

JETAANY

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Japan Exchange
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Alumni Association,
New York Chapter

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THE "ISSUES" ISSUE CONFRONTING THAT WHICH YOU MIGHT RATHER AVOID

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THOUGHTS ON THE ASIAN FETISH

By NATHAN HALL (YAMAGUCHI-KEN, 2000-2002)

Sometimes basely referred to as Yellow Fever, the predilection among many JETs for a local mate, or often local mates, is for some a source of mirth and for others a source of quiet animosity. The Asian Fetish is famous, in both the East and the West. It is time, thought some soon-to-be-without-credit editorial wonks at the JETAANY Newsletter, to explore from whence this trend came.

To fully expose myself (another fetish for another article[wheeee!]) for what I am and where I lie, I will divulge a bit from my own experience, which if nothing else, will prove that I do not believe in journalistic objectivity. Great. I dated a Japanese woman during my first year on the JET Programme. My intentions were pure enough (he says). For me, it was a part of the experience of living in Japan. My town strongly encouraged this. The deputy mayor told me at

my welcome party that he hoped I would marry a Japanese girl and have enough children to field a baseball team. He was drunk, mind you, but even so, I was the 7th JET in that location and I was to become only the 2nd to leave without a spouse.

I'm a person who will try anything once. I ate raw chicken, I still eat *natto* and I even tried *kujira sashimi* once. I learned as much Japanese as I could and I dated a Japanese girl. This all went together. I do not want put on a misogynist tone and suggest that I sampled a local the way one would sample food. Quite the contrary, it was a window into the culture, and she was as much of a teacher for

me as my supervisor was, in terms of language, culture, behavior and customs.

As George MacDonald Fraser put it so crudely in his novel *Flashman*, written as the memoirs of a British officer in India in the 1840's "I learned more of the refinements of Hindi from her than I would have from any *munshi*. I give the advice for what it is worth: if you wish to learn a foreign tongue properly, study it in bed with a native girl—I'd have got more of the classics from an hour's wrestling with a Greek wench than I did in four years from (my headmaster)." What a terrible thing to say; but do not blame the messenger. He said it, not I. I just

Since Marco Polo made his exploration, Westerners have been tantalized with "mysteries of the Orient" and perhaps our culture has created a fantasy out of this.

work here. I lived in a conservative and rural area, and while people in my village thought it was great that I was dating a Japanese girl, her family did not approve, or would not have approved had she actually told them, thus ending the affair in tears. Of all the insight into the culture that she gave me, this was perhaps the most acute.

It is common for some westerners to suggest that the Asian Fetish is a part of a broader gender politics issue. There is a widespread perception throughout the Occident that Japanese women are more submissive than western women. I think that this belief is largely ignorant of how cultures operate differently. It is no different than claiming that New Yorkers are rude or that southerners are racist. Of course Japanese might communicate their needs differ-

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The "Issues" Issue

You got a problem? Yeah, we're talking to you. We don't see anyone else, so we must be talking to you.

Welcome to the "Issues" Issue, where we don't give a pile of *natto* what you think. We just want to make you uncomfortable reading something on the train that says "Asian Fetish" right on the cover. We want to make you think about stuff you don't want to think about. And re-live moments you'd rather not re-live.

Why? Because it's none of your Fukushima business. That's why.

So just read the articles, and if you're a *yowamushi* with sensibilities too delicate to handle the content, then send an e-mail to us at newsletter@jetaany.org. And if you have anything half-interesting to say, maybe we'll put it in the next issue.

Otherwise, just deal with it and get over yourself. Oh yeah. And thanks for your support.

Steven and Jody

REQUEST FOR SUMMER NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS!!!!

We don't have a theme yet, but that's our issue, not yours. We're always looking for new ways to make the Newsletter more interesting, fun, off-the-wall, and all around just jolly great. So if you've got the urge to write something or just some nebulous ideas swirling in your head, get in touch with us and we'll give you some structure and focus. Just e-mail Steve or Jody at newsletter@jetaany.org.

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JETAA New York

CO-EDITORS

Steven Horowitz
newsletter@jetaany.org

Jody Mousseau
editor@jetaany.org

PRESIDENT

Shannan Spisak
president@jetaany.org

VICE PRESIDENT

Rosie DeFremey
vicepresident@jetaany.org

SECRETARY

Clara Kuhlman
secretary@jetaany.org

TREASURER

Jo Sonido
treasurer@jetaany.org

PHILADELPHIA REPRESENTATIVE

Bill Higgins
philyrep@jetaany.org

WEBMASTER/DATABASE

COORDINATOR
Andrew Barnes
database@jetaany.org

Please check out e-mail from our Secretary and the web site www.jetaany.org for updated announcements.

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UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENTS

FROM OUR JET DAYS

We've all had them. Times during our JET experience when we wished we could crawl into a hole. And now we will dredge a few of them up from some of your fellow JET alums so you too can cringe and perhaps relive a few of your own uncomfortable moments.

Monday at the Library

For the first month of JET, there were no classes so I had to go to the Board of Ed in my town and sit at a desk every day with absolutely nothing to do, and of course no one would talk to me. It was the pre-email era and I was going stir crazy. I figured out that they didn't mind if I left occasionally to go to the public library. But on Monday in the third week, after leaving for the library, I decided I'd just go home and have a short nap instead. When I got back to the office, one colleague asked me very nicely how the library was, and I said fine. A few minutes later a Japanese-Brazilian colleague came up to me and quietly explained that the library is closed on Mondays. I was mortified and wanted to apologize and resurrect my reputation somehow, but there was really nothing I could say or do.

Tell One, Tell Everyone

I once taught at a junior high school where one of the students (I'll call her Miho for sake of simplicity) recently came back from living in California. She was there for a few years and her English communication skills were excellent. During a break in-between classes, a group of students asked me which one had the better English skills, Miho or the Japanese English teacher. Being the innocent, trusting fool that I am, I automatically said, Miho has better English communication skills and is easier to understand. The next day, the same Japanese English teacher took me aside in the morning and as we were drinking the finger-burning, hot ocha, he remarked

about what he heard about my comment. He was very upset and wanted to know if I said his English skills were poor. It took me a short while to realize that he somehow got wind of the conversation I had the previous day and was surprised that I would give such an honest opinion. Needless to say, I ended up apologizing profusely and had to do a serious backtrack of my prior statement.

Fighting the Past

I was approached on the train by an old man who reeked of alcohol. The man must have been in his mid-seventies, and his dialect was so strong it sounded like a different language; I couldn't tell if it was Osaka ben or something else. He was staring straight at me and shouting something, but I couldn't make heads or tails of his slurred speech. My friends (those loyal ikebana club girls) turned bright red and said we should leave at the next stop and wait for a different train. When I asked what he was yelling about, they said, "World War II." Curious about their opinions about the war and our countries' shared history, I pushed them for more info, "what about the war? Why is he so angry? Is he blaming me? Can I talk to him?" They stopped me- "His wife and daughter were killed in Hiroshima. He called us traitors for talking to a murder like you. We're getting off the train here. Good night." I got off too, and walked home alone.

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MY GAY FURENDO

By Alexei Esikoff (Fukushima-Ken, 2001-2002)

I survived my year as an illiterate foreigner in podunk Japan because of David (David, please, never Dave). Believe me, David was just as illiterate and foreign as I was (I have very curly hair, he's over six feet tall), but something about him enabled him to cope better. We suspect he learned early on, as a gay kid growing up in Ohio, how to dodge uncomfortable questions and talk his way out of potentially embarrassing situations. For me, this was a whole new breed of socialization.

