

Háskóli Íslands  
Hugvísindasvið  
Japanskt mál og menning

# **Breaking Down the Walls of Japan**

## *Japan's Slow International Integration*

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í japansku máli og menningu

Justin Þór Daníelsson Pollock

Kt: 020487-2169

Leiðbeinandi: Gunnella Þorgeirsdóttir

September 2016

## **Abstract**

Over the past decades, Japan has become known as a powerhouse of business and culture. With exports ranging from cars to cartoons, most households have been affected directly by Japan in one way or another. In an age of increased economic globalization and technology that allows people from countries across the globe to network, the world is becoming increasingly small and cultures and people are increasingly intermingling with another. Which brings into question how Japanese culture has adapted to these changes; whether it is keeping pace with its Western counterparts or if the nation opts to keep to themselves, keeping outside contact to a minimum. To investigate this in broad strokes, a few key aspects of Japan are discussed. The historical context of Japan's foreign interactions is considered, along with how Japan is handling modern day social networking and media distribution. How Japanese society is arranged, along with governmental policies, are scrutinized. Ultimately answering how open Japan is to the outside world, or whether the nation remains exclusive.

**Table of Contents**

**Abstract ..... 2**

**Table of Contents ..... 3**

**Introduction ..... 4**

**1. Historical Overview of Japan’s Foreign Influences ..... 5**

**2. The Japanese Government’s Restrictive Approach to Outside Influence ..... 9**

**3. Inclusiveness Begets Exclusiveness: Distrusting the Unknown..... 14**

**4. Flawed Approaches and Mixed Messages in Japanese Education ..... 18**

**5. Accessible International Media: The Nationalist’s Worst Foe ..... 21**

**Conclusion..... 23**

**References ..... 24**

## Introduction

“Mazlum Balibay paves Japan’s roads, digs its sewers and lays its water pipes - all for a country that doesn’t want him.” (Funakoshi et al, 2016) When a country is seemingly on the opposite side of the globe, it can be simple to claim that it is isolated from the rest of the world. Compared to the Western sphere of influence, the East Asian island nation of Japan would seem excluded from the West. This could not be further from the truth as Japan, much like many countries, is substantially influenced by its neighbours and the world at large. Historically, Japan’s culture absorbed and adapted Korea and Chinese culture resulting in historical Japanese architecture, rice cultivation and the widespread appropriation of Buddhism. More recently, the West has influenced Japanese government and bureaucracy, as well as entertainment and culture. However, the Japan nation has also been able to easily isolate themselves at times. One such period was when the Tokugawa Shogunate banned all foreign intrusions and emigration from the Japanese islands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan’s imperialistic government ingrained within the nation their ‘unique’ heritage to create an atmosphere of extreme nationalism. Despite the ‘uplifting’ of the post-war American occupation, Japan still has relics from their past affecting their society. This is perhaps most obvious in the bureaucracy, education system and social structure. Japanese public institutes deny foreign labour from being hired as public servants and teachers. Meanwhile the family registration system (*koseki*) continues to cause a multitude of issues in grey areas such as multi-national children and mixed-nation marriages. Young Japanese are taught somewhat nationalist ideals, along with a government issued image of historical events. This youth is also brought up to operate in a society of intersecting collectives and to conform to their respective groups. Despite this, Japan is not immune to the effects of the shrinking world as other nations influence their culture and business. McDonalds, KFC and 7-11 can be found in Japan, alongside their inspired counterparts. The young are breaking the mould and exploring the world, bringing their experiences back home, that is if they decide to return home. Finally, businesses and organizations are pressuring the anxious government into making changes that may further open up Japan to the world. While claiming that Japan is isolationist would be incorrect, it would not be too off the mark to say that due to aspects such as the Japanese institutes, policies and the atmosphere they create make Japan rather exclusive to the outside world. How is Japan as a state and a society adapting to the ever changing world and what is being done to further integrate with the international community?

## 1. Historical Overview of Japan's Foreign Influences

Being part of East Asia, it should come as no surprise that Japan is a country in possession of a rich historical background. While Japanese history is filled with many interesting domestic events, there are many instances of how foreign affairs have affected the island nation. As early as its pre-history, local Asian cultures and people would fashion the budding nation into what it is now. It would keep strong ties with the mainland nations but at times be at odds with them and even attempt to rebuke them. The acts of aversion would later go as far as to completely isolate the country in order to halt European influence. These same influences would later help rebuild a stagnant state before it became the military power many feared during the Second World War. Despite periods of isolation and rejection of foreign influences, Japan owes much of its culture, knowledge and power to its interactions with the larger world.

Neighbouring East Asian cultures were essential in the formation of the first Japanese states and continued to remain important for centuries to come. The Japanese archipelago was originally the host of many tribal cultures. Eventually, these tribes advanced significantly in terms of technology and culture. This shift to the Yayoi period (c.a. 300 B.C.E. – 250 C.E.) was caused by influences from the Korean peninsula. Precisely how this occurred is debated, but it is a fact that communication with the continent, along with Korean migrants, allowed for this development to happen. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 10) Further foreign influences were essential for further development of the Japanese tribes:

Imported technology – the cultivation of rice in paddy fields, and bronze and iron metallurgy – enabled the Japanese to create a settled and stratified society, and diplomatic contact with foreign governments contributed to the formation of the Japanese state. (Okazaki, p. 268)

