

In our lecture today we will look at sport, pop culture and entertainment. This is a vast topic area and we can only cover a fraction of it. I will just try to connect it back to the relevance of leisure for our study of Japanese society. Today's lecture is also a chance to introduce my own research areas related to Japanese society, namely media, pop culture, and tourism.

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Leisure Time			
Table 16.8			
Major Leisure Activities by Sex (Aged 10 years old and over) (2021)			
Leisure Activities	Total	Males	Females
Free time per day (hours, minutes)	6.16	6.34	6.00
Participation rate (%) ¹⁾			
Hobbies and amusements	86.3	86.8	85.8
Sports ²⁾³⁾	66.5	69.9	63.3
Travel and excursion	49.5	48.9	50.1
Learning, self-education, and training ²⁾⁴⁾	39.6	39.8	39.5
Volunteer activities	17.8	18.2	17.5

1) Participants in the activity / Population × 100. 2) Including club activities at school. 3) Excluding sports performed by professional players as their job and by students in PE class. 4) Excluding worker training at the workplace, and study and research activities performed by children, pupils or students as schoolwork, such as study in class, preparation for class and review of lessons.

Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC.

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This is what the *Statistical Handbook* says about the amount of leisure time that Japanese people have, and what they do with it. I am not sure how much we trust such figures, or even what they tell us. Let's just say a completely obvious point: people sleep, work and have leisure time.

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The Media

- NHK, Japan's public broadcaster; NHK World, its English-language international service.
- Japan also has 5 commercial channels linked to the five national newspapers: Nippon TV (*Yomiuri*), Fuji Television (*Sankei*), TBS (*Mainichi*), Asahi TV (*Asahi*), TV Tokyo (*Nikkei*).
- There is a proliferation of local newspapers, and satellite, digital and other TV channels. Plus, many radio stations.

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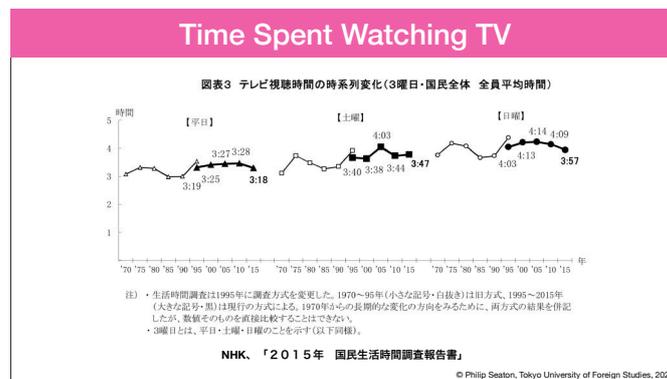
Let's start with Japan's media. Japan is a media saturated society. People watch lots of television, read newspapers lots compared to other countries, and are constantly looking at digital content on their smart phones.

An important characteristic of Japan's media is the role of public broadcaster, NHK. It is funded by a license fee and has a mission of producing politically balanced and high quality programming on television, radio and online.

Japan also has five major television networks linked to the five national newspapers.

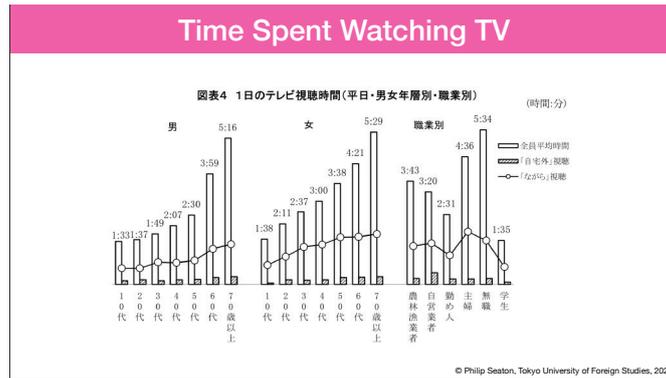
Beyond this there are thousands of media companies, large and small, local and national, all contributing to Japan's media. I will not go into all the different companies that exist. But, please spend some time exploring the mainstream news media via the section on the class homepage.

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Of all the media, television is particularly powerful when it comes to spreading information widely across the whole country. There is a lifestyle report produced by NHK that I have linked to from the class homepage. Japanese people were watching around three to four hours of TV per day in 2015. This is a rapidly changing area as on-demand TV services and streaming are revolutionizing viewing habits. Even if people claim that they get the majority of their news these days via social media and places like YouTube, the main TV stations and the clips they produce are still incredibly influential on these new platforms. Overall, the key point remains: people spend hours gazing at moving images on screens, whether big or small.