Generally, when people asked if I had a boyfriend (and they always did), I would answer no, hoping to put a kibosh on the subject. Sometimes, however, people would refer to the tall, loud *gaijin* boy I was seen with as we galled around Fukushima, doing all sorts of crazy *gaijin* things like riding bicycles and eating ramen. I would just smile and deny it, knowing they never believed me—a girl and guy in public together MUST be dating.

David relished his position as a stud. He was young, white, fit, and learning passable Japanese. Girls outwardly pointed to him, giggling "*kakko ii*." A flashing of his chest to his school during a volleyball game (accidental, he swears), drew admiration of both sexes from the crowd. He encouraged this behavior. In a clothing store, he spotted me chatting to some 15-year-old girls of mine. Making a beeline towards me, he kissed me, grabbed my hand, and said puppy-eyed, "Are you going to introduce me to your students, honey?" It may have been heterosexual, but dammit, he was hot, idolized, a celebrity in Fukushima!

No fag can hang around his hag forever, so we had to take care of David's sex life. Armed with his Stonewall Guide, we discovered there were two gay bars in our city of 300,000, around the corner from each other. So, one August two weeks after our initial arrival, we decked ourselves out (he put in more effort than I did), and headed off for the first one, Sanbo Snack—and discovered our first *gei ba* lesson: segregation of the sexes, like the rest of Japan, is strictly enforced. Hence why Sanbo himself, spotting me peering from behind my big white friend, said "NO!" in desperate English, making a big *dame X* with his arms. David, in a show of international peace and understanding, flipped him the bird and we stalked out, shaken.

Trunks, the other bar down the block and David's last refuge for a sex life, was literally just that, a bar, with about ten stools and a smiling, toothless, nervously *genki* bartender. He didn't shoo us out though, rather made the three middle-aged saggy patrons move down so the *gaijins* could sit together.

"Gay?" asked Ryu, the bartender, to David, who gave an enthusiastic "Hai!" The bar patrons noticeably smiled, and I noticed one of them was wearing a wedding ring.

Ryu seemed confused as to my presence. "Lesbian?" he asked. I was about to say yes, to prevent expulsion. David out his arm around me, "*Watashi no tomodachi*." He pointed back and forth between us—"Boys. Boys." As in our preferences.

Our Japanese was pretty limited at this point in our stay, so there was a lot of polite smiling and excessive beer drinking. Then Yukiko walked in.

Yukiko seemed to be the Japanese equivalent of me, and she's the only girl I ever saw in Trunks. She also spoke decent English. The patrons started pummeling her with questions for us, which we answered happily in English, so pleased to be accepted, to be objects of intrigue, to be making a connection here in rural northern Japan, when—

"What size are you?" Yukiko asked David.

"Excuse me?"

"He wants to know," she said, gesturing to the thickly bespectacled man next to her grinning with beer and hope, "what size is your penis?" I gave a guffaw, and David answered, "Huge!", spreading his hands wide in an international display of penile dreams.

The evening was capped when we stopped back in Sanbo Snack, where

David just had to flip Sanbo off again.

We became friendly with the Trunks' regulars, from giggly Ryu to Shoichi, who told us he wasn't interested in David because he preferred "fat old men." We were invited to a *yakiniku* picnic and the Christmas party. David even played volleyball with them every Sunday. (Gay Japanese volleyball: I kept my distance from that one.)

Things began to change as the deep fall set in. For me, anyway. My problems with Japan were the standard white Western female quasi-feminist ones: chirpy Office Ladies became the bane of my existence, Japanese men were frightened of me (except when they were drunk, when they propositioned me), Western men seemed interested in scoring (generally vastly superior) Japanese chicks only, people asked invasive, inappropriate, or nonsensical questions ("Do Australian girls get periods?"), and pants never fit my American ass. To fight it, we started exploring. But as we discovered Tokyo I became depressed. Compare Fukushima and Trunks to Tokyo and Ni-chome:

Sure, David liked Trunks. He had friends there, in a very platonic sense; most of the patrons were much older than us and unhappy. We figured all gay youths must flock to the cities, much as they do in the US. Fukushima was fine, but it was boring. There was one lame disco, one Indian restaurant, and lots of beautiful, uninhabited mountains. After I exhausted all exploring options, I needed something to occupy my time, something that had nothing to do with students, *kanji*, or Grammar Gamble. I tried; I organized parties, activities, and read every book I could get my hands on. But the limitations of my life in Japan, the isolation I felt because of my language and culture, grew. It didn't seem to bother David nearly as much. I suppose, in a way, he had been an outsider most of his life. He kept me busy with videos and restaurants. And we went to Tokyo together on weekends; sometimes he went to his kind of bar, sometimes I would strike out with Western single females. We soaked up Tokyo, the vibrance, the diversity, the hedonism.

Sunday night returns to Fukushima became harder. I couldn't face another day of questions about my breast size, or the hours and hours and hours spent staring at the six tape removal marks on the wall above my desk. After work, my few *gaijin* friends and I went to the same *gaijin* bar and bitched, though David didn't really complain. Inevitably, depression begot depression. I felt like I was drowning in something murky and unidentifiable.

I started losing David to Tokyo. He had a boyfriend, then a couple hookups, all of which were preferable to a sad, clingy girl who reminded him constantly of what Japan could do to you if you let it. I thought that because he was gay and attractive and a novelty, he was beloved, while I was just another pushy, overly emotional white girl.

Later, I learned Ni-chome was not the mecca I had imagined. For a major international city, it was a small scene. (True story: In the spring, I had an old friend come to visit for a few weeks, who went to Osaka on his own while I had to work. In a gay bar, a Japanese guy asked him if he happened to know a gay American who lived in Fukushima named David.) Japan has 120 million people, and this was the largest city. Where were all the gay kids? he wondered. Are they all at home with their mothers, dreading the day they have to get married out of filial duty?

Neither of us re-contracted, and as Japan thawed into spring, we realized we'd be leaving soon. I still had touches of malaise, but on the whole was having fun again. I think we both abandoned any hopes of establishing permanence. Instead, we lived solely for the moment, drawing what we could from our weird and wonderful experience.

I had intended to write about Japan and homosexuality and my dear friend David, but somehow it ended up being as much about me as him. (Typical, he would say.) Maybe that David is gay was incidental to our experience. I would have thought that of the two of us, he would have found Japan more constricting. Instead, I was the one with difficulty adapting. But with his help I survived, and made it back to New York, where I revel in the ability, once again, to find pants that fit my American ass.

(Continued from page 1)

ently and they may complain differently than westerners if those needs are not met; but one should not mistake that for being submissive or obedient. You can surely tell the difference between responses such as "yes," "a little," "so-so," "case by case" and "maybe." The shades of nuance are clear.

A related, though less inflammatory draw, may be the perceived cute or demure qualities that seem to be a feminine ideal in Japan. The underside of which is that cute, for most, is "non-threatening" and that there's a certain stigma of weakness associated with having an Asian fetish. The argument being that guys who go for Asian women are in part looking for something less threatening because they don't want to be challenged. Of course a language barrier is a challenge in itself.

Perhaps the draw is to that which is exotic and different. The satirical newspaper The Onion addressed this in a point-counterpoint editorial in which two views were expressed. The debate was European Men Are So Much More Romantic Than American Men vs. American Women Studying in Europe Are Unbelievably Easy (http://www.theonion.com/onion3510/european_romantic.html). Both the point and the joke the editorial was trying to make should be clear from the title. The point I am trying to make is that the Asian Fetish is not limited to western men. It is part of a broader trend in which many people are attracted to different cultures. Having a relationship with a foreigner is, going back to the food simile I was trying to avoid earlier, like going out to an exotic restaurant once in a while rather than having steak and potatoes seven nights a week.

