

Go-Tochi Boom: We Love Local

The term *go-tochi* ご当地—“this place” with the honorific prefix *go*—seems to be everywhere lately. The mark of local identity, it crowns the names of dishes like ramen or curry that have a distinctive local taste, Kewpie dolls or Hello Kitty goods sporting some regional hallmark, and the titles of special exams on information and lore aimed at promoting particular towns or regions. Why such a boom? What sorts of things are the most popular? In this issue we’ll look at the *go-tochi* boom and the backdrop that has shaped it.



This mark indicates that more related information is included on the “Click Japan” website. <http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/>

Rediscovering Local Culture

Nowadays, thanks to advances in transportation and communications technology, you can easily obtain the same information and merchandise no matter where you are. Such ubiquity is an indication of how widely things are becoming standardized. Still, Japan’s distinctive local cultures are as robust as ever.

Locally distinct cultures were shaped by various factors, including geography and climate, relationship to the routes of distribution of goods, and history. For example, extending as Japan does north to south in a long and narrow archipelago, its climate and terrain vary greatly from one part of the country to another. About 70 percent of the country is occupied by mountains and forests, and the land is laced with many rivers and streams. In

the era before the development of public transportation, whether a region was near the ocean, accessed by a broad river, or surrounded by mountains had an important impact on culture and fostered all sorts of differences.

Television broadcasters, along with other media, have taken note of local diversity and have recently begun to introduce local specialties—things with the *go-tochi* stamp—in their programming. One television program has gained great popularity by featuring *go-tochi* foods, local customs, and other distinctive features of different locales around the country. The program’s viewers greatly enjoy the discovery of myriad differences, such as that foods or customs they have taken for granted are specific to a particular area or that the ingredients or ways of eating certain dishes can differ from one part of the country to another.

Local PR



In the course of Japan’s rapid economic growth beginning in the mid 1950s and continuing through the early 1970s, which resulted in the industrialization and urbanization of the country, many people left the countryside and moved to the cities. The population of rural areas aged, leaving many villages practically empty. Local governments and business organizations have devised various schemes to stem depopulation and reinvigorate communities.

Go-tochi kentei ご当地検定

A more recent vehicle for promoting things local are the *go-tochi kentei*, or “know-this-place” exams that challenge people to learn about the history, culture, industry and other lore of a particular area and test their mastery. In 2004, nearly 10,000 people took the Kyoto Kentei, held by the Kyoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the first time, setting off a boom in similar tests elsewhere. The Nintendo DS game software *Go-Tochi Kentei* was put on sale in 2006. You can try various exams included in this software (<http://www.spike.co.jp/gotouchi/main.html>).

Go-tochi exams inspire many natives of the area in question to learn about or rediscover their own local culture. (See “Meeting People.”)

“Promote-local” gimmicks produced by high school students

Specialty products, made with locally produced goods, that are developed and marketed as cooperative projects by local high schools

and businesses are another “promote-local” gimmick. In Hokkaido, for example, students at Rumoi Senbo High School, working in collaboration with a local noodle-making company, devised a specialty pasta called “Motchiri Kome-pasta” (a pasta made with rice flour).

Yuru-kyara ゆるキャラ

Some local governments have original mascot characters designed to help boost the appeal of their locale. These mascots, called *yuru-kyara* (loosely designed characters),* are widely liked. “Hikonyan ひこにゃん,” for example, is the very popular character created in 2006 by the city of Hikone, Shiga prefecture as part of celebrations of the 400th year since Hikone Castle, the city’s main tourist attraction, was built. Many tourists visit Hikone to get a glimpse of its whimsical mascot, whose success in enlivening local tourism has drawn considerable attention. A major festival was organized in October 2009 in Hikone that drew 109 such mascots from all over Japan. Some 72,000 people flocked to Hikone for a three-day convention of these endearing characters (<http://kigurumi.shiga-saku.net/>).



