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Exchange Program Okayama
Fall 2022

EPOK Research Essay Collection

OKAYAMA
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About EPOK Research Project

　EPOK リサーチプロジェクトは、岡山大学の交換留学 EPOK 生の個別研究科目です。岡山での留学機会を活かして日本の社会や文化をより深く具体的に探求する目的から、自由に設定する個々の課題を研究します。秋学期の約４カ月を通じて、フィールドワークを含むリサーチを行い、成果を小論文にまとめました。多忙な留学の１学期は、日本社会に慣れつつある間に瞬く間に過ぎ、時間や言語の壁を実感しながら取り組んだのもこの個別リサーチでした。其々の調査方法を模索しながら完成した 2022 年度秋期のリサーチエッセイ集には、10 名の研究を掲載しています。学期末には、恒例の研究発表会を行いました。

The EPOK Research Project is an individual research course for EPOK exchange students at Okayama University. In 2022 spring eleven students worked on the individual set their own research topics in exploring Japanese culture and society, conducted the research for about 5 months. The variety of their interest stretches from Japan's language education, political interest of young generations, to contemporary and traditional art scenes. The compilation of the EPOK research essay shows the final product of their exploration and discovery.

In the fall of 2022,

This collection demonstrates the vigorous interest, effort and contribution of the students in pursuing the topics on Japan. At the end of the semester the students presented the paper and finalized the course with good applause.

2023 年 2 月

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The Japanese?
English Education in Japan?
Japan's social issues?
Art, History and Tradition?
and more …

Table of Contents: Research Projects

HAS NEOLIBERALISM IMPACTED POVERTY IN JAPAN ?

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Abstract 要約: この研究論文の目的は、1980 年代以降の新自由主義政策が日本の経済的貧困にどのような影響を与えたかを提示することであります。本研究では、フィールドワークの不足を考慮し、日本の政治経済が新自由主義的なドクトリンに向かって進化したこと、実施された政策とその国民的貧困への影響について、入手可能な日本および国際政策のレビューに依存するものであります。

現在の文献によれば、1980 年代以降、日本では経済的貧困が相対的貧困と公的社会的扶助の受給者数で著しく増加したことがわかります。この増加は、中曽根政権以降に打ち出された新自由主義的なアジェンダと、その生産と労働市場の自由化に関する様々な改革に関連するものであると考えられます。

I. Introduction

The neoliberal doctrine struck the world in the beginning of the 1980's initiated by the Reagan-Thatcher pair, also impacting Japan, though in heterogenic way. First and foremost, it is essential to define neoliberalism: Wendy Brown defines it as a new form of governmentality in which the State acts as an actor serving the market. The State's legitimacy is measured solely on its capacity of maintaining and fostering the market leading to the extension of principles to domains that are traditionally preserved of it. Though there is no consensus on when neoliberalism was adopted in Japan, some scholars point out transformations of the Japanese political economy in the 1980's shifting towards the neoliberal doctrine especially in domains such as industry and welfare (Suzuki T., 2014) while adapting it to the specific Japanese context. Like Germany, Japan adopted a coordinated market economy as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon liberal market economies (Hiroaki R.W, 2020, p.183). Poverty in a given country can be explained by its situation in the labor market (unemployment…), inequalities in income by non-access to certain non-market resources such as education, health or happiness, and can be measured in diverse ways. While the impacts of neoliberal policies on poverty in the United States and Europe is well documented, what about Japan? *Have neoliberal policies had impacts on economic poverty in Japan?*
While it was not possible for me to get results from the questionnaire I constructed, this question will be answered by going through the already existing literature on the subject and the analysis of several graphs showing how economic poverty evolved in Japan over the past 40 years. We will define poverty, how to measure it and the *status quo* of economic poverty in Japan in contrast to other OECD countries, before analyzing Japan's neoliberal shift, the policies implemented as a result, and in what manner poverty evolved consequently by considering several indicators measuring economic poverty.

I. What is Poverty?

Poverty can be defined in an absolute manner as the non-access to a certain basket of goods necessary for daily subsistence, and in a relative manner as the ratio of individuals, households whose standard of living[1] is inferior to a given poverty line. If one or more people are under a given level of economic well-being considered as the bare minimum for living reasonably in a given society, then we can argue that poverty exists in this society (Ravaillon M., 2016, p.221).

A. Economic and non-economic poverty

Economic poverty can be evaluated monetarily by analyzing the economic conditions of individuals. Three factors are considered when establishing individual or household economic conditions: level of income which is the primary indicator since it is regular has viable data; aggregated consumption on a

[1] Available Income (primary incomes – taxes + transfer incomes (subsidies etc.)) / number consumption units

household level which is representative of the access to goods/services such as food, clothing, and housing; lastly, the level of wealth meaning an individual's available capital referring to any form of economic asset that can help generate or increase revenue (real estate, investments, stock shares…).
Non-economic Poverty refers to well-being as well as to anything the individual cares about. It can be characterized by non-access to certain services such as education, health, but can be associated to a social reality riddled with norms and attitudes adopted by those who are poor.

B. Measures of economic poverty

Economic poverty can be assessed through empirical measures. Several indicators exist, each measuring economic poverty through another perspective. The most widely used indicator is the relative poverty rate. It measures the ratio of individuals or households whose standard of living – referring to amount of an individual's or household's available income – is inferior to a given poverty threshold, in terms of income or consumption (usually the annual national median household income). In Japan, governmental research on *hinkon* (poverty) has been absent from political semantics and was considered non-existent in the Japanese social landscape. While the first academic measures estimated poverty at around 8,1% in 1994 (Nishizaki *et al.,* 1998), and the first official measures were introduced in the 2002 *Global Report on Development* by United Nations Development Program (UNPD) based on the indicator of relative poverty, the DPJ created the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in 2009. The government then started to conduct official research based on the OECD methodology of relative poverty, establishing the threshold as the annual national median household income (5.14 million yen, thus 45.691$ in 2021 value). This meant the first official recognition of poverty in Japan (Noda H., 2015, p.13). Nowadays, the official measures are published in the report titled *Outlook on the Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions* and summarized in the annual "White Papers" published by the government, which are accessible by everybody. It is important to note that the extend of relative poverty rate can be influenced by the threshold that is established: in this sense, setting the threshold at under 60% of the annual median household income will obviously raise the rate.
Related to the relative poverty rate, the indicator of intensity of poverty also referred to as "poverty gap" is used to determine the gap between the living standard (referring to available income) of individuals in relative poverty and the given threshold and is expressed as a percentage. As the name indicates, it allows to assess the intensity of poverty and eventual disparities that exist among the poor. The bigger the ratio, the poorer are the poor.
Economic poverty can also be assessed by the level of public aid recipients. This is true in the sense that individuals who receive public aid, in Japan's case the "Livelihood Protection Program", are the individuals who do not have any other means of survival. As most public aids, Japan's program officially states that it will be allocated only if the individual's family fails to provide financial support (Tachibanaki T., 2006, p.16), putting private support over public support, which means that an increase of recipients could reflect a grave state of poverty.

C. Poverty in Japan today in contrast with the world

According to the OECD (2018), Japan experiences a rate of relative poverty of 15,7%. 14% of poor are between 0 and 17 years of age, 13% are 18 to 65 years old, and 20% are over 66 years old with a total of 15,7%[2]. In 2021, Japan was the 7th country with the highest relative poverty rate among all OECD countries, and the 1st among the countries of the G7 countries.
In terms of intensity of poverty, Japan situates at 36,3%: 18-to-65-year old's constitute 38,1% of this number and over 66 year old's 34%.[3] This places Japan on spot number four on the ranking of countries with the widest poverty gap among the OECD countries, and number two among G7 countries. As the latest data on public aid recipients is from 2015, we will focus on it later in the paper when discussing evolution of poverty.

II. Neoliberalism in Japan

A. What is neoliberalism?

To fully understand how neoliberalism could influence poverty in any way, one must know what neoliberalism is and how it impacts the political economy of a country. While neoliberalism is a concept that is difficult to define as one, coherent doctrine as it adapts itself to national conjecture and should therefore be referred to as many neoliberalisms, some traits can nonetheless be put forward. Adopting a

[2] OECD (2022), Poverty Rate (Indicator)(Consulted on December 17th 2022)
[3] OECD (2022), Intensity of Poverty (Indicator) (Consulted on December 17th, 2022)

neoliberal political economy has implications on several dimensions: *macro-economic policies* shift away from demand-side to supply-side economics with growing importance given to monetary, fiscal policies which stimulate the economy by reducing taxes, especially for corporations and on income of superior deciles (Suzuki T., 2014, p.4 ; the *organizational* decision making process on economic policies increasingly favors non-elected officials such as bankers in the traditional legislation (*Ibid.*) ; lastly, the *ideational* process rejects the Keynesian Welfare State for a new doctrine based on monetarism and rational anticipation (homo oeconomicus).

B. Japan's political economy until the 1980's

Post-World War Japanese Economy was based on the Keynesian Welfare-State, a developmental state model founded on the "administrative guidance" (*gyosei shido*) of the Economy in public and private sectors. This strategy was supported by the *keiretsu*, groupings of corporations linked through the intertwined holding of shares around a central bank (Ido M.,2014, p.242). Japanese economic growth – which was exceptional from the 1950's to 1970's -, was driven by framed internal production and national prices and fostered exportation in certain domains (*Ibid.p.243)*. More generally, this growth was sustained and combined with strong social cohesion by the specificities of the Japanese system, coined "System Japan" (Bouissou J-M, 2003, p.277), which is a major reason explaining the emergence of a middle-class society ("*chûkantaishû no shakai"i*) (*Ibid.*, p.285). The system is based upon three fundamental spheres which have narrow ties in their respective "market": the *Market of Growth* and *the Market of Stability* (*Ibid.*, p.280) are markets in which the Economic Sphere and the State-Sphere interact, which allows each sphere to pursue their common interest of growth ; *the Market of Standard of Living* (*Ibid.)* is founded on the Economic Sphere's and Social Sphere's mutual interest of elevating the standard of living. Nevertheless, to hinder to pursuit of individual interest of actors inside a specific sphere, the spheres and markets are regulated – in a non-economic sense – by an informal and arbitrary process grounded on tacit practices (*Ibid.*, p.285). The functioning of Japan's political economy and social system relies on one another: the former requires the latter in order to sustain itself, the latter requires this closed-circle Economy, with protection from foreign investment.

C. The Neoliberal Shift

This political and economic system started to break down in the 1980's. The internationalization of the Financial Market divided the *keiretsu*, a pillar of the regime. Additionally, the economic stagnation of more than a quarter century caused by burst of the Bubble in the 1990's fostered critics towards the great expenses necessitate by Keynesian demand-side economics, but also the protection of non-competitive sectors from globalized corporations (Ido M., 2014, p.244).

From the 1980's, the Nakasone Administration (1982-88) started a "modest" neoliberal transition by privatizing numerous sectors. Following the Bubble Crisis, the Hashimoto Administration implement the infamous "Big Bang" reforms (1996-2001), liberalizing the Japanese financial market, but also the Labor Market (Hiroaki R.W, 2020, p.27) which were pursued by the Koizumi (2001-6) and Abe (2012-20) Administrations. The Social Contract, incarnated by the "System-Japan" founded on regulation and protection, ensured labor and thus a certain security and prosperity, became unstable. Opening the Japanese market to foreign competition and liberalizing the labor market caused fierce exposure to international crises linked to the financial globalization of the 1980's which threaten first and foremost unstable jobs. As Japan's Welfare State relied on individual firms to cover for social security ensured by Japan's social contract to cover for its weak public security network, the unstable market meant grave risks for those being unemployed.

III. Japan's neoliberal Policies and its impacts on Poverty

A. Which Neoliberal Policies were adopted?

As stated above, it is generally recognized that Yasuhiro Nakasone, serving as Prime Minister in the Liberal Democratic Party from 1982 to 1987, initiated the Neoliberal Shift by increasingly favoring the private sector (Eccleston B., 1989, p.36) by privatizing numerous companies such as the National Railway. During his mandate taxes increased for the general population, pension subsidies decreased, contributory years and the retirement age increased as well as individual contributions to medical expenses. Following the grave financial crisis caused by the burst of the speculative Bubble, Ryutaro Hashimoto implemented the infamous neoliberal "Big Bang Reforms", aimed at alleviating the effects of the crisis by implementing numerous deregulation-reforms, namely the liberalization of the financial market and of the labor market. Following the general principles of the "Big Bang", Junichiro Koizumi initiated the labor reform in 2003 which made the labor market more flexible (Hiroaki R.W., 2020, p.28).

For instance, dispatch services were deregulated and affected more and more young workers. As unhappiness grew in the general population of affected workers, it is around an antagonism to Koizumi's neoliberal agenda that he Democratic Party of Japan's formulated its political manifesto and got elected in 2009. Several social-democratic policies were planned, oriented towards social aid, education etc. Nevertheless, the fear of a debt crisis akin to the Greek one, coupled with pressures for international notation agencies, resulted in the implementation of austerity measures which were contrary to the DPJ's promised agenda. This comes to show the importance of international pressures in the contemporary neoliberal "world-economy" (Braudel, 1977) in national political decision making. As a result, the LDP was able to rise again putting Shinzo Abe into office in 2012. His famous "Abenomics" further deregulated labor by liberalizing the sector of non-Regular workers (Hiroaki J.W., 2020, p.37), who are paid significantly less than regular workers

B. <u>How was Poverty impacted?</u>

As can be seen in Figure 1, there has been an increase of relative poverty from 12 to 16,1% and of child poverty from 10,9 to 16,3% between 1985 to 2012, coinciding with the neoliberal shift that started in the 1980's.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2020) Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions 2019

Figure *1 – Evolution of poverty according to OECD* , Red Line: Relative Poverty, Purple line: child poverty

By analyzing the evolution of "Livelihood Protection System" recipientsan increase in those recipients can indeed be observed since the early 2000's (Figure 2), as the recipient rate increased from approximately 0,7 to 1,7% between 1995 and 2015., a dynamic that is true for individuals as well as households.

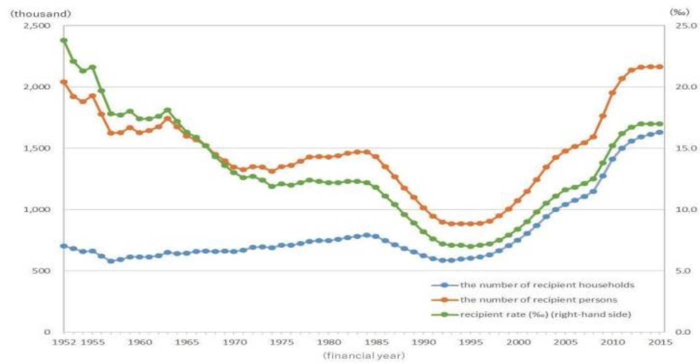

Figure 2 – Evolution of Livelihood Protection System recipients

Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Reseach, "Official Statistics on the Public Assistance System", http://www.ipss.go.jp/site-ad/index_Japanese/securityAnnualReport.html

This increase can be explained by these neoliberal policies that were adopted. The simultaneous increase of taxes and mandatory contributions to social security under the Nakasone Administration coupled with an economy that has been stagnating over the past 30 years (also called "lost quarter century") has consequently decreased available income for employees (Eccleston B., 1989*,* p.99) as well as their purchasing power. Liberalizing the labor market and deregulating non-regular work created an increase in professional instability (see Figure 3) in a time of global financial instability, which resulted in stronger social inequalities and the emergence of the so-called "gap society" (*kakusa shakai*). As can be seen in Figure 3, the percentage of non-regular employees in the workforce aged 25 to 64 years old has increased rather steadiliy from less than 15% to 28,1% between 1988 and 2018.

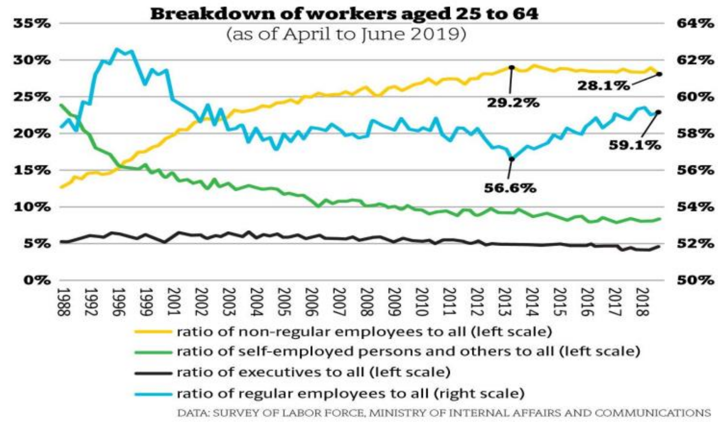

Figure 3 - https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/11/28/commentary/japan-commentary/ratio-regular-workers-rise/

These inequalities were true on a salary-level as well as professional level with an increase in "working poor" who make less than two million yen annually (approximately 18 000$ for 1$=110 yen) (Hiroaki R.W., 2020, p.28). Another strong sign showing that neoliberal policies impact poverty, is the flattening of the increase of relative poverty starting in 2009, which coincided with the raise to power of the DPJ which initially enacted reforms contrary to the neoliberal doctrine. Nevertheless, the ideological shift of the Party reflects the inability to invert the trend.

IV. Conclusion

A. Has neoliberalism affected the evolution of poverty in Japan?

In conclusion, can we say that the adoption of a neoliberal political economy and the implementation of neoliberal policies have impacted poverty in Japan? The elements presented in this paper strongly suggest they did, and in a negative way by increasing the relative poverty rate over the past 40 years. As neoliberalism is a market centered political economy which tends to neglect social welfare in favor of the unlimited accumulation of capital, it is not surprising that it increased Japan's poverty rate to almost 16%, following the dynamics of other countries that adopted it. As the "world-economy" became more and more unstable, unpredictable, and internationally intertwined, grave socio-economic consequences are brought upon countries in the case of crises (which happen regularly), as can be seen in the case of Japan where the Bubble Crisis laid out a precarious environment that impacted and still impacts Japan today. The neoliberal reforms such as the liberalization of key sectors such as labor, health, education… created an unstable conjuncture in which available income decreased, the labor market became unstable, and the State could not come up with a comprehensive social network system increasing the likelihood of poverty. Furthermore, Japan's social contract, the "System Japan", strongly depended on the existence of a developmental Welfare State and neoliberalism fragilized it, thus aggravating the negative consequences associated to poverty.

In short, the combination of international instability, national neoliberalization and the weakening of Japan's Social Contract strongly impacted Japan's poverty rate.

B. The limits of this Paper

While writing this paper has been an educating adventure, as it uncovered many interesting elements explaining the evolution of Japan's poverty rate, it is not and does not claim to be a comprehensive paper. Moreover, it does not give a detailed theoretical explanation of what neoliberalism in Japan really is, as there is no existing academic consensus. In this sense, the definition used in this paper refers to the one widely used in the mediatic and political semantics. Additionally, the shortly limited number of words and time available somewhat restricted the extent to which the subject could be explored and detailed. Furthermore, as no results could be extracted from the questionnaire I constructed, it lacks the personal dimension and comparisons between new and pre-existing materials, that fieldwork brings with it.

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Disability Rights and Accessibility in Japan
日本の障碍者の支援とアクセシビリティ

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Abstract
The report is an exploration of disability history, rights, policy and accessibility in Japan. It begins with an overview of disability rights history in Japan before looking at how disability related-laws have been laid out at the national level. As prefectures are responsible for practical implementation of these laws, the focus then narrows to look specifically at policy and accessibility in Okayama Prefecture, before narrowing again to look at policy and accessibility with Okayama University. The report is primarily focused on accessibility for those with physical disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and mobility-related disabilities, though other kinds of disabilities are also mentioned when relevant. The final component of the report is an analysis of the current state of disability support in Japan.
このレポートは、日本の障碍者の歴史、人権、政策、アクセシビリティなどについてです。最初に、障碍人権の通史を伝えます。それから今の障碍法律がどんな感じになったか確認します。府県が障碍法を取って障碍者を支援しますので、次の部分は岡山県の障害支援と政策について述べ、もう一度焦点を細くして岡山大学の障害支援と政策について調べます。それに、レポートのフォーカスは身体障碍者（盲人、聾者、運動しにくいの人）ですが、必要に応じてほかの障碍についても時々書きます。また、最後の部分で今の日本の障害支援のメリットと問題について論じます。

Introduction
The right to live a dignified life, to be respected, to be viewed as human. This is something that many take for granted. For those who have lived at the margins of society, however, these rights were only attained after decades of fighting for them. The following report is an investigation into the rights and welfare of disabled people in Japan. While I will touch on mental disabilities, my primary focus will be on physical disabilities including blindness, deafness, and mobility issues. To begin, a historical overview of disability rights history and advocacy will set the scene for how support and welfare in Japan today was achieved. Next, I will provide an explanation of Japan’s current laws for disability rights and welfare. Each prefecture has the flexibility to adapt national laws to the needs of the local community. With this in mind, I narrow my field of focus to Okayama, where I am living at the time of researching and writing this report. To see how policies at the federal and prefectural levels play out within an institution, I narrow my focus one final time to investigate how accessibility is supported at Okayama University. The final component of this report is a discussion of the merits and disadvantages of Japan’s current approach to welfare and rights for disabled people.

Historical Overview
The history of social welfare in Japan dates back more than a century. There is documentation of rice being provided as a form of social relief to those who were poor, sick, elderly or disabled as far back as 1874 (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2001). At the same time, however, disabled people were hidden from society, their existence considered shameful. There was little support for parents of disabled children, and it was widely thought that there was no hope for disabled adults to live independently. In 1932, the first school for the disabled was established for children with cerebral palsy. A small group of graduates would go on to form Japan’s first disability rights group: Aoi Shiba (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2001). The end of the Second World War saw more specific welfare laws introduced in Japan, particularly for children and for disabled veterans. Unfortunately, disability welfare was extended to veterans alone and excluded anyone with a disability that was unrelated to the war.
From the 1960s came the first major social and policy changes regarding non-veteran disabled people. In 1961, Aoi Shiba became the first disability rights group to meet with the government and demand policy changes (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2001). The first iteration of the National Pension System was established in the same year to provide relief to those in positions of extreme disadvantage. Under

specific circumstances, disabled people or their parents could receive pensions, however, income testing of families meant that actually receiving the pension was a rarity, and the sentiment that disabled people were burdens went unchanged. Around this time, parents also began demanding residential institutions to place their children in so they could remove their responsibility of care. Institutions for children and for adults were soon established and quickly became scenes for regular, horrific human rights violations. In many cases, parents were content to sign away medical consent and to forget their children even existed. Doctors would perform unnecessary surgeries for in an attempt to "cure" disabled children, many residents were used for medical experimentation, girls were given hysterectomies shortly after puberty to make the lives of staff easier, children died after being beaten, starved, or denied medical attention, denial of mobility aids was rife, and adults were denied basic freedoms like hearing the news and leaving facility (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2001). Conditions were so dire that residents of one facility went on hunger strike in 1970, followed by a staff sit-in at the Tokyo Municipal Building during 1972. As support grew, some began to wonder if there was a better way of life for disabled people. When a mother killed her disabled toddler in 1970, Aoi Shiba criticized those who sympathized with her, revealing an ugly sentiment – abled people believed that disabled people did not deserve to exist.

Following the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981, disability rights activists from the United States visited Japan to introduce the idea of centers for independent living (CILs). After Japanese activists visited the US to learn more, the Japan's first CIL opened in 1985 (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2008). The need for CILs was accentuated in the aftermath of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, which left many disabled people vulnerable to being forgotten and discriminated against when seeking emergency housing (Nakamura, 2009). The activism that followed eventually led the government to financially support these new centers, though later this was converted into an insurance scheme to tighten government spending (Nakamura, 2009). By 2006, more than thirty of these centers had opened. Some operated like social spaces, some as businesses. Some were designed for one kind of disability; some accommodated a mixed group. Most CILs house around ten people and all support disabled people to have freedom and a better quality of life (Hayashi & Okuhira, 2008, pp. 20-21). There are now a number of disability rights groups in Japan, including those focused on specific disabilities such as the Japanese Federation of the Deaf, Japan Federation of the Blind, and Aoi Shiba – as well as organizations that support disabled people more generally such as the Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (JANNET, 2015; JFD, 2022; JSRPD, 2021). Due to pressure from activist groups like these to change its own laws first, Japan was later than many countries to ratify the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Osamu, 2013). After following through on laws to prohibit discrimination and improve services for disabled people, Japan finally ratified the convention in 2014. Certainly, Japan has made great strides in the disability rights space due to the efforts of activists and gradual policy changes.

Current Disability Law in Japan

The current disability welfare landscape in Japan is guided by a number of laws and policies set out by the government. These laws are underpinned by cultural and political attitudes towards disability. Since Japan lacks a political left to push for social rights, the conservative government is responsible for considering Japan's social and economic needs alike (Lindqvist & Lamichhane, 2019). Stevens (2013) believes that due to neoliberal ideologies, institutions like schools and hospitals are run with a business model, and the same is likely true of welfare. Additionally, even though efforts have been made to normalize disability, it is still often viewed as an individual medical problem rather than a social issue. As a result, the onus is on disabled people to prove they are disabled enough if they want to receive any support or benefits. Once they have been accepted as disabled, many are also required to carry a card to prove their disability if they want to access services in everyday life, such as priority seating.

