

JETA.A.N.Y

Newsletter for The
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and Teaching Program
Alumni Association,
New York Chapter

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THE RIGHT-BRAINER

The Issue For The Creative Side In All Of Us

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WATASHI NO SHYUMI WA KANJI DESU!!!

By SCOTT ALPRIN (AICHI-KEN, 1992-94)

Just so you know what this article is about from the start... it's about KANJI. I can really read a Japanese newspaper. Not too big a deal, right? But, I'm different. I'm not that spectacular at Japanese. But my kanji skills are off the charts! Friends call me either "kanji hakase" (Japanese professor) or "kanji otaku" (kanji nerd). I love that. So, read on, if you dare...

The great thing about Japanese at first was that it was the great equalizer. For years in high school I had languished in a French haze, once nearly bringing my French teacher to hysterics arguing against her decision to deduct points for writing "*le fleur*" instead of "*la fleur*" on a quiz, insisting that "my flower is named Max, so a flower can be masculine, so I got that one right!"

Japanese freshman year in college was my shot at redemption: we were all clean slates. It was January, 1989 at Colby College in Maine. I had intended to continue with French, but overslept the placement test one fateful day. A special intensive Japanese course was offered in January, so I took it. The rest, as they say, is *rekishi*.

I soon found that I was just as bad at Japanese as I was at French. I would remember words like "hataraku" (to work) with mnemonic stories, like "the rock singer said to the crowd angrily, 'I didn't want to do the concert tonight, but, heck, I had to rock you (*hat a ra ku*), because that's my work!'" I still remember the doodle I drew of the singer who was having to

rock (she looked like Cher). The story for "weak" (*yowai*) was a no-brainer: The bouncer said to me as he threw me out of the bar, "Yo, why you so weak?"

Kanji was nothing special to me. It wasn't like that guy in Harry Met Sally who rode 9 extra floors to meet his future wife, love at first sight. Of course, I didn't rule "kanji" out as a potential "mate," but, you know, our "flames" resembled the flicker on a thumb on a lighter in the wind rather than, say, a roaring conflagration at a college pep rally.

"What? You are surprised that I sexualize kanji?"

What? You are surprised that I sexualize kanji? The Kubrickian symmetry of "mutual" the curvaceous temptations of "to reach," the wicked whimsy of "nightmare" (combining a cliff, a moon, a dog, and the devil), the shrouded secrecy of "cocoon" and the seductive yearnings of "to ingest." Who wouldn't sexualize the kanji? Then again, who would ever admit to it unless he was pretty sure that he'd never meet any of the readers of this article anyway!

So, where was I? I was graduating college, busy sexualizing a lot of things, but definitely not kanji. Straight out of college, I did JET. My Dad, who speaks no Japanese except World War II attack signals such as "Tora, Tora, Tora," bought me a book that changed my life. It was (and is) *Remembering the Kanji I* by James W. Heisig. The first year and a half in Japan I was

(Continued on page 6)

SEXUALIZED KANJI IN THIS SECTION

"mutual" (互)

"to reach" (及)

"nightmare" (魘)

"cocoon" (繭)

"to ingest" (召)

The Right Brain Issue

Welcome to the Right Brain Issue where we'll try to go outside the proverbial box. After a rash of rather "practical" Newsletter themes such as networking and job-hunting, we thought it was worth seeking out the creative side of JET alums and some of the different ways your fellow alums express themselves. At first glance, some of these pursuits may not seem at all practical. But in all of them you will see a passion expressed, in a multitude of forms, that may be one of the most useful of life tools to possess. Whether you're an artist, work in an office, or are looking for a job, we hope that readers will be inspired to recognize their own creativity, even in what may seem to be the most mundane daily activities. And of course, if you're ever looking for an outlet for expression for your creative side, just get in touch with the good folks here at the JETAA NY Newsletter and we'll be happy to help you to help us create.

Steven and Jody



SHOUT OUT FOR SPRING "ISSUES ISSUE" NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS!!!!