It is said that as the tribes evolved into states, Chinese bureaucratic models were imported and adapted to aid in the creation of said states. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 20) It may also be noted that foreign individuals residing in Japan would also become part of the state as “high-ranking kinship groups, many of them of Korean origin, served the central kings, married into their families, and played a significant role in determining succession.” (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 16) The importance of foreign politics did not end there. Recognition of Japanese rulers by the Chinese court aided in the political stability of the young Japanese states. (Okazaki, p. 280) That said, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century there were isolationist efforts made by

the Japanese state to restrict Chinese traders coming to port. This was done in fear of rampant piracy and potential foreign threats. It would go as far as to later ban overseas travel from Japan. However, enforcement was limited and eventually these policies would be rendered moot. (McCullogh, p. 87) Migrants would continue to travel to Japan and during the Heian period (794 – 1333) “the *kikajin* (continental immigrants) had largely been assimilated among the Japanese population, and their skills had been acquired by Japanese.” (Ury, p. 343)

Japan continued to be influenced by the mainland and the later arriving Europeans until domestic instability almost entirely isolated the country in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Japan’s government remained cordial with the continent as it advanced as a nation. Despite threats such as the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, Japan would remain open to East Asian cultures and patronize foreign arts and religions during the Heian era (794 – 1185) and beyond. As such, trade flourished as well as continental influences in the arts, architecture and religion. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 116) The 16<sup>th</sup> century saw the arrival of Europeans to Japan. This involved importation of the deadly gunpowder weapons that the warring factions of feudal Japan began to use. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 119) This would eventually lead to the invasion of Korea led by Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536 – 1598) resulting in many Koreans being brought back to Japan, but this would cement further Korean cultural influence into Japanese culture. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 127) However, back in Japan the Christian conversion attempts would have a dangerous, destabilizing effect on Japanese politics. By the time of Ieyasu Tokugawa’s (1543 – 1616) unified Japan, a mix of the attempts of missionaries to appease the local lords, and vice versa, created a deadly instability within the newly created state. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 135) To bring the country back into order, the Shogunate banned the practice of Christianity in 1606 and closed off the country by 1635. This policy would involve the aggressive removal of all foreigners and Christian influence from the country and utterly close off the country from the outside world. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 138)

As Japan passed from a state of extreme political dissolution and social upheaval to a new era of unity and peace, it also turned inward and away from the relative cosmopolitanism of the Christian Century’s first half. From *sengoku* [warring states], Japan was transformed into *sakoku*, a “closed country.” (Elisonas, p. 301)

As no one was even allowed out of the country, foreign influences were severely limited. Despite this, there was one window to the outside world left open via a small Dutch colony that was allowed to remain in Nagasaki. Travel restrictions were harsh but it would allow the Shogun to get reports of foreign events, as well as give Japanese scholars access to European

books. What became known as Dutch Learning was important for further technological and medical improvement. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 162) This period of isolation ended when the stagnated Japanese state was unable to deny the aggressive demands from America's powerful black ships in 1853. Unable to do anything but comply, Japan would open up to America and eventually the rest of the world. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 177)

Not long after the forceful reopening of Japan a new government emerged mimicking its Western counterparts greatly, and with it a surge of imported culture. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 saw a sudden increase of interest in everything foreign, specifically of that which is Western. Seeing the Western powers as role-models for greatness, the Meiji government sent expeditions of scholars and politicians to learn from the West and to adapt what they learned for Japanese consumption and assimilation.

Confronted by an apparently superior "civilization" represented by the states of Europe, the Japanese confronted tasks of achieving modernity – making themselves into a "nation" and a "state" – following the opening of their country (*kaikoku*). (Sukehiro, p. 432)

What began with Dutch Learning advanced even further in this new era. Not only knowledge but culture from all over was imported. Everything from dress and entertainment to architecture and institutions were taken in and adopted by the Japanese. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 199) This enthusiasm was not universal as some believed that these foreign ideas would result in the destruction of Japanese culture, so a hybridization of Japanese and foreign culture was attempted. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 203) Dark times were even darker during the 1923 Tokyo-Yokohama Earthquake as among those who aided one another were bands of individuals killing Koreans who were stuck in the chaos. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 231)

As the military took control of the country, Japan saw a turn from openly accepting Western influences to decrying them in the name of heavily enforced nationalism. In the 1930's, Japan's military took governmental control and took an opposite stance from that of the Meiji Restoration fifty years earlier. To create a nationalistic nation that would follow them unquestioningly, the regime sought out to wipe out all Western influences. This would not only include politics and academia but all aspects of Japanese life, including popular culture. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 252) Brutal discrimination against Koreans would occur once again. Against a peaceful protest of Koreans, Japanese officials ordered the use of aggressive force against the unarmed protesters. Acts such as these by the Japanese state would create a resentment towards Japan by the Korean people that lingers to this day.

(Peattie, p. 234) Furthermore, during the Second World War there was a drive for increased wartime productivity. To do so, Koreans were at first recruited and then later conscripted into Japan's war economy. (Mitchell, p. 78) As Japan surrendered and the United States Occupation began, much of what Japan's military regime worked for was undone. The emperor, previously made out to be divine and centrepiece of state power, was demystified as a normal human being during his announcement of surrender to the Japanese people. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 255) The occupation government then aided in the recreation of the Japanese constitution and government, this time based on American models rather than European. Although attempts to further Americanize the country were made, they were not entirely fruitful. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 263) Regardless, American influences were extremely strong and resulted in a large amount of imported American and Western culture. (Gay, Lurie & Shirokauer, p. 267) Once again, Japan's doors were, if not open, then at least slightly ajar.

Throughout history, the outside world helped shape Japan more than it might at first seem. Japan saw many changes in their culture and advancement in technologies and techniques thanks to foreign contact and more open borders. It could only be speculated what would have become of the early Japanese tribes had they never had any interaction with the wider world. Though the Japanese state may have elected isolation during times of turmoil, they had always reopened once the world could no longer be ignored. Although Japan has an incredibly rich history and culture of their own making, a lot is owed to the rest of East Asia and as we pass through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the entire world. As Korean migrants brought knowledge and ideas to early Japanese tribes, citizens of the world could bring even greater potential to the modern Japanese people.