The Japanese have a similar concept, called *gaijin-zuki*, which sounds a little less dirty and a lot less neurotic than Asian Fetish. Certain Japanese people prefer foreigners to nationals. Bringing a little introductory psychology into it, a belief that was voiced at a recent Nihongo Dake Dinner suggests that some Japanese women are drawn to foreign men particularly if they had a bad relationship with their father, causing them to project him onto all Japanese men. Another person thought that western men go for Asian women because they want their partner to look different from their mother. Hopefully this means people will be talking a lot less about Dr. Freud. Please, God, let him rest comfortably in his grave, where he seems to have stopped writing.

A less than random polling of two or three women at the aforementioned Nihongo Dake Dinner thought that Asian women are prettier, stirring the passions and prurient interests of our hot-blooded lads. I added that last bit myself. Beauty of course is in the eye of the beholder. If the beholder in question is taught by the contumely, accursed media that petite women are necessarily more attractive than others, then some of the traits that are more typical in Asian women embody a feminine ideal peddled by society (and media—damn their eyes).

A former JET told me Japanese men, out of shyness or whatever reason, did not approach her or her friends in the prefecture as much as they would see Japanese women approach male JETs. A Japanese expatriate in New York told me that this was because when Japanese girls get together they find strength in numbers and egg each other on. By contrast, when a Japanese guy is out with his friends and they see a foreign woman, none of them want to appear too keen in front of his friends, who will no doubt tease him. If this theory is correct, then Japanese girls are encouraged by the presence of their friends while Japanese men are discouraged by the presence of their friends.

Perhaps the Asian fetish then, is only more noticeable because it seems rather one-sided. Western men and Asian women seem to hit it off in greater numbers than Asian men and Western women. It is not so much different than any other intercultural dating trend except that Asian women seem to radiate a feminine ideal that both men and women around the world identify and

associate with Asia. Since my return stateside, I have not had a five-minute conversation about my experiences in Japan before some one asks if I had a Geisha. However ignorant the question is, it is how popular culture sees Japan. Since Marco Polo made his exploration, Westerners have been tantalized with "mysteries of the Orient" and perhaps our culture has created a fantasy out of this. Our imaginations have gotten a little carried away and this is not so bad or even unique, just silly. It is not so different from being asked by my Japanese students about cowboys or gangsters in America. Are?

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chosen profession. We don't all have tons of cash to donate around. (OK, I admit, a few JET alums may be successful and rich, but really, the job seminars are some of our best attended programs for a reason).

Lastly, seeking 501(c)(3) status is putting the form over substance, a **501(c)(3)** dynamic all JET alums are familiar with. Tax exempt status does not by itself confer professionalism upon our organization. That is something we must first create ourselves along with developing the goals and purposes for our organization that would make it justifiably a community-supporting, charitable organization worthy of 501(c)(3) status.

In general, I don't think that JETAA NY is the type of organization that can support full-fledged tax-exempt status. At least not now. It would be wonderful to be able to provide members and friends of JET with the incentive of a tax write-off in exchange for their donation, but the challenges outweigh the benefits.

So, there you have it – two sides of the 501(c)(3) coin!

With Clara's carefree and fun-loving perspective we can keep JETAA alive with minimal commitment and a lot of hope. With Shannan's serious look at the long-term possibilities, we may be able to create a lasting organization that will increase with benefits as time passes. What we members need to ask ourselves is: "Where is our organization going? Is it something that we want to preserve, or something that we can do without?" JETAA NY is still quite a young organization, but now it has grown to the point where we must decide if our membership is committed to designing a future for ourselves or letting a future be dictated by outside forces. It is not a decision that should be made only by a few of our members since it involves and affects everyone! Please, let us know how you feel about the future of JETAA NY.

If you have any opinions, comments, suggestions, or are interested in working towards JETAA NY becoming non-profit, please send them to Shannan at: president@jetaany.org



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Love Those Hotels

I was told that visiting a love hotel is definitely a part of that "hidden" Japanese culture that you just have to experience. So, "hmmm, okay," I figured, and dragged my significant other to one in the city. As we tunned the corner from the love hotel, I saw someone staring at me. And my gut feeling told me that that someone was someone who knew me, or knew of me. Why the hell would he be staring at me otherwise? My gut feeling was reinforced at school the following week when I had this other gut feeling that my vice principal was talking about me. You know that gut feeling? And then I caught bits and pieces of one of his conversations, which seemed unspecific, but much too coincidental to be a conversation about anything else. And was he drawing a diagram of the area around the love hotel to explain the story to someone else... as I noticed when I went up to his desk to ask him a question? Just maybe. I wasn't sure if I should just crawl into a hole and stay there, but I sure felt like it. And to this day, I won't know for sure if my gut feeling was just an upset stomach or something telling me to stay as far away from love hotels as possible.

NHK Mounties Always Get Their (Wo)man

Everyone knows about the NHK tax collectors in Japan, and most JETs know to avoid them at all costs, lest you be roped into paying 5,000 yen a month for two boring TV stations you never watch anyway. I think for most JETs, the preferred method of evasion was to feign ignorance- "I'm sorry, I don't speak Japanese," which in a little rural town like mine usually sends the NHK man packing. I was a CIR, everyone in the 6,000 person town knew I spoke Japanese well. Therefore ethically speaking I should not have been able to use the "wakarimasen" excuse- but we're not talking ethics here, we're talking stupid TV taxes. So when the NHK man showed up at my door, I sent him away with a polite, "Sorry, no Japanese, wakarimasen." I showed up for work the next day at the town office and began a long conversation with the

deputy mayor (in Japanese) about a translation I was working on, when the NHK guy showed up at my office door. I shrank into a corner and put Dave's ESL cafe on my web browser as my boss got up to talk to him. He says in a very loud voice, "Pardon me for coming to your office during work hours, but your gaijin over there doesn't speak Japanese, and I need you to explain to her that she owes the NHK tax." Everyone in the office looked at me in shock, my boss says, "Honto, Clara-san, nihongo wakaranai desuka?" Needless to say, I handed my bank account number over and paid the tax religiously after that.

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OK but taking psychotropic medication indicates that there's something wrong with them, like they're crazy.

Is there something the Japanese expatriate community needs?

I think other health care professionals should get together and communicate more. We need more collaboration to put out different options. It's very hard for Japanese in New York to find a therapist. There's no word of mouth in the community because there are so few therapists and most people wouldn't ask anyway.

Last question, what would you recommend to help Japanese people living in the US?

I know for a fact a lot of people feel isolated. They depend on other people to find them and don't have the courage to take the initiative and play host. They should invite people and put more effort into creating a circle of friends rather than just waiting. They should accept invitations that come to them. There's nothing wrong with depending on people but personal survival skills that work in Japan may not work here. They have to acquire new skills.

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Interview With a Japanese Psychotherapist

**Hope Nozomi Konno, M.S.W., Discusses Therapy and Culture
with Alex McLaren (Kyoto-ken, 1996-99)**

There is a large and thriving Japanese ex-patriate community in New York City with Japanese of all ages in all walks of life. Many of us work with them every day. Like Americans in Japan they face many challenges some are unique to their situation, others are the ordinary challenges faced by people everywhere.

In order to understand the issues that face Japanese ex-pats I interviewed Hope Nozomi Konno, a Japanese social worker in New York City. Hope has practiced in New York for several years.

Generally, how do patients who need help find you?

