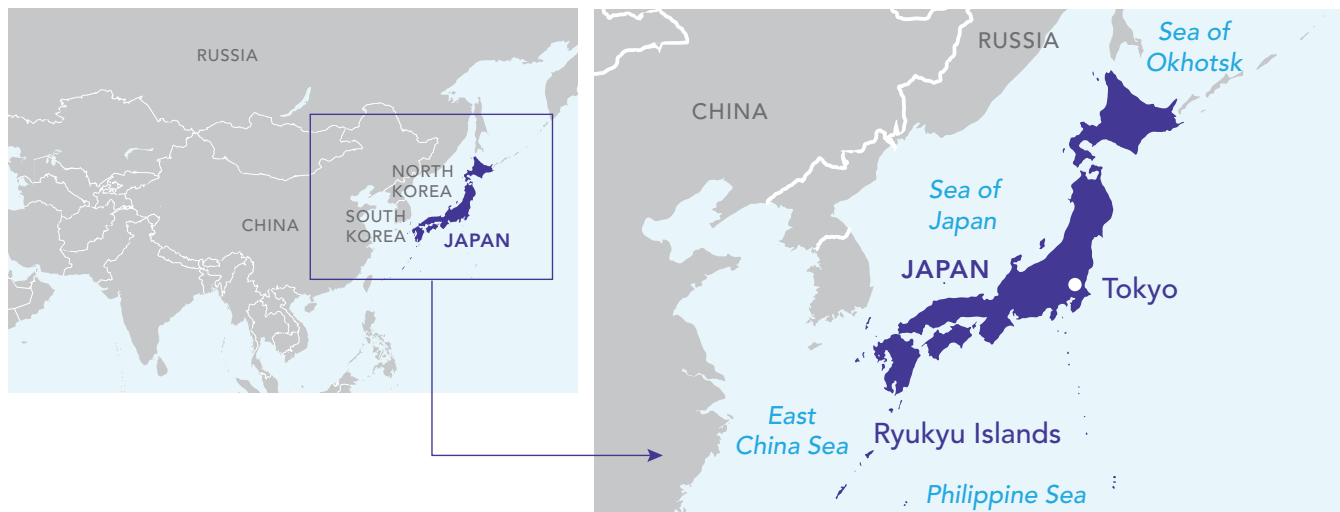




JAPAN



PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Japan is an archipelago of four main islands and nearly 4,000 smaller islands. Its islands stretch north toward Russia and south toward Taiwan, covering a span of roughly 2,400 kilometers. Japan has a rugged landscape, with mountains covering 80 percent of its

land surface. The highest peak, at 3,776 meters, is the famous cone-shaped Mount Fuji. Japan is also in a danger zone for earthquakes, with about 1,000 per year, as well as 60 active volcanoes.

BASIC FACTS

POPULATION: 126,451,398 (percentage under 25 years: 22.48%)

LIFE EXPECTANCY: 85 years

LITERACY RATE (AGE 15 AND OVER CAN READ & WRITE): 99%

OFFICIAL AND MAJOR LANGUAGE(S): Japanese

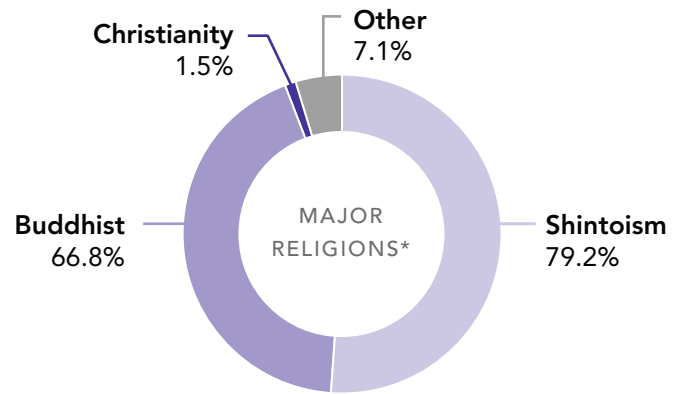
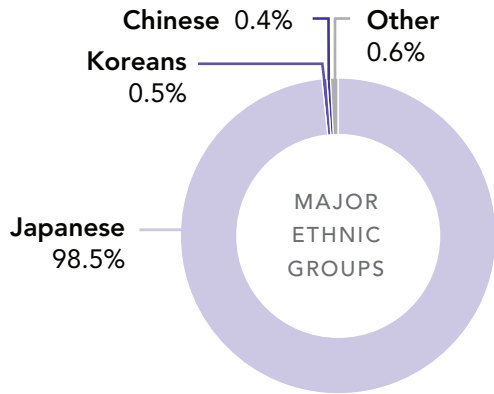
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: Parliamentary constitutional monarchy