## 2. The Japanese Government's Restrictive Approach to Outside Influence

Today is an age where corporations invest and branch out globally, culture and entertainment spreads rapidly across borders and people of wildly different nations are able to more easily communicate. It would not be far-fetched that a country as advanced as Japan would be on the forefront along other equally as developed nations. It seems to not be the case, however, as contrary to the wishes of forward looking businesses, Japan's government has done little to ease their concerns. Immigration flow is comparatively low to other industrialized nations, not due to a lack of effort from Japanese corporations. Japanese culture and entertainment, as well as other industries, have spread wide and far across the world, though what comes inwards is what businesses are able to market domestically. Institutes such as the Family Registration system create enough issues at home, let alone problems for those who wish to have a more open Japan. Despite globalization efforts of businesses and the adventurous spirits of enterprising Japanese, Japan's institutes and policies make sure to keep Japan, if not isolated, then at least exclusive to the outside world.

The Family Registration, or *koseki*, system may be how Japanese bureaucracy keeps track of Japan's citizens but also seems to promote a degree of nationalism and isolationism as it attempts to keep things 'Japanese,' causing many issues with any outlier such as illegitimate children or non-natives. A few things require explanation to fully understand the *koseki* system and its implications. What is thought as a traditional Japanese household is the *ie*, which is typically a family with a mother and father, along with children. This can be extended further down to grandchildren and so forth. The *ie* has a head of the household, usually the eldest male though he may retire and relinquish it to his eldest son. Much can change within an *ie*, such as members marrying into an *ie* or from one *ie* to another. However, in short, the *ie* is the core unit of Japanese bureaucracy in which an individual is registered in the system. The *ie* and its relationship with the *koseki* are essential to the Japanese as it is the legal groundwork for an individual's birth, marriage, divorce and death. (Bryant, p. 111-112) It is also important as an individual's status in the *koseki* "... is used to determine eligibility for basic government benefits such as education and income assistance." (Bryant, p. 112) As it is so important, as well as heavily based on the traditional *ie* structure, it should come to no surprise that it causes all sorts of issues in modern day society as the lines on gender, civil union and nationality are becoming increasingly blurred. Formally established in 1872, the *koseki* was created to centralize census data on households as previously such information was kept within the local governments. With this centralized system, the newly founded Meiji

government was able to bring some order to the chaotic remnants of the Tokugawa era, (Chapman & Krogness, p. 94) as well as "... enable the Meiji government to understand, define and control its population." (Chapman & Krogness, p. 94) However, even as early as its establishment it caused issues. Minority groups such as the indigenous Ainu and the ever discriminated people once classified as *hinin* were kept on separate registers from everyone else. This caused issues such as discrimination against these groups and their descendants (Chapman & Krogness, p. 98) or bureaucratic errors as late as 1961, when previous ordinances were to have these registries compiled into one. (Chapman & Krogness, p. 97) The *koseki* has caused other problems such as marriage troubles when parents of prospective brides or grooms discover the partner's ancestors were perhaps a *hinin* or some other minority, or job troubles as employers discriminate for the same reasons. (Bryant, p. 112) Illegitimate children, especially of mixed parentage, continue to suffer discrimination by the system as they are not recognized as Japanese, denying them services such as education. (Suzuki, p. 38) It may be noted that during one of these cases, the system had been questioned by the legal sector. (Suzuki, p. 41) All these issues, and the many more that have arisen, bring into question the effectiveness of the *koseki* and why it hasn't gone under significant reworking, or abolished altogether. It seems to maintain a certain guideline of what a Japanese family is supposed to be, at least in the eyes of those who support and uphold it, and casts aside those who do not fulfil the requirements, causing them grief as long as they reside in Japan.

Japan remains one of the strictest countries in the world in regards to immigration, however some local governments and organizations are doing what they can to support foreign residents to integrate into their communities. "The official stance toward immigrants suggests that non-Japanese do not have the capacity to become Japanese and, therefore, should be excluded." (Chung, p. 3) Perhaps as long as since the closing of its borders by the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan has been averse towards immigration. Even the forcibly relocated Koreans were registered as aliens, resulting in much grief since "they could not access many social rights because they lacked Japanese citizenship." (Kondo, p. 418) Japan's immigration policies have been so strict, it has led to some rather strong claims:

The Japanese government, which adheres to the myth of Japan as an ethnically homogenous nation that is not and never has been a country of immigration, has one of the more restrictive immigration policies among advanced industrialized countries. (Tsuda, p. 13)

