KYOTO JOURNAL

INSIGHTS FROM ASIA

106

cultural fluidity


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GUEST EDITOR
LANE DIKO

Cultural Fluidity

Cultures are sometimes perceived as having clear edges and centers. Seen from a distance, foreign cultures can appear as distinctly-defined entities with singular personalities and characteristics. However, exploration into any particular cultural trope—whether 7th century garden design, 1870s Impressionism, or 1970s punk rock—reveals the true nature of culture to be that of movement, change, and flow. On closer inspection, those seeming edges and centers seen from a distance cannot be found.

The tendency to personify and essentialize cultures is especially common when it comes to Japan, famous for its relative geographical and historical isolation. If, however, one island-hops along the Ryukyu Arc for example, from Kyushu to Taiwan, the cultures of each island can be seen to subtly but clearly differ from the next. At a certain point one needs to present a passport. This legal border, signifying the end of one space and the beginning of another, is no barrier in terms of cultural flows.

Cultures flow on a continuum in every direction and in time. Imagine a dynamic weather map, in constant motion, overlayed on a static map of political divisions. Like the weather, the dynamic trends and patterns of culture exist and move on a scale beyond human comprehension. Our language on this topic likewise cannot encompass its subtleties or scope. Out of necessity—in conversation and in this magazine—we use terms like "Kyoto" or "Japanese culture" as crude signifiers which may be intended to mean—and be interpreted as—countless things in interplay.

Cultural flows can be chaotic and cacophonous, and at other times gradual and subtle. Geographic images come to mind: whirlpools, rivers, underwater currents, and tidal estuaries of culture. In the unprecedented maelstrom of our globally networked age, conventional boundaries—cultural, historical, geographic, and linguistic—seem to be disintegrating. Simplistic concepts of imported and exported culture no longer apply. People are viewing themselves—their very identities—more and more as part of a spectrum: racially, nationally, sexually, and culturally.

In *KJ 106: Cultural Fluidity* we explore many ways in which culture has flowed in and out of Kyoto: how foreign cultures have manifested in new ways in Japan; how aspects of Japanese culture have been reimagined overseas, and further, how those manifestations of Japanese culture have returned to influence Japan. Fluidity can be observed in the complexity of diasporic and immigrant experiences around the world. It is inherent to the interpretation and reinterpretation of jazz and punk music. It is essential to the nature of shapeshifting international figures like Ryuichi Sakamoto, Phoebe Bridgers, and David Bowie. From *Japonisme* to Emoji, Cultural Fluidity includes Pokémon, cosmopolitan *ikebana,* modern Noh theater (and even the wandering ghost of Elvis Presley!).

KJ 108, coming in summer 2024, will further develop the wide-ranging theme of cultural fluidity, delving into topics including mythology, food, architecture, and tea culture. We hope that the poetry, personal essays, interviews, photography, and illustrations featured in these issues will invite you, as a reader, to recognize and appreciate the depth and fascinating complexity of these blending edges of cultures, in the world and in yourself.

first experiences

"What is your oldest memory of something Japanese? What cultural product, news story, food, or schoolbook can you recall as a child?"

TO EXPAND ON THE THEME OF CULTURAL FLOW, we asked this question of all KJ 106 contributors and staff. Their answers, a small sampling of experiences, are microcosms of how Japanese culture has diffused around the globe and how this flow has changed over the last century. In many cases, those things remembered were only later discovered to be Japanese. Ranging from WW2 to Nintendo, these childhood experiences offer a unique portrait of Japan's place in the world. We see Japan's transition from an object of fear to a supplier of cheap goods and beautiful, delicate products to a source of high-end food and gaming technology.

BOB BRADY
I was born in 1940, devoid of culture or politics, in Albany, New York. As the result of something in a place called 'Hawaii' (whatever that was) by 'Japan' (also wtw), my father was stationed in the 'bulge' of somewhere. I remember my mother packaging stuff to send him that I begrudged, like cookies and jam. Soon I was challenging the long sidewalks of Second Avenue with my tiny tin airplane, chanting the headlines "Bombs over Tokyo" (wtw).

ELISABETH MURAWSKI
My earliest memories are fearful. I was a little girl in Chicago when America entered the war. My eldest brother was a soldier, fighting against Japan. I remember newsreels of the atomic bombs. Later, my other brother, who visited Japan while on leave from the Korean war, sent me a beautiful Japanese doll in a red kimono. I still have it.

MARC KEANE
My father was stationed in Japan for six months immediately after the surrender. When he returned to New York, he brought back a boxed set of traditional Japanese fairy tales that had been published in the Meiji period in English by one Hasegawa Takejiro of Tokyo. The books were printed on a fabric-like crepe paper. The touch and feel of the books, the way the binding was sewn not glued, the incredible woodblock-print graphics, and the little case that closed with ivory tongs all left a deep impression on me—another way to see the world.

JOHN BRANDI
I was born and raised in southern California. In the early 1950s, at age eleven, I had a pen pal from Nara who wrote me on tissue-thin paper. Good English mixed with Japanese. Envelopes with cherry-blossom stamps. Postcards of a huge bronze Buddha, the deer park, a Shinto shrine. One New Year's I received a gift of wooden clogs, lacquered chopsticks, and a painted fan. I was immediately hooked.

JOHN EINARSEN
In the early 1960s, I collected stamps with Carl, who lived next to my grandmother's house in South Dakota. I spent summers there when I was a kid. We ordered bags of random stamps from ads in the back of comic books. I remember the ones from Japan being the most beautiful and coveted. It seemed like they were from a different planet.

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE
The various Japanese restaurants I went to as a kid in New York are a blur. I was eating sushi, sashimi, and other Japanese foods throughout my childhood in the 1950s / 1960s. It was no big deal. Japanese restaurants were everywhere, and Japanese food was just a normal part of life.

LOIS P. JONES
If someone could be a perfect child, it was Susan Watanabe. We went to elementary school together in Chicago. She was as beautiful as she was intelligent and was always the first to answer in our class. Her hair was long, straight, and glossy (impossible in those days before blow dryers and flat irons). Her eyes held a kind of confidence which seemed very adult.

GREGORY DUNN
When I was five years old, I remember seeing a Japanese army rifle in the closet of my father's bedroom. He showed it to me with care. He pointed out the embossed chrysanthemum above the trigger. A bayonet also attached to the barrel. My father had been in the war of course, and found the rifle lying on a beach somewhere in the Pacific. He never told me more than that. This was in 1962 in Chicago.

MASAO SUGIYAMA
In the early 1960s, in a rural area of Saitama surrounded by endless rice paddies, there was no sign of anything foreign. TV was not yet available in many households, so the only place I encountered something different was in the books at the school library. I used to read them while walking home. I was drawn into the world of the Arabian Nights, and I often dreamed of bandits, jinn, or flying carpets. My first contact with foreign culture was not European but Islamic.

KEN RODGERS
On a windswept Tasmanian Southern Ocean beach, I discovered a woven-straw *zori* sandal with black velvet straps, and mysterious bamboo tags inscribed with kanji, originating from far-ranging Japanese tuna fishing boats. In 1963, when I was in 6th grade, one of them made an emergency port call; the *Hobart Mercury* newspaper photographer snapped me with one of the crew.

LAUREN DEUTSCH
In the 1960s, there was a deluge of inexpensive stuff MADE IN JAPAN. I also somehow learned about origami when I was in junior high school in Philadelphia. Must have been through a library book.

SHELLEY BAKER-GARD
I was about ten years old in the mid-1960s when my piano teacher took me to a Japanese restaurant in Portland, Oregon. I was fascinated by the waitress in kimono. We removed our shoes and, to my amazement, were seated on floor pillows around a sunken table for our feet to dangle under. It was then that I fell in love with the dried seaweed that I quickly learned to roll my rice in. Now I am the old teacher, and I often remember this dinner when I see my grandson eating seaweed snacks.

DAVID COZY
When I was in first grade in Los Angeles, California, 1966, my best friend was Francis Mori. His parents ran a small Japanese restaurant and were kind enough to invite me to a sushi dinner there. I especially remember the squid and octopus. They tasted great, and what could be cooler for a six-year-old boy than eating tentacles?

MIKE FREILING
I suppose I was exposed through haiku in high school, but the most important connection was my college friendship with two Hawaiian students of Japanese ancestry—John Nishimoto and Paul Nishijima. Together we would read the novels of Mishima and Kawabata and take in as many Japanese movies as we could find in the art house cinemas of late 1960s San Francisco—samurai movies as well as *Woman in the Dunes* and *Tokyo Story*. We are still in touch all these years later.

SUSAN PAVLOSKA
There is a photo from the early 1970s of me standing in the paneled rec room of my parents' house in New Jersey wearing an embroidered satin Chinese robe. This I had accessorized with a blue plastic hairband around my skinny ribcage, ballet slippers, a conical metal lampshade, and a paper fan. I don't know exactly what inspired me, but I somehow already had an image of 'Japan' in my mind, perhaps connected with my father's stories about the Japanese prisoners of war he had known in Guam during the final months of WWII.

SUZANNE KAMATA
A girl in my elementary school class in Michigan, back in the 1970s, had lived in Japan with her parents. My first memory of Japan is a photo of that American classmate in a kimono.

JOHN WELLS
When I was an elementary school student in the late 1970s in Ohio, a woman from Japan visited our class. She wrote each of our names in Japanese in *hiragana* on pieces of paper and gave them to us.

RICK ELIZAGA
When I was a boy in the mid-1970s, living in Washington State, my dad brought me home an unfamiliar toy, a two-foot tall "Shogun Warrior Mazinga." He had a flared crown, grilled mouth, broad chest, glowing yellow eyes, and was armed with swords and rockets. I didn't know if this robot samurai was friend or foe, but he was clearly fierce and formidable.

JOHN OGLEVEE
In the late 1970s, I befriended Hideo Kusaba in my 3rd grade class. His family had moved to NY for his father's work. He became one of my very best friends, and I spent a lot of time at his apartment marveling at his robotic toys. I'll never forget his birthday party when his mother presented yakitori skewers. The taste of that sweet and savory glaze was a revelation!

FIONA BENNETT
In 1978, when I was about 12 years old, my father went to Japan for work. I distinctly remember a postcard that he sent back to us in London. It was a picture of a temple rooftop with intricate tiles, a chrysanthemum in the corner, and a golden carp superimposed over half the image.

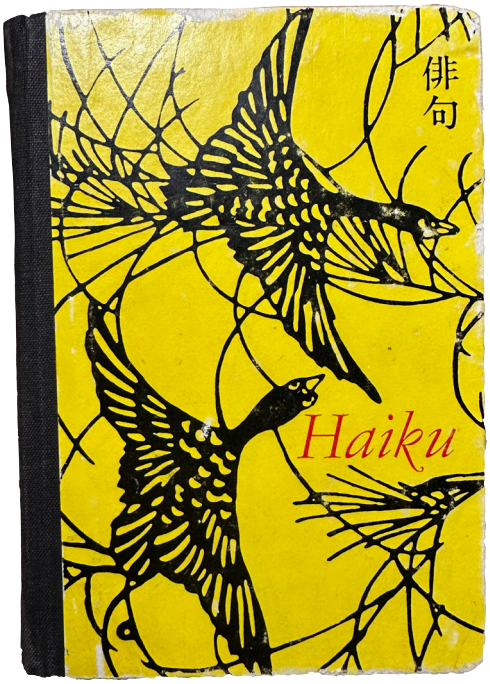
SUBHADASSI
The first encounter I am aware of was the television series *Saiyūki* (Account of the Journey to the West) made by Nippon TV and known in English as *Monkey Magic*. It was broadcast by the BBC beginning in November 1979. There were only three TV channels in the U.K. at that time and few programmes for children, so as an inquisitive 12-year-old, I was enthralled by this quirky and at times bizarre foreign folktale melodramatically overdubbed in English. I later discovered that *Saiyūki* is based on an ancient Chinese legend which traces the origins of Buddhism.

ALEX MANKIEWICZ
Like many, it was probably 1970s cartoons—*Go Speed Racer GO!* More particularly, however, I have a memory of a threadbare wind-up donkey of my mother's. I was drawn to the melancholy aesthetic. It seemed to be one of the few things she had from her childhood, yet something about it didn't feel English. After she died, a Google search for 'vintage wind-up donkey' brought up the exact one—from 1940s Japan. It's now in my studio.

MAGDA RITTENHOUSE
In the mid-1980s, as a teenager in my native Poland, I came across a bilingual anthology of haiku by Basho, Busan, and Issa. I had no idea what haiku was, let alone that it was Japanese. But the volume had a bright yellow cover and was printed on thin, textured paper. It was so beautiful and so different from the poorly produced books we were accustomed to during grim years of communism.

JENNIFER TEETER
Growing up in a suburb of Chicago in the 1980s, I remember seeing the adorable collection of Hello Kitty-themed stationery and thermoses that adorned the desks of my classmates of Korean and Filipino heritage. With each passing holiday, I would notice new Hello Kitty accessories making their way into my friends' pen cases.

LANE DIKO
I remember learning words like '*katana*' and '*ninja*' from my older cousin at an early age, fascinating ideas for a young boy. I grew up in the Midwest in the 1980s, but my mother would prepare Japanese macrobiotic dishes of brown rice and vegetables in a unique cast-iron pot with a wooden lid that she brought back from her years in 1970s San Francisco. (I would learn years later that this exact *nabe* pot was ubiquitous in Japan.)



REBECCA FLATO
For me, Japan first came into view while watching the 1980s John Hughes film *The Breakfast Club*. The movie's star, Molly Ringwald, plays a wealthy student who brings sushi for lunch, to the confusion of her less affluent classmates. She pulls out chopsticks and a black lacquered box to eat "rice, raw fish and seaweed." I was probably nine or ten and in South Texas, and this scene left me captivated, wanting to know more.

MK
In 1980s communist Czechoslovakia, cut off from the world, I got really interested in martial arts through Shaolin kung-fu movies, and my first taste of Japanese culture came from karate classes when I was nine or ten years old, where I learned moves, manners, and basic language like *hajime* (start) and *yame* (stop). My first Japanese words were counting to ten: "*Ichi, ni, san, shi...*"

MAHON MURPHY
Reruns of a French/Japanese Procidis/Tatsunoko animated series *Il était une fois...l'homme* (*Once Upon a Time...Man*), played on Irish television in the 1980s. It taught kids about world history, and I remember quite a clear feeling of being fascinated by it, even though my memory of the actual content is vague.

RAN ZWIGENBERG
I remember watching Japanese cartoons on Israeli state TV in the mid-1980s. *Space Battleship Yamato* and *3000 Leagues in Search of Mother*, titled *Ha'lev* (*The Heart* in Hebrew), were iconic in Israel but little known in the English-speaking world. They were the first animated series I was really into as a kid.

NATHAN MADER
Growing up in Saskatchewan on the Canadian prairies in the 1980s meant my contact with foreign culture was pretty limited, but I remember being spellbound by Mr. Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*, as well as the sequel, when they go to Okinawa—though I later learned many scenes were shot in Hawaii. I also had a pen pal from Japan in 4th grade and can still see the translucent blue rice paper and green ink.

ANNA MEHTA
When I was in primary school in Australia in the early 1990s, a Japanese lady visited our class to do a talk on Japan and Japanese language.
I can remember her telling us about borrowed words like '*kamera*.'
I was captivated by all she had to say.
I signed up for Japanese classes, and the rest is history!

HIRISHA MEHTA
In the early 1990s, when I was seven or eight, my mum took my sister and me to a Japanese cultural event in my hometown of Poona, India. I remember a Japanese lady in kimono writing my name in *katakana* with ink and brush. I was amazed to see this strange script and to know that it read as my name. I am now a graphic and type designer and love designing fonts and *kanji*.

ROBERT DAHLBERG-SEARS
I grew up in the Midwest in the 1990s. At around four or five years old I began saving my meager allowance for a Super Nintendo. One Christmas morning though, my parents surprised my brother and I with one; whether I knew Mario, Luigi, or Yoshi were actually Japanese, who can say?

MARTHA KNAUF
Sometime in elementary school, we all read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. I didn't fully understand what it was about or that it was based on a true story, but it affected me profoundly. This was in Vermont in the mid-1990s, and I had no idea that I would someday visit Hiroshima and stand in front of the statue of Sadako.

PETE GLOVER
In England in the mid-1990s, there were various Japanese brands with adverts on TV, like Toshiba, JVC and Toyota ("The car in front is a Toyota"). I remember that JVC sponsored Arsenal FC, who I despise, and when my dad bought a second-hand JVC stereo amp, I was suspicious.

LUAN BANZAI
Growing up in Brazil, for me there were always Brazilian-Japanese people around. I remember when I was seven or eight, in maybe 1995, my mom made me try something called sushi. The word didn't mean anything to me. For me it was just raw fish, and when I tried it, I vomited right away. (It's now one of my favorite foods.)

LEWIS MIESEN
I loved the kids TV show *Power Rangers* when I was a kid in Texas in the 1990s. Made up of different races, genders, and backgrounds, the team must unite into one mega-robot to defeat the evil monster. Looking back, the emphasis on teamwork and collective effort stands in contrast to American superheroes who single-handedly save the world.

CODI HAUKA
When I was around ten years old in 2000, my parents started hosting homestay students, and one of the first to stay with us was a girl named Kazuyo. I distinctly remember all the *omiyage* gifts she brought with her: small boxes of vivid, jewel-like candy, glossy *kamifūsen* paper balloons, and floral-patterned *tenugui* cloths. Kazuyo ended up living with us in Vancouver for two years and is still like a sister to me.

GARRETT SPELLER
I remember huddling next to the heating vent in my room on a cold Christmas morning—the double pulse startup sound of the Nintendo DS, the soft click of the buttons, and a rush of excitement as I navigated through Pokémon's Twinleaf Town. When given the chance to choose a Pokémon, I picked Piplup and named him 'Bubbles.' This was the early 2000s in a suburb of Buffalo, New York, and I think I was around seven years old.

HENRY LAN
Doraemon was a big part of my early childhood in Guangzhou, China in the early 2000s. The series imprinted a sense of familiarity and community with Japan. Features of Japanese scenery, like the sand-grit playgrounds and riverside recreation areas, made my first visit to Japan feel like stepping into a warmly recognisable world.

THÉODORA POULOT
Nintendo games like Mario Bros and Pokémon were my first unknowing taste of Japanese culture. I remember getting my first DS game in 2009 at age six and the excitement of playing it with my siblings in our home in Paris. Back then, I didn't think about where these games came from; it was all about the simple joy of gaming.

CULTURAL FLUIDITY

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COVER: "Summer Rain," 2022, acrylic and oil on linen.
Painting by Morimoto Keita.

GUEST EDITOR: American photographer and artist Lane Diko has been based in Kyoto for more than a decade and is a regular contributor to KJ as a writer, photographer, and editor. He studied painting and photography at The Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. His work has been featured by VSCO, and he most recently exhibited at The Terminal KYOTO and EV Gallery in NYC. A solo exhibition of his work will be held this spring at Ace Hotel Kyoto as part of Kyotographie/KG+.

kagami

the resonance of ryuichi sakamoto

MAGDA RITTENHOUSE

Wearing a black suit and tortoiseshell glasses, he leans over a grand piano. Spot lit, his neatly cropped silver hair shines in the distance. Coming closer, I can see freckles on his pale face. He lifts his hands, lets them fall on the glossy keys, and begins 'Before Long,' the first of ten solo pieces he will play tonight. I can see the hammers of the Yamaha twitch.

How is this possible? The piano was not in the theater minutes earlier. And the musician—Ryuichi Sakamoto—passed away in March of 2023. Is he real? Is he present in this room? He can't be, of course. But what does it mean to be present? To be real? The music, the sound waves, are alive. Is his spirit encoded in these frequencies and amplitudes? Sakamoto once said he wanted to create music with "less notes and more spaces." He insisted that this did not mean silence, but spaces between sounds that themselves could ring out, grow, and resonate. Resonance? Is that what this performance is about?

Questions bounce around my head as I listen to the opening of *Kagami* (*Mirror*). This mixed-reality concert was conceived of and produced by Sakamoto in collaboration with the Pittsburgh-based Tin Drum Studio. It premiered at New York's The Shed in June of 2023, three months after his death from cancer at the age of 71.

Celebrated as one of Japan's most charismatic composers, Sakamoto gained global recognition with a career that crossed cultural barriers and spanned multiple genres—from classical and electronic, through jazz and rock, to pop and folk. He left 21 solo albums, scored films (winning an Academy Award for *The Last Emperor*), dabbled as an actor, created music for commercials and soundscapes for multi-media artists. He also contributed music to the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and composed an opera exploring "the flux of matter and symbiosis of life."

Youthful experiments with sequencers, samplers, synthesizers, and programable drum machines led to Sakamoto being recognized as the "godfather of electronic music." He was credited with having opened a doorway to the coming digital age, but he would also engage in thoughtful explorations of subtle, organic sounds—raindrops filling an empty bucket, forest leaves underfoot, snow melting in the

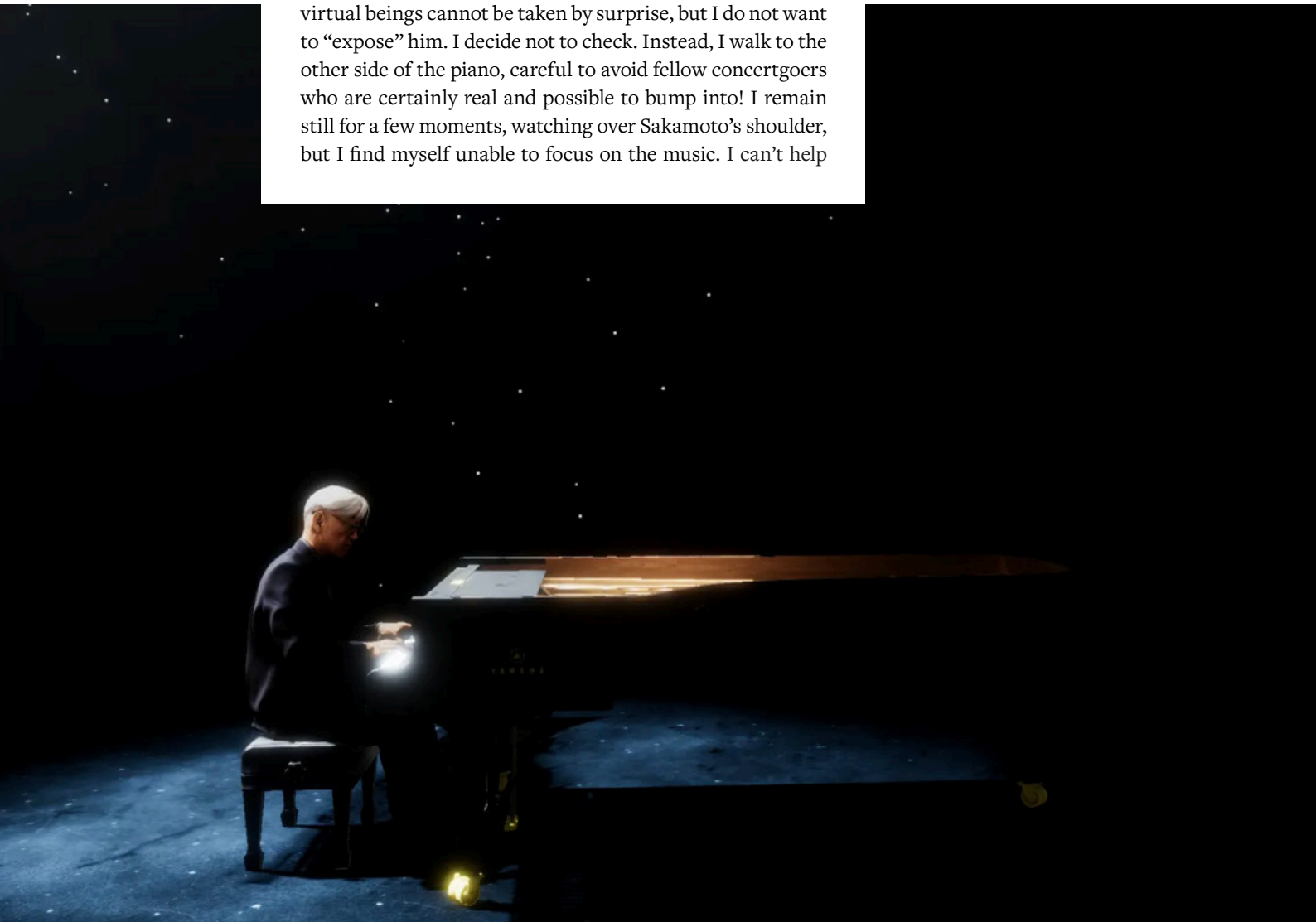
Described as a "multi-sensory experience," *Kagami* fuses three-dimensional, moving images of Sakamoto, with the here and now of the physical theater.

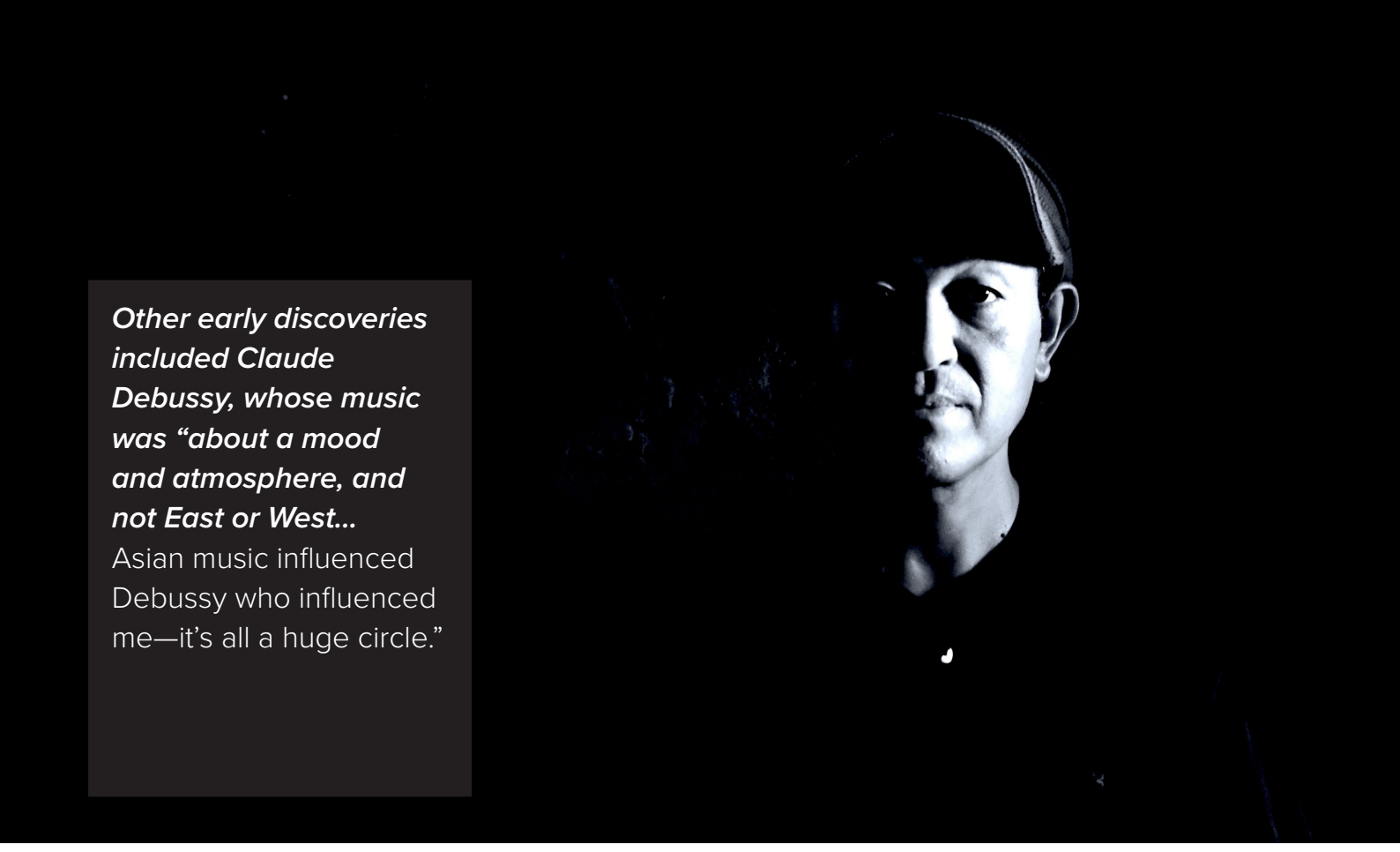
Arctic ("the purest sound I have ever heard"). Underlying all his projects and endeavors was an insatiable creative appetite, an openness, and a willingness to experiment, cross boundaries, and forge connections. "Ryuichi was a celebration of endless curiosity mixed with an astonishing lack of cynicism," says Todd Eckert, Sakamoto's friend and Tin Drum founder, who directed and produced *Kagami*. "This is why he was always creating new projects that worked. That spark of invention was always revealing itself to him."

There are 80 people in the audience, sitting on chairs that form a circle. We had entered the dark room to find scenography consisting of only a few rectangles painted in the middle, suggesting an empty stage. This is where Sakamoto and his grand piano will appear. Before that happens, we must mount transparent virtual-reality headsets, aptly named Magic Leap. Ten minutes or so into the concert experience, as Sakamoto begins playing 'Energy Flow,' I decide to take a leap myself and walk towards the "stage." (We are allowed to wander around the room during the performance). Getting closer, I toy with the idea of touching Sakamoto's hair. Would I disrupt the flow? Would he be distracted? Raise his eyebrow? I know of course that virtual beings cannot be taken by surprise, but I do not want to "expose" him. I decide not to check. Instead, I walk to the other side of the piano, careful to avoid fellow concertgoers who are certainly real and possible to bump into! I remain still for a few moments, watching over Sakamoto's shoulder, but I find myself unable to focus on the music. I can't help

The recording sessions lasted three days. As Sakamoto performed, the crew filmed him from multiple angles using 48 cameras. Additionally, tiny motion sensors were attached to his face and hands.

Photos courtesy of Tin Drum





Other early discoveries included Claude Debussy, whose music was "about a mood and atmosphere, and not East or West… Asian music influenced Debussy who influenced me—it's all a huge circle."

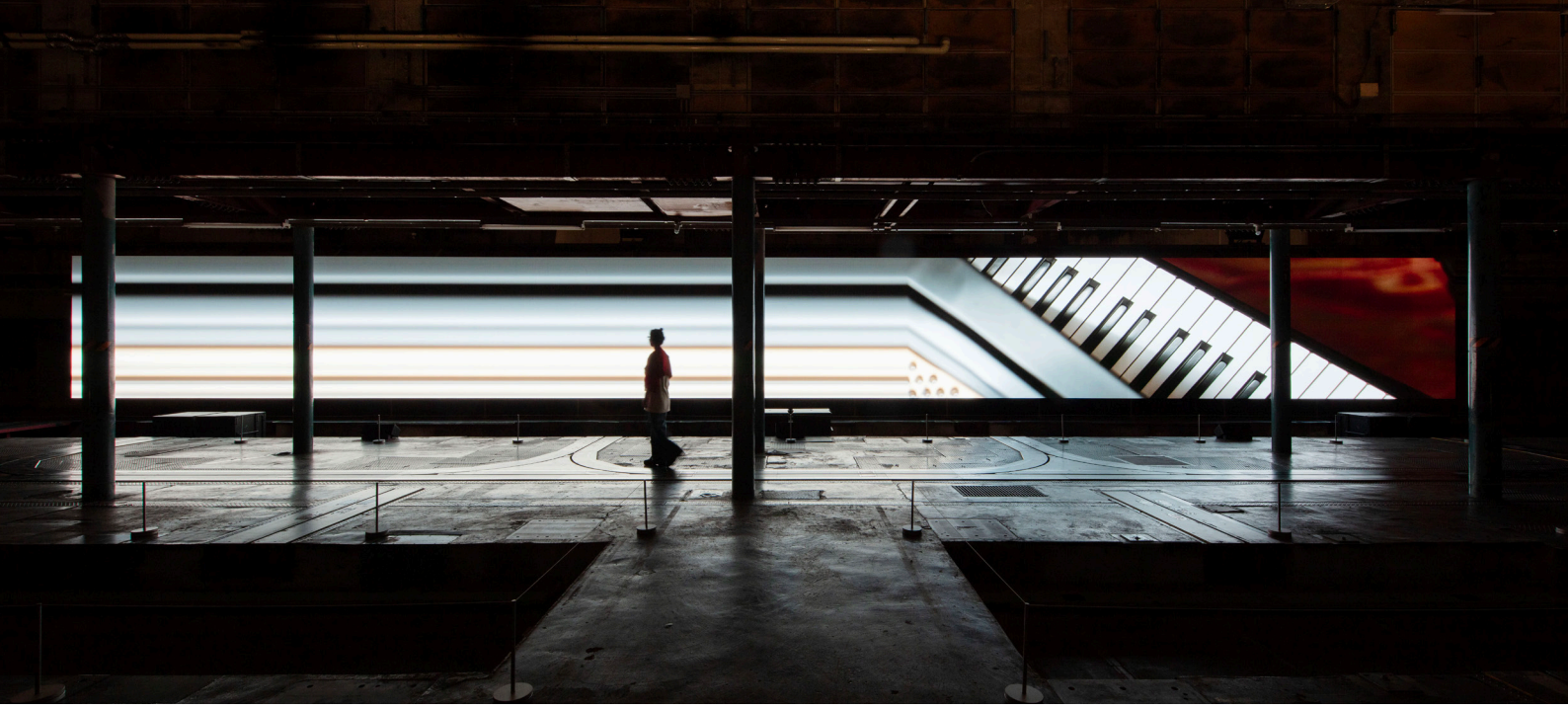
photo by Neo Sora (C) 2022 Kab Inc.

examining his hands (the skin seems too smooth) and scrutinizing his movements (they are not fluid enough). Are his fingers actually touching the keys? It does not seem so.

The performance is one example of many recent artistic experiments with augmented and virtual reality. Described as a "multi-sensory experience," *Kagami* fuses a three-dimensional, moving image of Sakamoto with the here and now of the physical theater. Along with the musical performance, there are several digital projections—a tree that sprouts from the piano, light particles that resemble snow. There is also a unique scent in the room: a blend of lily, ginger, juniper, and lemon grass, created by Sakamoto and produced for the occasion by a Japanese artisan.

According to the production credits, scores of people, including lighting designers, UX design experts, "3D artists," "server developers," and even a "mesh surgeon," were involved in the endeavor. The results are impressive but leave at least some viewers with a feeling of dissonance. "It feels like a wake in a laser tag arena," wrote a New York Times critic. Others pointed to the high price of the headsets ($3,499 USD each) and compared the performance to a video game in which the main character has "unlocked the piano spirit level." Todd Eckert of Tin Drum insists that it was never the intention to show off or engage in technological wizardry for its own sake. Nor was *Kagami* envisioned as a tribute to the late composer. "Memorial is always about a loss," he said, adding that both he and Sakamoto were hoping *Kagami* would allow him to connect with audiences that he would otherwise not be able to reach. "I wanted to create a relationship of energy and excitement for the audience—something present forever."