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And the amount of television watched goes up significantly the older the person. If you are old, not very mobile, and perhaps a bit lonely, television is your friend, companion and conversation partner throughout the day.

Press Freedom

- The media publishes a wide variety of political opinion.
- Press clubs: close relationships between journalists and the people they report about prevents freedom of reporting.
- Japan ranked 66th out of 180 countries in the world for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders.
- The UN Rapporteur David Kaye made a critical assessment of Japan's press freedom in 2016, which came under fire from Japanese conservatives.
- My take: There is considerable freedom of expression in Japan ... but I keep out of media debates ...

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I am going to focus on one major issue surrounding the media: namely press freedom. Japan has media outlets that publish a wide variety of political opinion. However, there have been many criticisms made against the system.

One relates to the *kisha kurabu*, or press clubs. These are clubs of journalists attached to a particular ministry, political party or other organization. This system is deemed to prevent freedom of reporting because the journalists develop close relationships with the people they are supposed to be reporting about. Consequently journalists avoid holding to account the politicians and organizations they cover.

This issue pulls down Japan's ranking for press freedom in the eyes of the journalism organization Reporters Without Borders. This year it is 66th out of 180 countries according to their survey, which is linked from the on-demand materials page.

In more recent years, the issue of press freedom has focused on issues of direct intimidation of the press, particularly during the tenure of Prime Minister Abe. This issue came to a head in 2016 when Special Rapporteur for the United Nations penned a

critical report about press freedom in Japan. An article severely criticizing the UN report is linked from the class homepage. You should be aware that many of the authors of the report are well known nationalistic commentators, and the website *Japan Forward* is run by Japan's most rightwing daily newspaper. But, it gives a good overview of the debates regarding press freedom in Japan.

If you want to know my own take on the situation, I think that in Japan you can say pretty much what you like in a political sense. And people do. I know many people who are highly critical of the government who regularly appear in the mainstream media. Of course, you have to watch out for online abuse if you decide to be politically active, but that is the peril of the Internet wherever you are in the world.

By the way, don't expect to see me on TV, in media debates, or on social media. I much prefer quietly exercising my academic freedom in my publications and talking calmly with my students in the classroom. Arguing online with someone I have never met is not my thing.

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Tourism



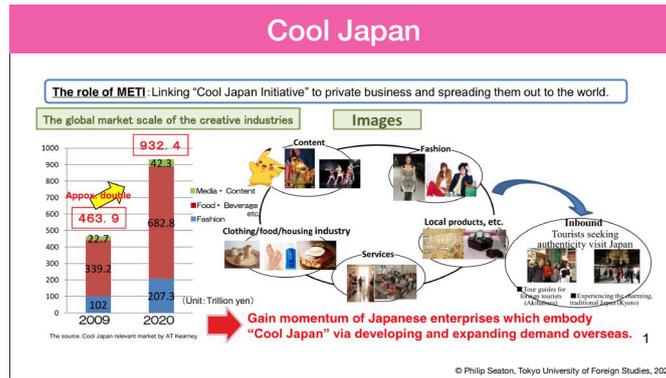
“Contents tourism is travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games. The concept originated in Japan and is closely related to what is known as film-induced tourism or media-induced tourism in English.” (*International Journal of Contents Tourism*)

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The next topic I want to introduce is tourism. This is an area I have published on extensively, particularly contents tourism, which is defined as “travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games.”

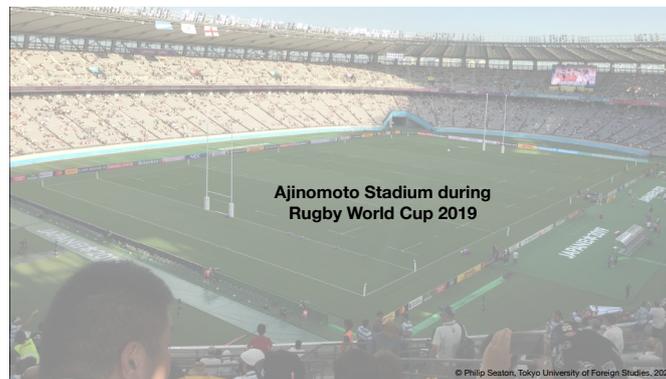
However, I am not going to give a long lecture on tourism. My chapter with Takayoshi Yamamura in the *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Japan* is our compact introduction to all tourism issues. Please read it. And to hear me giving a lecture on tourism as a researcher rather than teacher, see the video of my guest lecture at SOAS, University of London given in 2019. For my latest thoughts on tourism and their connection to environmental issues and the war in Ukraine, see my guest lecture at Wakayama University in 2022.

