

## **Burnout**

Katherine  
Wood

Mentor: Ashley Rougeaux-Burnes, Texas Tech University

Key words: Japanese schools, academic stress, mental  
health

*Mentor Statement.* The purpose of this mentorship relationship was to assist Apparel Design and Manufacturing students in exploring global events/issues to develop interculturally competent citizens. A studio-based class of third- and fourth-year apparel design students were challenged to research a chosen global theme or problem and utilize the information found while designing a garment. The student designer in this study chose to focus their garment on academic stress in Japanese schools. This design was chosen to be sponsored based on its high quality of construction and the significant meaning brought to the piece using a candle as a metaphor. By crumpling the “papers”, the designer also incorporated surface design techniques that emulate the frustration a student might feel. This student successfully communicated their desired message to the viewer.

*Statement of Purpose.* The purpose of my design is to bring awareness to the severe stress that students struggle with in Japanese schools. In Japan, students face an intense pressure to succeed. There is a cultural emphasis on academic success which is pushed by families, teachers, and society (Mistic, 2023). This is especially evident in the classroom setting where teachers enforce strict classroom etiquette. Schools even restrict self-expression by requiring uniforms and prohibiting students from dyeing their hair (Laura, 2023). Furthermore, the stakes for high school and college admission are high. Entrance exams are extremely difficult and competitive. For many students, a typical school day does not end after regular classes. Students attend cram schools in the evenings for extra exam prep (America Magazine, 2015).

Because of so much academic pressure, the mental health of students is compromised. Some students resort to bullying to take their stress out on other students. There are thousands of cases of bullying across Japanese high schools with many incidents going unreported (Nippon, 2023). Other students decide to skip class, and in the worst cases, they choose to take their own life. In Japan, September 1<sup>st</sup> is the most popular day for Japanese students to commit suicide because it is the day that school starts (Mistic, 2023).

My garments design focuses on the concept of academic “burnout.” Burnout is the experience of running out of mental energy due to overworking yourself for a long period of time. Students who push themselves to their limits without allowing themselves adequate time to relax, end up feeling drained and can no longer perform to the best of their abilities. My garment

portrays the harmful effects of academic burnout on students' mental health. Learning should be an enjoyable process, and it should not consume every aspect of a student's life. Ideally, Japanese schools should aim to promote a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

*Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact.* This dress is made up of multiple pieces of fabric that resemble crumpled paper. Each piece has a Japanese character painted in a repetitive pattern. The meaning of each character is a certain grade on the Japanese academic grading scale. These grades state "exemplary," "very good," "good," "satisfactory," "fail," and "pass" (Hello Japan, n.d.). I wanted to include all the different grades to show that students can experience burnout regardless of the quality of their grades. These "papers" are crumpled to express the frustration a student in burnout would feel. The sleeves of the dress are made to look like upside-down candles which are symbolic of burnout. The dress also incorporates elements of a kimono; a traditional Japanese dress. This can be seen in the neckline and the waist wrap.

*Process, Technique, and Execution.* I began the construction process by draping a shift dress and then altering it to make a wrap dress. Then I estimated how many pieces of fabric I would need for the "papers," in order to create the layered look. I decided to keep the same proportions as a standard 11 in x 8.5 in piece of copy paper, but use various sizes of text for visual interest (fig. 1). For the candle flames, I patterned a long teardrop shape that would be sewn into the wrist end of the sleeve. The waist wrap functions to hold the dress closed and ties in the back.

After cutting out the fabric, I added the Japanese grade characters using black fabric paint. After the

paint dried, I crumpled up each piece (fig. 2). The fabric was stiff enough to hold the creases from being crumpled (fig. 3). Finally, I sewed the dress together. Each "paper" was carefully placed to evenly cover the wrap dress and to also give a staggered appearance.

*Cohesion.* The placement of each part of the dress is crucial. The viewer can imagine that if the upside-down candles continued to burn, the papers would catch on fire. This adds even more emotional appeal to the design. Imagine - not only were the papers crumpled up, but they were also set to burn. The main body of the dress is the color grey which is in relation to the smoke emitted by the burning candles. Then of course, the Japanese references include the painted characters and the kimono features.

*Originality and Innovation.* A lot of artworks relating to academic stress or burnout does involve crumpled paper but having each grade of the grading scale written on the papers was my original idea. Furthermore, tension is brought to the piece through the addition of the upside-down burning candles. I believe the imagery I chose for this garment will evoke an emotional response for all students who have experienced burnout.

Fig 1. Japanese character being painted



Fig. 3 Material holds creases, adding texture



Fig. 2 “Papers” crumpled to show frustration

### References

- Misic, Lidija. 2023. “Hidden struggles: the surprising mental health crisis among Japan’s youth – Humanium.” Humanium. May 9, 2023.  
<https://www.humanium.org/en/hidden-struggles-the-surprising-mental-health-crisis-among-japans-youth/>.
- “Young and stressed out in Japan.” 2015. America Magazine. June 22, 2015.  
<https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/young-and-stressed-out-japan>.
- Nearly a third of Japanese high school students show depression symptoms. (2023, July 1). nippon.com. <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00943/>
- “GRADING SYSTEM.” n.d. HELLO JAPAN. <https://hello-japan.weebly.com/grading-system.html>.
- Laura. 2023. “Japanese Dress Code for Schools Explained - YouGoJapan.” *YouGoJapan* (blog). March 16, 2023.  
<https://yougojapan.com/japanese-dress-code-schools/#:~:text=In%20general%2C%20Japanese%20high%20schools%20tend%20to%20have%20blue%20and%20white%20are%20the%20most%20common%20colors>.
- “Bullying Incidents Reported at 83% of Japanese Schools.” 2023. Nippon.Com. July 1, 2023.  
<https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00855/>.

