

# NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN

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**If you can't lick 'em, join 'em!**

**"Bizarre Japan"  
dupes the gullible  
world press**

**+ Kakuei Tanaka's  
fateful day at the FCCJ**  
**The rise of hate speech  
- and the response**  
**Is there a future for  
Fukushima's farmers?**  
**The talents of Tamako  
Takamatsu**



# Rebuilding for resilience



**Rebuilding for resilience**  
Fortifying infrastructure to withstand disaster



As economically significant natural disasters become more frequent, the ability of infrastructure to withstand disaster is increasingly critical. And when disaster strikes, communities are focused on the need to rebuild in a sustainable and resilient way.

PwC's report explores the impact of disasters in Japan and elsewhere and proposes a new framework for building these resilient communities. This framework, designed in conjunction with the United Nations, emphasizes the complex challenge of recovery, and the need to balance speed with the desire to "build back better".

*Copies are available from the FCCJ front desk*

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Cover illustration by Andrew Potheary

From the president



WOW, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE STARTING off WITH A BANG. I knew the president's job came with issues but I never realized how many. (I'm appreciating former president Georges Baumgartner more and more for his three-year tenure!) The six items below are top priority for the Club. Woven within these are my goals to bring complete transparency, improve our reputation and strengthen our core as a journalist's club while creating a more attractive atmosphere for Associates and others to socialize.

(1) **PUBLIC INTEREST ASSOC. (KOEKI SHADAN HOJIN):** Our reincorporation with *koeki* status from April 1 next year should open a whole new world for us. Our application has been filed and we see no landmines ahead. We will need to contribute 50 percent or more of our income for public service, but we'll also receive significant benefits in return. Most importantly, our role as Japan's longest and most active foreign journalists' organization – promoting freedom of the press – will be strengthened. In legal terms, we will be on equal footing with the Nippon Kisha Club. The FCCJ will also be able to receive tax deductible donations which could be used for capital expenditures, such as badly needed renovations. We will also be largely sheltered from the proposed consumption tax increase that could take effect next April. In addition, *koeki* status will be an opportunity for the Associate members to finally have representation on the board of directors.

While F&B outsourcing produced conflict, it has been a financial blessing in disguise. First, outsourcing was necessary to gain *koeki* status. Second, the Club could no longer continue using membership fees to support our F&B operation. We are working hard to quickly settle the unfortunate related lawsuits. We need your continued support in our ongoing efforts toward becoming a Public Interest Association.

(2) **INTERNATIONAL RESTAURANT SERVICE CO./TOKYU:** We are looking forward to deepening our relationship with IRS and Tokyu on all fronts. In addition to meal service, they have proposed working with us on marketing projects, both membership and banquets/sales. We will be able to tap into their wide and established network of contacts.

(3) **INCREASING MEMBERSHIP:** To remain financially stable we need to regain 200 to 300 new members. We've launched a broad membership campaign with financial incentives. The newly formed Membership Marketing Committee will be overseeing this. But we greatly need your input and participation to make this successful. Please contact me anytime about this.

(4) **WEBSITE:** Our new website will be launched on October 1! This will boost our presence worldwide with quality journalism from our members; wider information about our many impressive speakers and press conferences/PAC events; connections with Facebook, Twitter and other SNS services; and much more. Our hardworking website team has developed a preliminary design that looks great, is easy to navigate, and is flexible with options to expand capability. We are sure you'll enjoy it.

(5) **NEW GENERAL MANAGER:** We're now wrapping up our GM search with excellent candidates. We hope the finalist will come on board no later than Oct. 1. A new GM will bring needed controls to the Club, motivate employees, find ways to streamline and reduce our personnel costs and find resources to modernize and renovate our facilities.

(6) **MOVING LOCATION:** To move or not to move? That is the question... A member recently told me the Club looks so shabby he didn't want to hold his event there. Fortunately I was able to change his mind, but the comment was a reality check. The Club's facilities are aging fast and we desperately need to replace equipment. We have studied moving options before, and were recently approached by a management company to consider a property in Akasaka-mitsuke. But our convenient location and enviable views are a strong incentive to stay put. We need to do a thorough cost analysis. Then ultimately the general membership will decide.

– Lucy Birmingham

Join the Movie Committee ...



... at 7 pm on Thursday, August 22 for *Hafu: The Mixed-Race Experience of Japan*, followed by a Q&A with director Megumi Nishkura. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 1 in 49 babies born in Japan today is born into a family with one non-Japanese

parent. This newly emerging minority has been under-documented and under-explored, but the documentary *Hafu* (the Japanese term for people who are half-Japanese) seeks to remedy that. Through the unique experiences of five hafu – with ancestry in Ghana, Venezuela, Australia, Korea and Mexico – the film focuses on issues of race, diversity, multiculturalism, nationality and identity within the mixed-race community of Japan. What does it mean to be Japanese? What does it mean to be hafu? Perhaps most importantly, what does the increasing presence of hafu mean for Japan?

– Karen Severns

(Japan, 2013; 87 min.; in Japanese and English with subtitles; Q&A in English)

Heard at the Club

“At these hate speeches, we see the flag of Japan being flown . . . the flag of Japan is weeping at being used in this way.”

Kunio Suzuki, right wing political activist, page 16



Steve McClure searches for cool spots in a sweltering nation

THE GOVERNMENT RECENTLY REVIVED its “Cool Japan” campaign by earmarking ¥50 billion to promote Japanese culture around the globe over the next 20 years. It's about time, too: Japan has been left trailing in the wake of the South Korean government's highly successful efforts to publicize K-pop on the international stage.

So what do you get when you google “cool Japan?” After the obligatory Wikipedia entry on the subject, second on the list of search results is the website of NHK World's “Cool Japan” TV program ([www.nhk.or.jp/cooljapan/en](http://www.nhk.or.jp/cooljapan/en)). The theme of the program that week was castles: “Cool Japan's”

Facebook attracts a huge number of visitors worldwide whenever it uploads pictures of Japanese castles which tells how much interest foreigners have on [sic] them.”

I have nothing against castles, but they've never struck me as especially cool. But maybe they are when compared to the other topics introduced on “Cool Japan,” which included “Early Childhood Education,” “Buses” and the very edgy “Why Japanese People are Stress Tolerant.”

But at least the folks at NHK World have made an effort to design a reasonably attractive and easily navigable website. The same cannot be said of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's imaginatively named “Cool Japan/Creative Industry Policy” site ([www.meti.go.jp/policy/mono\\_info\\_service/mono/creative](http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/mono_info_service/mono/creative)), which comes up high in the Google search results. The dull, text-only site looks like it's been designed by bureaucrats for bureaucrats.

I clicked on the “English” icon in the corner of the page to check if METI had used some of those 50 billion smackers to come up with a cool site aimed at an international audience. But the main English portal was as dull and text-heavy as the Japanese version. Scrolling down the page, I found the link to the

ministry's “Cool Japan” site. Like the main page, it's a text-only list of links to documents such as the scintillatingly titled “An Interim Report Compiled by the Creative Industries Internationalization Committee.” Yowza.