These claims haven't been entirely baseless either. Even as a nation wherein foreign residents are fewer than two percent of the population, the smallest percentage of the industrialized world, there is much anxiety about the potential dangers that these outsiders may exhibit. (Chung, p. 13) In fact, the Japanese government is so restrictive that in order to be naturalized and become a Japanese citizen, an applicant must abandon any former citizenship they may have had, as well as "demonstrate evidence of cultural assimilation". (Chung, p. 13) Foreign workers in Japan find themselves in the "only advanced industrial democracy that does not grant family reunification rights to migrant laborers (with the exception of ethnic Japanese immigrants.)" (Chung, p. 13) These foreign workers are often brought into Japan via side-door legal mechanisms that allows companies to import foreign labour, a mechanism that was create due to the large demand for unskilled foreign labour that simply cannot enter through any other way. (Tsuda, p. 14) These side-door methods are not effective enough to meet labour demands so more illegitimate, back-door, methods are used to bring in illegal foreign workers. Although these workers have to smuggle themselves into the country, they often find it well worth the risk considering the rewards of relatively high-paying jobs. (Tsuda, p. 16) For a long time there were efforts being made that would allow all permanent residents to vote in local elections. Despite two decades of legal issues and considerations, a bill that would allow this suffrage had been pushed to the side lines in 2001 when then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi and his party "had reservations about the bill because of nationalistic ideology." (Kondo, p. 420) In recent years, there have been strides made towards opening up the country towards immigration, or at the very least supporting the foreign residents that are already living in Japan. A case of note is a protest in 2003 against the odd scenario wherein the government was to give a seal a special Resident Registration Certificate, something that foreign residents were denied. Their efforts proved fruitful and an amendment was issued allowing foreign residents to receive this certificate. (Chapman, p. 3) Originally, fingerprinting was required to obtain an alien registration card. Contrary to these demands, local government would ignore this requirement and eventually, as of 2000, the practice of fingerprinting was abolished. (Kondo, p. 419) These local governments have been perhaps the greatest fighter for increased support for foreign residents, along with organizations that fight for the same cause. Calling for greater symbiosis between native and non-native community members, local governments such as Kawasaki City have made efforts such as the establishment of a consultative assembly for foreign residents to help them participate in city administration. (Kondo, p. 420) Another example is Hamamatsu City which is "working at becoming a "Community In Symbiosis With Foreigners."'" (Kondo, p. 419) On the

administrative side, amendments have been made that would allow multinational families to be legally registered in one system, solving many bureaucratic issues for these families. (Chapman, p. 3) However, multinational families are still separated between nationals and non-nationals in the *koseki* revealing more of the system's inherent discriminatory nature. (Chapman, p. 5) Despite these changes, Japan remains closed off for most prospective immigrants and may remain so for years to come.

While Japan has done an excellent job in spreading its people and culture out into the world, as well as globalizing economically, inwards there has been comparatively little effect. With the idea that globalization involves both diversity and cultural homogenization due to global economics (Block & Cameron, p. 13), Japan has been anything but a role model for this. The idea of globalization has been strong with the business community in Japan for decades. Originally under the term of *kokusaika*, the concept was meant to spread the word of international cultural understanding, allowing for greater international interaction and cooperation. (Block & Cameron, p. 16) Though successful to a degree economically, it has seen many obstacles. It has caused some backlash as with the increased emphasis of globalization there was an increase of nationalistic sentiments, resulting in things such as prouder displays of the Japanese flag. (Block & Cameron, p. 13) Institutionally, globalization has had an effect in education. While it involved an increased emphasis on developing better English communication skills, as will be explained in a later chapter, it has also resulted in "promotion of nationalistic values in educational contexts." (Block & Cameron, p. 16) That said, foreign companies have seen significant success in Japan, and contrary to the desires of nationalist idealists, "these commodities could also arouse the people's desire to identify themselves with Americans." (Block & Cameron, p. 13) Japan's businesses have also sought foreign investments as early as the 70's where they expanded their offices to other nations, though especially of note is South America. As a result, there are "a number of Japanese communities abroad with several thousand residents or more that are composed primarily of business expats and their families." (Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano & Hirabayashi, p. 12-13) With these communities, foreign nations have, in a way, a bit of the Japanese nation injected into them, as may be mentioned:

The major characteristics of such communities are that the Japanese language is the exclusive mode of communication and that the community is organized on the basis of Japanese cultural values. (Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano & Hirabayashi, p. 13)

These communities, although interacting with their country of residence out of the necessity of their work there, are often isolated clusters due to language and cultural

barriers. This effect was so strong that other unrelated Japanese businesses would open up in these communities just to service the expatriated businessmen. The expatriated workers would exclusively use these provided services due to their poor non-Japanese language skills and they “trusted Japanese more than locals for no better reason than their prejudice. (Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano & Hirabayashi, p. 13) With this in mind, there are those that were sent to work abroad by their company that fell in love with their host country and would resign from their company to permanently reside there, despite a large drop in income and benefits. They’d use their skills and contacts to open their own local businesses or become a local contractor for other Japanese companies. (Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano & Hirabayashi, p. 13) More recently, and outside of the business sector, there have been Japanese emigrants moving to other countries for a variety of reasons, ranging from curiosity, unhappiness with corporate culture or discrimination in Japan, or simply bored with their country of origin. Furthermore, the typical Japanese tourist culture of travelling in groups for safety, time and finance reasons is starting to dissolve as “young Japanese traveling alone are a common sight.” (Hirabayashi, Kikumura-Yano & Hirabayashi, p. 15)

Japan’s government has made some efforts in making the country not as exclusive as it once was, but their efforts pale in comparison to the drive of the local corporations and increasingly intrepid Japanese citizens. A multitude of issues and requirements await those who wish to immigrate to Japan due the nature of Japan’s policies, that is not to say what social issues might occur. The *koseki* itself, though the pride of those with nationalist ideals, causes enough trouble for the Japanese themselves, let alone for migrants or the workers that Japanese businesses require for their operation. Changes have been made to attempt to satisfy these needs but more must be done if Japan wishes to further integrate into the international community and not remain as closed to the outside world.

### 3. Inclusiveness Begets Exclusiveness: Distrusting the Unknown

The sight of office workers doing exercises in the street or a neighbourhood having a small festival isn't uncommon in Japan. This show of team building and tight-knit communities is the result of a collective mentality ingrained in Japanese society. From families to offices, the Japanese attempt to maintain an environment of consensus and unity. Deviating from what is acceptable within these groups can result in unwanted consequences. Having different groups interact can be difficult, however, not wanting to cause insult or unease to either side.

Although the Japanese nation finds strength in this collectiveness, the same mechanism can prevent social change as well as isolate them from the rest of the world.