The plan for *Kagami* began to take shape in January of 2020, shortly before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Visiting Eckert's Brooklyn apartment, Sakamoto shared an idea which had occupied him for some time: he wanted to create music that would have permanence, sounds that would not dissipate over time. Perhaps this was the result of reckoning with his own mortality. In 2014, Sakamoto had been diagnosed with laryngeal cancer. After months of treatment it went into remission, but the idea remained. "I am fascinated with the notion of perpetual sound," Sakamoto told Stephen Nomura Schilble, director and producer of the 2018 documentary *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda*. "I suppose in literary terms it would be like a metaphor of eternity… Essentially the opposite of a piano because the notes never fade." Paradoxically, the piano—his favorite Yamaha—would end up being the only instrument featured in *Kagami*. Sakamoto felt the piano was the instrument he



Ambient Kyoto: Ryuichi Sakamoto + Shiro Takatani <<async - immersion 2023>> photo: Nagare Satoshi

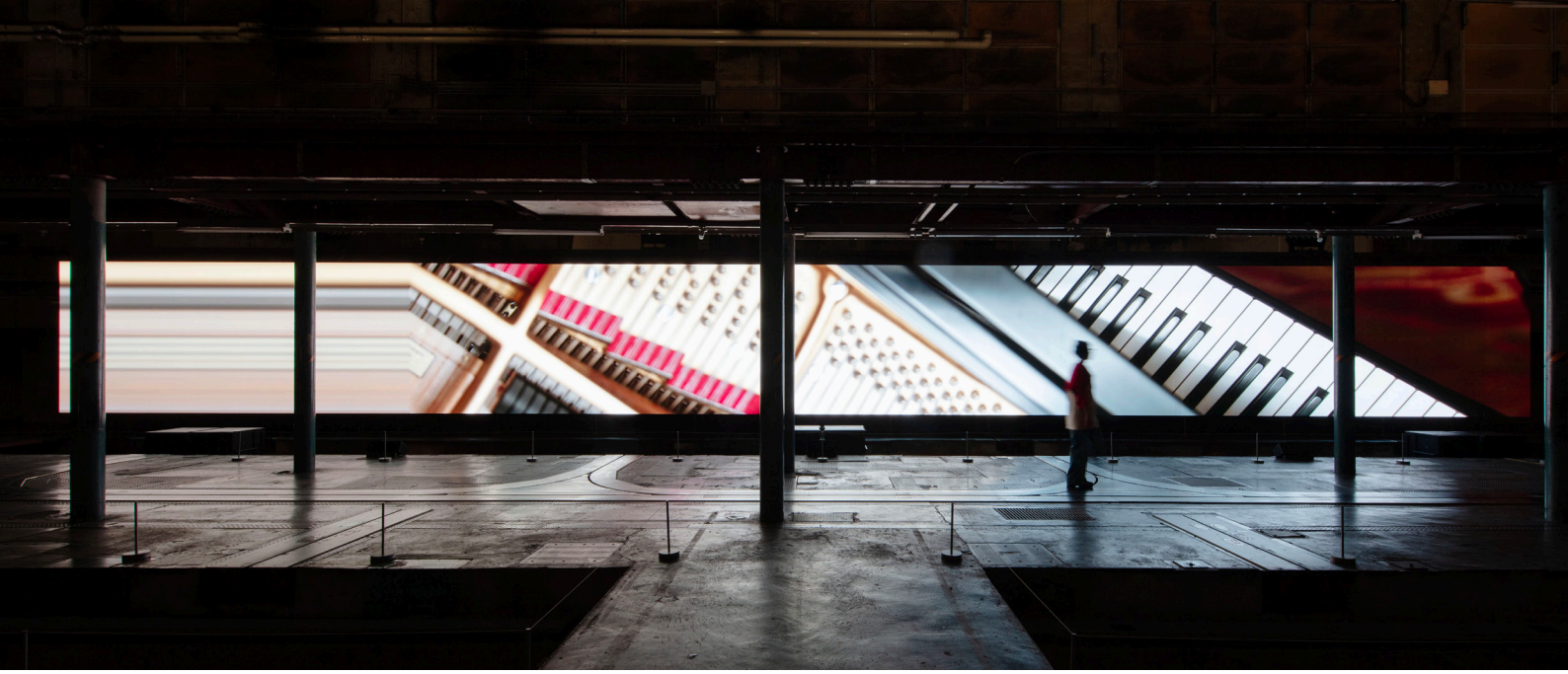
had been closest to, almost an extension of his body. "It's probably the easiest way to express my musicality, because I started playing the piano when I was three or four," he told an interviewer. "When I imagine some music in my mind, almost automatically I imagine the piano keys."

What Sakamoto probably did not imagine at this early stage was how many technical issues the production of *Kagami* would entail. "I honestly don't think Ryuichi thought through [the technology] beyond what the process allowed," Eckert says. As with his past projects, Sakamoto was keen on forging a new kind of connection with an audience. As their work on *Kagami* progressed, this need became even more urgent. Tin Drum producers had to address myriad technological and logistical challenges. For one thing, a grand piano, which Sakamoto wanted to use, would be difficult to handle in the 4D studio—given its size and complexity, it would occlude many camera shots. They considered using a keyboard with weighted keys and did several trial runs, but in the end, realizing how important it was to Sakamoto, Eckert gave in. "Ryuichi had a singular relationship with the piano and I wanted to present it in all its complexity and beauty."

Born in Tokyo in 1952, Sakamoto did indeed begin playing and even composing for piano at an early age. Attending one of Japan's most progressive kindergartens (which Yoko Ono had attended two decades earlier) he was exposed to the arts. Sakamoto's childhood was steeped in culture, his home often frequented by writers and artists. His father was an editor of renowned authors including Kenzaburo Oe and Yukio Mishima. His mother, a hat designer, took him to concerts of contemporary classical music while he was still a toddler. This is how he was introduced to the music of John Cage, whom he later credited as one of his most important influences. (Sakamoto liked to point out that he was born the same year that Cage's *4′33″* was unveiled.) Other early discoveries included Claude Debussy, whose music was "about a mood and atmosphere, and not East or West," as Sakamoto would explain decades later. "Asian music influenced Debussy, who influenced me—it's all a huge circle."

The production of *Kagami* began in December of 2020. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, Sakamoto and Eckert flew from New York, where both were based, to Tokyo. Its Crescent Studio was just one of two places in the world with volumetric motion capture, necessary for the project. The recording sessions lasted three days. As Sakamoto performed, the crew filmed him from multiple angles using 48 cameras. Additionally, tiny motion sensors were attached to his face and hands. To prevent his hair from falling and obscuring his face—as it often did in real life—they waxed it and put a net on top.

Unbeknown to Eckert, earlier that year Sakamoto had learned that his cancer had returned. Upon arriving in Tokyo, he went to see his oncologist and received more bad news: his tumor had metastasized. He did not share this with the production team, and Eckert only learned about it more than a year later. On that first morning in Crescent Studio, however, he did notice that Sakamoto was playing much more slowly, and his posture was hunched.



Ambient Kyoto: Ryuichi Sakamoto + Shiro Takatani <<async - immersion 2023>> photo: Nagare Satoshi

"Music, work, and life all have a beginning and an ending," Sakamoto told an interviewer in early 2019. Hoping to transcend this cycle, he sought to create "music that could escape constraints of time."

Once they finished recording and uploaded the data, it turned out that much of the time Sakamoto's face had been blocked from the view of the camera. He had been leaning too low. As they would not be able to repeat the sessions, the only hope was to come up with some solution in post-production. "It was an unprecedented process originated by Matt Hermans and Yoyo Munk that saved the project" says Eckert. The two—a 3D designer and a mesh surgeon respectively—were able to use the library of data that they had managed to gather during the recordings to recreate Sakamoto's expression. "[Sakamoto's] genuine spirit was the only reason for the project to happen in the first place," says Eckert. "And even though the technology is in a nascent, imperfect state, his genuine humanity always comes through. If it didn't, I wouldn't have released it."

After premiering in New York, *Kagami* traveled to the Manchester International Festival, and then to London. (It played at the Roundhouse from December 29, 2023 to January 21, 2024). Tin Drum is next planning to bring it to the Sydney Opera House and the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee. Eckert hopes *Kagami* will make it possible for the audiences to connect with Sakamoto's music for many years to come. "This was my goal... To me, he played the way I wanted the world to sound, and I want to bring people closer to that forever."

"Music, work, and life all have a beginning and an ending," Sakamoto told an interviewer in early 2019. Hoping to transcend this cycle, he sought to create "music that could escape constraints of time." One notable example involved playing a piano recovered from the 2011 Tōhoku tsunami. "I felt as if I was playing the corpse of a piano that had drowned," he said after the concert for survivors in an abandoned school in Miyagi Prefecture. The waterlogged instrument had indeed been beyond repair, badly out of tune. Yet Sakamoto was able to find beauty in this distorted sound. "People say the sound of an untuned piano is 'dissonant,' but to me, the instrument has just gone back to its original state, to what it is supposed to be," he told *Asahi Shinbun*, adding that he found the sound particularly comforting while he was fighting cancer. Both experiences—his terminal illness and the devastating natural disaster—helped him reckon with "the enormity of nature. We are only allowed to live on its palms. I never want to forget the lesson."

As *Kagami* comes to an end, there are no encores. Sakamoto does not bow or leave the stage. He just fades away. We remove our headsets. As we leave the theater, I keep thinking about what the late musician said about the spaces between the notes. "Space is resonant, is still ringing. I want to enjoy that resonance, to hear it growing, then the next sound, and the next note or harmony can come." Thank you, Mr. Sakamoto.

There is, in reality, a virtual me.
This virtual me will not age and will continue to play the piano for years, decades, centuries.
Will there be humans then?
Will the squids that will conquer the earth after humanity listen to me?
What will pianos be to them?
What about music?
Will there be empathy there?

Empathy that spans hundreds of thousands of years.
Ah, but the batteries won't last that long.

—Ryuichi Sakamoto, 2023

MAGDA RITTENHOUSE is a writer and photographer whose work focuses on nature and the built environment. The author of a best-selling book about New York, published by Czarne in her native Poland, she is currently working on a collection of essays and photographs on Japan. She has been a KJ contributor since 2018.

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ILLUSTRATIONS
BY LI ZIZI

floral encounters

LI ZIZI 紫子 [ZǏZI] ずず,
THE FOUNDER AND PROPRIETOR OF SEN Ikebana Flower Meditation was born in Japan to Chinese parents. She attended international school in Osaka before moving to New York City to pursue her university studies at Parson's School of Design. During the Covid-19 pandemic she started taking lessons in *ikebana* (flower arranging) and *kitsuke* (kimono) while working for the Tokyo branch of a U.K. consulting firm, eventually going on to earn a Level 1 License in the Sougetsu-ryuu school of ikebana and a certification in the highest level of kitsuke: *komogi/irotomisode*. Susan Pavloska recently interviewed her remotely at her home in Amsterdam.

What is the connection between gongbi painting and ikebana?

In both forms, the essence of my art stems from a deep love for nature, particularly the healing beauty of flowers. Gongbi is the embodiment of flowers within the context of my Chinese heritage, while ikebana reflects the influence of my Japanese upbringing on my floral expressions. Ultimately, my greatest aspiration is to convey the harmony of nature. Whatever the medium, my vision remains consistent: to share the profound connection between the beauty of nature and the human spirit.

SP: Please describe your artistic vision and inspiration.

LZ: The touchstone of my artistic vision is the memory of sketching by the lotus pond in my mother's hometown of Chengdu during a visit from Japan. It was on that trip when I was nine that I first began to study *gongbi*, a highly detailed realist school of Chinese flower painting. For as long as I can remember I have been drawing flowers. It seems that every artistic pursuit I've undertaken since then—whether it involves designing silk garments, in which I try to emulate the graceful movements of goldfish in water, or creating pearl and jade jewelry inspired by the image of a bead of water rolling down a lotus leaf—has drawn from elements of gongbi painting: fluidity, the use of negative space, and meticulous attention to detail.


紫子

How do people react to your ikebana workshops?
Participants in workshops abroad often enjoy ikebana as both a traditional art and a fresh experience. My initial workshops in Tokyo were more popular than I expected. The feedback I've received suggests that this is because of the modern twist I bring to this traditional art form. Traditionally, ikebana was displayed within the intimate setting of a teahouse, while someone dressed in kimono served matcha tea. This trio of ikebana, kimono, and tea embodies a tradition that has now faded from contemporary practice, so in fact the prospect of reviving this tradition fills me with excitement and a deep sense of purpose.

Can you tell me more about your kimono? You seem to have quite a collection.
I always wear one when teaching to uphold the tradition of ikebana being taught in kimono. Many of my kimono come from Kyoto, thanks to my mother's discerning eye during our visits to antique shops and kimono fairs. Her taste in textiles was cultivated through her childhood practice of *Shu Xiu* (Sichuan hand embroidery), which is recognized as a Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage.

During my childhood this was a cherished pastime for us, and each kimono carries a special memory from our outings. I have a collection of around thirty kimonos... my preference leans toward those of a silvery hue because they remind me of water and the elegant movement of goldfish. They allow me to seamlessly merge into my surroundings and let the flowers take center stage.

What happens in SEN's ikebana workshops?
I studied Sogetsu ikebana, whose philosophy, "*itsudemo dokodemo*" (anytime, anywhere), demonstrates its openness to beginners because it has fewer rules compared to more traditional ikebana schools. I hope these workshops and events can serve as a sanctuary from the fast pace of modern lifestyles by making ikebana accessible as well as sharing the aesthetics and principles of Eastern philosophy: harmony, simplicity, and a deep appreciation of the beauty of nature. We try to create an immersive sensory experience, commencing each session with an energy-aligning breathing exercise. While guests are learning how to create their own ikebana arrangements, I play guzheng harp music in the background, and serve Japanese and Chinese teas, and occasionally, sake.

I then talk about ikebana's origins as a Chinese ritual in which monks offered flowers on altars to the Buddha. This tradition, along with tea, came to Japan with the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century. I then delve into the four principles of ikebana: fresh approach, movement, balance, and harmony. Basic techniques, such as *mizukiri* (cutting under water) and proper scissor handling, are explained. Ikebana is more than just arranging flowers, it's a meditative practice that invites us to embrace a slower pace and brings us into the

present
moment—
fostering inner
tranquility and offering
new perspectives. We end each
session with a moment of reflection, where guests
share their experience.

What kinds of people are signing up for your lessons?

People from diverse backgrounds, including artists, collectors, students, and creatives at Soho House in Amsterdam. (I hold a residency there, hosting regular SEN workshops). Recently, luxury brands have asked me to provide their VIP guests with experiences that blend wellness, meditation, art, and culture. Ikebana not only leaves a lasting impression but also enriches guests' sense of presence, elevating the occasion.

What's next for SEN?

Since founding SEN last year, I've had the privilege of sharing the art of ikebana in seven different countries. The name SEN comes from the kanji character 千 (one thousand) which holds deep personal significance for me because it symbolizes the harmonious connections present in nature, inspired by the Eastern philosophy of *yuanfen* (*goen* in Japanese). It teaches that "thousands" of life cycles must unfold for a single encounter to take place and emphasizes the profound value of every interaction, whether with friends, family, or even strangers.

I strive to preserve and honor tradition by providing accessible, curated experiences that help us to reconnect with nature, our inner selves, and each other.


紫子製衣

ROBERT DAHLBERG-SEARS

kyoto song

If asked about Kyoto and music, for many the ring of a koto, the percussive twang of a shamisen, or temple bells may come to mind. For those with a taste for the underground, perhaps it's the city's history in Kansai's noisy, avant-garde scene. Given Kyoto's reputation for traditional art and culture, however, the former is more likely. According to the tourist marketing cliches, Tokyo is J-pop, fashion, and night clubs, while Kyoto is a journey into a Japan of old, filled with Buddhist chants, *maiko*, and courtly *gagaku* music. In English-language pop music, references to Kyoto are less common than Tokyo, but some notable appearances over the last 40 years help illustrate changes to the city's evocative power. Coinciding with increased globalization, tourism, and media representations, the treatment of Kyoto in song is beginning to move away from an Orientalized signifier toward something more personal and evidently lived.

Musicologist W. Anthony Sheppard in his 2019 book, *Extreme Exoticism: Japan in the American Musical Imagination*, examines the American musical imagination of Japan to demonstrate how Japan as a theme has been used as a fecund leitmotif of the alien and foreign for almost 150 years. It is no surprise that older representations of Kyoto skew similarly. Forty years ago, tourists visiting Japan numbered only 1.9 million annually, according to the Japanese National Tourist Organization, and relatively few had the opportunity to experience Kyoto as a real place.

ROBERT DAHLBERG-SEARS is an adjunct lecturer at Sophia University and PhD candidate in musicology at The Ohio State University, where he is finishing a dissertation on punk music magazines. He lives in the area of Tokyo most famous for *daikon* and Doraemon, with his partner, two kids, and a tuxedo cat.

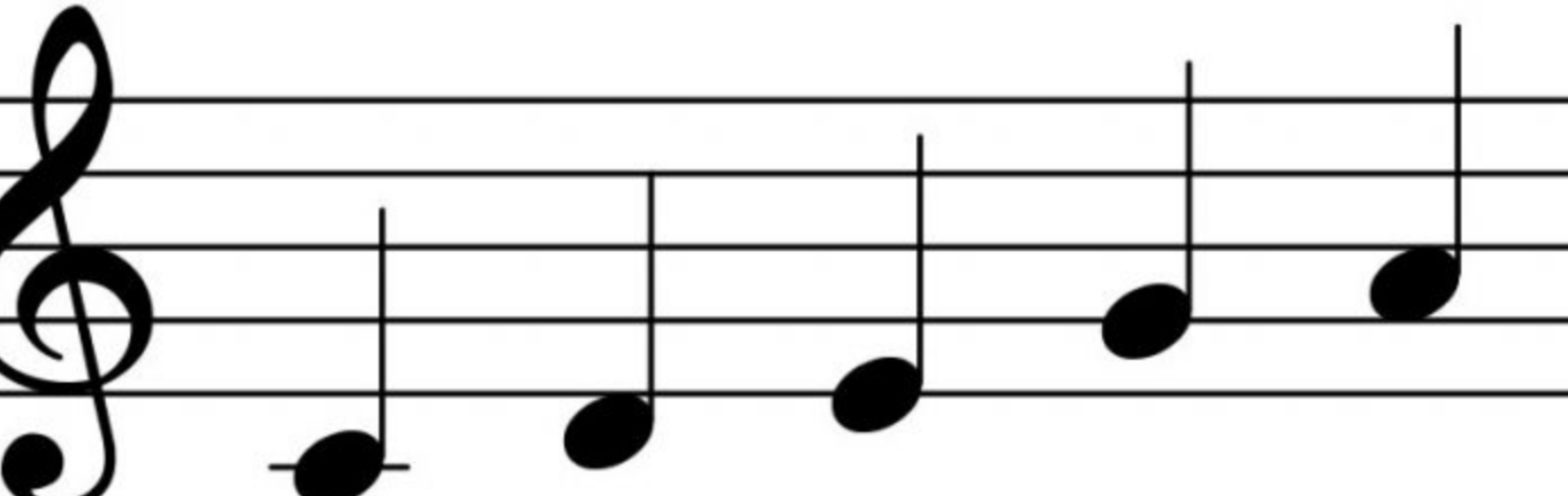
In 1985 The Cure used a moody plucked-string pentatonic melody (heard as "Asian") in their 'Kyoto Song,' but ignored Kyoto as a place. The city of the song exists as nothing more than a metaphor on which the morose protagonist hangs their sorry head. Almost two decades later, Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* brought audiences a dreamy version of Kyoto in a single standout scene. A deft series of images—first from a bullet train, then a station platform, and finally at Heian Shrine and Nanzen Temple—present the heroine (Scarlett Johansson) walking in quiet contemplation to ambient piano, bells, and (again) pentatonic guitar. 'Alone in Kyoto' by the French duo Air is an instrumental, and the only referential element is the title. Combined with the visual content, Kyoto is recognized here as a specific place, but this moment *alone in Kyoto* is a day-tripper's perspective of an exotic locale.

As tourist numbers swelled to over 8 million by 2010, two more takes on Kyoto offered contrasting references to the old capital. In 2011, electronic music producer Skrillex released his hit EP *Bangarang*, with the track 'Kyoto' featuring a dubstep buildup toward the artist's signature distorted drop, followed by a sample of pentatonic synthesizer. A few bars of rapper Sirah's braggadocio close out the song, but Kyoto is lyrically absent, once again a mere byword for 'Asian sounding'. Then in 2013, something new: as tourism rebounded after the 3/11 Fukushima disaster, Clean Bandit released the dance-pop hit 'Rather Be,' taking listeners on a mid-tempo stroll from "Kyoto to the bay" sans pentatonic scales. Although the single lyric is the only direct reference to Kyoto, the song embraces a much more personal approach, illustrated by its accompanying music video in which Japanese actress Abe Haruka guides viewers through a charming but unglamorous day-in-the-life in Japan.

By 2018, inbound tourism had hit 30 million people annually, among them many musicians on tour, not only in Tokyo but around Japan. Some of these performers would go on to express their personal experiences of Kyoto in song. The Wonder Years open their 2018 album, *Sister Cities*, with 'Raining in Kyoto,' in which the weather is both real—"flooding the streets"—and metaphorical, as the singer recounts the complexities of mourning the loss of his grandfather while away on tour in Japan. Although it includes a few touristic tokens—an Inari statue, an origami crane—this heartfelt song blends confessional writing with a distinct sense of Kyoto as place. The city serves as a metaphor for distance from home, but it is made more alive through details such as vending machine coffee and the offering of votive candles.

Based in part on her 2019 tour in Japan, Phoebe Bridgers' Grammy-nominated hit 'Kyoto' introduces the city as the setting for the song's narrative of emotional distance. In addition to its familiar temples, her Kyoto includes everyday details such as shopping arcades and convenience stores. In a few lines she conveys a sense of a lived experience in a real city.

Exploring the use of 'Kyoto' in anglophone popular music presents only a few examples; as a playlist, these songs comprise less than half an hour. In that time, however, careful listeners can hear the transition from exotic symbol to a more relatable, personally experienced Kyoto. Memory plays a powerful role in personal responses to music, and in an increasingly interconnected world, it should then be no surprise that listening to how others have attuned themselves to the city can offer resonance with our own experiences.



Performing with Phillip Strange at Bonds Rosary, Kyoto
Artwork by Tiery Le...

Jazz in Japan

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE

How and why friends end up in Kyoto is a question I've always found fascinating. Love often plays a part. But many times it's due to a fascination that began at an early age from a chance encounter with one aspect or another of Japanese culture—a book, manga, ikebana, origami, pottery, green tea, kimono, painting, a Japanese friend, etc. For many, the dream of Japan was one long held, and their first trip here, a dream come true.

This was certainly not the case for me. Growing up in New York, I'd been eating sushi and sashimi since I was a child but hadn't thought much about Japan until Victor/JVC Records contacted me in 1986 about coming over to help promote a recording of mine (*Echoes*). I came for the promotion, then found myself back in Japan six months later for the first of what would be more than 60 tours over the course of the next 30 years.

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE is a jazz musician based in Kyoto and NYC with 24 recordings out as a bandleader with such greats as Kenny Barron, Barry Harris, Tommy Flanagan, Pepper Adams, Jimmy Knepper, and Jack McDuff. He is the author of *Jazz Etudes: Studies For the Beginning Improviser* (Hal Leonard Publishing), a standard text at colleges and universities around the world. He has performed and presented improvisation jazz workshops throughout the world.

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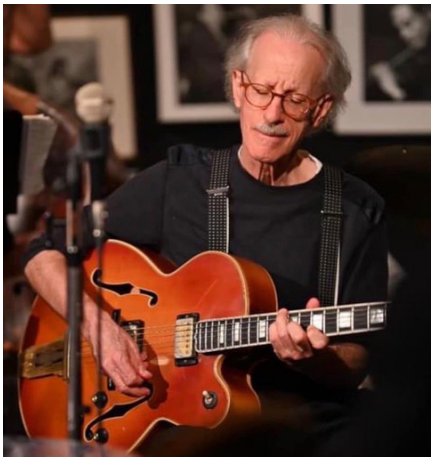
Playing with pianist Ohno Ayako.

With the great Yoshiaki Masuo. This photo was taken when we played together at a livehouse called AG22 in Tokyo (Koenji) in April of 2023. I heard Masuo frequently in the 1970s when he was touring with saxophonist Sonny Rollins. Years later I did three recordings in his studio located on Greene St. in Soho, NYC. A wonderful person, guitarist, and one of my own major influences.

With Nakamura Hiroko of livehouse Porsche (Yamaguchi)



Liivehouse Mam'selle in Fukuroi (Shizuoka) where I was playing on a tour sometime in 2023.

Vocal jazz is really the thing in Japan.
Everyone in Japan sings; after all, it's the home of karaoke.

We hear jazz everywhere we go in Japan—in elevators, liquor stores, coffee houses, restaurants, shopping malls. I love it, but I often wonder how it is perceived by Japanese. Is it easy listening? Is it a mark of sophistication? Over the years, I have noticed some unique characteristics of jazz in Japan. Before I explain my own experiences, I'd like to make a few comments about jazz in general.

Jazz improvisation, learning to play melodies over harmonies, is easy to teach—it's something anyone can learn. Improvisation is not an art, it's a craft by which one can then, hopefully, take the next step—to express something unique, personal, from the heart—to find one's own voice. It's that next step that's always been the most interesting to me as a teacher. And it's precisely at this stage where years of devotion to craft lead into the realm of art. Jazz, like all music, is a nonverbal means of communication. Verbal communication is a fundamentally human attribute manifested in the many languages of the world. The dynamics of language (literally, the way we use our voices) are few—the ups and downs of phrases, the rhythm of words, the use of space, and then, of course, the actual sound of our voices coming from our bodies (I like to think of our bodies as our instruments). It's amazing that each one of the billions of people in the world has their own distinct and recognizable voice using only these few dynamics. So how is it possible that everyone has their own speaking voice, but in the 100-year history of jazz there have been relatively few musicians who have found unique musical voices? How can we help musicians learn to communicate, to speak, in their own way?

Joshua Breakstone, photo by Nathalie Guarrancino

When we consider the progression of great jazz soloists, those who most greatly influenced the course of jazz history—Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane—we can hear how unique, personal, and subtly communicative their styles are, but why? What was it about their voices that allowed them to communicate on such a deep level? My answer is that each of these masters had an innate understanding of the dynamics of the voice as well as a natural ability to use those dynamics in their music.

So, if an understanding of speech is essential for communicating on a deep and personal level, and the language from which jazz derives is English, where does that leave the Japanese, and other non-native English-speaking musicians? As students immerse themselves when learning a language, so too do musicians of other cultures immerse themselves in the language of jazz to become fluent. Ultimately the challenges are roughly the same for American and Japanese players; the process of learning the language of jazz is much like learning to communicate in any language, one of imitation and repetition. Learning scales, playing variations, then repeating and repeating faster and faster—doesn't it sound a bit like a Japanese cram school?

At many jazz schools in the U.S. (and particularly Berklee in Boston), the tuition is exorbitant, and a large number of the students are Japanese. How many times over the years have I had young Japanese musicians introduce themselves and—even before saying hello or telling me their name—inform me that they went to Berklee? This credential, in addition to having either visited or lived in NYC, is enormously impressive in Japan. Japanese fans assume that Japanese musicians living in NYC are famous in the U.S. when in most cases they actually live there in relative anonymity—but return in glory!

There are a few aspects of jazz culture in Japan that are especially different from the U.S., and to which it's been difficult or even impossible for me to adapt. For one thing, the clubs (known in Japan as *livehouses*) have an expectation that groups arrive insanely early. It is routine for musicians to arrive at 3 or 4 in the afternoon for concerts starting at 7 or 8, but after 4 hours of sitting around, I'm ready to go home! In NYC, if we have a start time of, for example, 9, we get to the club at 8 or so with plenty of time to set up, chat with patrons, get a drink, and we're ready to go! We arrive energized, and when we start—POW!

As students immerse themselves when learning a language, so too do musicians of other cultures immerse themselves in the language of jazz to become fluent.

Artwork by Tiery Le...

There is a tendency for rhythm sections to keep meticulous time, like clockwork. However, jazz should strive for interaction between all instruments at every moment.

The Japanese penchant for punctuality has its place, but not so much in a jazz club. I'm aware that I have a reputation among Japanese jazz clubs for showing up on relatively short notice; I'm glad that after all these years of touring, word is out and the clubs understand my strange foreign ways.

Is imitation truly the sincerest form of flattery? Another difference is the number of Japanese jazz musicians who stake their reputations on being imitators of major jazz figures: guitarists who sound just like Wes Montgomery, pianists who sound just like Barry Harris or Bud Powell. When I play a standard composition, Japanese players will often want to know what recording it's from and ask why I don't play it the same way as on the recording. While I appreciate this respect for the masters, the whole point is to do something *with* these songs and find a way to play them in our own personal way.

In Japan there's a universal reliance on sheet music (or, as the great bassist Dennis Irwin used to call it, "the sacred scrolls"). Is it insecurity? An image of professionalism? My students soon come to understand that in order to play jazz we have to know, understand, and absorb the things we play. In my own humble opinion, if you need the sheet music to play a tune, you're not yet ready to play it in front of an audience.

Finally, there is a tendency for rhythm sections (largely bassists and drummers) to keep meticulous time, like clockwork. However, jazz should strive for interaction between all instruments at every moment. When I hear a rhythm section take such a sterile approach, I feel it's more an attempt to imitate jazz rather than embrace its interactive essence. But such an approach, along with the others I've mentioned, can also be found in the U.S. and around the world—not solely in Japan.

Vocal jazz is really the thing in Japan. Everyone in Japan sings; after all, it's the home of karaoke—a way of letting loose, a means of deepening bonds with friends and coworkers. I do a lot of teaching of Japanese singers, a recurring topic being that jazz singing is not karaoke. We sometimes hear singers perform as if in a vacuum; having rehearsed a song a million times at home in front of the mirror, they sing it in the exact same way every time. This is, however, the antithesis of jazz performance, and I try to teach my students how to develop ideas, to listen, react, and be an integral, equal partner in a group.

We live in a pop culture. Live audiences have come to expect a show, and the experience is oftentimes more visual than musical. This is true with jazz fans (both in Japan and around the world) who want to see musicians working as hard as they can, sweating and straining, and then reward their immense effort with enthusiastic applause. "*Ganbatte*!" they cry. This is a hard one for me to swallow because, simply put, it is all about how you play, not how *much* you play. How deeply one communicates is the essence of music.

All this said, it is an honor to be in Japan, where jazz, a unique product of American culture, is so highly revered in a way it is not in its native land. The Japanese love of the music is inspiring, as is the way I have been welcomed for so many years in Japan as a musician, a teacher, and a proponent of jazz.

kyoto university's seibu kōdō: *a punk nexus*

Despite common perception, neither Japan nor Kyoto were ever truly culturally isolated. Even during the period of *sakoku* when Japan ostensibly shut itself off from the world, transnational flows of culture continued. For instance, Date Masamune's illegal 17th century diplomatic mission to Europe returned with three Gobelin tapestries that continue to be proudly displayed (although now in replica) during the Gion Festival, a public symbol of defiance and a reminder that Kyoto has always been a part of the world. Kyoto's musical soundscape likewise reflects cultural exchanges, and just as Chinese court music was imported during the Heian period, in the 1980s punk and hardcore became a vibrant part of Kyoto's culture. The focus of our recent academic study on the history of hardcore punk in 1980s Kyoto highlights how culture, in this case counterculture, flows in, out, and around Japan's former capital. Indeed, even at the beginning of the Meiji period, when divorced from the new empire's bureaucratic centre, Kyoto developed its own tradition of radical counterculture.

To fast-forward 100 years, by the late 1960s Kyoto had gained a reputation as the place to be for the post-war beatnik generation, with Seibu Kōdō (Western Auditorium) at Kyoto University as its centre. Seibu Kōdō was a centre for performance and meeting spaces where students, artists, and others met to debate, dance, make out, and fight. Indeed, fighting and street violence was a big part of student lives, including massive fights with makeshift weapons between political factions on the banks of the Kamo River, and with university authorities and police when students barricaded themselves into the campus in the summer of 1969. Live music played an important role in these demonstrations with occupations borrowed from U.S. West Coast counterculture and live concerts to accompany demonstrations. The most well-known and extreme example of this interaction of music and politics was the band Les Rallizes Dénudés, formed at Doshisha University, who performed on the barricades of Kyoto University. Promising to revolutionise music, they also engaged in revolutionary politics; the bass-player, Wakabayashi Moriaki, was one of nine young radicals who hijacked an airplane to North Korea in the summer of 1970.

Kyoto's reputation as a counterculture capital was solidified by the early 1970s; the men's magazine *Heibon Punch* ran a special issue on 'Revolutionary Kyoto' in 1971. Here the magazine focused on Seibu Kōdō and the Mojo West festivals organised at the venue by Kimura (Ki-Yan) Hideki, who now operates as an artist under the brand *Ki-Yan Studio*. After attending the Newport Folk Festival in the mid-1960s, Ki-yan became fascinated by the American hippy and folk movements and wanted to bring that festival culture to Japan. Thus, Mojo West was born and had its heyday through the

To fast-forward 100 years, by the late 1960s Kyoto had gained a reputation as the place to be for the post-war beatnik generation...

1970s, making Seibu Kōdō a mecca for touring bands in search of the avant-garde. Ki-yan brought such artists as Frank Zappa, the Stranglers, Talking Heads, and Tom Waits to Kyoto. Even though the hall began to develop into a major concert venue, it remained an important space for experimental theatre and lectures on radical politics, intermixed with the experimental rock bands.

When punk arrived on the scene, however, things were not quite the same. The Japan of the 1980s was a very different place than the late 1960s and there was a significant age gap between the young high-school dropouts and students who turned to punk and the established avant-garde radicals. Japanese society had also morphed, the immense wealth and success of the Japanese economy leading to a more and more conformist society. Punk was a way to give the finger to a society driven by yuppy salarymen but was also a mode to differentiate yourself from the previous generation of folk and hippy free spirits. Kyoto's punk scene was rather small and often gets lost as a sub-section of the Kansai scene which is dominated by Osaka. Indeed, stereotypes of Kyoto-ites as rather shy and retiring followed them, meaning that the Kyoto punks had to be even tougher than their counterparts elsewhere.

In fact, Kyoto was a pioneering city for an aggressive punk movement. Japan's first 'hardcore punk' band, SS, formed in 1977 and became an underground phenomenon thanks to their scene-stealing appearance on the 1979 documentary *Tokyo Rockers*, which announced that something different was coming from Kyoto. In the 1980s Seibu Kōdō was in decline, but still provided a space for punk bands to develop. Much like the bike gangs—the other popular countercultural option for the young working-class kids who formed bands, danced and fought in the clubs—these punks worshipped speed, but rather than heading to the highway, they transferred this energy into a playing style that would try to go as fast as possible.

Kyoto was thus poised to be the centre of the nascent punk movement in Japan. In May 1979 a group of proto-punk bands from Tokyo made their way to Kyoto to hold Kansai's first big 'punk rock' event at Seibu Kōdō under the title 'Blank Generation: Tokyo Rockers in Kyoto.' The anger and angst of punk often gave it an edge associated with rebellious masculinity. As an anonymous punk told *Pelican Club* in its March 1983 edition, "punk is, to some extent, driven by a sense of anxiety and tension that the world may collapse one minute from now, and the roughness that arises from this is what makes it so appealing."

Transnational flows of punk culture were facilitated by record shop catalogues, cassette tape sharing, and zines available at Kyoto's record stores and music venues. Scene veteran Nakamura Shintaro (of First Alert and Back to Basics), points to the Jujiya record store as an important space for finding overseas hardcore punk records (which will be surprising for those familiar with the current state of the store). Record stores not only allowed fans to order the latest releases, but also made available overseas music magazines such as Britain's *NME* and the U.S.' *Maximum RocknRoll*. Domestic magazines, particularly *Doll*, also provided up-to-date info in Japanese, helping to key Kyoto punks into a wider scene. *Pelican Club*, a more local zine, circulated around Kyoto and Osaka.