METI's take on “Cool Japan”: not cool. Kyari Pamyu Pamyu's missile ears: cool.



One link on the page looked promising: “Cool Japan Daily” (<http://cooljapandaily.jp>), comprising “recent news, opinions and trends about Cool Japan.” It clearly isn't daily and it's hardly recent, since the most recent posting was dated July 17, 2012. And most of the articles on the site are in Japanese, which kind of defeats the purpose of promoting Japanese pop culture internationally.

Luckily, cool seems to be something that private industry understands better than government bureaucrats. Take the All Nippon Airways' “Is Japan Cool?” website ([www.ana-cooljapan.com](http://www.ana-cooljapan.com)), with its bright, bold, graphics and an overall stylish presentation that make this site a lot of fun. “Is Japan Cool?” covers all the topics that make Japanophiles drool: manga, sumo, cosplay, plastic food, high-tech toilets and, of course, Japanese hospitality. Nothing about stress tolerance, though.

My advice to the government: hire Harajuku idol Kyary Pamyu Pamyu to take over the “Cool Japan” campaign. That's not as crazy as it sounds – Kyary is one smart cookie, and she certainly couldn't do any worse than the bureaucrats at METI.

The surreal, psychedelic sense of style she shows in video clips like “Invader, Invader” (available on YouTube) has gained Kyary a huge overseas following. It mixes cool with *kawaii* – a winning combination for Japanese pop culture. ❶

Steve McClure publishes the online music-industry newsletter *McClureMusic.com*. He has lived in Tokyo since 1985.



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For those already in on the secret, the application form is available on the FCCJ website or from the 19F Club office.



IN THE DIGITAL WORLD, FACT-CHECKING  
AND COMMON SENSE NO LONGER EXIST

## LICK THIS!

by Mark Schreiber

**T**he craze is sweeping through Japan at an alarming rate, causing pink eye and is a hit among 12-year-olds who are taking it as the next level after French kissing." So wrote reporter Victory Oyeleke in the June 16 edition of the *Nigerian Tribune*, with an air of righteous certainty.

Oyeleke had not filed from Japan.

Neither had the journalist who wrote, "Surge in eye infections among Japanese youngsters due to sexual eyeball-licking trend" (*Washington Times*, June 13); nor "Eyeball-licking: the fetish that is making Japanese teenagers sick" (*The Guardian*, June 14); or "Japanese 'eyeball licking' trend carries blindness risk" (*CBS News*, June 14); or "Japanese craze for eyeball licking leads to rise in infections" (*The Telegraph*, June 17).

And to be fair to other nationalities, neither had the writer of "Japanische Schüler lecken sich die Augäpfel" (Japanese students lick their eyeballs),

as reported by Germany's DRadio Wissen on June 14.

Specialty publications were in on the act. A UK-based medical bulletin board, *Medical News Today*, even beat out ABC News by one day, running the alarming story under the title "Eyeball Licking (Oculolinctus) Can Be Dangerous, Doctors Warn." The site's readers, including medical professionals, rated the story an average of 4.5 stars out of 5.

That was just the beginning. Barring destructive earthquakes, tsunami or nuclear accidents, it's very likely this sordid tale of rampant oral-ocular sex will emerge as the big Japan news item for 2013. The story was tweeted, shared, copied. At its peak, a Google search of the terms "eyeball licking" and "Japan" garnered 82 million hits. (The figure has since declined as the Google algorithm weeds out duplicates.)

Where did the story originate? How was it circulated?

And more to the point – was there any truth to it? Did anyone attempt to verify it? And does anyone really care?

The source wasn't that difficult to find. An article in Japanese titled "Shogakusei ni gankyunome hentai purei ga dairyuukou" (The perverted play of eyeball-licking is a hit among primary schoolers) appeared on Friday, June 7 on *Bucchi News*, a site for subculture enthusiasts.

The story's sole informant was "Y," an anonymous teacher at a primary school in Tokyo, who revealed how he had traced an epidemic of pink eye at his school to "hentai (perverted) play" in the form of rampant eyeball licking among students. Notably lacking in attribution and details, the story had all the trappings of an urban legend.

Knowing the background of the story's publisher didn't instill much confidence in its veracity. *Bucchi News* is produced by *Core Magazine*, a publishing company raided by police on suspicion of obscenity last April 19, when a variety of materials, including its office computers, were confiscated. Four days later *Core* announced that two of its magazines, *Komikku Megastore* and *Nyan2 Club*, would suspend publication.

If that doesn't raise questions, last year *Core* sold off one of its most popular periodicals, a monthly subculture magazine called *Bubka* whose previous editor, Masaki Okazaki, in 2006 had the distinction of becoming the first person in Japan arrested under new laws banning child pornography.

*Bubka* contents ran the whole gamut of extreme, mondo bizarro lifestyles: biker gangs, leather, tattooing and body-piercing. It also catered to men with Lolita complexes, featuring depictions of not-so-innocent adolescent girls engaged in a variety of bizarre practices.

The same day the story came out in *Bucchi*, *GMO Mobile*, a Shibuya-based IT company, ran it verbatim on its own news site, *Yomerumo*. It was text only, graphically unremarkable, and it possibly would have dropped from sight. It was given a second breath, however, when it was picked up by *Naver Matome*, a slick site operated by *LINE*, the Japanese subsidiary of *NHN Corporation*, a big Korean-owned IT firm that provides applications and games for mobile phones.

*Naver* incorrectly credited *Yomerumo* as the story's source and provided a link, but

cherry-picked the contents of the article to highlight the more shocking points related to schoolchildren. And, crucially, it embellished its page with three photographs, including stock photos of two cute, vulnerable-looking adolescent girls wearing eye patches. So no one would miss the point, it added the photo of a male of indeterminate age and nationality poised to thrust his tongue into the eye of a young Asian female.

*Naver Matome's* story was reported to have been retweeted "over 10,000 times." This attracted the notice of a site called *JapanCRUSH*, a site that offers "interesting news and stories translated into English from Japan and the Japanese-language internet."

"We don't select our articles: Japan selects them for us," proclaims *JapanCRUSH* in its mission statement. "... at *JapanCRUSH*, we also understand that humans, particularly those with access to the internet, are capable of everything from the very bad to the truly amazing."

On June 9, a *JapanCRUSH* writer identified only as "Beth" began her story on the "phenomenon:" "A disturbing trend among younger Japanese school children has become one of the most popular recent threads on internet compilation site *Naver Matome*." (Some of Beth's other stories include one about a clever commuter who used a toilet plunger stuck to the train roof as a straphanger and a man arrested for walking around in a leotard.)

Beth followed with a quote from the "informant," "From the beginning of this year, styes were practically epidemic in my class. At first the staff didn't pay much attention to it, but when there were five kids or ten kids in a single class who all had eye patches, it really caught the attention of the adults. Even when homeroom teachers, who thought it strange, would question the students, all they'd say was that they didn't know anything about it. We held an emergency staff meeting about this strange occurrence, but the cause of it remained unclear..."