Japanese society has a long history for isolating themselves within groups due to what is known as an *uchi-soto* mentality. The *uchi-soto* concept is based on an inside (*uchi*) group and an outside (*soto*) group. An example is a person's family would be an *uchi* group and a neighbouring family would be a *soto* group. *Uchi* implies a more casual setting where there is much more familiarity and openness while interacting with a *soto* group would result in a more formal and uptight conversation. Thus, *uchi* groups could be friends, a company, or a club, while *soto* would be those outside these groups such as a rival company or simply strangers. This mentality is ingrained from childhood with the family, "*uchi* and *soto* are associated with the clean inside of the house, and the dirty outside world, respectively." (Hendry, p. 42) The idea of the familiar *uchi* group is attached to feelings of safety and desirability to be part of this group. This is used to great effect in disciplining children when the threat of being removed from the group is used by the caregiver:

Taken together with the association already established of security with *uchi*, and fear with *soto*, and the emphasis on equality of members of the group, this form of ostracism is usually rather effective in encouraging participation. (Hendry, p.47)

This builds a strong group mentality where an individual is more concerned about the well-being of the group as a whole rather than the individual itself, leading to even actions of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the group. Independence of individuals are less of a focus for the Japanese while a consensual collective is far more desirable. (Greenfield & Cocking, p. 277) However, this may also result in less productive and awkward inter-group relationships as "one cannot candidly discuss sensitive matters in *soto* but can straightforwardly break confidentiality in *uchi* situations." (Sugimoto, p. 26) *Uchi-soto* also builds a mentality of isolation as the unknown and unfamiliar is treated with much colder, calculated approaches, leading to ideas such as that foreigners are "'strange, 'dirty', or even 'stupid', since their

assumptions about the world are different.” (Hendry, p. 41) As such, while the desirability of *uchi* builds a strong collective consciousness, the fear of *soto* creates a wall of isolation.

The desire to maintain status quo within and between groups in Japan can lead to an atmosphere that stifles individualism and open expression, as well as hindering significant changes. As could be ascertained by the *uchi-soto* mentality permeating Japanese society, there is a great emphasis on conformity. The uniforms of students are but one example of this. As mentioned before, there is a desire to be part of the group and to do so requires maintaining a consensus within the group. Therefore, a certain amount of individuality disappears to maintain this group order. This can lead to scenarios such as the one Young found in his classes “I soon found that the best way (often the only way) to elicit spontaneous speech from a student was to ask a direct question.” (p. 130) This is further backed up by Miyamoto who states that within the group, open expression of critical thoughts is discouraged unless there is a consensus on it. (p. 21) The effects of this is felt as far up in society as the Diet itself where “serious dissent ... is rare, as decisions are supposed to be made by consensus, and dissent therefore usually leads to resignation or dismissal.” (Hendry, p. 191) Threats to the group makeup can come in many forms, such as in the case of Japanese children returning to Japan after living abroad. These youths have to go through much adversity as the groups they desire to join reject them fearing they would threaten the order of the system. (Hendry, p. 82) It may be noted that the collective strength of these tight-knit unions have been attributed to many positive effects such as the strong post-World War II economy and quick rebuilding efforts after natural disasters. (Aldrich, p. 87)

Due to fear of social ostracization, attempts at upsetting social norms are dissuaded. From childhood, the Japanese are under some sort of social pressure. Related to the strong family bonds, the actions of the Japanese are under scrutiny to keep up social graces as to not blemish the reputation of their family. (Hendry, p. 24) This extends to other groups as well as their schools and places of employment. The aforementioned ideal of self-sacrifice is part of this as well. Companies will demand sacrifices of their employees in the form of overtime, for example, as the greater good is valued above the individual. (Miyamoto, p. 20) Such is the power that this strong group mentality holds over many of the Japanese. As with the fear with upsetting the status quo, some may keep to themselves their opinions and interests. Not wanting to embarrass themselves or their group, they may avoid expressing thoughts or interest on things that might upset the order. This stress, along with the obsession with conformity, can also result in bullying, not only in schools but in the workplace. (Akiba, p.

220) This may well create an environment where an open mind to the outside world is actively repressed.

While any nation experiences xenophobia to some extent, there are accounts of popularized xenophobia in Japan. It should be noted that while outright racism and hate speech is a minority in Japan, there are concerns about inherent xenophobia within the system. An example of this is that non-Japanese academics are not entitled to tenure due to interpretations of Japanese government policy which denies foreigners the right to be staffed as public employees. Although this policy was later amended, it seems that few universities are willing to adapt to this change. (Watts & Feldman, p. 645) This discourages foreign career academics from considering Japanese universities as potential sites of employment which is an obstacle for international academic discourse. Furthermore, in Japanese academia there is hostility from some within the English teaching field towards foreign teachers taking roles other than assistant English teachers. This sentiment is felt so strongly that some such as Shishin feel compelled to claim that “the anti-English English teacher is a significant presence in Japanese academia.” (2002) While such a statement may sound extreme, it may be noted that xenophobic remarks have been made by members of the Japanese government:

An example of this is the widespread fear over crimes that foreigners commit in Japan. Shintaro Ishihara, the governor of Tokyo from 1999 to 2012, voiced these sentiments in many controversial statements about the moral decay and social disturbance fomented by foreigners. (Wohns, 2013)

Watts & Feldman do state that the Japanese are generally hospitable towards visitors of their country, however they also later mention that the same Japanese may not view those seeking residence in Japan with as much positivity. (p. 645) This concern is further cemented when considering a poll from Asahi Shimbun concerning immigration where 65% of poll takers opposed policies increasing immigration meanwhile only 26% favoured immigration. (Wohns, 2013) It must be emphasized that while this may paint the general Japanese populace as xenophobic, this is not the case because it would conflict with greatly with Japan’s booming tourism industry. This is evidenced as in August 2013 Japan attracted approximately 907,000 tourists, which 17.1% more from the previous year. (The Japan Times, 2013) In fact, according to TripAdvisor, Tokyo was rated the most satisfying tourist city in 2013. (as cited in The Japan Times, 2014)

Collective group strength may be one of Japan’s greatest assets but their isolating factors may cause issues in a country seeking to further internationalize. The unity of the

nation's groups is something to be admired, that cannot be denied. That said, as the world is getting smaller and the international community intermingles more, greater flexibility would be far more desirable. Otherwise the increased movement of groups and individuals will cause more friction with Japanese groups. That is not to say the unrest caused when individuals within the groups, influenced by foreign elements, start deviating from the norms they were raised with and let themselves be heard.

