



Illustration by Jacqueline Rees-Mikula

To the people of Himeji,

The 27 members of the CLS program come from across the United States, and last week we arrived at Himeji City. Due to the time difference, lately I've been waking up very early. Last Sunday I woke up at 5 and went to see Himeji Castle before the program orientation and happened upon the Volunteer Castle Cleanup Team hard at work keeping the grounds of Himeji's landmark spottless.

The following Friday morning I had another encounter. As I walked to the bus stop a white heron flew gracefully over the adjacent building. The castle and the heron are two symbols of Himeji, as on a sunny day the white walls of the castle shine like a heron in flight. For the next eight weeks, we will enfold our Japanese wings, gaining confidence and fluidity. Filled with gratitude for the gracious considerations of the people of Himeji, we will soon take flight into these streets where meaningful cultural experience awaits us.

Towards a future of mutual exchange and communication.

Garrett Norris

Harima Kawaraban Production Committee

"RPG Homework Time"

Asking for directions was my mission. I had to look for the whereabouts of so and so, and ask someone questions like, "Where can I do so and so?" "Is there a so and so in the area?"

First, about six o' clock in the evening, when I became hungry, I went to the Seven Eleven to buy a rice ball. After purchasing something to eat, I asked the person at the register, "Is there a Starbucks in the area?"

"Do you know the Starbucks toward the station on Miyuki Road?" but then she gave me a confused face. Unfortunately, I was told to try asking the station attendant. Luckily, because I met a classmate who also hasn't finished his homework outside the convenient store, we both decided to go to supermarket in front of the station. The number of the party members increased!

So then, in front of the station, I met some Japanese buddies by coincidence, and they entered our group. Once again, the party has increased. So at Daiso, I didn't want to go to the bathroom but asked the store clerk where to find the bathroom. From there, the homework was done. We all talked about a lot of things, and it was really fun.

-Frank Le

Faux Pas Forum

These entries are anonymous

First Action!

Yesterday in the Momogumi class session, we delivered our reports on the so-called "Action" fieldwork. Being forced to use our Japanese outside of the classroom in the real Himeji was great real world practice. Students either did their action homework by themselves or cooperated with other students. The reports of those students who cooperated was particularly interesting. Though it was the same content, since the reports came from individual perspectives, you could see their individual perspective come through.

In the inaugural week of the CLS program, I completed the Action fieldwork while becoming acquainted with the students of Himeji Dokkyo University. Aside from Japanese students, I came to meet students from China, Korea, and France as well. Talking about the experiences of other study abroad students was particularly interesting.

While doing their fieldwork, we strengthened our communication skills while also strengthening bonds with our language partners and the kind residents

Detergent Failure

One day, I went to a convenience store to buy laundry detergent, but when I arrived there were all kinds and the labels were difficult to read. I hemmed and hawed, "What should I do? Which one is good?"

I finally picked one out of impulse, or rather, I picked one and brought it to the store clerk. I wanted to wash all of my laundry simultaneously, so I asked him for clarification, "Is this bleach?" Only, I simply borrowed directly from the English word for bleach and adopted the Japanese pronunciation.

He replied, "Bleach?"

I tried to explain that I wanted to wash all my laundry without turning it white, but there was just no mutual understanding. Nevertheless, I bought it. After I returned to the hotel, I brought my laundry to the laundry room, only to find a sign attached to the top of the washing machine, "No Detergent Necessary."

Pronunciation Fail

The other day, I was in the cafeteria talking with another CLS student's language buddy, my actual language buddy was sitting across the room at another table. I intended to say "my buddy is sitting (suwaru) over there (acchi)", however what came out of my mouth was "my buddy is touching (sawaru) my leg (ashi)," to which the buddy replied "What?! That's sexual harrassment!"

Kawaii Culture

Since its emergence in the popular culture scene, Hello Kitty has become something of a global phenomenon. As this year marks the character's 40th anniversary, one would be hard pressed to find consumers unfamiliar with her iconic image, well beyond her home country, Japan. Not merely an object of consumption, however, academics have pointed to the ways in which Hello Kitty represents a change in the global production and circulation of goods, as well as the power relations intrinsic to economic exchange.

According to Professor Koichi Iwabuchi, a specialist on trans-Asian connections, since the 1990's Japan has transformed the global economy, its renewed export strategies reconfiguring global demand. While following the devastation of World War Two, Japan became a global superpower through the successful manufacture and exportation of audiovisual products, with the recession of the 1990's, Japan has shifted from a hardware to a software superpower. These often animated and digitized products are said to exert a "soft power" on international relations, as they are not only made in Japan, but reflect some of its cultural particularities. Arguably, Hello Kitty forms a representative part of this soft power cohort. That said, she also calls into question the extent to which shared products indicate shared social norms. While identical products may be sold in both Japan and the United States, its use and meaning are intimately tied to local cultures. In Japan, Hello Kitty is not only representative of Japan's export strategy, but also takes part in an entire kawaii culture. This connection simply does not exist in the United States, a point I understood well after visiting Café de Miki with Hello Kitty in Himeji, Japan.

Initially, one might find similarities between Café de Miki and the picturesque habitats of the Disney franchise. Entering the Café, one is at first struck by its powder pink interiors, the cat whiskers peeking out of nearly every dessert and beverage, and the Hello Kitty stuffed animals just waiting to be snuggled. That said, while Disney is often associated with, and in fact targets, a child-centric market audience, Café de Miki reflects an all-together different clientele. Having a French bistro inspired, fairytale atmosphere, it caters to the tastes of its young female customers. While in the United States, stuffed animals may signal childhood, in Japan, kawaii culture spans a larger range of age cohorts, extending through much of the population. This example highlights just how Hello Kitty, while mass produced and widely circulated, has distinct associations dependent on context, making me wonder, what other difference might exist. In Japan, her birthplace, she forms part of a kawaii culture unlike the cute variants common in the United States, at once challenging her "soft power" while supporting the success of her international reach.

-Michelle Bykowski

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The Tale of Kurotori Hanei

Long, long ago, there was a forest. In the highest trees of the forest was a kingdom of sparrows. The kingdom was ruled by a sparrow named Kozue, but he did not inherit the throne from his father. Rather, he was a surnameless commoner who toppled the government of Hanei, a member of the Kurotori, the original royal family of black sparrows.

Kurotori Hanei fled west by himself and searched the world for an ally, but he could not find even one. Finally, he was about to give up on the recovery of the Kingdom of Sparrows. Sitting in the branches of a camphor tree, tears began to fall from Hanei's eyes.

Suddenly, a strange voice came from above.

“Hey! Hey! Don't cry! Tears are outlawed in this kingdom.”

Hanei was startled. “What kingdom is this?”

“Why, Harima, of course!”

“Harima? What a strange name! To whom does this voice belong?”

“It belongs to me! It is the voice of the White Heron.”

And from the sky of green leaves above, a pure white bird appeared.