Hikonyan

© Hikone City

* Many *yuru-kyara* are often the work of amateurs that have a kind of uncomplicated, soothing charm. The term was coined by professional illustrator Miura Jun.

ほっかいどう
Hokkaido



あおもり
Aomori



いわて
Iwate



あきた
Akita



みやぎ
Miyagi



やまがた
Yamagata



ふくしま
Fukushima



とちぎ
Tochigi



Celebrating Differences

Food たべもの

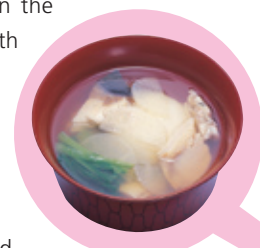
Japan's food culture varies from one part of the country to another and there are some major regional differences. Although where the line falls is not completely clear, there does seem to be a difference in tastes between eastern and western Japan. For example, more pork is eaten in eastern Japan and more beef in western Japan. Preferred types of soup stock and soy sauce are different between these areas.

Some food product manufacturers have developed product lines that specifically take into account such regional tastes. For example, the *Donbei* brand of Nissin Food Products' cup noodles has a basic soup stock made mainly with bonito, kelp, and soy sauce, but whereas for the eastern-Japan market the proportion of bonito flavoring is larger and dark soy sauce is used, for the western-Japan market the proportion of kelp is larger and light soy sauce is used.

Zoni: One dish in many guises

Zoni ぞうに, the special soup served in almost all parts of the country

at New Year's, is often mentioned as reflecting differences in food tastes. This soup features various kinds of vegetables, fish, or meat. Pieces of *mochi*, glutinous rice-cakes, softened by either toasting or boiling, are also added. The custom in most of eastern Japan is to use square pieces of *mochi*, while that in western Japan is to use round pieces. In the Tohoku (東北 northeastern Honshu island), Kanto (関東 central Honshu), and Kyushu 九州 island regions, a clear soup is preferred; in the Kansai 関西 region centering on the Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe area, the soup is flavored with miso. The ingredients used differ from one area to another, often including products that are specialties of the local area. A typical *zoni* of Akita, for example, includes "sansai" ("mountain vegetables" such as mushrooms and fern frond), that of Miyagi prefecture includes seafood, and that of Hiroshima shellfish.



⑨ Hiroshima

Go-tochi Guzzu ご当地グッズ

Railway stations and expressway service areas sell many kinds of local specialty goods and souvenirs. Recently popular especially among young people are local goods (*go-tochi guzzu*) and local specialty snacks (ご当地スナック *go-tochi sunakku*) sold only in the area.

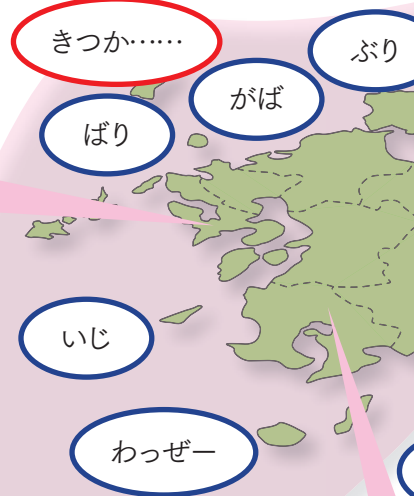
Among the most popular *go-tochi* goods are variously dressed Kewpie dolls and diverse *go-tochi* Hello Kitty goods such as those in costumes evoking a local product, tourist site, or famous person. Starting with the sales of "Lavender Hello Kitty" for Hokkaido in 1998, more than 1,000 *go-tochi* Hello Kitty characters are currently on sale. There are also *go-tochi* goods featuring Disney characters, including Minnie Mouse and Stitch. Not only goods featuring nationally famous characters but also products designed with local motifs and available only in the area are often very popular.