Some come through ads in Japanese newspapers. Others are referred by Japanese speaking doctors or HR departments at Japanese companies. A few are also referred by school counselors. I've also gotten patients through the US department of probation.

What can you tell me about your typical client?

Most clients are in their 20s to 40s, mostly women. Out of 20 people maybe 2 will be men. Usually husbands refer their wives. Often they both have problems, but men are much less likely to seek treatment.

It must be hard on wives though, they're isolated here, usually they can't legally work and may not speak English.

It can be especially hard for young mothers since they cannot advocate for their children. They can also have a lot of trouble adjusting since they are already adjusting to being a mother and now have to adjust to a new culture and country.

I remember in Japan many people were reluctant to see therapists since they felt if you saw a therapist you must be insane. Is that perception still around?

I think so. Japanese people either tolerate whatever is wrong or go to see a psychiatrist and get medication. Young people tend to prefer fortune tellers and psychics like the ones in New York.

I can see that, seeing a fortune teller requires no admission of weakness, you don't have to say there's something wrong.

I think it's more that they don't have to form a relationship with the fortune teller.

What sort of problems do you treat patients for?

I treat a lot of people for depression. It's easier to seek help for someone else than yourself so usually one member of a family refers another. There are not enough self-help and support groups for Japanese. For example, they need groups for people who have lost family members to suicide. Also there are few groups that deal with taboo subjects like suicide, rape, AIDS and substance abuse. I am also aware of some young Japanese in New York that have found themselves in trouble after being caught in transactions with drug dealers. For example, one person might offer to buy drugs for friends, but then ends up getting arrested and doing federal time.

Do you think young Japanese in New York are aware of the risks?

I don't think so. I think they are very naïve. They don't understand the city and don't realize they can get in trouble with organized crime or with the police. Japanese people need to be aware of the dark side of New York City life.

What sort of legal representation is available?

I am not aware of any Japanese speaking criminal lawyer in New York. The court can provide translators but it's a very scary thing to go through. The kids can be naïve but the parents can be naïve too. Many people assume that the worst thing that can happen is the kid will be deported. But the kids can end up doing federal time and then get deported.

What other serious issues do you deal with?

I also get calls from mothers of teen daughters about eating issues.

Really? I always suspected it was a problem in Japan but no one talks about it.

I think that awareness is growing in Japan. It's not hidden in the closet anymore.

What sort of older clients do you see?

I need to do this but, I haven't done as much outreach as I would like to. There are elderly groups like *Nikei* that work with older Japanese-Americans. It's difficult for them in New York.

Is alcoholism a major problem?

I think it has come out of the closet in the last few years. Alcoholics Anonymous groups are popping up in major cities but they tend to be run by primary care physicians and not therapists. They're more educational groups than therapeutic. Japanese companies are starting to pay attention to issues like alcoholism and domestic violence, though. They are collaborating with medical clinics to refer employees.

In the US a lot of those programs came out of churches. In Japan do religious groups run any alcoholism or other support programs?

Some religious groups do support but it's just individuals trying to help. There's no real psychodynamic theory behind it. It's just a beginning.

Switching topics, can you talk about what led you to get a masters in social work?

I got a lot of help from social workers in school and so on and wanted to become one ever since I found out it is possible to make a living helping people that way. I've always been fascinated by the subject of psychology and psychotherapy. Plus I became aware that there is a need for this type of service in the Japanese American community, so I ended up going to NYU.

What methods do you use in treating your patients?

My methods are usually psychodynamic and psychoanalytic. I'm really quite eclectic. I encourage patients to form an interpersonal relationship with me and through the relationship learn to interact, to negotiate and to develop other skills they need.

How many other Japanese therapists are there in the New York area?

I am aware of about six who do private practice. There are others around but they work in institutes and programs, maybe about twenty total.

To wrap up, what do think should be done to help Japanese with psychological issues?

I think there has to be more information available. For example there's Project Liberty. Many think it's only for US citizens but it's not. Groups like Project Liberty need to have things like Japanese speaking operators and lists of Japanese therapists. After September 11th many Japanese here are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I'm seeing some people who worked at the World Trade Center. But Japanese people want something they can see when they spend money. They'll spend hundreds of dollars on a bag but are very reluctant to spend money on therapy.

So do they prefer to see psychiatrists and get medication?

No, Japanese people don't like psychotropic drugs. Drugs for health are

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women's issues? what? over where?

Perspectives From An Anonymous, Over-analytical Female JET Alum

After living in a land where *are* refers to menstruation and *asoko* implies the vagina, I thought it was time to hit the unspoken, but prevalent, women's issues head-on.

I've heard it said that the status of women in Japan now is comparable to the status of women in the United States in the 50's. In some ways, I say, "That seems a bit over exaggerated. I have a lot of independent female Japanese friends." But in the way women's issues are dealt with, or not dealt with, in Japan some of the time, the statement doesn't seem too off target.

The workplace. A good place to start on the "women's issues" issue. Whereas women in the United States have been working to break through the glass ceiling for decades, Japanese women now face the rice paper ceiling. Vested blue uniforms. This is still commonplace in the typical Japanese office. If the women want to be doing that, fine. It is no doubt that Japanese corporate culture is growing in terms of opportunities for women. However, the presence of OLs in the office may add to the idea that women should be in certain positions, and should not be in other positions. I wonder if there are many OGs (office guys), however, wearing those vested blue uniforms? I certainly doubt it, though maybe in the next years we won't be seeing any of those vested blue uniforms.

Aside from women in the workplace, there are a couple other issues that seem "behind the scenes" that would make the typical American who is not familiar with Japan go "huh?" Birth control would definitely be on that list. Throughout my years in Japan, I learned that birth control is not on the top of the political agenda for many Japanese. At the time I was there, birth control pills were just becoming available. One of my very liberal Japanese friends, who had lived in the U.S. for years, stated, however, that she would never be able to ask her doctor for a prescription because it would make her seem, well, you know. Even though the pill had become legal, many women would still not even imagine taking advantage of this development because they did not want to seem easy or shame their families. On the flip side, acknowledging the progress, the fact that birth control pills are now allowed in Japan is a step forward, in itself.

On the same note, abortion seems to be a tool for birth control in Japan. Okay, so I haven't done my statistical research and don't know how many take place per year, but my few years in Japan and many discussions with both foreign and Japanese friends give me the impression that the number is pretty high. Some people that I have spoken to have even said that it has become one of the main forms of birth control in Japan. Not to be judgmental, but it seems strange that some women may not be comfortable with getting a prescription for birth control pills, but would be fine with the idea of getting an abortion in the absence of other forms of birth control. And I'm even pro-choice. Maybe if condoms, birth control pills, and other forms of birth control

had more of an open presence in society, abortion might not.

I certainly don't want this short article to be a vent session. But hey, girls. I'm sure you've had to buy tampons in Japan. They want to make sure that you have complete privacy and that nobody else in the world knows that you have them. The nice convenience store clerk will put them in a paper bag. Then they make sure to close it. And put it in another plastic bag. That's nice of them. But why? The entire world knows what women have to buy once a month. I know, I know. Maybe you don't want your students to see them. But one bag would probably hide the tampon box well enough.

Some JETs I knew of couldn't even find the "good" tampons in or around their towns, and had to have their favorite brands sent from home. "Hey Mom, I'll need more tampons in two weeks... So please send them soon."

I actually had menstruation leave in my contract in Japan. I think this may be typical of many JET contracts. Wow, what a great benefit. It would be great to have something like that here when you just can't make it to work because your cramps are just that bad. But as much as I always wanted to use it, I never did. I could only imagine calling my supervisor and saying, "Sorry, I have to use my menstruation leave." As nice as everyone I always worked with was, I'm sure the entire town would have known that I was out on menstruation leave by the end of the day. Hats off to the woman who used hers.