Beat Crazy, a collective of Kyoto punks, had their own section in *Pelican Club*, 'Beat Press', to promote their regular events and showcase new artists in the region. Music collectives were a long-standing feature of the Kyoto scene from the folk guerrilla days. There were collectives based around the band EP4 for early electronic and industrial music and many other genres. The interaction between different generations and groups of punks was an important feature of the Beat Crazy collective. It formed in 1981 as a punk union of sorts. The core of the collective consisted of Ishibashi Shojiro of FMN, a DIY record label, Shinoyan of SS, Bide of Ultra Bidde, Ranko of Sperma, and Wada Ryoichi of Vampire. Wada later turned Beat Crazy into a record label as well, pressing 7-inch singles of Kyoto-based groups. Shinoyan and Ranko also formed the group's flagship band, The Continental Kids.

Beat Crazy were a mix of high-school dropouts and university students. The presence of students was important as it gave the collective access to the *Seirenkyō*, Seibu Kōdō's student committee, with Wada being the main representative. This also gave them connections to university festivals and cultural events as students could get a budget to put on shows. As the author of *Dokkiri!* (the Bible when it comes to analysis of the Kyoto scene), the late David Kato Hopkins related to us: "They could share this with their friends and Beat Crazy were sort of at the centre of those exchanges." Kanda Takayuki, an early Kyoto adopter of hardcore punk with his band Greed, argued that "without Beat Crazy the 80's music scene in Kyoto, centred around Seibu Kōdō, probably would not exist. Many young punks sent demo tapes and it became a bit of a status symbol among bands at the time [to belong to Beat Crazy]."

Beat Crazy's no-genre approach to shows was influential in uniting bands of different tastes and left a big impact on the Kansai scene. In 1983 Seibu Kōdō hosted a collaboration of the groups The Stalin, an established punk group, and Hijokaidan, a pioneer of the noise genre. The result was chaotic and destructive, but also seminal. In our research on hardcore punk, almost every interview we conducted or read mentions this show as the inspiration to start a hardcore punk band. One of the most successful of these newly formed groups were S.O.B. who—in addition to becoming Seibu Kōdō regulars—were one of the first Japanese hardcore acts to tour Europe and the first to record sessions with the influential British DJ, John Peel. Their alliance with the U.K. group Napalm Death is a prime example of how punk music was able to travel in an era before the internet.

Seibu Kōdō has been quiet for the past few years, but the university has loosened the Covid-19 restrictions on performances. For Kyoto University's November Festival 2023, Seibu Kōdō hosted four days of musical, theatrical and other performances. It seems the event was a success, and the university may even relax its no-alcohol rules next year. What is interesting about the event is the explicit links it makes to Seibu Kōdō's past. The first night's program, organized by Soto and Club Kumano, advertised itself as a re-examination of the connect or disconnect between 1969 and today. While the musical styles presented are quite different from the past, the event reintroduced the concept of Seibu Kōdō as a centre of autonomy and freedom, albeit in a more modern form than that of its hippy hey-day. They question what needs to be revived and in what areas modern youth have progressed. It is encouraging to see to this resurgence of activity at Seibu Kōdō, a space where people can gather across generations.

MAHON MURPHY (Kyoto University) + **RAN ZWIGENBERG** (Pennsylvania State University) are the authors of *S.O.B.s Don't Be Swindle*, which focuses on the band's 1987 album to discuss the centring of Japanese hardcore punk in Kyoto. Due for publication in 2024 through Bloomsbury Press' 33 1/3 Japan Series.

ethnopunk pilgrimage

It had been a few months since we started our pilgrimage across Japan, traveling on foot the 2000 kilometers from Kamakura to Yakushima. Leaving Kanagawa, following Shizuoka's Tokaido road, and passing through Aichi, our path led us to the Grand Shrine of Ise after a Toba ferry ride. From there, we followed the ancient Kumano Kodo paths to Wakayama. As the chill of winter set in, we decided to take a break in a small village called Tochihara in Mie Prefecture. Little did we know that this pause in our journey would become the starting point for something magical, the birth of the 'Ethnopunk *shishimai*'.

Ethnopunk is the collaborative project of two friends from Czechoslovakia: MK, an ethnomusicologist and musician who has called Japan home for the past decade, and Hari, a crypto-anarchist and entrepreneur, who found himself grounded in Japan by the Covid-19 outbreak. We celebrate cultural diversity and forms of expression passed down through generations, putting great effort into the study of these traditions. At the same time, we believe that in order to create a vibrant future for ethnic music, artists must embrace innovation and challenge boundaries. The Ethnopunk ethos encourages the use of traditional knowledge as a foundation from which to explore fresh and authentic modes of expression. We want to create ethnic music of the present, not just present the music from the past.

Inspired by the European pilgrimage 'Camino de Santiago,' Japanese pilgrimage traditions, and the history of itinerant shamisen musicians known as *bosama* and *goze*, we embarked on our own journey. The goal was to explore the historical pilgrimage routes of ancient Japan, aiming to revive fading traditions and delve into the ways our ancestors lived.

Photograph by Hidetaro Thornhill

In the village of Tochihara, we found a cozy traditional farmhouse where we could stay and began to settle in and prepare for the winter. Hari had to return to Tokyo, so it was just me, MK, exploring the area, meeting local people, and getting to know the place. During one of my walks, I met the Shinto priest of the local village shrine and learned for the first time about the shishimai, a traditional Japanese performance where dancers, wearing costumes and masks, imitate the movements of lions to lively festival music. Unfortunately, I also learned that the dance custom had disappeared from the village ten years earlier. Only a few pictures and memories were left. The performers had grown too old, and the younger ones had moved away or didn't care much about old traditions. "What a pity!!!" I thought... all over the country, people are moving to cities and the old traditions are fading away.

It seemed to be waiting for someone to pick it up... for the next performance!

A few weeks later, I visited the local culture center and found a surprise: shishimai masks! A couple of wooden lion heads, but also drums, flutes. Everything needed for the performance was just sitting there covered with dust. To me, it seemed to be waiting for someone to pick it up... for the next performance! "Wow, everything's here! Let's do it!" With the help of the priest and a few enthusiastic locals I managed to gather a group of elders who still remembered the dance. I asked them to teach me and bring the tradition back to the village. They were reluctant at first but soon agreed, and rehearsals began. For a few weeks we were meeting at the culture center, learning the dance moves and practicing. More people joined in, and the village started buzzing with anticipation. I have many great memories from those days. I will never forget the moment when an old-timer showed up at rehearsal, sat down by the drum, grabbed the sticks, and "Bam! Bam! Bam!"

Even after a decade away he was drumming with so much energy and groove, like no time had passed. Those rhythms were just imprinted in him. Once, while cycling around the fields, I found a guy hiding in his truck during his lunch break, practicing the flute melodies for the evening rehearsal. Such enthusiasm and energy! Reviving their passion for the tradition was an immense joy for me.

It's now New Year's Eve. We're all at the shrine. The night is crisp, the sky adorned with stars. People are huddled around this massive bonfire, sipping sake, and chatting with excitement... Then "Bang! Bang!" The drum announces midnight, and after a Shinto ritual, it's showtime. I throw on the giant lion costume: long white hair, red face, big teeth, and green body. The shishimai performance starts! The heartbeat of drums and the haunting flutes guide the lion's movements, a dance that weaves between slow, deliberate steps and rapid twirls: a sacred tale told through mystical choreography. After a decade the dance had returned, and the village celebrated!

After the winter had passed, Hari and I continued our walking journey along the Kumano Kodo, stopping at Koyasan, through Nara, and finally arriving in Kyoto. The impact of Covid-19 had transformed the city greatly with no tourists around. The old capital had a serene charm, allowing locals to reclaim their streets and rediscover their cultural roots in the absence of the usual tourist hustle. We soon became part of this scene—connecting with locals, sharing Ethnopunk music and stories at temples, galleries, and restaurants—exploring the city to the fullest.

But soon the winter began creeping back, and we felt the pull of Tochihara and our shishimai performance with the villagers. The year before we had revived the tradition and were determined to keep it going! In late December, we returned to the village, ready to groove with the locals and prepare for another New Year's performance. But there was a problem: the locals who had performed last year were not interested in doing it again. This was disappointing, but we were not going to let our hard work from last year go to waste. "We gotta do it!" But how could we without music?

No flutes, no drums, nada. We were still allowed to use the masks and costumes though, as well as the practice room at the cultural center. With local support we decided to improvise and switch things up. I took charge of the music, replacing the flutes and drums with my shamisen, and Hari, with no background in music or dance, became the unlikely shishimai dancer. I started showing Hari what I had learned the previous winter. He caught on quickly. As it turns out, he had once lived in Thailand and trained as a professional boxer, providing him with some impressive moves. Just a few days of rehearsals and voila! He was ready.

New Year's Eve arrived with a sense of déjà vu. It was midnight at the shrine once more: the star-lit sky, the colossal bonfire, and the sake flowing generously. The drum echoed, the Shinto ritual unfolded, and it was showtime again, with Hari making his grand debut. As my shamisen rang out through the cold night air, Hari unleashed his beast mode. The shishimai lion slid into an incredible groove. With each strum of the shamisen, the dance cranked up a notch, becoming an electric performance that had the whole village going wild. A new style was born: Ethnopunk shishimai!

The drum echoed, the Shinto ritual unfolded, and it was showtime again, with Hari making his grand debut.

Our story illustrates that traditions need not be static; they can embrace modern ideas while maintaining their roots. Through the addition of dynamic elements, they can thrive within new diversity. The essence of Ethnopunk is a call for young people to be architects of cultural evolution by reclaiming the continuity of traditions in a rapidly changing world.

After three years and 2000 kilometers, in the grand finale of our journey, we finally arrived at the sacred island of Yakushima. Our pilgrimage wasn't just about covering distance. Traveling by foot allowed us to discover Japan

from a special perspective, unveiling unique experiences that might have stayed hidden otherwise. Our nights were spent in shrines, temples, mountain huts, or simply camping on a beach, immersing ourselves in self-discovery, story exchanges, and deep conversations. By presenting our music and dance at various events and festivals, we forged meaningful connections and planted the seeds of our beliefs. Along our winding path, we thought of ourselves as more than just performers, but as cultural researchers, exploring Japan's ancient cultures while striving to discover and articulate our own authentic voice. As we stood beneath the ancient Jomon Sugi tree in Yakushima, we felt the echoes of our journey, the shamisen melodies and shishimai dance, were a small contribution to the ever-unfolding narrative of human creativity.

MK is a co-founder of Ethnopunk and an ethnomusicologist, musician, and artist from Slovakia. His main instruments are the traditional Slovakian fujara and the Japanese shamisen. He has performed in Japan, India, Australia, and Europe and collaborated with many musicians from around the world.

ETHNOPUNK are currently recording a new album inspired by their pilgrimage and planning a 2024 tour of Asia, including Japan, Thailand, and India. They are also producing a documentary film and accompanying book recounting tales of their travels.
ethnopunk.org

THEATRE NOHGAKU AND THE "NEW NOH"

an interview with john oglevee

KEN RODGERS

Mask photos by Kitazawa Sohta
Performance photos by David Surtasky

Noh is said to be one of the oldest dramatic forms still being practiced today. Presumably the first Westerner to develop a sustained interest in noh was the great Meiji-period researcher and celebrant of Japanese culture, Ernest Fenollosa, who studied for 20 years with the former Shogunate noh actor Umewaka Minoru in Tokyo. It's said that a performance by Umewaka (taking place "in the Shogun's garden") was literally interrupted by the arrival of Perry's warships; Umewaka was subsequently instrumental in the survival of noh despite the Westernization that followed. Fenollosa's notes on noh were posthumously published by Ezra Pound, in 1916, together with a set of representative noh plays in English, also adapted by Pound from Fenollosa's papers, in close consultation with poet/playwright W.B. Yeats:

"The most striking thing about these plays is their marvelously complete grasp of spiritual being. They deal more with heroes, or even we might say ghosts, than with men clothed in the flesh. Their creators were great psychologists. In no other drama does the supernatural play so great, so intimate a part."

Incidentally, Fenollosa's ashes, fetched by a Japanese naval vessel after his sudden death in London in 1908, are interred at Hōmyō-in, Mii-dera—where he had been ordained as a Buddhist priest—close by Kyoto; his grave is now practically a pilgrimage site. In her 2016 book *Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching,* Carrie J. Preston delves into the subsequent formative influence of noh theater on Western writers and playwrights, focusing on Yeats, Berthold Brecht, Benjamin Britten and Samuel Beckett as early examples.

Post-WW2 interest in noh among expats in Japan expanded, with the 1965 publication of Leonard Pronko's *Theatre East and West*. In the early 1980s Jonah Salz set up the NOHO theater group in Kyoto with Kyogen actor Shigeyama Akira (also the long-running TTT, Traditional Theater Training program) and requested Richard Emmert, a noh practitioner and professor of Asian theatre in Tokyo to compose original music for a production of Yeats' noh-inspired "dance play," *At the Hawk's Well,* which had originally debuted in Britain in 1917. In 2000, Emmert, together with 13 other performers and academics, founded Theatre Nohgaku to create and perform "new noh," promote greater understanding of the art of noh, support training opportunities with Japanese noh masters, and explore possibilities across cultural and language boundaries. John Oglevee, one of the founding members, and at the time of this interview a PhD candidate in noh studies, remains an active participant:

John, thank you for your time! Could you begin by clarifying what essentially distinguishes noh from Western dramatic forms, making it so attractive to Western playwrights?

At its core, noh is a combination of text, music, and dance. Noh does not follow the standard form of storytelling most prevalent in Western TV or film. Noh is comprised of interlocking scenes or *sho-dan* that propel a story forward. These sho-dan can be put together in a myriad of ways, as noh has evolved over the years, and there are certain standard patterns that can give those "in the noh" as it were, an idea of what kind of sho-dan it is. It's a longer conversation but suffice it to say, the dramatic structure of noh is both varied and stringent. These very constraints I think are appealing to playwrights as they force them to find freedom within the structure of the form. Noh's presentational style gives great weight to the words being sung; this too is attractive to playwrights.

Does Theatre Nohgaku mostly adapt traditional Noh plays into English, or is the focus more on original works in English?

Our interest lies primarily in creating original works, but recently we've also toured Rick's English translation of 隅田川, *Sumida River*. Much of the traditional noh repertoire focuses on historical Japanese figures, which mean little to non-Japanese audiences. *Sumida River* is really a story of a mother's tragic loss of her son, which is a universal theme. It perhaps is more closely in line with the Western idea of tragic storytelling which is what draws us to that particular classical noh, but again, we are more actively engaged in the creation of 新作物 (*shin-sakumono*) or "new noh." We are currently touring *Blue Moon Over Memphis* by American playwright Deborah Brevoort with a score by Richard Emmert, a noh which explores identity and celebrity through the lens of Elvis Presley. We are also in development of *Gettysburg*, written by TN member Elizabeth Dowd and scored by David Crandall, which looks at "America's *Heike Monogatari*"—the Civil War—and the honor among friends turned enemies. It's sadly apropos considering the current state of the extremely fractured American landscape.

Blue Moon over Memphis *was originally written "to be performed by Western actors largely in a naturalistic style" and was later adapted "for a full noh presentational style" by Theatre Nohgaku. How different did it become as "a full noh"?*

Well, first of all it was much longer as a play. The original was well over 40 pages, and such a document being done as a noh would be probably close to 10 hours long. In the original, the chorus played separate characters and were dubbed the Memphis Mafia. Writer Deborah Brevoort and Rick worked together over a number of years to cut it down and "economize" it, extracting as many non-active words as possible. The original also perhaps told two stories, one expressing the longing of the fan Judy (*waki* character) and her search for the words to express to her idol. The other focused on the spirit of Elvis, in the first act portrayed by a black actor, in the second act, by a white actor more closely resembling the classic image of Elvis. In classical noh, the protagonist in both acts is generally played by the same performer. So there were a number of TN company members who raised red flags when thinking of a white actor wearing a black mask in the first act.

In our first few incarnations of the piece we simply had the first act character use *hitamen* or *direct mask*, meaning that he just used his own face. However, following the first Tokyo performance in 2015 at artist Allan West's Art Sanctuary in Tokyo's Yanaka district, we felt that the first act is very much about identity and the direct influence America's black culture had on Elvis, really forming his musical style. In classical noh, performers can play women, men, young or old, demons, Chinese, Japanese, it's just never an issue. So while Deborah had written in the character description that the first act actor was a middle-aged black man, the race of the character is never explicitly mentioned in the text. So we then approached Kitazawa Hideta, the mask maker who works closely with us, and asked him to design an appropriate mask for the first act.

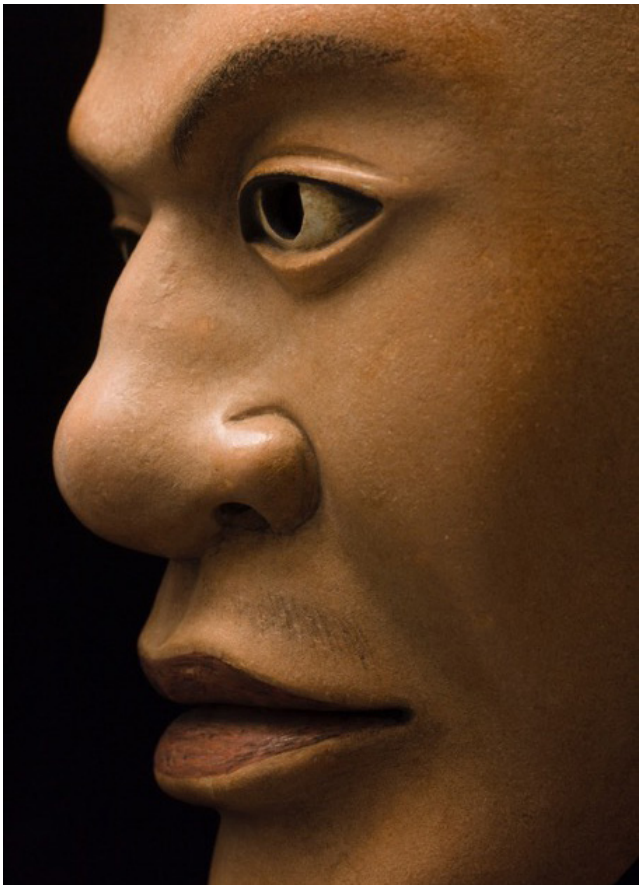
For the second act mask, the one that bears a striking resemblance to Elvis, we scoured countless images to try and pick out iconic characteristics to create a composite of the life of Elvis in one mask. For example, the mouth is modeled after the 30-year-old hardened but still energetic Elvis, while the eyes convey the emptiness of the near-death Elvis and the hair has the sheen and joy of a young naive Elvis. That being said, for the first act mask, we used images primarily of American Delta Blues musicians as source material and asked Kitazawa-san to be particularly sensitive in making sure it was character and not caricature. I think he did an amazing job.

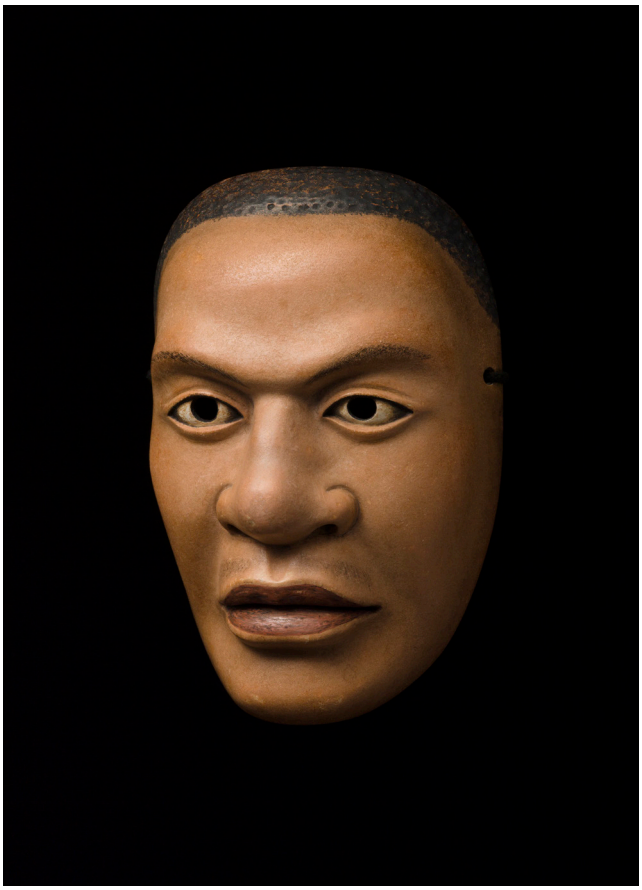
For the costume, we wanted to be very true to noh and at the same time recognize Elvis' true sense of showmanship. We approached the noh costume maker Sasaki Yoji with trepidation, wondering how he would feel about contemporary noh costumes. It turns out he professed himself to be a fan of Elvis and therefore was open to the discussion. After numerous brainstorming sessions, we came up with an inter-cultural first act *kami-shimo* / bluesman costume with the Elvis TCB (Taking Care of Business in a flash) logo as the *mon*, and the second act is a more traditional noh costume with a golden festooned phoenix on a *chōken* replete with silk *tsuyu* or tassels.

I feel that our jobs as noh performers is to be in service of the text, the music, the mask, the costume, the history, and the form. Any new *kata* are informed and born from our passion of the form and not in opposition to it. So while I as a performer want to tell a story, I am focused on telling the story of all the work that went into the artistry onstage, not simply the subject matter.

The play has been performed both in Japan and in the U.S.. How was it received in each location? Did it attract any seriously dedicated Elvis fans?

As Elvis became something of a parody of himself towards the end of his life, the art works that reflect his life are often





Two performances of 'Blue Moon over Memphis' will be held in July 2024, at Okuma Auditorium, Waseda University, Tokyo (July 19th) and at the Kongoh Noh Theater, Kyoto (July 21st). Details including sign-up to attend and short video here. Admission free.

KJ has previously featured full texts of two English "new Noh" plays: Rachel McAlpine's The Dazzling Night (KJ48), on the writer Katherine Mansfield, and Sears Eldridge's *Return to Kanburi* (KJ56), a real-life story of a meeting in later life between a British POW and a Japanese interpreter who had earlier encountered each other in the hellish circumstances of the Burma Railroad.

Special thanks to Stevie Suan, author of *Anime Paradox: Patterns and Practices through the Lens of Traditional Japanese Theater,* for providing the initial contact for this interview.

ironic or tongue-in-cheek. *BMOM* is 100% sincere and when audiences in the U.S. come to terms with that, as well as get used to noh's style of performance, they tend to be incredibly moved at the profound loneliness Elvis experienced.

In Japan, our audiences were more familiar with noh as a form and think more of Elvis as an historical figure than a personally cultural one. That being said, at one of our performances in Japan the audience was about half noh-aficionados and half Elvis fans, with neither group knowing much if anything about the other. The Elvis fans expressed interest in learning more about noh as it was so effective in finding the heart of what was tragic about "The King." The noh fans were shocked to learn that the Elvis story was so tragic; to them he was just another celebrity singer from 米国 (*beikoku*, America).

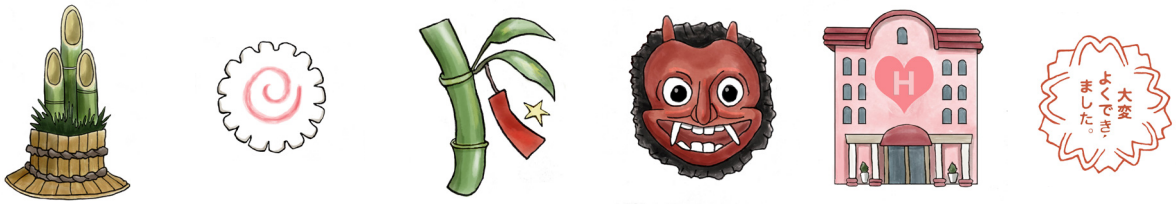
Is it difficult for audiences outside Japan to get beyond the physically exotic appearance of Noh, to appreciate its psychological depths?

I think for audiences both inside and outside Japan, noh is a difficult nut to crack. But if you are given just a small opening, the depth of the form reveals itself. This is why I feel that stories already within the consciousness of the observer are better for audiences regardless of the culture. Elvis' story, for example, is known by most Americans, so that when it is told in such a stylized way, it can be jarring, but the audience already has something they can relate to beyond the form. If we were doing a classical noh translated in English about the warrior Yoshitsune, there would be far less recognition, as both the story and the form would be foreign. Once the audience is well versed in noh, and I'm optimistic this is possible, we can perhaps explore more obscure subject matter.

One of the things I find so powerful about the form is its ability to explore tragedy in a non-sentimental way. The care and *ma* (間), or space, applied to the subject matter, gives the audience the context and time to meditate on the themes put before them. Noh is very good at posing questions, leaving the audience to dream their own answers. The noh in English has much in common with its Japanese roots, in that the *shite* is searching for something, someone, retribution, peace, etc. Noh also deals with "place" in a very direct way. I would say common elements in our new noh paint vivid pictures of time/place and look to quell unrest.

JOHN OGLEVEE is a performing artist and noh practitioner. He is a founding member of Theatre Nohgaku and also of the New York performance group GAle GAtes et al. His work has taken him throughout Europe, North America and Asia working with numerous creative initiatives including The Wooster Group, Richard Foreman's Ontological Hysteric, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater, and Min Tanaka's Maijuku. He currently lectures on noh and Japanese performance at Musashino University and Hosei University in Tokyo.

ALEX MANKIEWICZ



devil? doily?

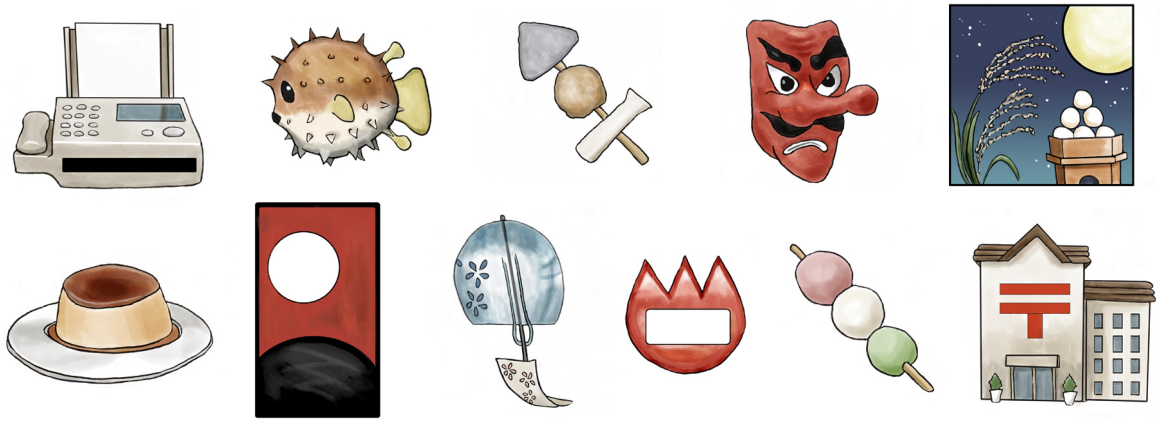
esoteric Japanese emoji explained

The amalgamated writing system that Japan now uses evolved over centuries, broadly starting with the adoption of Chinese characters in the 5th century. What is now known as 'kanji' 漢字 translates literally as 'Han', a nod to the era in Chinese history when the system was brought over, and 'character.' At their ancient roots, kanji are, like hieroglyphics, an example of the oldest form of communication—ideograms. However, in the case of many if not most of the 3,000 characters in common use, the original representation has morphed over time, obscuring any direct visual connection between the image and its meaning. Many kanji also have more than one interpretation.

At moments in the country's history, Japan flirted with abandoning kanji altogether in favour of the native hiragana and katakana scripts, but in the end they survived to be officially codified, along with romaji, into the hybrid mix used today. Four writing systems would seem enough for any language.

Nevertheless, at the dawn of the 21st century, 1500 years after receiving the gift of a visual way to communicate, Japan returned the favour, bestowing on the world (or cursing depending on perspective) a new set of ideograms: emojis, aka 'picture' 絵 'characters' 文字.

Currently also numbering well over 3,000, emojis have become globally ubiquitous in online exchanges, yet most users likely have little idea that they were developed by Japan's mobile companies Softbank and Docomo, looking to help email writers whose feelings and intent were being misconstrued. Emojis were intended to be available only in Japan, that is until otaku fans discovered them in Japanese apps and pressured Apple to include the option for IOS in 2010. The initial set of 200 were imported and while subsequent yearly additions, selected by the global consortium Unicode, pointedly embrace global diversity, lurking in that increasingly long sideways scroll are a number whose meanings remain mysterious beyond Japan's borders. That has not prevented users elsewhere from attempting to work out what on earth they are looking at.



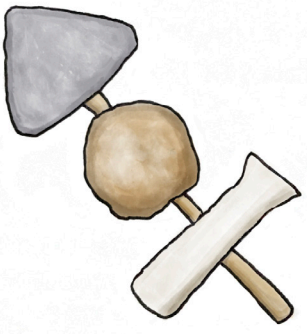
A rare Japanese emoji that's used widely to indicate evil thoughts or frustration. The red and horned *oni* is mistaken for the Christian devil, but is in fact a *yokai* (malevolent or mischievous spirit), a menacing ogre from folklore. The ritual of Setsubun at the start of February involves throwing soy beans to repel any nearby oni and allow good fortune in for the coming year. The design references classical Japanese theatre masks.

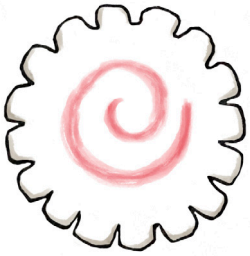
Tengu are also yokai and similar in usage to oni, though more frequently employed to express unattractiveness. In legend, they can be good or bad, and are even a symbol of Shugendō ascetic practice. The length and shape of the emoji's nose can imply a different slant on naughtiness...

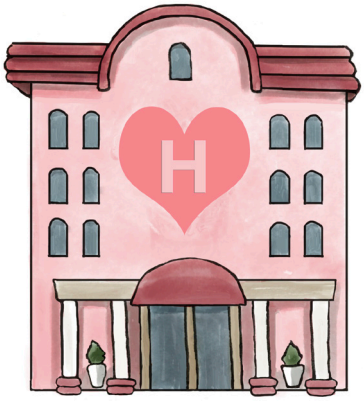
The best users can come up with for this emoji is a geometric kabob. But *oden* is a warming seasonal dish of ingredients such as boiled egg, daikon, tofu, and fish cake in a dashi broth that can be ordered by the piece at convenience stores in autumn. The menu selection for the emoji is *konyaku*, tofu, and *chikuwa*. The skewer nods to its origins, supplanted now by a styrofoam takeaway bowl.

Often mistaken for a doily (for whenever that is needed in 2024 messages), but actually a slice of *narutomaki*, a fish cake most often found floating atop ramen and other noodle soup dishes.

Dango are sweet chewy rice balls sold on skewers at festivals or street markets. The pink, white and green combination is specific to the cherry-blossom viewing season, the colours representing the blossoms' progress from bloom to fallen. Used overseas as a catch-all stand-in for Japanese food, locally it can mean a sweet nature or a fun day out.

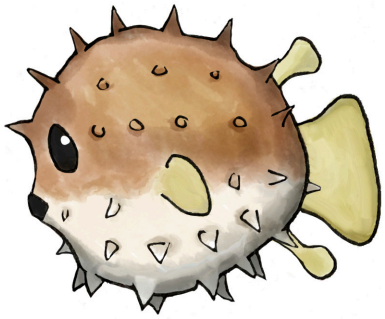






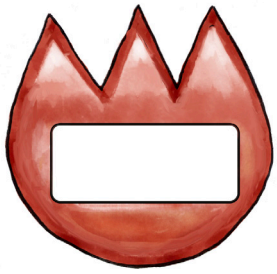
Mistaken for a compassionate hospital or even a (very grand) home where the heart is, the love hotel is a common—and acceptable—rent-by-the-hour option for trysts or simply privacy away from small living spaces.

In the logo for Japan Post, the T is adapted from the katakana テ which comes from *teishin* 逓信, 'communications.' The kanji are a combination of sending + truth, suggesting the post office emoji could be adopted more broadly as an ironic symbol for the age of fake news.



One of several exotic fish emoji. Globally the blowfish can be used to express spiky defensiveness, too much pride or even having eaten too much food. But *fugu* is a delicacy that requires a special chef's licence to prepare as the fish's organs contain a toxin which is lethal if not thoroughly removed.

Tofu on fire? Tulip with tape? Nope. A name badge modelled on a kindergarten design. Useful to forewarn about any gathering where adults may be subjected to them as well.



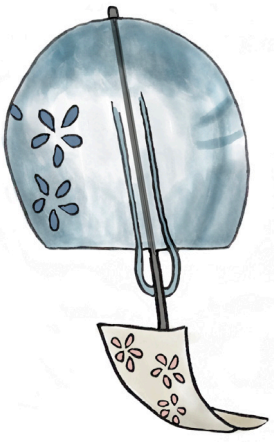
Another emoji that doubles as a doily or a Valentine's Day card. Apple labels it 'white flower', but it's a *sakura*-shaped teacher's stamp indicating schoolwork 'very well done'.

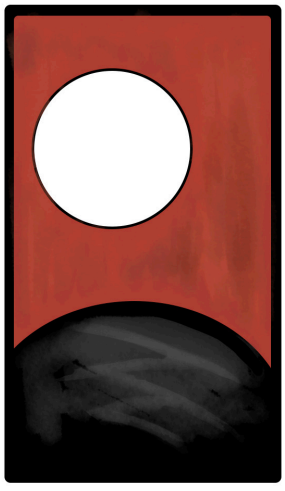
While at a glance the same shape as a Christmas tree and erected at the same time of the year, the *kadomatsu* (gate pine) is a New Year's decoration that welcomes the *kami* spirits. Traditionally made of pine, bamboo is now more common. Around mid-January the kadomatsu is burned—releasing both the kami and this singular emoji for another 12 months.

It looks like something leftover from a plant sale, but is in fact a symbol of *Tanabata*. The night of star-crossed lovers is celebrated throughout the country on the seventh day of the seventh month—most often now July but in some places more traditionally the lunar seventh month, August. The 'price tag' is a strip of paper that a wish is written on before being attached to a branch.

Not preparation for a strangely warm snowball fight, but representation of *Tsukimi*, the autumn harvest moon viewing tradition, which often involves a party. Decorations are made from pampas grass and, to reflect and celebrate the full moon's beauty, dango is offered and eaten.

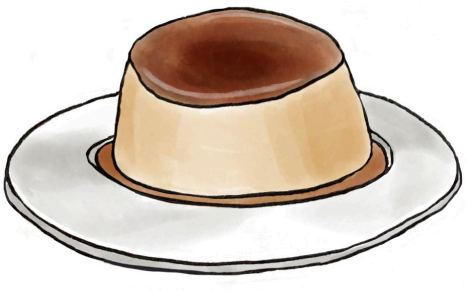
The jellyfish inexplicably banished to the 'objects' category is in fact a *furin*, a glass bell-shaped wind chime. Used in messages to denote calm and tranquility.





Not, as hazarded online, a depressing landscape painting, but a playing card from *hanafuda,* a popular game that depicts different flowers. This emoji can collectively represent games—even video games if paired with the handset emoji. Playing cards were first introduced by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Soon after, they were deemed an instrument of gambling and banned by the shogunate, so decks with innocuous designs passed more easily, fooling authorities. Once card playing was permitted under the Meiji, Kyoto's Nintendo was founded in 1889 to produce hanafuda.