Japan's constitution originally only recognized the rights of disabled people in Japan implicitly, with articles 11, 13, 14, 25, 26 and 27 implying rights to life, liberty, housing, welfare, and freedom from discrimination. Yet, the vagueness of these laws meant that disabled people were not yet a protected class (Stevens, 2013, p. 68). This discrepancy was rectified between 1947 and 1964 with the introduction of six new welfare laws, which included the Law for the Welfare of People with Physical Disabilities (Shintai Shougaisha Fukushi Hou) and the Law for the Welfare of People with Intellectual Disabilities. Since its introduction, there have been a number of revisions to the former. Its current form consists of three articles. The first outlines the purpose, which is protecting and supporting physically disabled people, and promoting social inclusion. The second regards the right for disabled people to have the same social and economic opportunities as abled people and promotes independence. The third and final article outlines the responsibility of the government at the national and local levels, as well as the responsibilities of regular citizens to support and include disabled people (Stevens, 2013, pp. 71-72). Working in tandem with this law is the 1970 Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities (Shougaisha Kihon Hou), which outlines a set of ideals that all disability welfare should be based around, and the Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of disabled people, the government, public entities, carers, and businesses more substantively (Stevens, 2013; JLT, 1970; JLT, 2005). Information about these laws has also been made more accessible, such as through easy-to-read pamphlets (MHLW, n.d.). Though these laws serve as a nationwide outline, municipal governments ensure the welfare of local disabled people is upheld (Lindqvist & Lamichhane, 2019). Some practical outcomes of these policies include disability identification documents, access to counselling, funding for mobility and technical aids, rehabilitation training when relevant, greater work opportunities, specialized nursing care and housing, and services like sign interpretation and implementing braille, helping people to navigate society (JSRPD, 2007, cited in Stevens 2013). More recently, service dog certification has become nationally recognized, allowing clearly marked assistance dogs to enter spaces where pets are not usually allowed (Takayanagi & Yamamoto, 2019). Financial rewards for when companies reach a quota of disabled workers has also helped to improve employment prospects for disabled people, though these quotas are reached far more in blue collar than in white collar work environments (Stevens, 2013, p. 79). There is also a basic disability pension which allows eligible disabled people to receive 82 758 yen per month or up to 797 000 yen annually after reaching adulthood (Stevens, 2013, p. 76). However, like previous pension systems, those who need it can only access it once all other possible sources of income, including family, have been exhausted – essentially, one must be in poverty to receive it. Upon further investigation, the average monthly cost of living in Japan, excluding rent, is 120 500 (Numbeo, 2023). The Statistics Bureau of Japan reports a higher cost of for single-person households, at 155 000 yen monthly – almost double the pension (SBJ, 2022a). Given that the median monthly income was 356 000 yen in 2021, though other sources estimate the average to be closer to 500 000 (SBJ, 2022b; Salary Explorer, 2023), it appears that the pension is designed only to support those who are already living in poverty, rather than prevent poverty in the first place. Further, it likely maintains poverty rather than providing people with equitable access to quality of life.

Disability Policy and Accessibility in Okayama

Given that measures for disability support are administered at a local level, I thought it appropriate to look at disability support and infrastructure in just one city. As I am currently living in Okayama, this was also the perfect chance to get to know the city better. When looking at the Okayama prefecture government website, it is easy to find a wealth of information about Okayama's approach to disability welfare. In addition to the framework set out at the national level, they have policies designed specifically for within the prefecture. These policies target a wide range of disabilities including physical disabilities, mental disabilities, blindness, deafness, and chronic illnesses. They consider the settings that disabled people are likely to need support in, including medical settings, during employment, in the home (especially support for parents of disabled children), in public, and general supports for daily life. Some supports can be put in place permanently, though in general each person is assessed individually and provided with supports depending on their situation. When a person is deemed eligible for support, there are many forms in which this support might be given. For some people, grants, a pension, or monetary support to be cared for by family members may help. Beyond monetary support, disabled people may receive training to make it easier for them to live in society and certificates to confirm their disability in case they need to prove it. Support for daily life may also include providing "help cards" so they can easily request assistance when using public transport, and funding for door-to-door transportation services can assist those for whom public transportation is not an option. People may access support to gain or increase independence, including through providing housing security, and there is also support for people to participate in society through sports or the arts. Those who work directly with disabled people are also eligible for support and training. All of this information is available freely through the prefectural website (Okayama Prefecture, 2022).

Figure 1: Banner at Disability Welfare Conference

The prefectural government also actively promotes events during Japan's annual Week for Persons with Disabilities, which occurs in early December. In 2022, one of these events was a conference about disability welfare in Higashi-ku, Okayama, which I attended on the day. The first half of the conference involved presenting awards to people who had been actively involved in disability welfare, as well as to three children who took part in a poster design competition. Three other students also talked about their experiences of their own or a parent's disability and the need for accessibility by design. Particularly memorable was one young girl, around 8 years old, who recounted her sadness that her father could not come to the school sports day because the school did not have a wheelchair ramp, preventing him from entering. The second part of the conference was a lecture by education board member Kazuyoshi Sugano on the topic of creating a connected and supportive community. He discussed special education at length and emphasized a need to shift people's awareness to the whole group, rather than just seeing individuals, and towards the future, rather than just the present. He believes it is important for children to connect with others and learn to work together even if their disabilities and the issues they face are different.

Figure 2: Tactile markers and clear signage in Okayama Station

In Okayama, and in Japan more broadly, there is an increasing movement towards a barrier-free ideology. Barrier-free means promoting accessibility by design, rather than adding it in as an afterthought, and is supported by the 2006 Law for Promoting Easy Mobility and Accessibility for the Aged and Disabled (Mizumura, n.d.). With this in mind, I noted kinds of accessibility and lack thereof when walking through Okayama. When walking along major roads, it does not take long to come across yellow tactile markers for the blind. With lines to guide where to go and dots to indicate a crossing or a place to be cautious, these markers appear along roads, through the major train station and at most minor ones, and even inside Okayama City Hall. I also discovered that these tactile markers were invented in right here in Okayama and installed outside a local school for blind students before anywhere else in the world (Yamauchi & Yamauchi, 2003). Crossings in Okayama make different sounds depending on the direction one is crossing and use a combination of sounds to indicate that crossing diagonally is okay. Busses and trains announce the names of every stop, and bus drivers may announce the destination before people board. Lights at crossings and clear signage may also help deaf people to navigate. In contrast, crossings in Osaka are silent, so without seeing the green light, it is impossible to know when it is safe to cross without assistance.

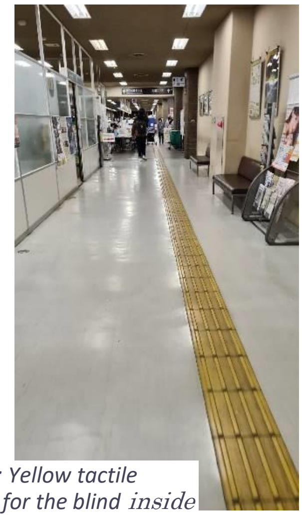

Figure 3: Yellow tactile markers for the blind inside Okayama City Hall

onnecting Okayama

Figure 4: A metal ramp outside a small shop entrance.

Thanks to the aforementioned barrier-free policy, most major buildings include escalators and lifts for easy mobility access by design. When walking through Aeon Mall, all shop entrances are flat, and signs make finding the nearest elevator easy. Though a little harder to find, the train station also has lifts to help those who need it to access the platforms. Most busses and trains are wheelchair accessible with assistance, through one local train I took had no identifiable way to board for wheelchair users. While many buildings now have lifts and accessible entrances – sometimes retrofitted, sometimes by design – the barrier free policy does not apply the same to all smaller enterprises and complexes. Many apartment buildings, for instance, have only stairs for access to the upper floors. A local karaoke business also has access via stairs only, meaning that wheelchair users cannot even enter the building. Some smaller shops have compromised by adding short metal ramps, though these entrances would still require some assistance for a wheelchair user to use. Cultural centers such as Okayama Castle and Kourakuen are mostly wheelchair accessible now too, though for Okayama castle, the stairs required to make it to the castle in the first place may defeat the purpose. Though individualized support is certainly useful, making places accessible by design reduces the burden on disabled people when navigating Okayama in daily life.

Disability Policy and Accessibility at Okayama University

To better understand how disability support plays out on a smaller scale, I investigated the disability welfare policies and practices at Okayama University. For students, the Disability Support Office (障害学生支援室) is a key place of contact. Their website provides contact information and promotes an Accessibility Leader Training Program designed to train students to notice accessibility or lack thereof and promote inclusion (CSSD, 2023a). Students can also access information about the services they can use while at Okayama University if they need. For abled students who wish to support disabled students, the office runs a volunteer peer support program. The work of student volunteers may involve taking lecture notes for another student or helping someone to find their way to classes (CSSD, 2023b).

Since the website alone does not provide a full picture of attitudes towards disability or what disability support can look like in practice, I interviewed a staff member to learn more. Like at the prefectural level, disabled students are treated individually. Services are provided on an as-needed basis, meaning that any accommodations are in response to a specific student's needs. Some examples of services include hiring someone to make a transcript of a lecture or interpret into Japanese Sign Language. If there is a student with a mobility-related disability, all of their classes may be changed so they take place in wheelchair accessible rooms. Depending on the disability, assignments can also be adapted so that it is reasonable for the student to complete. Funding for the office, like support, is also provided on an as-needed basis. When a student goes to them to request, help, they are then able to request funding in order to meet the student's needs – the more students requesting accommodations, the more funding they receive. This support is not limited to disabled students, however. The interviewee stressed that the office is there to help any student facing challenges that might impact their ability to complete their degree, whether the problem is big or small. When asked about support for teachers and other staff, the interviewee explained that office exists for students and any disabled staff are accommodated by their respective faculties. Responsibility for training staff also lies primarily with faculties, although once a year the office participates in a larger training session to help teachers understand the needs of disabled students more generally. Kayama et. al. (2015) write that educational institutions in Japan tend to have flexible legal requirements for supporting disabled students. This flexibility allows them to provide specialized support based on the needs of each student. Often these supports are implemented in a way that avoids removing the student from the classroom, as attendance is a priority in Japanese education. The findings of this paper reflect Okayama University's approach to supporting disabled people, with requirements and specialized support that changes depending on students' needs, and an approach that seeks to make attending, understanding, and participating in their classes achievable.

Outside of the support office, there are a number of ways that disability awareness and inclusion are promoted at Okayama University. The 袋の手 (Fukuronote – "owl's hands") club is an active student-run club that encourages people to learn Japanese sign language so they can communicate with deaf people. The Diversity and Inclusion Office also holds regular events to promote awareness of and interaction with minority groups, including disabled people and LGBTQ+ people. During November 2022, they held a diversity week including a supportive message board for LGBTQ+ students and a Boccia tournament which they encouraged disabled and abled students alike to attend. I attended the tournament and joined a team I met on the day. Many of the participants did not outwardly appear disabled (though some might have had

Figure 6

hidden disabilities), although there were also some students who did. While the tournament was competitive and teams were gradually eliminated, it was also a chance for students who otherwise might never have met to interact on a relatively even playing field. Most students and staff regardless of disability seemed to enjoy it. As I understand it, the Diversity and Inclusion Office regularly runs events like these, though they target a wide range of minorities in their efforts and cannot provide individualized support.

As many of the buildings at Okayama University predate barrier-free laws, not all of them are fully accessible. Important buildings such as the Library, Peach and Muscat Union, and the General Education Building have wheelchair accessible entrances and lifts, though not all entrances are accessible. In cases where a building is not accessible, the only option for accommodating a student is often to change the classroom used for that lesson. When I began attending Okayama University in October 2022, even the Health Center did not have a wheelchair ramp – perhaps there had not yet been a student who required one. During that term, however, one was installed. Some buildings, like the gymnasiums, also have inaccessible entrances. If someone requires it, staff may add temporary wheelchair ramps. Tactile markers for the blind also exist alongside the roads surrounding the university, but not within the university itself. The varying levels of accessibility at Okayama University can likely be attributed to the age of most buildings and the university itself, as well the fact that Okayama University does not receive much funding in comparison to private institutions and universities in major cities.

Figure 7: Words of encouragement for Diversity and Inclusion Week

A Brief Analysis of Disability Welfare in Japan

Like many places in the world, Japan's historical treatment of disabled people has been to regard them as less than human, something their own families consider shameful and want nothing to do with. In the era of institutionalization through the 60s and 70s, disabled children were subjected to unspeakable abuse while adults were denied basic freedoms like interacting with society. Governments will listen to the voices that stand to impact their political standing, however, and if the majority demand institutions and families want nothing to do with their children, then as we saw, they will listen. It has only been through the work of activist groups like Aoi Shiba that they even began to consider working with and supporting disabled people. Japan has made great strides in implementing disability welfare because of these activist movements, particularly since the 1980s. Laws at the federal level now require practical support at the prefectural levels, with flexibility built in so that each city can respond in a way that they believe supports their own disabled people. A positive side of this freedom is that prefectures can prioritize which disabilities to consider during city planning and building new infrastructure. Okayama, for example, prioritizes blind accessibility through loudspeaker announcements and tactile markers on footpaths. Unfortunately, this also means that cities can choose to do the bear minimum for accessibility. Osaka, for example, has silent crossings which would make navigation for a blind person difficult. Many pedestrian crossings in both Osaka and Okayama are bumpy rather than flat, which would also make the terrain difficult for a wheelchair user. Policies like the Barrier-Free law do help to raise the minimum standard, though it is ultimately the responsibility of prefectures to decide how this is enforced.

It is undeniably good that the kinds of supports and services available to disabled people has dramatically expanded in recent decades. Individualized support means that people can access services that are relevant to their needs rather than trying to fit their needs into a one-size-fits-all framework. Whether this is training to navigate society, or receiving specialized healthcare, having a variety of available services means people can make their own choices about the support they want to access. It is also positive to see that those who work closely with disabled people, such as medical professionals and family members, can access specialized support and training now. Further, the week for persons with disabilities, while perhaps not a major event, still helps to make the general public aware of disability issues. Compared to life 50 years ago, I believe it is fair to say that between the Week for Persons with Disabilities, the efforts of disability rights activists, and changes in national and prefectural laws and policies, disabled people in Japan are now viewed in a more favorable light.

While Japan has made dramatic changes for the better, there are still some issues with the way disabled people are treated. The pension, for example, is difficult to receive unless a person is already facing poverty and major problems which prevent them from receiving income on their own. The pension itself is well below the average cost of living, which undermines the goal of providing people with equitable access to quality of life. Another problem is the burden of proof. While the constraints of this project prevented me from looking more deeply at the processes for receiving disability benefits, navigating layers of bureaucracy and having to prove how severely a disability impacts their life likely means that there are people who require services but have difficulty actually applying for them. Like most places, Japan's approach to disability rights and welfare is complex. There have been some positive changes, and there is still room for more change to improve the lives of Japan's disabled people.

Conclusion

Shaped by activism and gradual change, Japan’s disability rights landscape today looks vastly different than it did a century, fifty years, or even two decades ago. The work of activist groups like Aoi Shiba, Japanese Federation of the Deaf, and Japan Federation of the Blind have been influential for shifting the viewpoints of Japan’s government and of society as a whole. Changes to disability welfare laws at the national level meant that Japan was later able to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with the knowledge that they were upholding its values. National level policy changes also directly influenced the ways in which disabled people are treated at the prefectural level and within institutions, while also providing flexibility for how different needs are met. Okayama in particular has taken those policies and adapted them to support many kinds of disabled people but has focused especially on increasing ease of access for blind people. Institutions like Okayama University may not have enough funding to pre-emptively meet the needs of every student, but they make every effort to provide individualized support when students request it. There will always be challenges in supporting accessibility and disability rights, and like in the past, the best way forwards will always be in consultation with disabled people themselves.

Limitations

As this was a short research project, there are a number of limitations to the research and findings. Given a longer time period and more resources, there are many avenues through which I could have expanded or deepened my investigation. One major limitation to my research was that although I was able to hear the perspectives of people who work with disabled people, I was not able to interview any disabled people to gain their perspective directly. As a result, my research was conducted primarily from an able-bodied perspective and should be read with this in mind. Another limitation was that I was not able to analyze the procedures required for disabled people to access support and welfare, so I am unable to discuss the practical effects of any kind of support. Finally, although I was able to touch on briefly on mental and psychiatric disabilities, I was unable to discuss them in any depth due to time constraints.

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Culture and Suicide in Japan and Western countries

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Japanese Abstract:
本研究では、日本とアメリカやイギリスなどの欧米諸国における自殺に関する文化的認識を簡明に比較し、自殺率に影響を与える文化的・歴史的要因を分析しようとするものである。そのために、自殺を定義し、自殺に対する社会の歴史的な認識を調べることによって、その分析を行う。また、宗教、文学、ソーシャルメディアおよびメンタルヘルスが自殺に与える影響についても考察する。

Introduction

"*Suicide is a medical issue; but it is also an economic, social relational, moral, and as September 11's tragic global spectacle of suicide terrorist attack made clear, a political issue as well. Suicide prevention, in turn, holds mental, social, psychological, economic, moral, and political significance*" (Kleinman, 2002)

Studies have shown that modern day society predominantly identifies the cause of suicide to be mental health. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death worldwide and the 2nd leading cause of death in 15–29-year-olds globally. Although mental health does heavily contribute to the act of suicide, with statistics showing that approximately 90% of people who commit suicide have suffered from at least one mental disorder; and mental disorders having been found to contribute between 47 and 74% of suicide risk; we cannot apply this to every society without looking into other contributing factors such as historical, environmental, socioeconomical and other psychological factors. For this essay, I will focus mainly on socio-historical factors as Japan is a country heavily influenced by tradition. I will looking into the work of researchers such as Durkheim and Shneidman in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. I will be using the questions 'What?' and 'Why?' to analyze the extent to which society and history play a part in suicides in Japan, in comparison to Western countries like the U.S, U.K and France, where suicides are consistently tied to mental health.

Why have I chosen this topic?

I choose to do research on this topic because studies have shown that Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. These statistics have highlighted that suicide is the number one cause of death for people aged under 30 years. In addition to this, Japan was ranked 54th in the World Happiness Report (UN, 2022), which is the lowest amongst the developed world. They also rank second for world's best education system (World Top 20, 2022). However, work-life balance has been rated 3.4/10, life satisfaction 4.1/10 and income 3.6/10, according to OECD Better Life Index. In comparison, in the U.K, Income has a rating of 5.4/10, life satisfaction is 6.4/10 and Work-Life Balance is 5.6/10. These ratings are a key indication that dispute Japan being a developed country, many citizens still suffer from more lower qualities of life due to socioeconomic factors in comparison to the U.K.

Mental health has always been a topic of interest and concern to me due to my own experiences with it, as well as the experiences of people close to me. During this research process, I would like to gain a better understanding of the subject, in order to increase my ability to address the subject and support those who need me in a more emotionally intelligent manner. I also believe that one of the best ways to help, support and reduce suicidal thoughts, and therefore suicide, is by addressing the subject of mental health and destigmatizing it.

Methodology

My initial plan was to collect primary quantitative and qualitative data as it is more reliable and accurate than secondary data. It would also have allowed me to better understand mental health and suicide from the perspective of a Japanese native. It would have increased the quality and quantity of my research through a controlled setting.

I was planning on getting some interviews, along with handing out a survey. However, due to the nature of the study, I thought it would be best not to include it at this point as the procedures required to get approval for this study would have been too extensive. I also thought that, out of respect towards participants in primary research, especially on a topic such as suicide, statements cannot be narrowed down into fewer words when speaking on other people's experiences. Thus, I used secondary data collected from journals, news articles, studies and books. The advantages of this are that I was able to save time and effort, it was more cost-effective, the data was cleaned and structured, and it provided a variety of expert perspectives and insights.

What is Suicide?

Suicide has been defined as a "complex phenomenon defined as an act with a fatal outcome that is deliberately initiated and performed by the person in the knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome". This act has been glorified, condemned and romanticized throughout history. Maurice Pinguet (1993) has noted how suicide is romanticized in Japan. Examples of romanticisation throughout history are- Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare in English Literature, Shinjū Ten no Amijima by written by the seventeenth-century tragedian Chikamatsu Monzaemon for the bunraku puppet theatre, or more recently, it has been prevalent on social media where young people have taken mental illness and the desire for suicide as a character trait, something to be admired. During the Romantic period of the nineteenth century, the influential critic Saint-Marc Girardin wrote that suicide "is not the malady of one who is simple of heart or in mind; it is the malady of the refined and of philosophers." It could be argued that some still follow this view point, as modern culture seemingly reflects the Romantic era, with young people valuing the same things including: "subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism; spontaneity; freedom from rules; solitary life rather than life in society; the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and devotion to beauty; love of and worship of nature; and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the middle ages." (Edu). Due to this some might argue that mental health might be one cause of suicide, but also might not be the only and most predominant cause as many psychologists assume.

For example, studies completed by suicidologist Edwin Shneidman who conceptualized the act, stated that it is mainly caused by "psychological pain ("psychache") stemming from thwarted psychological needs such as love, control, shame, grief, and anger", which has resulted in the creation of a scale for the degree as to which people feel emotions leading to such fatal acts ("perturbation" and "lethality"). This study would align more with the cause of suicide in Japan as research has shown that 'psychache' has been a consistent reoccurring factor in suicides in Japan. In contrast, studies in Western countries have shown that 90% of suicides are associated with mental illness and 60% with mood disorders. Emile Durkheim, a 19th Century sociologist, has proposed that the act itself is determined by "one's relationship with culture and society". He suggested that this form of suicide was "altruistic" and was completed on the basis of being a purposeful act "of social obligation, achieving some greater good to a group or reaching the afterlife". Both Emile Durkheim and Edwin Shneidman's theories coincide with both research completed in Japan and in Western countries, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the causes behind rising suicide rates.

Suicide in Japan

What were my newborn hands grabbing?
Why am I never forgiven no matter what I do or where I am?
I don't recall doing anything wrong
It's as if I have been chased since I was a newborn baby
Someone please look at me and acknowledge me
Please acknowledge the fact that I am here

397

TRANSCULTURAL PSYCHIATRY 47(3)

Though I shouted and shouted
It did not reach anyone's ears
It's not that I asked for a lot
I just want my own place, even if it's small
I get laughed at whatever I do
I cannot complain no matter what is done to me
Even when I lose something precious, no one comforts me
The cold world keeps on turning as if nothing had happened
Where can I go to be in peace?
With whom can I be to be in peace?
I have had the feeling of being alone since I was little
Nothing I do mends this feeling
I am always just looking at the crowd
Someone please look at me and acknowledge me
Please acknowledge the fact that I am here
Though I shouted and shouted
It did not reach anyone's ears.[1]

Figure 1. Anonymous poem which "illustrates the existential loneliness and need for recognition that is often characteristic of visitors to suicide websites:" (Chikako Ozawa-De Silva, 2010)

Japan has been going through a period of turmoil, as indicated in part by a sudden increase in suicide and depression rates since 1998 (Kitanaka, Ozawa-de Silva: Internet Group Suicide in Japan 393 2006; Motohashi, 2006; Takahashi, 1999, 2001; Vickery, 2010). This has resulted in suicide becoming the leading cause of death among Japanese individuals under the age of 30 (Takahashi, 2001) although reasons are not entirely clear (Ozawa-de-Silva, 2008). In Japan, research has shown that many suicides were due to loneliness rather than depression. A sense of "disconnectedness" from others and from society that signals an existential suffering that may not be reducible to just a psychiatric disorder. Traditionally, suicide has been considered an expression of an individual's free will throughout Japanese history (Cho, 2006; Takahashi, 1997, 2001). The rhetoric of a "suicide of resolve," is still a very popular notion in Japan and suggests that suicide can be the result of a rational decision by a freely choosing individual, and therefore is an option to be respected when necessity calls for it (Kitanaka, 2006, 2008). Alongside this, Susan Long points out that in Japan death with a "peaceful face" is considered a good death, while kodoku na shi ("lonely death") is cause of great concern (Long, 2001). Susan Long's statement would also explain the rising cases in Internet Suicides which result from "need for social connectedness and the fear of social rejection and isolation that this need engenders" (Philippe Rochat). The majority of reported Internet group suicides have taken place in Japan-, the first reported case of Internet group suicide took place in Korea (Cho, 2005; Shibui, 2009) and cases have occurred in many other countries since, including Guam and the Netherlands (Wired Vision, 2006). The three aspects of Internet group suicides that I have found are – "ordinariness, the wish to die with others, and the wish to die in comfort" – which are consistent with traditional views on what constitutes a good death in Japan. Unfortunately, in many internet suicide cases, the deaths have been publicly treated as "non-serious", with the cause of deaths of these individuals considered as insufficient. Ikeda Haruhiko, a biologist and social commentator stating, "I feel like saying 'Don't be so spoiled.' What more does one say to someone without any ability to live another forty years?" (Asahi, 2003). Research has showed that some individuals at the risk of suicide were asked "What are the reasons or occasions for you to think about dying?" a number of respondents replied with statements such as: "Just sort of (nan to naku) feeling bored,", "I am tired of living," and "When I feel unsure about who I am. One respondent also stating "When I think about it, it is not that I really wanted to die. I just wanted to pause from living. To have died or not to have died, either would have been all right" (AERA, 2003, p. 10).