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However, let me just quickly mention Cool Japan. Many of you have probably heard this phrase already. Cool Japan is basically a government initiative to increase global sales of Japanese culture. This means selling manga, anime, games and all those other pop culture products which are so important for bringing international students to Japan these days! The government has recognized how much popular culture can help bring people to Japan as tourists, and students. As this graphic from a Japanese government website shows, Cool Japan is now closely linked to the inbound tourism strategy. This strategy was refined pre-Covid, and now that all Covid restrictions have been lifted we are quickly seeing tourism get "back to normal". Whether that is the right thing to do given the circumstances of the environmental crisis is something that we can perhaps debate later.

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The final thing I will talk about is sport.

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Favourite Sports (2025 Survey)

▼男女別順位(上位10位)

男性 (n=527)				女性 (n=657)			
1位	野球	266人	50.5%	1位	野球	195人	29.7%
2位	サッカー	140人	26.6%	2位	バレーボール	162人	24.7%
3位	相撲	126人	23.9%	3位	サッカー	111人	16.9%
4位	ゴルフ	107人	20.3%	4位	フィギュアスケート	99人	15.1%
5位	マラソン	79人	15.0%	5位	卓球	94人	14.3%
6位	駅伝	75人	14.2%	6位	駅伝	92人	14.0%
7位	ボクシング・キックボクシング	71人	13.5%	7位	相撲	90人	13.7%
8位	バレーボール	65人	12.3%	8位	バスケットボール	77人	11.7%
9位	バスケットボール	63人	12.0%	9位	マラソン	75人	11.4%
〃	ラグビー	63人	12.0%	10位	陸上	65人	9.9%
	特にない・わからない	72人	13.7%		特にない・わからない	136人	20.7%

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There's a survey about Japanese people's interests in sport carried out by Central Research Services. You can see the results from each year online linked from the class website. This data from the most recent survey shows interest in sport by gender. The firm favourites among both women and men are baseball and football. Also popular are long distance running, basketball and volleyball. These figures move around a little over the years as popular athletes come and go. Needless to say, at the moment Ohtani Shohei is the Japanese superstar.

The Olympics

- Summer 1940 (Tokyo, cancelled)
- Winter 1940 (Sapporo, cancelled)
- Summer 1964, Tokyo
- Winter 1972, Sapporo
- Winter 1998, Nagano
- Summer 2020 (Tokyo / Sapporo, postponed to 2021)

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Japan has hosted the Olympics on four occasions, and been awarded it on two other occasions. The 1940 summer and winter games were both scheduled to be held in Japan, but Japan forfeited its host nation status because of its war in China. And the 2020 Olympics, of course, were held in 2021, a year late because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Olympics and Social Issues

- **Legacies:** Infrastructure legacies, including Tokaido Shinkansen, Sapporo Subway, Nagano Shinkansen, and "Barrier-Free" Tokyo.
- **Olympic Sacrifices:** All the students who were stuck outside of Japan in 2021 while 100,000 Olympians and officials were let in.
- **Olympic Scandals:** Allegations of bribery both before and after the games, the logo scandal, sexist comments forcing Mori's resignation, evictions of people to make way for Olympic sites ...

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I will highlight three major social issues regarding the Olympics and Japan.

The first is how the games have been linked to massive infrastructure development. The Tokaido bullet train opened to coincide with the 1964 games; the Sapporo subway was built for the 1972 games; and the Nagano Shinkansen was opened for the 1998 games. The motif of the 2020 games was making Tokyo "barrier free", which is a recognition of the infrastructure changes required in Japan's aging society.

The second particularly affected your *sempai* from the Covid era. There was a travel ban for much of 2020 and 2021. International visitors could not get into Japan ... unless you were an Olympic athlete. Of course, Covid never stopped people travelling entirely. Travel bans were always a political decision, albeit based on important medical considerations. However, unfortunately, international students at Japanese universities were one of the groups sacrificed so that the Olympics immigration rush could go ahead.