We're always looking for new ways to make the Newsletter more interesting, fun, off-the-wall, and all around just jolly great. The next one is the much-anticipated **Issues Issue** (things thought but not discussed). If you have any ideas or suggestions for our next issue, or would like to contribute an article or piece of any kind, please e-mail Jody and Steven at newsletter@jetaany.org.

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LETTERS TO HOME #23...

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE VENDING MACHINES?

A JET's Original E-Mail Home About The Wacky World Of Japan

By Matt Cholerton (Yamanashi-ken, 1999-2001)

Hello friends and family. I have been told that a word about the legendary vending machines of Japan are in order. Since I am such an expert in the area, I thought I would share my thoughts.

How strange is it that people from all over the world seem to have heard about the vending machines of Japan, and not about true Japanese cuisine, or the little chairs in the showers, for example? Well, I suppose there is a good reason for that...

I realized the great importance of vending machines shortly after arriving to my host city of Kofu. Although I have seen the machines all around Japan, it was on one of the many quiet back roads that I first realized their significance. As I peddled my bike down the road, I would use the bright light of the machines to guide me. Without fail, at every turn, next to every rice field, I could count on the safe guidance of the machines. Sure enough, after a bit of research, I found that The Japanese Bureau of Construction and Development considers "the primary source of city and rural evening lighting" to be "vending machines" or "jidohanbaiki". Although some of the main roads do have sporadic overhead street

lights, it is the vending machine lighting source that is solely credited for the notoriously safe conditions throughout Japan.

In addition, it is a known fact in Japanese intellectual circles that Japanese vending machines are the main reason for Japan's economic boom of some twenty odd years ago. Although unbalanced trade practices, industrial strengths, and work ethics are occasionally mentioned as a factor leading to Japan's success, it has clearly been the vending machines that have, traditionally (for the past 17 years), accounted for 74% of Japan's overall GNP.

The vending machines are truly amazing. As my time here progresses I am beginning to take them more and more for granted. They are no longer amusing; instead, I need them! Most have coffee. Boss coffee, Dydo coffee, hot coffee, cold coffee. And of course soda type stuff. When you encounter the row of 4 to 5 machines, you can find the diet sodas, the fruity drinks (like apple juice with pulp), yogurt drinks, the yummy milky "Calpis" and "Pocari Sweat", and a refreshing drink made from the water from thousands of miles below the ocean's surface; if I could explain these drinks, I would.

(Continued on page 15)

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Telling the Tale of NOBU

By Rosemary de Fremery

It's not every day you get a chance to dine at an establishment described as one of the best restaurants in New York. While I still have a lot of research to do before I can confirm that Tribeca's Nobu is in fact *the* best Japanese restaurant in New York, based on a recent trip there I can safely say that it does deserve the high praise it has gotten thus far (Best Japanese, Time Out New York, 2002; Voted Best Restaurant in New York City, Food and Wine Magazine 2000).

I didn't even know Nobu, named after its head chef Nobu Matsuhisa, existed until after I returned to New York in 2001. A lot of people, upon learning that I had lived in Japan, asked me, "So, you watched that show – *The Iron Chef* – didn't you?" I had watched plenty of TV while abroad, but I had never seen that show. I happened to notice it one night on the Food Network, so I watched and discovered why Americans are so crazy about *Iron Chef*. It's pure camp but is also an amazing showcase of culinary artistry. For those of you who haven't yet seen it, *Iron Chef* hosts a different challenger every episode, and that brave chef is allowed to choose with which Iron Chef (Japanese, French, Chinese or Italian – all Japanese nationals specializing in different cuisines) he or she desires to do battle. The dueling chefs are given one hour to craft a delicious multi-course meal using a theme ingredient, usually selected with a nod to the challenger's specialty or background.

The most recent Iron Chef Japanese was Morimoto Masaharu, who appeared at the Japan Society in December to discuss his experiences on the *Iron Chef* show as well as at Nobu, where he was executive chef for six years, in addition to his own brand new restaurant, Morimoto, in Philadelphia. Morimoto fans were heartened to hear that he hopes to start his own restaurant in New York soon. I am still trying to find an excuse to go to Philadelphia so I can try his cuisine. I'd also been hoping for a chance to visit Nobu since it has received such praise from critics and foodies alike. However, Nobu being the expensive place that it is, I figured that chance wouldn't come right away – most of my friends are on tight budgets and wouldn't consider such an outing worth the cost. I also hesitate at the prospect of throwing so much money on the table for one meal, but I'm willing to do it once in a blue moon if I can tell I'll be raving about that experience for years to come.