#### 4. Flawed Approaches and Mixed Messages in Japanese Education

It is said that what is learned and experienced in a person's formative years shapes their personality and outlook. With that in mind, education has an important role in how equipped an individual is to tackle new problems or navigate new areas. If a student is to be able to integrate fully with the international community, it must receive adequate tools to handle the situations that may arise. The Japanese government accepts that participation in the international arena is important for the growth of Japan as a nation. However, whether enough is being done, or the correct methods are being applied, is important. Although strong efforts are being made, not enough is being done to prepare the Japanese student for the outside world.

The Japanese government's strict control of what is taught gives students a skewed view of the world and allows the current administration to shape Japan's future workers as they please. Education in Japan and its policies are controlled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). This ministry has been given purview over many aspects of Japanese education. An example of which is that classroom textbooks must first be approved by the ministry. Consequently, they are able to select what is taught in the schools and use their power to influence textbook writers to "reflect the image that the Ministry deems appropriate." (Hendry, p. 98) This approach allows the ministry, and by proxy the government, to mould students as they see fit, at least to a certain extent. This power that has been vested in them has been viewed with some controversy as history textbooks depict Japan's wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as imperial expansion, in a positive light, (Hendry, p. 76) perhaps fitting the narrative that the ministry wishes to express. This bodes ill for Japan's relationship with its neighbours such as China and Korea as it gives them some recourse in hiding away or outright ignoring contentious historical events such as the Rape of Nanking or the Koreans who were brought to Japan as forced labour, and whose descendants still reside in Japan to this day. The teachers that are hired are recruited through prefectural education boards. Thus, the government can deny teachers who they find unsuitable with the current policies. This results in teachers who, for example, "when asked to focus on Koreans and human rights issues, would say it is too *'omoi, kurai'* (too heavy, too serious)." (Tsuneyoshi, p. 71) However, some of this power can be subjective as the ministry can change and with it the narrative they wish to distribute to Japan's youth. This centralized method of education control also allows MEXT to have a uniform curriculum across the country, (Hendry, p. 98) further strengthening conformity. Alas, this does also restrict experimentation of curriculum at

local levels, as well as a lack of flexibility. In the end, the government controls a great deal of the information that is taught in the classroom, which results in students more in line with what the government wants.

Outside school grounds the schools' influence is made known as they concern themselves with the students at home and elsewhere. In Japan, schools take on more responsibility to raising the youth than Western schools might. Being part of the school collective, students are considered representatives of their respective schools and "unseemly behaviour, even if out of school hours, reflects badly on the school, and teachers may well want to be involved in any disciplinary action that arises." (Hendry, p. 75) Schools and the teachers become part of the parenting unit in a way, with pressure being placed on parents and their raising of the child.

Parents who complain to the school about the beating of their child are routinely told that it is their fault for not raising the child properly. The school then informs the parent/teacher organization, and the parents are ostracized by that group. (Young, p. 131)

As the notion that too much free time for children is unappealing, schools will find ways to fill their students' time with activities such as after school clubs and school trips. (Hendry, p. 75) A stand is being made against the system by parents and children due to the stress that is put on the family, "some parents even encourage rebellion ... A few simply sent their children abroad to gain a different set of skills." (Hendry, p. 87-88)

The teaching of English is given much emphasis in Japan, however due to the nature of school and career tracks, it has given very few practical results. The importance of communicative English ability in the context of an increasingly globalized society, especially in the business world, has not been lost on the Japanese business community or policy makers in the government. An individual's skill with English is seen to be critical to interacting with other peoples and general international understanding. (Yoshida, p. 291) In fact, this emphasis on English have led to no policies to maintain the languages of minority populations in Japan or other languages than English due to the demands the Japanese business sector have placed on policy makers. (Yoshida, p. 291) This importance known, MEXT sought to improve the English capabilities of students with a variety of initiatives such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme) and the Course of Study Guidelines. For example, the JET Programme would import native English speakers to act as assistant teachers in the classroom to provide students a fluent speaker as a role model and as a window to foreign culture. Yet with these initiatives, the English ability of students have been found wanting, as

in 1999 the average TOEFL test scores of Japanese examinees never surpassed 500. (Yoshida, p. 290) In light of these results, studies have been done on English education in Japan and found that the nature of the academic track may be to blame. Due to the importance of entrance exams, students study for the exams themselves rather than practical ability. This bleeds into the teaching methods as “the overwhelming pressure that *Juken Eigo* (English for entrance exams) places on the teacher.” (Kikuchi, Browne, p. 187) Kikuchi and Browne’s findings went as far as to describe that the communicative objectives of the Course of Study Guidelines were never implemented and that students would claim that they took the classes only to prepare for the entrance exam. (p. 187) This would correlate with the remarks of Morley Young who found that “many Japanese are not educated; they are trained.” (p. 130) Regardless, efforts are being made with universities reserving places for students who have studied abroad and nursery schools hiring English teachers. (Hendry, p. 82) As mentioned before, the emphasis on English has resulted in neglect to other languages. The University Entrance Examination Center test does not include Spanish or Portuguese, two other important business languages, especially if working in South America. (Yoshida, p. 292) As previously mentioned, no policies have been made to help maintain the diminishing Ainu or Okinawan languages. (Yoshida, p. 292)

Given how much power the education system has over the average Japanese citizen; greater efforts must be made to prepare Japanese students for the increasingly small world. The government has a large amount of control over what the Japanese student learns, which they well know with their control of textbooks and language education policies. Thus, they carry a lot of responsibility in how their citizens will be able to handle interactions with the outside world. As long as the bureaucracy is unable to further adapt and improve their capabilities to prepare the citizenry, Japan’s integration with the international community will remain in its ponderous pace.