On the other hand, another phenomenon has become predominant in Japan. Hikikomori, defined as "pulling inward, being confined", also labelled as acute social withdrawal is used to describe extreme loners or "modern day hermits" (Alan Teo). Studies show that approximately over one million Japanese individuals have become social recluses with an average age of 31, and the government is worried that another approximate 2 million Japanese individuals are at risk of becoming hikikomori. Characteristics of these recluses include not leaving their parents' house, not studying or going to work, and, isolating themselves from society, including their own family, within a single room for over 6 months. A psychiatrist has defined it as "a state that has become a problem by the late twenties, that involves cooping oneself up in one's own home and not participating in society for six months or longer, but that does not seem to have another psychological problem as its principal source" (Tamaki Saito).
Suggestions for the reasons of this behaviour are "tendencies toward conformity and collectivism, overprotective parenting, and particularities of the educational, housing and economic systems".
Despite the syndrome closely paralleling "avoidant personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, agoraphobia or social anxiety disorder", it is considered a social problem in Japanese discourse rather than a disorder. My belief is that hikikomoris face similar issues as individuals with suicide risks, however, as social commentator Kayama states, living or dying is seen

as a lottery. One of the characteristics of hikikomoris is to be cared for by others such as their parents in order to live reclusively; whereas individuals having committed suicide have shown more links to independent living as statistics from 1998 showed that as unemployment went up suicide rates went up along with it. This shows that socioeconomic factors are key to understanding suicide patterns in Japan.

In addition to this, there is an idea that Japanese psychology is characterized by a "sociocentric or interdependent construal of selfhood and that western psychology is characterized by an individualistic construal of selfhood" (Kondo, 1990; Lebra, 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shimizu & Levine, 2001). This highlights the consistent pattern throughout Japanese history of suicide within the presence of someone else. An example of this is 'Seppuku' or 'hara-kiri', which is samurai suicide. It was an exclusive right of the samurai warrior caste, but it was abolished in the 19th Century by Japanese leaders as an attempt to modernize the country. The act referred to the disembowelment with a short sword followed by decapitation using a long sword by the hands of a trusted acquaintance. This form of suicide puts forward the idea that Japanese death with a 'peaceful face' and comfort is important to many and is considered a good death.

Suicide In Western Countries

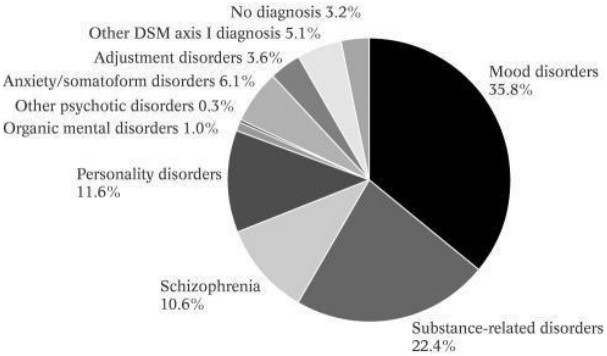

Figure 2. Suicide and mental disorders: distribution of diagnoses in studies with general population.

In comparison, the sacred horror of suicide is a peculiarly and exclusively Christian phenomenon. Buddhism, the predominant religion in Japan, does not condemn suicide the same way as Christianity or Islam. Many religious theologies conclude that suicide equals eternal damnation and is a selfish act. Buddhism does not. For example, the Bible states "My brethren, my children, we must not flee suffering, for Christ's sake, since He Himself of His own free will, accepted death for our sake." In addition to this, to commit suicide is to kill a man, oneself, therefore suicide is considered a homicide which is inexcusable and forbidden in the Ten Commandments according to St Augustine. However, the Bible does not forbid war or the death penalty; the Old Testament even records many suicides and wars which are sometimes also glorified, for example the case of Samson and Saul. One man argued that suicide is "a wild and misguided hope directed to the vast unknown kingdom on the other side of death. I would even venture on the paradox: men often kill themselves because they cannot and will not despair." Due to this, statistics show that suicide rates in Western and Islamic countries are lower than in Japan. However, it is important to remember that suicide may be hidden and underreported for several reasons- from prevailing social or religious attitudes, to misinterpreted information. Christianity is also predominantly found in Western countries such as the U.S, U.K and France. Some would argue that due to the increasing rate in agnosticism and atheism in the West, religion is having less and less of an impact on people who contemplate suicide. Thus, studies highlight the impact of mental and mood disorders on suicide rather than investigate the impact of religion and historical views of suicide on modern Western culture.

Goldney RD stated that modern views on suicide in psychiatry bring forth that "most important contributing factors to suicidal behaviours are depression, depression, [and] depression". Evidence of this is the measures put in place in countries like the U.K and U.S to prevent suicide. Policies put in place for individuals with a suicide risk coincide with managing and supporting people with mental health disorders rather than attempting to change religious views or customs. Suicide prevention includes treatments for disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, and alcohol related disorders. The WHO (World Health Organization) has stated that despite this, we should not dismiss the impact of social and physical environments. They encourage other actions, e.g Control of the availability of toxic substances and medicines; detoxification of domestic gas and car emissions; restricted access to guns; responsible media reporting about suicide; erection of barriers to deter jumping from high places. The CDC also promotes their strategies to prevent suicide based on available evidence collected.

Conclusion

Psychologist and popular social commentator Kayama wrote, “There is a sense that dying or not dying is a kind of lottery. One sees neither a suicide of resolve to cross the border [i.e., to die] nor anything that can be pointed to as a reason. I cannot help but feeling that it is a matter of mood and timing. There is not even any sense of the desperation of really wanting to die” (AERA, 2003, p. 10). Since 1998, there has been a change in public opinion in Japan, where suicide finally gained public recognition as a crucial social issue (Cho,2006; Ozawa-de-Silva, 2008; Motohashi, 2006). The mentality held by the victims of suicide in Japan is different in the sense that it is more than individuality that matters in Japanese culture.

Society plays a huge role in selfhood and contributes heavily to the mentality of young people as they develop into adults. Durkheim’s studies are highly relevant because his notion that individuals are inseparable from society fits with Japanese conceptions (Durkheim, 1951). My research has underlined the Japanese psychology of individuals being characterized by a “sociocentric or interdependent construal of selfhood” in comparison to western psychology which is marked by “an individualistic construal of selfhood” (Kondo, 1990; Lebra, 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shimizu & Levine, 2001). This theory has been investigated over time in both anthropology and psychology disciplines. It also shows us that Japan is taking measures to reduce suicide rates but still has a way to go in destigmatizing and initiating supportive conversations about mental health, and encouraging others to seek for help when needed.

Lastly, suicide is often seen as “an act indicative of decadent and anarchistic individualism”, however, this overlooks the fact that amongst “entirely healthy” and even war prone communities it is often considered “a social duty” (Landsberg, 2015). Therefore, one can assume that death is “above all so much a personal and individual thing that the problem it creates transcend the social life of this planet” (Paul-Louis Landsberg, 2015).

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An exploration of public opinion and understanding of plastic packaging usage and disposal in Japan

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日本とプラスチックの関係は面白くて、深い問題である。日本では、プラスチック包装の消費量は世界で 2 番目に多い。そして、そのプラスチックごみの過半数は燃やしていて、そのプロセスを通して二酸化炭素が生成され、排出した。そのせいで、地球温暖化が加速されてしまう。しかし、日本政府によって、プラスチックごみを燃やすことは「効果的な活用」だと言われているから、国民はプラスチックごみと廃棄物処理についての現実を知っているか。このレポートでは、日本人の大学生との話し合いを通して、この問題を探ってみたいと思う。

Introduction

There are few materials as synonymous with the modern age as plastic. Being both incredibly versatile and cheap to produce (World Economic Forum, 2016), plastic is found in practically all aspects of contemporary life. However for all its economic benefits, plastic is a very environmentally challenging material. Compared to the ease with which new plastic can be created, taking plastic out of circulation is near infinitely more challenging.

While the plastic problem is undoubtedly a global one, Japan in particular presents itself as an important area of research within environmental discourse due to a unique relationship with plastic. These unique aspects consist of disproportionately high consumption levels of plastic packaging, and a very heavy reliance on incineration to deal with said waste.

Naturally, high consumption of plastic packaging results in large quantities of plastic waste, and with limited access to open spaces, Japan cannot rely on landfill like many other economically developed nations, which has led to said reliance on incineration. Incineration of substances like plastic results in the emission of harmful gases which contribute to global warming. However, official government commentary on incineration in Japan raises some questions. Regardless of its associated environmental impact, incineration of plastic waste is seen and described as being environmentally positive, and it is this misleading juxtaposition around which this work is centred.

Methodology

However, through prior research in this area, I have identified that there is a gap in knowledge when it comes to the more qualitative, subjective side of this issue. In other words, little is known about public opinion on the issues surrounding Japan’s aforementioned relationship with plastic. In order to contribute to this area lacking research, I will collect first hand qualitative data through a series of discussions with Japanese students. The purpose of these discussions is to gain an insight into the public perception of this complex issue, and to gain answers to various research questions. For example; are the residents of Japan aware of the way in which plastic waste is being dealt with? And accordingly, are they aware of the environmental impacts of said disposal? In these discussions, I will place an emphasis on open ended questions, as to reveal the true understanding held by individuals, keeping impartiality throughout. In addition, the foundations of this research will be backed up through more statistical academic sources, from which I am able to build my own discourse.

Finally, I believe this research to be valuable, as not only is it always worthwhile to attempt to fill a gap in knowledge, but additionally the issue at hand is an environmental one. We all depend on and exist within our natural environment, which means that environmental issues effect every one of us. Therefore, I believe that environmental issues such as the one targeted in this project present a valuable research opportunity, and a topic which everyone can benefit from learning about.

Overconsumption

A stated prior, plastic packaging is consumed at a disproportionately high level in Japan. To be more specific, this means that plastic packaging consumption does not directly correspond to the overall plastic waste generation rate. For example, in 2018, the UN reported Japan as having the 2nd highest level of plastic packaging consumption per capita globally, behind only the U.S (UNEP, Claudia and Giacovelli, 2018). However, when the parameters are changed from packaging to all plastic waste, Japan falls down the rankings to having only the 15th greatest plastic waste generation per capita (Law *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, we can deduce that plastic packaging is the area of greatest concern, in terms of plastic waste in Japan.

So why is it that consumption of plastic packaging is so high? This is a very multifaceted question, but I believe it ultimately boils down to the cultural perception of plastic held by those living in Japan. Essentially, my day to day experiences here have reinforced the common idea (Emiko, 2020) that high quality customer service is highly expected by consumers, and therefore prioritised by the service industry. This results in routine overpackaging (most likely with plastic, due to its aforementioned economic benefits) to present products as being of high quality. For example, a bag of chocolates will most likely open to reveal each chocolate within its own individually wrapper, in an attempt to elevate the consumer experience. As a result, plastic packaging is nearly unavoidable to Japanese consumers. This in combination with a long running expectation of this sort of consumer experience, this vast amount of packaging swiftly ends up as waste, owing to the single-use nature of packaging.

Incineration

This brings us on to the next aspect of the plastic problem in Japan: disposal. For most economically developed nations, the main methods of waste disposal are landfilling and recycling. Usually, recycling is only carried out to a minor degree, with it being estimated that globally, only 9% of all plastic ever made has been recycled (Geyer *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, a majority of waste is sent to landfill. However, landfilling waste on this scale is far less viable for a nation like Japan. With developed land only accounting for 9% of all landmass (OECD, 2017), space for landfill is in ever decreasing supply. So, what happens to plastic waste in Japan? According to the Japanese government's Plastic Waste Management Institute (hereafter PWMI), 86% of all plastic waste was "effectively utilised" in 2020 (Plastic Waste Management Institute, 2021), and this figure is routinely interpreted as Japan's plastic recycling rate. While this makes it seem like Japan is a forerunner in plastic recycling, the reality of the situation is very different. This is because the Japanese government's definition of "effectively utilised" is questionable to say the least.

If we break down the definition of this phrase, it is revealed that the truth is far less environmentally positive. Reports from the PWMI show that mechanical recycling only accounts for 21% of the 86% figure. This means that instead of 86% being recycled (as is often stated), just 21% of waste is actually turned back into new materials (Plastic Waste Management Institute, 2021). Therefore, what does the remaining 65% of this figure represent? Besides a small proportion that undergoes chemical recycling, a vast majority is "thermally recycled", at 62%. This is yet another instance of misleading nomenclature, and this is where incineration enters the picture. Thermal recycling is the process by which waste (plastic in this case) is burned in incinerators, and the energy released via combustion is utilised, be it for heating homes, or for generating electricity. Therefore, thermal recycling is essentially the same process as incineration, and hence we can confirm that incineration of plastic waste is carried out to a high degree in Japan.

Having established this, it is important to evaluate the environmental viability of this method. As stated above, there is the potential for energy generation and hence, depending on how much energy is generated by incineration in Japan, it could potentially be a plausible method of waste disposal from an environmental standpoint, assuming enough power is generated to offset the combustion of fossil fuels. Judging from the fact that plastic incineration is considered to be effective utilization by the government, one would expect a considerable level of energy generation. But in reality, this is far from the truth. The most recent figures tell us that there were 1067 municipally operated incineration plants nationwide (in 2021), but only 63 of these were purpose-built power generation facilities. To put this into perspective, only 0.379% of Japan's total power generation capacity is made up of waste to energy incineration; a negligible amount (Agency of Natural Resources and Energy, 2021). Considering these facts, it is reasonable to argue that labelling this as "effective utilisation" is both misleading and untrue.

In addition, the environmental impact of incineration is also essential to consider. When plastic, a largely carbon based substance, is burned in the presence of oxygen, carbon dioxide is formed and released. This is not the only gas released via the incineration process, however CO2 cannot be removed via filtration or similar methods taken to tackle other harmful substances created in the process. This CO2 is then released into the atmosphere, where it accelerates global warming via the greenhouse effect. This is the process in which greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (such as CO2) prevent solar energy from leaving the atmosphere once it has hit the earth's surface, and it is reflected back. As it is more difficult for this solar energy to leave, it bounces between the atmosphere and earth's surface more times than it would otherwise. Each time this solar energy hits the earth's surface, a portion of the energy is transferred to the surface, warming it. Therefore, the same amount of solar energy has a greater warming effect on the earth due to the presence of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and hence incineration contributes to global warming.

If we consider all of these factors, we can say that the government's portrayal of domestic waste management methods is environmentally detrimental. This is because, the mislabelling of incineration with minimal power generation capacity as “effective utilisation” both diverts attention away from the true damaging practices that occur, and facilitates the continuation of plastic packaging overconsumption. Nowadays it is common knowledge that plastic is bad for the environment, but if people living in Japan were to see the government say that such a vast majority of plastic waste is being put to good use, then they might understandably not view plastic overconsumption as such a big problem. Therefore, I wanted to explore public opinion and understanding of these issues, in order to gain primary qualitative data that cannot be replaced by more quantitative, secondary sources. By holding discussions with Japanese students, I would be able to truly gain an understanding of their perspective on the issue. My prior research on the Japan-plastic relationship has indicated that there is a gap in knowledge when it comes to the more opinionated side of this issue, and hence this is a valuable opportunity to further delve into this complex and important environmental issue. My findings would indicate the degree to which the public is aware of and or understanding the environmental implications of this issue, and accordingly highlight any areas in which potential environmental progression are being held back.

Discussions and findings

The primary purpose of these discussions was to reveal and understand the views and opinions held by Japanese individuals on this topic. Therefore, I did not intend to skew anyone's views, so in order to retain impartiality I did not wish to input too much of my own opinions, instead allowing those I held discussions with to talk freely. By talking to individuals, I would be able to see whether or not people are aware of the actualities of Japan's waste management tendencies, along with opinions on the initial source of the waste; overconsumption of plastic packaging. The discussions I held revealed some interesting results, with some being very different to my expectations.

To begin with, as expected, there was a general opposition to overpackaging, with a majority of individuals disagreeing with the amount of plastic used for packaging. However, there was one individual that had no issue with the amount of packaging, in fact agreeing with it. I had expected a total opposition to this, but this outlying view may be explained by considering the emphasis put on, and desire for a ‘high quality’ consumer experience in Japan.

While this was largely in line with my expectations, the most interesting outcome of my discussions was a juxtaposition revolving around incineration. All individuals I spoke to stated that they did not believe that incineration is an environmentally friendly method of waste disposal. In fact, several individuals demonstrated a good understanding of the process, identifying the emission of carbon dioxide hence accelerated global warming as the main negative environmental aspect.

Taking this into account, one would also expect a general opposition to Japan's waste management methods, given that waste is primarily incinerated, as I have explained throughout this work. Despite this, opinions were split as to whether Japan's waste disposal methods were environmentally damaging or not. This is the most important result of my research, as this identifies the major point in which there is a lack of understanding, and hence the weak link in the Japan-plastic relationship. This means that there were a number of individuals who believed Japan's waste management methods to be environmentally positive, despite there being a unanimous understanding that incineration is environmentally damaging. This is very telling, as it indicates that there is a gap in public understanding when it comes to what actually happens to plastic waste. Furthermore, I believe that this gap arises not from public negligence, but from a lack of transparency in communication from the government. I would argue that the way in which the government present plastic waste incineration is the primary reason for this gap in understanding. This comes back to the term ‘effective utilisation’. Everyone knew that incineration was bad for the environment, and so it is logical to assume that they would not categorise incineration as such. Therefore, upon reading or hearing that so much plastic waste gets ‘effectively utilised’, they would likely assume this means mechanical recycling or other similar processes. Therefore it is no wonder that people do not realise the extent of incineration that occurs in Japan. This is backed up by the views of those I discussed with, all of whom believed that the government is being unclear about the true environmental impacts of incineration, despite not fully knowing the extent of the situation themselves.

Not only was this finding the most noteworthy of my research, but it went against what I had expected. Before conducting this research, I had predicted that people would not fully understand the negative environmental impact of incineration, but be aware of the level to which it occurs. In reality, the exact opposite is true (for the pool of people I held discussions with). There was a good, general level of understanding of how incineration contributes to global warming via the emission of carbon dioxide, but instead individuals evidently are not aware of how much plastic waste gets incinerated.

From this, we can see that awareness of the level of plastic waste incineration is an area in which potential environmental development is being held back. This potential shift to more environmentally friendly practices would rely upon a greater level of public understanding of this issue, which of course begins with the Japanese government being less misleading and more transparent about what actually happens to plastic waste. Ultimately, if people are aware of the environmental impact of their plastic waste, then there might additionally be a shift in consumption trends, which outlines the importance of knowledge when it comes to environmental issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aimed to gain insight into the public’s perception of the relationship Japan has with plastic, particularly overconsumption of plastic packaging, the nation’s heavy reliance on incineration, and the governments misleading stance on said incineration. As explained throughout, incineration contributes to global warming, but is regarded as an environmentally sound method of waste disposal by the government. I intended to investigate this unique juxtaposition, and did so through a series of discussions with Japanese students. Not only is this topic of personal academic interest, but this area also presents a knowledge gap within the field. Accordingly, this work was an opportunity to fill said gap by collecting primary, qualitative data that would provide a valuable, more personal side to a normally entirely numeric field.

As for my findings through the research, general opposition to overpackaging was expected and seen, but the main discovery from this research is that the public is not fully aware of the degree to which incineration is carried out, which went against my expectations. Therefore, we can conclude that the government has a responsibility to be transparent about how much plastic really gets incinerated. Seeing that those I spoke to unanimously deemed incineration to be environmentally detrimental, if people were made more aware, more pressure might be put on the government, and ultimately a transition to more environmentally viable methods of both consumption and disposal might be realised.

Word count (2954)

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Comparing both the Japanese and Scottish Fishing Industries through the lens of Environmental Sustainability

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Summary: この論文は、スコットランドと日本の漁業について、主に両者を取り巻く環境の持続可能性に焦点を当て、調査、分析、比較したものである。具体的には、日本の日生（ひなせ）とスコットランドのフォース湾の 2 カ所を取り上げる。この作品の各章は、ある特定のサブテーマに焦点を当てています。背景 - 近代の歴史、地理的なエリア、一般的な漁獲物について概説しています。漁法 - 各漁法について、環境への影響と、その影響を軽減しないまでも抑制する方法について説明します。既存の問題点 - 日生で行われているアマモの再生プログラムや、スコットランドにおけるフォースリバー・トラストの活動を分析します。今後の計画 - 若

い世代への教育の価値と、資金を増やす計画を探る。本稿を終えるまでに、各国の産業の違いと共通点、そして水産業と密接に連携している地域について、うまく説明できたのではないかと思っている。そして、その成功例と、より持続可能な未来を築くための改善点の両方を明らかにすることで、その環境の持続可能性を十分に評価できると考えています。

Intro

Ever since I began working at a Japanese sushi restaurant in Edinburgh back in 2019, I became fascinated with Japanese cuisine. But as I looked into each roll as they were being delicately handcrafted by the chefs, I couldn’t help but notice the presence a western influence - Salmon Futomaki rolls being packed full of avocado slices, filled generously with cream cheese, and sometimes paired mayonnaise on top of that! Although this Western style of sushi has always had an appeal to my mild British palette, the stark contrast between western sushi and traditional Japanese sushi always stood out to me as an interesting difference between the west and the sunrise kingdom. And as I pondered this thought more and more, it slowly evolved (or devolved) into a deeper question about the fishing industry as a whole. I scaled back my interest in sushi and wanted to investigate the origin of this cuisine - the fishing industry. Moreover, I wanted to compare both the Japanese and Scottish fishing industries through the lends of environmental sustainability. That is precisely what I intend to do in this piece. As part of my studies at Okayama University, I had the privilege to travel to a small fishing village on the prefectural border named Hinase. With this in mind, I decided to focus my research in Japan primarily on this location, using the resources I acquired there. As well as that, I carefully selected a location in Scotland, The Firth of Forth, to which I can compare. Beginning with the necessary contextual history of the two locations, I intend to dive into this topic slowly making my way through a number of subtopics regarding both of the regions - Fishing methods, existing problems, and future plans. At the end of this piece, I will be able to make a clear, concise comparison between the two locations whilst providing an evaluation of the overall environmental sustainability each area’s industries too.

Background

Hinase-cho is located in the southeast of Okayama Prefecture, on the border with Hyogo Prefecture. It is made up of both the mainland, and 13 other islands of various sizes. It is blessed with a mild climate which not only makes it a popular tourist destination for those wishing to see the sea, it also makes it a prosperous fishing area. Since ancient times, fishermen have flocked to Hinase for its abundance of oysters, valuable seaweed, and other fish such as Japanese Spanish Mackerel, Sea eel, and Mantis Shrimp. Because of the plethora of oysters however, the oyster farming industry in Hinase has become one of the most successful and famous in the whole nation, bringing in an average annual catch of 2000 tons of oysters. In recent years, the Hinase Town Fishery Co-operative has been working alongside fishermen to promote the area. Today, there are 71 union members, 71 regular members, and 52 associate members in the Co-operative.

Moving onto Scotland, The Firth of Forth is a 650 square mile estuary comprised of several Scottish rivers such as the River Forth. It meets the North Sea with Fife on the northern coast and the Lothians on the southern coast. Surrounded by many small towns like East Nuek, the fishing industry is extremely important to the economy of the local area. The majority of fishing in the forth takes place within 12nMiles of the shoreline with the main catch being shellfish such as prawns, lobsters, and crabs. In 2014 alone, the total value of prawns taken from the Forth's waters totalled £25,000,00. As well that, there exists over 120 active vessels in the waters, and jobs totalling around 250 overall.

Fishing Methods

The first topic I want to explore is fishing methods. There are a number of different fishing methods used in Hinase. Firstly, there is Tsuboami - a type of surface net-fishing that catches migrating fish along the coast. The fish collide with long, straight nets that leads them into a bag net. As well as this, I also learned about Utaseami - another net-fishing technique where a cone shaped net is trawled across the seabed, catching a wide variety of fish. There were a number of other techniques such as Kagoami and Sashiami which also use similar net-fishing techniques. In regards to environmental sustainability, these methods are somewhat questionable. From my research, I came to understand that rod-and-reel fishing is significantly more environmentally sustainable for two main reasons. Firstly, it results in less bycatch as unnecessary fish and other species can be immediately returned to the sea. As well as that, rod-and-reel fishing methods has been proven in some cases to prevent overfishing. That being said, trawling is a necessary method in Hinase for one primary reason - In order to maintain the viability of the Hinase fishing industry, fishing needs to continue into the winter period. At this time, due to a great temperature drop, fish migrate to deeper water where other fishing methods other than trawling are untenable. However, there are certain measures in place to ensure the safe practice of this trawling with minimal impact on the sea-life and the ecosystem. For example, the aforementioned Hinase Fishing Co-operative undertakes a cleaning service of the seafloor, selling the "fallen oysters" they find at the local market. The relationship between the trawlers and the sea-bed cleaners creates an economical and environmental stability about the fishing practices.