My opportunity presented itself sooner than I expected. A JET friend who I met in Shizuoka-ken called me up and said she'd be visiting her brother in New York for the holidays, so we made arrangements to get together. I think I must have mentioned meeting Chef Morimoto, because the subject of Nobu somehow slipped into the conversation and we ended up deciding to check it out after the New Year.

I did some research online and quickly learned that reserva-

tions at Nobu are very hard to come by (A 1999 Gourmet review claimed "God himself couldn't get a nine o'clock reservation at [Nobu] on a weekend ... unless He had an in with (part owner) Robert De Niro"), so I called up Next Door Nobu, their auxiliary restaurant which basically accepts patrons on a first-come first-serve basis. The receptionist advised me that the doors open at 5:45 and I should arrive no later than 6:15, or else I would have to wait for at least an hour. On the evening of our gourmet appointment, I arrived early and was seated right after the doors opened. Marlene didn't show up until 6:15, so that gave me plenty of time to browse through the menu and the impressive wine list. By the time she appeared I had already thoroughly contemplated my options, engaged in the inevitable little dance of logic with myself ("What's \$20 more? Bring your lunch to work for a few days. Ok, \$40 more. But that's it!") and decided on the \$120 *omakase* (chef's tasting menu) for my meal.

After consulting with Venus, our waitress, Marlene opted for the \$120 *omakase* too. It wasn't much more complicated than that, although the waitress did ask us if we had any allergies or if there were certain foods we disliked. My answer? "I love everything!" Marlene mentioned that she was very curious about the uni tempura, so if they could find a way to work it into one of the courses she would like that very much. Pleased with how things were going so far, we both ordered lychee martinis and happily sipped on them as we waited for our culinary adventure to commence.

A few minutes later the first course appeared before us, and what an impressive entrance it was: toro tartar, topped with caviar, in wasabi soy sauce. It lay on a large green leaf which itself rested atop crushed ice in a clear glass bowl. It was served with a spoon, and Venus explained that the small berry-like fruit accompanying the toro tartar was a *yamamomo*, intended to clear the palate in anticipation of the next course. The toro tartar was soft and buttery as I expected it would be, not wholly unlike the toro one might find in *negitoro maki-zushi*, and it tasted heavenly when swathed in the wasabi soy sauce. Immediately gratified by the mixture of flavors mingling in my mouth, I wasted no time in finishing the rest of the tartar. I savored the lingering taste of wasabi soy sauce until it was too faint, and then I scooped up the *yamamomo* with my miniature spoon and dispatched with it right away. Tart and fruity, it indeed cleared the way for a new course just as Venus had said it would.

Arriving soon afterward was an eye-catching assortment of *kanpachi* (yellowtail tuna) sashimi, complemented with fresh soy greens and encircled by generous splash of the chef's special Matsuhisa sauce. Marlene and I speculated as to what might be in the mystery sauce; we settled on ginger, soy and citrus as likely candidates. Whatever the contents, it lent

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(Continued from page 1)

engrossed in this book, which is truly the only “course” I’ve ever seen from learning all the kanji through self study. I made the flash cards and carried them everywhere... I made mnemonic stories for 2,000 kanji. I started calling my book “Precious.” And by the end of the course, I was a maniac! I was truly in love with Heisig’s book. I couldn’t believe what a genius he was. This explains why at the renewer’s conference in Gifu I rose in front of about 800 people as Heisig fielded questions, and stated proudly, “Mr. Heisig, sir, I just want to thank you for writing your book!” To which he replied, “Which book?” Ah, such is genius.