CURRENT LEADER: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Source: CIA World Fact Book



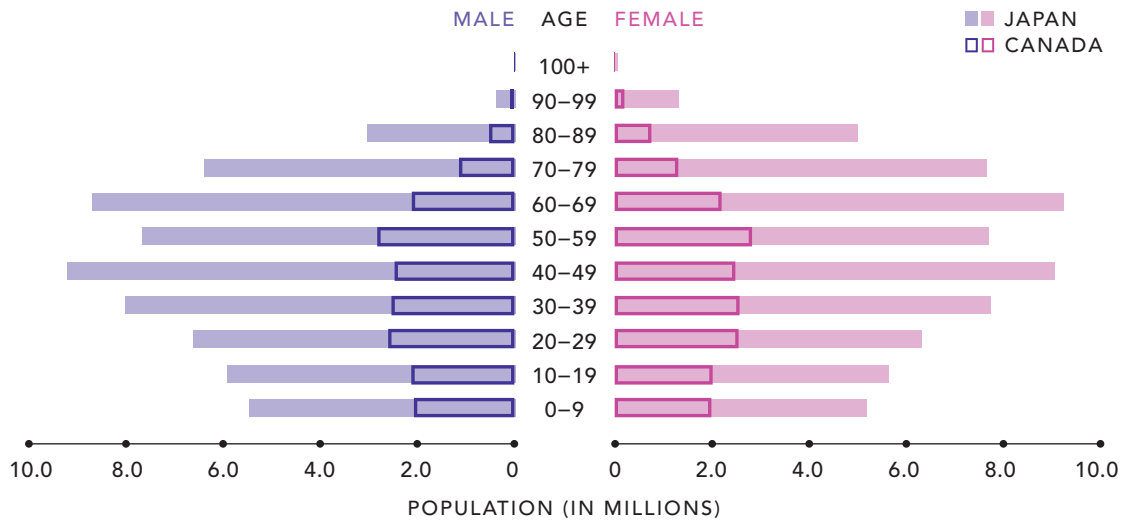
PEOPLE & CULTURE



*Total adherents exceeds 100% because many people practice both Shintoism and Buddhism

Source: CIA World Fact Book

POPULATION PYRAMID



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

ACTIVE INTERNET USERS: 93% of population

ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: 42% of population

AVERAGE DAILY INTERNET USE: 4.2 hours

AVERAGE DAILY SOCIAL MEDIA USE: 0.80 hours

Source: We Are Social



ECONOMY

GDP: C\$6,327.45 billion

GDP PER-CAPITA: C\$49,921.45

CURRENCY: Japanese Yen

MAJOR EXPORTS & IMPORTS:

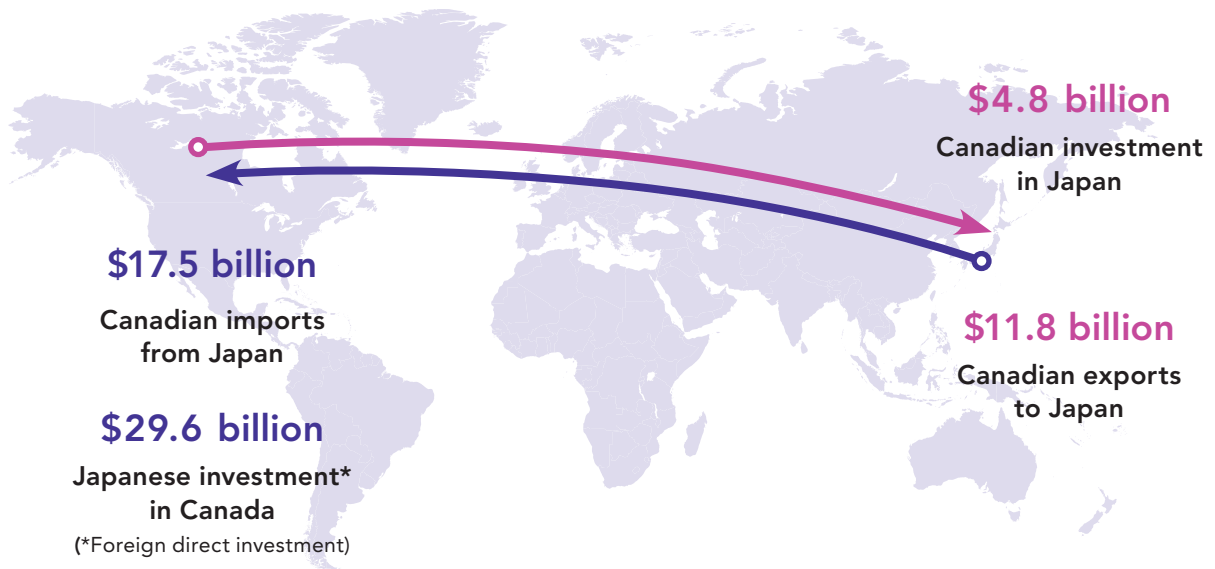
Exports: motor vehicles, iron and steel products, semiconductors, auto parts, power generating machinery, plastic materials