That same day, crediting *Naver Matome* and *JapanCRUSH*, a site in China called *Shanghaiist*, which claims 500,000 unique visitors a month, ran its own story: "Japanese teens are spreading pink eye by licking each other's eyeballs." "It was with no small amount of trepidation that I approached this story about an alleged craze among Japanese teens of licking each other's eyeballs," its editor wrote. "On the one hand, this is the kind of insane, WTF news that blogs are built upon. On the other, it has to be fake right? Right?!"



### Hey kids! Follow the online trail of a dubious news story:

- <http://bucchinews.com/society/3374.html>
- <http://news.merumo.ne.jp/article/genre/1249531>
- <http://matome.naver.jp/odai/2137058819724992001>

or search "eyeball licking" on:

- [www.medicalnewstoday.com/](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/)
- [www.japancrush.com](http://www.japancrush.com)
- <http://shanghaiist.com>
- [www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/)
- [http://abcnews.go.com/ABC\\_Univision/](http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/)

Such caveats didn't inhibit news organizations from jumping on the bandwagon, however, as over the next three days the story went viral globally. Reporters typically sought quotes from their local eye specialists, who were happy to advise that yes, indeed, tonguing eyeballs was definitely unsanitary and could lead to all sorts of infections.

No one appeared very keen to establish the story's veracity. As far as I can tell, only one Japan-based correspondent reported the story for an overseas publication. And that story was just a rehash of previously posted content with no indication of any effort to confirm the phenomenon via a reliable Japanese source.

ABC News, at least, decided to have some fun. It spoofed the story, saying, "Here in the United States of America, we prefer to keep our fetishes wholesome and private." It included two tongue-in-cheek parodies of old public service advertisements "against the perils of this menacing and quintessentially Japanese trend." One read, "Don't give in to peer pressure! Teens, say no to eyeball licking!!! Or at least save it for marriage!!!"

Debunking an anonymous, unattributed story may be impossible, but it was not

Mark Schreiber currently writes the "Big in Japan" and "Bilingual" columns for *The Japan Times*.

especially difficult to at least cast doubts on the sweeping claim that large numbers of Japanese adolescents were suffering from an epidemic of tongue-induced pink eye, as the blogs were now claiming.

I contacted three Japanese professional organizations, including two ophthalmological associations and an organization of school clinicians. Queries were also sent to a professor of nursing at a national university and a Yokohama-based ophthalmologist. None of them had the faintest idea of what I was talking about. None knew anything about the rampant spread of disease.

Convinced at this point that the story was based on a hoax, I fired off mails to editors who saw fit to run the story, at *Raw Story*, the *SF Chronicle*, the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, *Shanghaiist* and several others. A few responded. None of them were prompted to remove the story from their site.

"We didn't write the story, dude. It's a syndicated story," was how *Raw Story's* editor responded, advising me that if it was good enough for *The Guardian*, it was good enough for her.

Possibly after reading my mail, *Shanghaiist* added the following comment: "Some reports have suggested that this 'trend' is more of an urban myth, created in part by Western media always happy to report a 'weird Japan' story. While this accusation is understandable, our original post was based on Japanese sources/reporting."

As this story was going to press, I was able to reach the editor at *Core Magazine* who had posted the original story on *Bucchi*. Expressing astonishment at how the story had gone viral in the foreign media, he evaded my questions about the identity of the writer. "The story never claimed the problem was widespread," he said defensively, implying that readers of his site are looking for thrills, not facts, and anyone who read the story in Japanese would clearly recognize the story's main purpose, which was to titillate.

It's hard to judge how many of the foreign readers of the story understood the purpose of the original: whether they actually believed that eyeball lickings were running amok across Japan or whether they were just titillated by the outlandishness of the report. But, sadly, it appears that – even at "news organizations" – the rationale for running anything has become that somebody else said it first.

"I can't imagine that journalists who write blogs, contribute as freelancers, etc., are held to different editorial standards than staff and other full-time writers," a Japan-based correspondent of a UK newspaper wrote to me.

Tracking this story from its source to its audience has convinced me otherwise. ❶

Subculture site *Bucchi News* (top) ran a piece from a single "informant." That was run on *Yomerumo*, which was picked up by *Naver Matome*, left.

*The Washington Times* (left) ran theirs a week later, and other news outlets followed. Some enthusiastically sited music video by Japanese band *Born* (below) as "evidence."

Medical sites warned against it, while the story spread worldwide – from ABC TV in the U.S. to, below, in Chile.



A Japanese farmer works his paddy fields 40 kms from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in 2011

▶ WHILE SOME MAJOR BREAKTHROUGHS HAVE BEEN MADE IN REDUCING RADIATION IN FOOD, THE STIGMA OF THE FUKUSHIMA LABEL WILL BE HARD TO OVERCOME

## Do Fukushima's farmers have a future?

by Azby Brown

EVERETT KENNEDY BROWN

I first met Yuyuki Fujimura a few years before the 3/11 disaster, when I was writing *Just Enough*, a book about traditional Japanese approaches to sustainability. Fujimura is an engineer and inventor – a quite successful one – with many patents to his name. An outspoken eccentric, he had decided to purchase a large plot of land surrounding a small lake in Nasu-Shiobara, in Tochigi Prefecture, and build what he called an “alternate energy theme park.”

Fujimura is an opponent of nuclear power, but he goes further, designing appliances and other devices for daily use, like refrigerators, dehumidifiers, stoves and lamps that do not require external sources of electricity (and often none at all), in an attempt to help society wean itself off any kind of centralized power generation. I visited his “theme park,” which he had named “Hi-denka Kobo,” or “Atelier Non-electric,” and found it to be charmingly improvised, a bit ramshackle in parts, and like Fujimura, brilliant and eccentric.

When I heard after the disaster that Nasu had become a radioactive hotspot, with radiation levels similar to those of much of central Fukushima, I went to visit Fujimura the first chance I got. His living room was strewn with expensive high-end radiation detecting equipment, like high-spec scintillators and portable nuclide monitors, as well as textbooks

and printouts on radiation. During that visit, he laid out his plan for helping Nasu, one that depended on using local expertise, with local farmers taking control of the measurement, decontamination and education processes. He told me he had gotten 50 farmers to join him.

Today, the citizens’ group, an NPO called *Nasu wo Kiho no Toride no Kai*, (Make Nasu a Bastion of Hope), has about 500 members, with close cooperation among producers and sellers. Their standards are much stricter than the government’s 100Bq/kg maximum allowable level for cesium in food. “At first,” explains Fujimura, “some of our members were insistent that cesium levels had to be reduced to zero. But I told them if that was the only acceptable level, there was nothing we could do. But my research had shown that it would be possible to reduce it to 37Bq/kg for almost all products, so if they could live with that, then we could continue farming in Nasu. That became our target.”

The results have been just as Fujimura predicted. Based on their experience, the group has published an extremely thorough and informative guidebook to help farmers elsewhere. The techniques include removing topsoil, adding potassium to inhibit cesium uptake in the plants, and most importantly, carefully matching the natural cesium uptake ability of the plants

to the specific conditions of each farm plot.