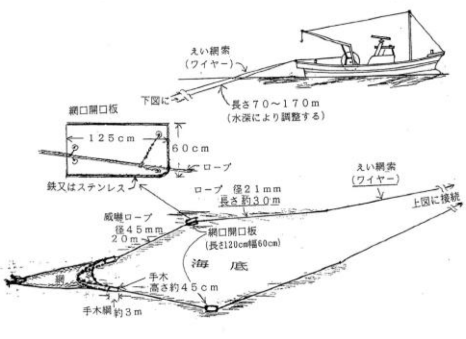

Figure 1. A trawling boat illustration from Hinase

Similar this, we have the fishing methods from the Firth of Forth. As I previously mentioned, shellfish is one of the most abundant catches in the Forth and the most common method for catching them is, like Hinase, trawling. Evidence of this would be the 20 trawling vessels present in the small town of Pittenweem. I've already spoke of the environmental questionability of this practice but there are also methods in place in the Forth to minimise the environmental impact. For example, each trawler is required by law to carry a square, mesh fitted panel. This is done to reduce the amount of discards of whitefish.

Contrasting the method of trawling, I want to speak about rod-and-reel fishing methods in the Firth of Forth. Although this method is primarily by recreational fishermen in the water (mainly due to the lack of Trout in the water making it financial unviable) it is still worth examining through the lens of environmental stability. They use live bait, such as fresh prawns, to lure the fish such as Sea Trout onto their steel hooks and reel them onboard. Due to the simple nature of this method not requiring large, expensive nets that are present in Hinase, this has a number of implications on the waters.

I mentioned that rod-to-reel fishing has a significantly lesser impact on the environment of the waters which therefore means little cleaning is required specifically to address the actions of the fishermen. Secondly, recreational fishing is significantly more common in the Firth's waters in comparison with Hinase. That being said, there are a number legislative laws in place to ensure that this recreational fishing practice has little to no impact on the environment of both the local water, and the environment as a whole. Firstly, recreational rod-and-reel fishing in the Forth requires a permit which is only available from the 15th March - 31st October annually. This £20 permit strictly prohibits the catching of Salmon as the taking of Atlantic salmon under the regulations of The 2019 Scottish Conservation of Salmon Amendment is illegal. All money raised from the selling of this permit goes towards The Forth Rivers Trust which aims at sustaining both the water and fish population of the Forth.

Existing Problems

When I interviewed Mr. Amakura, the administrative support manager to the Hinase morning auction market, I expected his response to any questions about existing problems to be related to a lack of successors. A 2018 study conducted in Japan found that over 66% of all Japanese businesses lacked a successor to take over from the current owner. This often leads to a large number of bankruptcies, disproportionately impacting smaller businesses such as ones in Hinase compared to larger firms in cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. However, I was surprised to hear from Mr. Amakura that at his family run business, he has a number of trainees from countries such as China, Vietnam, and Indonesia with his total workforce totalling around 130. As well as that, he mentioned that although the average age of a fisherman in Hinase is around 60 years old, most of these local fisheries have successors in place. After assuring me of the stability of each Hinase fishery, Mr Amakura told me about the single largest issue facing Hinase, one of environmental concern - the decreasing amount of eelgrass in Hinase's waters. From an article written by the Japan Times about this topic, I came to understand that "Eelgrass beds provide a habitat and nutrition for small fish and other organisms, releasing oxygen into the water via photosynthesis and creating a better environment for oyster farming and coastal fishing" (Shinobu Yamada, 2018). According to Mr Amakura in an interview that undertook by the Japan Times "Hinase's fishing grounds had about 590 hectares of eelgrass beds right after World War II. However, this decreased to 12 hectares in 40 years, mainly because of sewage contamination and the disappearance of shallow water due to the installation of vertical seawalls" (Shinobu Yamada, 2018). However, a huge movement is underway in Hinase to restore the amount of eelgrass in the surrounding waters to what it once was at the time of World War II. Beginning in 1985, 19 local fisherman and 12 members of the Hinase youth group, guided by Okayama Prefectural Government began a restoration project of the eelgrass. Their method began with researching suitable areas for eelgrass growth. Following this, they collected eelgrass branches from the water in June of that year, which is the blooming season, and began to collect seeds of the highest quality in order to replant rapidly growing eelgrass in these desired areas.

図-1 昭和 20 年頃 590ha　昭和 60 年 12ha　平成 26 年 200ha

Figure 2. A graph illustrating the regeneration of Hinase eelgrass

From the graph above you can the amount of eelgrass around 1940 totalled 590ha. In 1985, at the time of the inception of the regeneration project, it totalled just 12ha. Thanks to this environmental project, the amount of eelgrass in 2014 totalled 200ha and this number continued to rise in the years after. From this, it is clear to see that although this problem is still ongoing in the local area, efforts are being undertaken to ensure the environmental sustainability of Hinase's fishing industry.

Eelgrass growth is also a significant issue in the water's of the Firth of Forth. With a declining amount having a huge impact on the oyster industry, the WWF pledged £600,000 towards a £2.4 million project aiming to restore up to four hectares of seagrass and 10,000 oysters per year by the end of 2024. There also exists other problems for fishermen and environmentalists in the waters of The Firth of Forth. One such problem is the endangerment of a number of once prominent species in the water. For example, the number of eels in the Forth has been decreasing in recent years. In some populations, it has decreased by over 95%. Eels play an important role in the ecosystem of the Forth as they act as food for a number of different species which sustain the fishing industry. As well as that, when they mature into larger, yellow eels, they themselves become predators which help curb the number of unwanted species in the waters. This problem is being tackled however. The Forth Rivers Trust's 'Forgotten Fish Project' conducts a number of vital activities to support the ecosystem of the forth, thus supporting the fishing industry as well. They monitor the populations of eels throughout the Forth using pipe traps, catching eels arriving at the coastline. This is done to better understand the distribution of the eels in the water so conservation efforts such as habitat improvement can be focused on the most vulnerable areas. The project also seeks to highlight the illegal trade of eels. This trade is driven primarily by demand from China and other East-Asian countries. They are caught in Europe, in places such as the Forth and then smuggled abroad for profit (as the cannot be be bred in captivity). By raising awareness around this issue, the Forth Rivers trust seeks reduce the amount of this traffic and to minimise the impact of it on local environments and fisheries.

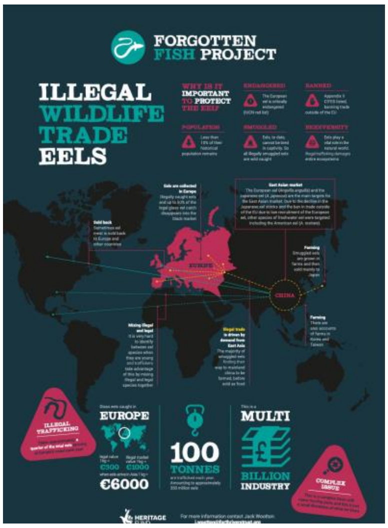

Figure 3. An Infographic showing the international impact of illegal eel trade

Future Plans

Lastly, I want to discuss the future plans of both Hinase and the Firth of Forth. In Hinase, the main focus of the local fisheries and environmentalists isn't globalisation, its education. The current eelgrass regeneration project is far from over and the fishermen are looking to continue this project alongside the future generations. Today, they regularly hold educational classes at Hinase's local Junior High School to inform them of the environmental necessity of the eelgrass in their water's. They hope to attract more young people to the industry both locally and from afar. With some trainees from Vietnam, China and Indonesia, they plan for the number of international roles in the industry to increase, thus promoting the international prosperity of the Hinase area as a whole.

The firth of forth also plans on educating the younger generation in order to promote the environmental sustainability of their waters and fishing industry. The Forth River Trust's 'Forgotten Fish' program also works alongside local schools to teach young people about the delicate eco-system of the Forth. This ability to provide this education hinges on funding however which needs to be increased as time goes on. Currently, the 'Forgotten Fish' requires around £32,000 annually to conduct both conservational and educational activities. Unfortunately, this figure is not being met and moving forward, the program intents to promote awareness which will hopefully increase public funding as well.

Conclusion

Both Hinase's and the Firth of Forth's fishing industries will inevitably grow. Despite some environmental concerns regarding the fishing methods and the sustainability of the water's ecosystems, work is being conducted to minimise the impact of these problems. The Hinase Fishing Co-operative is successfully regenerating its eelgrass population to support the local fishing industry. This in turn has wider, positive implications on the environment as a whole. In Scotland, the Forth River Trust is working on promoting the populations of endangered species and large amounts of funding are going towards improving the eelgrass amounts. This of course also has, and continues to have a positive impact on the Forth's fishermen. Overall, I think the work being done in both these areas is fantastic and as we, the general population, focus more on the environment, I hope both of these areas can and should learn from each other.

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日生町漁業協同組合（アマモ再生活動 30 年の歩み ~目指せ持続可能な里海づくり，天倉 辰己）[Print]

日生町漁業協同組合（アマモ・里海 日生かき ~里海づくりを活かしたブランディング，天倉 辰己）[Print]

The Japanese Mining Industry

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この研究は矢の原とアヴィティヴィにおける鉱業の歴史に基づいている。今日の日本の鉱業産業は衰えつつあるため、その歴史を日本とカナダで比較した。一番の論旨は鉱業が盛んであった地域において鉱業企業が撤退したことによる、人口減少である。また、採掘をする際の道具、技術、困難な点について論じる。

At the beginning of the 20th century, industrialization gave birth to many towns in countries like USA, Canada, Japan, Russia, etc. Especially for the exploitation of natural resources in rich areas that are sometimes a little far away from the big cities. I was born in an area called Abitibi in Canada; an area known to be rich in gold. Abitibi really came to life for the very exploitation of gold, for many it was an opportunity to start a better life away from the big cities. I worked in the Gold Mine industry for a little over 4 years, but I’ve heard about it my whole life. After coming to Okayama I heard that many areas were facing depopulation a problem that I’m also aware of in Canada. This made me quite curious on how it all started here, made me curious if deindustrialization could be the cause of depopulation in certain area of Okayama. In this essay I will be comparing the techniques, tools the effect of depopulation between the countries but more specifically on the two towns: Val d’Or and Yanahara.

Research Methods

I started my research broadly by searching online for any trace of the mining industry and was surprised to see that it is quite inactive in Japan, then we found out that there was a mine in Okayama prefecture called the Yanahara Mine and decided to make a study based on it’s history, which turned out to be a great sample since Yanahara was one of the largest active Iron Mine at the time having one of the largest Iron deposit. For my research, I travelled to Yanahara and visited the museum where I got most of my information from. I was able to observe the equipment that they used at the time, and learn about their methods, what they used Iron sulfide for, the effect industrialization and deindustrialization had on the town and why the mine closed its doors. From other courses that I’ve had a Okayama University such as the two courses on SDG’s I learned a great deal on depopulation, Japan and Okayama History and swordscraft.

From I wich I was able to relate to for I am also from a an area that industrialization gave birth to and which is also facing risk of depopulation today. From the knowledge I gain in those classes I was able to create links and better understand the features of Okayama, specifically on its demographics, natural resources and history.

History of Yanahara

If we go back to the Kamakura Period, the Bizen region in Okayama Prefecture was famously known for being a sword producer because it was known at that time for it soils rich in Iron. As for Yanahara, Iron deposit were found and first exploited in the area during the Keicho Era (1596 to 1615). However, industrial mining of Iron Sulfide only started in 1882, which is approximately 40 years before Abitibi. The town came was officially founded in 1955 by merging a few towns and got its name from the mine. Iron Sulfide was used for many things like clothes, chemicals, fertilizer, magnets etc. Productions reduced yearly after its peak in 1966 until it’s closure in 1991. The first reason is that a newer, cheaper way to extract sulfur from petroleum was found making it cost ineffective. The ban on certain chemicals and fertilizer abroads reduced exportation as well which didn’t really didn’t help to problem.

History of Val d’Or

Val d’Or which stands for Vallée de l’Or meaning Golden Valley in English was established in 1923 as a gold rush town in the Abitibi area. But it was officially founded in 1934, and in less than a year emerged numerous businesses, shops, hotels, restaurants and a total of 6 different gold mines around the city alone. By 1947 there were 150 business establishments in the city for a population of only 9,400 inhabitants. The Abitibi area counts other municipalities like Rouyn-Noranda, Malartic, Amos, and La Sarre. Most of the gold deposit reside in the rift of Cadillac on which Val d’Or, Rouyn-Noranda and Malartic sits on.

Tools

There were similarities between the tools used by both Japanese and Canadians and their differences were mainly due to economic reasons and technology advancement. Firstly it is important to note that what has mostly change today in the mining industry are mobile machinery used underground. 50 years ago, using rails and carts was the popular method for transporting ore, only the very old mines in Canada still have rails and tracks in certain areas but they are mainly used for the transportation of personel. One quick way to determine whether a mine can extract large quantities of mineral is by how large their tunnels are dug. The larger the tunnels are dug the bigger the machines are used the bigger you extract. Now if you look compare the tunnels that were dug during the 60's to those of today you will understand why they were using tracks and carts. Now during that period both Canada and Japan were using the same locomotive but the Japanese ones were electric which is quite impressive, they were essentially using electrical wires like today's tramways, which means that you have to run electrical wires on a very long distance, at that time Canadian's locomotive were diesel one's, our mines weren't as electrified as the Japanese ones way. Now in terms of tools used for extraction they were the same drills, we call them Jacklegs. Today our mining industry is the most advance on Earth, the gold mine where I used to work at created lamps with integrated GPS, and they brought cellular data underground. We now have access to 4G data underground which means that workers can have a company cell phone and be able to communicate with anyone whether they are working at the surface or 3 kilometres underground. The best of all is that we now have scoop tram that are piloted from the surface, and 50 tons that are automatically piloted, in areas that are more at risk for workers. Danger is still present underground, but it is much safer than it used to be thanks to advance of technology. This leads me to my next topic, the difficulties encountered.

Difficulties

Today, everyone in the mining industries knows that the worst that can happen in a mine is a fire, the reason is simple, because we send ventilation underground from the surface it always comes out by the exit, which is the ramp. Now if a fire were to happen the smoke would travel so fast barely leaving time for anyone to escape, and then asphyxiate them. Rest assured we are well prepared for such event but still today people die from such causes. Back in the day, it is safe to say that water was a bigger problem, there was no way of knowing if they would hit an underground river while digging and sadly this happened in my area at the mine Belmoral in the 80's, killing 8 miners. It doesn't rain much in Canada compared to other countries but in some places, it rains a lot, and it can be a serious problem. In April 2022, 8 miners died in Canadian owned mine in Burkina Faso. In Japan, it can also rain a lot, but imagine how devastating the effect of a typhoon on a mine could be, it is exactly what happened at the Yanahara Mine in

1918. Not only did it stopped part of the operation but also created fear among the workers and villagers who didn’t want to work there anymore. This problem sparked the mine to revise their techniques, tools and strategies to make the workplace safer for its worker and resume the operation. They mention that they started to use rock drills instead of manual digging from that period, yet in 1945, the typhoon Mukurazaki caused the Yoshii River to overflow, once again submerging many of the tunnels at the Yanahara Mine.

Extraction in tons

It was extremely hard to find data on the gold mines of my area from those dates since it goes back to the very beginning of our local history. According to our data in 1947 the 6 gold mines of the area of Val d’Or: the Lamaque mine, the Siscoe Gold Mines Limited, the Sigma Mines Limited, the Sullivan Consolidated Limited, the Shawkey Gold Mines Limited, and the Perron Gold Mines Limited. Together they had a capacity to collect 2000 tons of ore per day or 720,000 tons yearly representing a third of gold production in the province of Quebec. Now if we divide those number by 6, they each collected about 120 000 yearly. The same year, with 2112 workers, the Yanahara mine collected 327,375 tons of ore all by itself. At its prime the mine collected 849,961 tons in 1966 also all by itself. To give you a better idea on today’s number the Perron Gold Mine renamed Beaufor, where I worked at in 2019, was collecting on average 6000-8000 a month. It is considered to be a small mine because it is very old, hence limiting the capacity of gold to be extracted but it is comparable to Yanahara, which pulled out similar number with much more rustic equipements 53 years earlier. Today a productive gold mine in Abitibi can pull out 8000 tons of ore daily, which is 2M more annually.

Techniques

The major difference lied in their method to support the terrain, in Canada men were simply using large beams of wood which is a very old method. The Japanese were more sophisticated, they were tying up bamboo together, making floors on which to walk but also to support the terrain with large iron beams and poles; only in areas that were more at risk. There are many similarities in methods employed, the drilling methods were essentially the same since they were using similar drills. The methods for bringing ore to the surface as well, through the mining shaft they could bring ore from any level and then straight to the surface. Yanahara Mine had a total of 7 shafts, and according to their plan below 6 were used to transport mineral. What is marked in yellow is referring to the ore deposit, as we can see tunnels were dug horizontally and sometimes vertically but essentially horizontally. The technique is simple, drill holes in the wall in front of you, load the holes with explosives, take cover, blow it up, collect the ore and dump it at a dumping station which will then bring it to the surface. Nowadays we still use the same technique, but we have also developed other techniques which they seem to have used as well when digging holes vertically, see the plan that I've found in my company's book. From the upper level you can drill in the floor and reach a lower level and blast that section which will then fall in the lower level and be collected from there, nowadays when we are done with that area we must filled it back up with paste to avoid leaving to many empty spaces underground.

Depopulation

There are many similarities on the effect deindustrialization has on the population of remote town between the two areas. In 1965, a town named Joutel was founded in Abitibi, but after the opening and closure of 4 different mine the town was deserted and demolished. In 1947, Yanahara had a population of 14,328 inhabitants and Val d'Or 9,400 inhabitants that's nearly a difference of 5000 inhabitants. In 2004, Yanahara's population was at 6,696. The town was then merged with other municipalities and is now called Misaki town. Misaki-cho now has 12,473 citizens. If we count the population of every town before the merge and the number of inhabitants today, the area lost about 5000 people since 2000. In 2021, Val d'Or is now at 32,752 inhabitants which is more than double in population and still growing, the reason because the industry is still very strong and active. Deindustrialization and the closure of important economic factor caused towns like Joutel to die in Canada, those threats are serious and highlight the importance of industry on municipalities. Perhaps a major factor that contribute to the survival of Yanahara is their ingenuity, in transforming a part of the mine for agriculture purposes, to grow mushrooms and potatoes. Something that we didn't think about in Abitibi. However, each year a famous cycling tour is held in Abitibi and during one stage of the competition participants (some of them Japanese) have to start in the tunnels of one of our famous gold mine called Lamaque in Val d'Or, they must cycle their way out and then converge onto the city's main street. Perhaps our success relies on convincing our residents to stay in an area which they have helped to shape and created, we have created a link of attachment between the resident and their lands, we also found a way to incite families to leave the big cities to establish themselves into our area, by promoting affordable house and the richness of our nature, so easily accessible. Perhaps areas like Misaki-cho and Abitibi have a lot to learn from each other.

In Conclusion, when we look at Yanahara Mine accomplishment's it is quite remarkable, and yet I am sure that many people don't know about its existence in Japan. A memory which only those that were there during it's prime remember of. The lack of Japanese mining industry today doesn't reflect the past over, it is important not to underestimate the impact a simple mine had on the local economy and I'm sure there were many more out there in the past, Japan is 26 times smaller than Canada, but it is much older, which means the limited resources have been exploited for a longer period of time. Today, area like Misaki-cho are only an example of what deindustrialization can do to a local area, yet the perseverance and love of its people have kept it alive today. So many town in Japan shares this common problem, that needs fixing, since depopulation is not only caused by centralization but also lower birth rates it would be good for Japanese people to go back to the rural areas and conservative values around family building. If we compare both industry in the 1950's it is safe to assume that the Japanese industry was already quite efficient while it was only beginning in Canada. Some of the techniques and tools they used are still effective in today's mining industry that has evolves so much already. There is much respect to have for their accomplishment despite having a bigger number of workers and better tools at the time. Although, the mining industry in Japanese is nearly inexistant within the country companies like Dowa, which owned the Yanahara mine in the past, now possesses mines in foreign countries, companies like Sumimoto Metal, who own the Hishikari gold mine in Kagoshime, and Dowa also invest in other companies abroad to make profit. For their ingenuity in finding ways to keep rural areas alive perhaps areas like Misaki-cho and Abitibi have a lot to learn from each other.

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**How does onsen tourism stay relevant in the growing wellness industry?
A case study on Misasa Onsen**

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要旨：この論文は日本の温泉に研究する。伝統的な温泉は、現在の成長ウェルネス産業でどのように競争すると知りたい。ウェルネス業界はこれまで以上に人気がある。特に観光客を温泉に惹きつけるものについての研究である。ある研究によると本格と歴史は重要な要素である。最近、小さな田舎の村はその要素を強めて、村を観光地に人気になる。ウェルネス産業にも人々は本格的な温泉を経験したい。この研究はその動静と方法を説明するつもりである。

Introduction

This research focusses on onsen tourism and specifically how it is viewed in the current wellness industry. Due to recent trends and developments, the wellness industry is more popular than ever and evolving at a fast rate. My hypothesis is that onsen is still very popular among both Japanese and international tourists, but there has been a recent change. The wellness industry keeps on expanding and becoming more popular. This study wants to discover how onsen competes with more modern wellness options. What kind of updates or strategies would they use to remain relevant. Within the wellness sector it could be interesting to see what specifically attracts tourists to onsen.

This research will be built upon one specific case study, namely Misasa Onsen in the Tottori prefecture. Misasa Onsen is quite famous for the healing effect of their water as well as their cultural heritage site, Nageire-dou. The goal of this study is to discover a link between a literature study on recent developments in onsen tourism and my participants observations of Misasa onsen. These observations were made as a participant in a 2-day field trip to research and give feedback on tourism in Misasa Onsen.

1. An introduction to onsen

As one of the most volcanic countries in the world, Japan has been blessed with many hot water sources called onsen 温泉. This boiling water that flows upwards from within the ground to the surface, has many different meanings and interpretations. From ancient times it has been viewed as a blessing and was used in holy rituals, as a way to relax, as a cure for certain maladies or just as a place of social gathering between friends (Wide and Mackintosh 2018, iv). The goal of this paragraph is to introduce the concept of onsen and clearly explain what it can be or what it can represent.

Since the Middle Ages, bathhouses have been built around natural hot springs as a way to optimises their use. We can see an evolution in these buildings, at first they were mainly used as a secret hot spring or a place for samurai to spend the night during a long journey. Now bathhouses have become popular holiday destinations or local gathering places. We also see the ryokan 旅館 industry blossoming around onsen now. A lot of emphasis is put on the authenticity of both onsen and ryokan. Even though Japanese bathhouses are often modernized, the hot springs maintain a traditional atmosphere (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper 2010, 159). Japanese men, women and families used to bathe together, and though this custom still stands in some areas of rural Japan, most baths are segregated by sex.

The current definition describes onsen as a hot bath filled with water coming from under the ground surface with a natural temperature of more than 25 degrees or a certain amount of at least one of the 19 special chemical elements (dissolved substances, Carbon dioxide, Lithium ions, Strontium ions, Barrion ions, Iron ions, Manganese ions, Hydrogen ions, Brome ions, Iodine ions, Fluor ions, Hydro-Arsenicum oxide, Arsenious acid, Sulphur ions, Meta-Boron, Meta-Silicic acid, Sodium bicarbonate, Radon and Radium salts). This also means that onsen can in fact be cold (Wide and Mackintosh 2018, VII).

The above-mentioned definition is a short summary of the Hot Spring Act. This law was formed in 1948 to ensure the quality of the bathwater. For example, there are strict laws about the mixing of spring water with regular water. A revision of this law in 2007 now demands that every 5 years onsen facilities show records and test of their baths and springs. Moreover, this Hot Spring Act does not only ensure safety and hygiene, but it also shows a more detailed classification of different types of onsen.
*Include citation, when necessary. This classification is mostly based on the above-mentioned 19 chemical elements, which allows for 9 different categories. The existing categories are a simple spring, a simple carbon dioxide spring, a carbonated spring, a chloride spring, a sulphate spring, Ferruginous spring, a sulphur spring, an acidic spring and a radioactive spring (Serbulea and Payyappallimana 2012, 1368-1369).

2. Recent trends in the wellness industry

As previously discussed, the use of hot springs dates back several thousands of years. However, since the late 20th century the wellness movement has been developing at a fast pace. At that time, we saw a general modernization of the industry. Many hot spring spas, after years of decline, became modernised and redeveloped their facilities. This can also be reflected in the 'onsen-boom' around 1985 in Japan. We saw a sudden growth in the consumption and production of onsen (especially open-air baths)(Say 2022, 285).

To this day, health and wellness tourism is one of the fastest growing industries of the global tourism sector. This continuous growth can be linked to the increasing desire of people to remain well as they grow older. This has resulted in a renewed interest in the use of geothermal springs on a global level. Not only has this health and wellness trend caused existing hot spring destinations to redevelop, but also many new developments and ideas came to life. For example, people began to investigate if they could tap into geothermal waters to enhance their business prospects. This resource could be derived from artesian groundwater basins, from volcanic activity nearby or from water heated by cooling magma bodies deep inside the world. There were a lot more possibilities than before (Erfurt-Cooper 2010, 1).