Imports: petroleum, liquid natural gas, clothing, semiconductors, coal, audio and visual apparatus

Source: Embassy of Canada to Japan & CIA World Fact Book

LINKS TO CANADA

TRADE, INVESTMENT IN 2017:



Source: Embassy of Canada to Japan

IMMIGRANTS FROM JAPAN TO CANADA IN 2017*:
(*does not include tourists)



Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada



NOTABLE DATES

HISTORICAL

Constitution Memorial Day

On May 3, 1947, Japan's post-World War Two constitution went into effect. The new constitution granted universal suffrage and removed all power other than symbolic power from the Emperor. Article 9 of the constitution outlawed Japan's right to wage war as a way of settling international disputes. Every year Japanese people mark this national holiday on May 3 by reflecting on freedom, democracy, and human rights.

More on Constitution Memorial Day: May 03, 1947: New Constitution Goes Into Effect, *History.com*, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/new-japanese-constitution-goes-into-effect>

CURRENT EVENT

3/11 Fukushima Triple Disaster

On March 11, 2011 a 9.1 magnitude earthquake struck 70 km off the coast of Tohoku in eastern Japan. The earthquake caused a second disaster, a tsunami with 30-foot waves that destroyed entire towns and communities. The third disaster was the damage—caused by the tsunami—to several nuclear energy reactors in the town of Fukushima, much of which was left uninhabitable. More than 18,000 people lost their lives in the “triple disaster.”

More on the 3/11 Triple Disaster: 2011 Japan Earthquake—Tsunami Fast Facts, *CNN Library*, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/17/world/asia/japan-earthquake--tsunami-fast-facts/>

CULTURAL HOLIDAY

Coming of Age Day

Coming of Age Day is celebrated on the second Monday of January each year. The day marks the passage of the country's 20-year-olds into official adulthood. The holiday was celebrated for the first time in 1948, although coming-of-age rituals in Japan go back much earlier than that. The holiday represents a young person's passage into independence and self-reliance. Some 20-year-olds in Japan mark the day by visiting Tokyo Disneyland.

More on Coming of Age Day:

Coming of Age Day Ceremonies Held Across Japan, *Japan Today*, <https://japantoday.com/category/national/coming-of-age-day-ceremonies-held-across-japan-3>

Coming of Age? Japan's Shifting Definition of Adulthood, *Japan Times*, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/25/national/social-issues/coming-age-japans-shifting-definition-adulthood/#.WXepyYjuUk>