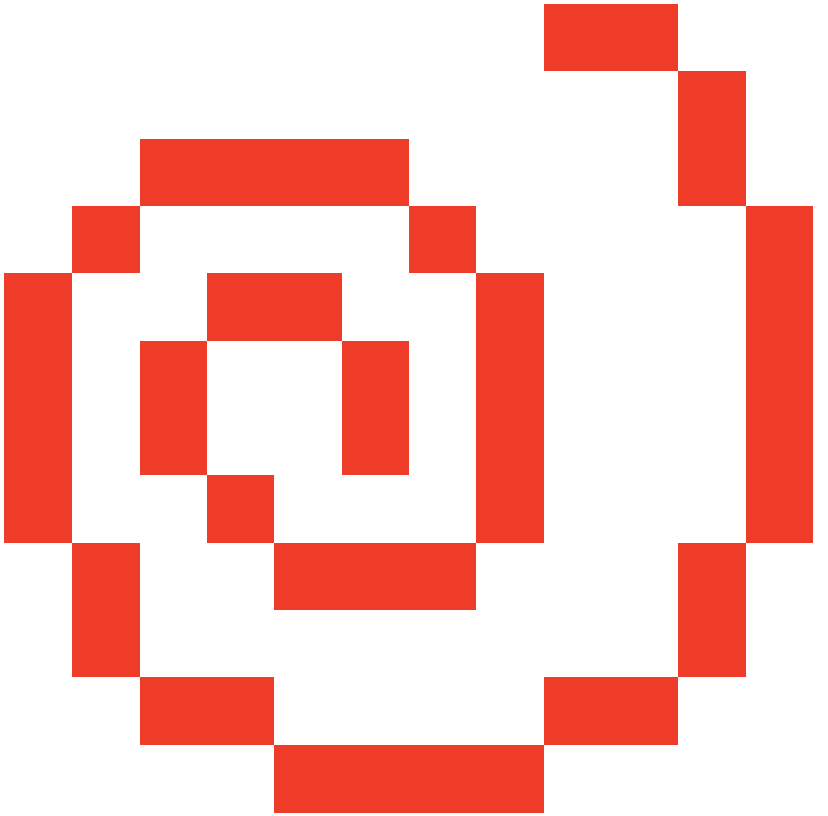
At a glance a perfect visual rendition of crème caramel or flan and not Japanese at all. But like other Western imports of sliced bread and cheesecake, Japanese *purin* evolved to have a very specific texture, as it is baked not steamed. They are also not high-end desserts, sold instead in *combinis* and supermarkets.



The quintessential symbol of obsolescence. Except the fax remains very much in use in Japanese offices and bureaucracy.

Sometimes a picture is simply what it depicts.

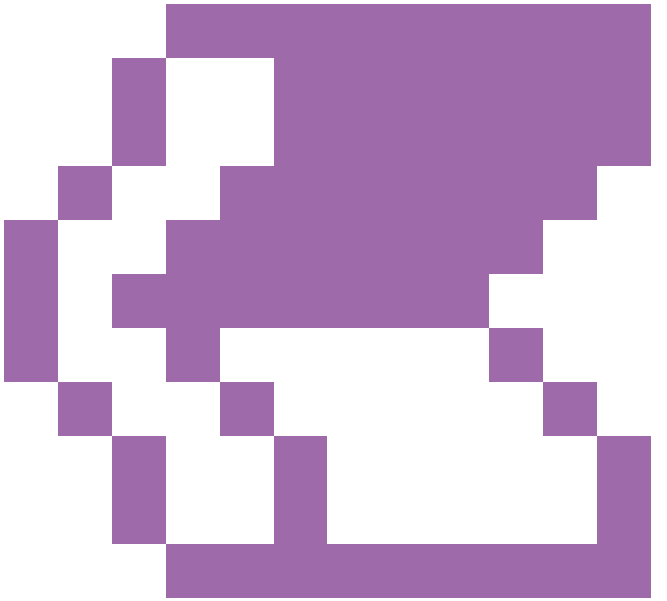
ALEX MANKIEWICZ is a Kyoto-based illustrator and artist, specialising in graphic narrative. *When the World Was Soft: Creation Stories of the Yindjibarndi* (Allen & Unwin) is due in 2024.

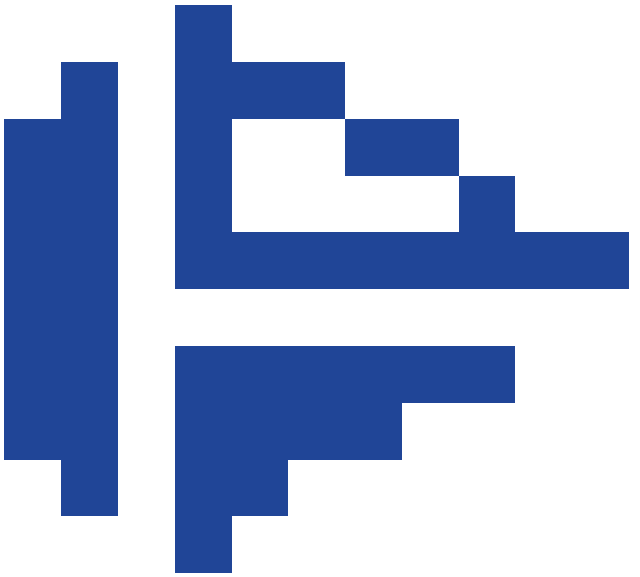


NTT docomo's original emoji

The original 176 emoji characters were developed by Shigetaka Kurita and his team for the cellphone company NTT DOCOMO in 1999. These 12 x 12 pixel pictograms revolutionized mobile communication in Japan, spreading worldwide in 2011 when Apple added emoji to the iPhone. As mobile phones proliferated globally, texting began to supplant voice calls. A mere 25 years after their introduction, these basic characters now look like ancient precursors to their current form—which as of September 2023 has expanded to 3,782 Unicode Standard symbols.

Ideograms are the building blocks of many languages, including Japanese. *Romaji* (Western alphabetical characters) once seemed poised to become the standard for global digital communication. Text, however, lacks nuanced immediacy, so the emoji—at once cute, expressive, and universal—has advanced to become a lingua franca for Gen Z, adding color, play, and a human touch to quotidian text communication in the 21st century.





Michiko *and the* Shumisen Stone

MARC PETER KEANE

The year is 612AD,

the place, a kingdom in Korea known as Baekje. A man stands at a crossroads with a choice to make. A life-changing choice.

A serious case of ringworm has left him disfigured; his skin covered with white blotches. At a time when the causes and cures of such diseases were unknown, just the sight of him makes people nervous, aggressive even. The safe money says he should go hide himself away, become a monk at a monastery sequestered in the depths of the mountains. But there he stands, mulling over another possibility that has come his way. A downright crazy idea. Instead of running away to the mountains, he can get on a small wooden ship and make a harrowing journey across the sea to a country he has only heard of in tales. Doing so would mean casting himself off into the world with no hope of return and trying to make his fortune among a foreign people about whom he knows basically nothing. Well, the hero of our tale must have been impossibly brave and self-confident because leaping off into the great beyond is the path he chose.

When he arrived in Japan, it was the 20th year in the reign of Toyomi-kekashikiya hime-no-mikoto, known to us posthumously as the Empress Suiko. The realm she reigned over was in a period of rapid development as new ideas, materials, and technologies were being introduced from continental cultures. Some were imported directly from China, but many made their way through one of the three Korean kingdoms, especially Baekje. When our hero arrived at the capital of Asuka, he was in the company of many others like him who had certain skills that they hoped to parlay into a place for themselves in Asuka society. There may have been Buddhist priests, carpenters, paper-makers, scribes, weavers, and scholars of geomancy or governmental law, to name but a few, but our hero was none of those. He was a gardener.

MARC PETER KEANE is a Kyoto-based landscape architect, garden designer, artist and prolific writer, whose books include *Japanese Garden Design*, the *Sakuteiki* (translation), *The Art of Setting Stones, The Japanese Tea Garden, Songs in the Garden, Garden Notes, Of Arcs and Circles, Dear Cloud,* and *Moss.* https://www.mpkeane.com

Buddhism, as an aspect of continental culture, was inextricably linked to other continental cultural influences that were ushering Japan into a modern era, including agriculture, architecture, governance, and literacy.

His arrival is recorded quite clearly in the *Nihon Shoki* (*The Chronicles of Japan*), one of two ancient books of classical Japanese history. Whereas earlier accounts in the *Chronicles* are considered to be mostly apocryphal and mythological, by the time the records reach the age of Empress Suiko, it is likely that what is written is a reasonable record of the actual events that took place. The account of our hero's arrival goes as follows:

> *This year a man emigrated from Baekje whose face and body were all flecked with white, perhaps having been infected with white ringworm. Disliking his extraordinary appearance, the people wished to cast him away on an island in the sea. But this man said, "If you dislike my spotted skin, you should not breed horses or cattle in this country which are spotted with white. Moreover, I have a small talent. I can make the figures of hills and mountains. If you kept me and made use of me, it would be to the advantage of the country. Why should you waste me by casting me away on an island in the sea?" Hereupon they gave ear to his words and did not cast him away. Accordingly, he was made to create the figures of Mount Sumi and the Bridge of Wu in the Southern Court. The people of that time called him by the name of Michiko no Takumi, Michiko the Artisan, but he was also known as Shikomaro, the Ugly Guy.*
>
> —based on the Japan Historical Text Initiative website text

When Michiko said that he could "make the figures of hills and mountains," what he meant was that he was skilled in the art of garden-making. The note about the garden he built in the Southern Court referred to the *nantei*, the open area south of a central palace hall, in this case the palace of the Empress herself. However, the most enduring impact on the history of Japanese gardens stems from the revelation in this account that Michiko crafted the representation of Mount Sumi within the garden.

Mount Sumi refers to *Shumisen*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Sanskrit word *Sumeru*. Sumeru, sometimes called Mount Meru, is the sacred mountain of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious cosmology. The mountain is believed to form the *axis mundi* or central core of the physical and spiritual universe. The mountain is described as having four sides made of precious materials facing in the cardinal directions—gold facing north, crystal to the east, lapis lazuli south, and ruby west. From those four faces issue four great rivers that flow out into the various seas and mountain ranges that surround the towering Mount Meru.

By creating an image of this sacred mountain in a garden, Michiko infused the garden with an aura of spiritual sanctity and, at the same time, created an allegorical symbol that could be used by Buddhist priests to expound on religious matters. At this time, Buddhism was in the very early stages of being

The actual carved Shumisen stone that was unearthed in 1902 at an archeological dig in Asuka.

introduced into Japan. The people who promoted and supported Buddhism were in direct opposition to those who promoted and supported the native religion of Japan, which we now call Shintō (The Way of the Gods). Empress Suiko was walking the middle path, trying to appease both factions. Buddhism, as an aspect of continental culture, was inextricably linked to other continental cultural influences that were ushering Japan into a modern era, including agriculture, architecture, governance, and literacy. Suiko, however, as a member of the imperial household, based her entire life story and raison d'être on the ancient lineage described in Shintō mythology. Building a garden around a Buddhist image such as Shumisen was as much a political act as an aesthetic one.

Jump forward about 1,300 years. In the year 35 of the Meiji period, or 1902 by the Western reckoning, an architectural dig about 25 kilometers south of Nara in the Asuka region found a number of interesting artifacts. Among them was a large stone carving of a Shumisen image. It was made in three sections which, when stacked one upon the other, stood about 2.3 meters high. Research suggests that a fourth piece existed at the bottom, so the structure would have been even taller originally. The sides were carved with images of mountains, and the inside was hollowed out to create a kind of reservoir. Furthermore, it was determined that if the sculpture was attached to a flowing water source, it could be turned into a fountain with spouts streaming out in four directions, just like the rivers of Mount Meru. It is believed that this garden fountain may have been the very element that Michiko installed in the Southern Court of the Empress Suiko's palace.

Shumisen imagery continued to be placed in gardens throughout the following eras but in future years, the design changed radically. Rather than creating sculptural elements with literal carvings of mountains on the sides and actual flowing water, Shumisen came to be represented by a simple standing stone, a natural boulder taken from a forest or river, unaltered by the human hand and set into the garden. These natural Shumisen stones hearken back to the sacred boulders of Shintō known as *iwakura*, and represent one way in which continental culture was modulated to better settle into Japanese society.

These natural Shumisen stones hearken back to the sacred boulders of Shintō known as *iwakura*, and represent one way in which continental culture was modulated to better settle into Japanese society.

A Shumisen stone in the Muromachi-period Ryōgintei garden (龍吟庭) at Ryōgen-in temple (龍源院) in Kyoto.

By the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, natural boulder Shumisen stones were used in *karesansui* gardens, the dry landscape gardens composed of stones typically set in fields of raked sand. One such example can be found in the Muromachi-period Ryōgintei garden at Ryōgen-in temple. Ryōgen-in is one of the many subtemples in the large Daitoku-ji Zen monastery in Kyoto. The garden is on the north side of the *hōjō*, main hall, where the rooms facing the garden were used as the head priest's residence and studies. In Ryōgin-tei the stones are placed in a field of carefully tended moss, although the original surface was more likely to have been sand, or simply packed earth.

Another more contemporary example can be found in a garden I designed for a residence in Manhattan, called the Still Point Garden. Although the intentional theme of that garden was the scientific concept of singularity, it can also be said that Shumisen, as a central stabilizing axis point, is also a kind of singularity, and the single standing stone in the Still Point Garden looks uncannily like the Shumisen stones of ancient Japanese gardens. Michiko no Takumi created the first image of Shumisen in a Japanese garden and, in doing so, he initiated an allegorical motif that has had incredible longevity, echoing down 1,400 years to our very time.

Still Point Garden, NYC, designed by Marc Peter Keane.

john manjiro & *the end of* sakoku *isolationism*

KEN RODGERS

Nakahama Manjiro, 1880

When Japan sought to emulate the organizational success of its culturally advanced neighbor, China, in the Asuka and Heian periods (specifically, between 607 and 839), delegations of high-ranking Japanese aristocrats and monks were dispatched to make perilous journeys there and back. The scope of knowledge that they gained—written language, bureaucratic systems, architecture, Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist philosophy—was vital to Japan's transformation into a politically cohesive state.

After over a thousand years of evolution of a distinctively Japanese identity, including 220 years of deliberate isolationism (*sakoku*) under the Tokugawa shogunate (allowing only limited contact with Dutch traders), Japan was in 1853 suddenly forced to engage with an unimaginably different kind of alien power—a brashly self-confident young republic known as the United States of America. However, the origin and personal history of one of the leading facilitators of intercultural communication enabling Japan's transformative emergence from medievalism into the modern era was in absolute contrast to Japan's illustrious Heian ambassadors to the Middle Kingdom.

Japanese woodblock print of Commodore Perry (center) and other high-ranking American officials.

John Manjiro (aka John Mung), was born in Nakanohama, a small coastal village in Tosa, southern Shikoku. At the age of 14, in 1841, he was the youngest crew member of a small fishing boat that was blown off shore by a storm and swept away by the powerful east-bound Kuroshio ocean current. He and his four companions fetched up on an uninhabited, almost waterless island, barely surviving as castaways for six months before finally being rescued by a passing American whaling ship. Though he spoke no English, Manjiro was a fast learner. The ship's captain, William Whitfield, was so impressed that he brought him back to his hometown, Fairhaven, Massachusetts, to sponsor three years of education focused on English language, mathematics, surveying techniques, and navigation. In this way, Manjiro became the very first Japanese to live in and to be educated in the U.S.A.

From 1846 through 1849 Manjiro worked on American whaling ships, rising to first mate, before heading for California to join the Gold Rush. In only four months he made enough money to finance his return to Japan, together with two of his original fishing crew companions, who had been waiting for him during these years in Hawaii. (Another had died, and one preferred to stay on in Oahu). In 1851, ten years since their fateful departure from Japan, Manjiro and his companions were dropped off close enough to Okinawa to row ashore, under risk of immediate execution under the shogunate's still draconian mandate against overseas travel.

A drawn-out process of tense interrogations in Naha, Nagasaki and Kochi eventually convinced the wary authorities that Manjiro was in fact a valuable asset. After a brief visit to Nakanohama to see his mother (who had believed him to have been lost at sea all these years), he was employed by the Tosa domain and the shogunate to make full use of his unique education by translating books, advising on marine navigation and Western-style shipbuilding, and, of course, teaching English.

Less than two years after Manjiro arrived back in Japan, Commodore Matthew Perry's "black ships" dropped anchor in Uraga, at the mouth of Tokyo Bay, and he was called to the capital, Edo, to assist in negotiations.

Capt. Whitfield's log entry, June 27, 1841

"Sent in two boats to see if there were any turtles [to eat]. Found five poor distressed people on the isle. Took them off. Could not understand anything from them more than that they were hungry."

Excerpts from the seclusion edict of 1636

No Japanese ship … nor any native of Japan, shall presume to go out of the country; whoever acts contrary to this, shall die, and the ship with the crew and goods aboard shall be sequestered until further orders. All persons who return from abroad shall be put to death. … Whoever presumes to bring a letter from abroad, or to return after he hath been banished, shall die with his family; also whoever presumes to intercede for him, shall be put to death.

The Japanese Embassy with naval officers at the Washington Navy Yard in 1860.

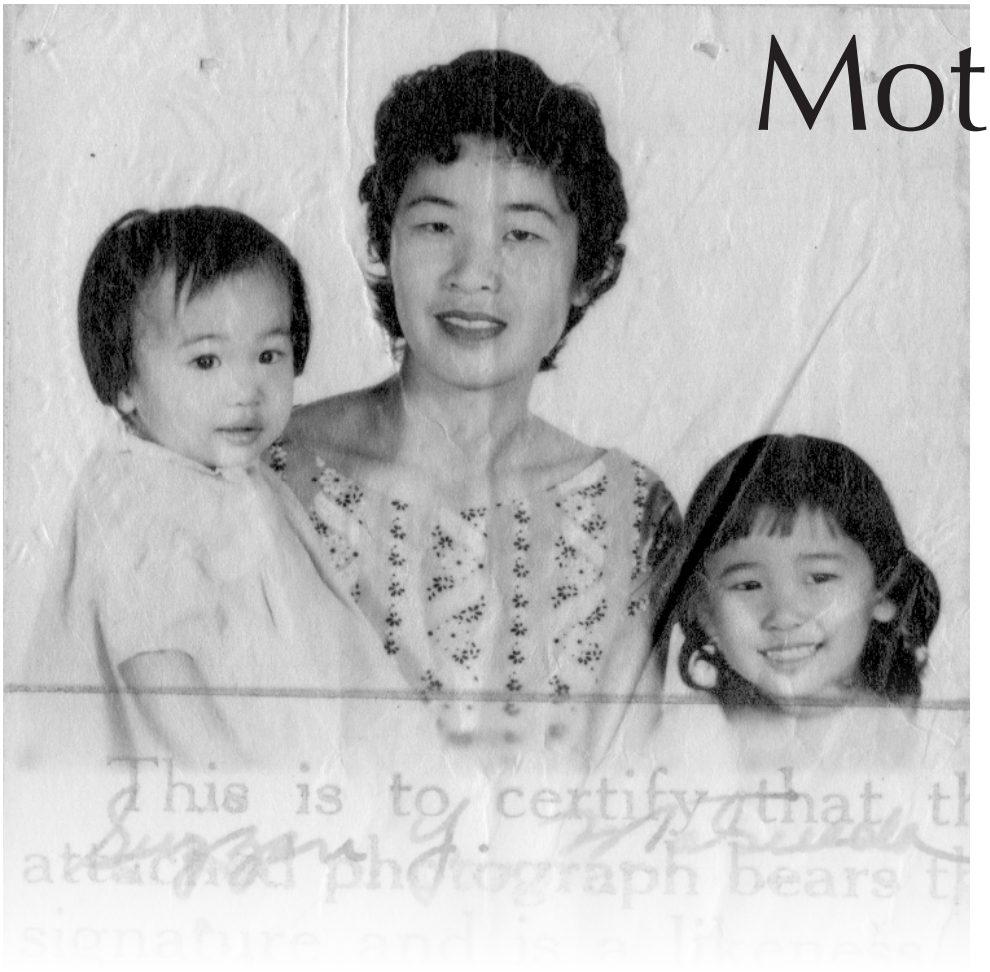
Appointed as a two-sword-carrying samurai in direct service of the Shogun (an unthinkable honor for someone of his village background; he was also allowed to take a second name, Nakahama), he was instrumental in drafting the Convention of Kanagawa, which in 1854 ratified U.S. demands to open the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American vessels, and to establish diplomatic relations through a consulate. He continued to teach shipbuilding, translated a classic navigation manual, Bowditch's *The American Practical Navigator* (first published in 1802—and most recently updated in its 2019 edition), wrote Japan's first English language textbook (*Shortcuts to English Conversation*), and in 1860 served as the official translator accompanying the historic first Japanese Embassy to the United States, which met with President Buchanan at the White House.

Lieutenant John Mercer Brookes, who accompanied Manjiro as a naval advisor on the first Japanese steamship, the *Kirin Maru*, which took the Embassy to San Francisco, wrote "I am satisfied that [Manjiro] has had more to do with the opening of Japan than any other man living."

In the following years Manjiro continued to contribute to Japan's absorption of American know-how, including naval architecture and whaling techniques, and in 1869 (the second year of the Meiji era) was appointed as a professor at the Kaisei school (later part of Tokyo Imperial University), which specialized in Western Studies. In 1870 he returned to the U.S.A. as a member of a governmental delegation on its way to Europe to observe the Franco-Prussian War, and briefly revisited his benefactor and former captain, William Whitfield, in Fairhaven.

Transcending his provincial roots, Manjiro clearly showed great aptitude and practicality in making excellent use of unforeseen experiences and opportunities in his life—and a can-do spirit that was obviously in tune with that self-same aspect of America's national character, making him a perfect go-between, educator and influencer in a period of immense transformation. Although he died in 1898, preceding Japan's war with Russia in 1904–5, a major part of his legacy was his vital groundwork in developing the new nation's naval strength, which led to decisive victory—the first ever defeat of a Western power by a non-Western adversary.

My Mother's Story



PAT MATSUEDA

PAT MATSUEDA was Managing Editor of *MĀNOA: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* from 1992 to 2022.

In the afternoon of August 31, 2023, I handed a document to a woman at the main branch of the Hawaii State Library, a capacious three-story building with towering white columns that identify it as one of many American libraries funded in part by Andrew Carnegie. On the second floor is an office where U.S. passport applications are processed, and I had gone there to apply for a new passport, having lost mine.

The document I handed to the woman was over seventy years old, issued seven years after the end of WWII, and was, like its owner, still in passable condition. The woman glanced at the document, failing to apprehend what it was, and was about to hand it back to me when she stopped. Taking several seconds, she studied it. At the top were these words:

Form No. 240	*REPORT OF BIRTH*
Triplicate	*(Corrected May 1940)*
FOREIGN SERVICE	*CHILD BORN ABROAD OF AMERICAN PARENT OR PARENTS*

Realizing what the form was, she started to process my application. As the document noted, my place of birth was the United States Army Hospital, 8162nd Army Unit, Fukuoka, Japan. My father's name was Donald Yoshikatsu Matsueda, his race Mong.[1], date of birth Mar. 17, 1930, occupation S/Sgt. U.S. Air Force. His birthplace was Kahului, Maui, T.H.[2] My mother's name was Yoshiko Shigenobu, her race Mong., date of birth May 5, 1929, and birthplace Kagoshima, Japan. Donald and Yoshiko were married in Fukuoka on June 19, 1951. The physician who attended my birth was Beverly R. Cockrell, Jr., 1st Lt., MC. The State Department official who signed the form was Thomas W. Ainsworth, Vice Consul at the American Consulate in Fukuoka.

It's this document and not my birth certificate that is accepted by government agencies as proof of my American citizenship. My birth certificate includes some of the same information but lacks the State Department seal. However, it does have my footprints on the back: two inky impressions three inches high. A child of woe, I was born on Wednesday, August 20, 1952.

I watched anxiously as the woman at the processing office made a copy of Form 240 and stapled the original to my passport application. I wrote two checks—one to the U.S. Department of State and the other to Hawaii's Department of Finance—and was sent on my way. About a month later, I received Form 240 and my new passport in the mail, allowing me to leave the country and assuring me that wherever I traveled, I was watched over by the government of the United States of America.

NOTES

1. Mongoloid. The other choices were Caucasian, Malay, Negroid, and Indian.
2. Territory of Hawaii.

Donald Matsueda was born on Maui along with his two sisters, Jane and Grace. He joined the Air Force at age seventeen and was stationed at Itazuke Air Force Base, now known as Fukuoka Airport. At that time, following WWII, Japan was occupied by the United States. My memories of this part of my childhood are faint. I remember that a black girl was my closest friend; an older friend (the

mature age of eight) was named Patricia; a teenaged student who wore a uniform of white shirt, black pants, and black cap took me on rides on his bicycle; and a housekeeper made dresses for my dolls. And I remember making two especially terrible mistakes. The first was begging my father to take me to see *Frankenstein*. The second was playing with matches and setting a shed on fire, then getting such a fierce beating that a neighbor interceded and pleaded with my father to stop.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ORIGINAL
TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

No. 7695774

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION

Petition No. 18622

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization. Date of birth May 5, 1929 ; sex female ; complexion medium ; color of eyes brown ; color of hair black ; height 5 feet 2 inches ; weight 105 pounds ; visible distinctive marks none ; Marital status married ; former nationality Japan ; I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

(Complete and true signature of holder)

United States of America }
District of Hawaii } ss:

Be it known that at a term of the U. S. District Court of District of Hawaii held pursuant to law at Honolulu, T. H. on December 20, 1956 the Court having found that Suzzan Yoshiko Matsueda then residing at 141 Davis Ave., Honolulu, T. H. intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the Naturalization Laws of the United States), had in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and she was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 20th day of December in the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and fifty-six and of our Independence the one hundred and eighty-first.

Clerk of the U. S. District Court

By Deputy Clerk.

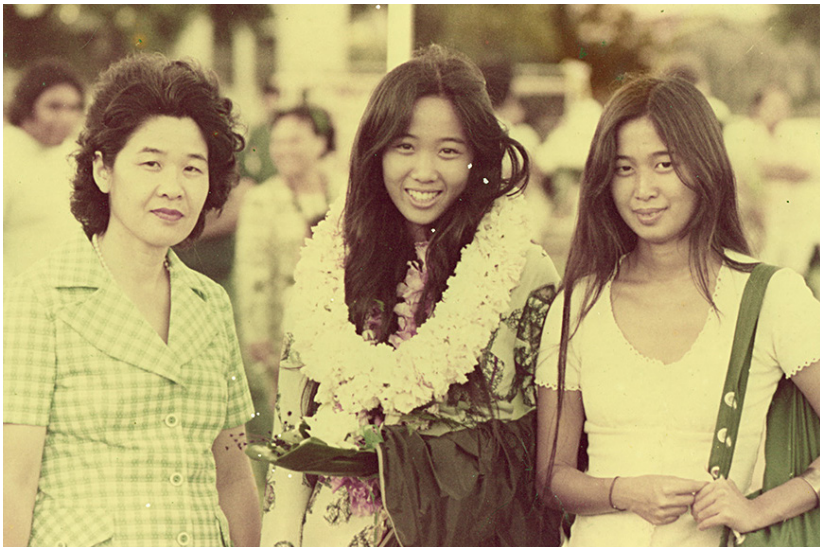
It is a violation of the U. S. Code, punishable as such, to copy, print, photograph, or otherwise illegally use this certificate.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Shortly after their wedding in June 1951, my mother applied for an immigration visa and alien registration (Foreign Service Form 256a) in order to join my father, who was then in Houston, Texas. On the form, she stated she knew "Japanese and little English" and would be entering the U.S. for "permanent residence" as a housewife.

They must have returned to Japan sometime before my birth in 1952 and then moved to Hawaii, where my siblings were born at Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu: Donnie Toshio in April 1954 and Kathleen Chiyo in February 1956. Donnie, my brother, was born prematurely and did not survive. On December 20, 1956, my mother became naturalized citizen Suzzan Yoshiko Matsueda. The back of her certificate of naturalization states "Name changed from Yoshiko Matsueda by order of Court this 20th day of December A. D. 1956, as a part of the naturalization."

Donald Matsueda was not a happy or healthy man, whether because of mistreatment by his parents or because he had a mental illness, I don't know, but his ghosts and demons plagued us nearly as much as they did him. He was a brutal husband who often struck my mother, an alcoholic, a gambler, and a womanizer who left my mother for someone he had gotten pregnant. I have a memory of my mother sitting on the couch in the living room of our two-story home on the base and being told by my father that he had to divorce her. Despite the hellish life he created for her, she stayed loyal, and as I found out later, carried a grudge against the other woman for decades. When he wrote a letter telling her that the woman had died of a brain hemorrhage, she said one word: "Good."



Shika Shrine, Japan
for Kathy

In the courtyard
the winter light is granite.
Our mother is braced against a tree,
We follow our father,
you and I,
trying to conceal her wounds.
food in our small hands for the temple deer.
My face is solemn,
Thirty years from now
yours simply curious.
Two years old,
we will be safe from him.
you have a mouth like split fruit.
There is no world without our father.
He will be blighted and hungry for rain;
We follow him beneath the ironwoods,
through the stains of shadows on the ground.
And we will be in the center of an ocean,
In silence, we feed the deer
at Shika Shrine.
shaded by flowering trees.

After the divorce, my mother moved us to Hawaii, apparently at the invitation of my father's parents. Since she received a mere $150 a month in child support from my father and had only a high school education, she had to work at low-paying jobs. I remember her working for Kaneda Delicatessen, *Hawaii Hochi* (which hired her as a linotypist), and, much later, a fashion company known as Shadows (where she was a seamstress).

My sister and I were latchkey kids until we graduated from McKinley High School (known in the early twentieth century as Tokyo High because of the number of *nisei* students who went there). The process of our assimilation into American culture had started on the air force base, and we lost a further connection to our Japanese heritage when our mother began working. We didn't know at the time that our assimilation would create a gulf in communication, closeness, and empathy and create problems

We had a parent whose heart and mind remained connected to Japan, but we children were hybrids. My sister and I were partly Japanese and partly something else, shaped by American and fiftieth-state ideas, events, and vocabularies of the sixties and seventies.

when we reached our teens. We had a parent whose heart and mind remained connected to Japan, but we children were hybrids. My sister and I were partly Japanese and partly something else, shaped by American and fiftieth-state ideas, events, and vocabularies of the sixties and seventies. We majored in English when we went to the University of Hawaii and eventually entered publishing. My mother's command of English was limited, and she was self-conscious about it and her lack of education. She did excel as an artist, though, and could draw like an angel. As a child and teenager, she won prizes and received awards for her artwork. And she was without peer when it came to being goodhearted, gentle, and kind. These traits, plus her inexperience with American culture, made her dependent on men and caused her to be taken advantage of.

We moved many times while my sister and I were growing up. How our mother managed to find apartments for us and take care of the moving, I'll never know. At least a few times, our homes were broken into, and somehow we survived these and other crises. For the most part, we did this alone: we were loners, not associating with other families or individuals except for those men my mother became involved with. When I was in the sixth grade, she met a Japanese man named Satoshi Morimoto, whom she could speak to in her own language and with whom she had a long-lasting relationship. He took her on trips to the mainland and somehow helped her reconnect to her relatives, the Shigenobu family, and return to Japan to see them. I know almost nothing about this reunion and only have a few photographs and a collection of letters between my mother and Sumiko, an older sister, which I can't read. After my mother died, Sumiko mailed a sum of money, and I had to appeal—after having a bilingual friend translate the letter—to the Japan post office to return the sum. I wrote my letter in English, and the post office graciously replied in the same.

The language in which much of the home life my sister and I shared with my mother was, I realized recently, that of silence. Much of what we regretted, questioned, wondered about, resented, and so forth was expressed in silence. For immigrant families like ours—ignorant of the ways of our world—there was no way to move forward, to solve things, to get better when silence was the medium in which important topics were constrained. Perhaps this was characteristic of the Japanese culture of our social class then or of the culture in which my mother was brought up.

Luckily, there was another expression of culture we could use our mouths for: consuming food. Few things made our mother happier than seeing my sister and me eat the meals she made for us. Because money was scarce, however, the food sometimes required a second or third look before being eaten: the meat might be green because it was old, or a cockroach might be in the apple pie. One day when I was in my thirties, I saw that my mother was using a full bottle of Clorox to compress the kimchee she was making. Knowing her habits, I assumed that she hadn't cleaned the bottom of the bottle before inserting it in the bowl, and I decided not to eat the kimchee even though I knew it would be delicious.

Tragically, though my mother had a beautiful soul, she never found someone worthy of her.

Kao-mise

Showing one's face: on a balcony under the eaves of the theater, kabuki actors greet the public and show their faces. The ramp on which the actors enter and exit the stage is known as the flower path.

At the end, we meet in the empty theater,
beneath a row of lanterns.
You touch my face,
stroke my skin.
With each pass of your hand,
you block the light,
so my face appears and disappears,
appears and disappears.
Your hand plunges into my face,
slips inside and takes away
each knowledge that is me.
My hair is silk,
my face ivory,
my eyes lacquered wood,
my mouth a prayer bead.
And there is nothing in my world but you.
You with your eyes of cut flowers,
your dreams of women,
and your skin like summer.
Outside a burst of thunder
and the silver sky shatters and turns dark.
Rain beats against the roofs and paper doors.

In this rain and turbulence, time will wake
from its languor and your face
withdraw, disappear.
I step outside in a kimono
common as the moon, open my umbrella,

and hide my face.
The streets are filled with guttering lights
and faces I do not recognize.

And the wet ground
is scarred with flowers.

My mother died suddenly on a Sunday morning in September 1989, when she collapsed from cardiac arrest. I was thirty-seven and my sister thirty-three. We called an ambulance, but it took twenty minutes to arrive. When the ER doctor came to tell us they were unable to save her—the damage to her heart too extensive—his chest was covered in her blood. For years I have dreamed and thought about her, but it was only recently that I realized—and truly *felt*—how isolated she must have been. The depth of my mother's sense of displacement was akin to mine, but mine manifested as anxiety, sadness, depression, self-pity—in other words, as intense but short-lived illnesses, not as an existential condition. I understood so little until I matured and entered the final decades of life. With my ignorance and illusions dispelled, I was finally able to confront truths I had been denying.

For years I have dreamed and thought about her, but it was only recently that I realized—and truly *felt*—how isolated she must have been.

Mockingbird
for my mother

I sing
and the past sings back
and the present is changed.
I bring my face to the mirror

and see yours in pain,
and what I love is changed.
I write,
and my words describe *you:*

the face you hid,
the words you failed to use,

the acts of consolation performed
for a desperate man.

I sing the past,
and the present sings back;
and they are two birds
fighting over the same flower.

Only after your death
is life quiet enough
for our love.

All unhappy immigrant families may be unhappy in different ways. Despite a prevailing sadness in my work, I feel grateful that my Japanese voice has been able to find an audience.

LAUREN W. DEUTSCH

nikkei dancing for joy
obon odori in diaspora

In Kyoto, it's easy to celebrate one's ancestors at the annual Buddhist ritual of *Obon* with the lighting by local monks of Daimonji bonfires at 8pm on August 18th. But what if one moves across the ocean? How will the spirits find their loved ones if the ancestors' remains literally *remain* back in Japan? Among Japanese Americans (JAs) living in Los Angeles' highly diverse population, the answer since the 1930s has been... *dance!*

Commonly known as the Buddhist festival of lanterns, Obon observance is based on the Japanese interpretation of Buddha's *Ullambana Sutra* in which Maudgalyayana, one of Buddha's two chief disciples, dances with joy upon successfully releasing his deceased mother's spirit from the realm of hungry ghosts.

At the turn of the 1930s the San Franciso Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) Rev. Yoshio Iwanaga set the *Obon odori* model in motion. While *Jodo Shinshu*, the largest Buddhist sect in the U.S., rejects the notion of "souls" returning at Obon, the idea of *okagesama-desu*, compassionate appreciation for those whose prior efforts have enabled life today, is paramount to their practice. Whether professed Buddhist or culturally Japanese, generations of *Nikkei* emigrant JAs take immense pride in maintaining family and cultural values while aspir-ing to achieve success in all endeavors, including social integration.

