



Race and ethnicity

While people are aware of race and ethnicity issues, mainly through news or moral education at school; the Japanese society is relatively homogeneous regarding race & ethnicity. Therefore, most Japanese do not consider them to be a concern in their society.

The older generations and people living in rural areas tend to be unaware of racism and racist attitudes due to fewer encounter and experiences with foreigners.

Thanks to the development of social media, Japanese citizens are becoming more informed of, or engaged with the topic. News or social media rooted discussions like the backlash against skin colour modification of Naomi Osaka and the dispute over the NIKE *The Future isn't waiting* campaign have drawn attention from the wider population and raised their awareness of race and ethnicity.

Gender and sexual orientation

While there are some advances in LGBTQ+ rights, especially amongst younger people, a large part of the older population, more conservative in their views, still tends to see those from sexual minorities as "different". Many people still associate LGBTQ+ people/issues exclusively with certain industries such as showbiz and night clubs and the topic is not openly discussed on individual, daily life levels.

On the other hand, there has been a sharp increase of gender awareness, brought by a series of sexist incidents that occurred within a short period of time. It started with an inappropriate comment towards women by

then-Olympic committee chief, Yoshiro Mori, followed by insults made by Hiroshi Sasaki, also a member of the committee, towards a female comedian. These events caused an outburst of rage in the society and both men were forced to resign, showcasing a deep sensitivity regarding gender issues in the current Japanese society.

Age

As Japan rapidly heading towards an aging society, issues around age are much focused and discussed. Both at the public level and the personal level, discussing topics such as poverty, loneliness, dementia, etc.

How much "freedom of decision" can be assigned to the elderly and how that would be judged is a sensitive issue and the discussion often divides opinions: young vs. old, locals living in rural areas vs. those in urban areas. An illustration of this is a tragic car accident that happened in 2019 where a young mother and daughter were killed by an 89 year-old driver. This led to a heated discussion over elderly drivers, and it partly extended to basic rights of the older population.

Disability

The Japanese society has a high level of awareness around disability and those needing additional support as well as a high acceptability amongst all. They have several charity campaigns and media events focusing on disabilities that receive a huge amount of donations.

Although they have not yet accomplished total inclusive education in schools, as part of the school curriculum, pupils and students are provided with many occasions to learn about and openly discuss disabilities and related issues.



Mental health

A series of suicides that occurred in the showbiz industry in 2020 and the death of several famous Japanese celebrities have raised awareness of mental health, prevention against suicide and support towards the bereaved in the society. It also opened society up to new ideas to prevent them.

Yet, mental health and suicide are still stigmatised topics which people prefer to avoid in discussions. At a personal level, having mental health issues is still regarded as not “normal” and people struggling with these issues tend to hide them.

Socio-economics and class

The majority of Japanese people have a middle-class consciousness and as the extreme poverty is not so visible, people suffering from poverty tend to hesitate to talk about it, worrying they will be seen as a minority or “loser”.

Discrimination also still remains against people who belonged to the “burakumin-class”, communities made up of labourers like butchers etc, but the intensity differs very much depending on regions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has enlarged the economic gap in society in Japan and so people are more aware of these issues at the moment.

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WATCHOUTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Topics like sexual orientation and race/ethnicity could be perceived differently depending on place of residence (rural vs urban) and age (old vs young).
- Gender issues can also be perceived differently depending on gender and age. Japanese men tend to be tolerant to Mr. Mori’s inappropriate comments.