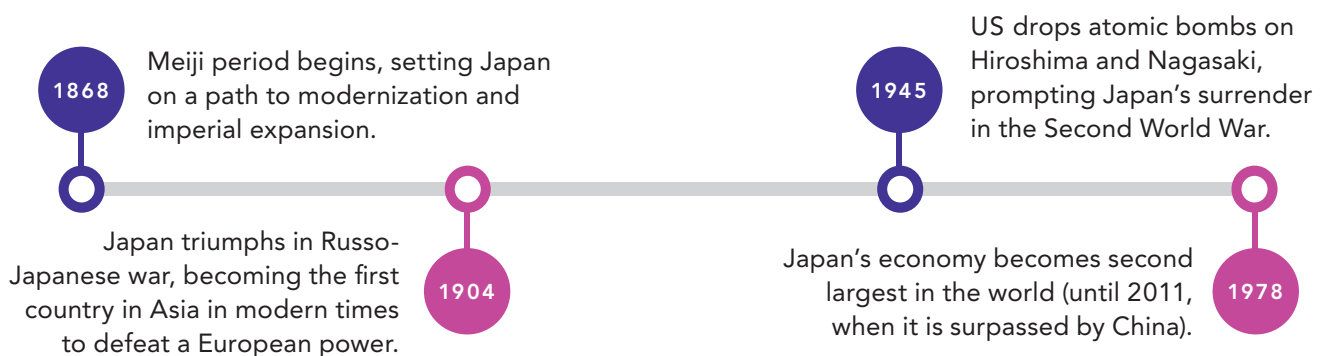
HONOURABLE MENTION

Emperor's Birthday (Tenno Tanjōbi)

This day honours the birthday of Emperor of Japan and the Chrysanthemum Throne. The date of the holiday changes depending on the birth date of the current Emperor. As of 2017, the holiday is on December 23, Emperor Akihito's birthday. The day is for festivities and for Japanese citizens to express their patriotism. On this day, the Imperial Palace is open to the public.

More on Emperor's Birthday: Emperor's Birthday: December 23, *A Global World*, <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/emperors-birthday-japan/>

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS



Source: Public Holidays & BBC



AGING JAPAN IN THE AGE OF ROBOTS

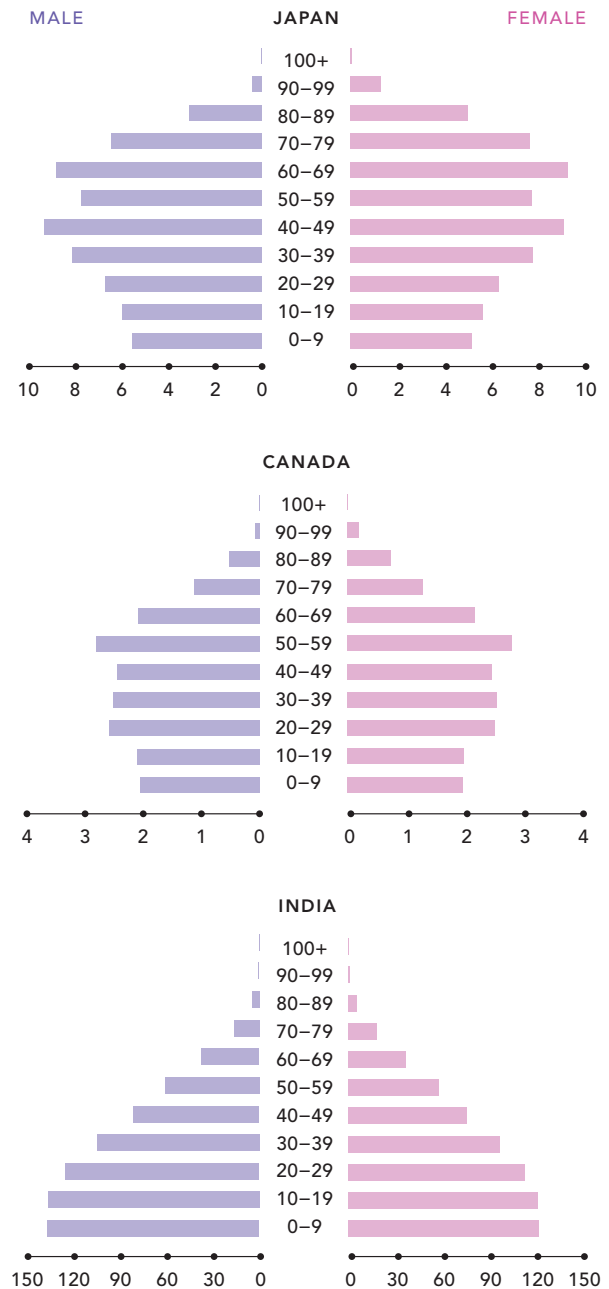
Japan's population is one of the oldest in the world, with more than one quarter of its people over the age of 65. This is due to two main factors: its long life expectancy, which is 85 years old, and its low birthrate, which is only 1.5 babies per woman. (A population needs a birth rate of 2.1 live births per woman to 'replace' itself from one generation to the next.) As a result, Japan is having to prepare for a shortage of working-age people, especially people who can provide assistance to the growing number of elderly people. To illustrate the size of this gap, it is estimated that by the year 2025 Japan will face a shortage of 370,000 nurses.

