Introduction to Japanese Society
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Brainstorming

• How many of these did you come up with …?
  Kamikaze
  Convenience
  Homogeneous
  Electronics
  High tech
  KANJI
  History
  Rice
  Trying hard
  Shinto

Bowling
Mountainous
Salarman
Idols
Baseball
Aging society
Manga
Tradition
Samurai
Clean
Poite
Crowded
Disasters

Earthquakes
Apologetic
Bullet train
Cool
Unique
Rich
Culture

Japanese Society

• How many of these did you come up with …?
  Cheap
  Organized crime
  Ethnic minorities
  Immigration
  Gender equality
  Skiing
  Pornography
  Curry
  Cycling
  Individualism
  Musicals
  Creativity
  Rudeness
  Pollution
  Potatoes
  Beach holidays
  Communism
  Bureaucracy
  Charity
  Planos
  Christianity
  Jeans
  Scandal
  Renewable energy
  Flat land
  Hip hop

Orientation

Class website:

www.philipseaton.net

Rethinking Japan’s Geography
Japan’s Geography

Chapter 1: Land and Climate

The Area of “Japan”

• A nation-state with clear borders.
• The modern Japanese state and culture can trace their roots back through history to time immemorial.
• An “in/out” view of “Japan”: things are either Japanese or non-Japanese.
• A list of characteristics that define typical Japaneseness (based in the perceptions of the powerful).
• This is the “Nihonjinron” view.

The “Neat” Japan Myth

• A political unit in a constant state of territorial and political flux.
• An “imagined community” constructed over the course of millennia.
• A population of people that self-identify (to a greater or lesser extent) as “Japanese”, and who are certainly not monolithic.
• A subset of our species, homo sapiens, that has most things in common with other human beings around the world.
• In this classroom, we are all part of Japanese society!

The “Messy” Japan Reality

• We will think of Japanese society as ...
  • diverse rather than “homogenous”;
  • evolving rather than “inherent”;
  • contested rather than “harmonious”;
  • connected to the world rather than “isolated”;
  • and not “uniquely unique” but “typically unique”.

In This Course …

A Good Starting Question …

“Suppose that a being from a different planet arrived in Japan and wanted to meet a typical Japanese, one who best typified the Japanese adult population. Whom should the social scientists choose?”

(Sugimoto, page 1)

[The person chosen should be female, because women outnumber men in Japan … she would definitely not be employed in a large corporation but would work in a small enterprise … Nor would she be guaranteed lifetime employment … She would not belong to a labor union … She would not be university educated …]

( Ibid)
End-of-term Exam Question

“Describe three ways in which Japanese society will need to adapt in order to cope with the climate crisis in the twenty-first century.”
• Week 2 (14 October): Population – population shrinkage, rural depopulation, aging society