Since the start of the 21st century, there have been several new trends relating to onsen tourism in Japan. The most important one being the creation of a new nostalgic symbol of the past: the rural village. This was a result of growing migration from the countryside to urban places. For their vacations, people wanted to return to a simpler more relaxed lifestyle which was associated with the countryside. Through clever advertising, onsen villages became the go-to place for tourists who wanted to rediscover their own cultural heritage. Villages will promote their own heritage and history more than before as a way to attract customers. There are 3 main aspects necessary to fit in this 'rural village' image: 1. A proximity to nature, 2. An architectural cohesiveness and familiarity and 3. A sense of co-operation and community. These phenomena gave the onsen industry a new and huge boost (McMorran 2008, 334-339).

This trend of nostalgia is also used in different aspects of the onsen industry. Most notably, the healing aspect of bathing in hot springs. In recent decades there has been a lot of research about the curing qualities of onsen and even though they have been refuted, it remains a fact that onsen is good for maintaining one's health. As a result, we see 2 traditional practises returning, onsen ryohou 温泉療法 and touji 湯治. Both practises have a long history in Japan and while there is no scientific proof it can cure illnesses, recently it has been modernized as a way to revitalise or keep good maintenance of one's body. Touji is a prolonged stay at an onsen resort of a longer period, sometimes a week, sometimes 10 days or even a month. Onsen ryohou emphasises that there are certain conditions necessary for a bath in a hot spring to be healing. These conditions being the type of onsen (with additional herbs sometimes), the duration of the bath and the number of times one should take this bath (Serbulea and Payyappallimana 2012, 1370). To conclude, we see onsen villages going back to their own history and authenticity as a new way to advertise. Traditional practises that had been refuted, can be rebranded and advertised as a part of the hot springs' authentic history.

3. An introduction to Misasa Onsen

Misasa is a small onsen village located in the centre of Tottori prefecture. The town's most famous attractions are its radon hot springs and Nagereidou located on Mount Mitoku which is a Japanese cultural heritage site. The town has several legends. Firstly, the origin of the name 'misasa' which means 'three mornings'. According to this legend, if you soak in the springs every day for a 3-day stay, on the third morning all illnesses will be cured, hence the name. Secondly, Misasa is quite famous in the Shugendou practise. Shugendou is a form of mountain asceticism combining elements of Buddhism, Shinto and other religions, founded by the sage Ennogyouja. It is said that Ennogyouja threw three lotus petals in the air while saying 'they should fly down to places related to the gods and Buddhas'. One of these petals found its way to Mount Mitoku and since then it has been a place to practise Shugendou. The third legend entails the story of how the hot spring at Misasa was discovered. In the Heian period, Ōkubo Samanosuke, a vassal of Minamoto no Yoshitomo went on a pilgrimage to Mount Mitoku. On his journey he met a white wolf, but he let the wolf go because he believed it was a divinity. This was true, the Myōken Bodhisattva appeared in his dream that night. To thank Samanosuke, the divinity showed him where to find a hot water source. That place was called 'Kabuyu' and remains the place where the history of Misasa Onsen began (Association for the promotion of the Japan heritage sites in Misasa Town n.d.,1-11).

Radon hot springs are quite rare, not only in Japan but around the world. These onsen emit radioactivity at an extremely low level, which means it does no harm to the human body at all. To the contrary, a low amount of radiation activates the cells of the body and is good for boosting immunity.

Besides onsen and Mount Mitoku, there are many more touristic attractions and spots to visit in Misasa town. There are quite a few artisan shops selling hand-made products. For example, Enomoto Traditional Crafts, this shop sells products hand-made from chestnut wood. Fuji Shuzo is Misasa's only sake brewery and has received the gold medal at UK wine contests. For those who enjoy a bit of culture, they can visit Misasa Violin Museum or the Yu no Mura Gallery decorated with traditional washi lanterns. Furthermore, the Koitani Bridge is a beautiful scenic spot and it is said that if you rub the kajika frog statue, it will bring you good luck (Misasa Onsen Tourism Association n.d.,1-10).

4. Field observations of Misasa Onsen

As part of a research Misasa Onsen invited 16 international students to discover which touristic aspects of the town they could highlight or improve to attract more international tourists. This research trip was completely funded and included an overnight stay. There were a lot of applicants to join this trip (because is was free) but eventually 7 Europeans, 2 Americans, 2 Australians and 5 east-Asians were selected. It was said that they were specifically interested in the opinions of Europeans about Misasa, this makes sense looking at the participants.

The first day of the trip consisted of several activities and due to the size of our group, we were split up into smaller groups. Misasa is quite a small town, you can do everything on foot and there was also a guided English tour around town. The person giving the tour was part of the touristic centre of Misasa, but was by no means an actual tour guide. This was noticeable by his lack of sense of the group he was guiding. There were times he started an explanation without the whole group being present. Nevertheless, it was quite interesting and he knew a lot of small details. The first stop of the tour was the violin museum. We stayed here for around half an hour and were able to freely explore or receive a very short introductory violin lesson. During this period, the international students were followed and filmed by a film crew. Then we visited the kabuyu spring and the monument of the discovery legend. This being maybe the most important monument in Misasa town itself, there were only Japanese explanations on the monument. Afterwards we took a short stop at the Yakushi no Yu footbath, which was followed by the radon hot steam baths. This was my first experience with radon hot springs and it was quite refreshing, but not that different. During this visit the students were asked to do a short interview while being filmed. Around 5pm we had some free time at the hotel and we were highly encouraged to bath in the hotel’s onsen before and after dinner.

On the second day our group started the climb up Mount Mitoku to Nagereidou shrine accompanied by 3 guides. It is also important to note that 2 of those guides were Europeans working for the touristic centre. We had not received much information beforehand and the hike was quite physically demanding. A lot of roads were very narrow and so high-up that it could be dangerous if you did not remain focussed. Even though our group struggled and was scared at times, everyone made it to the Nagereidou site and back down. Personally, the climb was hard but the view of the valley and Nagereidou were definitely worth it, in my opinion. This climb took around 4 hours (with a lot of breaks) and was followed by a lecture from a local Buddhist monk. This lecture was completely in Japanese and though I noticed the monk had tried to simplify his explanations, by that time our group (with different levels of Japanese knowledge) was so tired of the hike that I do not think many were paying a lot of attention to the lecture.

Subsequently, we were given a questionnaire about our stay. We had to rate every activity, choose our favourite activity, our least favourite activity and detail what kind of souvenirs we had bought with the 3000 yen coupon we had received.

To conclude this paragraph, I will detail some observations and suggestions relating to Misasa onsen's tourism. Misasa onsen has a good grasp on their own history and authenticity, like the monument of the founding story and advertising for the hike of Mount Mitoku. The healing aspect of Misasa's radon onsen is also something that is emphasised to visitors. All this is highlighted and easy to understand in the English brochures. However, in the town itself there is little to no English explanations, which could be a problem for international visitors, which was their target group for this study. Also, the hike to Mount Mitoku is their main touristic attraction besides onsen, so it struck me as very strange that there are no guided hikes normally. Especially because the hike can be quite challenging to internationals from non-mountainous regions. So I would say that Misasa Town has a good grasp of what attractions of their town they should advertise to attract tourists, but are still looking for ways to improve their methods. They have received a lot of similar feedback as a result of their study with international students, so they probably will find ways to improve their touristic advertising and attractions even more.

5. Conclusion

In recent decades there have been several developments and trends in the wellness industry. This has also had an influence on onsen tourism. To compete within this industry, onsen has had to redefine itself as an authentic and original travel destination. Whereas some in the wellness industry rely on modernizations and scientific proof, onsen will emphasis their roots as an advertising strategy. Aspects like discovery myths, legends containing famous military or religious figures or possible health benefits are used as a method to prove an onsen's history or authenticity. This is supported by the current wave of nostalgia in Japan, people want to escape their life in the city and visit rural and authentic Japan.

This trend of highlighting the authenticity of onsen is also recognizable in Misasa onsen. Based on this research one could say that they are now trying to expand this methods to attract possible international visitors as well. They have a very good understanding of what their most authentic and historically interesting touristic spots are. This was made clear by the schedule they made for the group of international students participating in the study of Misasa onsen's tourism. Small villages like Misasa have the opportunity to use this wave of nostalgia and refine their touristic highlights. This study with international students was a great method of testing and maybe afterwards improving these highlights for an international crowd.

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Sober Curious? Sober Curious.
A study of Sober Curious in Japan through 20s aspect

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「ソバーキュリアス」とは実際に酒を飲めるが、あえて飲まないことを選択する人という意味である。酒は日本人との付き合いが長く、飲み会といった様々な場面で日本文化に関わってきたが、近年の日本では飲酒離れの増加傾向がある。厚生労働省「令和元年国民健康・栄養調査報告」によれば、2019 年に日本では飲酒習慣がない人が 55.6%となったという。本研究は、2023 年となった現在、日本におけるソバーキュリアスという現状および背景に関して検討するために 20 代の人を中心に、ソバーキュリアスに関する調査を行った。その結果、ソバーキュリアスという流行は日本全国的に浸透せず、20 代の若者は人間関係を尊重し、健康や美意識などの価値観を持っているということがわかった。

“Sober Curious” is a term that used to describe someone who are able to drink alcohol but choose to avoid it for personal reasons apart from inevitable reasons such as health problem, religious restriction, etc., and it is said that Sober Curious lifestyle has become a new social phenomenon since it is getting more popular nowadays in several places in the world. According to the Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2019), the number of people who choose to not drink alcohol, so called “Sober Curious”, has been increasing rapidly these recent years and has already exceeded half of the people in Japan (55.6%). As Japanese people has been associated with alcohol for a long time and has been a part of Japanese culture in various situations such as drinking party (飲み会), giving alcohol as a souvenir or gift, the fact that present society is getting further from drinking has brought up many questions.

Compared to other countries, Japan has no specific duration to refrain from alcohol like Dry January in Europe or Buddhist Lent in countries that have Buddhist majorities such as Thailand. Furthermore, there are plenty of expected possibilities behind this Sober Curious phenomenon. For instance, due to change of alcohol assumption, it could change the marketing approach of manufacturers to focus more on non-alcoholic drinks for people who prioritize productivity, or if Sober Curious has become more familiar, people's lifestyles could change and we might see non-alcoholic bars more than before. As for the cultural change, Sober Curious could sway the importance of drinking party (飲み会) or people who pay attention to “type of drinks” of other people might have better image than those who pay attention to “amount of drink" of other people. Besides, as a person who cannot drink alcohol due to a health problem, this prevents me from being the one who is able to choose this Sober Curious lifestyle in the first place. In other words, I could not understand the idea of people who choose to stop drinking even though they can drink in general. Therefore, I am interested in this Sober Curious phenomenon in Japan. This study will focus on the Sober Curious phenomenon among 20s (mainly university students) since they are going to be the next target consumers and there are many surveys revealed that many Japanese 20s are shying away from alcohol as follows.

Kuga (2020) has researched about Japanese drinking behavior and referred to statistics which prove that Sober Curious in Japan is increasing consecutively. Comparing the number of people drinking in 20s between 1997 and 2017, the men's ratio in 2017 has decreased approximately half while the female's ratio has decreased about 3 times than 20 years before. Furthermore, the research also revealed that in 2017 teenagers who choose not to drink, cannot drink and rarely drink alcohol have reached more than 50% in total. This statistic proves that the development of the Sober Curious phenomenon in Japan is increasing consequently. However, the statistic was conducted in 2019 and was not able to be carried on since then due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Reidy (2022) indicated that Japan's tax revenue from alcohol has been falling for years in Japan as the younger generation are getting away from the hard-drinking habits, and the number of izakaya pub-style restaurants has dropped 23% before the pandemic. Additionally, Cursino (2022) has reported about the "Sake Viva!" campaign which is a campaign that is working on encouraging people to drink more alcohol in order to boost the alcohol industry due to the decline of alcohol tax revenue. These two articles reflect that Sober Curious is something more than a lifestyle because it could have a large impact economically. Nevertheless, Japan does not ignore this phenomenon but they are attempting to encounter this issue.

Considering that the development of the Sober Curious trend is yet to be proved in these recent years, this study is aimed at clarifying whether the Sober Curious tendency is as popular among 20s as the statistic mentioned above or not. Also, the objective of this study is to grasp awareness and values of the 20s generation through their aspects toward alcohol assumption and Japan drinking culture. Besides, this study is expected to use the results for interpretation and analysis about cultural changes in Japan by comparing perspectives from 20s and elders aged 30-79 years. Lastly, this study is expected to contribute some useful information such as hints for future challenges of manufacturers, or even inspire ground-breaking business ideas in order to respond to this group of target customers, too.

As for the hypothesis, it is expected that many Japanese aged 20s are likely to be Sober Curious without knowing about the term itself, but the study results will still show that which kind of social values do the 20s give precedence to. Considering the information from blogs and social media in general, presumably the reason that 20s are starting to shy away from alcohol is because they are concerned about their health, taste, hangover, and money. Also, there are many alternatives for drinks, socialization, and ways of stress relieving these days, so 20s might not notice the significance of alcohol as much as elders.

In order to gather information, this study has utilized a survey which was conducted in an online format (Google Form) with 2+10 questions; 12 questions in total. 2 questions are for personal information and another 10 questions are conveyed for research purposes. There are 2 types of answers provided between multiple choice questions and short answer questions. As for the personal questions, the survey has conveyed 1 multiple choice question for the age section and another 1 short answer question for the gender section. In the age section, the answers are divided into 20-29, 30-39 until 70-79 range. Whereas in the gender section, the answer is provided in free-form. As for the second part, there are 7 multiple choice questions and 3 short answer questions for the part that is expected to collect information about awareness about Sober Curious, alcohol assumption, experience on a drinking party (飲み会), and opinion towards drinking. The survey was delivered in Japanese language. The question lists are the following below:

(1) Have you ever heard the term “Sober Curious” before? (2) Do you usually drink alcohol? (3) On what occasions do you drink? (4) Has your drinking frequency changed due to the Coronavirus pandemic? (5) Why do you drink? (6) How do you feel about those who do not drink? (7) Why do you not drink or avoid drinking? (8) What is your impression towards non-alcoholic drinks? (9) As a person who does not drink, have you experienced any problems or concerns so far? (e.g., difficulties in relationship or work problems) (10) What advantages or disadvantages do you see regarding alcohol consumption? Lastly, an additional free-form question for people who have other questions or opinions towards the Sober Curious or survey will be provided.

From these questions given, respondents will be divided into 2 groups in terms of ages; 20-29 will be considered as one group which they are the main target for this survey, and people whose age are above 30 will be considered as another one group. Besides, respondents will be divided into 3 groups in terms of their drinking behavior that they answered to question (2) as mentioned above. The choices of this question are: (1) I usually drink (2) I sometimes drink (3) I’m avoiding drinking (4) I do not drink (5) I cannot drink. In this question, there is an instruction given in each choice of which question they should continue to answer. For people who answered I usually drink and I sometimes drink (choice 1,2), they will be instructed to continue question (3). If respondents answer I'm avoiding drinking and I do not drink (choice 3,4), they will be assigned to start answering the questions from question (7) to answer about their reasons why they choose to avoid or not drink the alcohol. In case the respondents answered that they cannot drink alcohol (choice 5), they will be asked to skip to question (9) and answer about their difficulties or hardships they had experienced by being a non-drinker. Concisely, as the questions and options that have been given, respondents will be divided into terms of ages first, then their drinking behavior will be considered accordingly.

This survey was conveyed from 2023, January 4th to 2023, January 20th and has got 48 responses in total. From the total responses, there are 24 respondents that are in the 20-29 age range and another 24 respondents are in the 30-79 age range. After the survey was published, it was mainly shared to people in many ages and many areas such as Okayama, Onomichi, and Tokyo. So, this study is aimed to research the Sober Curious phenomenon and Japanese alcohol assumption overall, not at specific area level. Besides, the results will be reported in the 20s and the elders (30 years old and above) in order.

In the 20s group, this research finds that none of them have ever heard the term Sober Curious before. From 24 responses, 5 (20.8%) of them usually drink, 16 (66.7%) of them drink sometimes and 3 (12.5%) of them do not drink at all. As for the occasion, 70.83% said that they drink with their friends most, and 41.67% answered that they drink with their family or drink alone. Also, it is found that the frequency of alcohol assumption in 20s has not changed significantly due to Coronavirus pandemic in which 14 (73.1%) of them said that COVID-19 has no effect to their drinking behavior at all, 1 (5.3%) of them said they have drink more during the pandemic, and 4 (21.1%) of them said that they have drink less than before. For the reason of drinking, most of them answered that they drink in order to maintain or develop their relationship, or they drink because the environment encourages them to drink. In other words, most of the 20s drink for socializing purpose. Then the taste, and stress relieving are the second and third reason consequently. Furthermore, the other reasons are because drinking is enjoyable, one of them likes to craft alcohol infused fruit personally, and another one of them answered that they could be separated from their parents by drinking. Next, question (6) has asked about respondents' impression towards people who do not drink, and most of them answered (1) no opinion and (2) everyone has their own choice or will; personal option. The other opinions are "I think it is respectful", "I feel them", "I think they do not have to force themselves", and "I cannot believe there are such people".

On the other hand, non-drinker and people who avoid drinking in the 20s have answered that they do not drink because alcoholic drinks are not tasty for them and this reason has the highest answer among all the choices given. Next, they tend to avoid drinking in order to maintain their health as healthy as possible, some of them answer that they do not drink because they can save money, and because some of them were on a diet. The other answer is because they do not have any reason to drink. For question (8) that mentioned about interest in non-alcoholic drinks among the 20s, the result turned out that most of them who have tried non-alcoholic drinks like non-alcoholic drinks, while those who have not tried yet are not interested in non-alcoholic drinks. Most people in the 20s never experienced any hardships or difficulties being non-drinker, but one of them answered that “I have experienced enough to make me get jealous of people who are able to drink”.

For the advantages of alcohol assumption through the 20s aspect, there are many short-written answers since it was delivered by free-form, so the answers that are going to be presented are the categorized one, and the answers are the following: (1) It makes me feel like I am a grownup (2) The communication will get smoother, it cheers up the atmosphere. (3) Nice way for refreshment and changing pace of mood (4) I can talk honestly (5) Good for stress relieving (6) It broadens my social environment (7) It makes me sleep better. On the contrary, disadvantages of alcohol assumption through the 20s aspect are: (1) It is bad for your health (2) It makes you become unreasonable and may cause accidents or troubles to others. (3) It makes you become upset due to a hangover (4) It makes you unable to drive (5) I will spit out my thoughts unintentionally (6) Makes me fat (7) It worsens sleeping quality (8) It costs money.

Besides, the other opinions of 20s towards alcohol are the following: (1) Drinking party itself may has an advantage to connect people, but I do not think it has to be always held with alcoholic drinks. (2) There is not much advantage when it comes to alcohol, the only impression I got is that you will get dizzy after you drink. (3) I hope there is a drinking party for people who cannot drink (4) I became an adult during the COVID-19 pandemic so I feel no change of my drinking behavior before and after the pandemic.

In elders (30 years old and above), this research finds that 1 of them knows the Sober Curious term, and 2 of them have heard the term before. From 24 responses, 8 (33.3%) of them usually drink, 9 (37.5%) of them drink sometimes, 2 (8.3%) of them are avoiding from drinking, 3 (12.5%) of them do not drink at all, and 2 (8.3%) of them cannot drink. As for the occasion, 50% said that they drink with their friends, 37.5% drink with their family, 4.17% drink with their colleagues and 54.17% answered that they drink alone. Also, it is found that the frequency of alcohol assumption in the elders has changed significantly due to Coronavirus pandemic in which 10 (50%) of them have drink less during the pandemic, 8 (40%) of them said that COVID-19 has no effect to their drinking behavior at all, and 2 (10%) of them said they have drink more during the pandemic. For the reason of drinking, most of them answered that they drink because it is tasty, enjoyable and because they like it. The other reasons are they drink for socializing, stress relieving, and to promote their appetite. Next, for the question (6) most of them answered (1) no opinion (2) it is their choice (3) nice and (4) boring, they are bad at socializing.

On the contrary, non-drinker and people who avoid drinking in the elders group have answered that they do not drink because they concern about their health, and there are many more ways to relieve stress rather than drinking. Also, drinking alcohol decreases your productivity. It turned out that 46.2% of the elders who have tried non-alcoholic drinks are not interested in it at all, whereas 38.5% of them like it and 15.4% said they never tried but they are not interested either. Some elders have experienced hardships of being non-drinker, and answered that it is difficult to socialize as non-drinker and some of them do not get invited to parties.

For the advantages of alcohol assumption through the elders aspect, they said that (1) It is enjoyable and it adds flavor to your life (2) It makes you get along with people easier (3) Good for stress relieving (4) It broaden your social environment (5) It could deepen a relationship (6) Good for your health if you drink in a right amount. On the contrary, disadvantages of alcohol assumption through the 20s aspect are: (1) It is bad for your health (2) It could harm a relationship if you drink too much (3) You will talk too much (4) It prevents me from driving, so I cannot go outside (5) Makes me sleepy (6) It worsens sleeping quality.

Besides, the other opinions of the elders towards alcohol are the following: (1) There was a time that I could not deny and end up drunk hard unintentionally (2) I'm glad to see that the culture of "hey, one more drink!" is changing (3) In Japan, the older the generation, prejudice like "You're a woman but you drink?" towards women is higher than men.(4) I feel that alcohol harassment is getting better these days and there are many times that people could deepen their relationship through alcohol, so it would be a little bit sad if the drinking culture gets completely denied.

In conclusion, compared to elders, 20s tend to drink alcohol because of socializing purpose rather than personal preference like the elders do, and they have concerns about tastes of alcohol. However, it turned out that most of the 20s respondents have a favorable image of non-alcoholic drinks. Unlike the elders, most of them do not struggle being non-drinker, so this could reflect that pressure or harassment that people in previous generation have experienced in drinking culture has diluted. Apparently COVID-19 does not affect their drinking behavior much. However, according to the survey, 20s have less awareness about Sober Curious compared to the elders and most of the 20s do not judge people who do not drink. According to the results, it is thought that 20s give precedence to socialization, health, and taste. Also, 20s also tend to give precedence to their appearance concerning their worry about their body, inappropriate behavior due to alcohol drinking, and some believe that alcohol has grown-up image and would make them look more mature. Despite the fact that the Sober Curious trend has been getting popular these recent years, this research has proved that there is also a group of 20s who are still communicating with alcohol as usual but just not as frequent as before and it can be assumed that Sober Curious trend might starting to broaden not only in younger people but also in the adults and the previous generation too.

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“Thirsty? Drinking Habits within Okayama City.”

Jennon McCurry Tracey

Summary
このエッセイでは、岡山県民の飲酒習慣を調査しています。
文献調査を行い、アルコール乱用の健康への影響、飲酒の動機、最もリスクの高い層、オーストラリアにおける若者の飲酒、治療によるアルコール依存症の治療について分析した。
フィールドワークはアンケート形式で行われ、岡山県民にアルコールと飲酒に関する一連の質問がなされた。
これらの結果を分析し、岡山県民や日本の人々の生活を向上させるための提案を行いました。

Introduction

Alcoholism and binge-drinking are issues that affect many members of Australian society. Considering efforts dating back to the 1890’s, evidently such issues have also been present within Japanese society for an extended period of time.
These issues affect not only physical and mental health, but also personal relationships. It is not necessary for a person to directly engage in these behaviours to be negatively affected, as the effects of the alcoholic are felt by those around them.

The exploration of this topic is important to me as at a personal level several members of my own family have been affected by alcoholism or the problem of binge drinking, including myself.
I would like to better understand the culture behind drinking within societies other than Australian, and the types of people that engage in these behaviours.
As I have spent the last six months as a resident of Okayama City, the aim of my Research Project will be to investigate and examine the drinking habits of people within the local area of Okayama City.

It is my hope that I can analyse my findings and help find solutions which may benefit people affected by alcoholism. I hypothesize that there will be clearly demographics, for example gender and age-group, and motivations behind the consumption of alcohol in Okayama. By focusing on these greatest affected people, solutions may be suggested to help curb negative effects of alcoholism.

For example; feelings of loneliness or isolation which may serve for motivation to over-consume alcohol can be mitigated through increased efforts of social support, such as support groups or activity programs serving to reintegrate these individuals into the community. Education of younger generations in regards to the dangers over-consumption of alcohol may have the potential to curb rising instances of alcoholism as they transition from adolescence into adulthood.

Through my research I intend to attain a better understanding of the demographics and motivations behind consumption of alcohol for residents of Okayama, and pinpoint potential deep-seated issues which may cause harm to the community. It is my intention utilise my research in order to contribute toward the local Okayama community, and facilitate a healthier future for coming generations.

Literature Review

The sources gathered for the Literature Review were investigated with the intention to identify leading demographics, reasons for, problems and actions taken related to overconsumption of alcohol. Dorrian (et al. 2014), Ilomäki (et al. 2013), and Willsher (2010) formulate their research upon members of Australian society, while Saito (2014) is exclusively focussed on Japanese society. Freed (2021) is based on society within the United States, but can have its identified methods applied for our purposes.