© 1976,2009 SANRIO CO.,LTD,APPROVAL NO.S503076



⑩ Nagasaki



おきなわ
Okinawa



かごしま
Kagoshima



ながさき
Nagasaki

いばらき Ibaraki



ぐんま Gunma



さいたま Saitama



とうきょう Tokyo



ちば Chiba



かながわ Kanagawa



やまなし Yamanashi



----- Border between the eastern and western markets for the Donbei brand of cup noodles

○ Dialect expressions for とても (very)

○ Dialect expressions for つかれた (I'm tired)

なまら



① Akita

らずもね

まげに



⑥ Tottori

えらかった……

ぶち



Donbei

すんげえ

くたびれた……

ぼっけー

めっちゃ

えらい……

でら

すっげー



④ Tokyo

むっちゃ

がんこ

ごっつー

しんけん

しょう

ものすご

ごっつい

ことうたちや……

しんだい……

よだき……

てげ

たいぎゃ



⑦ Kagawa

角餅 kakumochi (square pieces of mochi) area
丸餅 marumochi (round pieces of mochi) area

① © Ryusendou Kankoukaikan

② © Miyagi Prefecture

③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩ © Zenkoku Mochi Kogyo Kyodo Kumiai

⑧ Kagoshima



みやざき Miyazaki



くまもと Kumamoto



おおいた Oita



さが Saga



ふくおか Fukuoka



こうち Kochi



えひめ Ehime



ことば Language

Besides the standard vernacular (きょうつうご *kyotsugo*), Japanese is spoken in many dialects (ほうげん *hogen*). The dialect categories are variously identified by region, prefecture, or subregion; for example, the Kansai dialect (かんさいべん *kansai-ben*) is regional, the Kagoshima (かごしまべん *kagoshima-ben*) and Tochigi (とちぎべん *tochigi-ben*) dialects are prefecture-wide, and the Tsugaru dialect (つがるべん *tsugaru-ben*) is subregional. Some of the differences stem from intonation or accent and words or inflections are sometimes completely different from standard Japanese. Some words carry nuances that are specific to that dialect alone.

Until quite recently, most people from outlying prefectures thought it embarrassing and unsophisticated to speak their home dialect in public. For a while after the end of World War II (1939-1945), education officials advised schools to discourage use of dialects and train students to master standard Japanese. With the dissemination of television, use of the standard language became widespread and many of the traditional dialects went into decline.

Dialects enriching expression

Recently, however, dialects are back. A movement to preserve and value them has gained momentum, and it is now general practice to use standard speech or dialect as suited to the situation. Using dialect in private communication, such as when speaking to close friends, is now viewed positively, in the recognition that it enhances the sense of solidarity among members of groups, allows them to express their identity, and enriches the overall quality of the language in general.

Encouraging the diversity of language

Active efforts to bring dialect into the limelight have also emerged. Some theater performances are given in dialect and quite a few comedians and other entertainers are known for their use of dialect. An increasing number of television programs take up the subject of appreciating dialect. Only a few years ago dialect speech enjoyed something of a boom among high school girls, who experimented with various dialect expressions in their daily conversation and email exchanges. Some people have criticized such use of dialects as an exclusivist code used among group insiders, but others see it as a valuable way to develop awareness of the diversity of language.



みえ Mie



なら Nara



わかやま Wakayama



おおさか Osaka



きょうと Kyoto



しが Shiga



ひょうご Hyogo



ひろしま Hiroshima



② Iwate

いきなり



③ Miyagi

Let's Try!

Pick three of your favorite Kewpie dolls among the 47 examples shown here and then try to find the prefectures on the map. What is the theme of your favorite Kewpies costumes? Can you find out what it is in Japanese?

What clothes Kewpie dolls wear can be found at <http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/>



The "Click Japan" site provides more information on specialties of prefectures across the country.