“Daikon,” he explains, “doesn’t absorb much cesium at all, and it can be grown in soil with 10,000 Bq/kg of cesium or more and still end up with no more than 37Bq/kg. Same for tomatoes, rice, and a few others. Pumpkin, cauliflower, and cabbage can be grown in ground with between 1,000 and 3,500 Bq/kg of cesium with similar results. But forget about trying to grow mushrooms or blueberries in even slightly contaminated soil.”

At present, he says, local farmers are successfully growing almost every crop at their own stringent levels, except mushrooms, bamboo shoots and mountain vegetables (*sansai*), which they’ve given up on. “One local association has been successful at implementing a 5Bq/kg limit for the rice it sells,” says Fujimura, “It’s really not that difficult to do, particularly when the rice is polished. The bran (*nuka*) retains cesium, but the white grain itself doesn’t.” Fujimura considers Fukushima Prefecture’s claim that less than 1 percent of the rice grown there has measurable cesium to be completely plausible, based on his own two years of experience.

Since March, 2011, farmers throughout the affected region, and particularly in Fukushima Prefecture, have been learning how to grow uncontaminated food even in contaminated soil, and can point to quite a

few successful experiments. Yuki no Sato, an organic cooperative in Towa, Nihonmatsu, reports that over 90 percent of the area’s key crops now have cesium levels lower than 10 Bq/kg.

Similar independently-verified examples have been presented by farmers all over the prefecture, who consistently report more success than failure – enough to dub it the “Fukushima Miracle.” But their success stories are invariably coupled with persistent gloominess about their future prospects, because the name “Fukushima” has become so tainted by the disaster that it is hard to sell their food, no matter how little contamination tests show it to have.

Unbelievable as it may sound, food well under the official 100Bq/kg limit is being grown even in Iitate-mura, one of the most highly contaminated areas. Once home to over 6,000 residents and a leader in ecological development and “slow life” sustainability, Iitate is now empty except for a dozen or so holdouts. One of them is Nobuyoshi Ito, an engineer who relocated to Iitate in 2010 to open a retreat and seminar center where corporate employees, particularly those who work with technology, could experience farming and working with their hands.

The center was in operation for barely a year when the disaster occurred. Since then, Ito has been extremely active, often clashing with local government officials, whom he feels are publicly underestimating the risks and challenges of resettling the town. Like Fujimura, he has experimented with growing food in contaminated soil, and has found considerable success. “In a hothouse in Iitate,” he says, “I’ve been able to grow many things – like cucumber, eggplants and tomatoes – that have no detectable cesium at all, and green beans that had only 33Bq/kg Cs 134-137 combined.”

He also carefully measured the contamination levels of 15 outdoor fields, and tried growing different crops. “In soil with 12,000 to 25,000 Bq/kg of cesium, I’ve been able to grow spinach, potatoes, sweet potatoes,” he says, “and other things with only 30-60Bq/kg. And that was in 2011. The contamination levels are lower now.” He considers his rice, with 30 Bq/kg or less, safe enough to eat.

Despite these results, neither Ito nor his elderly neighbor Meguro-san, who also continues to tend a few of his fields in Iitate, is very optimistic. “Rivers continually carry contaminated soil down from the mountains, and it collects in irrigation ponds,” Ito explained. “Even if fields are successfully decontaminated, they’re not decontaminating the mountains, and

there will be a continuous supply of new contamination through the watershed. Farm fields don’t distribute it evenly, so every field ends up with patches of high and low cesium content.”

But beyond that, he pointed out, “It will be decades, I think, before outdoor radiation levels are low enough for people to work all day long without health risks. And who will buy our rice anyway? Japan has a rice surplus now and people will avoid ours even if it measures safe.”

The Fukushima farmers may have much to learn from another disaster area. Since shortly after 3/11, representatives from Minamata, the city that suffered an environmental disaster from mercury poisoning, have been visiting Fukushima. They’ve also been sharing their experiences in symposia and meetings all over the country, hoping to help Fukushima residents gain redress and plan for the future.

There are many parallels between that industrial disaster and this one. By 1997, the ocean off Minamata was demonstrably clean, and repeated testing of local seafood showed that it was as safe as any other allowed onto the market. But their market had collapsed. The name “Minamata” simply had too many negative associations, and all the reassurance in the world could not reverse the damage.

So Minamata reinvented itself, and leveraged its experience of the disaster into many kinds of relevant expertise. It is now a model city, focusing on new energy, eco tourism and many new industries. Most of these are environment-related, including sustainable urban development, forestry, food and education. The name “Minamata” is increasingly associated with “environmental awareness.” Maybe it’s time for Fukushima to reinvent itself as well.

Quite a few Fukushima farmers have already quit and moved away. And regardless of how successful remediation of farmland might prove, demographic realities, specifically the lack of young people who want to continue farming, will continue to make the choice difficult. The local market for tested and approved food will probably remain, so farmers can expect some future income from food, and to be able to eat what they grow.

But the most promising possibility would seem to be shifting over to non-food agricultural products. Growing corn for bioethanol is one idea; in fact Ito proposed this to the Iitate town council and found support, while farmers in Tomioka have also been experimenting with the process. Fiber products for industrial use could also be grown. Other plants, like rape (*nanohana*) can be grown for oil

### Some facts & figures

*Fukushima Prefecture reports that between Aug. 25, 2012 to July 9, 2013:*

- Over 10.3 million bags of Fukushima rice were monitored for radiation, in order to clear them for market.
- 71 of these, or 0.0007 percent, were above 100Bq/kg limit and were stopped from sale.
- 1383 (0.01 percent) had between 51-75Bq/kg; 20,251 (0.2 percent) between 25-50Bq/kg.

*Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW) reports that from the start of 2013 to July 5:*

- Nationwide: 87,693 items tested; 372 (0.4 percent) were above 100Bq/kg limit.
- Fukushima Pref.: 10,655 items tested (including meat, fish, milk, wild plants and animals); 241 (2.2 percent) above limit.
- Fukushima Pref., agricultural produce only: 3211 items tested; 102 (3 percent) above limit.

While the Japanese 100Bq/kg limit for cesium in food is the strictest in the world, some insist that it is still too high. This in itself is worthy of a lengthy debate, and while controversial, just about everyone agrees that less is better.

Extensive information about food testing and reported results, as well as links to online sources consulted in the preparation of this article, both official and independent, can be found at the *Number 1 Shimbun* online site.

extracted from the seeds which can be used to make biodiesel, and other parts of the plant can be used to generate biogas. There are also possibilities for hemp, reeds, textiles, organic abrasives, waxes and biomass, to name a few.

For even these efforts to prove successful, however, many concerns about testing, waste products and continued consumer concerns will need to be fully and transparently addressed. In a short span Fukushima has painfully developed a shared base of valuable knowledge and experience regarding food safety and in the interactions between radioactivity, soil, and plants.

