activities during their senior year to devote more time to preparation for university entrance examinations. Although visible in the general high school experience, it is in the clubs that the fundamental relationships of senpai (senior) and kohai (junior) are established most solidly. It is the responsibility of the senpai to teach, initiate, and take care of the kohai. It is the duty of the kohai to serve and defer to the senpai. For example, kohai students in the tennis club might spend one year chasing tennis balls while the upperclassmen practice. Only after the upperclassmen have finished may the underclassmen use the courts. The kohai are expected to serve their senpai and to learn from them by observing and modeling their behavior. This fundamental relationship is important for their future in terms of understanding the Japanese hierarchy system.

There are two types of sporting clubs within university that students are able to join. One is the official sporting club of the university whereby students will train intensely to represent their university in official tournaments. Students that join this club will take the sport extremely seriously. However, students that play a particular sport as a hobby will not be left out. For those students the university will have circles. These circles are a gathering of students that will usually meet up at least once a week to play their desired sport. Often this will happen in a relaxed environment without the need to train. These circles also will not represent the university and not attend important tournaments such as the intercollegiate matches.

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### **EPOK Reflections**

The EPOK program has been a thrilling adventure for me. I was able to see much more of Japan than I would've ever hoped for. I don't think it would've been possible to be exposed to the Japanese culture and schooling life as much as I did without this opportunity. Being able to live here for six months has given me the opportunity to make lifelong friendships and experiences that will stay with me forever. Though Okayama itself is considered a small city, it is the relationships that develop, which will make Okayama special. During my time here I was fortunate enough to be allowed to join the badminton circle. It is here where I felt comfortable as although my Japanese language proficiency is quite low, playing badminton broke these barriers. Members of the circle and I were able to communicate with each other through playing badminton and over time my Japanese proficiency was increasing. It was very much a shock to me at the start whereby Japanese was spoken to me everywhere without any help or speed reduction so that I would be able to understand. However, I do believe that as a learner of Japanese, that it is a good way to try and understand Japanese for what it is in its natural state as that is what I should be aiming for. Nevertheless I very much so recommend joining either a club or circle as it is not only about playing sports, but it also encompasses outings, dinners, and activities that will truly enhance one's stay within Japan.

## Elementary School in Japan

**Jamie Lee Wadsworth**  
**York St. John University**

**Summary:** Within this essay is a brief description of elementary school in Japan. It discusses what happens before a Japanese child enters an elementary school, the process the parents go through and how difficult it really can be for Japanese children even at such a young age. This includes talking about pre-entrance test preparations such as cram schools, and the effects it can have if a child is not put into a cram school. Furthermore, It also goes on to talk about what the curriculum and philosophy of some elementary schools in Japan are, with an occasional comparison to American elementary school.

In Japan, the struggle for education is fierce. Since the Meiji era, education, science and technology have been realised to be important cornerstones for socioeconomic development in Japan, and thus there has been a significant increase in expenditure on education. The number of school children and university students has gradually increased from 1900 to 1945, however due to the falling birth rates in Japan; the number of school children has as declined. (Karan, 2010, pp. 181) Now, Japan is making rapid progress in the fields of science and in the manufacturing industry, and its educational curriculum is world famous. In this essay I am going to mainly be focusing on elementary level education in Japan, looking at a brief overview of the philosophy behind Japanese education, exploring young Japanese children's journey to pass their entrance exams, and the curriculum they learn.

Japan is considered one of the most aggressively meritocratic countries in world, meaning that achievement is viewed by Japanese not as the result of innate, unchangeable intelligence, but instead as the result of effort. If a student fails, it is not seen as only a failure of the student, but also all those involved in their learning, such as their teachers and parents. (*Japan, 2015*) Living in a very collectivist society, the Japanese place a very high value on acceptance and support from the group they are a part of, including family and school, so they work very hard to win the approval of their families and teachers. This need for acceptance is deeply integrated into the Japanese way of life, Japan has been seen by some as a group-orientated society, where individuality is frowned upon, and others have seen it as a society of strong-minded individuals who share an ideology of collective harmony. (Cave, P. 2007, pp. 2) Some writers argue that preschools and primary schools predominantly use group activities to fill expected roles, and many agree that education plays a significant part in making Japanese people who they are.

