

# Understanding Environment through Culture

This class has taught me a lot about Japan and its environment that I did not expect previously. Prior to this class, or even before I came to Japan to attend Waseda, I have always thought that Japan would be a much better environment free of litter compared to Indonesia. However, after 2 year of living in Tokyo, I realize that even in Japan, there are still many irresponsible people who litters on the streets and even on the roadside, especially on the shoulder of the highway. Although Tokyo is still not as bad as Jakarta in terms of littering, the fact that this problem persists even in a country as advance as Japan shows that such a simple problem could not be solved entirely.

On our first field work to the beach in Kamakura, I enjoyed the first part of the field work. Never have I thought that leftover coffee could be used that way. But what really left a deep impression on me is the condition of the beach. Visually, it was horrendous. The amount of things that does not belong on a beach was beyond believe; plastic products, organic trash, even furniture were left on the beach. I consider beaches in Indonesia to be dirty and appears to be poorly managed but the Yuigahama beach on the time we visited tops all of the Indonesian beaches that I have been to in terms of uncleanliness. It was even more heartbreaking when one of the interviewee seems to feel that it was not his responsibility to clean up the beach and that one of the interviewee that other groups had interviewed littered almost immediately after being interviewed. The lack of proper garbage disposal area on the beach grounds was also an issue for the beach or in truth, for Japan in general. Even though group clean ups are held once in a while, unless everyone decides to contribute to and makes it part of

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their culture to maintain the cleanliness of the environment, the goal of maintaining a clean beach will not be possible. A quick search on the internet about the Yuigahama beach would show that despite being quite a distance away from Tokyo, it is listed as one of the beaches that are of a reasonable distance away from the capital city and that tourists would flock to the area especially during summer. Upon browsing the comments left by visitors, I noticed that one of the comments stated the dirtiness of the beach. I believe that if more care and effort is put into conserving the environment, we can set an example for generations to come.

Our second field work would be one that taught me a lot. Meeting Kinsei-san and Akiko-san, and hearing their opinions regarding some of our questions have provided me with a different perspective in conserving the environment. Upon our arrival at Iriomote, being a pretty remote island, it is evident that the island is spared from the excessive modernization of the modern world. Everything is simple and peaceful. However, behind the seemingly simple life of the island is a culture that is completely different than anything I have ever encountered before. With the advancement of technology and current trends of modernization, culture seems to be replaced and eventually disappear. Even so, the culture that Kinsei-san and Akiko-san upheld had impressed me a lot to the extent that I believe that it needs to be embraced by more people. Kinsei-san respects nature and would always take no more than what was needed for the workshop that his wife runs. There are a lot of people today that take advantage of nature with no respect towards it or the thought of conserving for future generations. Meeting people with such a positive mindset shows that there is still hope to save the environment. The talk with Kinsei-san on our last night in Iriomote allowed me

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the chance to ask him some questions that is on my mind regarding the eco-tourism that he is trying to promote. During the talk, he mentions on how in conserving the environment, we tend to focus more on the nature and wildlife than the people who lives alongside them which is true as the Iriomote Wildcat is prioritized over the people living in Iriomote. Kinsei-san then argues that it should have been about humans and nature together as humans requires resources from nature to survive and that nature too, needs humans help to survive. Never have I ever thought of things that way. I have always thought that since humans are the ones that destroyed nature in the first place, allowing humans to co-exist in an area with an endangered species might not be a good idea. But upon hearing his words, I reflected upon myself and came to understand that people are needed to control the balance of nature as nature could not do so by itself.

One of the things that I have learned from the Iriomote trip is how someone else's mistake becomes another's problem. In this case, Iriomote, despite having a relatively small number of people living on the island, has a serious trash issue that does not correspond to the population of the island. This is due to trash coming from overseas, mainly the major islands that are close to Iriomote. I was not expecting the problem to be this severe but when we were taken to our first field work on the island, where we will be going to a beach to collect several PET bottles and analyze its country of origin, it is evident that this case is much more distressing than Yuigahama beach.

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Trash that are washed ashore covered the beach entirely. Our plastic bags were completely filled in no time and we have only covered a small portion of the beach. As I looked around, there are endless streams of trash along the beach that does not seem to end. Even beyond the bushes along the beach there are trash everywhere. To think that it was all washed ashore from other country was intolerable. Even worse, due to the cost limitations of transporting the trash from Iriomote to Ishigaki, trash are collected every now and then with one type of trash being collected every time. I feel like this would cause excessive buildup of trash on the already dirty beach, which will cause issues in the future. I was hoping that after all the trouble of collecting and transporting the trash to the Ishigaki, it will all be recycled, however, I was shocked to find that the trash will not be recycled and will be buried instead. I also find that the reasoning behind

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the action to be poor as there are ways to solve this problem. I cannot fathom the decision to bury the trash when conservation of the environment is a priority. Upon hearing the explanation, I thought of several ways in which the trash problem could be solved, although it does not seem all too feasible to put into practice. Not to mention the fact that the incentive that was given by the government to the islands were barely adequate.

In conclusion, I feel like this class has taught me a lot, especially since I want to preserve the environment for generations to come. Being able to see the persistence of the people of Iriomote to come up with new methods to reduce the deaths of Iriomote Wildcat to having the opportunity to listening to the opinions of Kinsei-san and Akiko-san has been a great experience. In the subject of understanding environment through culture, I think that culture helps us appreciate whatever we have more. We have been given a lot by nature and by embracing a culture, it deepens our bond to nature and to the people around us. Culture can also be applied to other aspects of our lives too and bring a significant improvement in the way we live. A culture can also be referred to as an identity, as if we grew up with that culture, it becomes the basis of how we live our everyday lives. Being exposed to the culture in Iriomote makes me change some of my ways of living and also my perspective. Though I am still far from my goals, I would want to try and make a difference in the future. I am quite sure that we can make our environment a better place for the future.

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