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## **MASKS, SCIENCE, AND BEING FOREIGN**

### **JAPAN DURING THE INITIAL PHASE OF COVID-19**

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Nearly a year ago, in February 2020, news in Japan was consumed by the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship docked at Yokohama port.<sup>1</sup> For days, it appeared to be the sum total of the country's experience with COVID-19. According to a swirling narrative, neither a viral outbreak contained in Hokkaido nor an infected tour bus driver in Nara should cause alarm: by getting rid of the passengers on the British-registered cruise ship, Japan and its people would be safe. (Although, on February 17, the government did suggest that if you thought you might be sick, you might consider staying home from work but not to worry; by early March, banning South Koreans and Chinese would be essential to sustain this story, too.)

Readers who have lived in Japan since the beginning of the pandemic at the end of 2019 may disagree with everything written here. I was last in the country in February 2020 (in Kyoto and Hiroshima) and have been at home in Connecticut since March 2020, making it awkward to write about anything other than the public health catastrophe surrounding me: as of this typing, the State of Connecticut—spiking again now in October 2020 after having been one of the safer spots in the United States—has had more deaths from COVID-19 than Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia combined, despite a population of only 3.5 million people.

In this context, below are some outside observations about what Japan displayed to the world during its initial experience with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes the novel pneumonia known as COVID-19, which is now eponymous with the pandemic and its history). One thing is clear: the Japanese government had the opportunity to act like New Zealand or even Germany, yet, for various reasons, Japanese officials elected to follow America as their guide. On February 26, political analyst Nakano Koichi trenchantly observed that Prime Minister Abe Shinzō had, “in effect, outsourced the government’s containment efforts to the population itself, while the state concentrate(d) limited resources on the severely ill and (made) little effort to increase those resources.”<sup>2</sup>

Nakano’s observations hold too for the United States. On June 26, Vice President Mike Pence said, “Younger Americans have a particular responsibility to make sure that they’re not carrying the coronavirus into settings where they would expose the most vulnerable,” as if this injunction equaled a public health action plan of widespread testing, tracing, and quarantine (the three basics about which we have all learned so much, and which we in America do not yet have).<sup>3</sup>

However—and in radical contrast to the United States, which surpassed 8 million cases by October 2020 compared with Japan’s 90,000—fortunately for Japanese society, mask-wearing has long been commonplace: tens of thousands of lives have been saved as a result. Nonetheless, by following America’s political lead, cases in Japan during July and August spiked again due to the Japanese government’s rushed emphasis on reopening businesses and schools, the result of which continues to erase early mitigation efforts, creating an entirely unnecessary expansion of COVID-19 cases and deaths.

Hopefully Japan’s leaders are planning more responsibly for the second transmission of the virus this fall, at which point researchers believe the pathogen may prove at least as strong as it did during the initial outbreak.<sup>4</sup>

## **Masks**

In August, Japan’s Obon summer holiday season began “quietly amid requests to avoid trips”—one of the most subtle and revealing headlines thus far in the country’s COVID-19 record of events and in stark contrast to the headlines that mesmerized the nation only half a year earlier during the New Year’s holidays. Noticeably, the normalcy of mask-wearing for Japanese in everyday life is the connective thread.

At the outset of 2020, news in and from Japan centered on Carlos Ghosn, the rakish former Nissan CEO under house arrest in Tokyo for underreporting his assets to Japanese tax authorities. On December 29, 2019, Ghosn upped the ante for lovers everywhere: one of the world’s richest men had escaped Japan inside a

box loaded onto a private plane to be home with his wife in Lebanon for the new year. On January 2, 2020, Interpol issued an alert seeking assistance with Ghosn's apprehension at the very same moment that Asian-language and Asian-based English-language media outlets reported a new "SARS-like" viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China. By January 12, not only had researchers in China and at the World Health Organization confirmed the existence of SARS-CoV-2 but they had even published the genetic sequence of the virus on the Internet in a startlingly transparent plea for global scientific collaboration.