And what? Women don't play soccer in Japan?! Well, I could definitely deal with the tampon thing, but the no soccer thing was just unacceptable. I just couldn't stand for it.

So during my longer-than-average JET stay in Japan, it was my personal goal to break through all stereotypes of women that every Japanese person I knew thought. As a result, all foreign women in my town are now regarded as strange, loud, soccer and baseball playing people who like to consume large amounts of beer.

Many of the challenges that women face on a daily basis in Japan are not issues of influence or power in society, but instead that certain things that are inherently part of a woman are not accepted or acknowledged. Japan is certainly not alone in this struggle, however.

Even with the women's issues that I've mentioned in this article, and even though it may not be apparent to the world, we would have to admit that women in Japan are becoming more empowered and becoming more independent. I'm sure the JETs who were there at the beginning of the Program would have had different perspectives of Japanese women and their status in society. What will the JETs ten years from now say?



JETAA NY and Non-Profit Status: To 501(c)(3) Or Not To 501(c)(3)

By Shannan Spisak, Your JETAA President, and Clara Kuhlman, Your JETAA Secretary

JETAA New York has an issue: Should we pursue federally tax-exempt, non-profit status (a/k/a 501(c)(3) under the Tax Code)?

Pros and cons both abound, and emotions regarding this subject can run deep. We can't take this decision lightly, so we're turning to the experts: JETAA President Shannan Spisak and JETAA Secretary Clara Kuhlman debate both sides in this point-counterpoint.

Brief Background:

**Special thanks to David Stein, a corporate tax lawyer and JET alum, who has been a great help and advisor regarding this topic.*

501(c)(3) status means that not only is an organization exempt from paying income tax, but donations to the organization are tax deductible for the donor. This makes the status extremely valuable to any organization that raises money through donations. But getting 501(c)(3) status isn't a matter of just filling out a few forms.

For anyone who thinks, "isn't JETAA NY a non profit corporation already?" Yes, several years back we filed the appropriate papers with the state of New York to become a non-profit corporation. This is separate from and a prerequisite to any filing with the IRS. So what does this mean? Diddly-squat. It has no bearing on our federal and state tax status or financing, which is essentially the point of being a non-profit organization.

Additional considerations for obtaining 501(c)(3) status: To qualify, one-third of JETAA NY's total funding must be from the public (i.e., donations from members and companies). So you can't get all the funds from one source. Also, the law does not clearly define whether funding from a foreign government is "public," but there is a strong chance that it would be characterized as private.

In the Pro corner: Shannan Spisak puts the "Can" in Ameri-Can with a dazzling look at the future of JETAA NY as a tax-exempt organization.

The Japanese government has been very generous with JETAA over the years and does give us a small budget (about 1,000 yen per member). We appreciate their support and constantly work to make JETAA NY an organization worthy of Japanese taxpayer money.

However, the constraints of 1,000 yen per person means that JETAA NY is currently running on a very tight budget.

First of all, JETAA NY is not currently "legal" in our income tax filing. Even though we do not have a very large operating budget, we are still required to report our income every year. We have recently discovered that JETAA NY has not been reporting, due to the fact that we don't have an official status. If we continue on as we are – a "non-profit" in name only, we are required to pay taxes on all of our income for the past decade or so that we have been receiving funds from the Japanese government.

Secondly, in the context of Japan's economic difficulties, the government grant that we do receive may eventually decrease or possibly even disappear. With this being JETAA's only consistent source of funding, we would be in a very precarious situation. Of course, we could begin to solicit donations from individuals and other organizations to increase our operating budget, but when a donation is given, the donor generally expects this to be a tax deductible contribution. JETAA cannot offer tax deductible options if we do not have official tax-exempt status.

In addition to tax deductions for donations, we would also be eligible for tax-free purchases (ranging from softball T-shirts and supplies to seminar supplies to books for the book club or whatever else we may need), and lower postage rates for newsletter mailings.

With an increase of funds, we would be able to arrange opportunities that do not even exist at this point – we may raise enough money to pay a monthly stipend to JETAA NY "manager" or "administrative officer" to handle the increasing daily responsibilities of the communication and paperwork that we currently have officers volunteering to do in their already overly-busy NYC Metro Area lives. We could even provide certain types of scholarships to returning JETs for further study in Japanese or teaching! We could use the

money we would raise to expand our programs and provide more of a public outreach for some of our activities. Currently, the money that we receive is restricted to use ONLY for JETAA members to participate in activities – we are limited in our audience and attendees when costs are incurred since it is frowned upon to use the Japanese tax dollars for the "general public". If JETAA were to generate our own funds, we could use them for any projects that any person would want to attend, and expand our participation in some of our annual events.

As many of you know from conducting interviews, the "face" of the JET Programme has become much more professional. As it has gained a reputation and become more well known, it has been attracting more and more applicants, making it a rather competitive employment opportunity. This type of competition brings a more professional quality to the applicants that are chosen. It follows then that the Alumni Association should reflect this increased professionalism in the way our own organization is run. Being an officially recognized tax-exempt organization is a way to promote this increasingly professional image of the JET Programme.

Also, it follows that as our alumni become more established in their careers and their salary increases, they will be looking to make some charitable contributions and boost their philanthropy rating – why not give back to an organization that helped put you on the right track? In one way or another, alumni come to realize that their JET experience has had some impact on their current career path (whether direct or indirect), so tapping into that resource will only become easier over time.

Lastly, an important challenge that JETAA NY faces when organizing events is finding SPACE for them – space in NYC is VERY expensive as many of you know, and having a larger budget to secure nicer venues for some of our events would be a great benefit – all of this boils down to being able to raise money for ourselves, and the first step in that process is officially becoming a 501(c)3 organization!

In the Con corner: Clara Kuhlman, the Secretary of Cynicism, outlines the challenges that lie between JETAA NY and tax exemption.

While the prospect of JETAA NY living out its days in tax-exempt bliss sounds truly lovely, we need to think about the challenges- being a public non-profit will permanently change the tone of our organization. We will have to devote a significant amount of time and energy to fundraising and will need dedicated reliable people to fill that role. Now, don't get me wrong- I love you JETAA NY people, but I wonder if there is enough commitment out there among the members to keep a full fledged fundraising non-profit afloat.

Currently we struggle to get regular members to come to our business meetings- those who do come (we appreciate you greatly) already have so much on their plate, it would be difficult to ask someone to take on the additional task of fundraising. Considering JETAA NY's current budget, we would need to raise at least \$5,000 a year to potentially qualify for nonprofit status.

It's also worth noting that the process of applying for 501(c)(3) status is itself both time consuming and costly. Plus there is also the issue of continuity. We are dedicated and enthusiastic right now, but if we become a non-profit, we are saddling future generations of JETAA NY members with the burden of constant fundraising. The IRS may audit us on a regular basis, meaning there is no room for slacking off in these efforts once we've started them.

And another thing, one of the best points of JETAA NY is that it is all inclusive- anyone who was a JET (and most friends of JET) are welcome and encouraged to take part in our non-funded activities. If we have to start charging for membership or soliciting members for funds, it would detract from the carefree, fun loving JETAA NY that we all rely on. Besides, I know many JET alums (myself included) are still "breaking in" to their

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE WAR IN IRAQ IN JAPAN

Alexei Esikoff (Fukushima-ken, 2001-2002)

War coverage in both the US and Japan can be predictably comical. Here, a pounding drum is punctuated by a swelling arpeggio; Saddam Hussein broods darkly and deeply constipated, which gives way to an American flag willowing in the breeze. There is no question to our stance as opinion polls gleefully demonstrate public approval for Operation Iraqi Freedom and President Bush. On Japanese TV, a somber man in a gray suit and aviator glasses recites the day's events tonelessly before turning things over to two more gray-clad men who have little plastic models of Iraq that they manipulate like a young boy with a Tonka truck. What they actually think is left unsaid.