Saito was a necessary source in understanding the history of alcohol and associated problems within Japan, and provided an extensive timeline of the actions taken within Japan to treat overconsumption of alcohol. With knowledge of the institutions capable of offering assistance to those who suffer from the ill-effects of overconsumption, advice can be given to members of the public

Dorrian was useful in identifying reasons for overconsumption, including circumstantial and environmental factors that contribute to such behaviour. Drinking behaviour such as binge drinking is observed, tied closely with work routine. Individuals who experience these factors are likely to fit the leading demographic that overconsume alcohol.

Ilomäki further defines the leading demographic, identifying ageing men as the leading individuals suffering from overconsumption of alcohol. More reasons for sustained drinking are identified, culminating in overconsumption being linked with numerous forms of cancer and motor accident fatalities.

A recommended number of standard drinks per day, two, was identified as the safest form of drinking.

Willsher identifies drinking habits among Australian youths are extreme compared to most other countries in the world, and recognises the long-term habits that can form if not treated early. Youths affected by overconsumption are beginning to take a toll on an already stretched Australian health system, and are not responding to health education as effectively as expected.

Rather than formal education, which is seen as overwhelming to youths, the idea of health promotion is given as a solution to treat the problem. It is far easier to treat the problem before it becomes entrenched.

Consumption of alcohol is identified as a marker of development among youths transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, and instead of an authoritarian it is more beneficial to offer health facts and encourage healthy choices to elicit results.

Freed analyses 'gamma alcoholics', and shows that there are positive effects experienced by alcoholics who undergo therapy and education related to the overconsumption of alcohol. These positives may last between one to two years, and therapy and education are best renewed periodically to guarantee ongoing effect.

As total abstinence is not always possible for alcoholics, controlled drinking is used as a method of promoting healthier practices.

Dorrian (et al. 2014), 'Alcohol use in shift workers'

According to Dorrian et al., Australian shiftworkers may use alcohol as a tool to help them regulate their sleep cycles in order to maintain an irregular work routine. Shiftworkers were also demonstrated to be less likely to drink more than the average 8:00am – 6:00pm worker, but more likely to binge drink when consuming alcohol. In particular, young males working long rotating shifts are the most likely to binge drink.

This source is useful as binge drinking is defined within the text as "heavy periods of drinking followed by abstinence"; a definition to be used as a guideline for interpreting results. A particular outstanding statistic drawn from this article is that nearly one third of participants reported consuming 12 or more drinks within 24 hours. I believe it would be a good choice to include a question in my survey to derive a similar figure from my participants to be compared with the figure from the article.

Freed (2021), 'The Natural History of Alcoholism: Causes, Patterns, and Paths to Recovery - the virtues of an interdisciplinary perspective of alcoholism and alcoholism recovery'

Freed (2021) draws attention to findings of Sobell & Sobell (1973), in which the term 'gamma alcoholics' are defined as men "who were trained in and encouraged to practice controlled drinking". These gamma alcoholics were shown to experience many positive benefits relating to their health and well-being approximately one year after receiving therapy and education to help them control their drinking. Even two years after their education, the gamma alcoholics were still shown to demonstrate a trend of improvement.

Controlled drinking is offered as an alternative to total abstinence, however it is stressed that this alternative is certainly not viable to all alcoholics, and should not be offered as a blanket solution to the problem of alcoholism.

This article supports my hypothesis that education can potentially be used as tool to combat alcoholism. In fact this finding goes beyond my hypothesis, as it applies to individuals who are currently alcoholics rather than only adolescents who are at the cusp of their introduction to consumption of alcohol.

It is important to note however that Sobell & Sobell were criticized by Pendery (et al. 1982), who demonstrated through their own study that there was no evidence to suggest that gamma alcoholics retained their controlled drinking skills after ten years. It could be theorized that rather than therapy and education as a once-off are not enough to guarantee continued control, and must be periodically renewed to give the best chance of success.

Ilomäki (et al. 2013), 'Alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking among community-dwelling older Australian men: The Concord Health and Ageing in Men Project'

Ilomäki et al. conducted a study relating to alcohol and tobacco consumption among men loving in a local community, aged under 70 years. 19.2% reported heavy or excessive drinking, 33.7% drank daily, and 14.1% reported binge drinking.

Daily drinking was associated with chronic pain, and binge drinking was associated with anxiety and being widowed.

Alcohol was also identified as the cause of 51% of all larynx cancers, 46% of all oesophageal cancers, 39% of all liver cancers, and 39% of all oral cancers in Australian men. It was also implicated in 30% of all motor accident deaths.

Men were advised to limit their alcohol consumption to two standard drinks per day, and to have alcohol free days also.

The statistics taken from this article are truly frightening, and serve as more than enough reason to encourage safer drinking habits. Reasons were given for daily and binge drinking, which could be included in the survey to participants in an attempt to glean whether these problems are also related to drinking in Okayama residents.

OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY

Another useful piece of information is the recommended amount of standard drinks per day as a guideline to a healthier relationship with alcohol and its consumption.

Saito (2014), PL4 THE HISTORY OF ALCOHOLISM TREATMENT IN JAPAN'

Saito details the history of Japanese response to the problem of alcoholism, beginning with the formation of the temperance unions in the 1890's, and stalling at the establishment of The Japan Temperence in 1898.

It took until 1953 for the next development in the movement, when The Tokyo Restarting Life Sobriety Club was created and established as a temperance union. A collective of educated supporters were inspired by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to create another temperance union in 1958, The Kouchi Restarting Life Sobriety Club. These two collectives merged into a new organization in 1963, and were renamed The Japan Sobriety Federation. During the same year psychiatric treatment specializing in in alcoholism at the Kurihama National Hospital, followed by the development of community-based care for alcoholics in Osaka 1966.

The first official AA meeting took place in Tokyo, 1975. In 1976 the Kurihama National Hospital began to offer a training course for psychiatrists in treatment for alcoholics. Such training courses are open for non-physician medical providers.

During the 1970's many more local medical centres followed suite in regards to treatment for alcoholics. In present day these smaller organizations have merged into one large organization, the Japanese Society for Alcohol Related Problems.

Although a short article compared to the others, Saito's piece acts as a comprehensive list of events starting from the beginning of Japan's response to alcoholism right through to the modern day. Most useful is the knowledge of training courses offered to non-physician medical providers. This fits the hypothesis that education may be a major key in managing the problem of alcoholism. Such courses may be offered to non-medical personnel in order to boost the number of individuals qualified to treat alcoholism.

Willsher (2010), 'Overcoming mixed messages on alcohol consumption: A teaching strategy'

Willsher focuses on the tool of 'health promotion' as opposed to health education in regard to the education of Australian youths. The rate of alcohol consumption among youths in Australia is extreme compared to most other countries in the world and is an issue that is beginning to take its toll on the Australian health system, in addition to planting the seed for deep-seated physical and mental ailments for the future generations.

Current efforts may be seen by youths as overwhelming, and therefore have the opposite of their intended effects to educate and protect. Instead youths must be left to their own devices and offered brief interventions every now and then to maximise effectiveness of education. Other than education, other factors contribute largely to the situation such as abundance of and ease of access to alcohol.

Present education efforts are seen by most members of Australian society as authoritarian in nature, and are therefore not well received by the community. As an alternative, Willsher suggests health promotion; education that takes into account the role of alcohol in Australian society and its relationship within human development and behaviour. Health promotion is a holistic approach that seeks to help the individual and greater community understand the complexities of human behaviour and allow them to tackle environmental and social issues that affect mental and physical health. It is intended to be an ongoing method.

This article brings forth more evidence to support the education hypothesis suggested, and also supports the notion mentioned in the summary of Source 2; that efforts must be periodically renewed in order to better guarantee continued periods of effective drinking control.

This is the only source to directly address the holistic element of alcoholism, and to encourage an approach that is not purely based on physical health concern. It also takes into account the role of the community in its offered solution, and acknowledges that the issue of alcoholism and over-drinking is more complicated as it is intertwined with other environmental and social issues. A brilliant point is made in that youths learn in part through interaction with their peers, and also in part from observing their adults. This issue must be considered from the point of both demographics to be truly effective.

Methodology

An anonymous survey format was chosen as the preferred research method for gathering information from Okayama residents (see Appendix).

The reason for this choice is the belief that it will be the most accurate practice for gaining honest data for analysis. Questions were kept purposefully closed to yes or no answers, with the option for participants to expand if they choose, in order to preserve as much dignity for participants as possible without compromising their identities.

Questions were chosen with the intention of gathering relevant data based on the problems identified within the literature review, and to clearly define the main demographics of the local Okayama area.

All questions were asked in English as well as Japanese. There are some differences in the phrasing between English and Japanese; this is due to the respect and care needed when asking questions to strangers, especially elders, in Japanese culture. My Japanese room-mate assisted with translation, and was relied upon for advice in phrasing questions to be less invasive for the participants.

The intention of the survey was to be able to glean a glimpse into the leading demographics within Okayama for drinking, and their motivations behind their actions. Interpreting this data, problem trends were identified and methods for curbing observed trends were suggested.

Results

A myriad of information was discovered from the results of the surveys issued.

There were 15 total participants, of which 5 were male and 10 were female.

All participants were employed; 8 full time and 7 part time.

Most participants were aged between 20-30 years old, comprising 7/15 of total participants. 2/15 were aged 30-40 years old, 3/15 aged 40-50 years old, 2/15 aged 50-60 years old, and 1/15 aged 60-70+ years old.

Of the 15 participants, 9 drank alcohol, 6 did not drink alcohol, and 1 participant had never drank alcohol.

Males were reported to consume between 4-10 drinks per session, with females consuming between 1-5.

11/15 participants had their first drink at age 20, the legal age within Japan. 3 other participants reported their first drink at a different age, with 1 at age 16 and 2 at age 18.

All participants reported that they drink alcohol while happy, with 4/9 drinking when they feel sad. 1/9 participants drink to help them sleep at night. 4/9 participants reported drinking 1-2 times per week, and 3 participants reported drinking daily.

0 participants reported drinking to cope with chronic pain or past trauma. 0 participants also reported ever having sought help for their drinking problems, despite 3/15 participants reporting relationship problems arising from alcohol abuse, and 2/15 reporting health problems arising from overconsumption of alcohol. 3/15 participants reported that they had quit drinking at least once before.

Only 2/15 participants had heard of the Japan Sobriety Federation

5/9 participants reported drinking with friends, 3/9 did not drink with friends at all, and 1/9 drank only with family. 6/9 participants reported drinking alone. 2/6 participants report going out with friends who drink, but choose not to partake themselves.

OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY

Discussion

Following the survey, it is obvious that the participant sample size is not sufficient to identify a leading demographic within Okayama. However this does not necessarily mean that the results are useless, and may still be sued to understand some of the motivations behind drinking within the local area.

Despite relationship and health issues reported, no participants had ever sought outside help for these issues. This could be due to sociocultural factors limiting the willingness of participants to open up their private lives to outside influences or potential judgement.

There was found to be a severe lack of awareness for organisations such as the Japan Sobriety Federation, which is surprising considering their extensive history within Japan.

Anecdotal evidence gained from conversation with participants suggests University and work stress to be motivations for drinking.

Number of non-drinking participants suggests sense of normalcy for sobriety. This could signal that the practice of nomikai within the workplace could be a thing of the past within the near future.

Based on the results of the survey, and analysed through the lens of the sources listed, males are most at risk of health issues stemming from overconsumption of alcohol. This may manifest in the form of physical maladies such as cancer, in addition to relationship issues between family members and romantic partners.

Conclusion

The results of the surveys gathered suggest that it is equally as socially acceptable to drink or refrain from drinking alcohol in Okayama. Main contributing factors for motivations behind drinking are work and University related stress.

Stress management techniques may help curb overconsumption of alcohol as a results of work and University stress, and lead to a reduction of health issues relating to alcohol abuse.

The Japanese Government has a necessity to re-evaluate their position on use of alcohol to be in line with what Japanese society desires. Rather than promotion of alcohol use among young generations, instead the government should promote awareness of organisations that can provide assistance and information relating to alcoholism such as the Japan Sobriety Federation.

In its current state, the government is sacrificing the health of their people in the pursuit of profit from the sale of alcohol. The money gained through the rigorous promotion of alcohol is coming at the cost of the safety of the Japanese public.

Perhaps the alcohol industry within Japan could branch out and explore alternative options to generate revenue, such as creation of products from alcohol (hand sanitisers and perfumes, for example). International markets could be more easily accessed by negotiating with international governments to implement better reciprocal alcohol taxes when exporting alcohol.

Information programs and counselling services to provide advice to young Japanese may lead to more supported and educated future generations, reducing the likelihood of unsafe consumption practices in older age. This could also lead to a more healthy future population and ensure longevity of the public. Males between the age of 18-50 should especially be targeted by such campaigns, as they are most at risk of health issues resulting from overconsumption of alcohol.

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OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY

Appendix
Survey for Okayama Residents:

1. What is your age?
現在おいくつでしょうか？
□20-30 歳□30-40 歳 □40-50 歳 □50-60 歳 □60-70+歳
2. What is your gender?
貴方の性別はなんでしょうか？
□男 □女
3. Are you currently employed?
現在の職業何でしょうか？
4. Do you drink alcohol?
お酒飲まれますか？
5. How many times do you drink alcohol per week?
週に何回飲酒しますか？
6. Do you usually consume more than one drink per session? Approximately how many do you have?
飲みに行く時一杯以上飲みますか？もし、はいなら何杯ぐらいのみますか？
7. Do you drink alcohol when you are feeling happy?
嬉しい時飲酒しますか？
8. Do you drink alcohol when you are feeling sad?
悲しい時飲酒しますか？
9. Do you drink alcohol to help you sleep?
寝るためにアルコールを摂取しますか？
10. Do you drink alcohol to cope with chronic pain?
お酒を鎮痛剤として使っていますか？
11. Do you often consume more than 12 drinks in a 24 hour period?
一日の間 12 杯（日本酒、ワイン、ショット、焼酎など）
12. Do you drink alcohol to cope with past trauma?
過去のトラウマの問題を対処するためアルコールを摂取しますか？
13. Have you ever heard of The Japan Sobriety Federation?
（全日本断酒連盟）を聞いたことありますか？
14. At what age did you first begin drinking alcohol?
初めて飲酒したのはいくつのときですか？
15. Have you ever quit drinking alcohol before?
断酒をしたことありますでしょうか？
16. Have your personal relationships ever suffered due to overconsumption of alcohol?
過度の飲酒することで家族や親しい関係に迷惑や危害を与えたことがありますか？
17. Do you suffer from any health problems due to overconsumption of alcohol?
過度な飲酒による健康問題ありますか？
18. Have you ever received support to help change your drinking habits?
アルコール関連の問題で誰かに相談したことありますか？
19. Do you often drink alone?
よくひとりで飲んだりしますか？
20. Do you often drink with friends?
よく友達と飲みますか？

ご協力ありがとうございました。

Okayama University Students Experiencing Loneliness Comparison
岡山大学生が経験した孤独感

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Abstract:

この論文では、岡山大学の学生における孤独感の結果について述べている。Qualtrics というツールを使って、84 人の岡山の学生をサンプリングし、アンケートを実施しました。岡山大学の学生 84 名は、全体として、現在、孤独感を感じている可能性経験は低いことがわかった。もうひとつは、COVID-19 の流行が始まった 2020 年 3 月に、岡山大学の学生がで孤独感経験を感じる可能性が低いという結果です。同じ結果であっても、COVID-19 のパンデミックアウトカムでは、「もっと孤独感感じ」に近いスコアとなりました。この結果を受けて、San Jose State University の学生が経験する孤独感との比較を行いました。

Introduction

The topic of my EPOK research project is student loneliness. The theme surrounds mental health and student wellness. Specifically focusing on Japanese Okayama University students. Although the main point of this research project is to focus on student loneliness, it is possible that the mental health illness, depression, may be brought up as a subject. The time range of this research project is the beginning of COVID-19 era (the forced lockdown) and present time. To see the difference in students that have experienced loneliness, during lock down and present time. The intent of this study was to initially discover if burnout led to the result of loneliness. Okayama University students were the main demographic in disclosing the outcome of the research question. However, the question took a pivot when discussing the contents of the topic with my assigned advisor. Realizing that I took part in a research report about loneliness experience at San Jose State University. Directing the same research project would evoke the question if students at Okayama University had similar results in experience in loneliness like San Jose State University students. Thus, a comparison research project in experiencing loneliness was organized. Outlining the characteristics of the project, finding scientific papers about general Japanese society was one of them. Another was studying about the mental health and wellness practices in Japanese society and how the nation utilizes them to their own people. When answering the scientific question, “What is the distribution of students that experience loneliness during COVID-19 shutdown vs. present time?" A measurement tool must be applied. The Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool was used throughout the project. This tool consisted of 3 questions which produced the most reliable information on people's experience in loneliness. The tool is a scoring type of measurement where after an individual completes all the questions, a number identifies if the person has felt least lonely to most lonely. Using the same measurement back at San Jose State University, I compared the results that I got here at Okayama University. Generally, college students go through a lot of stresses, which can take effect in their mental health. These stresses can contribute to the idea of experiencing loneliness, making the feeling inevitable because being a college student is difficult. COVID-19 can be a factor as to why the increase of negative mental health affects had risen.

Literature Review

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact. Social isolation is a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated (CDC, 2021). The definition that the CDC writes on the website was towards elderly and although it is recognized that most can feel lonely because the experience that elderly people are put through like entering retirement homes or forgotten by family members. The definition can be applied to college students as well. College is a transition for students to start adulthood, moving away from home or even staying at home and not being able to join extra activities. The feeling of loneliness is inevitable for college students. Those that are not involved with school activity can suffer from the feeling and experience of loneliness. Especially during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. "COVID-19 erupted in 2020, quarantines, social distancing, and stay-at-home orders exacerbated the baseline level of loneliness. Through the pandemic in the US, the sense of isolation has fluctuated" (Goldstein, 2021). Because of this being able to socialize normally was minimized. Students were forced to be alone to stop the spread of COVID-19. Goldstein emphasizes that the effects of the pandemic will be difficult for Americans to return to 'normal,' insinuating that there was a change in behaviour and many experiencing loneliness. In the same article Goldstein discloses, according to the American Psychological Association, "While loneliness is not a medical or psychological diagnosis, it is strongly associated with behavioural health, physical maladies, and increased suicide rates" (Goldstein, 2021). This can be connected as to why Japan rates in suicide is generally prevalent. In a study called Loneliness in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic: Prevalence, correlates, and association with mental health. "In conclusion, this study has shown that a large number of Japanese individuals are feeling lonely during the COVID-19 pandemic, that loneliness is linked to socioeconomic disadvantage and that individuals who are lonely are more likely to have worse mental health" (Stickley and Ueda, 2021). Both conclude that it is possible that suicide can be linked to loneliness in Japan, however there is not enough research about interventions in reducing loneliness as well as other mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Another study was conducted in Germany at a university that examined the university students, "Even before COVID-19, students were exposed to multiple stressors during the emergent adulthood adapting to social and academic life" (Weber, M. et al. 2022). It is noted that college students faced a lot of hardships before COVID-19, so when the pandemic hit, some of the health of many students were worsened during the pandemic. "Health-related concerns during the pandemic were associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, and loneliness. Social stress due to the pandemic situation was associated with loneliness. The results imply that university students represent a risk group for psychosocial long-term ramifications of the pandemic" (Werner, A.M. et al. 2021). It can also be said that Loneliness was developed due to COVID-19 restrictions, for some students who already were showing signs of mental health related concerns, loneliness worsened students health. "College students conducted after March 2020 have repeatedly suggested that psychological distress among college students has increased" (CCMH, 2022). This is due to the regulations and outburst of news about COVID-19 because there were not a lot of information about the disease it caused many to become stress. This indicates the start of the mental health concerns in college students to increase and the beginning of feeling loneliness. Continuing from Penn State impact on college student mental health, "Students who report this general negative mental health affect from the pandemic are suffering at much higher rates in almost all major areas of their lives, including distress levels" (CCMH, 2022). This shows how there might be others in need of help that do not seek for help. Penn state also mentions that there are many ways that disrupts ones' mental health and the pandemic had increased the levels of reactions.

Methods

For the methodology, my goal was to have the same sample size as my SJSU research project which was 180 participants. For the Okayama project, I was able to get 84 Okayama university students to participate. I know I wanted to make a comparison, however because of the size of my sample, it would be difficult to make a comparison. Not only that, but there are also bias within the project. The questions consisted of 1. I am content with my friendships and relationships 2. I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time 3. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be. I asked these questions twice in a survey using Qualtrics, identifying during COVID-19 shutdown, March 2020. As well as, during present time. In total 6 questions. In Qualtrics I was able to translate these questions in

Japanese. My participants were going to be Japanese students only and not involve international students. However, the survey was offered in English as well. For the outreach of the survey, I had asked my EPOK buddy to share a QR code and a link to the survey in her class. I also shared the link with my assigned advisor and was able to get more participants. Throughout the project, I measured the experience of loneliness using the Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool, and gender, age, and grade. Earlier, I mentioned bias within this project, because half of the questions in the survey is based in the past. All the participants must remember if they felt a certain way back in time in their life. That can cause inaccuracy because it is talking about the past. Comparing the two university results, I concluded to make all 84 students as one and 180 students as one. The outcome of this approach would be worded as an example, “84 students as a whole…” etc. When creating the survey, I wanted to make sure that the survey was inclusive to all. When asked about gender, I included woman, man, transgender, non-binary/non-conforming, and prefer not to respond. As written above, asking all 3 of the questions together produces the most reliable information on people’s experiences of loneliness. The length of the measurement tool was 3 questions, the language was positive wording, and does not mention loneliness. I used this tool rather than another tool because it was a short and sensitively worded that is easy to use. Not only that, to score the results was simple to do and easy to explain. Although Qualtrics calculates different data, I can use that data for other usage or answering other questions within the project. Since this was an online survey, there was no in person contact that was involved. In person contact was only present in the research project only to share the link with others to take the survey. When sending this survey off to the participants it was mentioned that this was a research project on mental health and that those who participate in the health survey would come out to being anonymous. While analysing the results, there would be a few of participants that do not finish the survey, because of this I had to delete those trials so it would not create an inaccurate statistic. In Qualtrics there is an option to close the survey which stops anyone who has the link to my survey to not be able to have access to taking it. I have concluded that I want to keep the survey from closing because I do intend to have more people take it so I can have more results. I at least want to have 180 Japanese Okayama students to part take in my mental health survey. An extra comment to add is when conducting my research back in the States, there was one more factor that was included in the research project. The factor was questioning participants if they were taking all online classes, in-person, and mix classes. Adding the factor to Okayama research would make no significant different in the result.

Results and Analysis

Again, the total of participants is 84 Okayama University students. When measuring Grade there was 25.68% that were 1st years. 2nd years was 10.81%, 3rd years was 16.22%, 4th

years was 43.24%, and lastly 5th years and above was 4.05%. Measuring Gender there was 77.33% that were women, 18.67% were men, 1.33% Transgender, and 0% Non-binary/non-conforming, and 2.67% preferred not to answer. Measuring age there was 94.67% that were between the ages of 18-24, for ages 25-39+ it was 5.33%. For answering the 1st question which was, I am content with my friendships and relationships. Strongly Disagree 0%, Disagree 3.45%, Neutral 13.79%, Agree 48.28%, strongly agree 34.48%. Majority of the 84 participants had agreed that as of now, they are content with their friendships and relationships. 2nd question, I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time. Strongly Disagree 0%, Disagree 5.17%, Neutral 12.07%, Agree 39.66%, Strongly Agree 43.10%. Again, as a whole, 84 students at Okayama University have enough people, they feel comfortable asking for help at any time. Last question, my relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be. Strongly Disagree 0%, Disagree 8.33%, Neutral 15%, Agree 36.67%, Strongly Agree 40%. To score and interpret the results, the responses which are, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree all have points. Strongly disagree equals 4 points, disagree equals 3, neutral equals 2, agree equals 1, and strongly agree equals 0. The score for each individual question needs to be added together. This then gives a possible range of scores from 0 to 12 which can be read as:

least lonely 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 most lonely

In this case we are counting 84 of the participants as one human being and summarizing what the majority of individuals had selected in the responses. With the first question, I am content with my friendships and relationships, scored a 1. The second question, I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time, scored a 0. Last question, my relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be, scored a 0. With the 3 scores, you add them together making the total being 1. Looking back at the least lonely to most lonely scale you can configure the results. 84 students at Okayama University, collectively was unlikely to be experiencing any sense of loneliness at this present time.