Promoting Our Hometown Through NPO Activities



Natsuki

Fuyuki

Fuyuki (Director of NPO “Furusato Komatsu Kentei”+)

Natsuki (Deputy Director of NPO “Furusato Komatsu Kentei”)

Third-year high school students, Ishikawa Prefectural Komatsu Commercial High School

Q: Why did you decide to join the Furusato Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: When I was in my first and second year of high school, I went on a Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour. This was a tour organized by Komatsu Commercial High School students to show local participants around historic sites in the city of Komatsu. I learned many things about the city that I didn’t know before and really enjoyed myself, so I decided to join the group when I became a third-year student.

Natsuki: When I learned about Komatsu Kentei from some upperclass students who talked about it at a school gathering, I thought it would be an interesting way to interact with the people in the community. I, too, had a great time talking to local people during the Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour and the school festival. It made me want to join Komatsu Kentei and get to know the people in the community better.

Fuyuki: My teacher encouraged me to become director of the group. I had also been the treasurer of the student council before, but the NPO activities sounded very demanding so I wasn’t sure at first. However, I thought it would be a valuable experience, and I decided to give it a try.

Natsuki: I was also uncertain when my teacher encouraged me to join, but as deputy director, I thought that I would have more opportunities to interact with the local community. I accepted the position because I thought I could learn a lot from the experience.

Fuyuki: People are always asking us for favors!

Natsuki: Maybe we just look approachable. (laughter) Fuyuki and I are both third-year students in the same class. Fuyuki knows what she’s doing, and she’s reliable and a lot of fun, too. She helps me out in so many ways.

Fuyuki: Natsuki really spoils me. (laughter) Whenever she hears me say, “I can’t do that,” she always lends me a hand, saying, “Come on, I’ll help you out!”

Q: What does your organization do?

Fuyuki: We are divided into two teams: one that works on preparing flyers, posters, and the questions for the exam+ and one that maintains the website. Up until now, we’ve been involved with promoting the exam and re-writing the text and the workbook that have been prepared in the past. The exam team is currently compiling the questions for the exam in November. When that’s done, we’re going to discuss the draft and create the

final list of questions. We’re also planning to update the website. Natsuki and I are both on the website team, and we’re currently learning how to build websites.

Natsuki: We also go out to find question topics for the upcoming exam. The other day, we visited a *machiya* by Komatsu station, and had someone from the *machiya* preservation society tell us about it (see the photo below.) Other than that, since we’re the director and deputy director, we have to prepare the NPO annual report of activities and the accounts ledger to hand over to the prefectural government office. We also answer interviews from local newspapers. In class, we’re learning about the history, purpose, and management of non-profit organizations.



Machiya is traditional style of urban dwellings built by merchants and artisans from the Edo period (1603-1867) through prewar Showa era (1926-1945). <http://www.city.komatsu.lg.jp/pre/machiya/k-koma-index.html>

Q: And by the way, what level of Komatsu Kentei certification do you both have?

Both: Actually, we took the elementary level exam in our first and second years, but failed both times! (laughter) It’s actually so difficult that even our teachers have trouble passing the intermediate level. We took the exam without studying much for it because we had other certification exams around the same time. We were taking bookkeeping, information and word processing, and tourism certification exams that might help us in our job hunting.

Q: What difficulties do you encounter working for Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: Remembering all the website codes is a lot of work.

There are so many similar codes that as soon as I learn a new one, I forget one that I learned before! Preparing the NPO paperwork is exacting, too, but Natsuki writes up most of it, so all I do is stamp it with my seal (*hanko*). (laughter) You would be surprised at how difficult it is to make sure the seal comes out nice and neat!

Natsuki: The NPO paperwork is definitely a lot of work! Our teacher helps me along the way, but I had never prepared documents like these before. They're official documents, so the wording has to be appropriate, and there's so much to write. It was very hard at first, but I've grown quite used to it now.