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The third is an issue we encountered in the lecture on politics: scandal. There were allegations of bribery both before and after the games; the original logo was changed after claims of plagiarism; Mori Yoshiro resigned as head of the organizing committee after sexist remarks; and people who were "in the way of the games" got moved, either residents from their homes to make way for Olympic site construction or homeless people from the streets near Olympic venues.

In a nutshell, therefore, the games had their less savoury moments, in amidst all the good spots, of course.

Baseball & Football

- **Baseball:** Much discussion over how the sport and the way it is played have been “Japanized” (e.g. Robert Whiting, *You’ve Gotta Have Wa*).
- World Baseball Classic: Japan winners in 2006, 2009, and 2023.
- **Football:** Popularized in the 1990s; beginning of the J-League in 1993.
- Japan co-hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2002 with South Korea (and Rugby World Cup 2019).
- **Social Issue:** Professional vs amateur (e.g. Hakone ekiden & high school baseball).

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Let’s move onto the major team sports in Japan: baseball and football.

Much of the discussion about Japanese baseball is cultural, and relates to how the game is played differently in Japan to the United States. Do not think that just because many top Japanese players head to the United States that the game in Japan is somehow of a lower standard than the major leagues. Japan has won the World Baseball Classic three times, and the bronze twice, making it the most successful national team in the history of the tournament. And when Otani Shohei moved to the Dodgers he became the most expensive player in baseball history: 700 million dollars over 10 years makes him the richest salaryman in Japan.

Football, meanwhile, exploded in popularity after the establishment of the J-League in 1993, and was further boosted by Japan co-hosting the 2002 FIFA World Cup with South Korea. Each time the World Cup comes around, football fever grips the country. And then rugby had a similar boost from the highly successful World Cup in 2019, which included the Brave Blossoms reaching the last 8 for the first time.

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Another key feature of sport in Japan is the ongoing love affair with amateur sport. The Hakone ekiden run at new year and the high school baseball championship in the summer both capture the public imagination as much as any of the major professional sporting events. I think this connects to the Japanese love of “ganbaru” and “kando”, in other words, being moved by seeing people trying their best. Rather than wanting to see the performance of the top athletes, there is a culture of cheering on people who have only one or two chances to achieve victory during their limited times at school or university. Sharing the tears of joy or desolation trumps the desire to see the highest level of performance. The result, I think, is that in Japan amateur sport has a distinctively prominent position in the national sporting calendar.

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Women's Sport

- Volleyball: Olympic Gold Medalists in 1964.
- Football: Nadeshiko Japan won the FIFA Women's World Cup Final in 2011 (beating USA).
- Free-style wrestling: Kaori Icho (four consecutive Olympic Golds, 2004-2016) and Saori Yoshida (13 consecutive world titles, 3 Olympic Golds & 1 Silver).
- **Social Issues:** Sexist attitudes toward female elite professionals and athletes (see the article by Robin Kietlinski). Allegations of harassment against female athletes by their coaches.

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And one final notable point about sport. While we have learned much about male female inequality in Japanese society, this is certainly not the case in sport. Japanese women have performed equally well on the international stage as their male counterparts.

There is the legendary gold medal for the women's volleyball team at the Tokyo Olympics,

or how about Japan's women winning the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2011. While the men dream about reaching the best 8, Japan's women have actually won the World Cup.

Then, Japan's greatest ever Olympian is Icho Kaori, who won four consecutive Olympic Golds in Freestyle wrestling. Equally legendary is wrestler Yoshida Saori, who won 13 consecutive world titles and 3 consecutive Olympic golds before falling one short of Icho's record at the Rio games by only getting silver.

Despite all this success at the very top level, the expectations of women in a male dominated society continue to affect female athletes, as do issues of harassment and bullying. Read more on this issue in the article by Robin Kietlinski linked from the class homepage.

Finally

- The Japanese are ...
 - avid watchers of television but keen sportspeople ...
 - and hard workers but hard tourists, too.
- **Once again our key word is “diversity” not “homogeneity”.**

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So how can we sum up all of this discussion of Japanese leisure?

Well, in a country that watches a huge amount of television but has some amazing sporting achievements,

and in a country that spends long hours at work yet still has a vast tourism industry, we need explanations of Japanese society that go beyond the familiar cultural tropes or stereotypes about “the Japanese”. One again, our key word is “diversity” not “homogeneity”.