That's where robots come in.

For many decades, Japan has been a leader in developing new technologies. Now, it is using its technological skills to design robots that will fill the growing gap in care workers. What are these robots able to do? One robot called Robear can lift people from their wheelchairs or beds. Not only is Robear stronger than a human being, but it also doesn't suffer from a sore back or other injuries caused by lifting heavy objects. A robot called Pepper serves a different function—'she' can entertain and interact with people by singing, dancing, and having simple conversations. Unlike humans, Pepper can be available any time of the day, and doesn't get tired. That's not always the case with human caregivers. Similarly, robotic pets can help alleviate loneliness, an issue that affects many elderly people. For example, a robotic seal called Paro can blink and respond to people's touch. Robotic dogs can bark and sit like real dogs, but don't require baths and daily walks, and don't make a mess on the carpet.

How do Japanese people feel about robots in their daily lives? According to one survey, 65 percent of Japanese people say they are willing to be taken care of by "nursing robots." Another survey shows that elderly Japanese feel that humanoid (human-like) robots will play a positive role in their daily lives. Some people in Japan claim that robots can have unique personalities, and even a 'soul.'

Figure 1. Population Pyramids (in Millions): Japan, Canada, India



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs



Japan is not the only country thinking about how to adapt to an increasingly aging population. Canada, China, and most countries in Western Europe are following close behind, with longer life expectancies and birth rates below the replacement rate. Therefore, Japan's experience with robots could contain lessons for people in other parts of the world. This includes asking questions about this experience,

such as, *What are the benefits to incorporating robots in our daily lives? Are there any dangers? Should robots be a part of everyone's daily life, regardless of age? Can they be better companions than humans? And Should robots also replace other types of workers, such as teachers, police officers, bus drivers, and politicians?*

Want to learn more?

- (Video) "Can Robots Take Care of the Elderly?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuwP5iOB-gs>
- "Cute or Just Creepy? 5 of Japan's Most Human-like Talking Robots" (with video), <https://www.techinasia.com/cute-creepy-5-japans-humanlike-talking-robots>
- "Japan Lays Groundwork for Boom in Robot Carers," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/06/japan-robots-will-care-for-80-of-elderly-by-2020>
- (Video) "Robots Take Care of Elderly in Japan," <https://www.dw.com/en/robots-take-care-of-elderly-in-japan/av-43165739>
- (Video) "The Soft Side of Robots: Elderly Care," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppPLDEi82lg>



THE GEOGRAPHY OF JAPAN'S NATURAL DISASTERS

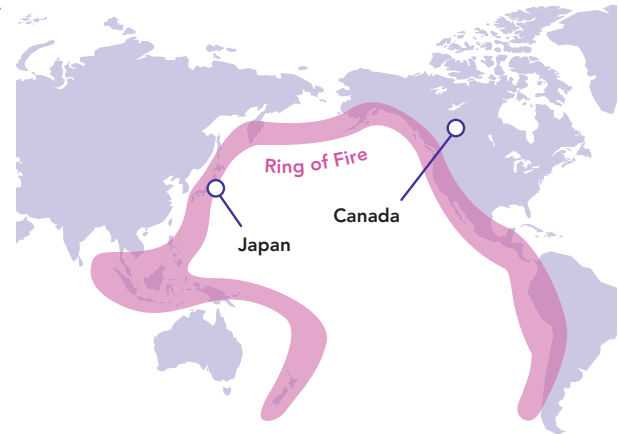
Japan's geography makes it very susceptible to natural hazards. It sits along the 'Ring of Fire,' a horseshoe-shaped area rimming the Pacific Ocean. The Ring of Fire accounts for nearly 90 percent of the world's earthquakes, caused by tectonic plates shifting and merging into and away from each other. Every year, Japan alone experiences around 1,500 earthquakes. Some earthquakes cause tsunamis—long, high, and sometimes very powerful sea waves.

One of Japan's worst natural disasters was the "Triple Disaster," which started on March 11, 2011. It began with the 9.0 Tohoku Earthquake, sometimes called the Great East Japan Earthquake, off Japan's east coast. The tsunami that followed reached 30 meters in some areas. It swept away houses, cars, telephone poles, and almost everything else in its path. The tsunami waves also damaged the backup generators at the nearby Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, adding to the area's long-term environmental damage. Scientists have called it the second-most significant nuclear incident in history (behind only the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine).