Iwanaga was instrumental in bringing some of the recorded repertoire of music from Japan to inspire congregants' dancing in circles in temple community spaces. Later, he commissioned new songs in Japanese to expand the selection. The dances usually were of the odori folk tradition, while the *ondo* songs' lyrics reflected both folk and religious themes. *Bon Odori*, the first and last dance at most annual temple gatherings, was written in 1934 by the Buddhist Music Association of the *Honzan* (mother temple) in Kyoto.

Among West Coast JA communities in late summer, the scene has morphed into a robust festival of Japanese *and* Japanese American life. Most JA Obon Festivals are similar: inside the temple sanctuary candles are lighted and the space is festooned with *chochin* paper lanterns dedicated to the congregants' deceased relatives. The ministers hold religious services for the repose of ancestors; perhaps the deceased wonder why their progeny doesn't visit more often. Outside in the courtyard, scratchy recordings of ancestral hometown ondo—often reflecting unique *kenjinkai's*, regional geographic, historical or cultural features—blast from loudspeakers. Congregant families, many dressed in *yukata* and matching *happi* jackets, with *geta* sandals clacking in time to the stirring beats of an *odaiko* drum, circle the make-shift raised *yagura* bandstand. Each song narrative is enacted by unique hand gestures, clapping and waving *uchiwa* fans and *tenugui* scarves in sync with familiar repertoire well into the night. Are there hungry ghosts still lurking in the shadows or are the participants merely hungry for grandma's *takoyaki*?

Obon at Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles

A perennial favorite dance that has many young and old up and dancing has been *Tankō Bushi* ("Coal Miner's Song" of the women of Miike Fukuoka, Kyushu, 1932). Like any oral tradition, the tune remains the same but the lyrics may be adapted to suit the current time and place or to have new relevance. Yet, the gestures still reflect the hard labor of mining: digging, wiping sweat from brow, putting coal in basket, basket getting heavy, pushing the cart, spreading coal on the ground.

Tankō Bushi was performed at the first Obon Odori in Los Angeles in 1933 by congregants of Hompa Hongwanji Church near Little Tokyo in multi-cultural Downtown LA.

OBON IN INTERNMENT CAMP YEARS

From 1942 through 1945, in response to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, 120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated by U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Order 9066. Although being forced to move to desolate internment camps—leaving possessions and livelihoods behind—was disorienting, this did not stop Obon observances. The War Relocation Administration banned most Japanese cultural expressions and practices in "American spaces." Every movement of internees was scrutinized by government officials seeking proof of the existence of un-American activities. Nonetheless, Obon and sumo wrestling (not to mention baseball) seemed to be consistent with internee "Americanization." Scholar Lon Kurashige notes that, "That so many internees embraced Obon dancing and sumo wrestling suggests these pasttimes developed an American identity without devaluing and discarding Japanese traditions."

Remarkable Kodachrome photographs by Bill Manbo, an auto mechanic from Riverside, California who was interned at Hart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming, show internees dancing in 1943 and 1944. These were published in *Colors of Confinement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Among the most popular songs was *Tankō Bushi*. The piece was also interpreted in 2017 in *Heart Mountain*, a performance by artist Maya Jeffereis. She relates the *Tankō Bushi* narrative to the forced labor within the camps, "... as well as the perceived economic threat the Japanese American farming community posed to white farmers, a contributing factor that led to incarceration. While the dance is at once a tribute to the memory of those imprisoned, it also serves to bring visibility to an overlooked history."

RETURNING HOME

At the end of their internment, returning Los Angeles Nikkei still faced restrictive covenants that limited access to the neighborhoods and other resources enjoyed by the white population. The highly diverse BIPoC (Black, Indigenous and other People of Color) communities once again found themselves living on the perimeters but in proximity, all now struggling for socio-economic parity.

In 1948, Rev. Iwanaga brought together approximately 1,000 Nikkei congregants from a variety of kenjinkai (prefectural associations) on the steps of the San Francisco Civic Center for a celebration that created a sense of community in the face of still overt racism in the dominant Euro-centric culture. This was a very brave event, considering that many temples stopped holding odori events that

Top: The soul of FandangObon in Los Angeles

Bottom: Nobuko Miyamoto with some of the Mottainai Band members

might attract unwanted attention from still wary neighbors. In 1949 Rev. Iwanaga and pianist Mary Taira of Fresno Buddhist Temple created the music, lyrics (in Japanese) and choreography for the first Japanese American Obon song and dance: *Fresno Ondo*, which captured the feeling of grape-picking. It's still a favorite!

It was Buddhist practice, especially participatory arts that came to the forefront to galvanize the JA community. Obon Odori, among the precious cultural legacies which had given the community its identity by drawing attention to their heritage, eventually ceased to be sufficiently inspiring for young Nisei and Sansei activists to entice affiliation with extant community institutions. They sought to respond to social justice inequities on their own terms and began to identify with the struggles of the civil rights advocates of their African American and Mexican American neighbors.

"Iwanaga dancing at an obon festival", late 1940s. From Obon Dancing in America: Rev. Yoshio Iwanaga Photo Album, Portland State University Special Collections & University Archives.

Around 1974 Rev. Masao Kodani of Senshin Buddhist church near LA's Little Tokyo, began to introduce new traditional Japanese cultural activities and art forms to his congregants that not only contributed to the emergence of vernacular ethnic art and music, but also to the evolution of a community of socially engaged Japanese American Buddhists. Scholar Masumi Izumi calls it "engaged ethnic Buddhism." He observes, "By opening their temple to members of local minority communities, Senshin formed artistic and political coalitions with other peoples of color, harboring subaltern cultural activism, which transgressed national, racial, and religious borders, and defied hegemonic racial, gender, and class hierarchies." Senshin is also renowned for its emphasis on teaching and performing groups of traditional Japanese instrumental music—*taiko, shamisen, fue*, etc. This practice caught on throughout

the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), the national Jodo Shinshu organization. The annual Obon festival calendar is set so that congregants, often identified by 'team' happi coats, can attend events at each other's temples as well. BCA's Joy, Remembrance, Death: Obon Music for North America is the definitive explanation of just how JA Buddhists have reimagined strong community fabric, much like those of Japan's kenjinkai.

TRANSITIONING FROM JAPANESE TO ENGLISH

Prior to 1984, still most Odori dances were still performed to music on those scratchy recordings from Japan or JA compositions in Japanese language. That year, Rev. Masumi Izumi tasked Nobuko Miyamoto to create a JA Obon song with English lyrics. She recalls in her autobiography *Not Yo' Butterfly*, "He wanted a song that would help younger people who did not speak Japanese to understand *why* they were dancing." Miyamoto, a Sansei, had made a professional career as a contemporary dancer/singer on Broadway and in film, and later, as songwriter/troubadour with Chris Iijima and William "Charlie" Chin, had traveled throughout the U.S.' Asian American communities presenting new anthems that bolstered the Asian American Movement. While she had never previously created an Obon song before that, her compositions have now become a significant part of the annual national BCA's Obon Odori repertoire. In 2021 Smithsonian Folkways issued *120,000 Stories*, a double CD of Miyamoto's compositions; others are found online: *Yuiyo Bon Odori* (Just Dance, with Rev. Mas, 1984), *Tampopo Ondo* (Chrysanthemum Ondo, 1994), *Gadena Bushi* (Gardener's Song, with Rev. Mas, 1998), *Mottainai* (Don't Be Wasteful, with Rev. Mas, 2011; also a Great Leap Eco-Vid), *Ichigo Ichie* (This Moment But Once in a Lifetime, with Yoko Fujimoto and P.J. Hirabahashi, 2003), *Senbazuru* (1000 Cranes, 2014) and *Kangie* (Gathering of Joy, 2023). The lyrics, often with only a single Japanese word as chorus, celebrate the essence of Obon, as well as promoting contemporary cultural concerns from a JA perspective, such as reverence for the environment and remembrance of the victims of war.

Elaine Fukumoto, Los Angeles Obon Dance Teacher

FANDANGOBON: ALL THINGS CONNECTED!

Miyamoto's most complex piece is *Bambutsu No Tsunagari* (10,000 Things All Connected, 2013). Like the other works, it has been embraced at temples across the U.S. and has replaced *Tanko Bushi* as the final piece in the annual Los Angeles Little Tokyo Nisei Week ondo. The song emerged from friendships, activist affinities and past musical collaborations with Quetzal Flores and Martha Gonzales of the Grammy Award-winning band Quetzal, and *son jarocho* composer César Castro. The son jarocho music of Veracruz Mexico is influenced also by Afro-Cuban melodies. The trilingual (Japanese, English and Spanish) piece is a "conversation" among Japanese American and Mexican American cultures through collective songwriting. Elaine Fukumoto, a leading Obon Odori dance teacher, created the choreography.

Bambutsu No Tsunagari
(translation from Spanish in italics)

In the circle we dance
No beginning, no ending
In the circle we dance
I am you, you are the other me

Ceremonial character
Fandango breaks with order
A special celebration
Where souls intertwine
With its rhythms and melodies
From which we celebrate today
Ancestral knowledge
Which we used to embrace

In the circle we dance
Like the moon and the sun
In the circle we dance
Let our hearts be the drum

Let's put things right
With our musical ancestors
It's time to celebrate
Life with FandangObon

In the circle we dance
To remember the dead
In the circle we dance
Oneness is moving

We are faith, we are hope
We are the dawning
And the energy that we reach
Will give life to new beings.

Chorus: *Bambutsu no tsunagari*

Bambutsu is the anthem of the Great Leap's annual FandangObon Festival, produced since 2013 by Miyamoto's Great Leap organization. Similar to Obon Odori, a *fandango* is a *fiesta comunitaria* (community festival) typical of Veracruz, Mexico that is frequently held in East Los Angeles/Boyle Heights. Neighbors enjoy dancing around musicians and adding their individual styles atop the *tarima* stomp box. FandangObon is usually held on the Isamu Noguchi Plaza of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, a space designed for Obon Odori circle dancing. The event includes Miyamoto's repertoire of participatory circle dances featuring live instrumental music, including the group East LA Taiko. Multi-generational, local dancers from the African American and Sufi traditions also lead participants in circle dancing to celebrate their ancestors and galvanize commitments to common contemporary social and environmental justice concerns. In 2018 FandangObon represented the "Sounds of California" at the national Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC. During the COVID pandemic, Great Leap invited Japanese *fandango* aficionados in Tokyo and Japanese Mexicans in Veracruz, Mexico to join its FandangObon online workshop.

Whether dancing with Japanese ancestral spirits, Mexican *Dia de los Muertos callaveras* (Day of the Dead skeletons), or West African *orishas* (divine spirits), no matter what language we use to call upon our ancestors, we hope they will continue to help us live good lives today... together!

Author's Note: Great appreciation to Nobuko Miyamoto, Rev. Masao Kodani, and Southern District Dharma School Teachers League.

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Fresh off the yagura at Senshin's Obon

the japanese diaspora in japan

LEWIS MIESEN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LUAN BANZAI

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JAPANESE?

What does it mean to be Nikkei, a member of the Japanese diaspora? By being simultaneously Japanese and non-Japanese, Nikkei are forcing a re-evaluation of Japanese identity.

Japanese identity is complex and often oversimplified, its nuances underappreciated. Through interviews with Nikkei—particularly those who have returned to their ancestral homeland—I hope to shine a light on their experiences as outliers of Japanese identity, find common threads, and gain a deeper insight into the edges and unspoken essence of *Japaneseness*—what it means to be Japanese.

The Japanese diaspora represents all walks of life. My interviewees for this article include artists, designers, factory workers, public servants, an investment banker, a farmer, and a Pilates instructor. Some are genetically 100% Japanese, and others are mixed race. Before returning to Japan, they lived in countries including Canada, America, Spain, and Brazil for a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 35 years. Their temporal connections to Japan also vary dramatically. *Issei* (一世, 1st generation Japanese) are those who were born in Japan but moved abroad (and for the purposes of this article eventually returned to Japan). *Nisei* (二世, 2nd generation), were born outside of Japan to at least one Issei parent; *Sansei* (三世, 3rd generation) were born to a Nisei parent, and Yonsei (四世, 4th generation) were born to a Sansei parent. All of these groups are collectively referred to as *Nikkei* (日系). Although this term is particularly associated with Japanese Brazilians, I use it as a catch-all term for global Japanese who have spent a significant part of their life abroad.

PARALLEL REALITIES

To be Nikkei is to be between two cultures and fighting for your right to belong in both. For those settling abroad as well as those returning to Japan, a similar struggle has unfolded across generations. Many Issei left Japan with few material possessions and limited foreign language skills; their descendants have been returning to Japan and facing a similar fight: to learn a challenging new language, to be accepted, and to build a better life. Different generations of Nikkei vary in values and outlook, but this immigrant struggle is an experience they all relate to.

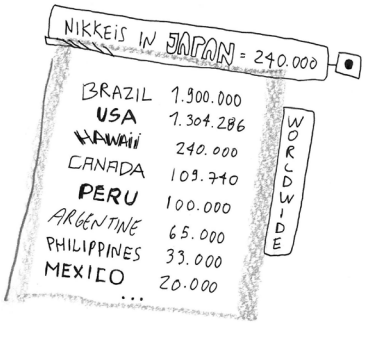
Nikkei living abroad experience a broad spectrum of Japaneseness. Some grow up immersed in Japanese ethnic enclaves, speaking Japanese at home and on the street, while others have almost no cultural connection to Japan. Some report trying to hide their Japanese culture after being mocked for things like taking shoes off inside or eating sushi. Brazilian Nikkei interviewees described the experience of growing up in a majority-Japanese community. *"My family spoke Japanese and Portuguese at home, but on the street, especially with older generations, we often spoke Japanese. Probably 80% of my neighborhood was Nikkei. I studied Japanese at the temple school and ate Japanese food every day. I don't feel very Brazilian."* With personal, familial, and social identity all built around Japaneseness, the local matsuri festival became a focal point for Nikkei identity, culture, and pride. Tradition and education were tools used to protect Japanese language and culture.

Brazilian Nikkei described the experience of growing up in a majority-Japanese community.

"Probably 80% of my neighborhood was Nikkei. I studied Japanese at the temple school and ate Japanese food every day. I don't feel very Brazilian."

In Japan a parallel reality has been unfolding. Nikkei return to Japan for economic opportunity, safety, accessible healthcare, and affordable cost of living. Often, they are influenced by a golden image of Japan passed down from previous generations and are surprised to discover an unfamiliar country. While returning Nikkei have some familiarity with Japan, they report finding Japanese people less informed of the world outside the archipelago, mentioning that classmates assumed Brazilians *"live in the jungle."* Issei returnees found that old friends had become insular, with little curiosity about other cultures. Without common ground, these old relationships withered. Abroad, interviewees are valued for their "Japanese perspective" but in Japan they feel that they are considered unrefined. *"In the U.S., I can be the 'true me', valued as an individual, but in Japan I'm just a trained monkey."*

Instead of rejoining the great Japanese family, many Nikkei find themselves outsiders. Perhaps on realizing they were less Japanese than assumed, their identity re-centered around Brazilianness. The same group of people who were branded 'Japanese' by Brazilian society became 'Brazilian' in Japan.



Interviewees described living in a Brazilian bubble, with Portuguese being the predominant language spoken in school, work, the home, and stores. These communities are often localized, mostly around auto plants in Aichi and Shizuoka, rather than in major cities. Brazilian food, music, and pastimes like football, Carnaval, and BBQing are unifying symbols of Nikkei Brazilian identity that help them "*feel at home*." Far away from their hometowns overseas, Nikkei form surrogate families among neighbors. They describe sharing every experience together: songs, photos, news of the day—both good and bad.

Whether in Japanese or Brazilian ethnic enclaves, Nikkei typically don't grow up with rigid concepts of nationality or border. By osmosis, they acquire multicultural knowledge from both their ethnic community and majority society. Dekasegi Portuguese, a dialect with a generous helping of Japanese words, is the lingua franca for Latin Americans in Japan. Similarly, the Japanese dialect spoken in Brazil borrows tones and vocabulary from Portuguese. Some Nikkei resonate very deeply with both cultures, describing themselves as amphibians. "*I feel neither Brazilian nor Japanese, my nationality depends on the day.*" They have stayed connected to their roots while learning from their adopted countries, acquiring a mix of cultural values from the education system and their life experiences. Some Japanese cultural values mentioned include always returning a lost wallet and never taking shortcuts that compromise the quality of work. Western culture taught the value of free expression, thinking for oneself, enjoying life, and openly sharing with others. Being minorities in both countries, many interviewees try not to judge others because they've been judged themselves and are passionate about accepting differences.

NEITHER JAPANESE NOR BRAZILIAN

As cultural bridges, Nikkei have managed to straddle two different cultures from opposite sides of the planet, and yet are not considered full members in either. "*Nikkei understand Japan better than Brazilians, and Brazil better than Japanese, but we don't fully belong in either of them.*"

One of the downsides to having this bicultural fluency is the challenge of filling in gaps in knowledge of both cultures. Attending a Brazilian school, one interviewee mastered Brazilian history, but has major gaps in Japanese history. This slightly-less-than-perfect cultural competency sometimes has major disadvantages, especially in sensitive areas. Nikkei Americans complain that a lack of fluency in advanced Japanese such as highly formal *keigo* expressions has limited their success in Japan, by causing them to appear uneducated. Sometimes students lack fluency in both languages, causing frustration both at home and the classroom, where in turn parents, teachers, and classmates expect complete bilingual competency. The brother of one interviewee suffers from bipolar disorder and struggles to communicate his experience with Japanese and Brazilian psychiatrists alike. He is currently searching for a bicultural mental health professional who can understand his specific circumstance as a person between cultures. His condition makes it challenging to hold a steady job, but because he is not a Japanese citizen, it's more difficult to get government assistance. He is considering naturalizing as Japanese to get more support.

> **"Nikkei understand Japan better than Brazilians,** and Brazil better than Japanese, but we don't fully belong in either of them."

BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

Education System

Under Japanese law, foreign children living in Japan aren't required to be educated. Many Nikkei children fall through the cracks as overworked parents are less able to monitor their attendance. They are often academically behind their Japanese peers. Parents also struggle with the Japanese language and are unable to tutor them, and remedial Japanese classes vary in quality. Cultural misunderstandings and parent-teacher miscommunication are common. Parents complain about the lack of bicultural and bilingual counselors.

There is also the challenge of navigating an education system infamous for bullying; individuals with a *katakana* name or a mixed-race complexion can be targets. Coming from multicultural countries, the Japanese diaspora feels Nikkei children in Japan are discouraged from speaking other languages or standing out in any way. To fit in, they must deny a large part of who they are. "*In Canada there is more internationalism, kids are free to speak other languages. In Japan, kids are shy to stand out by speaking English. My son likes other foreigners because he can talk to them in English.*"

Xenophobia

Nikkei's understanding of the process of immigration comes from stories

passed down from Issei, or the lived experience of moving to diverse countries with a greater history of multiculturalism. On returning to Japan, many Nikkei expected Japan to have a similar functional openness to what their Issei forebears experienced but have found Japanese wary of anything not Japanese.

"Brazil was open to Japanese immigrants. People tried to talk to them, even if they couldn't speak Portuguese and despite some jokes and racism. But in Japan people are afraid of foreigners—scared of anything different—even Japanese Brazilians."

Japanese culture stresses unity, like a magnet pulling everyone towards the center. Being different goes against this collective identity and associating with foreigners can mark one as different.

"Japan is a xenophobic country. Unlike Brazil and the U.S.—which are composed of immigrants and contain people of all appearances and a mix of many cultures—Japan only opened its borders in the late 1800s due to military pressure. There's a history of violence against foreigners. Foreigners only came recently. It's easy to be racist when you're not used to seeing foreigners."

In the last 20 years, however, with more and more Nikkei able to speak Japanese, Japan is becoming more accepting, fostering communication and cultural exchange.

Segregation by Language

Language barriers make human barriers. Nikkei typically come to Japan for financial gain, working overtime with the goal of returning home after a few years. They mostly find work in places that don't require communication in Japanese. With a busy schedule, they have little free time to invest in language study, and don't require fluency as they can live in a Brazilian enclave. Some Nikkei have been in Japan for 25 years but still can't communicate because all their needs can be met in Portuguese. One city, Homidanchi, is located deep in an industrial area and is almost completely Brazilian. Most services there can be accessed in Portuguese.

Structural segregation in the workplace also hinders language learning. In many factories, Brazilian and Japanese workers use different entrances and work in different wings of the building. They even wear different uniforms, with Brazilian workers wearing the uniforms of their employment agency and Japanese wearing factory uniforms. Not all companies treat Nikkei workers differently, but many do. Without opportunity or necessity to use the language, workers have little incentive to learn it.

Language barriers make human barriers. Some Nikkei have been in Japan for 25 years but still can't communicate because all their needs can be met in Portuguese.

Some cities offer programs to help foreigners, such as translators at city hall, language classes, and public announcements in common immigrant languages. Many Japanese language textbooks emphasize formal, polite Japanese over functional language, but some public servants offer government services in *yasashi nihongo* (easy Japanese). Exposure to English is also helping to provide a common means of communication. However, almost all Nikkei interviewees described language barriers as a major barrier in their life.

Citizenship and belonging

Nikkei find irony in the fact that they are allowed to live in Japan because of their supposed blood connection to Japan, yet face many obstacles to becoming Japanese citizens, including required tests of language fluency beyond that of even native Japanese speakers. Because the Japanese government doesn't recognize dual citizenship, Nikkei are forced to either cut their connection to their overseas roots or remain in Japan as permanent residents without the same benefits as citizens. *"Some interpretations of Japanese citizenship leave little room for multiculturalism."*

One interviewee compared settling in Japan to the Issei experience of settling abroad. *"When my family came to Brazil, they couldn't speak Portuguese and were very poor, but still could immigrate and become part of the country. Japan still has weird rules about who can be a citizen. Some Japanese don't accept foreigners into their family, which is uncommon in Brazil."*

Still from interviewee and artist Amanda Narumi's autobiographical work, Drawing My Life, a story of growing up in a Brazilian ethnic enclave in Japan.

Some Issei became dual citizens before Japan eliminated that option. Despite carrying a Japanese passport, many Issei feel more connected to the political values and culture of their adopted country. After decades in Japan, one interviewee's parents returned to Brazil because they missed the *"easy-going culture."* Although there is some discrimination against Nikkei in Brazil, they still feel more at home there. On the other hand, even after marrying into Japanese families, many Nikkei in Japan say that they never feel fully accepted. Many interviewees said they hope to immigrate to Europe or North America because of the barriers to full citizenship and lack of belonging in Japan.

> ***"When my family came to Brazil,*** *they couldn't speak Portuguese and were very poor, but still could immigrate and become part of the country. Japan still has weird rules about who can be a citizen."*

Mistreatment

Nikkei describe mistreatment by Japanese coworkers, some of whom outrightly refuse all communication, but there is also bullying by other Nikkei for acting overly Japanese. Higher-status Nikkei who can speak Japanese more fluently harass their less fluent colleagues to keep competitors down or even sexually harass female workers. Some interviewees complained that Brazilian areas have more trash on the streets, and many fellow Nikkei don't value Japanese social norms. There are also many positive experiences, however, and great variation in workplace acceptance. If some Nikkei were sick, co-workers offered to take them to the doctor and help fill out forms. On the last day of a work contract, their Japanese colleagues cried. *"We made some money here, but we made friends and family more than money."*

WHAT NIKKEI CAN CONTRIBUTE TO JAPAN

Due to their lived experience abroad, Nikkei are a natural link between two cultures. They can broaden awareness in both societies, creating opportunities for cross-cultural pollination beneficial to Japan.

Nikkei are often vocally passionate about topics Japanese typically avoid discussing publicly, such as politics and religion. Some interviewees intend to become Japanese citizens primarily to obtain voting rights. One enterprising Nikkei claims that *"Japanese society stays as advanced as the preferences of old men."* Others want to stimulate a deeper reflection on life and its meaning through spirituality and religion. Shaking up business leadership is another area of contribution. One Japanese startup founder credits the Nikkei community with teaching him to take risks, value an international team, and challenge the unwritten rules and assumptions that guide Japanese behavior.

Nikkei are the ubiquitous and invisible labor that keeps Japan running. For example, the ready-to-eat meals sold at convenience stores across Japan are often cooked by Nikkei and other immigrants. *"Japanese contributed a lot to the economic development of Brazil and other countries, working on coffee plantations, farming, and building infrastructure. Likewise, Nikkei contribute to Japan's economic vitality."*

Especially compared with Latin Americans, the Japanese are not known for their warmth or emotional openness. Interviewees expressed discomfort with the rigid stoicism and

lack of emotional intelligence in Japan and have worked to reduce the stigma of direct expressions of feelings. *"People in Brazil emotionally help each other. Sometimes you need a hug, need to cry. Japanese aren't open to sharing their feelings—they don't hug, kiss, or hold hands. Nikkei can give affection."* Perhaps due in part to this openness, Nikkei Brazilian suicide rates in Japan are lower than the national average. Nikkei often become impromptu life coaches. Understanding both physical and emotional pain, one Pilates instructor's clients sometimes cry for hours, as a result of finding themselves in an empathetic environment. She often coaches Japanese women to be independent and take charge of their own lives by sharing the wisdom of her international experience. One interviewee mentioned that he goes out of his way to share his culture's food and music, simply because *"Life is not about sadness, but about learning and sharing. Brazil is a 'sunshine country', bringing happiness, coffee, food, samba, and Carnaval. We want to show the good things that all countries have in common."* This forth-right and exuberant connection can help dispel misunderstandings, open minds, and improve Japanese mental health.

JAPAN SHIFTING OPEN

As cultural bridges, Nikkei have helped lay the foundation for Japan to become a more diverse society. Recently, other intercultural exchange through social media, such as the Korean Wave, have also stimulated curiosity and engagement. This increased international contact is gradually opening Japan to the world.

Historically, Japan undergoes rapid cultural change only under duress. After living decades abroad, one Ikkei returnee remarked, *"Japan is still stuck in the Showa era,* (which ended in the late 1980s) *only the surface has changed."* In contrast to superficial changes like fashion, deep cultural change is made only as a last resort. *"Unlike in other countries, some Japanese never change their opinion, even if it hurts them."*

Economic necessity is driving diversity. Many believe that maintaining Japan's current standard of living without any immigration is virtually impossible. The elderly are the majority in Japan, and they vote in lawmakers who maintain the status quo. As one Nikkei reported, *"Despite the international image, Japanese people don't care about efficiency or the tangible benefits of a policy. They don't like change. Instead, Japan is forced to accept immigrants in order to maintain their current levels of prosperity."* Ironically, the retirement and pensions supporting these older generations fuel the economic need for immigrant workers. Accepting immigrants helps Japan avoid catastrophic changes in quality of life.

Nikkei play a profound role in the future of Japan. They force a re-definition of Japanese identity and challenge the myth of Japanese uniformity.

Nikkei play a profound role in the future of Japan. They force a re-definition of Japanese identity and challenge the myth of Japanese uniformity—that all Japanese people share the same genetics, language, culture, and nationality. In the 21st century, a broader and deeper definition of Japaneseness is emerging that is compatible with multiculturalism.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF FUTURE JAPANESE IDENTITY, ACCORDING TO NIKKEI

Japanese identity is not monolithic. It is diverse enough to encompass various sub-groups such as Okinawans and *Hafu*. Other groups could also be included under the Japanese banner. To Nikkei, the core of Japanese identity isn't strictly genetic, but is tied to a lived experience both physical and mental. Is it in the posture of how you hold your body, perhaps earned by many years kneeling on tatami? Is it in listening deeply—to others, to situations, to the seasons? Is it cultural knowledge, such as the *omotenashi* spirit of hospitality? It can't be explained, only lived. *"There is no such thing as a 'Japanese person', only people 'living Japanese culture'."*

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cultural continuity in a time of social disruption

selected poems from *They Never Asked*

Between Train and Troops. Central Photographic File of the War Relocation Authority, Department of the Interior. Courtesy of the National Archives.

The poems presented here were written at the Portland Assembly Center, located on the grounds now occupied by the Portland (Oregon) Expo Center. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 allowed the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) to establish an "Assembly Center" at the Portland Stockyards. Starting in April 1942, Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes to temporarily live in repurposed livestock stalls. In the meantime, larger camps were being built in isolated areas of several states. The poets and their families, as well as the rest of the Assembly Center population, would be confined to camps, primarily in Idaho and Wyoming, for the duration of the war years.

Conditions at the Assembly Center were appalling. The floors had been impregnated with dung from the livestock, and flies were an incessant nuisance. Amid these conditions, the prisoners found that resorting to humor, as well as to certain modes of thought and practice from their native Japan, were a great help in maintaining their morale and their emotional equilibrium.

The poems in this article are taken from a sequence of *senryu-kai* which took place at the Assembly Center between August 8 and August 22 of 1942. Most of the senryu-kai focused on a specific topic (connections, sensibility, habits, suspicion, etc.). Participants would write their own poems on the designated topic, and then bring them to the meeting to share with others. The transcript of these sessions was compiled by one of the participants, Masaki Kinoshita, and likely hidden from the WCCA authorities, because documents written in Japanese were forbidden. The transcript was only discovered in late 2017, among the belongings of his daughter.

The poems presented here illustrate a variety of techniques employed to express their feelings, but also to gain some detachment from their circumstances. We see them venting their anger and anxiety, bonding together over shared experiences, and reminding themselves to accept their situation with equanimity. We also see several types of humor employed, from outright sarcasm to the serene and ironic detachment that is characteristic of the Zen influence in Japanese culture.

Perhaps most importantly, we see the residents learning and teaching each other to draw on the resources of their own unique Japanese culture as they endeavor to maintain a harmonious relationship and persevere within their circumstances, however horrific. Seen in this light, the poems of the Assembly Center represent an inspiring hymn to the triumph of the human spirit.

—Michael Freiling and Shelley Baker-Gard

Santa Anita Lunch Line.
Central Photographic File of the War Relocation Authority, Department of the Interior.
Courtesy of the National Archives.

汽車が出る迄を淋しく笑ひ合ひ
kisha ga deru made wo sabishiku warai ai

melancholy laughter
helps us pass the time
until the train departs

—Kurokawa (Kentsuki)

On the surface, this poem, the first one we encountered as we examined the manuscript, depicts a fairly simple scene. The residents of the Assembly Center are waiting for a train —presumably the one that will take them to permanent camps such as Minidoka in Idaho. But under the surface, there are a host of unanswered questions. What will the new camps be like? Will we be able to stay together, or be separated from each other? The melancholy laughter reveals itself as an attempt to cope with the anxiety latent in the uncertainty of this move.

疑ひのあるなし問はず収容し
utagai no aru nashi to wazu shuuyoushi

they never asked
suspicious or not—
just put us away

—Sen Taro

The title of the book comes from this poem, presented at a session whose topic was "suspicion." It offers a stark contrast to many of the other poems in that session which expressed hopes of being cleared of suspicion after the war. An exasperated Sen Taro feels compelled to point out that "suspicion" was never the real issue, that the official narrative offered to explain Executive Order 9066 was not the whole story. Much darker, unstated forces—greed and racism among them—were also at work.

From the standpoint of the prisoners, they were suffering a terrible and irrational injustice. The "system"—not just the government, but economic and political forces as well—had descended on them with implacable brutality, despite the fact that so many of them had been leading model lives. In fact, it may have been their very prosperity that made them prey to demands that they sell their farms and other possessions (sometimes in just 48 hours). No wonder they were angry.

垣のそと燃ゆるネオンが瞳にしみる
kaki no soto moyuru 'neon' ga me ni shimiru

beyond the barbed wire
a glow of neon lights
stinging my eyes

—Masaki Kinoshita (Jōnan)

The anger continues, as Jōnan vividly captures the frustration resulting from the painful experience of the injustice done to them. Out there, beyond the barbed wire, bright neon lights remind the poet that life continues

almost unchanged for many of their former friends and neighbors. The Japanese Americans have been forgotten. Jōnan's choice of the word *shimiru* is especially evocative here, with its connotations of piercing, penetrating, stabbing, stinging. The very act of witnessing this contradiction is painful to his eyes.

Many poems in the collection express just this sort of anger and frustration. And that naturally leads us to speculate that these senryu-kai might have been playing an important therapeutic role for the prisoners in offering them a "safe space" in which they could vent their feelings in their own native language—incomprehensible to their jailers—without fear of reprisal.

母の髪寫眞に残る二〇三
Haha no kami shashin ni nokoru 'ni-rei-san'

in the picture
mother's hairdo
like Hill 203

—Jōnan

This is perhaps the most complex poem in our collection, and required quite a bit of research to decipher. Hill 203 was actually the scene of a very bloody battle in the Russo-Japanese war which took place in 1904. Think of the horrors of Gettysburg, or Pork Chop Hill, or the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in Crimea. The Japanese commander, General Nogi, was moved to pen his own poem in classical Chinese form:

Hard it was to climb this hill
Men were seeking honor, men made it so
Transformed by blood and iron
All gaze upward now at this mountain
where souls fell like rain

So what's all this got to do with mother's hairdo? One possibility we considered is that it might have been a comment on the impact their disheveled conditions might be having on their personal appearance. But the fact that the hair in question is in a photograph suggests a different interpretation. Women in the 1940s often had elaborate hair arrangements, and the poet may be making a wry insinuation that the hairstyle is just a little bit "too much," poking fun at it with an exaggerated metaphor.
Humor has long been recognized as useful in helping people cope with their circumstances, even when the circumstances themselves are objectively negative. In some cases, it has even been observed to extend life expectancy.

Mrs. Saito's Hairdo.
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In this poem, and in others to follow, we see the Japanese American prisoners using this time-honored technique to cope with their own experience.

But there is more here as well. The story of Hill 203 was taught in Japanese history classes at least up until the advent of the war. So while the reference to Hill 203 might seem hopelessly obscure to us, it represented a common cultural reference to the first-generation immigrants at the Assembly Center. Along with the humor, we see the poet reminding these Japanese Americans of who they are, and making implicit reference to their well-known reputation for bravery and perseverance.

もう聞けぬ酔った機嫌の父の唄
mo kikenu yotta kigen no chichi no uta

no longer heard
the sound of father's
happy drunken songs

—Jōnan

Another means of accommodating to circumstances is to employ the power of memory to bring to mind happier times, escaping for the moment to relive experiences tinged with warmth and happiness. In this poem, Jōnan evokes memories of his father to just such a purpose.

We don't know the context for this poem, and the fact that Jōnan took on many different voices in his poems opens up the question of whether the experience was really his own, or that of another. We do know that he emigrated to the U.S. at the age of 19, and was 46 years old at the time of this writing. If the memories are his own, they likely occurred back in Japan, in his childhood or early youth.

Further, we don't know whether this was actually a happy memory, or if the young Jōnan might have been somewhat embarrassed by his father's songs. In terms of

the poem itself, this almost doesn't matter, because of what we call the "paradox of nostalgia." When we remember events nostalgically, we tend to see them in a bright hazy glow, so to speak, whether or not we found them to be thoroughly enjoyable at the time of the actual experience. We will see Jōnan put this paradox to very good use in the last poem of this article.

無料で見る活動にさへ不平あり
Muryou de miru katsudou ni sae fuhei ari

their free movie —
such generosity
escapes me

—Jōnan

In this poem, Jōnan employs a different form of humor than that of the Hill 203 poem—a biting sarcasm that exposes the pretensions and hypocrisy of their captors. Yet even in its use of irony, the poem is a shade more detached than the poems expressing raw anger that we saw earlier. The prisoners are beginning to come to grips with their emotions, and their situation, displaying an ironic awareness of the insane contradictions of the world they inhabit. And that detached awareness opens up the possibility of transcending them.