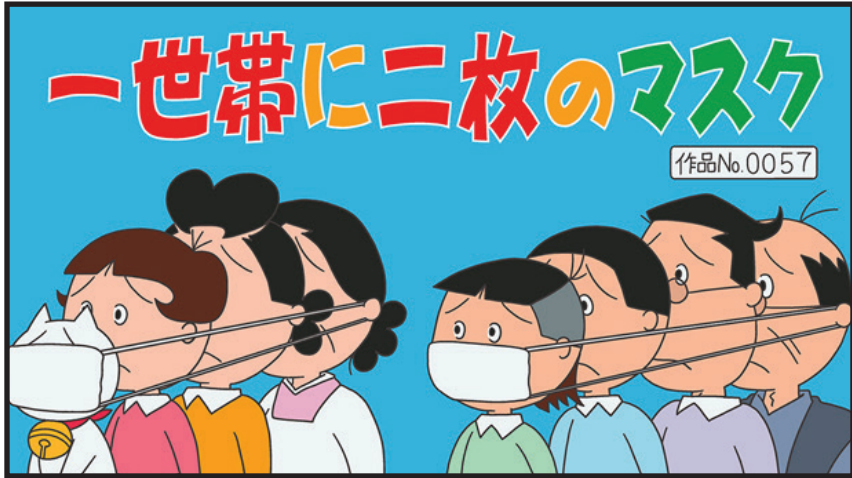
Nonetheless, within Japan, Carlos Ghosn remained *the* story. Commentators across the board explained in bewildering detail that Ghosn simply donned a mask common for colds and, thus, left unnoticed through the front door of his expensively surveilled house in central Tokyo, sauntering off and making his way by train to Osaka and out of the country.<sup>5</sup> The rest is for the movies.

Today, Ghosn's masked escape is interesting chiefly to Nissan's shareholders and the men arrested for assisting him. Meanwhile, mask-wearing writ large transformed in many places around the world into a political dog whistle signaling ideological preference. Within Japan, masks morphed into the primary object lesson with which to reveal the government's failure to fulfill its responsibility to act on behalf of Japanese people and to safeguard them during the first wave of COVID-19.

Already by late February, newspapers, TV shows, and social media groups were reminding Japanese people how to make their own masks. This public service effort attempted to offset the panic buying of masks that would continue in Japan through the end of the spring as many people remained unconvinced by government assurances that the virus would not spread. In turn, this led to empty shelves in stores and chronic supply chain shortages for something usually as bountiful as beer in the country. (In the United States, masks were difficult to purchase in stores or online until early summer because they had previously been so uncommon in American life; noticeably, however, comparable public efforts to help others and to explain basic mask-sewing techniques appeared.)

In the mix, the first major self-inflicted political disaster emerged for the Japanese government: the "Abenomask." Launching the scheme on April 1, Prime Minister Abe announced his plan to combat COVID-19 by shipping two cloth face masks to each household in the country. By this logic, mask shortages would be alleviated and people would be grateful. If nothing else, the policy proved consistent with his administration's vestigial fixation on hierarchical norms akin to the Tokugawa era (1603–1867) notion of "經世濟民 *keisei saimin*" ("order the social world; feed the people").<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, twenty-first-century derision was nearly universal. Immediately branded the "Abenomask"—a play on the former prime minister's less than successful "Abenomics" fiscal policies, combined with

something along the lines of “The Emperor’s New Clothes”—arguably the most popular commentary was a meme on social media that featured one of Japan’s most beloved cartoon families, collectively known by the mother’s name, Sazae-san (the tallest character in the picture below).



April 1, 2020. Popular meme spoofing Hasegawa Machiko’s beloved, *Sazae-san*.

Unlike Mr. and Mrs Abe and their two-member household, what were others to do? Moreover, marginally housed and homeless people should count themselves right out of this US\$450 million publicly funded plan to nowhere: registered addresses were mandatory.