I was still a relative newcomer to Japan when 9/11 ransacked New York, and most of the footage I saw was the endless shot of the towers falling, falling, falling, people screaming in the street, remarkably devoid of feeling. Of course, the American coverage I received, mostly from ABC and PBS, was the opposite: lacking new details every five minutes, they repeated tales of narrowly averted disasters and heroic rescues. I assumed this war would be no different.

For some anecdotal fun, I asked friends still living in Japan (divergent in nationality and sex, both JET and non-JET), what they thought about the media coverage and the Japanese attitude in general. Not all of it surprised me:

"I feel Japanese people are apathetic. Cherry blossoms take up more of a daily discussion than the war." This is from a friend who works for a non-profit in Tokyo, and it seems to be the strongest vote for saving face.

Another said, "I think everyone over here is much more concerned about SARS."

Another friend who lives in rural Japan told me, "'As you know, they aren't big on protesting here... However, I did see a group at the train station last weekend, although they were not so obvious and anyone may have confused them with those people who stand around handing out tissues.'" Which is a mental image anyone who's ever lived in Japan should have no trouble envisioning.

Fellow JETs who stayed in the town I left behind found themselves being interviewed by the local TV station for the *gaijin's* opinion. This was a nice idea that is also hilariously exasperating: asking a bunch of young, well-traveled teachers to speak for the whole Western world, differences in opinion between Australians and Americans and social positions and levels of education be damned.

What was surprising was how many of the *gaijins* I spoke to were approached quietly at work. Many of the Japanese were concerned about the repercussions of war. There was some dismay that Koizumi was supporting Bush and Blair. They seemed reluctant to discuss with the other Japanese at work but curious as to a Westerner point-of-view. Perhaps outrage is growing, however cautiously:

"It changed people from being calm to quite emotionally charged with anger. At first the protest rallied were quiet and amazingly civilized, a stark contrast to protests around the world. But recently, I saw a protest on TV and they had posters with Koizumi's face with Hitler-style mustaches. I think they had been watching American news."

Unsolicited, I received an email from a former student of mine, Satomi. She said, "Please tell Mr. Bush to stop war. [The] Japanese don't want war."

The conclusion I can draw from this highly unscientific, purely hearsay anecdotal report, is that the Japanese do care. But they are as quiet in their disapproval as Americans are vocal in their praise. Which is somewhat predictable, because "the Japanese will always basically support America, because they depend on us for military protection." Maybe in this particular instance, the Japanese reluctance to publicly voice opinions is beyond saving face. Could it be fear of upsetting an ally? Tolerance for difference of opinion? The Japanese could stand to lose a bit of their clinical approach if they are truly united against a war, just as Americans, conversely, could lose some zealotness.

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BO-RU GEIMU. MATSUI VS. ICHIRO

By Steven Horowitz, Your JETAA Newsletter Co-Editor

Approximately forty JET alums and friends made it out to the historic game, which was apparently watched on tv in Japan at 8am by most of the population there. The Mariners beat the Yankees 6-0, and Matsui's only action was a late game single with little effect on the game, while Ichiro's only hit was an artistic bunt single. And the best Japanese performance of the night turned out to be Shigetoshi Hasegawa who closed the game for the Mariners.

But everyone had a great time, particularly those such as Ryan C., who is not what some would call a fan of the Yankees. Even on the 4 train up to the stadium, you could tell it wasn't your average Yankee game by the large number of Japanese fans and Matsui jerseys. And every time Matsui or Ichiro stepped to the plate, the stands lit up with camera flashes. The genkiest part of the game was probably in the

6th inning when a Seattle single to left field required Matsui to pick it up and throw it back into the infield, prompting Lance and a few other JETs to get our whole section cheering for Matsui's only action in the game up to that point.



Fan Least Likely To Be Accepted Into The JET Program: A young Caucasian male was walking around the upper deck with a sign reading "Krazy Kevin Says: Matsui = Godzilla / Ichiro = Sucks". Now there's a boy with issues.

Big thanks to our JETAA officers for getting the tickets and organizing a terrific event which even included a celebrity sighting – on the return trip, I shared a subway car with Willam DaFoe.

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been and where they are going. RIGHT NOW, mortgage rates are at around 40 year lows. This means, if you can get a mortgage loan, or refinance an existing loan, DO IT. – of course the devil is in the details. Refinancing several times might not be wise, especially due to all the fees involved. One couple I know will not see the benefit of their home refinancing until 3 years later, at which point all the refinancing costs will be recuperated. But since they plan on holding their house for many years, their decision to refinance will be turn out to be a money-saver in the long-run.

Educational planning is more complex. Due to the growing costs of higher education, it will be likely that the combined four-year cost at a college /university will average over \$100,000 and this is for public colleges/universities. Private schools will be much more expensive.

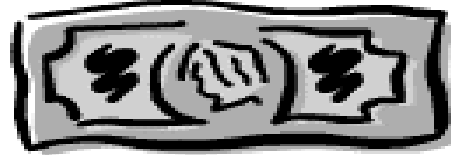
There are several options available to recent parents and growing families. The most recent is a 529 college savings plan. This plan allows control of the funds by the parents, earnings are tax-deferred and withdrawals are federal and usually state, income tax-exempt when the funds are spent on qualified higher education expenses. (Beware: this tax-free provision is subject potential change on December 31, 2010.) Another benefit is the maximum contribution amount is around \$300,000, though high contributions are not necessary to contribute. Some programs allow as little as \$10 to \$15 per month. In addition, account owners may withdraw funds to pay for tuition-related expenses at most private or public college, university, technical or vocational school.

Finally, retirement planning for mature JETAAs will center on developing and monitoring one's investments. This can be done by oneself, by opening accounts at one or more mutual fund firm or through a discount or full-service brokerage firm. Another alternative is to use a financial planner or investment advisor. It all depends on one's level of interest and time commitment necessary to learn about the various areas of personal finance and investing. Several good magazines include: SmartMoney, Money Magazine, Kiplinger's and Barrons. In addition, there are a number of good books on

personal finance as well. Keep in mind, though, that a magazine's purpose is to sell magazines, and not necessarily to offer the best long-term financial advice. That's why every other month there are articles for the top 10 investments for the next 10 years.

Using a financial advisor has its pros and cons as well. The biggest advantage is that one's investments will be managed and monitored by an experienced professional. In addition, there are more investment selections available to investors through a full-service firm such as individual corporate, municipal and government bonds as well as tools created to develop a personal portfolio based on an investor's objectives, time horizon and risk tolerance level. Some negatives of using a financial advisor consist of the higher transaction costs compared to a discount broker or no-load mutual fund. Picking a trusted and reputable advisor who offers unbiased advice without a conflict of interest is not always easy. However, like picking a good family dentist or physician, a good financial advisor seeks to develop a long-term relationship and places the interests of his clients first.

*Questions or comments? Contact James by e-mail
James.Williams@RaymondJames.com..*



Helpful Financial Advice for JET Alums

James Williams (Sapporo-ken, 1992-94)

One of the most significant issues we have to deal with in our lives is money. How to get it. What to spend it on. Where to put it. And aside from the practical issues, it can affect us all on a psychological level as well, creating stress, mixing in with relationship issues... Helping us confront and think about relevant financial issues is JET alum James Williams. James is a financial advisor with Raymond James & Associates. He has an MBA in finance and is a Level II candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst Program.