初聲に家中ホット安堵する
ubugoe ni iejyuu 'hotto' ando suru

the whole center
when the baby first cries—
sighs with relief

—Jōnan

Research over the last few decades indicates that the formation of affective social bonds enhances the ability to survive, even in stressful situations, and avoid excessive symptoms of trauma later on. In this poem, we see the citizens of the Assembly Center bonding together in their relief and joy upon hearing the cry of a newly born baby.

Life goes on, even here. The depredations of their captors cannot extinguish it. Not only is this poem quite literally life-affirming, it illustrates yet another deep cultural instinct that the Japanese Americans are able to draw on in their quest for psychic survival—their near-legendary ability to come together as a group, feeling and acting as one.

Hisako Saito with Shamisen.
Courtesy of Greg Kozawa, used with permission.

収合所住めば都と云ふ感じ
shuugousho sumeba miyako to iu kanji

starting to feel
perfectly at home
here in the Center

—Hisako Saito (Ryūko)

Hisako Saito (pen name Ryūko) was actually born in Oregon in 1913 but spent 20 years of her early life being educated in Japan. After the war she became an accomplished poet and a leader of the Bara Ginsha poetry group, which had its beginnings in the camp at Minidoka. She was a lifelong friend of Masaki Kinoshita (Jōnan). In this poem, she reminds her comrades of a traditional Japanese saying, "*sumeba miyako*"—drawing on cultural memories of ancient Japan to help them cope with their difficulties.

The translation, "perfectly at home" doesn't really do justice to this phrase, but it's unlikely we would ever find an English equivalent. Literally, the phrase means "if you live there, it is the capital." But the capital being referred to here is not just any old seat of government, it is Miyako—the ancient Heian capital at Kyoto, with its legacy of elegance and grace.

Miyako was where one could witness the glorious leisure pursuits of the Heian court—where every courtier was expected to dress impeccably, as well as display consummate poetic skills. Where messages between ladies and their gentlemen were expressed in tanka verse, much of which was spilled extolling the virtues of Lake Biwa, Mt. Hiei, or nearby Naniwa Bay. Where the *hototogisu* was constantly singing, in contrast to its well-remarked reticence during the Sengoku Period.

It's hard to conceive of cultural memories that would be more uplifting to the incarcerated Japanese—reminding them of who they were and how (with their poetry) they could live well—creating their own Miyako in the midst of the mayhem.

センターで命名札もなつかしい
'senta—' de mei mei fuda mo natsukashii

someday after—
Center name cards just might
become nostalgic

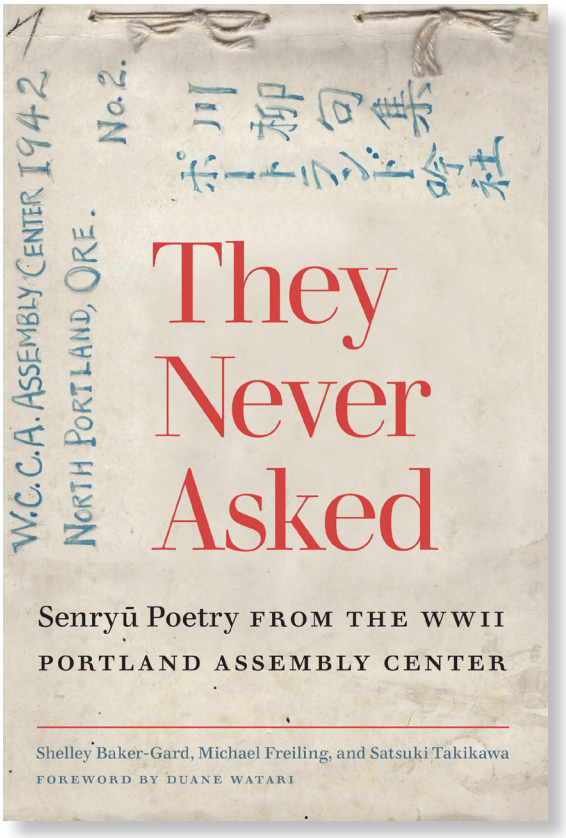
—Jōnan

This final poem in our sequence displays a form of humor that rises to a high level of sophistication. We've already talked about the paradox of nostalgia—that the past events one might pine for in the present might not have been overwhelmingly joyful at the time they took place. Here, Jōnan turns that paradox inside-out by performing a feat of poetic "time travel"—where the future becomes the present, and the present becomes past.

In this mythical future, the citizens of the Assembly Center might even come to feel nostalgic about their incarceration, however much they might be suffering in the moment. In that warm glow of nostalgia, Jōnan invites them to feel—even in the present—a certain appreciation for what they are enduring, and a pride in their ability to endure it.

This poem demonstrates a wisdom that is literally prophetic. The Japanese American Museum of Oregon has a display case containing several of these name cards. Visitors to the museum, especially descendants of the original prisoners, gravitate to this display case to see if they can recognize any of the names that appear on the cards.

This is not the crude humor of the oppressed, or the sarcasm that attends upon a cynical judgment of the situation. Rather, it represents the placid acceptance of a Jōdo Shinshu *obōsan*, or the ironic detachment of a Zen monk. Seen in that light, the poet is once again encouraging his audience to draw on their common cultural heritage to transcend the painful circumstances in which they have found themselves.



Poems from *They Never Asked: Senryū Poetry from the WWII Portland Assembly Center*; Trans. Shelley Baker-Gard, Michael Freiling, and Satsuki Takikawa; OSU Press 2023

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TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOHN BRANDI

beauty askew

the haiku eye

During my late teens, long after my parents gave me enough early ventures into the natural world to set the background for haiku, I was browsing a shop in L.A.'s Chinatown when I found D. T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*, a substantial hardback enhanced with illustrations: a snow-laden peach tree, monkeys peering from bamboo, a cloud-hidden hermit shack, a solitary angler in mist. In the dim clutter of the shop, a cat napped under a lacquered altar set with a cup of tea and two tangerines. On the wall were antique photos of family elders. The world was suddenly very old, and very new. With eager adventure, I purchased the book, the most I'd ever spent on the printed word. As I drifted in and out of many striking passages, a poem by Masaoka Shiki (1869–1902) caught my eye:

among the grasses
an unknown flower
blooming white

As a boy, I had seen that flower in the sunlit grasses above the middle fork of the Kaweah River in California's Sierra Nevada. It was insignificant, nameless. It was everything. As I pressed closer on hands and knees, it was every bit as large as a redwood. Lost in its whiteness, I was inseparable from it. According to Suzuki, I had experienced the "suchness" of the flower, what he called *prajna* intuition (*pra*: before; *jna*: wisdom): a "quick knowing sans analytical thoughts, ideas, and concepts." A moment when observer is one with the observed, receiving it unhindered. No enquiry, no interpretation. No comparing the flower to a star, contrasting it with a redwood tree, or using the apparent loneliness of the flower (how can a flower be lonely?) as

a metaphor for the emotional state of the perceiver. Mind isn't, flower is. Intellectual size-up is residue. Analysis can be done in a laboratory but it shouldn't happen down on all fours in a meadow. Nor should the fingers be busy counting syllables. Haiku has a beat of its own, already counted out before the hand picks up the pen.

Suzuki's take on the person who beholds a flower is that too often there is a gap between the eye and what the eye sees. The human mind relentlessly fills that gap with definition, categorization, empirical analysis—the need to make sense. Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) told his poetry students:

> *Learn about the pine only from the pine, or about the bamboo only from the bamboo. When you see an object, leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself; otherwise you impose yourself on the object, and do not learn.*

As a college freshman, camped in coastal redwood canyons on a semester break, I tried a few haiku, but inevitably the dripping trees said it better. Counting syllables, worried whether the *kigo*—the seasonal word traditional to Japanese haiku—was there, I felt that my haiku were dictated by rules not my own. I was eighteen years old, exploring California's Big Sur coast, hiking the High Sierras, reading *Walden*, entranced by Hokusai's woodblock prints, and charmed by Gary Snyder's rough-cut translations of the eighth-century poet, Han Shan. The language was remarkably fresh. For a kid crazy about the wilderness, it drew me in:

> *Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,*
> *The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on:*
> *The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,*
> *The wide creek, the mist-blurred grass.*
> *The moss is slippery, though there's been no rain*
> *The pine sings, but there's no wind.*
> *Who can leap the world's ties*
> *And sit with me among the white clouds?*

Timidly, I handed my first few attempts at haiku to a writing professor, hoping for some feedback. The professor eventually returned my haiku, suggesting that instead of studying "an over-imitated Japanese pastime," I should consider the European sonnet, the sestina, the villanelle. He even suggested the limerick. I thought it odd that a California kid who got his kicks looking across the sea and imagining the mountains of Japan should be pointed toward Europe. From then on, I decided to hoe my own row and take my cues from non-academic poets writing from real life experience. Sad to say, that professor is still around—in the form of teachers who don't include haiku as a valid experience of poetry. A shame, because everything one should know about writing a long poem is inherent in haiku: brevity, silence, what to leave in, what to do without, the strength of singular imagery, the power of suggestion, the power of "what is" without modifiers or embroidery. One can also listen to *Kind of Blue*. Along with his music, Miles Davis offered his own advice, as wise and immediate as Bashō's dictums:

> *I always listen to what*
> *I can leave out*
>
> *Don't play what's there,*
> *play what's not there*

For a while I gave up writing haiku, though I was aware that prose descriptions in my journal would often break off into three- or four-line snippets that floated on the page by themselves. As for reading haiku, I stuck with it, spurred by the discovery of R. H. Blyth's four-volume *Haiku* in the college library. I was especially drawn to the poets Yosa Buson (1716–1783) and Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827). The way they saw the world complimented my increasing forays out of Los Angeles, up the wind-blasted Big Sur coast. A primeval landscape, it was home to artists like Henry Miller, Robinson Jeffers, Jaime de Angulo, Edward Weston, and Emil White. Fog-shrouded cliffs were charged with

the deep roll of Asian wind. Spring storms turned the air champagne. Sapphire coves glimmered under emerald hills mottled with blue ceanothus and orange poppies. The face of God, I thought. But almost immediately I heard a voice: Find that face in the flower!

One afternoon I was at the easel in the art department when a student stopped by and invited me to a poetry reading in the English department. I wasn't keen on leaving my painting, but when I learned the poet lived in the Big Sur, I set down my brushes. The reading was in a featureless institution-green classroom, but when the poet entered I caught a waft of sea foam and wild fennel. The man, Eric Barker, asked if we were ready "for a walk through creation" and began to read his poems. I didn't quite understand them, but I felt them. I loved the wild imagery and the poet's salty presence: his sunburnt face, faded work shirt, sea-splashed corduroy, leather sandals. When he peppered his reading with stories between the poems, he spoke like a poet; images pulled from thin air matched his craft on the page. He described the work of the night tide, the hazards of solitude, a bath in a cold copper stream. His descriptions of how he lived and where his writing came from pumped my enthusiasm. A cabin in the cliffs above the sea? Getting up at midnight, running out naked to shoo wild peccaries from the cabbage patch? Standing beneath the Milky Way listening to waves pound the rocks, then returning to a lamplit cabin to write a poem? "*This* is a possibility!" I muttered to myself.

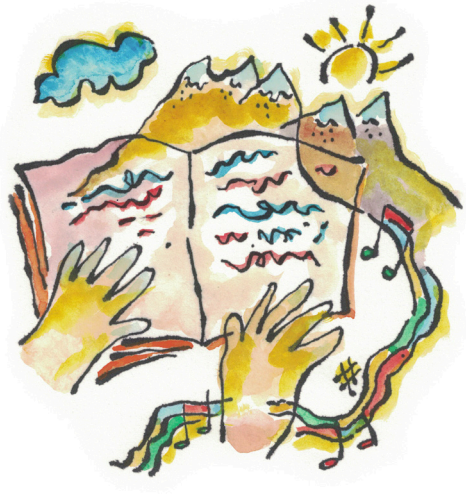
Eric Barker's effect was like a gospel ship rocking into a harbor with all the revelation I needed: that it was okay to come undone, go adrift, bump against sheer walls, drop the net into the unseen. The poet's voice—his cadence, his quavering lilt, his pauses—stayed with me. I felt like a novice musician at The Village Vanguard learning new licks from a master artist. Eric Barker's poems revealed how haiku imagery could work itself into longer poems. And, how a lifestyle embodying utmost simplicity could influence one's work. Henry Miller, who introduced Barker's New Direction's book, *A Ring of Willows*, noted his "Japanese sensibility":

> *Eric is of course not Japanese. Nor is his work modeled on Oriental lines. Perhaps I associate him with the masters of haiku because I see in him the connection between the poet and poetry which is so markedly missing in most modern poets. Eric lives as a poet should live, that is, in a constant state of awareness of the animate and inanimate world about him. He makes no stir, he simply breathes... doing things effortlessly.*

Here indeed was an exception to the academic poet, a man fed by the natural world, living a spare life much like the early Chinese hermit poets who did away with social distractions, moved to the mountains, planted gardens, and prioritized a slow, reflective manner of being in the world. Solitude, for the most, but not without visits to others living similarly: studying the Tao, tilling the mind. In Japan this tradition would develop into the meditative sojourning embraced by Saigyō, Ryōkan, Bashō, Issa, and Santōka—poet monks who took to the road as an act of temporary renunciation, an exercise in solitude, a desire to wander "as helpless as the waves that beat on the shore, and fleeting like the froth that vanishes in a moment," wrote Issa.

Basic human curiosity played a big part in these journeys—the need to witness firsthand, to experience the "down low" reality of farmers, laborers, fisherwomen, merchants, street sweepers, even panhandlers, prostitutes, and thieves. There were literary implications too. Slinging a bundle over one's shoulder and walking into the world was almost certain to provide the sojourner with materials for his poetry. Moments of pause, moments of mystery, moments of doubt and reaffirmation led the poet deeper into introspection, yet trivial everyday events were not to be overlooked. Issa recorded an old woman blowing her nose into the petals of a moonflower. Saigyō, the cry of the first wild geese winging over the mountain. Santōka, the sound of a sad letter being dropped into a mailbox at twilight. Bashō, rolling a big snowball while his friend prepared tea. Ryōkan, sunning a few lice he plucked from his robe, then tucking them back in.

Returning from a journey, Bashō advised his students: "Seek always the truth of beauty but always return to the world of common experience." In the twentieth century, Kerouac followed up with: "Believe in the holy contour of life. Blow as deep as you want to blow. Submissive to everything, open, listening." Beat poets of the 1950s wrote of hitching a thousand miles to have a down-home



conversation with a comrade. David Meltzer recalls the amity he shared with other poets in the 1950s and 1960s: "We didn't need awards or gigs or recompense. Things were cordial, non-competitive. We had each other. We just went out and read. We drank, we listened, we devoured!" Margaret Randall recounts the experience of "vibrant, many layered interactions... through person to person contact." Getting the latest, face to face, in times when word of mouth was paramount.

Probably ten years went by before I began writing haiku again. Two incidents rekindled the flame. First, reading the poems and journal entries of Santōka Taneda, I got to know the "unstructured structure" of his free-form haiku, poems that broke with traditional Japanese rules. I saw how he traveled, kept close to the unfettered lives of common people, and sought not so much to be informed by nature, as to be reformed by it. Second, I met the poet Steve Sanfield, who was living in the Sierra Nevada foothills and writing his own haiku. What was important, he reminded me, was to show the season of the heart, and to realize that haiku needn't clone Japanese predecessors in style or content—much like Whitman's disregarding European influences to embody the rhythms of his new continent.

The lid was off. I no longer had to be Japanese but could write from where I stood, wept, slept, exalted. I could pursue haiku as the spontaneous leap of nature into my consciousness. Or catch myself bumbling in awkward moments of human folly which, when penned, fell into the genre called *senryu*. Kobayashi Issa again became a favorite. Blyth called him "the poet of destiny who moved with the movement of fate." Issa wrote about fleas, mosquitoes, lice, polliwogs—and himself, the clumsy being who ambled among them. He opened up a democratic approach to haiku, took it from literary circles, put it into the hands of the people. Anyone could write it. Priest, farmer, samurai, streetwalker, vagabond, child, grown-up. Caste, gender, age, background, schooling, no-schooling didn't weigh in. Two by Issa:

how lovely
through the torn paper window
—the Milky Way

it begins
from the cicada's song
the gentle breeze

There is a feeling of *sabi* in the first poem, a rustic unpretentiousness coupled with loneliness. The paper window is torn, but there is no complaint. Issa peers through the tear to the beauty of the Milky Way, and in so doing is transported from the poverty of his hut into the elegance of the universe. Small to big. Poor to rich.

The second poem is fascinating in its turn-around. The breeze does not carry the insect's song. Instead, it is borne from the song. It would take textbooks to explain the phenomenon of sound creating movement, not only in the ear, but in the universe. Issa, with only a few words, gives us the mystery and the science. Santōka Taneda (1882-1940) wrote poems in a spirit similar to Issa's:

Finally
both the futon and the night
were long enough.

in the grass
trodden by the horse
flowers in full bloom.

once again
no mail
dragonflies here and there.

The first poem brings a chuckle. Both the length of the night and the length of the bed are at last accommodating. After the chuckle, poignancy creeps in. The poem's bare details reveal much about Santōka's poverty. His life was unadorned, likewise his words. He enjoyed no permanent living quarters or conveniences. As a mendicant, he wandered, often sick and penniless, always between this world and that. Perpetually on the move, it is said that Santōka journeyed over 28,000 miles on foot. Who can be sure? He certainly didn't measure his steps with a pedometer!

Santōka's next two poems indicate season by using the *kigo* "flowers in full bloom" and "dragonflies." In the second poem the flowers endure despite the horse tramping the grass. In nature all goes on without blame. Strength, action, passivity, destruction, creation—they exist simultaneously. The third poem powerfully expresses a contrast between empty and full. There is an absence of mail, nothing to hold or read. Yet life is replete; the nonhuman world is alive and brimming. The poet sees the hovering dragonflies, and human emotion effervesces. The dragonflies are timeless, transparent, and elusive as in a *sumi-e* brush painting.

Another poet in the canon is Chiyo-ni (1703–1775), a student of two of Bashō's pupils. Painter, poet, and Buddhist nun, she remains Japan's most celebrated female haiku poet. As her premier translator, Patricia Donegan notes: "She lived the Way of *Haikai*, appreciating each moment, creating art as part of everyday life . . . And she achieved fame during her lifetime through her intense devotion to her art in an age when women's freedom and creativity were restricted." All of her haiku are remarkable, her morning glory poem being the most famous:

morning glory
wrapped around the well-bucket—
I'll borrow water

The poet wakes, brushes her hair, goes for water, and discovers the well bucket wrapped with a morning glory vine. Instead of removing it, she halts with a realization: this simple flower is an equal in her world. It has found an unexpected home around the bucket, and in her heart. Rather than disturb nature, Chiyo-ni inconveniences herself and borrows water from a neighbor. Her poem paints a picture with hardly a word said, and with no philosophic allusions. Everything is fragile in this transient world. Like the flower, we come, we go.

A similar recognition of life's impermanence is expressed in an Aztec poem:

The body makes a few flowers
then drops away withered
somewhere.

Students looking at modern haiku often ask: "Why does haiku look like it does today? What happened to the rules?" A simple answer, to quote Zen teacher Joko Beck, is: "a good practice is always undermining itself." Continent to continent, culture to culture, language to language, haiku makes itself new as practitioners part ways with rules that suited the Japanese landscape, its language, culture, and seasons. The core ideas of Bashō's time are with us though. Keep it brief, let it jump, follow the natural world through its seasons, but do not forget the seasons of the heart. Harold Henderson and R. H. Blyth provided early translations of classical Japanese haiku into English. Henderson believed "Haiku should be starting points for trains of thoughts and emotions." Blyth saw haiku as a moment of living, sans emotions and subjectivity. Both approaches cause us to consider the haiku practice more deeply. Whichever school you identify with, it's worth remembering what Yogi Berra said about belonging to teams: "What difference does the uniform make? You don't hit with it."

BEAUTY ASKEW: THE HAIKU EYE is an excerpt from John Brandi's latest book, *Luminous Uplift: Landscape & Memory–Selected & New Writings* 1979–2021 (White Pine Press), an essential collection of insightful self-illustrated poetry and essays arising from long-time residency in the mountains of New Mexico and extensive travels in Asia.

JOHN BRANDI was born in Los Angeles, 1943. He received a B.A. from Cal State Northridge, 1965, and joined the Peace Corps. His first poems were published while living in the Andes. Settled in New Mexico, 1971; worked as a poet in rural schools, prisons, urban colleges, the Alaskan outback, Navajo Nation schools: 1973-2020. His many books include: *That Back Road In*; *Reflections in the Lizard's Eye*; *Seeding the Cosmos*; *Water Shining Beyond the Fields*; *The World, the World*; *The Great Unrest*; *The Way to Thorong La*; and *Into the Dream Maze*, a collectors' edition of his hand-colored *haibun*.


vending dreams

Previous page: Moirmoto Keita, 'Before the End'.
Acrylic + oil on linen, 2023

Late night Japan falls into two extremes: intensely neon, roaring with electricity, or high-contrast silence, crisp and polished like a newly chiseled relief. The latter is where you may find yourself late one Kyoto night, drifting home through ancient streets—a little lost, jet-lagged, and ready for something you haven't quite identified, some kind of salve for your wandering body. Suddenly, as you turn a corner, you're met with brazen, gleaming doors, luring you in with the promise of magical and effortless delight: the singular and unmatched Japanese vending machine.

Japan has more vending machines per capita than any other nation by far, one to every twenty-three people by some estimates. Bright and colorful, most have opaque facades that enshrine their hidden mechanics, unlike the clear glass fronts in the West that leave nothing to imagination. You can buy nearly anything from them. The most common offer ice-cold drinks and piping hot coffee, but in a competitive vending landscape, others offer more enterprising and unique options: live beetles, umbrellas, bread in a can, board games, personalized business cards, hot hamburgers, cut flowers, live goldfish, batteries, neckties, cups of sake, dog wigs, cat hats, fresh lettuce, boxes of perfect strawberries, bubble wrap, baked potatoes, as well as items for safe sex and, notoriously, for any kind of sexual kink.

REBECCA FLATO is a Mexican-American designer and sculptor living in San Francisco. She has worked for Donna Karan, Jenna Lyons (J. Crew), Stuart Vevers (Coach) and brands such as Everlane and Madewell. She holds degrees from Parsons School of Design and the University of Missouri-Columbia and studied at the Chelsea College of Art & Design.

The very first vending machine was created by Hero of Alexandria in Roman-controlled Egypt, one hundred years after the death of Cleopatra. The famed engineer and teacher at the Mouseion ("seat of the Muses"), an institution of learning which included the Library of Alexandria, also developed a rudimentary thermometer and the first recorded wind-powered machine. However, his most influential legacy may be his device built to stop the theft of holy water at a local temple. A devotee would place a drachma, the Roman currency, on top of a lever mechanism hidden inside a clay pot which then released the exact amount of holy water purchased. It is unsurprising that Hero's machine was made for a holy place; his inventions embodied a sense of awe, whether powered by wind, gravity, or temperature.

The most common offer ice-cold drinks and piping hot coffee, but in a competitive vending landscape others offer more enterprising and unique options.

It would take the world nearly two millennia to catch up to Hero's invention. It was not until 1883, when the Second Industrial Revolution brought the wonder of steam engines, turbines, and electricity to the world, that a forerunner of our current vending machine was developed. Originally designed to sell stamps and postcards, the speed and convenience that this industrialization promised was encapsulated by these contraptions, and by the end of the century automated dispensation had spread globally.

At first, they were limited to selling gum and cigarettes as users quickly found clever ways to pilfer from these early prototypes. Tying a string to your coin and pulling it back out was an especially popular trick. Iterative

adjustments were made over the next forty years to ensure that they could be trusted with more expensive items. (This is apt considering Hero's original design was installed to stop the theft of holy water.) After WWII, their proliferation was exponential in a world that was rebuilding and making space for the new. Technology was taking humans to space, and new genres of music set the tune for an era that promised bright, Coca-Cola red-colored convenience. Uniquely suited for privacy, vending machines found a niche in Japan beyond mere convenience. A generation of liberated youth looking for more private pleasures—condoms, alcohol, erotica—could purchase them without face-to-face contact. Blending the necessary and convenient with the glamor of the discrete and novel added a layer of intrigue to the already wondrous machine. In a country where the etiquette of interaction is held to the highest of standards, removing the time and effort of formal communication added yet another layer of convenience.

Over the following decades vending machine culture in Japan blossomed and expanded, but has since contracted, many experiments being too niche or high maintenance. Today, in a Kanagawa tire shop half an hour from downtown Tokyo, you can visit the world's largest collection of vending machines, some dating back to the 1960s and still fully functional. Here you can delight in cups of popcorn popped just for you, enjoy made-to-order curry rice that arrives ready to eat on a plate, use a pair of tongs to pull your toasted sandwich from its slot, or even purchase an *omikuji* fortune slip and add it to the thousands already covering the ceiling and walls. The gentle purr of electricity drifts around you as you inspect each row of machines, your eyes racing ahead. You dig through your pockets looking for the aid of financial boundaries to help narrow your choices and hear the clink of change. You step forward and slip in your coins one by one. A short clink and the buttons light up responsively, accepting the offering. Mysterious whirls and clicks begin, and with a swish and a thunk your item is there waiting for you. No thank-you required or judgment on your choice. Worry about messy procedures has been replaced by a touch of wonder—this moment is yours alone to enjoy.

Uniquely suited for privacy, vending machines found a niche in Japan beyond mere convenience.

Elsewhere in the world, ubiquity and accessibility have tarnished the vending machine's reputation. The popularity of pop culture can often render things edgeless—its angles and intrigues, its uniqueness, are sanded down for a wider audience and fall on the trash heap of past trends. But the vending machine in Japan transgresses its domain, the rare popular item that has become its own form of small individual subversion. This may be why you find so many foreign tourists along with locals at the Kanagawa tire shop, excited to try a vending machine hamburger. Though there are machines everywhere, they don't feel like these.

In Shinto belief, gods can be found in places that inspire awe and wonder. Even the walls of a vending machine tourist destination are covered with the omikuji of previous visitors, as you might see at a Japanese shrine. It's a reminder of Hero and his machine 2,000 years ago at the temple in ancient Alexandria... All this history is forgotten on your late-night wander in Kyoto, when you find yourself suddenly standing in that pleasant glow. You slip in your coins and walk on through the night, holding your moment of joy.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ラベルが
リストバンドに!


24hr
HOT M
CASUAL FROZEN
お好み焼きバー
たこ焼き
から揚げチキン
韓火焼炒飯
ホットドッグ
フライドポテト
焼おにぎり
焼おにぎり
塩ぶしえだまめ
"出来上り"まで
あと


悪魔のホットソース
SRIRACHA


WONDA
WONDERFUL COFFEE


缶の実
焼プリン(ややかため)
自販機 の書
お求めください。
1個 ¥300


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(株)豊田商店
ご飯のお供やお酒の肴に
相性バツグン!
まろやか明太子
プチプチの食感とピリ辛で
風味豊かな味わいが魅力


SHAMPOO VENDING MACHINE
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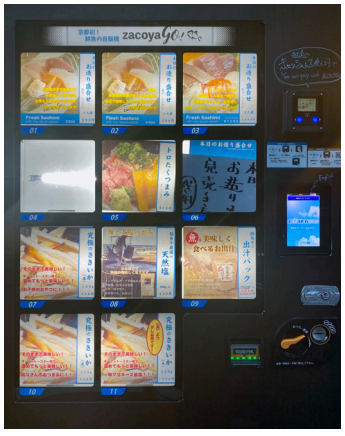
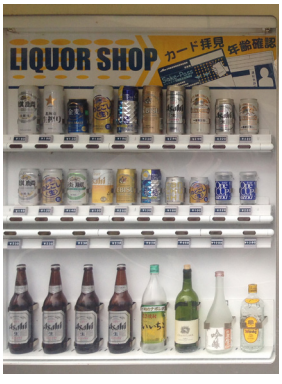
CONFIDANTE FOR DOG


24 taspo


HAKATA ICHIBANDORI
冷凍厳選グルメ自販機
炭火
やきとり
逆さマーホ
じっくり、ていねいに
焼き上げました
博多一番どり
屋台家
あらい


冷凍粉好み焼
京都
あうた





Above from top left: sashimi, ponzu, sriracha, coffee beans, gyoza, gourmet food, fresh-squeezed orange juice, alcohol (beer, sake, shochu, wine, whiskey).

Previous page from top left: cookie dough, soft drinks, hot meals, sriracha, beer, pudding, kimchi, dog shampoo, cigarettes, yakitori, soft drinks, okonomiyaki.

Photos: Lane Diko, Pete Glover, Alex Mankiewicz

pokémon gogh

Few outside cultures have influenced the Western visual canon more than the traditional arts of Japan; while arguably no other country has absorbed more Western popular fodder into its own. In a mere 150 years, the two-way exchange has significantly changed the course of both Western art and Japan. However, which hybrid most captivates global public attention continues to shift.

In 1858, after centuries of self-imposed isolation, Japan opened her borders to European and American trading ships. From that moment what flowed both ways across the oceans was not only commerce, but art. Ceramics, textiles, and prints arrived in France and Britain, sparking public crazes for all things Japanese and inspiring a generation of artists seeking a new approach, one that departed from entrenched academic rules of depiction. The resulting movement came to be known collectively as *Japonisme* and among its most well-known proponents were Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, James McNeil Whistler, and of course, Vincent van Gogh, who was deeply influenced by the perspective, cropping, colour, and rendering of nature he saw in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints.

Van Gogh first encountered the style of the prints via illustrated newspapers, but he soon found the real thing in Parisian shops, notably *La Porte Chinoise*. He even organised an exhibition in 1887. Indeed, after ditching the grey sombre tones of his early paintings, for the rest of his life van Gogh attributed his approach fundamentally to Japanese art. He wrote to his brother, Theo, in 1888:

[W]e wouldn't be able to study Japanese art, it seems to me, without becoming much happier and more cheerful, and it makes us return to nature, despite our education and our work in a world of convention.

Regrettably, in the end that study did not make him happy enough.

Although *Japonisme* generally refers to Western artists influenced by Japan, the exchange was mutual. Japanese artists settled in Paris and engaged with subject matter drawn from the industrial silhouettes and overt social freedoms that arose at the start of the 20th century. Nevertheless, as these artists sought to master new materials and techniques, the resulting work was often imitative rather than transformational. One notable exception was Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita, who successfully merged Eastern sensibility and training with Western methods and imagery. Back in Tokyo, woodblock print publishers diverged from the classical ukiyo-e style by hiring Western artists residing in Japan to create a new genre, *shin-hanga*. These artists added elements of Impressionism's use of light and brushstrokes to images of classical Japanese scenes, thus completing the cycle of influence.

> **Finally this autumn** homage and transformation came full circle when Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum, to celebrate its 50th anniversary, announced a collaborative exhibition with Nintendo.

However, in the reciprocal exchange there was one crucial difference: the way resulting works were viewed and accepted. Ukiyo-e was always considered art for the masses in Japan and so the shin-hanga movement, despite the European infusion, continued to be viewed as low art, whereas Western paintings inspired by Hokusai, Utamaro, and their contemporaries went on to become some of the most highly-valued art of all time.

By the 1930s, styles had travelled back and forth enough that foreign craftsmanship had less ground-shifting impact on respective domestic cultural trends, and then World War II firmly interrupted further communication. The free flow of art and design between Japan and the West only fully resumed in the 1960s, led by animation (and to a small degree, manga, which itself was the result of Western newspaper comics' popularity in 1920s Japan). Disney and *Astro Boy*, *Speed Racer* and

Godzilla all figured in childhoods of the period, yet Japan was largely considered a source of cheap electronics, not must-have collectibles. That is until the late 1990s when a modern Great Wave hit Western schoolyards with the arrival of Pokémon.

Pokémon was originally released by the Kyoto company Nintendo as a video game for its Game Boy console, but the franchise took off with the introduction of the trading cards. One hundred years after Nintendo was founded to produce *hanafuda* playing cards for a popular centuries-old game, its trading cards featuring 'pocket monsters' who battle each other sparked a worldwide craze—one that would also spark futile backlash from parents who watched their children turn into playground black marketeers. For two decades, a savvy flow of anime and fresh card series kept the yellow hero Pikachu and his brethren at the forefront of Japan's new cultural cachet; and with the augmented reality Pokémon Go game of 2017, adults were also firmly brought into the fold. Films, TV series, video games, and toys—Pokémon was ubiquitous. Culturally there remained just one area left to infiltrate, one that amid an increasingly saturated media landscape was struggling for both visibility and the bottom line: high art. Pokémon pounced.

It's no surprise that the first successful cross-promotion and integration between cartoons and fine art was instigated by a Japanese company. Aesthetic mash-ups of cartoonish renderings and serious topics have long been visually and conceptually accepted and employed in Japan, not least for practical messaging. Nor is there a snobbish bias against 'childish' merchandise—many a salaryman has harboured a *Hello Kitty* pencil box in their briefcase. Museums endorsing the mix, however, is relatively new. Yet they have embraced Pokémon enthusiastically—in a way Disney has not been. (Mickey and his ilk, if anything, are appropriated worldwide for ironic critique of capitalism.)

In 2018, in conjunction with an important Edvard Munch exhibition, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum released a series of cards showing Pokémon characters enacting the famous *Scream*.

More recently, in July 2023 the Los Angeles Japan House hosted Pokémon x Kogei, a show that invited renowned Japanese crafts artists to create work blending centuries-old techniques and a Pokémon character. Points of intersection cited were use of the elements—i.e. fire, water, metal etc.—and the time it takes to develop mastery. Finally this autumn homage and transformation came full circle when Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum, to celebrate its 50th anniversary, announced a collabrative exhibition with Nintendo. Paintings of Pikachu and other monsters that referenced van Gogh's most famous works (including Sunflora running through what else but a field of sunflowers?) were displayed in the galleries. According to the museum, the show was inspired by Vincent's thoughts on Japanese art in the letter to his brother. And the sold-out crowds were indeed happy and cheered by what they saw, so much so that the gift shop was overrun, stripped bare, and some merchandise had to be placed exclusively online. Perhaps the impoverished van Gogh would have been wiser to have focussed on a further observation:

I envy the Japanese the extreme clarity that everything in their work has. It's never dull, and never appears to be done too hastily. Their work is as simple as breathing, and they do a figure with a few confident strokes with the same ease as if it was as simple as buttoning your waistcoat. Ah, I must manage to do a figure with a few strokes.

Photos by Lane Diko

DAVID BOWIE *and the* garden of Shoden-ji

NATHAN MADER

If you ask Wikipedia, *the* haibun *is a Japanese literary form in which autobiography, diary, and/or travel journal is interwoven with a series of haiku. It was first made famous by Matsuo Basho's Edo period masterwork* Narrow Road to the Deep North. *If you ask the ghost of Emily Dickinson, she might say that the* haibun *is a house with painted screens inside it.*

It feels like the first day of summer in Kyoto—even though it's barely spring—now that the cherry blossoms have come and gone and the trees have fully burst into leaf. My friend Pete and I are riding our bicycles along the Kamo River out to Shoden-ji, a temple rumored to be one of David Bowie's favorite places. According to various local websites, Bowie came here in 1979 to shoot a commercial for Jun Shochu, a brand of alcohol trying to improve its numbers with the younger demographic. The director was at a loss as to where to shoot the ad, so Bowie suggested the raked gravel and azaleas in the Zen garden of Shoden-ji, which he'd seen during one of his many previous visits to Japan. In what has the ring of the kind of legends that grow around brief encounters with famous people, one of the crew members later said Bowie shed tears when he first looked out over the garden on the day of the shoot.