YouTube social critic Akari-chan (listed online as “chan Akari”) was perhaps most scathing. On May 4, Akari posted a video through a pink-haired avatar in Japanese and English to appeal for broad awareness that things were *not* okay in Japan despite the government’s efforts to suggest otherwise. Equally important was to hammer home to fellow Japanese that, as taxpaying citizens, the responsibility for combatting a public health crisis rested not with them, but instead with the officials who represented them: “When an emergency like this happens, what we’d expect from the government is compensation and support. Countries like Germany and Canada were offering compensation right away. My Japanese friend who lives in Germany working as a freelancer applied and got five thousand Euros within two days. How quick is that? And here in Japan, without proper financial support you are left with people who have no choice but to leave their homes to keep working.”<sup>7</sup>

Akari-chan’s condemnation of the government’s early handling of the pandemic circled back to Nakano Koichi’s observations from February about

the Abe administration's determination to offshore the totality of the virus onto the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship. Like Nakano, she zeroed in on Prime Minister Abe's disregard for Japanese citizens' well-being during COVID's initial outbreak because of his fear of losing the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games. On March 24, the International Olympic Committee finally prevailed on Japan to agree to a postponement (never mind that by this point around the world, athletes such as the American swim team implored for cancellation). Leading up to this moment, the Abe administration's continued Olympic dreams obscured the virus's deadly potential for many in Japan, even though the government's guarantees flew in the face of school and museum closings, among other things. To be sure, on top of mask-wearing, customary behavior such as *not* kissing and hugging when greeting others kept early infection and mortality rates low—something observers elsewhere noticed unevenly imperiled Italians and which in Japan would unfortunately reverse course once bars, sex clubs, and sumo matches reopened in June (notably, the government and its supporters scapegoated the evening entertainment industry as debauched while empathizing with sumo-sans, regardless that the virus could care less what your job is, just that you aerosolize its path in some way).

During the Olympics-Do-Or-Die phase of Japan's first wave of COVID-19, a wide range of exceptionalist arguments blossomed. Jeff Kingston explains how many of them—including one that stated that speaking the Japanese language itself is a “barrier” to transmission—had little to do with anything, on top of which Abe's abrupt February 28 school closure “appeared to be an effort to show he was on top of the situation, but it emerged that he did so without consulting health experts or his Education Minister, making it look more like a PR stunt than a considered public health initiative.”<sup>8</sup> Confusingly, some schools would reopen on April 6 because that was supposed to be the first day of the school year, regardless that the prime minister would issue his first emergency declaration the next day.<sup>9</sup> Throughout it all, the government eschewed the term “lockdown” in favor again of outsourcing responsibility onto citizens themselves to avoid the “Three Cs” (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings), which proved moot since so many people continued to commute to work and school.

Thus, to Nakano Koichi's initial question—“Japan Can't Handle the Coronavirus. Can It Host the Olympic Games?”—literary scholar Norma Field and antinuclear activist Muto Ruiko would give this profound answer in their June essay, “This Will Still Be True Tomorrow: ‘Fukushima Ain't Got the Time for Olympic Games.’”<sup>10</sup> In clear terms, Field and Muto underscore the government's push to deny reality in Japan both before *and* during the pandemic, focusing special attention on the fantastical insistence that the 2020 Olympic torch relay take place as planned in March through irradiated areas of Fukushima regardless of the safety risks involved there, let alone the fact that much of Japan (and much of the

rest of the world) was sheltering at home together. On March 23, the day before the games were postponed, the Olympic torch traveled through an area of Japan where radiation levels remain too high for sustained habitation despite political decisions to the contrary, with COVID-19 icing the cake. As Field explains, there would “be no spectators—and no *runners*. The flame would be driven around Fukushima prefecture. . . . It could be taken for parody, this frenzy over the torch relay. The Olympics were meant to be a magic wand waving a spanking new post-disaster world into existence. As those prospects began to dim, the flame burned ever more brightly.”<sup>11</sup> In an act of further magical thinking, Tokyo 2020 Olympic boosters have now re-branded their “Recovery Olympics” to glide through the Fukushima component and transfer meaning onto the pandemic: the 2020 Olympic opening ceremony is scheduled for July 23, 2021 (and, yes, they will still be called the “2020 Olympics” because the T-shirts have already been made).<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding, a deep structural reality of the pandemic for Japan emerged both domestically and internationally in what Field brilliantly describes as the “recent remote” past in Fukushima. First, as commonplace as mask-wearing has remained in Japan since the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, the government’s determination from the beginning of the “Triple Disasters” of March 11, 2011, to will away ongoing radiological devastation politicized mask-wearing in Fukushima in ways now aligned outside Japan during COVID-19.<sup>13</sup> Second, Japan’s ostracized internal Fukushima refugees can connect their history to the current pandemic by virtue of their sheer existence: today, if you are a displaced person, refugee, or someone trapped somewhere in a system of state-sponsored violence, the new coronavirus is just another thing to kill you. Government directives be damned; you’re lucky if you have the right mask to wear.