Recent JET returnees

Most JET participants will likely save anywhere from \$3,000 to well over \$10,000 - \$20,000 during a two-to-three year period. In addition to buying some nice electronic toys and spending on travel within Japan, Asia and beyond, there are some other good uses for one's savings.

Developing a savings and investment program is highly recommended for new JETs. An investing and savings program consists of the following basic areas:

- 1) **Consumer Debt Repayment:** The most important money issue is to try to pay off any consumer debt, like credit cards or other loans. This not only helps one's credit rating, but makes it easier to take out a loan again in the future, for graduate school, a new car or even a house.
 - 2) **Creating an Emergency fund:** usually 3 - 6 months of one's normal expenses, in case the job search upon return from the JET Program takes a little longer than expected. (Also good idea to have this emergency fund as a permanent fixture of one's lifelong financial plan).
- a. **Services:** Places to keep this money include a money market account at a bank or mutual fund company or even a savings account at a bank will suffice. Check out www.bankrate.com
- 1) **Retirement Planning:** True, for most people in their early-mid 20's, retirement seems (and is) a long way off. However due to the seemingly magical power of compounding, the earlier that money is saved away, the earlier it has a chance to grow and compound into more money. Getting to \$300,000 - \$700,000 in an investment account is a lot easier when one begins investing at the age of 25, as opposed to age 45.
- a. **IRA accounts:** In general, funding an IRA account is the second best method to save for retirement. (401(k) plans where an employee contributes pre-taxed money and the employer matches an employee's contributions is usually considered the best). IRA accounts come in 2 forms: Traditional and ROTH. There are several differences between these types of accounts, though the primary difference is that money in Traditional IRA accounts are taxed at distribution, age 59 ½ and later, while ROTH IRA accounts are NOT taxed at distribution.
- b. **Investment selection:** It's important to have an investment strategy when placing money into an IRA account. In an IRA account, one can invest in stocks, bonds, mutual funds and money market funds. For younger investors, an aggressive stock-oriented strategy is best, however diversification is important. This can be accomplished by selecting several types of mutual funds (a large-cap growth fund, a small cap value fund, and international fund) and by adding specific stocks. It is important to remember that when buying an individual stock or mutual fund, it is not good to follow the crowd. Buying when prices are low is a good policy at the food market and is also a good policy at the stock market.

For recently returned JETs, it is also important to develop a savings and investment plan. (please follow steps 1-3 above). In addition, if an employer offers a 401(k) plan, it is usually best to try to contribute the maximum amount to the plan. This is especially so if the company matches one's contributions. However, if the company does not match and the investment options are not very broad or attractive, it may be better to fund an IRA

account first and then put extra money into a regular investment account with a mutual fund firm or brokerage firm.

In addition, now that interest rates are at historic lows, refinancing one's student debt and consolidating the debt into one low rate is a very smart idea. Rates are not likely to rise in the next six months so there is still time to refinance one's undergraduate debt. A question that some individuals have is whether or not it is a good idea to pay off student debt early; meaning making more than the minimum payments. Generally, paying one's debt off early is wise, but in the case of a low interest rate student debt, it would be better to make the minimum payments and use any extra money you have to invest in something that pays a higher rate than your loan. For example, if a student loan rate is around 5.5% and there is an opportunity to earn 6-8% on a corporate or government bond, preferred stock or through stock dividends, it is a wiser choice to pay the minimum monthly payment while using the remainder to invest in a bond, preferred stock or high-dividend paying stock.

More Established JET Alums

Money issues for experienced JETAs center on three main areas: student loan repayment, housing (mortgage) payments, educational planning for one's children and retirement planning.

As stated above, paying the minimum amount on student loans is usually the wiser choice. The next big money issue: a mortgage has to be viewed in terms of where current mortgage rates are now, where they have

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BURAKU ISSUES

BOOK REVIEW: The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto
by Kenji Nakagami Review by Rosemary DeFremery, Your JETAA VP and Book Club Leader

Hinin (inhuman). *Eta* (extreme filth). These are two severely pejorative terms once used to describe the *burakumin* of Japan, an underclass of ethnic Japanese who have suffered discrimination for centuries as a result of their ancestors' occupations as butchers, tanners and the like during the feudal era. You may or may not know of them; I only learned of them from my readings on Japan, but if I have ever met a person of burakumin origin I would not know it. No one ever spoke about such things to me while I was living in Japan. In an attempt to find a suitable description of burakumin for this article, I visited the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute's web page, which explained their status in this way:

Buraku people or Burakumin (min refers to people) are the largest discriminated-against population in Japan. They are not a racial or a national minority, but a caste-like minority among the ethnic Japanese.

They are generally recognized as descendants of outcaste populations in the feudal days. Outcastes were assigned such social functions as slaughtering animals and executing criminals, and the general public perceived these functions as 'polluting acts' under Buddhist and Shintoist beliefs.

When the social status system was established in the 17th century (early Edo era) in the form of three classes (warrior, peasant, townsfolk), those outcastes, origin of the present Buraku people, were placed at the bottom of the society as *Eta* (extreme filth) and *Hinin* (non-human) classes.

From this outcaste class arose Akutagawa prize-winning writer Kenji Nakagami (1946-1992), author of *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto* (known as *Misaki* in Japanese). Born in the ghetto of Shingu, Wakayama-ken, Nakagami grew up steeped in the misery of a people who had been historically classified not simply as second-class citizens but as beings that were not even human. Accordingly, his success was seen as phenomenal, unthinkable for someone of his origins. He commented on this in an interview, bluntly stating, "I write for a public that cannot read me. My mother, my sister, my brothers are illiterate like all the burakumin."

Nakagami reads like no other Japanese author you are likely to find. Despite having seen an Amazon.com review forewarning me that *The Cape* was "marked by madness, incest and violence," I was startled by the raw, feral quality of his prose that kept dragging me up against the sights, smells and anguish of ghetto life among the burakumin. Whether following Nakagami's main character Akiyuki through his descent into self-obliteration in "The Cape" and "House on Fire" or observing Kozo and his red-headed woman copulating without rest in "Red Hair," I was continually smacked by the shame, anger, violence, and sex which are central to Nakagami's writings.

I didn't often find passages detailing what injustices burakumin face (one exception is in "House on Fire" when the man, just before viciously beating his wife, raves about how humiliating it is to be continually turned down for jobs), but upon closer inspection of the imagery Nakagami incorporates into his writing, I soon noticed that the burakumin experience of oppression underpins everything in these stories and is clearly expressed through a variety of stylistic means.

A predominant theme coursing through *The Cape* is the characters' perceived lack of humanity. Classified by society as inhuman, filthy and therefore innately animalistic, they don their assumed bestiality by plunging headlong into violence and sexual oblivion. In order to be less than human, they must lack the capacity for rational thought – and that is what they disavow entirely. Most of their actions appear to be taken on impulse alone, with an explicit aversion to forethought and deliberation. Any attempt at such practices is struck down, forcibly in the case of the man in "House on

Fire" who, after beating his wife, tells her "You think too much. That's why I hit you."