Q: What is it that you find so enjoyable about Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: Our visit to the *machiya* that Natsuki mentioned earlier was great. I was so impressed by the way a little decorative cap is used to hide nailheads on the pillars or walls. I also enjoyed being able to talk to different kinds of people. Students usually don't have a chance to talk to teachers with whom they don't have classes. But through our NPO activities, we've had the opportunity to meet different teachers and learn about their viewpoints and personalities, and feel much closer to them.

Natsuki: For me, the Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour was the most enjoyable experience. Since we all took the same bus, I became friends with people in my community I had never met before. Prior to the tour, we handed out flyers around school and at the station, calling for participants. It was also fun planning the tour and thinking about what part of the city would interest people. For our tour last year, in addition to local people, there were ten students from a high school in Osaka we have an exchange relationship with. In turn, we joined them on their Osaka tour, and they took us to different places, like to a livestock-raising farm and Korea town. It's thanks to Komatsu Kentei that I've had the opportunity to experience so many things that I would have missed as an ordinary student.

Q: What kind of activities are you planning from now on?

Fuyuki: I'm looking forward to promoting Komatsu Kentei at local festivals, where I'm planning to organize Komatsu Kentei trivia games that everyone can enjoy. Also, as we near our exam date in November, all of our members will be spending more time working together. As director, I'd like to create an environment in which everyone will feel free to contribute. I hope all the members, including those in different classes who don't know each other well, will get along. I try to make sure I listen carefully to others' opinions so that everyone can get along with one another.

Natsuki: I'm also looking forward to meeting the people in our community at festivals and other events. As deputy director, I'll try to support Fuyuki as much as I can!

Fuyuki: I told you she spoils me!

Natsuki: Member's opinions tend to diverge widely. I'd like to work together with Fuyuki to see how well we can coordinate them and come up with good plans.

Q: What do you want to do after graduation?

Fuyuki: I enjoy bookkeeping, so I'd like to work in accounting or finance. When I'm working on accounting worksheets, I have to do many calculations to make the figures tally. The calculations take a lot of time and effort, but it feels great when I get everything right at the end. I'm a bit uneasy about leaving the prefecture, so I'd like to work close to home. Osaka feels somewhat familiar, but Tokyo is a bit intimidating. I'd like to stay in my hometown where I've grown up.

Natsuki: There was a time when I wanted to leave Ishikawa prefecture and make friends in different places, but now I'm thinking of finding a job here, in my hometown. Like Fuyuki, I find living in a big city a bit daunting because I think people who live there are rather cold and distant. I'm planning on applying to financial institutions this year. Working for a bank will give me more opportunities to speak to the people in my community, and it will help me learn more about my hometown.

(Interview held August 2009.)

+ What is Furusato Komatsu Kentei?

Run by third-year students at Komatsu Commercial High School, Furusato Komatsu Kentei (literally, "the Komatsu Hometown Exam") is an NPO devoted to the promotion and appreciation of local culture founded in 2005. The group, which became an officially approved non-profit organization in 2008, administers an examination (*kentei*) testing knowledge of local culture once a year, at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. A total of 7,042 people have taken the exam the four times between 2005 and 2008, and 2,756 people have passed it. Test takers can prepare using a text and workbook compiled by the group. Other than planning, administering, and promoting the exam, the members of Furusato Komatsu Kentei also organize computer classes for the local community. Currently, there are sixteen members. The official website is <http://www.tvk.ne.jp/~kshs/>



My favorites



好きなことば (favorite phrase)

Fuyuki: 温故知新 (おんこちしん) Learn new things by studying the past.

Natsuki: 十人十色 (じゅうにんといろ) To each his (or her) own.

好きな食べもの (favorite food)

Fuyuki: カレー Curry.

Natsuki: 桃 Peaches.

好きなこと (favorite pastime)

Fuyuki: 読書 Reading.
I like romance novels.

Natsuki: 音楽をきくこと Listening to music.
I like Japanese rock music and ballads.