## 5. Accessible International Media: The Nationalist's Worst Foe

The world has become even smaller in the age where information can be accessed readily via the Internet. This information is not only in the form of messages between friends or co-workers but also entertainment as users worldwide are able to more easily access films or television programmes from other countries that they'd normally not have access to. This is no different in Japan where Internet use is commonplace. As such, the Japanese keep in touch with their different groups as well as the outside world. They have also had plenty of exposure to foreign media as these profit-seeking companies aim to distribute their product wherever possible. Avid consumption of foreign media as well as the openness of the Internet and social media is giving the Japanese a way to see and interact with the wider world beyond their isolated island nation.

Western media has garnered a certain amount of success in Japan, although it is becoming increasingly adapted within the media culture for ease of accessibility. Japanese culture has often been influenced by foreign culture, although more recently these influences have come from the West. For example, Japanese animation and comics, also known as *anime* and *manga* respectively, were influenced by Western styles of the time, as evidenced by Astroboy *manga* creator Osamu Tezuka who took inspiration from Walt Disney's works. (Schodt, p. 43-44) It should be no surprise that the works of Disney see much popularity in Japan, although some attribute it to "the intensive and very successful promotion of Disneyland in Tokyo." (Rohn, p. 327) Western films see much success in Japan (Rohn, p. 327) as well as the television channels that have been opened up by Western companies such as MTV and Cartoon Network. Although, there are alterations such as MTV Japan focusing entirely on music videos (Rohn, p. 305) unlike its American counterpart. These alterations are common as Iwabushi comments "... Japanese media has successfully localized the influx of US media culture by imitating and appropriating the original ..." (as cited in Rohn, p. 175) On the note of these alterations, although Western films in theatres had been subtitled due to the preferences of the audiences, there is a shift towards overdubbing the films in Japanese as the dubbed releases are drawing in increasingly larger audiences. (Gaijinpot, 2010) Worthy of mention is that there is an increase of interest in Western made video game titles. This interest is affecting the sales of domestically created titles, worrying Japanese video game studios. (Consalvo, p. 139) As can be seen, Western media has had a significant impact on the media consumption of the Japanese, although it remains to be seen how this will change in the future.

While initially isolated to domestic social media outlets, the Japanese are expanding to more widely used networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Being one of the largest users of Internet-capable devices (Hjorth & Khoo, p. 54) it should come to no surprise that the Japanese are savvy consumers of social media. In fact, being social media users as early as 2003 (Bolton et al, p. 251), they share information with each other at a phenomenal rate. The Japanese originally kept an exclusive approach towards their use of social media, using Japan-only networks such as Mixi with little interest in more globally used sites like Facebook. (Berthon et al, 2012) Other sources would claim that this is expanding to the aforementioned Facebook (Hjorth & Khoo, p. 55) as well as Twitter. (Kaigo, p. 24) It may be mentioned that the use of social media sites, including Twitter, helped with the spread of information and relief efforts in the wake of the earthquake and following tsunami in 2011. (Hjorth & Khoo, p. 55) The same source claims that “It was through social media that users fully contextualized the disaster as a political crisis and opportunity for wider, even democratic, participation.” (p. 53) Twitter has also helped the Japanese communicate in a more with real life friends and acquaintances as well as provide an outlet of indirect communication with said associates. (Kaigo, p. 24) It could be said that social media is helping the Japanese to interact with the greater world outside of the cliques and groups they’re used to. While there are fears that social media is leading to shallower social relationships (Kaigo, p. 24) it is there to stay: “As the Internet and social media usage is being quickly incorporated into the daily lives of Japanese, more time is spent on communication through these methods.” (Kaigo, p. 25)

With the frenzied use of social media and other Internet outlets, along with exposure to foreign media, the Japanese are becoming more easily integrated with the international community. Foreign entertainment is providing Japan bits and pieces of culture from across the globe, while the Internet sites and social media outlets update them on current events and let them interact with the world at large. With these subtle exchanges of ideas and opinions, the Japanese nation is opening up more to the world. As this increases in the future, it’ll become increasingly difficult for even the most xenophobic person, Japanese or otherwise, to maintain isolation from the rest of the world.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, Japan remains cautious about the influx of foreigners and outside influence during an era of increased globalization, leaving their borders, if not open, then at least slightly ajar. The efforts of politicians and bureaucrats leave much to be desired for those hoping to enter Japan from the outside to make greater contributions for the country. Life can be difficult for those looking towards Japan seeking new life or further success. Corporations with global ambitions may find great success in Japan but the effort may be great or outright wasted. Meanwhile the nation's youth learn English by rote to pass their exams, alas much of this effort is wasted when the true objective is the ability to communicate with other English speakers. The strong collective mind-set is a great asset but remains a hindrance in its current form for outsiders hoping to assimilate within society, as well as potentially creating distrust for the unknown. Despite all this, history has proven the importance of intermingling with other nations for developing as a power and a nation. The attempts made to broaden Japanese horizons, while currently hindered, are gradually opening the nation to the outside.