Now to calculate during the COVID-19 shutdown, March 2020. First question, During the COVID-19 shutdown around March 2020, were you content with your friendships and relationship? Strong Disagree 4.84%, Disagree 20.97%, Neutral 24.19%, Agree 30.65%, Strongly Agree 19.35%. Second question, During the COVID-19 shutdown around March 2020, did you have enough people where you felt comfortable asking for help at any time? The results, Strongly Disagree 1.61%, Disagree 16.13%, Neutral 11.29%, Agree 45.16% Strongly Agree 25.81%. Last question, During the COVID-19 shutdown around March 2020, were your relationships as satisfying as you would want them to be? Results are, Strongly Disagree 3.23%, Disagree 33.87%, Neutral 12.90%, Agree 33.87%, Strongly Agree 16.13%. Again, to score and interpret the results, the responses which are, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree all have points. Strongly disagree equals 4 points, disagree equals 3, neutral equals 2, agree equals 1, and strongly agree equals 0. The score for each individual question needs to be added together. After this, look at the possible range of scores from 0 to 12 like above. For the March 2020 results, for the first question, I am content with my friendships and relationships, scored a 1. Second question, I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time, scored a 2. Last question, my relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be, scored 3 or 1. The reason for this is because there was a tie between two responses. To add up all the scores the total is 5 or 3. 84 students at Okayama University, collectively was unlikely to experience any sense of loneliness during March 2020. Lastly, for SJSU results during the period of March 2020. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be, Strongly Disagree 45.45%, Disagree 32.73%, Neutral 40.50%, Agree 34.67%, Strongly Agree 16.46%. Secondly question, I am content with my friendships and relationships, Strongly Disagree 27.27%, Disagree 34.55%, Neutral 28.10%, Agree 35.77%, Strongly Agree 32.91%. Last question, I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time. Strongly Disagree 27.27%, Disagree 32.73%, Neutral 31.40%, Agree 20.56%, Strongly Agree 50.63%. I am content with my friendships and relationship scored a 1, I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time scored a 0, my relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be, scored a 4. Total is 5. 180 students at San Jose State University collectively were unlikely to experience any sense of loneliness during March 2020. Looking more in depth into the results both schools scored different on the second question, San Jose State University students felt more confident in asking for help at any time and having enough people. While Okayama University students had scored neutral. For the third question, Okayama University students had stated that they were half satisfied and half disagreed that their relationships were as satisfying as they would want them to be. San Jose State University students said that they completely disagreed in being satisfied. A different discussion like emotional connection differences within culture can be made because the results were significantly different. The campaign to end loneliness had mentioned, “someone with a score of 0 or 3 can be said to be unlikely to be experiencing any sense of loneliness, whereas anyone with a score of 10 or 12 is likely to be experiencing the most intense degree of loneliness. Scores in-between these two extremes are on a spectrum of feelings of loneliness; however, it is not possible to say that each point on the scale represents an equal increase or decrease in the degree of loneliness someone might be feeling” (The Campaign to End Loneliness, 2014). It can be said that just because both scored mostly towards least lonely, that the individuals did not ever feel lonely.

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Conclusion

Repeating the thesis, college students go through a lot of stresses, which can take effect in their mental health. These stresses can contribute to the idea of experiencing loneliness, making the feeling inevitable because being a college student is difficult. COVID-19 can be a factor as to why the increase of negative effects of mental health had risen. Looking into the results (present time) Okayama University students, had scored on the lower side which indicated least lonely. However, the score had went higher as the survey questioned the participants to remember back when COVID-19 had forced many to stay inside. Although both scores were on the lower end and imply least lonely. The campaign to end loneliness measurement tool affirms that individuals had never felt the feeling of loneliness. San Jose State University students had scored the same as Okayama university students dating back to March 2020. However, San Jose State University students affirmed feeling more confident in feeling comfortable asking for help at any time. While Okayama University students felt neutral. San Jose State University students had also portrayed that their relationships were not as satisfying as they would want them to be. While Okayama University students said 33.87% agreed and 33.87% disagreed. Students can fight loneliness by being more involved at their school and using their campus resources, as well as connecting with family members.

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English Learning in Japan
日本での英語学習

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要旨：本研究では、日本の英語早期教育に対する意識を調査した。Wilder.P（1959）の臨界期説では 2~13 歳の間で最も第二言語習得が進むといわれている。岡山大学の学生 15 人にアンケートを行った結果、5%の学生が中学校から英語学習を始めていた。そして約 70%の学生が臨界期説を知らなかったにもかかわらず、ほぼ全員が「早くから英語学習を始めたほうがよかった」と答えた。その理由は会話力、聴解力、発音に自信がないという回答がほとんどだった。

Summary: This research project, titled English Learning in Japan, focuses on the popular Japanese view on second language acquisition and learning as it stands in Japanese culture today. This includes general opinion on how and when a second language should be taught, how the Critical Language Hypothesis influences acquisition, and how these factors tie together in actual application. The method of which this research was completed was through a survey of Okayama University students who are learning English. 15 students sent their chosen and written responses in Japanese which were analyzed as they were before being translated and analyzed in English. The questions asked centered around the participant's history with English learning. Time began for learning English, the method of which they studied English, various scores on English tests, and various opinions of matters surrounding the English learning culture in Japan were gathered. Looking at everyone's response and how they correlate to other participants' results gave a clear pattern on association between the learner's score and opinion. There was also a consensus on various questions that dealt with the future of second language teaching in Japan. Overall, the results generally matched the previously expected result with a few outliers and surprising individual answers.

English and general foreign language learning is an important part of Japanese culture and early education that many have varying opinions on and want to learn from. It is quite a different culture than in western countries and the style in which second languages are taught. When in high school, I researched American opinion and statistics of second language learning. I was surprised to see how behind the American education system was with second language teaching and how few Americans truly felt they benefited from their language class of choice. When comparing those results to the rest of the world, it was disappointing to find that most other countries began second language teaching as early as five years old in their respective school systems while the U.S. did not. When I came to Japan, my interest was piqued once more about how the culture surrounding the similar topic of particularly English learning would differ here. It seemed to be quite different from America, as most began learning as early as middle school and kept with it until high school and beyond. For this reason, I wanted to survey Japanese people who were learning English at Okayama University to see just how different the reality of early second language learning is in Japan.

When it comes to previous outside research done on the topic of English learning in Japan, there are multiple studies that beg the same question on what exactly is occurring in the education system, and what would improve said system. One study, named *English Education in Japan - From Kindergarten to University* (2), touches on this complex topic. The research found in this study, which was done by Japanese researchers, found that the issue seemed to lay in the actual teaching method of English. Despite students being taught English for upwards of six years, the levels were not reflective of all that time spent studying. The scientists found that the university entrance examinations were a main part of the issue, as most students were only taking English classes to fulfill requirements and score higher on aforementioned examinations. It was all a matter of test scores, and the idea of more conversation based classes were not even an actual presented thought. The students ended up feeling a mere numerical obligation to English rather than any actual application of using it. This is partially due to lack of opportunity, but largely due to the intense pressure and focus many Japanese students face when thinking about high school and college entrance exams. If there were to be less pressure and more of a focus on actual conversation, perhaps the students would indeed be more engaged and passionate about learning English and the opportunities that could come along with it. Despite Japan indeed inciting these mandatory years of English learning unlike America, it seems that this can be somewhat fruitless unless actually focused on. In this study particularly, there was a push for and desire of starting English education as early as kindergarten instead of middle school or even elementary. They proposed that even something as simple as teaching the alphabet song in kindergarten instead of elementary to middle school as they typically do, could make a large impact on how Japanese students view alphabetized words and their pronunciation.

The worry is that starting the focus on letters late into education could be contributing to the issue of Japanese students wanting to pronounce English words with a more katakana based pronunciation. This isn't a dire or extreme issue, but is a problem that could have a simple solution. Although there are other factors, such as availability of good English teachers per the number of students that need them, overall Japan seems capable of this kind of change as the requirement is already there.

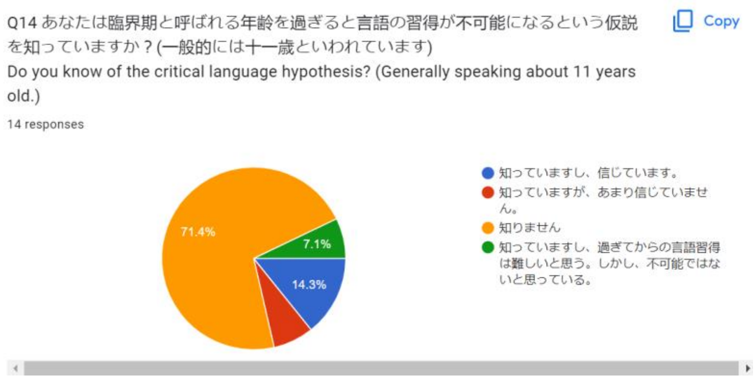
There have been attempts by the Japanese government itself to take a try at fixing the problems in the system. In 2013, The National University Reform Plan was announced (3). The plan aimed to reform universities while keeping their famed competitiveness, while also creating value based ideas and encouraging independent development. Selected universities received money to aim at improving economic rates. One of the main goals of this plan was to encourage globalization related feats. For example, they wanted to increase the amount of English courses themselves at these universities. There was also a focus on increasing communication and study abroad efforts between Japan and a select few, mainly English speaking, countries. The number of students who had chosen to study abroad in English speaking countries such as America had decreased from its peak in 2004 to being extremely low in the time the plan was enacted. The main reasons were a lack of English confidence and a fear that going abroad would affect their job hunting prospects. It seemed that despite the push for more English classes and more opportunities abroad, the core of the problem was not changing. The students' confidence in their own skills were greatly affecting the number of cross-cultural interactions, which was in turn affecting the education problem even more. Since this plan was enacted, the number of students learning earlier and being more interactive with English studies have increased by a small percentage, but there is still much room for improvement. Simply adding more funds and simply a plan for the students is one thing, but to actually affect how the students view their own English abilities and future in general, more major cultural reform must be implemented. In an ever growing global society, especially with the continued rise of interconnectedness through the internet and social media, there is much need for higher numbers in all of these departments.

From this research, it seems that despite Japan's early start in English, there is still much to be desired when it comes to the results of this education. When compared to America, though the rates of education based bilingualism are a bit higher, I was surprised to find that there wasn't as much difference as I had expected. I forgot to account for the fact that similar to the U.S., Japan is also largely a monolingual society

(4). In monolingual societies, the need for a second language nearly disappears, which highly discourages learners. In countries like those in Europe, where bilingualism rates can go as high as 80% (5), the society is much more of a globally connected landscape. This is mainly due to the fact that European countries are famously smaller and easier to travel between each other, but also due to the culture around cultural interconnectedness. For countries like the U.S. and Japan which are largely disconnected from other countries around them, it makes sense that the language culture is largely monolingual. In the U.S. however, which is far from a homogeneous society of people, the rise of bilingualism is rising mainly in the sense of Spanish as more speakers immigrate to the country. Although there is still a large push against this kind of education, and rates are staying somewhat the same, the culture around the idea is what is changing. The desire for English speaking students to be able to communicate with this quickly growing Spanish speaking population is rising as it does. Compared to Japan, which has more of a need for English based on tourism and simply English being the lingua franca (common language) because of colonization, this fact alone nearly counteracts the fact that language is taught earlier in school. Despite being first surprised by my research and results, due to the Critical Language Hypothesis and my previous study in America, as I started to dive deeper into the facts it began to make sense. I now find more articles about the fear of Japan falling behind in a growing international world landscape than I do about the English education system. This was a surprising twist in the research and results of my study.

When it came time to complete my research on this topic, the method in which I conducted the study was through the format of a survey. I created a survey on the Google Forms application and sent it out to as many Japanese English learners as possible. I began with those living in the International Shared House dormitory and spoke to those in a language cafe and the public. I also created posters which include the explanation of the survey and its QR code, which I handed out to possible participants. I also had the means of simply sending the link directly to participants through applications such as LINE. This survey covered basic demographic questions, such as age, gender, time began learning English, English test scores, and more. It also included multiple short answer opinion based questions, such as questioning how the participants felt the age they began affected their scores, what their opinions were on their English education, if they felt learning early was necessary, and more. The entire survey was in both Japanese and English to make sure that there were no communication boundaries. All of the results were received in Japanese, and therefore first analyzed as they were before also being translated and analyzed in English. Graphs were used as a means to gauge any strong correlation between answers as will be shown in further analysis. As a whole, the survey seemed to work well for this kind of research.

Before presenting the analysis of the results, I will elaborate on what exactly the Critical Language Hypothesis in which the research heavily relates to and mentions is. It is a theory that states that there is a period of time in one's life where full native competence in the target language is possible. The period ranges from early childhood to adolescence and has much impact on how society views language learning itself (1). While often discussed in teaching environments, it is not a universally accepted nor proven theory. However, it can greatly affect one's view on their own language learning ability and how it correlates to their age. It may motivate or discourage one from beginning to or continuing to study a language, which can have effects on the statistics of those learning certain languages. Even if one does not know that this theory scientifically and officially exists, it seems that it has a general vast cultural impact around the world on how the population views language itself. Because of this, it was important to factor this kind of belief into this research as it correlates to why or why not people feel the way they do about how the time when one begins learning a language affects their outcome in said language. Some may feel it affected them, while others feel it is their own motivation that affects their outcome the most. In America, it seemed as though many believed this theory and used it as an excuse to why a second language didn't need to be studied. They often felt as if it was too late, so there was no use in starting. I wanted to see how this compared to Japan as the language education system is vastly different, and what that meant for the students' confidence in English or the target language. Below is a portion of the survey where I asked if the students knew of this theory, and if so, what did they think?



From the graph, we can see that most students did not actually know about this theory. However, most of the students said that they agreed with the notion that learning earlier was more beneficial. This was largely due to the fact that they believed things like pronunciation would be more easily acquired, which is precisely what the actual theory aims to say. While actual ability to learn things like grammar and vocabulary stay relatively the same, skills like pronunciation somehow weaken over time. This does not make it impossible for students to learn at an older age, but simply means more effort will have to be put into the endeavor if one wants to become fluent. When looking at the rest of the results, it becomes clear that this way of thinking seems to impact the students and their opinions on the subject.

The results showed that the subjects mostly agreed that teaching English and teaching it early was a positive and helpful idea. However, there were surprising themes and unexpected answers that occurred over multiple submissions. For example, there was a large focus on the content of English classes. Which from outside research made sense, but from a strictly comparative point to America surprised me. Many felt as if the classes focused too much on correctness and grades, while they wanted to be focusing on actual conversation. They felt as if there weren't many chances to use English, so when classes weren't focused on speaking and communicating it was less helpful. While most agreed learning early was a good idea, many also agreed it wasn’t impossible to learn later and that motivation matters as well. There also seemed to be a trend in those who started learning earlier than middle school, that they felt the main area of their English that early learning affected was pronunciation. Those who began learning in middle school seemed to have a more expansive view on the process, saying that grammar is easier to understand at an older age while speaking naturally gets more difficult. However, each of them expressed that they wish they could have started learning earlier. Most thought that English allowed them to expand their cultural understanding and integrate themselves into the growing international society of the world, and for this reason that others should study as well. Overall, there were multiple instances of correlation between answers, even if unexpected and seemingly random. There was more of a focus on changing the system of how English is taught than the age of which it is taught, and more of an expression for things to change in order to help them to grow. The understanding of how language is connected to the world was impressive as well.

As we can see both from outside research and the research done in Okayama, although Japan’s system of teaching English at a relatively young age seems to encourage cross-cultural communication and motivate young learners to push their boundaries, there are also many parts of the system that students and the government feel could be improved. However, when strictly compared to American research and morale on the same topic, there seems to be much more of an air of positive thinking surrounding second language learning in general. This goes to prove that due to the immense cultural impact the Critical Language Hypothesis seems to have on societal confidence and motivation for language learning, starting at an earlier age in school does benefit a society no matter the other setbacks. Of course there is much nuance to all of these factors, studies, and research, but as a whole they all point to the same conclusion. Students everywhere want to be learning languages earlier in school, which is supported by science and even school systems. Despite this, the main issue to tackle next is the quality of said language classes, which ends up falling behind as only the age is debated and focused on. In conclusion, Japan's system of early English education seems to reap more benefits than America's system of late second language education, which proves multiple theories surrounding the Critical Language Hypothesis and childhood second language acquisition as a whole.

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English Second Language Acquisition & Writing Output for Japanese

OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY

Students
日本人学生の英語第二言語習得とライティング・アウトプット

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要旨：本研究は岡山大学の日本人学生の英語を書く能力に対する意識を明らかにすることを目的としました。18 人にアンケートを行ったところ、約 71%の学生が書くことに自信を持っていないことがわかりました。そして、ほぼ全員の学生が学校教育で書く練習をしていないこと、そして、その経験不足が原因だという意識があることが明らかになりました。本研究の結果から日本の英語教育は書く能力の育成に問題があり、改善すべきだと考えました。

Introduction

Second language acquisition, a major aspect of being a student in most countries; especially for countries in which English is not the de facto language. Given that English is the lingua franca of world trade and business, it is considered a valuable skill for many to acquire. Japan being a country interested in educating its citizens has increased the priority of English language acquisition steadily with time, with it being made into a compulsory subject for 5th grade elementary in 2011. [McCurry J. 2011]

The experience of learning English as Japanese students is often a difficult one. Fundamental differences in grammar and syntax, absence of articles, word-verb order and plurality among other aspects. These all compound together to create an imposing barrier to English learning students in Japan.

Thesis

As a student at York St. John University, I have been studying Japanese Language, English Linguistics and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) for 2 years prior to now. So, my academic interest is placed on this subject as an area to explore. With that, this project focuses specifically on written English in relevance to teaching, and comprehension in the education system. With preliminary investigation on the subject of student's perceived comprehension of English, I found the general consensus was that written application of English was one of the weaker areas of understanding due to less of a focus on the area in the education system and in testing, at least in free form essay type writing.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Japanese university students' perceived writing abilities in English and to determine if a lack of practice is contributing to lower comprehension in this area. And that a lack of time spent doing English writing tasks such as essays or free writing tasks contribute towards to the lower comprehension despite students expressing desire to improve or otherwise be as proficient at writing as other abilities in English comprehension.

Background

To establish some information relevant to this study I will provide summary on some concepts, input and output for one, in the context of language acquisition. Input representing reading and listening, that being the input of the language stimulus and understanding the meanings from them. Output represents speaking and the focus of this paper, writing.

To this end, Merrill Swain's (1991) theories on comprehensible output come to mind, in which he argues that "problems that arise while producing the second language (L2) can trigger cognitive processes that are involved in second language learning." In summary, she argues that the use of output based second language usage contributes considerably to the overall learning ability of the student, through encountering faults in their output and correcting it.

Methodology

To contribute my own findings to this study, I prepared a means of data collection for the purpose of gathering data from university students of any area of study, including English learning students. The data collection took the form of an anonymous questionnaire that I prepared in Japanese. The questionnaire asked four questions related to the student's general perceived English writing ability, their specific ability at constructing essays and free writing projects in English, to what degree they wished to improve their writing ability, and how frequently they had the opportunity to engage in longer writing assignments during middle school.

The purpose of these questions was to:

1. Procure an understanding of the student's ability to write in English and to present contrast for the later questions.
2. Narrow down their writing ability to essay writing ability to look for results that may offer a difference in their view of writing competency between essay writing and general writing ability (simpler writing exercises such as single sentence composition).
3. Explore the desire of the student to improve their English writing ability, which could potentially offer an explanation of their writing ability (e.g., if they have little desire to improve their English ability, it could account for a lower ability in general).
4. Position the last question as the crux of the questionnaire, which asked about the frequency of opportunities to engage in longer writing assignments such as essays. Lower ranges of opportunities may lead towards the proposed hypothesis of lower overall comprehension.

For a detailed look at the questionnaire provided see appendix A.

Results

After collecting data for the duration of the study period, I obtained 18 responses to the questionnaire:

In the perceived writing section, A1 through to B2 represent the increasing levels of comprehension system used by CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), A1 representing the lowest beginner level while C2 (not shown) represents the highest advanced level. B2 being the highest in the collected survey represents a higher intermediate level.

1. Perceived Writing Level	
A1	7
A2	6
B1	4
B2	1

2. Essay Writing Ability	
Very Poor	7
Poor	7
Moderate	4

4. Middle School Essay Writing Frequency

3. Writing Improvement Desire	
No desire	4
Not strong	7
If possible	5
Strong	2

Nothing	4
Not Much	9
Sometimes	5

The result of the questionnaire finds that students do seem to show that students generally have a mixed level of ability, although as expected in my starting hypothesis essay writing ability and the frequency of essay writing undertook in school is low relative their desire for their writing to be improved upon.

Although the results are promising, it is important to note that the sample size used in the study was relatively small, and further research may be necessary to confirm the findings.

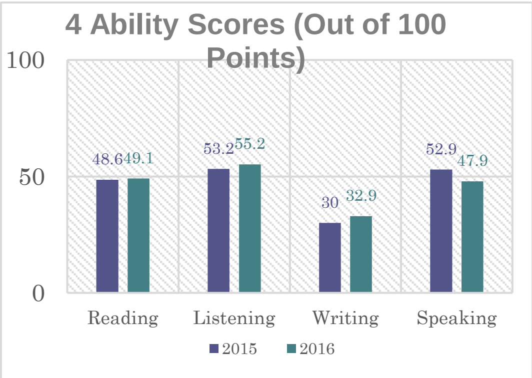

Figure 8 - 2015/6 English proficiency survey results of middle school

Parallel Evidence

Following my study, I found other relevant information. To start, figure 1 shows the significant discrepancy in writing English proficiency in middle school students as reported by the Ministry of Education, with a significantly lower score compared to the other abilities.

In another study Sugiura R. et al. (2020) found that the cognitive demand for analysis, evaluation and creation activities were more or less lacking from standard textbooks (Communication Eigo I & II), popular books used Ishikari region of Hokkaido to teach English.

The study found that the majority of the activities in the textbooks were input activities, with only a small proportion of output activities. The input activities were predominantly receptive skills-based, focusing on reading and listening comprehension, with few opportunities for production. The output activities that were included in the textbooks mainly focused on grammar and vocabulary, with fewer opportunities for extended writing and communication practice.

Conclusion

To conclude, I found that my hypothesis mostly aligned with the reality of both my studies and other evidence from other studies and surveys, in that despite students' desire to be proficient in writing, their overall confidence and test scores show to be lower. I believe from the lack of opportunity to perform longer form essay writing, student's writing ability as a whole has suffered, and thus student's overall comprehension has also suffered.

I believe that if the Japanese education system made some changes to how it teaches and evaluates English writing it will be better contribute and allow for a deeper understanding of English overall in Japanese students. The implications for the study of English for Japanese students and their writing ability are a key aspect in preparing tomorrow's workers for success in this increasingly globalized world.

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Sugiura R. et al. (2020) Input and Output in Japanese High School Government-Approved English Textbooks J. Higher Education, Tokai University (Hokkaido Campus)

Appendix

A.

英語の書く能力についてのアンケート

皆さん、こんにちは。私は EPOK の交換留学生のベン（Benjamin Macbeth）と申します。EPOK の授業「リサーチプロジェクト」の調査のためにアンケートを行っています。回答はすべて匿名で、みなさんの個人情報は公開しません。

Q１．あなたが英語で「書く」レベルは、どのぐらいだと思いますか？

☐ A.初級の前半（A1 レベル：簡単な表現や文を、一文ずつ書くことができる）

☐ B.初級の後半（A2 レベル：「and」や「but」「because」などの簡単な接続詞でつなげた、簡単な表現や文章書くことができる）

☐ C.中級の前半（B1 レベル：自分の関心がある身近な話題について、簡単な文章を作成することができる）

☐ D.中級の後半（B2 レベル：さまざまな情報や議論をまとめ、自分の関心がある分野の幅広い話題について、明瞭かつ詳細な文章を作成することができる）

☐ E.上級前半 （C1 レベル：複雑な話題について、明瞭にしっかりした構造を持って、理由や事例を付け加えながら文章を作成することができる）

☐F. 上級後半（C2 レベル: 適切な文体と論理的な構成を用いて、明瞭かつ複雑な文章を作成することができる）

Q２．あなたは、英語で作文を書くのが得意ですか？

☐A. はい、とても得意です

☐B. まあまあ、得意です

☐C. あまり得意じゃない

☐D. 全然得意じゃない

Q３．あなたは英語で書く能力を上げたいですか？

☐ A．とても能力を上げたい

☐ B．できれば能力を上げたい

☐ C．あまり能力を上げたいとは思わない

☐ D．全然能力を上げたくない

Q４．あなたは中学の時に授業で英語の作文（自由に意見を書くエッセイ等）を書きましたか？

☐ A．授業で毎回書いた

☐ B．授業でときどき書いた

☐ C．授業であまり書かなかった

☐ D．授業で[illegible]書かなった

その他、裏面に自由にコメントを書いてください。

How Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts are Performed

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要旨
ある特定の会話の中でどの様にして発話行為、発話内行為、発話媒介行為が行われているかについて、また、他の国の方達と比べ日本人は比較的間接的に発話するのではないか、といった仮説を立てた上で調査を実施しました。この研究論文では、これらの語句の大まかな説明、具体的な例を交えての解説、５つ質問した中から特に興味深い結果を得られた３つの調査内容と結果、仮説が成立しているか否か、それを踏まえての所見について書かれています。

Hypothesis

My research topic is how locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are performed in certain situations. The reason why I chose this topic is that I am interested in learning about linguistics and how people communicate. First of all, my hypothesis was that Japanese people would talk indirectly, especially when they are speaking to people who are older than they are as a way of showing some respect towards them. Also, Japanese people tend to use high-context speech, which involves indirect and implicit speech. (Nishimura, et al., 2008, p. 790). Moreover, there is a term in Japanese called 暗黙の了解, which means without saying anything, people would expect others to understand and act in certain ways. For instance, you are waiting for a train in line and when the train comes, people including those who are waiting to get on the train with you would expect you to let the people get off first. No one is going to actually tell you to wait, but that is what people would expect you to do, and if you are the one who is on the train, you probably would expect them to wait for you to get off first as well. Furthermore, Japanese people would speak indirectly especially when they are rejecting, and “The Japanese will seldom answer a question with a straight yes or no” (Kaji et al., 2016, p. 6). “The words used are kind of, maybe, and I think so are used frequently by the Japanese to avoid a direct clash of ideas” (Mehra, 2014, p. 58). For example, there is a phrase often used in a conversation where one rejects an invite, 行けたら行くわ. The literal translation for this is, ‘I’ll go if I can’ but people especially in the Kansai area know that it is an indirect way of saying that they cannot make it. This is also another example for 暗黙の了解 as when people say 行

けたら行くわ, they are expecting others to know that most likely they are not showing up. On the other hand, in North America or Europe, people tend to speak more directly and use low-context communication. Not everyone is like that of course, but in general, many people tend to speak that way (Salleh, 2005, p. 5). According to Austin, a locutionary act is "roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference" (Austin, 2018, p.108), so it is almost the same thing as meaning. In terms of an illocutionary act, "We perform illocutionary acts such as informing, ordering, warning undertaking" (Austin, 2018, p. 108), so it is done with the intention of bringing about an action or result. And these actions are referred to as perlocutionary acts. A perlocutionary act is "what we bring about or achieve by saying something" (Austin, 2018, p. 108), so when one person says something and the other says or does something, that action is the perlocutionary act. If the person you are talking to does not hear you, then the speech act is not complete. I am going to demonstrate two examples of different situations to make this a little bit easier to comprehend. The first example is making a request, and the second one is demonstrating rejection.