On August 1, shortly before his abrupt resignation, Prime Minister Abe himself appeared to admit defeat to his mask gambit and began to don respectably large, full face coverings. Given the wide array of fashionable options now available, Abe’s choice of a conservative white mask, on the one hand, was entirely standard. On the other hand, a cynic might read it as surrender.<sup>14</sup> He submitted his resignation by the end of the month.

## Science

On March 5, the Japanese government announced that South Koreans and Chinese arriving in the country would need to quarantine for two weeks. The policy resonated well with Prime Minister Abe’s base, which has long defined itself around a putative notion of Japanese identity in opposition to all things Korean and Chinese. In this vein, even at this early stage of the pandemic, some of the prime minister’s more notorious supporters had already created a YouTube channel to denigrate Nakano Koichi as a “national traitor” for challenging Abe’s



Figure 2. August 3, 2020. Combined photo of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō wearing his “Abenomask,” July 11, 2020, and him wearing a proper-fitting mask on August 3, 2020. *Kyodo News*.



Figure 3. March 8, 2020. Yamaguchi Noriyuki decries Nakano Koichi as a “national traitor” for his February 26, 2020 *New York Times* editorial, YouTube.

response to COVID-19: the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship, Koreans, and Chinese were to blame; Professor Nakano was a turncoat; end of story.

To be fair, although it is unimaginable now in October 2020, in early March of this year, COVID-19 cases in China and South Korea still subsumed global metrics. On February 23, the South Korean government raised its national alert system to the highest level, enabling it to bar Chinese visitors should officials decide to do so (something many South Koreans demanded).<sup>15</sup> In turn, this made the Japanese government's ban on Chinese and South Koreans logical not only to Abe's palace guards, but also to most Japanese (and many others, including American President Donald Trump). The problem, however, was that Japan's policy as planned rested solely on a person's passport—and not on testing and tracing the individual for the virus—making it epidemiologically vacuous. On March 6, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha summoned the Japanese ambassador to Seoul, Tomita Koji, to her office to say so. Explaining Japan's plan not only as “unfriendly” but also “unscientific,” Kang said that South Korea would respond in kind, even though she knew that the science behind this retaliatory measure made as little sense as Japan's in terms of public health.<sup>16</sup>

During March and April, the virus tore through the world. Similar national, identity-based bans became standard procedure, albeit far too late. South Korea led the way with a scientifically viable approach, becoming, on March 16, the first country to demand its own citizens be tested and quarantined when entering the country. Japan, however, like the United States, Brazil, and India, exempted its own nationals from such procedures (urging people simply to stay home if they felt unwell upon return to the country). Between April 7 and May 25, during Japan's initial period of emergency measures, identity-based exclusionism prevailed over testing, tracing, and quarantine. Even positive measures, such as Japanese universities' distribution of cash and ramen-filled care packages to students staying home and whose part-time jobs had evaporated, was limited to Japanese nationals and foreigners with high grade point averages, despite the hundreds of other foreign students clamoring for help in excellent Japanese. The fruits of this hierarchical, racially hued, nonscientific approach reached a head on June 4 with Finance Minister Aso Taro's wildly premature declaration of Japanese victory over the virus in his assurance to fellow lawmakers that, in his phrasing, “民度 *mindō*” (a form of Japanese exceptionalism stressing Japanese superiority above all) had been essential to the nation's ability to contain the pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

As the unfortunate recent surge of cases throughout Japan has shown, mythmaking about Japanese superiority has nothing to do with anything. Moreover, *if*—as researchers everywhere are trying to determine—*if* certain genetic predispositions to the virus exist, this is not the same thing as an imaginary essential Japanese-ness granting Japanese people special immunity to the deadly



pathogen. That is the simple part of SARS-CoV-2 science. The virus does not care what flag you wave; it looks for a host in which to thrive, and wearing a mask appears to be the best chance you have to keep it away. The difficult part of the pandemic rests in unraveling the virus itself. In this instance, like mask-wearing, a generalized understanding in Japanese society that scientists should lead discussions about science has helped those who want to learn about it.<sup>18</sup>