## References

- Akiba, M. (2004). Nature and correlates of Ijime—Bullying in Japanese middle school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 41(3), 216-236.
- Aldrich, D. P. (2008). The Crucial Role of Civil Society in Disaster Recovery and Japan's Preparedness for Emergencies. *Japan aktuell*, 3.
- Berthon, P. R., Pitt, L. F., Plangger, K., Shapiro, D. (2012). Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy. *Business Horizons*, 55(3), 261-271.
- Block, D., & Cameron, D. (Eds.). (2002). *Globalization and language teaching*. Routledge.
- Bolton, R.N., Gruber, T., Hoefnagels, A., Kabadayi, S., Loureiro, Y. K., Migchels, N., ... (2013). Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 245–267.
- Bryant, T. (1991). For the Sake of the Country, For the Sake of the Family: The Oppressive Impact of Family Registration on Women and Minorities in Japan. *UCLA Law Review* 39(1), 109-168.
- Chapman, D. (2012). No more "Aliens": managing the familiar and the unfamiliar in Japan. *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 10(40), 1-6.
- Chapman, D., & Krogness, K. J. (2014). *Japan's household registration system and citizenship: Koseki, identification and documentation*, 94. Routledge.
- Chung, E. A. (2010). *Immigration and citizenship in Japan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Consalvo, M. (2009). Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry. *Cinema Journal*, 48(3), 135-141.
- Elisonas, J. (1991). Christianity and the daimyo. In J. W. Hall (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 4) (pp. 301-372). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Funakoshi, M., Miyazaki, A., Saito, M., Wilson, T. (2016, August 10). Banned from working, asylum seekers are building Japan's roads. *Japan Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/banned-from-working-asylum-seekers-are-building-japans-roads>

- Gaijinpot*. (2010, September 7). More Western movies being dubbed as Japanese tire of subtitles. Retrieved from <https://injapan.gaijinpot.com/play/culture/2010/09/07/more-western-movies-being-dubbed-as-japanese-tire-of-subtitles/>
- Greenfield, P. M., Cocking, R. R. (2014). *Cross-cultural Roots of Minority Child Development*. Psychology Press.
- Hendry, J. (2013). *Understanding Japanese Society* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). USA: Routledge.
- Hirabayashi, L. R., Kikumura-Yano, A., & Hirabayashi, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *New worlds, new lives: Globalization and people of Japanese descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan*. Stanford University Press.
- Hjorth, L. & Khoo, O. (2015). *Routledge Handbook of New Media in Asia*. Routledge.
- Jansen, M. B. (1989). Japan in the early nineteenth century. In M. B. Jansen (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 5) (pp. 50-115). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- The Japan Times*. (2013, October 1). Attracting 10 million tourists to Japan. Retrieved from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/10/01/editorials/attracting-10-million-tourists-to-japan/#.V6pkXilkjmh>
- The Japan Times*. (2014, May 31). Tourists rate Tokyo top city. Retrieved from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/05/31/editorials/tourists-rate-tokyo-top-city/#.V6pkYClkjmg>
- Kaigo, M. (2012). Social Media Usage During Disasters and Social Capital: Twitter and the Great East Japan Earthquake. *Kei Communication Review*, 34, 19-35.
- Kikuchi, K., Browne, C. (2009). English Educational Policy for High Schools in Japan: Ideals vs. Reality. *RELC Journal*, 40(2), 172-191.
- Kondo, A. (2002). The development of immigration policy in Japan. *Asian and Pacific migration journal*, 11(4), 415-436.
- McCullough, W. H. (1999). The Heian Court, 794-1070. In D. H. Shively & W. H. McCullough (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 2) (pp. 20-96). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, R. H. (1967). *The Korean Minority in Japan*. University of California Press.
- Miyamoto, M. (1994). *Straitjacket Society*. Japan: Kodansha International Ltd.

- Peattie, M. R. (2005). The Japanese colonial empire, 1895-1945. In P. Duus (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 6) (pp. 217-270). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Rohn, U. (2009). *Cultural Barriers to the Success of Foreign Media Content: Western Media in China, India, and Japan*. Peter Lang.
- Schodt, F. L. (2007). *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution*. Stone Bridge Press.
- Shishin, A. (2002). The problems of xenophobia and the teaching of English at Japanese universities. *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English [EESE]*.
- Shouji, K. (2003). Japan and East Asia. (G. C. Hurst III, Trans.). In K. Yamamura (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 3) (pp. 396-446). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Sugimoto, Y. (1998) *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Suzuki, N. (2010). Outlawed Children: Japanese Filipino Children, Legal Defiance and Ambivalent Citizenships. *Pacific Affairs*, 83(1), 31-50.
- Takashi, O. (1997). Japan and the continent. (J. Goodwin, Trans.). In D. M. Brown (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 1) (pp. 268-316). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsuda, T. (Ed.). (2006). *Local citizenship in recent countries of immigration: Japan in comparative perspective*. Lexington Books.
- Tsuneyoshi, Ryoko. (2004). The 'New' Foreigners and the Social Reconstruction of Difference: The Cultural Diversification of Japanese Education. *Comparative Education*, 40(1), 55-81.
- Ury, M. (1999). Chinese learning and intellectual life. In D. H. Shively & W. H. McCullough (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 2) (pp. 341-389). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Watts, M., & Feldman, O. (2001). Are Nativists a Different Kind of Democrat? Democratic Values and "Outsiders" in Japan. *Political Psychology*, 22(4), 639-663.
- Wohns, A. W. (2013). Calling all gaijin!: Immigration reform for japan. *Harvard International Review*, 35(2), 6-7.
- Yoshida, Kensaku. (2003). Language Education Policy in Japan: The Problem of Espoused Objectives versus Practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, 87(2), 290-292.

Young, Morley. (1993). The Dark Underside of Japanese Education. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(2), 130-132.