Fukushima could take advantage of this expertise and the interest worldwide, flip its injured name value, and actually become a global hub for learning about and promoting food safety, biofuels and ecologically sound restoration of damaged farmland and watersheds. Once damaged, a reputation may be fragile and elusive, but it can be restored. And one day, maybe, people will be happy to buy Fukushima’s food again. ●

Azby Brown is director of the Kanazawa Institute of Technology’s Future Design Institute and a volunteer at Safecast, the radiation monitoring group.



ANDREW POTHECARY

A WELL-TRAVELED CHILDHOOD LEADS TO A REMARKABLE CAREER AS THE VOICE OF MANY CLUB PRESS EVENTS

## Tamako Takamatsu: interpreter extraordinaire

by Julian Ryall

As the economist makes his point about the Bank of Japan's quantitative easing steps and shifts in the macro-economic fundamentals, Tamako Takamatsu is serenity personified. She effortlessly talks the listening journalists through the complicated assessments of the impact of Abenomics, national balance sheet projections and fluctuations in the yen exchange rate.

After she has finished jumping through both linguistic and financial hoops for the 90-minute press conference and we sit down in the bar, she leans in conspiratorially and says, "I have such respect for the journalists of the Club. You take all those ramblings and turn them into a coherent story. I don't know how you do it."

I am dumbfounded.

But I quickly learn that Takamatsu – whom I fear does not receive nearly the

had aptitude, not wisdom."

She studied piano for three years at Oberlin College, near Cleveland. The plan after graduation was to spend a year off in Tokyo in 1978 before going on to graduate school and becoming a college piano teacher, but we can thank James Clavell for the career change.

"Towards the end of my last year in college I read Clavell's *Shogun* and found myself admiring his capacity to make Japanese people easier for foreigners to understand," she said.

Takamatsu was making ends meet by translating at conferences when she received a call from the composer Seiji Ozawa, a distant relative, who asked if she could interpret for his manager from Columbia Artists Management. The two hit it off and Takamatsu was subsequently

'IT'S FRIGHTENING TO ME THAT SO FEW PEOPLE IN THIS NATION OF 130 MILLION ARE ABLE TO SPEAK ENGLISH.'

recognition that she deserves, and would probably deflect any applause should it be offered – has a number of other skills that she has kept quiet.

Born in Tokyo, she moved as an infant to Denmark, where her father was working as a theoretical physicist at the Niels Bohr Institute. The family lived in Copenhagen for two years, then relocated to Berkeley in California for a further year before returning to Japan.

The family was soon on the move again. Takamatsu spent her first five school grades in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where her father was again engrossed in his nuclear research. After a summer back in Japan, it was off to Austin, Texas, and then high school in Chicago.

"The only things at school that I had any aptitude for were the piano and math. I never really understood or liked math, but I think I was able to interpret the teachers' emphasis and always knew what would be in the tests," she said. "I think I

asked to be the Japan end of the company's global operations. This enabled her to work with some of the greats of classical music, from the pianist Vladimir Horowitz to conductor Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

She kept up a punishing schedule as a translator and in public relations for the next decade – managing to fit in marriage and the arrival of two sons – before deciding she needed a break. Stepping back from work, the family moved to Osaka shortly before the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. Two years later, they returned to Tokyo.

Although Takamatsu did not want to go back to work full-time, she did want something to keep her busy. "And then I realized that that only thing I could do was be an interpreter," she said.

"I have very mixed feelings about inter-

Julian Ryall is Japan correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*.

preting," she admits. "I also teach in an interpreting school and I hope that I will be among the last generations of interpreters.

"Japanese people have to be more proficient in English," she said. "They have to be able to at least read a newspaper in English and not have to wait for it to be translated for them. It's frightening to me that so few people in this nation of 130 million people are able to speak English."

As well as working at the FCCJ and teaching interpreting skills, Takamatsu has built a reputation that enables her to work for companies that range from airlines to international finance firms, railways, pharmaceuticals manufacturers and more. Every day, she says, is different.

Some are harder than others, and the press conference at the Club with the mother and brother of Shosei Koda in October 2004 is one that remains embedded in her memory.

Koda had been kidnapped by militants after naively crossing the border from Jordan into Iraq. His captors demanded that Japan withdraw its troops immediately or they would execute him; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi rejected the ultimatum.

Immediately after the press conference, Takamatsu said she was shaking. She could hardly stop crying as she identified with the young man's mother so closely. The following day, the militants decapitated Koda, and footage of the beheading was released over the internet.

Days like that are – thankfully – rare. Takamatsu said that the ideal press conference is one in which the speaker and the audience strike up a rapport or relationship that flows easily, to the point that the participants hardly even notice that their conversation is being relayed through a third party.

Being around journalists so frequently has encouraged Takamatsu to write, particularly after a 3,500-word short story she wrote for ANA's in-flight magazine won first prize and earned her and her husband a trip to Paris.

"A part of me has always wanted to be a novelist," she said. "I never thought that I could write, but I like it and I want to get across an explanation of Japanese people to foreigners so we don't seem so strange.

"The way that Japanese people are portrayed is so often only related to money, sex or strange things. Correspondents who are based here understand that we are three-dimensional people," she said. "But I fear that readers in other countries don't see us like that."

Takamatsu hopes her novel will set out to correct some of those errors – although, she feels, "‘She wanted to write’ will be engraved on my tombstone." ❶

THE STORY BEHIND THE UNRAVELLING OF  
JAPAN'S MOST CHARISMATIC POLITICIAN

October 22, 1974 was a seminal day for the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. The consequences of what took place at the press conference held that day still resonate in the halls of the Club many years later.

It began with then Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka fulfilling the customary commitment to appear before the foreign correspondents; it ended with Tanaka as the target of increasing calls for investigation into his financial background. There is no lack of analysis into what followed – as Tanaka was shaken, then toppled from his perch at the helm of the country – but it is rare to have a voice explaining the details of what led up to the historical press conference, and the coincidences that made things happen the way they did.

The late Sam Jameson left this piece, written in 1996, which recounts his own role in his position as prior FCCJ president and facilitator of Tanaka's appearance. It is a fascinating, inside look at how the Club – and its member journalists – operated at the time. It is also as much a part of Japan's history as it is the Club's.

by Sam Jameson



Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka speaking at the Club in 1974, with Bela Elias (wearing headphones) and Gebhard Hietscher

## Day of Reckoning: Kakuei Tanaka and the FCCJ

Although nearly 22 years have passed since the event, somehow the day that Kakuei Tanaka came to the FCCJ still stirs passions among old-time Members.

No one has ever written the whole story about what led to that day and what happened on Oct. 22, 1974. And with Tanaka gone, it is too late to put together all the sides of the story.

But as an event that changed the political history of Japan, perhaps one more “blind

man feeling the elephant” story is merited. If Tanaka had come to the FCCJ when, by custom, he should have come, it is virtually certain that he would not have been forced to resign. He would have served at least another two years as prime minister; indeed, he might have been in office and forestalled the 1976 U.S. Senate revelations of Lockheed's secret dealings in Japan.

My role in Tanaka's appearance at the Club was an accident of history.