Former US government trade negotiator and prominent US-Japan businessman Glen Fukushima chose to remain in Tokyo in March when international travel began to shut down. Albeit trapped more comfortably than many, Fukushima did not miss a beat when asked to describe the most positive aspect of riding out the pandemic in Japan instead of Washington:

Most Japanese television “wide shows” are full of useful information about virtually every aspect of COVID-19 and serve a valuable role to ensure that the facts, analyses, and recommendations of doctors, epidemiologists, scientists, and public health experts, rather than opinions of ignorant politicians like Trump are conveyed to the public. Based on the non-stop, round-the-clock conveying of updates on COVID-19, I would think that the Japanese public is among the most educated in the world about the pandemic and how to deal with it.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, not everyone wants to learn anything about the virus, and some in Japan, like elsewhere in the world, appear more content to cope through comforting superstitions. A craze, for example, surrounding the traditional epidemic-repelling spirit, Amabie, began almost as soon as masks began to fly off shelves. By late summer, the Amabie fad reached stress-relieving heights with a farmer in Chiba organizing 250 sheep into the spirit’s shape for socially distancing, mask-wearing tourists.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding, options for learning the science of COVID-19 in Japan starkly contrast with the United States, where the best bet for those not binge-watching a Netflix series or engaging in virtual combat on Facebook rests with the noticeably lone voice of CNN’s Sanjay Gupta, whose own segments grew throughout the year from comical vignettes about disinfecting groceries to furious editorials against the Trump administration’s cataclysmic mishandling of the virus.

For his part, Yamanaka Shinya, the Kyoto University-based stem cell researcher and 2012 winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, has become his own “wide show.” He explains on his home page that although coronaviruses are not his specialty, the pandemic compelled him to refashion his fifteen-year-old blog space into an effective location with which to disseminate scientific information about the virus as understandably as possible to his compatriots. Since March, Yamanaka has distilled hundreds of journal articles from around the world in clear terms

to explain transmission and risk, resembling in impetus and effect a one-person version, for COVID-19, of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. *Nikkei* newspapers in Japanese and English have published several interviews with Yamanaka as well as editorials written by him, including one on June 10 in which he challenged Aso Taro's exceptionalist understanding of science: "Unravelling the mystery behind Japan's ability to fend off a worse situation will take time. . . . [Japan] must stick to the basics of building up capability to 'test, trace and isolate' and to ramp up hospital capacity to treat patients."<sup>21</sup> As cases continued to surge, Yamanaka's tone became more noticeably urgent: "It is necessary to reconsider your actions in order to protect yourself, the people you care about around you, and society at large."<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, however, during the summer, former Prime Minister Abe fully committed Japan not only to an American style of reopening businesses, but he—the man whom right-wing political strategist Stephen Bannon lavished praise on as "Trump before Trump"—disbanded Japan's own coronavirus task force just like his hero in Washington.<sup>23</sup> After all, what would scientists know about science?

## Being Foreign

Some people reading these words may have endured Japan's policy banning long-term residents from reentry even if they vowed to test, trace, and quarantine upon return.<sup>24</sup> Others may be residing in Japan, yet still apprehensive about leaving the country despite recently updated protocols lest they be barred from coming home. Racially and nationally-based policies are unscientific and inhumane, and there is no other way to describe it. In addition, Koreans, Chinese, and others considered less-than-authentically Japanese have long been targeted among the "Make Japan Great Again" crowd (popularized by Prime Minister Abe as "Take Back Japan," although from whom or what was never specified). Since at least the 1923 earthquake, such prejudices have endured; at that time, Japanese soldiers, police, and police-backed vigilante groups massacred 6,000 Koreans, Chinese, and Okinawans living in Tokyo and Yokohama, simply for being who they were, when the quake struck. Fast-forward to Tokyo 2020, where, on May 22, police in Shibuya yanked a Kurdish man from his car and shoved him on the ground for the crime of being non-Japanese in Japan.<sup>25</sup> In short, COVID-19 brought social ostracizing patterns into the open in new ways, and the video of the police roughly treating the innocent man who was repeating in Japanese, "I haven't done anything! I haven't done anything!" hit this idea home to the hundreds, and then thousands, of Japanese who protested on the streets and the hundreds of thousands more who watched it online.