> *Once there were mountains*
> *on mountains | And once there were*
> *sunbirds to soar with*
> (Bowie, 'Station to Station')

The temple's tucked away at the edge of the woods in Kyoto's north ward, and Pete and I have to walk our bikes through a hillside graveyard and up an incline. It's the second month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, so we inevitably talk about what might come next. I tell him about F—, a friend from Russia living here who told me about how she watched first-hand the police violence against protesters in Moscow, how no one she knows likes Putin, except for her grandfather. Partly because of their very distinctive cultures, and partly because of the fact that Japan is an island, it can be easy to forget that Russia is a neighboring country.

> This hornet hovers
> inside its own sound the way
> a war holds its ground.

We leave the bikes behind, put our Covid masks back on, and walk up the seemingly endless stone steps to the small wooden entrance gate, but nobody's there. Soon an elderly woman in gardening clothes appears from somewhere out back, apologizing for deserting her post. I ask her for two tickets and try to engage in small talk about the weather. Pete gently corrects some of my Japanese grammar as we take off our shoes, and I keep thinking about being fourteen.

About how when I heard Bowie say the word "bisexual" it was the first time I heard the word that held the wordless thing I'd felt my whole life in the mouth of someone with the power to cut through the culture. The interviewer asked if Bowie loved both men and women and he said *Yes. I've said I'm bisexual*. When she asked if that meant he was hiding his true sexuality, Bowie sternly said, *I've already answered the question*. Bowie taught me that bisexuality is not to see the world as binary, but to dwell in a desire that refuses to be defined—this is also my experience of poetry.

Dickinson: *I dwell*
in possibility—A
fairer house than prose—

When we arrive at the veranda overlooking the garden, our eyes are immediately drawn upwards to its overhanging ceiling. The boards were once the floor of Fushimi Castle, and they still contain the red streaks and blood-stained handprints left by the many men who dragged themselves across the floor when they committed *seppuku* after their leader was beheaded, their castle surrounded and set aflame. In the 17th century, the Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, distributed the boards to five temples across Kyoto to appease their ghosts. Sitting beneath the boards, we look out towards the garden, out towards the space where Bowie sat over forty years ago. Beyond the white wall at the edge of the stones is a clear view of Mount Hiei, enhancing the humble, though elegant, space with what garden aficionados call "borrowed scenery."

Sudden silence. *Shoji*
shift in the breeze. A warbler's
song. A Weedwacker.

Ghosts. Before coming to Kyoto in 1979, Bowie had just buried his five personas in a still-divided Berlin as he tried to wean himself off the coke habit that was killing him. Transitioning from *Lodger*, the last album of his so-called Berlin Trilogy, to the more pop-centric *Scary Monsters*, he was still fashioning the mask made of his own face that would emerge on *Let's Dance*, the album that brought him back to the top of the charts while signaling the start of his dissatisfaction with himself as an artist throughout the 80s—though some regard the albums he produced in this period as among his best. In the version of the ad I found on YouTube, Bowie's white silk blouse absorbs the light as a single wavering synth chord gives expression to his expressionless gaze.

Ripples of gravel—
a still life of memory's
radio static.

We pass beneath the crimson handprints on the ceiling and enter the interior of the small temple. Inside, there are a series of *fusuma*—painted screens on sliding doors—around a central altar that houses a small bronze Buddha, and the scent of centuries of incense hangs in the air. Sandalwood. Pine. Time. I slip a 5-yen coin into the offering box and hold a concentrated silence that feels like a prayer. *If you say run / I'll run with you / and if you say hide / we'll hide* ('Let's Dance'). One of the *fusuma* has faded four-hundred-year-old paintings by Kano Sanraku sprawling across it. In the late 16th century, Sanraku entered the service of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of the "great unifiers" of Japan, and rose to prominence in his court. When Tokogawa Ieyasu seized power, the artist changed his name to avoid punishment for his loyalty to the previous regime and in his exile from the court ended up painting for several smaller temples in the wooded outskirts of Kyoto, including Shoden-ji. In and on the off-white, smoke-damaged surface of a painting just above the tatami floor, there's an empty field ringed by black reeds with a network of barely visible brushstrokes emanating from its center.

On this bridge between
us and the vanishing point:
two people, one ox.

—April 22, 2022

NATHAN MADER is from Saskatchewan and lives in Kyoto. Recent poems have appeared in *The Fiddlehead, Plenitude, The Antigonish Review,* and *Grain*. He was in *The Best Canadian Poetry 2018* (Tightrope Books) and has been a finalist for the Walrus Poetry Prize. *The Endless Animal,* his first full-length collection, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fine Period Press.

Of Rams and Japan

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

I kick memory
and it does not soar through the air
or roll down a hill
in Kyoto
where I've never been.
How soft the skin of the plum blossom.
How purple the sky
at sunset. See
Kawabata.

I bought the netsuke
of two rams
even before my brother said
buy something beautiful
when you're sad.

The ram
was my father's sign.
And my youngest son's.
They never met, locked
horns.

Tears are what I get
for kicking memory.
So many thoughts are born again.
The sky is gray with freezing rain.

In Kyoto,
where I've never been,
scores of temple bells ring out
on New Year's Eve
one hundred eight times.

What must it be like
to hear such a tidal wave of sound,
the beauty in the bronze
reverberations
hanging on and on.

ELISABETH MURAWSKI is the author of *Heiress, Zorba's Daughter* (May Swenson Poetry Award), *Moon and Mercury,* and three chapbooks. *Still Life with Timex* won the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize. A native of Chicago, she currently lives in Alexandria, Viginia, USA.

Woken by a Huge Moon
(Renga sequence)

Camping in the old chalk quarry
It's too cold!
The crow calls

Plant a copper beech hedge, she said
its leaves last longest

Walking on the tops in thick fog, hard rain
a sliver of chalk, the path keeps him safe
on this, the shortest day

High tide and light floods the meadow
the sea is in the river

Woken by a huge moon
he feels his frozen breath—
ice crystals on the pillow

Snow reaches the city
makes children of us all

No gathering, take the long view
and the present moment
will catch your heart wide open

Wild Spanish Iris
beside the Upper Spring

In the shadow of the mountain
the dark surface of the pond
jewelled with frogspawn

Dozens of faces cover the screen
desperate to connect

A streak of yellow appears on green
then another and another and another
A bright emergence bursts open

Fiona and Subhadassi, two poets and freelance artists working in collaboration on a wide range of projects in the U.K., have been inspired by Japanese culture and poetry to create renga events and to write together in this form. Subhadassi is a Buddhist and through his Buddhist practice has been connected to Japanese culture for many years. Fiona worked in Japan on a range of theatre-based projects from 2000-2010. In 2012 Fiona and Subhadassi collaborated with Satsuki Yoshino to create an international collaboration between young people in the U.K. and in Japan, Renga Exchange, *generously supported by the Sasakawa Foundation. Subhadassi visited Japan and participated in and led renga sessions alongside Japanese poets and translators. The school groups worked together at long distance to create a renga-inspired collaborative poem.*

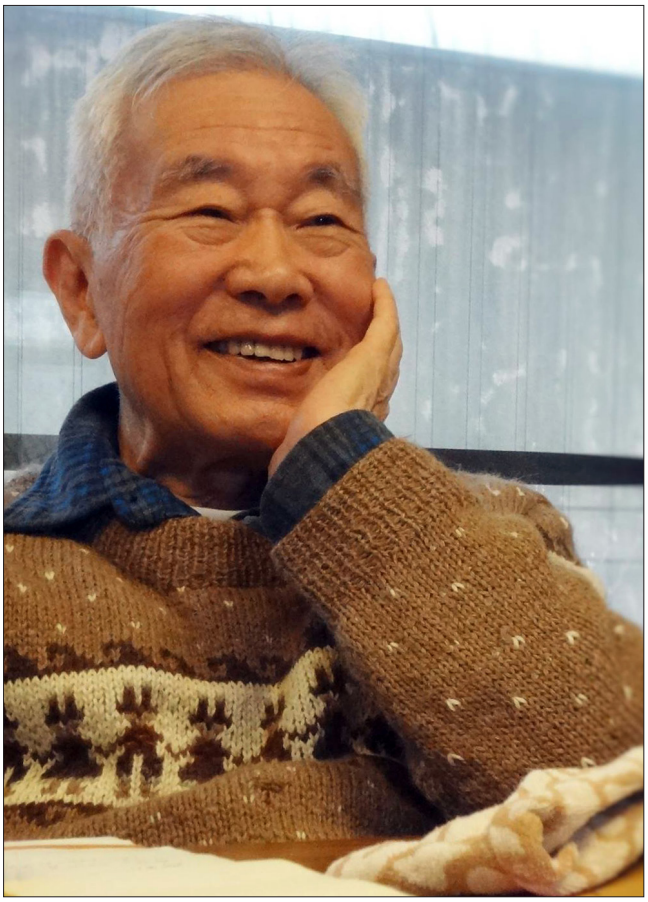
FIONA BENNETT is a writer, director and facilitator. She is founder of the award-winning project and podcast The Poetry Exchange. Her poems have been published in journals in the U.K. and U.S.A. including *The Rialto* and the *San Pedro River Review* and listed in competitions including the 2022 National Poetry Competition and The Bridport Prize. She has an MA (distinction) in poetry from The Poetry School / Newcastle University. She curated and directed the poetry of Adrienne Rich for Ballet Black's *Then or Now* at The Barbican, choreographed by William Tuckett.

SUBHADASSI is a writer, artist and facilitator. His poetry has been published widely and his collection *Peeled* is published by Arc Publications. He has an MA in creative writing from Goldsmiths College, University of the Arts, London. He currently works as ethics convenor for the Triratana Buddhist Order.

Katagiri Yuzuru

poet and translator of Dylan and Ginsberg

JOHN WELLS



WORDS

words.....seeds
scattered to the four corners of the universe
in hundreds and thousands
never sprouting

but sometimes
a seed
takes root in somebody's heart
what flower will blossom?

Kyoto Review #8, 1976

Katagiri Yuzuru, Japanese poet and professor emeritus of Kyoto Seika University, passed away October 6th, 2023 in Kyoto, Japan at the age of 92. Yuzuru was one of the first people I met as an exchange student in Japan thirty years ago at Kyoto Seika University, and we remained close friends until the end, working together on many media projects and engaging in fascinating conversations about art, films, and poetry.

Yuzuru was a scholar of semantics and received his master's degree in English literature at Waseda University in Tokyo. He was an active member of the Kansai folk movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, publishing a mini newspaper about folk music and creating alternative distribution systems of audio recordings to put them into circulation and avoid censorship. He was active with Nakayama Yo, Nakamura Satoshi, Yamashita Kayo, and other poets in the early days of the Kyoto coffee shop Honyarado which became a hub of the counter-culture movement and a gathering place for international poets, scholars and students.

Poetry readings by Yuzuru recorded at Honyarado in the early 1970s, along with poets Arima Takashi and Akiyama Motoo, are featured on the record (and CD) *Honyarado no shijintachi*. In 1971 Yuzuru, Tamura Ryuichi, and Tanikawa Shuntaro read their poetry at New York's Guggenheim Museum, translated by Gary Snyder and Harold Wright, my teacher who first brought me to Japan. Along with

Yuzuru

Yuzuru piles sugar onto his cereal
and into his coffee as snow is piled on Mount Fuji.
Every day, though there is a choice for dinner,
he chooses fish ("something from the sea")
and a lot of coffee with a lot of sugar.
He eats his favorite part of a food first.
When he was a child, the adults were always talking
about the Great Earthquake.
It occurred as people were sitting down to their lunches
and they never got to eat.

Quiet, impassive, peaceful behind his "language problem"
he says yes to everything, consuming potatoes, rolls,
the more mysterious parts of lobsters from other people's plates
No napkin is used, even on lobster night --
"Japanese children are not supposed to dirty themselves."

Walking quietly through the woods
on the rugged windward side of the island,
he wears only slippers on his feet
and a little white sailor hat, rim down.
In town he dresses the same way and walks the same way,
as if still surrounded by pine trees and sea air.

At the little dock, perhaps the busiest in the world,
where all food, all people, all supplies, all communications,
all love are frantically exchanged two times each day,
he simply holds me lightly, long, with no movement,
creating the stillness of deep black water.

As one stalking what there is, he is always part of the landscape.
Always coming or going, he is never really there.
As he passes up the hill outside my window,
he sees me through the screen and greets me.
He is the only one who ever has.

Karen Hollander

A page from *Kyoto Review 23,* Spring 1990

photo by Sano Masaaki

Counter-cultural Kyotoites still have vivid memories of Yuzuru reading with Allen Ginsberg at Kyoto University's Seibu Kōdō hall in November 1988—an epic event attended by an over-capacity audience. Even with a temporary mezzanine constructed for additional seating, the hushed and enthralled audience spilled onto the stage where Yuzuru and Allen shared a single spotlight. During his visit, Ginsberg also gave a talk at Kyoto Seika on 'What the East Means to Me', with lively interpretation by Yuzuru—yet another of his important contributions to interculturality.

Nakayama Yo he translated Bob Dylan's lyrics into Japanese, which have appeared in records, CDs, and a book of Dylan's complete works published first in 1974 and later in 1993. At Seika, he founded and co-edited the *Kyoto Review*, an English-language literary magazine that provided valuable insights into Japanese contemporary trends.

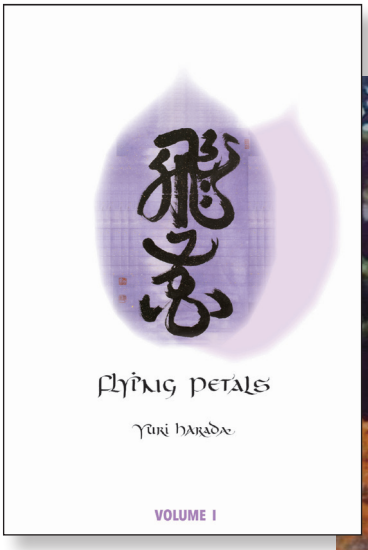
Yuzuru taught Japanese at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio in the late 1980s, some years before I was a student there. Harold Wright and Yuzuru had arranged an academic exchange for a year; this connection led to the now defunct Antioch and Kyoto Seika student exchange and fieldwork program which brought me to Japan. (During Harold's time in Kyoto he read at the Kyoto Connection monthly open mike performance event, and his poetry and translations appeared in *Kyoto Journal*). Yuzuru often told me how much he loved being at Antioch; it was one of the happiest memories of his life.

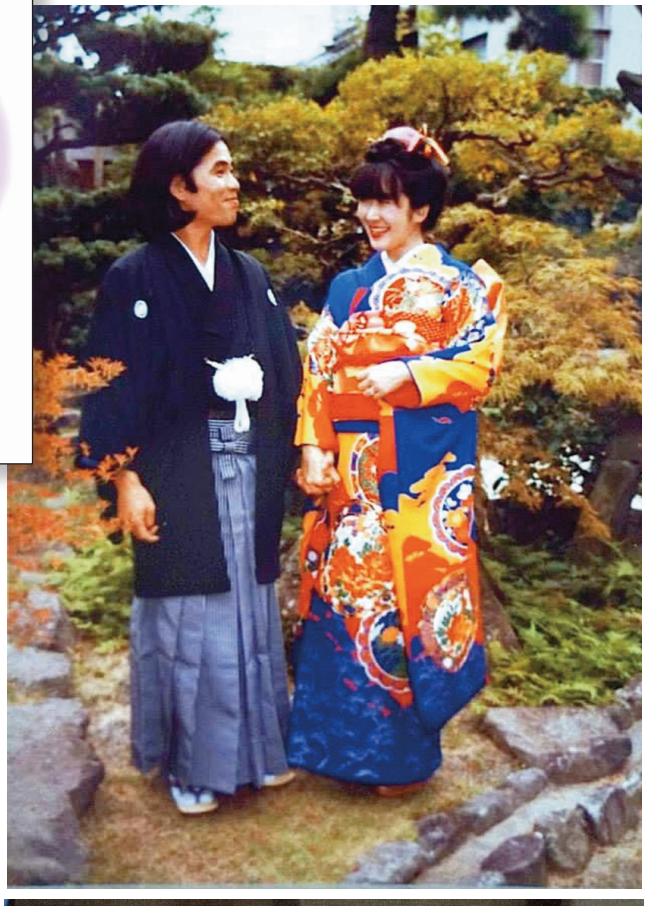
Yuzuru was a teacher of the Graded Direct Method (GDM) of language learning and the Alexander Technique of mind/body self-care. I worked with him as a filmmaker for more than 25 years, helping make films he produced related to GDM, based on the books and films of I.A. Richards at Harvard in the 1950s. Yuzuru also produced several documentaries that I shot and edited about Alexander Technique.

JOHN WELLS (Can Tamura) is an artist, filmmaker, and audiovisual anthropologist based in Kanazawa, Japan. Working primarily in Japan, Mongolia, and Türkiye, he makes experimental documentary films that explore the intersection between ethnographic film and art. He was a participating artist in Oku-Noto Triennale 2020+ and Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2022. In 2021 he co-curated 'Hybrid Culture,' a group exhibition of Mongolian public media art held in Ulaanbaatar, Kanazawa, and Kyoto.

Creating Connections Through Culture

A tribute to Harada Shokei and his father, Harada Kampo





From upper left, clockwise: Cover, *Flying Petals*; Shokei and Yuri, wedding, 1984; Shokei and Kampo editing a video in the studio

Back in 1986, a small group of writers were meeting on a monthly basis at John Einarsen's house in Kyoto to share mostly poetry. When late-night conversations turned to pooling our talents to start up a non-profit magazine, we considered self-funding but had no clear business plan. Fortuitously John soon received an introduction to Harada Shokei, head of the Heian Bunka Center, which published textbooks for his father Harada Kampo's hugely successful Japan-wide calligraphy school.

To pitch our aspirational proposal to what we assumed was a mainstay of the conservative Kyoto establishment, John put on an uncharacteristic suit and necktie before visiting the Kampo office. He recalls total surprise at first sight of Shokei's shoulder-length hair, jeans and cowboy boots. Within minutes Shokei agreed to sponsor production of *Kyoto Journal*, an act of great generosity that eventually covered our expenses for a full 75 issues, for 23 years from 1987 to 2010.

Without Shokei's assistance, it is very unlikely indeed that *Kyoto Journal* would have ever become the evolving forum and creative showcase that it is now recognized as, a publication spanning 36 years now, still counting. This is just one example of the massive ongoing contribution that Shokei, Kampo Harada and Heian Bunka Center made to support cultural initiatives and international exchange ("connecting people through culture") around the world. It is worth noting that Japan's Cultural Affairs Agency is currently in the process of proposing to UNESCO the addition of Japanese calligraphy to the organization's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

As a tribute to Shokei, who passed on in 2014, and the intercultural vision that he shared so strongly with his father, his wife Yuri recently published a 416-page limited-edition compilation of recollections, historical photos and other memorabilia, titled *Flying Petals*, as part one of a two-volume set (hoping to publish the sequel in April 2024). Her book traces Shokei's wide-ranging travels, especially in the Himalayas, and times they spent together in Nepal, India and the U.S., along with a compelling history of Kampo Harada's development as a traditional-style master calligrapher, and his tireless dedication to cultural internationalization.

Without Shokei's assistance, it is very unlikely indeed that *Kyoto Journal* would have ever become the evolving forum and creative showcase that it is now recognized as, a publication spanning 36 years now, still counting.

Key points in Kampo Harada's timeline include saving numerous calligraphic treasures in China from destruction in the early 1960s, visiting America for the first time in 1971, establishing a six-story cultural center in New York's Bond Street in the mid 1970s, and tours giving demonstrations and exhibitions in Mexico, Nepal, Israel, the U.K., the U.S.S.R., Ukraine and other countries, along with building study centers and museums in Japan for the benefit of his school's multitude of students.

Newly-renovated Kampo Cultural Center, Bond Street, New York

Beyond its impressive displays of superb calligraphy, the Kampo Museum in Shiga, close by Kyoto, is notable for its priceless examples of Chinese artefacts including a room where the Emperor carried out state business in an actual Imperial villa during the Qing Dynasty, replicas of historical steles from the Beilin Museum in X'ian, and a very rare 1,500-year-old bronze drum. Kampo also funded construction of a large-scale International Youth Center in Kuala Lumpur, opened in 1988. With Shokei and a film crew, he travelled twice around the world including remote outposts on the Silk Road, to make the documentary *Going Afar on the Wind*.

Shokei's keen interest in the spiritual dimensions of local cultures (including those of Nepal, Tibet, New Guinea, and indigenous Australia) was matched by a lifelong devotion to music, both as a musician and producer.

Shokei was integral to the realization of his father's many projects, while his own initiatives included setting up a recording studio for next-generation musicians in Kathmandu, support for the Ngor Thartse Ladrang Monastery in India, and helping craftspeople to continue creating traditional gold-plated bronze Buddhist sculptures in Nepal (see "Spirit from Fire," KJ 66). His keen interest in the spiritual dimensions of local cultures (including those of Nepal, Tibet, New Guinea, and indigenous Australia) was matched by a lifelong devotion to music, both as a musician and producer. His fully-professional recording studio in KCC New York was used by musicians such as Alicia Keyes, David Byrne (Talking Heads), Billy Joel, Deborah Harry (Blondie), Brian Eno, and a Grammy Award-winnng producer, Pat Dillett. Yoko Ono often visited Pat at KCC. Shokei also had a highly-reputed studio in Kyoto.

Flying Petals is a wonderful record of unique lives lived well, benefitting countless others along the way.

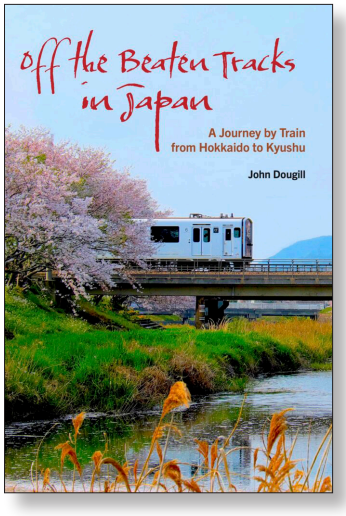
All Aboard: Off the Rails in Rural Japan

***Off the Beaten Tracks in Japan: A Journey by Train from Hokkaido to Kyushu* by John Dougill. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press. 308 pp., $19.95 (paper).**

In the preface to *Off the Beaten Tracks in Japan*, John Dougill, a long-time Japan resident and author of several books about Japan, such as *Kyoto: A Cultural History* and *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians*, talks about influences on his account of his train journey from north to south. Dougill references many of Japan's preeminent foreign writers from the past such as Lafcadio Hearn and Isabella Bird as well as the more recent ones who also did the north-to-south route, such as Alan Booth, who walked from the tip of Hokkaido to the bottom of Kyushu and recounted his journey in his seminal *The Roads to Sata,* as well as the excursion of Will Ferguson, who did the journey while hitchhiking following the cherry blossoms from north to south in *Hokkaido Highway Blues*. Dougill references these two authors' impressions throughout the book.

The length of the archipelago produces different climates, and thus different cultures and regional food specialties. Most chapters are a stop on the journey and each section closes with "On Track," a note about the train station and the train lines used to get there, and what the next stop will be on the route.

The starting point for the journey is Wakkanai in Hokkaido, the city which contains Japan's northernmost point, a spot from which the Russian island of Sakhalin is visible. Dougill tells us how Canadian Ranald MacDonald convinced a whaling captain to abandon him not far from Wakkanai, on Rishiri Island in 1848 where imprisonment or death awaited



intruders during Japan's self-imposed isolation. MacDonald was transferred to Nagasaki where he became the first English teacher to twelve samurai.

Asashikawa, Hokkaido's second-largest city, is the point from which Dougill ascends Mt. Asahi, the tallest mountain in Hokkaido. From the summit, he enjoys a magnificent view of the countryside. Then onto Sapporo, which is known for its myriad of food options from seafood to the *Jingisukan to* miso ramen. All of these gustatory delights are discussed at length. Next, while in Otaru, Dougill muses on discriminatory rules such as the one that prevented foreigners from using the public baths in Otaru in the 90s. Shiraori is where he visits an Ainu museum which gives him a chance to discuss the history and legacy of the original inhabitants of Hokkaido, the Ainu, whose culture is almost extinct.

Next on the itinerary is Hakodate, one of the four ports (alongside Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama) that first opened to the outside world. This visit allows Dougill to ruminate on Japanese attitudes toward foreigners. Some view foreigners as troublesome, as they may struggle to adhere to the strict rules of Japanese society and behavior.

The first stop Dougill makes after crossing from Hokkaido under the Strait of Tsuguru is in Aomori, known for its apples and the elaborate floats of the Nebuta summer festival. Dougill uses his visit to Sanmai-Maruyama, the World Heritage historical site of a former Jomon settlement, to introduce that long-ago part of Japanese history. The next stop, Akita, is notable for a trip to the Namahage (ogre) museum, which has displays about a New Year's ritual in which people wearing red-faced big-nosed monster masks scare children into being good. Tsuruoka in Yamagata allows Dougill to discuss the Japanese *yamabushi* (mountain ascetic hermits). In Niigata he makes a diversion, opting to travel via ferry to the isle of Sado, formerly known as the "Isle of Exile." Here he indulges in his four interests on the island: exile (for example, the influential Buddhist priest, Nichiren), gold (once there were thriving gold mines here), Noh (traditional theater, whose founder Zeami was also exiled here), and *taiko* (the acclaimed drumming group Kodo is based on Sado). On his way back from Sado, he passes through Joetsu City, which allows him to digress into the nuances of Japanese "pork-barrel politics" and the spoils that rural areas like Niigata have received.

The next section is in the Hokuriku area and during his first stop there, Toyama, Dougill catches up with a former English student over a sumptuous seafood meal highlighting some of the regional delicacies. He analyzes the region's reputation for prosperity:

> Of all the many places I have visited on my travels, I cannot recall anywhere that so completely embodies the word "bourgeois" as Toyama. As soon as you step out of the station, there is a sense of well-being and good taste. Everywhere you look there is a pleasing sense of orderliness. Comfortable and

At his last stop in Honshu, the port city Shimonoseki, Dougill ruminates on the city's historical significance as the location of the climax of *The Tale of Heike*, as well as the plight of Korean-Japanese (many of whom live in Shimonoseki).

deeply conservative, it exudes middle-of-the-road conformity. Touch a taxi and you will be admonished for leaving a fingerprint on its polished surface.

It is in Kanazawa that Dougill reveals that he started his life in Japan in this "little Kyoto" and has strong feelings about the city. While in Kanazawa he muses on the changes in himself as well as the city. Dougill continues on to Fukui and that gives him an opportunity to discuss the Japanese Zen tradition by explaining the history and significance of Eihei-ji (Temple of Eternal Peace).

Dougill crosses over from Hokuriku to the Chugoku region for his next stop, Tottori. Here he discusses Tottori's number one attraction: the sand dunes. He also takes advantage of the subsidized taxi tours made available by the city government: Ten stops and three hours in duration for a measly ¥1000. He also loses his iPhone (in his room as it turns out) and has a difficult time reporting it stolen. From there it is on to Matsue in Shimane prefecture, known for having one of the twelve remaining original castles still standing in Japan. Here Dougill examines one of Matsue's most famous former residents, Lafcadio Hearn, who is well-known for his books on Japan and Japanese ghost stories. After that he moves on to Izumo in Shimane which is most famous for its Shinto shrine, the second most important after Ise Shrine in Mie prefecture. This occasions a discussion of the Shinto religion and its importance in Japanese society.

Passing through Tsuwano, a small castle town with a small samurai district, he makes his way back on the Sea of Japan to the much larger castle town of Hagi in Yamaguchi. Here Dougill ruminates on the Choshu Five, a group of five samurai who traveled to Great Britain:

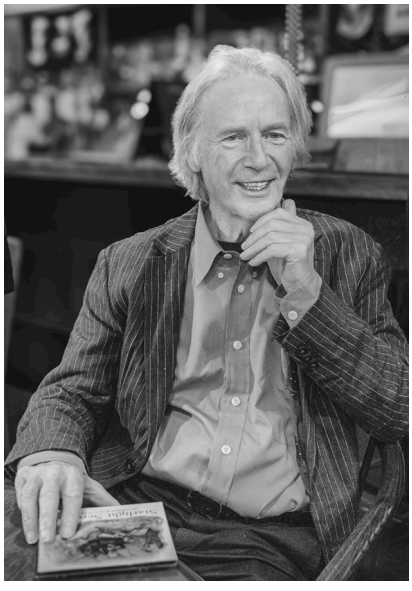


photo of John Dougill by Mark Thomas

In London, the Choshu Five were able to audit natural science and analytical chemistry at University College in London. Two of them only stayed a year, but the experience proved invaluable. The group went on to become respectively the first prime minister of Japan, the first foreign minister, a construction minister, a mint master, and a founding figure of Japan's railways. Not bad for five young lawbreakers!

At his last stop in Honshu, the port city Shimonoseki, Dougill ruminates on the city's historical significance as the location of the climax of *The Tale of Heike*, as well as the plight of Korean-Japanese (many of whom live in Shimonoseki). He also visits the isle of Ganryu, famous as the site of a duel between legendary Musashi Miyamoto and top swordsman Sasaki Kojiro.

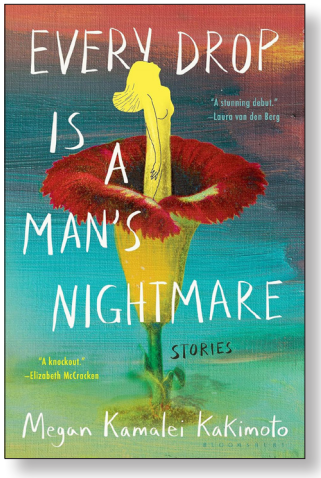
In Kyushu, the author muses on the island's independent nature and its distance from Honshu as he partakes in local food and drink with his on-and-off travel companion, Hirota-san. When not eating and drinking, he investigates the site of the Mongol invasions of the 13th and 16th centuries. He also visits Iki Island off the coast of Fukuoka and contemplates rock worship at the local attraction Monkey Rock before returning to his train journey.

The next major stop is Nagasaki which is, of course, universally known as the second target for the atomic bomb in WWII. This allows Dougill to discuss how the war is interpreted in Japan according to what he considers a right-wing nationalist perspective, and how that view differs from how much of the rest of the world understands the bombing.

He continues on to the final stop on his tour, Ibusuki, the southernmost manned station in Japan. Here he takes a sand bath and meets up with his partner Lili for a proper soak at a hot spring before visiting the Kamikaze Museum, which produces different reactions from the couple—sympathy and gratitude from Lili, while Dougill sees the pilots as dupes of the militaristic government. The trip over, Dougill concludes with "A Brief History of Japanese Railways," where we learn, for example, that 46 of the world's top 50 busiest stations are in Japan and that there are more than 20,000 departures a day.

Overall, Dougill's trip from the subarctic climate of Hokkaido to the subtropical climate of Kyushu is an informative and enjoyable overview of a fascinating country. Japan may not be as big as many other countries, but it has a long, deep history with distinct regions with different climates, histories, and attractions. I suspect it will be an inspiration for readers to investigate places off the beaten tracks in Japan in future travels.

—Patrick McCoy



***Every Drop is a Man's Nightmare: Stories* by Megan Kamalei Kakimoto. New York: Blooomsbury. 272 pp., ¥2745 (paper).**

Stories from Hawaii

Kakimoto endeavors to bring Hawaiian literary tropes and cultural traditions into her work in a respectful way, not sanitized for American consumption but rather in their messy and tangled actuality.

A twelve-year-old girl is sitting in the back seat of her mother's car traveling on the old Pali road on Oahu with a container of pork. This is considered bad luck in Hawaii, just as sticking your chopsticks straight up in a bowl of rice is frowned upon in Japan. People in Hawaii all know that the Pali road is built on the bones of ancestors and carrying pork will make the ghosts hungry. It is the girl's stepfather who is driving. And yet, he is the one who comes from a family that tends to believe in old superstitions—like pork on the Pali road. Unlike her mother, her stepfather is afraid of "Night Marchers" and Pele's wrath. He believes in the sanctity of lava rocks, and of the White Lady who hitchhikes her way through the city, "testing the tensile goodness of men." That's why the men in his family don't whistle at night or sleep with their toes pointing toward the bedroom door. So, the girl is surprised that her stepfather would dare to drive the road with pork in the back seat. Nothing good can come of it. And sure enough the girl gets her period for the first time and there's a lot of blood and somehow they hit a *pua'a* (pig) standing in the middle of the road. It dies and from then on she can't stop bleeding.

In all the stories in this marvelous debut collection by Megan Kamalei Kakimoto, traditional Hawaiian folktales and superstitions exert power over characters' imaginations, breaking into their modern lives in surprising ways. Kakimoto, who hails from both a Japanese and Native Hawaiian background, was born and raised in Honolulu. Her stories call to mind Aoko Matsuda's 2020 linked story collection *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, (translated by Polly Barton), which feature traditional Japanese ghost stories and folktales reimagined in contemporary Japanese settings. In both books, women are the focus of this kind of haunting—with female characters dwelling in the liminal space between tradition and the modern world. Struggling with negative body images, female characters work to meet male expectation in terms of their weight and hair removal (shaving in Matsuda and waxing in Kakimoto). The stories of both these authors are evocative and ... yes, painful to read. Characters in Kakimoto's story 'Ms. Amelia's Salon for Women in Charge,' for example, can receive Brazilian waxing free of charge, saving hundreds of dollars, but they must first give up one of their personality traits. Easier said than done.

While spirits and ghosts haunt Kakimoto's tales, the stories are about desire and the female body. About love and family. The collection is also about oppression and colonialism. "Hawaiians are outnumbered, each by a hundred *haole*. Our culture is on the run," says one character. And this is part of the unfinished business of the spirits and ghosts in the stories.

Kakimoto endeavors to bring Hawaiian literary tropes and cultural traditions into her work in a respectful way, not sanitized for American consumption but rather in their messy and tangled actuality. For example, the mother in the first story tells her daughter not to store bowls in stacks of four since "the *kanji* for *shi* is the same kanji for death." She admonishes her daughter to learn proper Japanese—and yet the mother has it confused since the kanji for four and death are not the same—it is the identical pronunciation that is the issue. The mistake speaks volumes about the way cultural traditions change over time. Things get watered down or even mistaken as time passes. This is what Kakimoto shows us in her stories.

Incorporating diverse storytelling traditions, they will linger in readers' minds long after they are read, like the smell of the corpse flower in the last story 'The Love and Decline of the Corpse Flower,' in which the flower's odor carries with it the spirit of the female character's dead wife: "the smell from the other side."

—Leanne Ogasawara

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From the series *Shadow in the Shadow* 影の中の陰
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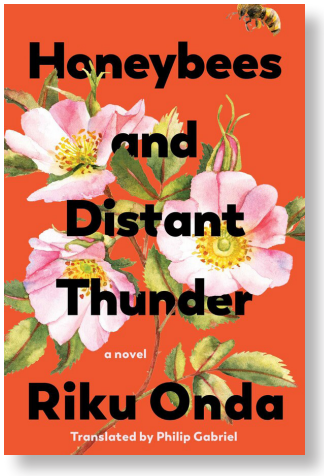

The Eternal Sunshine of Riku Onda's Mind

The reader doesn't need to play the piano to enjoy this book, though one cannot help but be impressed by the author's incredible knowledge of classical music.

Honeybees and Distant Thunder **by Riku Onda. U.K.: Pegasus Books, 432 pp., ¥3177 (paper).**

The American writer Joan Didion famously said, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Riku Onda's bestselling novel, translated by Philip Gabriel, inspires readers to peer into their souls and release their inner creativity. Onda won the Naoki Prize and Japan Booksellers' Award in 2017 for this literary masterpiece and Gabriel, too, should be commended for his brilliant translation. Themes include maturity, yin and yang, traditionalism and originality, friendship, perseverance, loss, death, triumph, and the transient nature of life.