In Japanese elementary school, most follow a trimester system, which includes a forty-day summer vacation and both winter and spring have 2 week vacations. The MOE (Ministry of Education) has recommended that there also be an autumn break. The curriculum consists of ethics, Japanese language, arithmetic, and physical education. There is also the additional option to take drawing, singing, handicrafts, or for girls, sewing was also available. (Primary schools in Japan, 2011) it is general school philosophy for the teachers to teach the children following the principle of 'whole person education', so that the children's moral, aesthetic, emotional, physical and cognitive aspects are all catered to. According to Wray, H. (1999) Early Japanese education mainly focuses on developing the character of the individual, rather than their intelligence. Through this, parents expect these elementary school teachers to be able to teach the students the values and attitudes necessary to fit into group life, and have good



public behaviour. However, the parents must play a very important role in the very beginning, ensuring the children are able to get into elementary schools and kindergartens in the first place.

To get into private elementary schools and kindergartens in Japan, the children will begin preparing for the entrance exam. This is done by a lot of parents by sending their children to cram schools, sometimes as early as 6 months old, practicing gross motor skills such as opening and closing their hands. They will prepare for the examinations that they will take at the age of around 4 – 5 years old. An estimated amount of 500,000 young pre-school children are enrolled into cram schools (Juku) to prepare them for these tests. According to a study on educational expenditures done in 2000, one-third of elementary school students (36.7%) attended Juku, and parents spent an average of 119,000 yen per year for Juku (cram schools). ‘Successful’ Cram schools or Jukus, which can range from national chains or small group classes in an apartment, with class time dependant on the school.

The kindergarten and elementary school tests are based on their knowledge of shapes, the colours of fruit, number sequences and polite behaviour. Unfortunately, going to the cram schools and getting through these entrance exams plays a strong role in deciding whether they retire from first-rate jobs sixty years down the line. All this work at elementary level of course is all with the aim for the students get into a good senior high school and then a good college. By getting the children into these private elementary schools and kindergartens, a lot of the time this means that there is an automatic acceptance into that schools junior high school, and higher levels of education. If the student doesn’t work hard enough, and doesn’t get into a good college, or get/already have a good social standing, they cannot expect to have a good job or career. (Karan, 2010, pp. 182) So this means that for example, compared to the average American student, the Japanese students can be considered very serious and intense when it comes to studying and working towards exams.

Group work at elementary and kindergarten level is considered crucial by Japanese teachers. Compared to other countries such as America, Pre-school teachers think American pre-schools’ emphasis on small classes encourages too much independence and individuality, and cultivation of self-esteem and individual identity at the expensive of group cooperation. (Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, & Dickson, 1980) This could be where the view of Japan being a collectivist society may come from, as mentioned previously, Education has a large influence on how an individual will be many years down the line.

Unfortunately for these cram schools, there is a warning that the schools could be causing the children to lose their ability to think independently. The system that thousands of children are put into is often heavily criticized for depriving children of the job of youth, and turning them into almost robots. These students are taught to obey, not to think actively and critically as an individual. However, parents and educators are slowly working towards a reform in the system, aiming at the youngest learners, with the aims of producing more individualistic and independent thinkers. (Karan, 2010, pp. 183)

In conclusion, a lot of Japanese society it seems, both good and bad, can be connected back to the school practices they took part in as a child. A lot of the time it seems that the children’s lives are planned out before they have developed enough to realise it has happened. Hopefully in future, the Japanese education system can keep realising where the system may be at fault, and work toward a new age of independent thinkers in Japan.

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## **EPOK Reflections**

In reflection of my time here in Okayama, I have come to realise that it has been a truly life changing experience. I have made potentially life-long friends with people from countries I never thought I would travel to, travelled to a country that I never thought I would go to in my whole life time, it's amazing. Whilst here at Okayama university I have gained a confidence in myself that required stepping entirely out of my comfort zone. This whole experience has been out of my comfort zone, it is my first time travelling abroad alone (without family), my first time in Asia, and my first time having to deal with my own insurance, Banks and bills.

I think I have grown as a person; I am more confident in my own abilities and also more independent. The support from the university has been amazing, but done in a way that has also allowed me to rely on myself. I hope one day to return to Japan, to Okayama, and to continue growing to be a better person. So a big thank you to all the people I have met, and a huge thank you to the university. I would recommend an experience like this to anyone.



2015 FALL Semester

# EPOK Student フォーラム

## EPOK 修了式

2016年2月10日 (水) 10:00~11:30

場所：国際交流会館交流棟 (図書館裏)



**10:00~ EPOK フォーラム**  
EPOK修了生によるプレゼンテーション

**11:00~ EPOK 修了式**  
修了書授与・記念撮影

**11:45~ 修了式の後, EPOK Tutors**  
による送別懇親会を開きます

主催 グローバル・パートナーズ 086-251-8547 epok-inbound1@adm.okayama-u.ac.jp

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