Noticeably, as the pandemic conjoined with the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, even Osaka Naomi had to remind many Japanese people who she was and is, and she took to Twitter to do so.<sup>26</sup> The highest-paid female athlete

in world history and winner of the 2020 U.S. Open is a taxpaying Japanese citizen and in strong contention for an Olympic gold for Japan whenever the games occur. Critics nonetheless derided her ideas of Japanese-ness, belaboring to her the importance of knowing her place: there is no racism in Japan was the common theme. With multiple multi-million dollar contracts at stake (one of Osaka's sponsors, Nissin Foods, last year infamously whitened her skin in advertisements), Osaka Naomi continues to teach truth to power to her significant fandom, tweeting in Japanese and English to highlight specific instances of racialized terror in the United States and to suggest summer reading books such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. On August 6, she even drew attention to the horror of the bombing of Hiroshima.

Less famous or financially secure, on Instagram a woman known as "Cocoalizzy" (born and raised in Japan; now living in New York) dug in maybe even a little deeper to explain to fellow Japanese what it means to be Japanese and Black in Japan, recounting to her followers in fluent Japanese about the time she was denied a minimum-wage restaurant job because her very being would "scare away customers" for "looking the way (she) did." All of this landed in the context of the pandemic.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 4. June 2, 2020. "Cocoalizzy" on Black Lives Matter and being Black in Japan, Instagram.

In the midst of predictable patterns of alienating foreigners and Japanese who do not appear the way textbooks suggest they should, US soldiers in Japan continued to be excluded from rules or norms: the nonforeign foreigner. Japanese lawyers and activists have long decried exemptions for American troops as a form of extraterritoriality. In a pandemic, such privilege becomes exponentially irresponsible, especially in Okinawa. Since Okinawa's first reported case of COVID-19 on February 14 just south of Naha (a taxi driver in her sixties), the prefecture managed to sustain an impressively low infection and mortality rate. By the end of June, there were 148 known cases and seven deaths attributed to the virus (in a population of 1.5 million). July brought a different reality, however, and within weeks, there were over 1,000 cases and ten deaths. The reason was clear: as cases in the United States spun out of control, no one required American soldiers arriving for duty in Okinawa to follow testing and quarantine protocol required of everyone else. On and off base, moreover, mask-wearing and social distancing did not appear to concern the American command. On July 16, a taxi driver in his eighties fell gravely ill; his case stemmed from a soldier stationed at Camp Hansen who hailed a ride after a Fourth of July party.<sup>28</sup> As cases mounted, on August 3, Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki ordered "lockdown," using the word the Abe administration so anxiously avoided and in direct contrast to the central government's plan at the time to encourage Japanese to "Go to Travel" and "Go to Eat" (although by this time, Tokyo and Tokyoites were excluded from this additional plan to nowhere because of skyrocketing case numbers in the capital).

### それから

Countries such as the United States and Brazil have allowed COVID-19 to spiral out of control. A month-long lockdown of life around me would, without doubt, save lives. This, however, is unlikely to happen, beginning with, but not limited to, the ravings of a demagogue in the White House demanding schools remain open as if his administration ever cared about public education for American students. Japan, however, still has a chance to control the next phases of COVID-19. Failure to take substantive action only serves as a better example of philosopher Achille Mbembe's observation that modern society operates through what he describes as a system of "necropolitics," in which those in charge "define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not."<sup>29</sup>

Now, towards the end of a wildly unanticipated year, weather reports would do well to incorporate Yamanaka Shinya's advice into daily forecasts: "Dress warmly and 'reconsider your actions in order to protect yourself, the people you care about around you, and society at large.'"