Example 1: 'Request'

A: It's hot, isn't it?

B: Yeah? Do you want me to turn the AC on?

A: Yes, please thanks.

B: Turns the AC on

The situation here is A and B are in B's room and A is feeling hot, so A wants to make a request to turn the air-conditioning (AC) on. In this case, the locutionary act is A's speech, "It's hot, isn't it?" and we can interpret it as a request to turn the AC on. A says it indirectly and implies that A wants B to turn it on. And that request is the illocutionary act. The perlocutionary act is when B has been asked "It's hot, isn't it?" and then turns the AC on. B might open the window instead of turning the AC on, which is not what A wanted B to do, but since B made that action because of A's speech, it is still considered a perlocutionary act.

Example 2: 'Rejection'

A: Would you like to do something this weekend?

B: I have other plans this weekend.

A: Ok, then let's just do it some other time.

Here is another example. The situation here is A wants to hang out with B, but B is not available. Essentially, B wants to reject the invite. In this case, the locutionary act is B's speech, "I have other plans this weekend". As I mentioned above, a locutionary act is roughly equivalent to meaning, therefore this B's speech is the locutionary act. We can think this B's speech as a way of rejecting, even though B did not say it directly like, "I can't go" or "I don't want to go". This rejection is an illocutionary act. And the perlocutionary act is when A understands and takes B's statement as rejection and says "Ok, then let's just do it some other time."

Method and Results

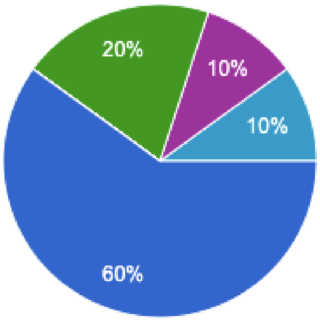

Figure 9

I used Google forms and did a survey where I asked ten people what words they would use in five certain situations and gave a few options to choose, as well as a space where they can choose 'other' and explain their reasonings. I am going to show three of the results that I found particularly interesting; situations where people need to make a request or to reject in different scenarios. First, the question I asked is 'Request': Q. Your roommate was playing music very loudly last night. You would like to tell them to be a little bit quieter. What would you say or do? The options I gave are 1. I would appreciate it if you could be a bit quieter. 2. I don't know why but I couldn't sleep last night. 3. It seemed like you were having fun last night. 4. I'm sorry but would you mind being a bit quieter at night, please? 5. Other

60% of the people said that they would choose to say the first option. They said that they would say what they want directly and get straight to the point while being nice and respectful. People said that options 2 and 3 are very indirect and not clear with what they want, and as I mentioned earlier, Japanese people tend to speak indirectly to be polite, but rather, it is an ironic or sarcastic way of saying it and it does not sound very nice. 20% of the people said they would choose option 4 because they do not want to have unnecessary arguments by confronting someone, so they would say it as if it is their fault for complaining. The rest chose other and said that they would tell them to be quiet as it is happening. The locutionary act here is the speech that they say to make a request, and that request is the illocutionary act. The perlocutionary act is whatever speech or action that the other person makes after hearing what they have said. For instance, if the other person says like, "Ok, yeah sorry I'll turn it down" and then turns it down, that speech and the action are perlocutionary acts.

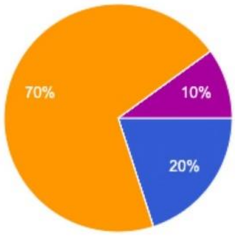

Figure 2

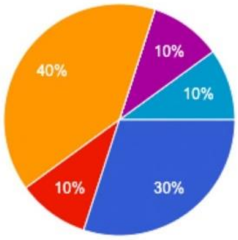

Figure 3

Second, I asked two questions that are almost the same, yet one occurs in a friend's room and the other occurs in a professor's room: 'Request': Q. You're in your **friend's/professor's** room and you want to open the window because it's too hot in the room. What would you say or do? The options are: 1. Would you mind opening the window? 2. It's hot in here. 3. Ask if you can open the window by yourself. 4. Not going to say anything and just suffer. 5. Other. Figure 2 shows the one in a friend's room and Figure 3 shows the one in a professor's room. The reason why I asked these questions is that depending on who people are interacting with, I thought they would choose different options. Especially, I thought Japanese people would choose to say nothing or choose option 2, which is a very indirect way of saying it. Over half of the people said that they would choose option 3, which is to ask if they can open the window by themselves when they are talking to their friend. Meanwhile, Figure 3 shows that 40% of the people would choose option 3, but 30% of them said that they would ask if the professor could open the window for them because they think that they should not touch anything that belongs to someone else. The rest chose other and said that if they are comfortable enough with the person that they are interacting with, they would let them know that they feel hot and ask if they can open the window by themselves or ask if the friend or professor could open the window for them. The locutionary act is whatever speech that the person chooses to say except option 4 as no speech act occurs. However, if the person decided not to say anything but to, for example, make a motion of fanning with hands in order to indicate or imply that they feel hot without verbally saying, that action is considered a locutionary act because it has a meaning. When the friend or professor interpreted that as a request to open the window, that request becomes an illocutionary act, and when they open the window, that action is the perlocutionary act. Although, a conversation is not always as smooth as this or does not always pan out in the way that the speaker wanted it to. For example, even if the person says, "Oh it's so hot in here" as a motive to encourage them to open the window, and the other says, "I

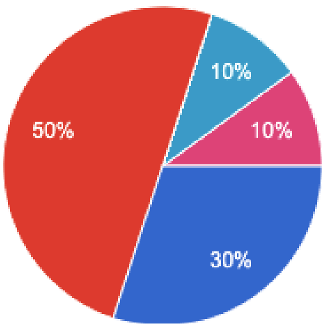

Figure 4

know right" and does not do anything until the conversation is over, then that is not how the person wanted the conversation to go. However, as the speech act is complete, the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are performed just like in the previous example.

Lastly, here is another question I asked: 'Rejection': Q. If someone asked you to go on a picnic with them on the weekend but you're not available, what would you say or do? (Essentially, you'd like to reject the invite.) The options are 1. I don't really want to go. 2. I have other plans this weekend. 3. Sorry, I'm not feeling well. 4. I'll try to make it. 5. It's supposed to be cold and raining. 6. Other. The research shows that half of the people said that they would tell them that they have other plans this weekend instead of saying directly that they do not want to go. But 30% of the people said that they would tell them that they do not want to go and explain why they do not want to. The rest chose other and said that depending on the circumstances, they would talk differently, like directly or indirectly. No one chose options 3, 4, or 5. Especially these three options are very indirect. Option 5 for example, is not very clear whether it means yes or no. It is making a statement and implying that it would be hard to eat outside if it is cold and raining, which implies that they should not go on a picnic, so the answer is no. Therefore, indirect speech requires a few steps to get to the point. Also, in this situation, the locutionary act is the speech that the person says to reject the invite. Without any context, the speech, "I have other plans this weekend" only means that the person has other plans; nothing more or less. However, since the person is trying to reject the invite in this context, it makes this speech contains some sort of force, in this case, 'rejection', which is the illocutionary act. And when the other says or does something, that action is the perlocutionary act.

Also, in this survey, I asked people how or in what way they would like to be spoken to if they were the ones on the other side of these conversations, as well as their reasonings. Most of the people had identical responses with similar reasonings. They said that they would like to be talked to directly but in a nice way and respectfully as it is clear to understand and can be avoided misunderstandings. Furthermore, I asked people if they would speak or act differently depending on the situation or circumstances, and they said that depending on who they are talking to or how comfortable they are with the person, they would behave differently and choose different words or changes the way they talk, like directly or indirectly. I found it interesting because most of the people said that they would rather be talked to directly, but when they are talking, they do not always speak directly.

Opinions/Findings

This research made me reflect on how I interact with people and how I prefer to be talked to. I thought I tend to speak to people directly and be honest with my feelings or intentions. I was talking with my friends about this research, and I brought up the conversation that I previously had with another friend. The conversation started with me saying to my friend, “Are you not going to eat this?” while pointing at the last piece of sashimi. My intention was to encourage my friend to eat it, but the response I got was, “Oh, you can have it”. After I told my friends about this, they said that my speech was not very direct. Instead, I should have said to my friend, “You can have the last piece” if I wanted to be direct. It made me realize that I do not talk to people as directly as I thought. I prefer to be talked to very directly. For example, if I asked my friend to hang out with them and they need to reject me, I prefer to be told that they are not in the mood for it or simply they do not want to hang out, because there is no problem with them saying no as long as they are being thoughtful. From this research, I found that people tend to talk directly when they are making a request but when they are trying to reject, it is the opposite, so they would talk more indirectly. I think it is because when they are making a request, they are the ones who are starting the conversation, which means they can control the conversation, so they can be direct while being kind. On the other hand, when they are trying to reject something, not many people are comfortable with speaking directly especially when they are rejecting, so they would say it indirectly as indirect speech leaves room for interpretation by the receiver of that information. Lastly, I could ask only ten people who are around my age and most of them were male so the results might have been different if I have asked more people in different age range, different genders, and from various countries. That is something I would do to improve my research.

Conclusion

People who completed this survey said that depending on who they are talking to and how close or comfortable they are with the person, they would behave and talk differently. Therefore, it depends on the situation and circumstances. It is interesting that when they are making a request, most of the people said that they would speak directly and be clear with what they want, but when they are trying to reject, it is the opposite; they would speak more indirectly. Also, most of the people said the same opinions with similar reasonings, so it is less about where they are from, but more about what type of person they are. Before I did this research, I thought that Japanese people would talk more indirectly than people from other countries, because that is what I learned from previous studies however, that is not what my research says, so it made me want to do more research on this area of linguistics.

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A Peek at the Deaf Culture and Sign Language in Japanese Culture

日本社会におけるろう文化および手話についての研究

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要旨：本研究では手話に関する調査を通して、日本におけるろう文化、アクセシビリティおよび教育について考察することを目的とする。結果は現地調査とアンケート･インタービューにより収集された。手話教育については回答者の 78%が学校で教えること賛成していたが、人的･物的資源の配分などの懸念を挙げられた。以上の点から、日本では①手話はろう者の通信手段として確認されていること、②しかし、学びたい、広めたいと言う前向きな意見があっても、学ぶ場所が限られていること、③そのため、ろう者のための情報アクセシビリティを保障することが重要であることが分かった。

Introduction

In Japan, there are approximately 360,000 people are deaf or partially deaf. Out of that number, about 50,000 or 14% use sign language, while the rest favors written communication[4]. While this could seem like a challenge to Japan's perceived approach to disabilities, sign language should gain more exposure as a means of communication. That is because it is not only a communication tool for deaf people, but it could also be used by anyone that is non-verbal. Furthermore, sign language being widespread could also be a way to guarantee accessibility to information during disasters, or for another recent example, during a pandemic. Finally, sign language is the gateway to another culture within the country and knowing about different cultures promotes a better understanding of others.

This research project was born out of personal interest and curiosity. The primary goal was to partake into something uniquely Japanese during the Exchange Program of Okayama (EPOK) and beyond. In the U.S., I was able to take an American Sign Language class in college so I wondered if I could do the same in Japan. I could not find any such a class in the curriculum but noticed that there was a university circle on the clubs and circles' information page. Apart from some accolades in pop culture, chiefly anime, my knowledge of Japanese sign language was

[4] The Japan Times: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/22/national/social-issues/sign-language-deaf/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20most%20recent,hearing%20people%20use%20it%2C%20too.

inexistant. Thus, this project became an opportunity to look at “another” Japanese language, while learning “spoken Japanese” in Japan.

Background and Overview

Even though the *Kojiki* (古事記, “Record of Ancient Matters”), the oldest book of classical Japanese history, features the deaf god Ebisu as part of the myth of creation, not much is known about how deaf people used to communicate before the Meiji era (1868-1912). In 1862, the Tokugawa shogunate sent envoys to learn more about deafness in Europe[5]. Then in 1878, the first deaf school was established in Kyoto by the Japanese educator Furukawa Tashiro. Furukawa taught his students fingerspelling, and they also learned how to read, write, and pronounce words in Japanese. It is that fingerspelling that evolved to become the Japanese sign language as it is known nowadays[6]. Fast-forward to post-war Japan, the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) is founded in May 1947. Its goal is to bring a sense of community to Japanese deaf and hard of hearing while aiding and defending their rights. Currently, prominently featured on the JFD website is their campaign towards sign language legislation, “A Sign Language Act is necessary to create a "sign language friendly society" for the future”[7]. The JFD has identified two goals: promoting the fact there are two Japanese languages, namely spoken Japanese and sign language, and promoting the use of sign language for a society where deaf or hard-of-hearing people can live harmoniously with hearing people. The Sign Language Act is to guarantee sign language rights which were identified as acquiring sign language, learning with sign language, learning about sign language, using sign language, and protecting sign language[8].

There are three main types of sign language in use in Japan[9]. The first one is Japanese Sign Language (JSL, 日本手話). It is distinct from spoken and written Japanese. The second one is Signed Japanese (対応手話) also known as Manually Coded Japanese (MCJ, 日本語対応手話). It uses the same word order as the Japanese language, so that is why is “signed Japanese” and technically not sign language. However, this is the type that will be referred to hereafter as “sign language” in this work. The third one is Pidgin Sign Japanese (PSJ, 中間手話), which

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5 Tofugu online article on Japanese sign language: https://www.tofugu.com/japan/japanese-sign-language/#:~:text=But%20in%20JSL%2C%20the%20sign,people%20bowing%20to%20each%20other.

6 ibid

7 JFD pamphlet found on their website: https://www.jfd.or.jp/en/docs/2022/lets_go3_sign_language_legislation.pdf

8 ibid

9 Cf Tofugu footnote

combines JSL and spoken Japanese grammar. This is also not a sign language technically, this type of "mix" is referred to as "contact sign" in the U.S. Thus, out of the three, only JSL qualifies as a sign language. Lastly, JSL is not only a matter of signing. It includes "air writing"「空書」 and "mouthing"「口話」.

Methodology and Discussion

For this research project, I primarily collected data through fieldwork in the form of online surveys and short in-person interviews, all in Japanese. Due to cultural differences, there was a need to rephrase or cancel some questions I wanted to ask. So, I could not expand too much on the social perspective regarding Japanese deaf people. Yet, it can also be considered an advantage, as my original idea was too broad for me to properly grasp a direction to work toward to. There is also the risk of some nuances being lost in translation but being able to interact directly with most of the respondents should have greatly diminished that risk. The survey targets fit into three categories: Japanese sign language learners, Education professionals, and the general (working) population. Firstly, I joined the Tsushima campus sign language circle, *Fukurounote*「ふくろうのて」, shortly after the in-person university festival in November 2022. Due to the recent COVID pandemic, the weekly meetings were online, so I could only interview some members during the festival, and I shared a Google form survey in the chat group. The questionnaire had seven questions covering data collection about their majors, academic grades, reasons for learning sign language, whether they had previously learned sign language in school, and if/how they intended to use Japanese sign language in the future. Three students agreed to be interviewed at the university festival, while five others responded to the online survey. 40% of the respondents were Education majors, in addition to students from the faculty of Agriculture, Medicine, and Dental school. They were also all undergraduate students, with 60% being sophomores. Most of the students, 80%, were learning sign language out of personal interest and the remaining 20% joined the circle after a friend suggested they did. None of them had learned sign language before becoming college students, and when it comes to using it in the future, professional and altruistic reasons were the main factors. For example, one student answered that they would like to teach it to children in school if they became an educator or help deaf people if they became a sign language interpreter. Another wanted to be able to assist deaf people that needed help if they happened to meet in the streets. The medical student wanted to ensure they could communicate with the patients if they were deaf. In addition to the student data, I also visited the Asahi Community Center, where there is a sign language class every other Monday. After being introduced to this community center by my research advisor, Pr. MOHRI, I visited the center at the end of November as they held a community festival and audited the class the following week. The class had six regular students, mostly older ladies in their 70s and over. On average, they have been learning for approximately two years with a forced break due to the COVID pandemic. Moreover, I was able to attend the first sign language festival in Okayama mid-January, where I once again got the opportunity to exchange with sign language practitioners and gather more interview data. As we could only briefly talk after class or at lunch break during the Okayama festival, I only asked questions about how they came to learn sign language. In both settings, the Asahi class and the Okayama festival, the top reason for learning was personal interest or merely a coincidence. One lady was trying to join another activity, but it was full, so she went for sign language as it fit into her schedule. None of the people interviewed were learning because of a family member being deaf, for example.

Besides, I also sent another questionnaire to some faculty members of Okayama university, to which nine people answered. The question to faculty members was whether they thought sign language should be taught in school and why they thought so. Nine professors answered, with 78% in favor of teaching sign language in school. The keywords that appeared most often were "necessary", "communicate and "understanding". For instance, “it is necessary to communicate with people with disabilities”, or “it is necessary to convey to children the importance of understanding those who use [sign language]”. One professor answered “yes”, but also mentioned that the concepts of school and learning mentioned in the question were a bit vague. That professor happens to have “learned” sign language in elementary school, where they used it for play and songs in sign language. However, during their college years, they read a book on communication with deaf people and realized their “learning” of sign language was superficial and insufficient. So instead of teaching sign language to people who can hear, the focus should shift to teaching the dynamics of deaf communication, for example. It might be better to raise awareness that way, as currently, the Japanese society does not have sign language interpreters available everywhere they are needed. The points made by this professor resonate with some of the reasons why the remaining 22% disagreed with sign language being taught in schools. One person pointed out that teachers had a lot to do already, thus increasing their duties would be difficult. It does not seem realistic to imagine a sign language professor assigned to every school. Additionally, even if that were doable, it does not mean the students would master sign language or even be willing to learn in the first place. Another professor opposed to the idea stated that sign language should not be a compulsory school subject. In the Japanese curriculum, there is a part covering an introduction to the deaf culture, so students are aware of the existence of sign language. Instead, there should be more efforts made towards raising the interest of students. For example, there is a national sign language competition for Japanese high schoolers. Getting more people interested in such activities might lead to more enthusiasm towards learning on their own, as part of a university circle, or in a community center.

An additional group of people that received a survey were working people in the general population. One of the faculty members had an acquaintance working in the sign language interpretation of a local TV broadcasting station. Thus, another short survey was tailored, and four people provided feedback. To the question “What is sign language to you?”, the answers were “The best communication tool”, “A way to communicate with deaf people”, “A means of gathering information from some friends” and “Something that I memorized from seeing an upperclassman used, so I use it naturally”. So, all the people that responded to this survey use sign language in their daily lives as hearing people. When asked about their opinion on teaching sign language, one respondent mentioned that there is almost no concept of “teaching” sign language. Instead, there is more of a “welfare” component associated with sign language, so regular people do not think of sign language as something that can be taught as a second language for example. Another question was about what they knew or thought about deaf education in Japan. One person answered that they had a general impression of Japan being still behind in this aspect. Another one mentioned that there is a broader range of communication methods used in deaf education, so there was an improvement. However, they also mentioned the issue of cochlear implants and questioned whether it makes sense to deem sign language unnecessary for people whose hearing is impaired but not completely deaf. When it came to a question about the ways to spread sign language and awareness, the frequent answer was to “create a sense of acceptance in the general population”. Both deaf people and hearing people should participate in whatever initiative is taken in any case. In terms of accessibility and representation, the consensus was that there is still work to do. Some of the suggested solutions were having promotional campaigns showing celebrities using sign language or generalizing the use of sign language interpretation in news and emergency bulletins. Lastly, when asked whether they noticed anything different following the COVID pandemic, they all answered that it was the masks. That is because sign language uses facial expressions, and some deaf people can also read lips. However, clear masks are not the norm, so communicating has been more difficult.

Finally, I was able to interview one deaf person, Ms. OOE Asami, who is the chairwoman of the Okayama City Association of the Hearing-Impaired (岡山市聴覚障害者協会). She also happens to be the sign language teacher at the Asahi Community Center. Her first language is sign language, and when she meets people that do not understand it, she uses another form of oral or written communication. There were eight questions, plus a bonus general impression question. While her opinion and thoughts do not represent the entirety of the deaf population, it was crucial to get some data from an actual deaf person, at least. She gave some insight about the education and efforts to be made for the deaf community in Okayama and in general. For example, one of the questions asked was “What do you wish other people understood about your experience as a deaf person?”, and the answer was “I want people to know the inconvenience of not being able to hear. I want them to know that it can be inconvenient for people around me because I can’t hear sound or know that I am making sounds.” There was also a question about her thoughts on the education of deaf people in general. She replied that she would like all teachers in deaf schools to work hard on signing. There was also the issue where some teachers who finally managed to sign were transferred to a different school, so the students had to start all over with someone that did not know how to sign again. Her answer also included that appealing to the government had been ineffective so far. Thus, on the question about potential actions and solutions to raise awareness and spread the use of sign language, Ms. OOE stated that she would like the government to put more effort into these types of initiatives. Starting from childhood is essential and adequate education from elementary school is required. She also wishes that people in public institutions and the general public were more informed and educated. As for accessibility, Ms. OOE pointed out that it was hard for deaf senior citizens and deaf people who are not tech-savvy to access information. So, it would great for more public institutions to have electronic signboards. She even shared the story of someone that needed medical assistance with COVID, and they could not communicate because the phone was the only means of access to the emergency line. To remedy this situation, the Okayama City Association of the Hearing-Impaired holds information sessions to let deaf people know more about remote sign language interpretation and relay phone service, for instance. At the start of the EPOK journey, the TV series “Silent” was being broadcasted and was quite popular. It depicts two people rekindling their high school romance after reuniting as young adults. As teenagers, they bonded over their love for music, but the adult male protagonist is almost completely deaf now. Consequently, I added a question about representation in the media. Ms. OOE said that she hopes people do not assume all deaf people act like the ones they see on TV. Some deaf people cannot communicate by writing or signing as fast as the characters portrayed in the show. She also feels like more deaf actors should be used and mentioned that she does not nitpick too much because "it is a drama." Finally, regarding COVID, she repeated that communicating became more arduous due to the masks. Then, she pointed out that people became more isolated since there were few events outside.

Conclusion

As suggested in the title, the driving force behind this research project is to provide a glimpse into deaf culture. I figured sign language was the most accessible aspect of the culture,

OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY

hence the project's focus. From the direct interactions and responses to the surveys, it appeared that even if sign language does not prominently feature in daily life, people know about it. However, different from the practices in the U.S., its usage seems to be exclusive to communicating with deaf people. There was never a mention of using sign language with babies, or in non-verbal cases. Most respondents that were not already studying sign language were also willing to learn, at least greeting signs, just like for any foreign language. However, even with the learners, the overall knowledge remains rather superficial. This was of the worries of people who were against having sign language as a school subject. In terms of resources, even if there were many enthusiastic students, there would not necessarily be instructors adequately equipped to assist in their learning journey. From improving the daily lives of deaf people to providing additional learning resources for hearing people, there is a need for communities and the government to put more effort into making what hearing people take for granted accessible to deaf people. This effort can take a visual shape by having monitors displaying the necessary information in places that lack them, for instance. It could also be workshops to assist the less tech-savvy part of the population and making sure the deaf community knows which tools they can use to interact with the world when they need help.

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Good work

The End

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