Despite the devastation of the Tohoku triple disaster, Japan is one of the most well-prepared countries in the world for earthquakes. Many of its buildings are designed to withstand large shocks. For example, skyscrapers are built to sway from side-to-side rather than collapsing during an earthquake. Preparation also includes human behavior. Japanese students participate in earthquake preparedness training every month, and most buildings and houses keep emergency earthquake kits on hand. Japan is also exploring ways to minimize the damage cause by tsunamis. Scientists are studying tsunami patterns so they can better predict and warn people about them.

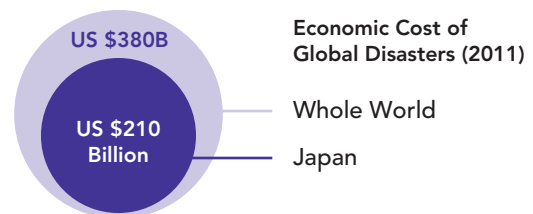
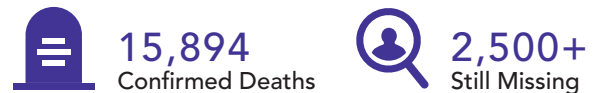
As an archipelago, Japan is also susceptible to typhoons—tropical storms that can cause flash floods and landslides. The government has tried to mitigate the damage from typhoons by building dams and encouraging residents to move away from areas susceptible to floods. Other aspects of adaptability, however, are not so straightforward. Many rural Japanese homes are built from wood, which is ideal for an earthquake-prone country because wood is

Figure 1. The Ring of Fire



Note: Location is approximate

Figure 2.
By the Numbers: The March 2011 "Triple Disaster"



Source: Brookings Institution, "The Year that Shook the Rich: A Review of Natural Disasters in 2011"

flexible enough to endure shaking. However, wood homes are not ideal for typhoons and landslides because they are more easily swept away than concrete buildings during floods.



Want to learn more?

- “2011: Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami” (with 3:34 video), *National Geographic*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/mar11/tohoku-earthquake-and-tsunami/>
- “A Closer Look at the Damage from the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan,” *New York Times*, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/03/11/world/asia/20110311EARTHQUAKE_zoomer.html?ref=asia
- “How Shifting Plates Caused the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan,” *New York Times* (interactive, with maps and images), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/03/11/world/asia/maps-of-earthquake-and-tsunami-damage-in-japan.html?ref=asia>
- “Revisiting 3/11: Five Years after the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake,” *The Japan Times*, <https://features.japantimes.co.jp/march-11-recovery/>



WHAT DOES JAPANESE POP CULTURE TEACH US ABOUT JAPAN?

Japanese pop culture is a global phenomenon. Many millions of people around the world are eager consumers of Japan's *anime* (animation), *manga* (comic books), and video games, as well as karaoke, karate, ramen noodles, sushi, Sudoku, and more. Some of these products are "odourless," meaning they do not have an obvious association with Japanese culture. For example, using a karaoke machine does not necessarily make you more informed about Japan, nor does doing a Sudoku puzzle. In fact, some people might not even be aware that the products they're using are Japanese.

However, some forms of Japanese pop culture do help us understand issues that have been on the minds of Japanese people. Historian William Tsutsui points to a few themes.¹

Fascination with the apocalypse: This appears mostly in Japanese popular films, anime, and manga. Such a focus should not come as a surprise: Japan is the only country to have experienced atomic warfare, and also suffers from natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis. An early example of this theme is the 1954 movie *Godzilla*, or *Gojira*, in Japanese. In it, a 50-meter-tall "ancient monster, deformed by a series of nuclear bomb tests and expelled from his natural habitat, lands in Tokyo and starts destroying Japanese cities."² (*Godzilla* also touches on another theme in Japanese pop culture: monsters.) Over the years, *Godzilla* has been featured in dozens of films, both Japanese and Western. The original Japanese version was released less than a decade after the end of the Second World War/Pacific War, when memories of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki and the firebombing of Tokyo were still fresh in the memories of Japanese people. (The later American version of the film was edited significantly, removing anything that could have been seen as criticism of the U.S. and its post-War occupation of Japan.)