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The *Diamond Princess* narrative was so all-consuming during the early phase of COVID-19 in Japan that the discussion generated its own Wikipedia page.
- <sup>2</sup> Nakano Koichi, “Japan Can’t Handle the Coronavirus. Can It Host the Olympics?” *New York Times*, February 26, 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> Meg Wagner, et al., “Pence Claims Americans Are Seeing ‘Encouraging News’ as Cases Surge,” *CNN*, June 26, 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> Worrying reports exist of mutating strains of the first wave. See Yonhap, “3 New Mutated COVID-19 Strains Detected in S. Korea: KCDC,” *Yonhap News*, August 10, 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> The surveillance system was outdated; see, Rachel Metz, “Think Your Mask Makes You Invisible to Facial Recognition? Not So Fast, AI Companies Say,” *CNN*, August 12, 2020.
- <sup>6</sup> For explication, see Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudo Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- <sup>7</sup> Chan Akari, “How Stupid is Japanese Government? 日本政府のアホさに怯え！ #Covid19,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLLICz2xqis>, May 4, 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> Jeff Kingston, “Pandemic Downsizes Abe,” in James Brown, Robert Dujarric, and Delamote Guiborg, eds., *The Abe Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming): 1, 3.
- <sup>9</sup> See Barak Kushner, “Japan’s State of Emergency Has Dark History,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, April 7, 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> Nakano, *ibid*; Norma Field and Muto Ruiko, “This Will Still Be True Tomorrow: ‘Fukushima Ain’t Got the Time for Olympic Games’: Two Texts on Nuclear Disaster and Pandemic,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 18, 13 (2020).
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>12</sup> For a wide-ranging measure *prior* to the outbreak of COVID-19 detailing Japanese contestation about the 2020 Tokyo games, see Jeff Kingston, ed. “Special Issue: Japan’s Olympic Summer Games,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 18, 4 (2020); 18, 5 (2020); 18, 7 (2020).
- <sup>13</sup> See Alex Martin, “The History Behind Japan’s Love of Face Masks,” in *The Japan Times*, July 4, 2020; on Fukushima, see, Higaki Shogo and Hirota Masahiro, “The Reductive Effect of an Anti-Pollinosis Mask against Internal Exposure From Radioactive Materials Dispersed from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster,” in *Health Physics*, 104, no. 2 (2013): 227–231.
- <sup>14</sup> Shortly before ditching the plan, the Abe administration attempted a second mask giveaway scheme only to be confronted with greater criticism. See Sam Nussey, “Japan Government Persists with ‘Abenomask’ Giveaway, Reignites Social Media Outcry,” *Reuters*, July 28, 2020.
- <sup>15</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, “As Coronavirus Cases Spiral, South Korea Raises Threat Level,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Riyaz ul Khaliq, “South Korea, Japan in Row over Coronavirus Restrictions: Seoul Expresses Displeasure over Tokyo’s Move to Put Its Citizens in 2-Week Quarantine,” *Andalou Agency*, March 6, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Asahi Shimbun, “Aso: Low Virus Death Rate Due to Japanese Superiority,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, June 5, 2020; English translation of the term, 民度, was hotly debated; Norma Field urges Aso’s hierarchical emphasis, suggesting “civilizational level” over “culture.”

<sup>18</sup> Arguably, this contrasts with the governmentally determined science used to back current policies concerning radiation in Fukushima.

<sup>19</sup> Glen Fukushima, email correspondence with the author, June 26, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Asami Shigeharu, “East Japan Farm Trains Sheep to Make Formation Portraying Disease-Warding Amabie Spirit,” *The Mainichi*, August 13, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Yamanaka Shinya, “Uncovering Japan’s Coronavirus X-Factor Matters to the World: Cultural Traits Have Helped but Are No Substitute for ‘Test, Trace and Isolate,’” *Asia Nikkei Review*, June 10, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Yamanaka Shinya, <https://www.covid19-yamanaka.com/index.html>, July 15, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> For discussion of this committee’s effective response, see Togo Kazuhiko, “The First Phase of Japan’s Response to COVID-19,” in Jeff Kingston, ed., “Special Issue: Pandemic Asia, Part I,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 18, no 14 (2020).

<sup>24</sup> Ben Dooley, “Japan’s Locked Borders Shake the Trust of Its Foreign Workers,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> See Mari Saito, “Kurdish Case Becomes Rallying Cry for Japan Protest against Police,” *Reuters*, June 6, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Simon Denyer, “Japanese Tennis Player Speaks Out for Black Lives Matters, Faces Backlash,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Baye McNeil, “‘No Justice; No Peace’: The Sentiment That Resonates in America, Japan, and All Over the World,” *The Japan Times*, June 10, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> *Okinawa Times*, July 16, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, 15, no. 1 (2003): 27.