I was serving as president at a time when the foreign ministry and the Prime Minister's Office had agreed by informal consensus that the prime minister should come to the FCCJ once a year, in principle. But by April 1974, or nine months into my term, Tanaka had not come since 1972. I liked Tanaka and wanted him to come while I was still president so that I would have the pleasure of introducing him and hosting the luncheon – and

I created a chance to ask him to come at the annual prime minister's cherry blossom party in Shinjuku Garden.

After waiting in the long line of guests, I took the few seconds I had with Tanaka as I shook his hand to say to him in rapid-fire Japanese:

“Mr. Prime Minister, you have not come to the FCCJ. Are you afraid of foreign correspondents?”

Tanaka laughed heartily, but said only, “Wakatta! Wakatta!”

Behind him, within hearing distance, was his chief Foreign Ministry secretary, Akitane Kiuchi. I walked around the VIP line to say hello to him and he said he would try to get the PM to come to the Club. I explained to him that I would be

president only until the end of June.

I did not have a close association with Tanaka but he and I had met from time to time over a period of about 10 years. He was a personality who left a strong impression on anyone who met him.

In an exclusive interview with him when he was secretary-general of the LDP in the late 1960s, I asked him on what conditions he thought Japan ought to seek the reversion of Okinawa.

“The return of Okinawa administration rights is one kind of transaction. In transactions, there is a seller and there is a buyer. First, the seller sets the price, and then the buyer decides whether to make the purchase or not,” he replied.

Initially, I was shocked. How could

a leader of a country talk about seeking return of part of his nation's territory in the terminology of a horse trader?

Later, I came to see that in that reply to my question, Tanaka had summed up what appeared to be his basic philosophy: namely, that politics is always a transaction (*torihiki*). And as long as no bribes are involved, that isn't a bad definition for the way a democracy should work in any country.

I was privileged to know Tanaka well enough before scandals demolished his cheerful personality – when he often acted as if he were a simple, open-hearted country boy – to consider him a leader with an extremely engaging personality.

At Honolulu in August 1972, when he met President Nixon prior to going

## ELIAS' SPEECH WAS ONE LONG, ENDLESS, PAINFUL SERIES OF JABS, SOME BORDERING ON INSULTS

to Beijing, I sat next to Tanaka for about 10 minutes during a garden party at the home of the Japanese consul general.

"I told President Nixon he shouldn't worry about the trade deficit. Japan is such a close ally of the United States that it's like putting all of that money in one purse. But Nixon wasn't convinced," Tanaka said, laughing heartily.

In a display of friendly accessibility that I have never seen any other leader of a country make toward reporters, Tanaka chatted with every reporter in the traveling press group.

As he was about to leave Haneda Airport in September 1972 to establish diplomatic relations with the Beijing government, Tanaka headed for his airplane walking on a red carpet and shaking hands with VIPs. I was standing at least five meters behind the VIP line but when Tanaka came abreast of me, he pushed aside two of the VIPs and walked forward.

I was too flabbergasted to move, and he walked all the way over to shake my hand. All I could say was, "Pl- pl- pl- please go and return safely."

It was the same kind of charm Tanaka always displayed toward his supporters in Niigata 3-ku, whose names and whose children he remembered unforgettably.

As a reporter, I knew I shouldn't let such a display sway me. But that act and the other kindnesses Tanaka showed over the years did sway me. I liked him. And if he had come to the FCCJ while I was still president, I would have given him a friendly introduction.

But, as it turned out, the vagaries of scheduling prevented an appearance before June 30 [the end of Jameson's term]. Finally, the summer was drawing to an end, as Kiuchi contacted me about Tanaka appearing at the Club. I suggested that the two overseas trips Tanaka was planning for the fall might provide an opportunity for a luncheon. The appearance was scheduled between the two trips.

Only after the date was fixed did the *Bungei Shunju* "Kinmyaku" article about the torihiki of Tanaka over his entire career appear.

No move was made to change the date.

But an official in the press section of the foreign ministry called me to ask what questions I thought Tanaka might be asked. I replied that if Tanaka had not made any statement about the *Bungei Shunju* article by the time he came to the Club, that he would be asked about the kinmyaku charges.

Thus, it is certain that the Foreign Ministry and Tanaka knew in advance that he would face at least one kinmyaku question.

What neither the Foreign Ministry, nor Tanaka, nor members of the Club expected, however, was the introductory speech



The author pictured while FCCJ president

delivered by Bela Elias, the Tokyo correspondent of the communist Hungarian News Agency.

Elias was an extraordinarily cheerful person with what usually was a good sense of humor. I had appointed him to the board of directors of the Club when another board member left Japan and had to resign.

As if all the elements of fate were working against Tanaka, Max Desfor, my successor as president, was out of town, so Elias filled in for him as the MC at the Tanaka luncheon. Desfor was a pleasant man but had no sense of humor – and if he had delivered the introductory speech, it would not have been the disaster that Elias made it.

Elias, in fact, asked for my opinion about whether humor would be appropriate for an introduction to the PM.

Assuming (as it turned out, incorrectly) that Elias would balance any humorous pokes at the PM with an equal amount of praise, I assured him that it would be acceptable. That advice turned out to be a horrible mistake.

Elias' speech was one long, endless, painful series of jabs, some bordering on insults – with no balancing praise at all. I cringed as he delivered it, and later that day called Kiuchi to apologize.

Tanaka scowled at the speech but made no overt protest. Two reporters asked him questions that had nothing to do with kinmyaku, and then I got up to question him.

Because the venue was the FCCJ, I asked the question in English. But I made it a point to look him in the eyes to show that I was not being nasty. And I intentionally put the question in an international context, citing investigations that the U.S. Congress was making at that time into the financial affairs of vice-presidential nominee Nelson Rockefeller. I asked Tanaka if he thought investigations into the financial affairs of a politician were appropriate, and asked him to comment on the charges in the *Bungei Shunju* article.

Tanaka looked me in the eyes when he replied, and did not appear angry as he spoke.

And if his reply had been a straightforward denial, it all might have ended right there. But his answer was vague, stirring another correspondent to follow up with another kinmyaku question. Two more questions followed and Kiuchi gestured to Tanaka to leave.

Complaining about "excessive questions about a magazine article," Tanaka and his party walked out.

Tanaka's answers were so vague that trying to write a story about what he said about kinmyaku was all but impossible. The real news, as it turned out, was yet to be made – and that was the news that was created by the Japanese media.

The large national dailies had not been reporting anything about the *Bungei Shunju* article or kinmyaku scandals. But all of them leaped on Elias' introduction and the four kinmyaku questions as an excuse to pull the

scandal in from the "cold" of weekly Japanese journalism, which is always ignored by the mainstream media.

Detailed reports of the introduction and full transcripts of the Q&A were printed to give the impression to Japanese readers that kinmyaku had become an issue of major international importance – and, by implication – cause to drive Tanaka out of office.

As popular as Tanaka had been at the beginning of his term, when he was about to realize the dreams of the Japanese media to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing, by this time two years later the simple country boy with a 10th-grade education from night school had worn out his media welcome. [Tanaka resigned on Nov. 26 after LDP rivals began a public inquiry in the Diet.]