Human interaction with technology: This theme focuses especially on interaction with human-like androids, robots, and cyborgs. Several stories told through *anime* and *manga* explore the limits of what it means to be human and the possibilities of fusing human and machines.³ An early example is the 1952 *manga* (later an *anime*), *Astro Boy*. In this story, a scientist tries to fill the emotional hole left by the death of his young son. He does so by creating a humanlike android, named Astro Boy, to replace him. Although the father later concludes that his son cannot be replaced by a robot, Astro Boy lives on. Not only does he survive, but he learns how to control his powers and develops a conscience.⁴

A more recent example of this theme is the film *Ghost in the Shell*. (Canadians may be familiar with the 2017 re-make of the film, which was based on a 1995 *anime*.) In this story, the main character is a cyborg named Major Motoko Kusanagi. Her human brain, or soul, is the 'ghost' inside the 'shell' of a manufactured body. The body is owned by the government, and she works on behalf of Section 9, an anti-cyberterrorism task force. In the film, "She questions who she is, who she was, and what it even means to be human," leading viewers to wonder: "If even your brain has been augmented by technology, are you still you?"⁵

-
1. This discussion of themes is summarized from William Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, Key Issues in Asian Studies, Ann Arbor, MI: Association of Asian Studies, 2010.
 2. Yoshiko Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a Scapegoat of the Americans to a Saviour of the Japanese," *ACTA Orientalia Vilnensia*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (2011), p. 43.
 3. Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, p. 21.
 4. E. John Winner, "Astro Boy and the Mark of the Human," *The Electric Agora*, June 23, 2016, <https://theelectricagora.com/2016/06/23/astro-boy-and-the-mark-of-the-human/>.
 5. Paul Schrodt, "How the Original 'Ghost in the Shell' Changed Sci-Fi and the Way We Think about the Future," *Business Insider*, April 1, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/original-ghost-in-the-shell-movie-influence-2017-3>.



A love of cuteness (*kawaii*): This theme is prevalent not only in stories, but also in a wide range of material products and fashions. The most well-known example is Hello Kitty, which appears in cartoons, on t-shirts, and splashed across a wide range of accessories. In fact, *kawaii* does not mean just cuteness, but also an embrace of “childishness, vulnerability, smallness, and sweetness.”⁶ It appeals not only to Japanese children, but also adults, especially women (and some men). Some experts suggest that this embrace of *kawaii* is a way for Japanese young adults in particular to cope with the strict nature of work culture in Japan. Another example of *kawaii* is TarePanda, or “lazy” or “droopy” Panda. In fact, this character appeals to people, both men and women, because it depicts a creature that is tired, which is how many working-age Japanese people often feel.

The embrace of *kawaii* includes not just ‘stuff’ like clothes and pencil cases, but also behaviours, such as talking in the manner of a child. This is most common among young, unmarried women who are trying to hang on to the “simplicity, happiness, and emotional warmth” of childhood, rather than thinking about the heavy responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.⁷

What is notable about Japanese pop culture is that it is not just popular in Japan—there are millions upon millions of fans all over the world. That leads to some questions: *When people outside of Japan consume its pop culture, are they engaging in the “odourless” versions, that is, without thinking much about what the products say about Japan? And, How would people in other countries, including Canada, relate to the themes mentioned above?*

Want to learn more?

- “Astro Boy Episode 1: The Birth of Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atom), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpwbNYFvZy4>
- Frank Fuller, “The Deep Influence of the A-Bomb on Anime and Manga,” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/the-deep-influence-of-the-a-bomb-on-anime-and-manga-45275>
- (Video, 3:14) “Living the Anime Lifestyle,” BBC News, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5Hdn59o5Q>
- Ryan Lamble, “Ghost in the Shell: Why It’s Still Disturbingly Relevant,” *Den of Geek*, November 10, 2016, <http://www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/ghost-in-the-shell/259920/ghost-in-the-shell-why-it-s-still-disturbingly-relevant>
- E. John Winner, “Astro Boy and the Mark of the Human,” *The Electric Agora*, June 23, 2016, <https://theelectricagora.com/2016/06/23/astro-boy-and-the-mark-of-the-human/>

6. Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, p. 20.

7. Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Eds.), Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996, p. 240, https://alexys.asian.lsa.umich.edu/courses/readings/Kinsella_Cuties%20in%20Japan.pdf.



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Asia Profiles introduces you to some basic facts, background, and points of interest of the countries and territories of the Asia Pacific. It is part of the Asia Pacific Curriculum initiative by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.

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