Honeybees and Distant Thunder is a story about an eclectic group of pianists who take part in a prestigious but gruelling international piano competition in the coastal town of Yoshigae, near Tokyo. The story focuses mainly on four musicians and two judges, Mieko and her ex-husband Nathaniel. The friendships they forge are formidable.

The eccentric and naïve son of a beekeeper, Jin Kazama, is the most exciting pianist to join the competition. The sound of bees makes him feel at home but in desperate times he hears the rumble of distant thunder. Jin's appearance and attitude are unique, and his playing is frenzied. Is he gifted or a disaster waiting to happen?

Jin becomes friends with the sweet but self-critical Aya Eiden, a young prodigy returning to the stage seven years after the devastating death of her mother. Aya is reacquainted with her childhood buddy, the musical genius, Masaru Carlos Levi Anatole. The fourth and oldest pianist is a kind-hearted father, Ayashi Takashima. He's taking part in a TV documentary directed by his high-school friend Masami.

The reader doesn't need to play the piano to enjoy this book, though one cannot help but be impressed by the author's incredible knowledge of classical music. Onda is adept at establishing correlations between music and places, especially natural surroundings, allowing readers to visualize them as they turn the pages. Here Onda describes what Masaru is thinking while he's playing Béla Bartók: "He smelled a forest, grass, a complex graduation of green, drops of water falling from the leaves. Wind wafting through the forest to an opening, where a log cabin stood."

The themes of death, loss, and maturity are ingrained in the pages of this novel. When Aya was thirteen, her mother died, and she lost her reason for playing the piano. One could exchange "playing the piano" for "living." Piano playing becomes a metaphor for life: sometimes it's wonderful, but at other times it's difficult to go on. This is one of the many contrasts the novel considers: the positive and negative, the dark and the light.

The characters come most alive when Onda writes about them engaged in the practice of their art. Jin's playing is magnificent: "Colours seeming to undulate, to flow out from beneath his fingers . . . But this young man had no need to put on any sort of show. He simply drew out of its essence, staying relaxed, completely natural."

The Japanese have a sensitivity towards the eternal and the ephemeral. These themes are expressed throughout the novel. Here they are conveyed through Aya's music: "The wonderment of a living creature with a finite life creating the eternal. Through that fleeting, transient moment of music, one was in touch with eternity."

Those who read this translation might regret that, though this book is set in Japan, Onda does not do much to evoke that place and its culture, but that's a quibble. This book is an absolute joy. It teaches the reader, especially the artists among them, to have faith, to be more benevolent, compassionate, and caring in the face of adversity.

The pianist Masaru insists that music originated alongside human beings to help them evolve into spiritual beings. Perhaps Onda's novel can help us in just that way.

—Renae Lucas-Hall

Show Me the Light: Chasing Brunton's Lighthouses

***The Japan Lights: On the Trail of the Scot Who Lit Up Japan's Coast* by Iain Maloney. Perthshire, UK: Tippermuir Books, 256pp., ¥2157 (paper).**

Iain Maloney, Scottish author of eight books including the well-received memoir *The Only Gaijin in the Village,* has written another entertaining and informative book about Japan, *The Japan Lights: On the Trail of the Scot Who Lit Up Japan's Coast.* He joins the foreigner in Japan travel/memoir tradition exemplified in volumes such as Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan,* and which may well have reached its zenith with Donald Richie's *The Inland Sea*. Maloney, a former resident of Aberdeen, visits all of the 20 lighthouses still in use today that were designed in the late 19th century by fellow Scotsman Richard Henry Brunton.

In the Introduction Maloney explains what led him to undertake this particular project. The 20 Brunton-designed lighthouses still in use are spread across the country from Tohoku in the north all the way down through Shikoku to Kyushu in the south. As a sort of coda, he visits two that are no longer in operation as well. There are discussions of each lighthouse including an account of its origins and its context within Japan's history. In addition to a biography of Brunton we are also offered discussions of Japan's transition from a closed feudal state into a modern nation during the Meiji Restoration. During these years, Japan aimed to modernize and catch up with other world powers. Brunton, who was recruited to help build up lighthouse safety along Japan's long coastlines, was brought to Japan as a part of this push.

Much of the pleasure of this particular journey can be found in Maloney's wry personal observations, likes and dislikes, and the wit with which he scatters them throughout the book. The reader is privy to Maloney's musical interests (grunge rock) and he and his wife's admiration for the painter Saeki among other things. As for his wit, it can be seen in asides such as the following:

> *Copper wire was invented by two Aberdonians fighting over a penny. So goes the old joke—a double-layered one, reinforcing the dual stereotypes of Scottish skinflintery and inventiveness.*

He ends the book philosophically, surmising that "life is fragile and humans are frail."

Books such as this one, which are hard to categorize, are often the most interesting. Maloney's volume is no exception. Is it a travel book? Memoir? Historical narrative? It is all of these and more. It's tradition we can see in other books about journeys in Japan such as Alan Booth's compelling *Looking for the Lost: Journeys Through a Vanishing Japan* and Will Ferguson's *Hokkaido Highway Blues: Hitchhiking Japan.* If there's a flaw in the book, it may be that there were only 26 Brunton lighthouses to discuss; Maloney leaves the reader wanting more.

—Patrick McCoy

The 20 Brunton-designed lighthouses still in use are spread across the country from Tohoku in the North all the way down through Shikoku to Kyushu in the South.

The Reach of the Umbilical Cord —Back to Mother Earth

We might say that haiku is all about the unsaid,
and with the unsaid comes the silence.

***Night Jasmine* by Goran Gatalica. Various translators. Croatia: Stajer-Graf Press, €18.**

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say thousands of haiku books have been published and will continue to be published. And still, when a book like *Night Jasmine* by Goren Gatalica, a physicist, writer and haiku poet from Croatia, is brought out, it piques our curiosity—the poetry, the artwork, the layout and the impressive credentials of the contributors and translators are all noteworthy.

The author of the Foreword is Jim Kacian (U.S.A.), and the authors of the Afterword are academician Luko Paljetak (Croatia) and Toshio Kimura (Japan). The haiku are translated into seven languages: Croatian (Stanko Jerkic), English (Emiko Miyashita, Geethanjali Rajan, Marina Bellina, Dejan Pavlinovic, Sanela Plisko and Tomislav Maretic), French (Damien Gabriels), Italian (Antonio Sacco), Czech (Libuse Stranjik and Helena Stranjik), Hindi (Aparna Phatak) and Japanese (Emiko Miyashita, Ikuyo Yoshimura, Masako Kakutani and Hidenori Hiruta). The translators for French, Italian, Czech, Hindi and Japanese are themselves haiku poets from these countries. The book is illustrated with Japanese calligraphy by Kit Pancoast Nagamura.

We might say that haiku is all about the unsaid, and with the unsaid comes the silence:

"A Japanese emperor once asked a famous artist at his court to paint a four-panel screen of crows in flight. After much thought, the artist finally drew a single crow disappearing off the edge of the fourth panel of the screen. It was a masterpiece of movement. A great Oriental principle of drawing was fulfilled: 'The idea must be present even where the brush has not passed.'"

— Charlotte Willard

What is your life about,
anyway? Nothing but a struggle
to be someone.
Nothing but a running
from your own silence.

— Rumi

Silence in music is what makes music memorable. I remember the many concerts I've been to when the silences between the nuances and phrases left me breathless and mesmerised.

Goren Gatalica handles silence delicately in many of his haiku.

spring lockdown
the library windows stare
into the emptiness

in the churchyard
sharing a birdsong
only with god

full bloom . . .
a boatman inhales
his lost childhood

amid the pandemic—
on our little balcony
the cardinal's song

In his book *An Introduction to Haiku: An Anthology of Poems and Poets from Basho to Shiki,* Harold Henderson discusses how to write haiku. He cites a story about Basho and his disciple, Kikaku. One day, while walking with his teacher on a country road, Kikaku was deeply moved by the sight of dragonflies and wrote the following haiku:

Red dragonflies!
Take off their wings,
and they are pepper pods!

Basho revised it as follows:

Red pepper pods!
Add wings to them,
and they are dragonflies!

To be intimately connected to nature one must have a sensitive mind: a prerequisite for a haiku poet. I'm giving just one example from *Night Jasmine,* here:

searing heat—
a spotted dove drinks
without raising its head

Fuga no makoto means truth, sincerity and honesty, qualities a haiku poet needs to aim for when writing haiku. And if it's expressed naturally, without fuss or cosmetic padding, the poem lends itself to deeper meaning.

years of farming—
father's comb passes smoothly
through his thinning hair

new coldness—
the light from the fire making
mother's wrinkles deeper

Some more striking images seen through the *haikai* lens:

October wind
a maple leaf repeats
its acrobatics

edge of the forest
a logger's shoulders
carry the dusk

Reading through *Night Jasmine* is like walking through a forest, with abundant fresh fragrances rekindling fond memories. This book richly deserves repeated readings, reiterating the fact that the more time we devote to understanding and respecting Mother Earth, the more she offers her stories to be captured through our words.

—Kala Ramesh

Tweaking the Genre

***Mami Suzuki: Private Eye* by Simon Rowe.**
Singapore: Penguin Random House SEA. 224 pp.

It is impossible to write a book in as well-established a genre as detective fiction without nodding to the established classics of that genre. The *haru-ichiban*, for example, that blows through Kobe in the first of the stories Simon Rowe gives us about the private eye Mami Suzuki, will certainly call to mind the Santa Anas that blow through Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles. Of course, all the writers carrying on a genre after its progenitors not only preserve the conventions but also do their best to tweak them. The most successful entries are those which preserve enough of the things that make the genre appealing but also include enough tweaks to make it new.

Rowe's detective is something out of the ordinary. She is a single mother taking care of both her daughter and her own mother. She has a day job at the front desk of an international hotel, so she's only able to moonlight as a private eye, and she drinks a bit more than is good for her (unlike a lot of hard-boiled detectives, the alcohol she consumes actually affects her). Like the best fictional detectives—and like an actual human being—she does not remain the same. She changes as we move through the pages so that not all of her quirks remain in place at book's end. She is an appealing enough character that one looks forward to more in what will surely be a series.

—David Cozy

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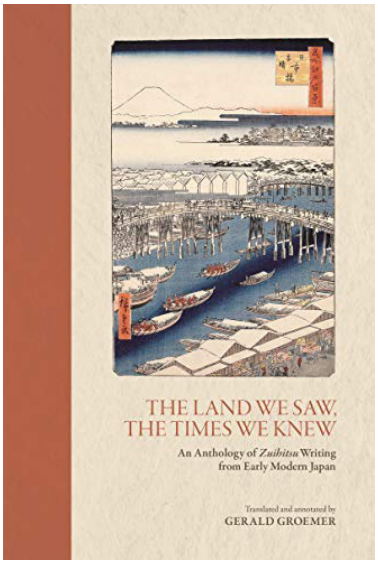

***The Land We Saw, the Times We Knew: An Anthology of Zuihitsu Writing from Early Modern Japan* by Gerald Groemer. Honolulu University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, 324 pp.**

'A Dustheap of Discourses' and Other *Zuihitsu*

In academia as in other pursuits, there are advantages and disadvantages to going first. In terms of the translation of Japanese literature, the primary advantage is being the first to introduce the English-speaking world to some of the treasures of Japanese literature. One thinks of Arthur Waley in this regard and his de facto successor, Donald Keene. As a young translator (or even an old one) who has spent half (most) their life studying Japanese and literary forms so as to be finally in a position to render an authoritative translation, you would be excused for believing that all the good stuff has been taken.

Fortunately, if you're content to work in an area that hasn't been gone over too many times, offer a new translation, or research a subject thoroughly, there is plenty of good material to go around. Such is the case with Gerald Groemer's *The Land We Saw, the Times We Knew: An Anthology of Zuihitsu Writing from Early Modern Japan*. Stephen Carter may have got there first with his ground-breaking and comprehensive *Columbia Anthology of Japanese Essays: Zuihitsu from the Tenth to the Twenty-First Century,* but Carter couldn't include everything.

What are *zuihitsu* exactly? Zuihitsu are short, whimsical, often witty, observations of life written by intelligent people (You know that the writers are intelligent in the same way that you know a tree by its fruits). Zuihitsu are singular in this respect. They may take the form of journal entries but they are not journal entries exactly. They may take the form of essays but they are not essays per se. People can write bad novels, bad poetry, and bad essays (bad reviews?) but they cannot write bad zuihitsu because a bad (unintelligent, *omoshirokunai*) zuihitsu by its very nature disqualifies itself.

From the foregoing, you might assume that quality, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. To a certain extent, this is true. The unofficial response of the Japanese public to what constitutes a good or bad zuihitsu or a good or bad writer for the matter would be a preponderance of readers who think that the work is good. This is how the haiku poets have been received down through the ages. An additional yardstick would be the approbation or backing of a member of the court or recommendation of an esteemed critic.

Those of us who cannot read the original must wait for a translation. Since only a fraction of Japanese literature is translated into English, we have to trust that the translators, the universities, the state, and the foundations are promoting the best work. Only then can we read the work in translation and decide for ourselves whether the work is any good and/or whether we like it or not.

In this regard, Groemer's collection is a mixed bag. While the scholarship and the notes together with a very strong introductory chapter on zuihitsu (the advantage of going second) in all its forms are outstanding, one of the seven chapters that Groemer has decided to translate is decidedly dull and probably shouldn't have made the cut. Miura Joshin's 'Tales That Come to Mind' is a banal and repetitive account of early Edo reminiscences of the water trade. Long sections of Dazai Shundai's 'Monologue' read like a broken record. Yes, Edo society was going to hell in a hand basket: "The culture I remember from the 1680s contrasts to that of today [1730s] like a person in a full formal outfit compares to someone stark-naked." A more apt title for Dazai's rantings would have been "Diatribe." Then there are the labored comparisons and contrasts between Edo and Western Japan in three other chapters: interesting from an ethnographic standpoint but not especially clever or wise in the tradition of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* or Kenko's *Essays in Idleness* nor sharp enough (with few exceptions) as journal entries per se.

Perhaps a better starting point for *The Land We Saw, The Times We Knew* would have been Chapter Two's 'A Record of Seven Offered Treasures' by Kozai Raizan:

> In the past I lacked proper loyalty and filial piety. I disobeyed my lord and neglected my parents. To mourn my parents suitably and prepare for my own afterlife, I contentedly sheared my head and became a gong-beating monk forsaken by the world. I am ignorant and unlettered; my writing is crude; my style is harsh. Since my text would not be read by the world at

large, I collected my thoughts as they came to me. Then, one spring morning I grasped my brush and wrote for seven days. For this reason I have entitled the result 'A Record of Seven Offered Treasures.' On reviewing it, I find its wording and orthography poor, its statements repetitive, and its tone offensive to the ear. I beg my daughters for their indulgence and goodwill. Let us commence.

The beginning of Chapter Seven: Kusumi Suketoshi's 'The Breezes of Osaka' is similarly strong.

The highlight of Groemer's anthology, however, is undoubtedly Ogawa Akimichi's 'A Dustheap of Discourses.' This is a fascinating and sometimes droll account of Edo society in 125 installments. Since Ogawa was a doctor, many of these are on the health/medical side, but he also covers subjects like horse-buying, fashion, kabuki, *joruri* (puppet theater), religion, tobacco, house painters, and "beggar nuns." Although Ogawa's discourses read more like journal entries than zuihitsu in the Sei Shonagon or Kenko mould, they are so descriptive, intelligent, and thoughtful that they rise to the level of an art form as in the journal entries of Henry David Thoreau.

As we approach the centenary of Arthur Waley's translation of the first volume of Lady Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari* (1925), "new" discoveries of Japanese literature in the form of English translations continue to give depth and scope to a literary tradition that is hundreds of years old. After Waley and Donald Keene, it has been a question of filling in the blanks. The contribution of Gerald Groemer's *The Land We Saw, the Times We Knew: An Anthology of Early Modern Japan* is in increasing our understanding of what constitutes a zuihitsu and in giving us many representative examples from the Edo Period.

Holding the mirror

"No human eye can meet the Buddha's."
—*Anil's Ghost*, Michael Ondaatje.

Imagine the stone-carved buddha still
and alone in the woods. From a distance

we are insects at the foot of its infinite
ladder. I am papoosed to your side

as we begin the climb, scale the folds
of his robe, the curve of his belly.

The air thins as we reach the trunk
of his neck. We do not look up

into the moon of his face. Below
paddy fields patchwork the valley,

stitch the earth with their watery harvest.
I hold the mirror up, its line of sight angled

over your shoulder, reflecting
the great blank oval –– his empty eye

awaiting your colour. I pass the brush,
nestle into your neck, until

the unspoken truth of you,
the bottle-green hue of your darkness

wets the stone –– his sight alive
in the line of your stroke.

—Fiona Bennett, July 2023

FIONA BENNETT is a writer, director and facilitator. She is founder of the award-winning project and podcast The Poetry Exchange. Her poems have been published in journals in the U.K. and U.S.A. including *The Rialto* and the *San Pedro River Review* and listed in competitions including the 2022 National Poetry Competition and The Bridport Prize. She has an MA (distinction) in poetry from The Poetry School / Newcastle University. She curated and directed the poetry of Adrienne Rich for Ballet Black's 'Then or Now' choreographed by William Tuckett.

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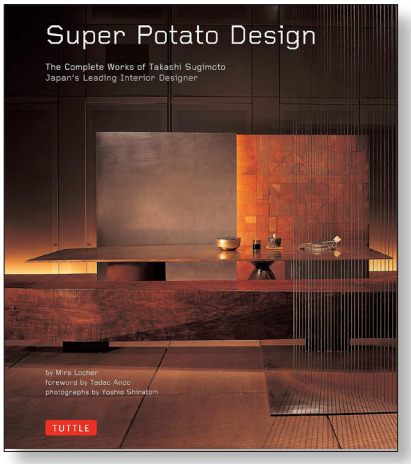
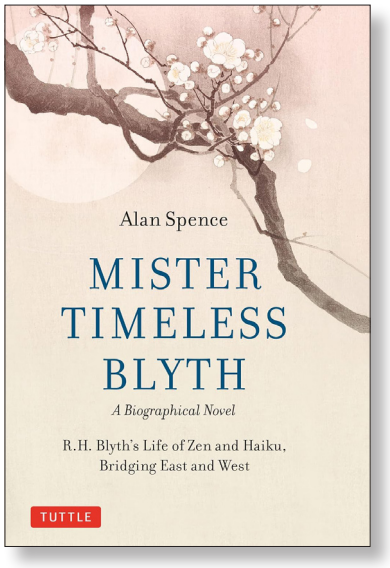


SUPER POTATO DESIGN*: *The Complete Works of Takashi Sugimoto*: *Japan's Leading Interior Designer
by Mira Locher

Japan's "leading interior designer" Takashi Sugimoto (1945-2018), founder of Super Potato design practice, is presented in a large format, beautifully printed volume with 320 color photographs, plus floor plans, elevation diagrams, an extensive index and chronology. Author Mira Locher, an architect and Japan scholar, gives project details and includes short conversations between Sugimoto and architect Kiyoshi Say Takeyama and graphic designer Kenya Hara. Sugimoto-inspired architect Tadao Ando provides a thoughtful introduction: 'Beyond Layered Discontinuity.'

The earliest (1983) showroom of Sugimoto's client MUJI, the super-cool Japanese contempo lifestyle retailer, could easily be converted from purveyor of minimalist but functional much-less-is-more essentials for right-now fashion into a chic bar. According to Ando, "MUJI's succinct design reveals a Japanese aesthetic, which values sustaining simplicity by completely discarding all worthless decoration." Sugimoto's love of salvaged, found and repurposed materials from industrial processes plus his extensive use of large lumber, as well as stone and steel is a perfect example of the *wabi* (rustic) and *sabi* (worn) aesthetics for which Japan is renowned.



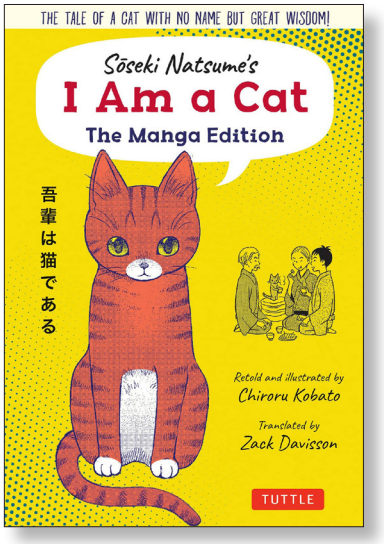
Mister Timeless Blyth—A Biographical Novel
by Alan Spence

This fictional account of English poet, pacifist, and scholar R.H. Blyth frames his awakening to the practice of Zen Buddhism through several multi-year incarcerations, as a British conscientious objector to WWI and as an alien noncombatant in WWII in Japan. As a professor of English language and literature living under the sunshine of the Japanese imperial government in Korea and later Japan proper, he was in the good company of august persons such as the Imperial Crown Prince, cultural aesthetes such as Yanagi Soetsu, Zen teachers Kayama Taigi Roshi and D.T. Suzuki Roshi, and mentored American Zen pioneer Robert Aiken Roshi. Spence's Blyth expresses discomfort seeing German and Japanese flags flying together in Tokyo and at learning how young Nazis were invited to train at Soto Zen Eihei-ji Monastery. As the author of *Zen in English Literature* and many volumes of translations of haiku, senryu and other Japanese and Chinese classic literature, Spencer's Blyth provides non-Japanese language readers / seekers with an "expedited pass" to *satori* and beyond through the more familiar literary works, while not dismissing the value of *shikantaza* (just sitting).

Festival of Shadows
by Atelier Sento
(Cecile Brun and Olivier Pichard)

Festival of the Shadows, the second book by the French duo Atelier Sento, following their award-winning *Onibi*, is an outstanding full-length manga telling of a Japanese ghost story. Moving seamlessly and surprisingly between the core rural town setting and the glamorous art world of Tokyo, the story unfolds over a year. The tale is divided into four seasonal chapters, a choice that adds not only a further layer of visual complexity, but reenforces how nature's rhythm retains relevance in Japan as the ever-present thread binding old to new, this world to the other.

The author and illustrator have deep familiarity with the country and it shows. The superb artwork is recognisably European yet evokes modern and spiritual ancient Japan on every page. The dialogue captures social mores and interaction between distinct characters perfectly while also conveying the mysticism at the heart of the story in a culturally satisfying, informative way. Billed as a thriller, *Festival of Shadows* is that and much more—a page turner.



I Am a Cat* by Sōseki Natsume: *The Manga Edition, trans. Zack Davisson, illustrated by Chiroru Kobata

Sōseki Natsume, arguably Japan's most well-known author of the past century, is also one of the most accessible to younger readers, his books regularly appearing on school syllabi.

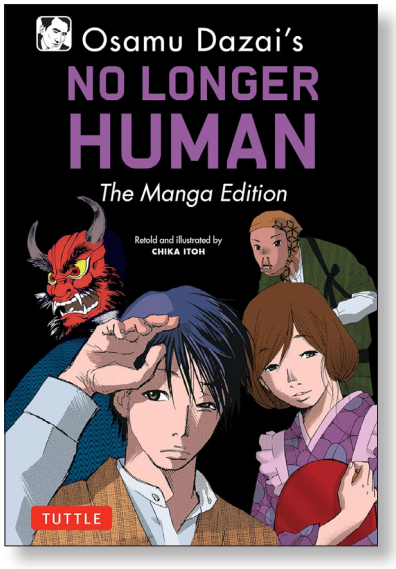
I Am a Cat (*Wagahai wa Neko de Aru*), the satirical novel that propelled him to national fame, is told from the perspective of a homeless but well-spoken kitten who is adopted by a Tokyo family; a narrative conceit that enabled Sōseki to more freely comment on the still raw Meiji era culture clash of East and West, and also slyly offer his views on human nature less directly.

This new manga version presents the plot, text and themes in a simple way. Chiroru Kobato's illustrations (read right to left in the traditional manner) conjure up the period in a straightforward layout that will appeal to those more drawn to the author than the format. Equally though, for manga fans new to Japanese literature, it could be an entertaining easy introduction; one to inspire further reading of both Sōseki and the country's other exceptional 20th century writers.

Haruki Murakami: Manga Stories, adapted by Jean-Christophe Deveney, illustrated by Pierre-Marie Grille-Liou

In the 21st century, without debate, Japan's most famous author internationally is Haruki Murakami. His books have been translated into dozens of languages and adapted into numerous films, the most recent being the highly-praised animation, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. This new manga-style collection of four short stories shares not only that film's creators' French nationality, but two of the tales here were woven into the film's narrative.

On their own, each is classic Murakami—strikingly original stories of psychologically afflicted protagonists trying to survive in a surreal, heavily Westernised Japan. If new to Murakami, don't expect pat resolution. The artwork by PMGL is compelling; each story employs a different style and palette, capturing the Westernised world Murakami lives in, while still making the Japanese setting immediately clear. The translation by Jean-Christophe Deveney maintains the hard-boiled, sophisticated rhythm and language of the written text. A volume for both fans and those seeking a gateway to the addictive rabbit hole of Murakami's oeuvre.



Osamu Dazai's No Longer Human: The Manga Edition
Retold and Illustrated by Chika Itoh, translated by Makiko Itoh

This version of Dazai's 1948 novel is more faithful to the original than the one by Ito Junji, which emphasized the story's horrific aspects. It alters the Prologue and ending slightly but otherwise faithfully follows the events detailed in main character Oba Yozo's notebooks. Oba, as the manga's back cover states, "is a young man tormented by his failure to find any value in himself or in human relationships, despite being surrounded by women who love him." The novel is closely linked to the figure of the author and "Dazai's own sense of failure as a human being." Itoh skillfully exploits the cinematic potential of the manga format to convey the main character's sexual and emotional turmoil.

Readers of this version are likely to be familiar with the Dazai character in the manga and anime series, *Bungo Stray Dogs* ("Literary Masters Stray Dogs"), which, as Juliet Carpenter notes in her new translation of the novel (also published by Tuttle) has caused Dazai's works to surge in popularity, resonating with a new generation of readers in print and on BookTok.

Abstractions Across Continents

Exhibition by African, Japanese, and European painters at Papa Jon's, Kyoto, Feb. 7 – 19, 2024

In 1991, as a young painter and musician in my twenties, I was drawn to Kyoto because of my interest in traditional Japanese art and because it was a meeting-point for artists and performers worldwide. At that time, an American expat named Charles was setting up his first café gallery near Doshisha University. He asked me to make a painting of his café interior and bought a few other images; very encouraging to a fledgling artist.

I left Kyoto in 2000 and returned to Europe with my Japanese husband. We missed Japan enough to return in 2010, to live in Tokyo. We teach and continue as artists, painting and playing music (the *Bix & Marki* duo). In 2022, a French friend, Céline, also living in Japan, created an online gallery called Artweast (ART West and East). Céline's husband is Mauritanian. In 2023, they invited two artists from Mauritania to join the core group, myself included, to be represented by Artweast.

Charles still operates Papa Jon's café gallery in Kyoto, and will host an exhibition, 'Abstractions Across Continents,' from Feb. 7 – 19 including works by all six Artweast members. Please visit.

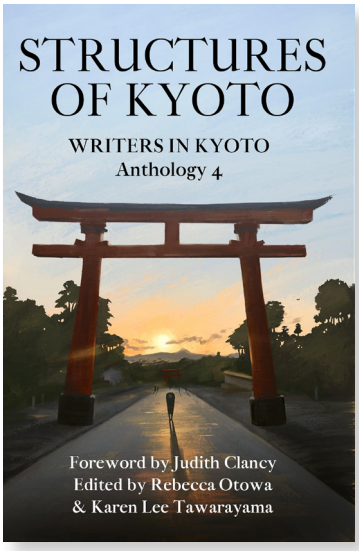
—Beatrix Fife

painting: https://www.beatrixfife.com/

playing music: www.makbx.com

Artweast: https://artweast.com

Papa Jon's: https://papajons.co.jp



WRITERS IN KYOTO
4TH ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY

Structures of Kyoto

Poetry and Prose, Fiction and Memoir, Academic and Evocative

Rebecca OTOWA and Karen Lee TAWARAYAMA, editors
Judith CLANCY, foreword

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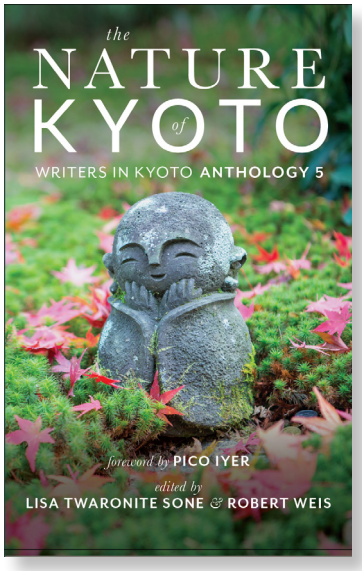

The Nature of Kyoto

WRITERS IN KYOTO ANTHOLOGY 5

Lisa Twaronite Sone & Robert Weis, editors
With a foreword by Pico Iyer

In selecting the theme of the Anthology, we wanted contributors to investigate the myriad aspects of Kyoto's "nature"—referring to both the natural world and the "inner nature" or soul of the city. —Editors

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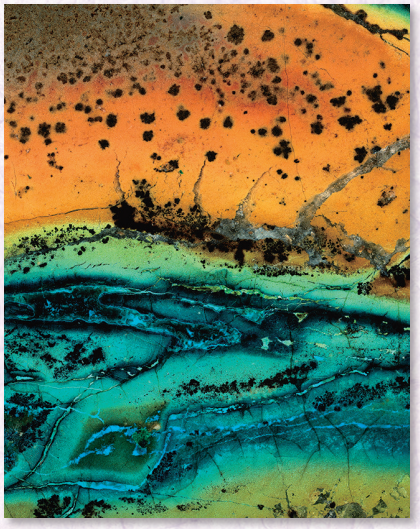
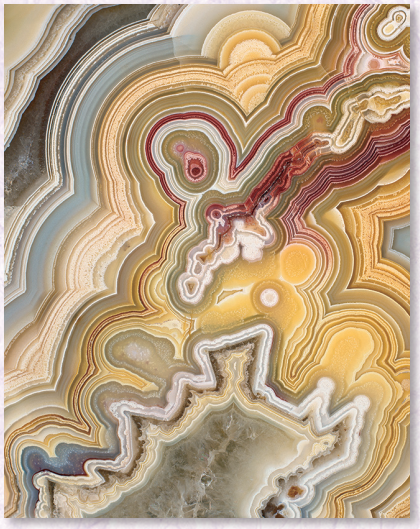


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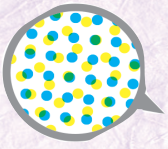
PAPER SURFACE

In 8K printing, there is little overlapping of halftone dots, the problem of moiré is resolved and vivid colors are reproduced.



PAPER SURFACE

In general printing (175 lines) dots are large and overlapping occurs, which causes colors to be cloudy.

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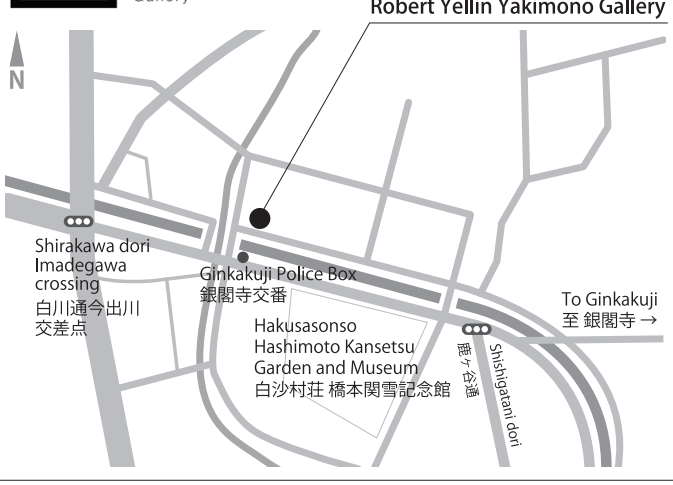

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ALLAN MANDELL

About KJ

Based in one of the world's great cultural cities, *Kyoto Journal* strives to engage, celebrate, and showcase thinkers, artists, craftspeople, cultural masters and activists whose tradition-influenced practices reflect daily life locally, in Japan, Asia and world-wide today.

Founded in 1987, our all-volunteer publishing entity is now a Japanese nonprofit general incorporated association (*ippan shadan hōjin*). Our staff and international board are professionals, scholars, artists, designers, translators and authors who bring a deep appreciation for the unique cultural heritage accessible in this remarkable 21st-century city.

Our goal is to sustain a publishing frequency of one print and two digital issues of *Kyoto Journal* per year, and to continue to expand our online presence through our website and social media platforms. We reach our world-wide readership through on-line sale as well as regional distribution to retail outlets.

Our award-winning English-language journalism and vital graphic content engage with critical issues of today, including time-honored approaches to environmental and cultural sustainability. To this end, we welcome submissions of written word (including translations, fiction, poetry, interviews and essays) and visual arts (including photography) from both renowned and upcoming creators.

Supporting KJ

Kyoto Journal's business model is simple, despite having to manage constantly changing distribution costs of shipping printed matter and seeking to maintain the highest production quality by working with SunM, Kyoto's most distinguished printer. Our objective is to generate a diverse stream of funding, including donations and grants, limited advertising and sponsorships, to sustain our production costs at minimum, hopefully enabling production of additional issues / books, and sponsoring of lectures and other cultural events.

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A non-profit, volunteer-produced quarterly since 1987

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Thought-provoking articles on Japan and Asia are invited. KJ is a volunteer-based, non-profit publication; contributors receive a free issue and special discounts on subsequent issues. Please review our submissions guidelines.

www.kyotojournal.org

ROBERT BRADY

EXPATRIATISM

I find myself now and then yearning for things and moments "American," then realize that my template for such yearnings is nearly thirty years old, and that *that* America no longer exists, if in fact it ever did, since the old template, even when current, was almost completely subjective; in fact, back then I was disappointed in my expectations more often than not, which after all is one reason I left America and became an expatriate, a Terran, a citizen of the world.

There should be a society of Terrans. Not just *gaikokujin,* foreigners. Culture has nothing to do with it beyond a certain limit of collective identity. If you plan on going back, you haven't really left, and are an expatriate. If you're out in the world and you live wherever you are, you're a Terran. You no longer define yourself primarily by your culture.

Once your canoe slips away from the riverbank into the current, you find that there is a large and distinct society upon the big river, the society of travelers, who are different from the society of stayers on the shore, and that once a traveler, one can never fully rejoin the stayers, or see things as they see them; one is changed forever, and cannot speak of river experiences and be understood, except by other travelers.

When I go back to America and attempt to describe my life here in Japan, I see the eyes soon glaze over from indifference or lack of shared experience; in a strange way it's like talking about an illness one has had, a past and remote reality; as you can see in the hearers' eyes and feel in your own heart, they can never share the fullness of what you mean, though in kindness they may try; it's easier to describe having been to the moon. Everyone knows about the moon.

People have no idea "which" Japan I'm talking about, there are so many Japans out there. There's the Seven Samurai Japan, the Golden Tour Japan, the Zen Japan, the Mighty Industrial Giant Japan, the Ideal Dietary Health Japan, the Economic Basketcase Japan, the Inscrutably Delicate Sensibility Japan etc.

And if an expatriate then has children with a Japanese person and subsequently raises the children in the "foreign" land, the children grow up to claim no strong affiliation to the expatriate parent's homeland, nor even particularly to that of the patriate parent.

At a young age the children show the embers of a worldliness that their monocultural cousins in both lands know nothing of, that even the parents themselves know but little more of; and so a greater knowledge widens through the generations, to the blending betterment of all...

ROBERT BRADY, Rambler-at-Large, is one of the founders of *Kyoto Journal* and has contributed to almost every issue. 'Expatriatism' is excerpted from *The Big Elsewhere,* his classic collection of reflections on the homesteading life out in Shiga, overlooking Lake Biwa.

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cultural fluidity