When I asked the first question, I thought I was merely asking for a comment on a subject that Tanaka had not yet discussed. I was astonished – and remain so – by the campaign against him that the Japanese media launched, using the Club appearance as an excuse.

As events showed, it was not a campaign against corruption. It was a vendetta against an individual politician whom the press had simply grown to dislike, at least partly because of his humble upbringing. After Tanaka had been driven from office, the word "kinmyaku" and all the whiffs of charges against him, disappeared from the media – until Lockheed emerged in the U.S. in 1976.

Japanese leaders, like then Construction Minister Takeo Kimura, speculated in public that American correspondents had "plotted" to get rid of Tanaka. To me, a correspondent who believes, even today, that Tanaka was one of the best Japanese prime ministers from an American standpoint, such an accusation was preposterous. (Tanaka solved in one year nearly all of the economic complaints Americans accumulated against Japan during the seven years and eight months of "the politics of waiting" of Prime Minister Eisaku Sato.)

The truth is closer to the criticism made by political commentator Minoru Morita. He commented that the Japanese press suffers an intellectual "menstruation" (*gekkei*) once every 10 years or so, and needs to go on a witch hunt against a politician.

Tanaka was the victim of the 1970s. But that is just one blindman's portion of the elephant. ❶

## IT WAS A VENDETTA AGAINST AN INDIVIDUAL POLITICIAN WHOM THE PRESS HAD SIMPLY GROWN TO DISLIKE.

### Excerpts from the transcript of Bela Elias' introduction of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka (at the FCCJ, October 22, 1974)

"If you want to know everything about his family life, please read *Newsweek*. As to his personal well being or financial affairs, you can probably find more than enough in the latest issue of *Bungei Shunju* (boisterous laughter)."

"He's a man of great contrasts. He has a deep sense of informality, humor and compassion, or at least I hope so (laughter)."



"... he has his likes and dislikes ... they say he dislikes Western food, the teacher's union, and expressions like "inflation" or "shunto."

"He was born to a humble farming household ... before he became a businessman, a politician and finally the prime minister of Japan. Witness the phenomenal change of his defeated and devastated country from rags to riches – naturally not without any favorable effect upon himself. If one may believe the usually reliable Japanese press, the total interests he controls ... is more than ¥2 billion."

"His party's flying apart, the economy is in depression, inflationary trends and prices skyrocketing – not to mention the latest *atomu shokku* (laughter)."

"In his well publicized book, *The Submersion of Japan – gomen nasai* (hearty laughter) I wanted to say, *Building a New Japan* – he proved he is not only a shrewd businessman ... but a man of noble dreams."

"The *Mainichi Shimbun* reports that the popularity of the Tanaka Cabinet has shrunk to a mere 18 percent ... The horizon for our guest of honor looks definitely gloomy."

"He says, 'two-thirds of my term as party president has passed. I will throw the ball with all my might during the remaining one year. ... Let us hope that his ball will not turn out to be a boomerang.'"



A RIGHT-WING ACTIVIST AND AN UPPER HOUSE MEMBER FROM THE DPJ FIND COMMON GROUND ON THE NEED FOR HATE SPEECH LAWS

## Should Japan be free to hate?

by Tyler Rothmar

There can be no meaningful discussion about freedom of speech without an examination of hate speech. Venomous and vitriolic, hate speech is the antimatter of communication. Although it is a statement, hate speech runs contrary to the spirit of dialogue from which the right to free speech draws strength. "I may not agree with you," Oscar Wilde is reputed to have said, "but I will defend to the death your right to make an ass of yourself."

On July 9, Kunio Suzuki, an outspoken right-wing political activist, and Yoshifu Arita, a House of Councillors lawmaker, DPJ member and former journalist, held a press event at the FCCJ to discuss the rise in recent years of incidents of hate speech in Japan, and to explore the question of whether laws should be enacted to censor it.

Both men began by denouncing the recent rash of hate speech in Japan and made clear their desire that the rest of the world should not mistake it for the sentiment of the Japanese people in general. "At these hate speeches and these demonstrations, we see the flag of Japan being flown," Suzuki said. "It fills me with a renewed sense of grief, because the flag of Japan is weeping at being used in this way."

The chief offender has been a group that was founded in 2006 called Zaitokukai, or Citizens Against Special Privileges for Koreans. The organization, which claims 13,000 members and has offices in Tokyo's Akihabara district, organizes protests at which its members chant anti-Korean slogans and carry signs calling for violence against residents of Japan with roots on the Korean Peninsula.

Early TV news reports of the protests led some view-

ers to complain about being exposed to such discriminatory messages. The result has been a vacuum of reporting on the subject in Japan's domestic media, a worrying scenario because of the feedback loop it creates whereby the lack of public awareness causes politicians to ignore the problem, emboldening similar protests.

"Most Japanese people are unaware that [such demonstrations] are taking place," Suzuki said. "The television stations have stopped showing this kind of footage, with the idea that eventually this thing will die out. The problem is that the footage is being shown abroad."

In one YouTube video that has become particularly infamous, a 14-year-old Japanese girl can be seen speaking into a microphone in Tsuruhashi, the Korea town of Osaka, in front of a line of police.

Addressing a small crowd in the same crisp way that other kids her age pledge to do their best at the opening ceremony of their school's sports day, she says: "I hate Koreans so much I can't stand it... if they continue to be so arrogant, it won't be the Nanking massacre, it'll be the Tsuruhashi massacre!"

Suzuki is a founder and advisor of Issuikai, a right-wing organization established in 1972 that opposes what it sees as the strong role played in

Japanese politics by the United States. He believes the Zaitokukai and similar groups have symbiotic connections with the police that allow them to conduct their protests more or less unhindered, while the police

use such opportunities to look necessary.

There have, however, been signs of change. Lawmaker Kan Suzuki asked Prime Minister Shinzo Abe about the issue in the Diet. Abe responded that the hate speech incidents were "regrettable," prompting the police to take a tougher stance in recent months.

Arita noted: "When these terrible demonstrations were taking place in Shin-Okubo and Tsuruhashi in February this year, people in the vicinity, voluntarily and without any visible leader, started to gather and say, 'Stop doing things that are so shameful and discriminatory.' The numbers of counter demonstrators swelled to two or three times those of the demonstrators."

Despite this and other more concerted efforts, Arita said he does not believe the incidents of hate speech will stop. He called for the Japanese government to adhere to the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which it approved in 1995, by following up with legislation to ban hate speech.

Although the government has set up a committee to make recommendations on the matter, its most recent response to those recommendations, which came just this year, was a total denial of the problem. "The conclusion of the Japanese government is that racial discrimination does not exist in Japan," Arita said.

Given this blanket refusal on the part of the government to look the problem in the face, one has to wonder about the wisdom of entrusting that same government with its resolution, whether by legislative means or otherwise – to say nothing of the consequences of granting the state a mandate to censor speech. ❶

Tyler Rothmar is a Tokyo-based freelance writer and editor.