Sex in *The Cape* also reveals a tendency towards instinct rather than logic. "Red Hair" depicts a series of sexual encounters between Kozo and an unnamed woman who he picks up by chance and takes to his apartment. Their encounter is hardly a typical one-night stand sort of arrangement; the red-headed woman remains there and they continue devouring one another for days on end until they're too sore – and then they keep going. Pain, a constant in their lives, is not something to be avoided but rather welcomed openly and perhaps even bitterly savored, as Nakagami writes: "He asked her if it didn't hurt doing it over and over again... [she] whispered with a smile that yes, it hurt." Where most people would stop, Kozo and the redhead continue, neither of them knowing or even caring why they have ended up together or what they will do later: Kozo "didn't understand why she stayed on in his apartment... one day simply turned into three, and three days stretched into four." While the sexual instinct is present in all of us, Nakagami takes it and superimposes it over everything else in this case, having instinct override the social conditioning and reflection that would otherwise cause his characters to moderate their actions.

Nakagami's description of the endless coupling in "Red Hair" includes much animal imagery, causing Kozo and the redhead to seem more like dogs or beasts than two human beings driven towards each other out of desire. One such passage leaves no doubt as to this: "Like a dog, she licked from his balls to his anus, holding Kozo tightly by the ankles, her nails digging into his flesh." Not hesitating to inflict pain or put herself in what might be viewed as a bestial position, the woman just follows her impulses, apparently unconscious of the social norms which look down on such behavior.

Taboos are also enacted, this time intentionally, in "The Cape", when the main character, Akiyuki, closes the story by visiting the brothel where his half-sister works and having sex with her. In doing so, he attempts to shed his humanity and take on the mantle of bestiality and filth for good. "I'm trying to degrade all who share blood – my mother, my sister, and my brother too. Degrade everything," he says to himself as he penetrates his sister. From that point on, everything is different: "Animal, beast. It no longer mattered what people called him or how they punished him for it." If they call him *hinin*, he will be inhuman. If they call him *eta*, then that's what he will be – filthy and polluted. "From that day on," Nakagami writes, "he would smell like an animal." His identity as a burakumin is confirmed. However he might appear to embrace this codification of his outcaste status, Akiyuki's humanity is tragically apparent as he wishes "if only we had hearts for sex organs," indicating his yearning for true feeling, a love that cannot exist in such harsh environs.

Thus we are brought to terms with the extreme pain of Nakagami's characters, who undoubtedly reflect the despair with which the author was so familiar in real life. His prose, so boldly primal and without pretension, can itself be described by a passage from "Red Hair" in which a drug addict suddenly shrieks uncontrollably in the middle of the night: "it sounded like a rage that had been pent up so long she couldn't hold onto it anymore, and just had to unleash it." Most of us cannot imagine what it is like to be treated so unjustly that we are not even considered human beings; *The Cape* serves as a shocking introduction to Western readers (as *Misaki* likely did to non-burakumin Japanese readers) of just how terms like *hinin* and *eta* have been internalized by the burakumin to what damaging effects. As such, I highly recommend it to anyone concerned with issues of discrimination and human suffering. For more information on Nakagami himself and the status of the burakumin today, please consult the links below.

CAPE.2J (Official Site of Kenji Nakagami)

agami" <http://plaza8.mbn.or.jp/~nakagami/>

Nakagami, the Pariah of Shingu (Translation of an interview with the author)

<http://www.pur.demon.co.uk/jack/Politics/nakagami.html>

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12. Finding a happy hour locale with cheap drinks AND shuffleboard/gateball
11. Increased competition for JETAA readership from the Nikkei Shinbun.
10. Restructuring of JETAA's off-shore tax-exempt entities.
9. Reclaiming the softball tournament after a ten year drought.
8. Eradicating the Asian fetish.
7. Enforcing proper pronunciation of the word "karaoke."
6. Working with SONY to develop the first robotic JET.
5. Coordinating efforts with CLAIR and other JETAA chapters to achieve world domination.
4. Getting tickets for the first *real* World Series game (Chicago Cubs vs. Chiba-Lotte Marines).
3. Answering the unanswered question of why there are no digital alarm clocks in Japan.
2. Finally severing ties with Henry Kissinger and certain other former members of the Nixon administration.
1. Getting the Editors to publish the Newsletter on schedule.



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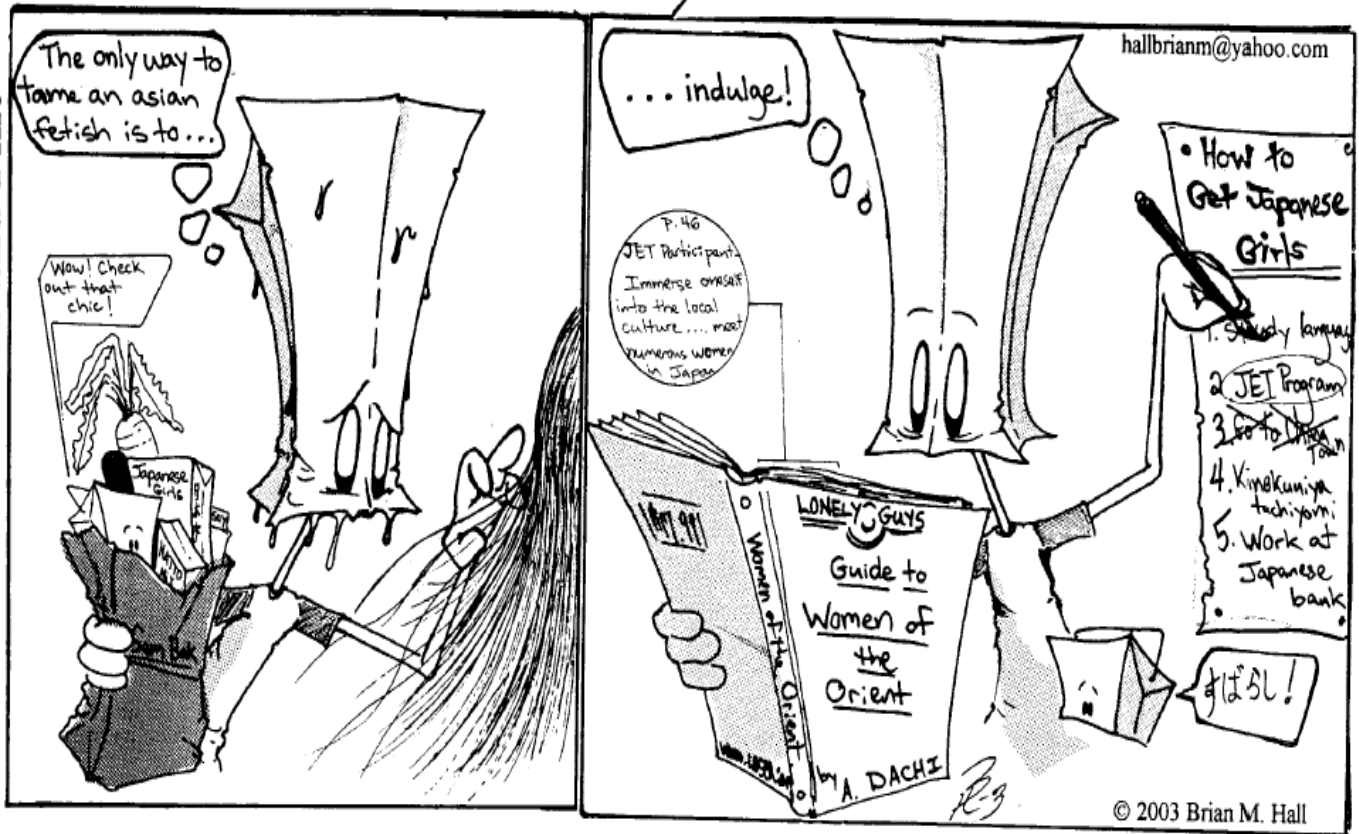
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