Kunio Suzuki, left, and Yoshifu Arita at the Club

## FCCJ EXHIBITION: SEA BREEZE OF RIO DE JANEIRO



photographs by Junshi Nakamichi



Junshi Nakamichi became a freelance photographer in 1976. He has worked extensively for magazine and commercial clients, and has had many solo exhibitions.

I LANDED IN RIO DE JANEIRO at the end of January 1990, when it was the height of summer.

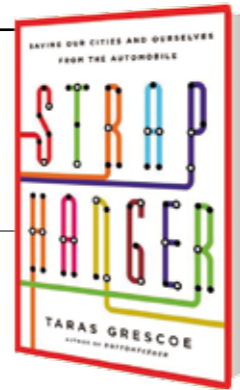
For several weeks until Carnival began, the many beaches of the Rio area – Botafogo, Copacabana, Ipanema, Revlon and Barra – were packed with youths enjoying sunbathing and social activities. I was struck by many images: The brown skin of a creole woman in a white swimsuit; a peddler with a giant tray of ripe, red watermelon; a group dancing a samba to the rhythm of a drum; and muscle-bound youths training with weights.

As the day ended, in the silence of the now deserted beach, I felt *saudade*: a nostalgia and admiration for the Brazilian heart. In those days, I loved photographing with Kodachrome film, and in Rio de Janeiro, I was left with an airy sense of drifting in my own world. ❶

## STRAPHANGER

By Taras Grescoe (Times Books, 2012)

reviewed by John R. Harris



To go through finding your sea legs on Tokyo's rail system – learning where to change for anywhere and which car lets you off right at the stairs – is to comprehend the vastness of the ocean. For me, that process began in 1985, and ever since I have watched in awe as Tokyo's train system has evolved from ticket punchers, the fuming stench of platform ashtrays and platform pushers compacting drunks into non-air-conditioned cars ... into an unparalleled masterwork of efficiency, civility and scale.

But how to explain that to someone who's never been here, and who has heard only of pushers? What superlative do you cite? In 2002, fed up with the lack of information, I put weeks into researching a piece ACCJ Journal ran under the head, "Riding the Eighth Wonder of the World" (alas, no longer on their site). Here's the pearl I found and have used ever since:

"By almost any measure, the Tokyo urban rail system dwarfs all others. Take passenger volume. Each year, the combined subway and commuter rail services of New York, London and Paris (total regional population 48.9 million – about 1.5 times Tokyo) carry about 4.6 billion passengers. Tokyo trains do triple that (over 13 billion passengers annually)... More than 87 percent of journeys into central Tokyo are by rail, versus 31 percent for Manhattan."

To really grasp the scope of Tokyo's magnificence, though, what you need is a comparison with the world's other great urban rail systems that is rich in context and detail. At long last, that's what Canadian writer Taras Grescoe has given us in his book *Straphangers*.

Grescoe has an engaging narrative recipe he applies to explorations of New York, Paris and Moscow (all among the few systems that could hold a candle to Tokyo) and other fascinating cities from Bogota to Copenhagen. In about 25 pages for each city, he cooks a rich mélange of you-are-here actuality, artfully spiced with nicely told history, thought-provoking statistics and insightful social observations.

In New York, Grescoe recounts how the

subway spawned the high-rise forest that defines today's Manhattan. He traces the history from clashes between proletarian riders and plutocrat owners that made the "nickel fare" sacrosanct, through takeover by city hall and down into the financial abyss that left the subway a crime-infested rat hole by the 1970s. But his account of the subway's renaissance is so inspiring you may feel the urge to ride all the way from the Bronx to Flatbush.

In Paris, his sketch of the Métro and its culture is so vivid you can imagine yourself boarding Line 1, "Direction La Défense." Grescoe explains how the creation of a dense route network in the city center, with closely spaced stations, influenced the evolution of an urban gem from 1898 on. And how the Paris system is poised for an expansion that recent news reports describe as "pharaonic."

In Moscow, the ever-ironic city of tsars and commissars, we meet Lazar Kagarovich, the Stalinist *apparatchik* mastermind of the palatial Moscow Metro, which stands with victory at Stalingrad and space travel as one of three undeniable Soviet achievements. The initial line was built in the 1930s with picks and shovels by 74,000 "volunteers." Today, while post-Soviet BMWs and Benzes sit mired in the world's worst jams, the Stalinist miracle still gets you anywhere in 30 minutes, 78 cents U.S. for an all-day ticket.

As Grescoe finally reaches Tokyo, I will admit to some trepidation, just because reading any visitor's take on this town you risk getting hit in the face with a flock of canards – like the *New York Times* auto writer whose book said Tokyoites wear masks because of air pollution. In that regard, I'm Grescoe's reader from hell: a self-confessed Tokyo train nerd of long standing. But I hereby testify that he aces it, weaving in 30 pages a narrative that embraces everyone from *chikan* to 6-year-olds riding alone to the lady who nods off on your shoulder to the train driver who talks to himself while pointing at everything he sees. Along the way he neatly explains the difference between JR, the two subways and the private lines ... and

what we mean by "platform pizza." It's all in there, neatly contextualized with the recognition that: "Tokyo's railways are the standard by which all others must be judged."

Okay, so it's not vegan-level canard-free. Tokyo is not mainly low-rise because of earthquakes. The limiting factor is regulations that restrict overshadowing adjoining properties. And I have a few other niggles that a knowledgeable editor might have caught. But let's not quibble: I'll give the Tokyo chapter 9 out 10.

The only thing distressing about this book was imagining what Grescoe went through to get a U.S. publishing deal. I can almost hear a dumb-ass New York editor insisting he make it about America and "saving our cities and ourselves from the automobile." In a book that brilliantly explores the world's great urban railways, nearly half the pages are about the U.S. – which is like devoting half a work on global soccer to somewhere that barely plays it. So he spends way too much time in sad-sack Phoenix and Philadelphia when he could have taken us to Madrid, Cairo or Delhi. We don't even get London.

Editorial pandering to a U.S. audience is likewise evident in the rendering of all that should be meters and grams to yards and ounces; something a Montrealer like Grescoe would never do of his own volition. And you can almost hear an editor saying, "Taras, you need an inspiring spin." So we follow him through Portland, Oregon and Philadelphia's student ghetto scratching for scant evidence of hipsters beyond Manhattan willing to ride the train. Glossing over the pervasive issues of race and the not-unfounded fear that someone else on-board has a gun, he leaves us with a sense that any day now Americans are going to get on the train. Don't believe it.

What a Canadian writer like Grescoe might usefully have done is to point out that every major city north of the border has transit ridership that dwarfs U.S. levels. And hammer home the message that having millions commute 50 miles or more a day, one person per car, is detrimental to both economic competitiveness and the environment. But the message is in there if you look. Where the average American generates 24 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, Tokyoites emit just 4.8 tons each.

But I'm just quibbling out of rank jealousy: this is an excellent book I wish I'd written. I just hope Grescoe will give a talk at the FCCJ next time he visits Tokyo. ①

**John R. Harris**, a speechwriter based on Chiba's Pacific coast, lives largely on the avails of the auto industry. But at heart he is a train nerd who hails from Toronto, a city with transit ridership second in North America only to New York.

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