Heisig’s Volume I is dedicated to “meaning.” After I finished Volume I, I eagerly moved on to II, and was reading newspapers pretty fluently within a few months. I had long since picked up the habit of writing kanji in the air. I started to challenge the natives to kanji-offs (they’d always win). A tender *obasan* would comment, *ohashi wa o-jouzu desu ne* (you are very good at chopsticks),” to which I would defiantly reply, “ohhh, thank you so much, I’ve been practicing very hard... ha ha ha, oh, do you know the kanji for “akuseku?” (a rather rare and difficult character) The look of horror in the eyes of any little old lady in this situation would cause me much pleasure. Once a colleague egged me on to show up a waitress who had lauded my dexterity with the chopsticks, and this same colleague had cackled when the trick had been played. At these times, I felt like a kanji whore. Still, it was all good.

Anyway, I returned to Washington, D.C. after my three year Hei(sig)atus, and Customs let me through with all those kibbles and bits in my head. Suddenly, in a land of non-kanji knowers, I felt infused with a desire to teach the huddled masses kanji. It was like I was onto something big, something that could liberate these well-intentioned yet ignorant bunch of people known as “Westerners,” and I wanted to spread the gospel. This is the closest I’ve come to religious fervor. I understand a bit more why religious people can’t help but preach a bit. They feel like they used to be in the darkness, but now they can see, and if you would just take the plunge like they did, your life could be so much better (like they feel theirs is). They do this out of a selfishness and a love all at once. I see people studying kanji, and feel the same way, that is, I feel like these students, and their instructors, going all the way up from the teaching assistants to the tenured professors, and beyond, to the hallowed halls of Japan’s ministry of education, live in darkness.

After coming back from JET, though, all I knew was the Heisig method. I started trying to teach friends and family. I started to make variations. Something was brewing. I took a year off from law school in 1999 and spent a year in Japan getting a Masters in something or other in Kyoto. For a month, I lived with all these college students (mostly juniors) on their year abroad in this dorm (by this time I was a ripe old 29). Suddenly, I was surrounded by energetic, charismatic, fun-loving Japanese students. This was the catalyst. I started hounding them about kanji, even in the o-furo, and soon developed a bad reputation as the grad student obsessed with kanji. I was losing them. This problem was remedied, however, by adhering to the principle of: “Bring beer wherever you go.” Beer brings acceptance, my friends.

Although I was supposed to be getting a Masters in something or other, I started spending virtually all my free time developing a new system, based largely on Heisig’s method. I wanted to help my friends (one in particular). In January of 2000, I started rearrang-

ing the kanji in an order suitable to my idea (explained below). By mid-November, 2000, I had finished a working draft of a book, all hand-written, that consisted of about 700 pages (admittedly, many of them had about one scribble, but I still called it a “page”). That working draft is still “working,” huffing and puffing. I have introduced my idea at two Japanese pedagogy conferences, and given an on-line study forum <http://www.tappedin.org/pipermail/fl/2002q2/000163.html> called 21st Benkyoukai: Scott Alprin “Teaching Kanji with Components,” sponsored by Keiko Schneider. Also, I currently tutor four beginners in Japanese. A twelve year old student knows about 130 kanji at this point, but cannot say, for example, “I ate sushi.” In fact, I’m not the best Japanese speaker, to say the least.

Kanji is taught utilizing a “frequency-based approach,” which is the way it is taught throughout the United States, and the world. This is a problem. Heisig’s book teaches the “element-based approach,” a more effective, efficient, and logical method, in my humble view.

In my variation of the “element-based method,” there are two basic types of “elements”: (1) pure kanji and (2) open elements. (1) Pure kanji are the simplest kanji that are easy to learn and used as building blocks. Examples include: “mouth” (*kuchi*), “big” (*ooki*), and “river” (*kawa*). (2) Open elements are the simplest shapes in kanji, are not real kanji, and are not assigned any particular meaning. It should be noted here that, though I choose to call these basic building blocks of kanji “elements,”

Ha ha ha, oh, do you know the kanji for “akuseku”?



Heisig calls them “primitives” and Foerster and Tamura call them “graphemes.” Whatever you call them, they must be given great weight when teaching kanji under an “element-based approach.”

Hey, I’d love to teach you kanji. You can contact Steve (the editor) if you want to be my guinea pig. It’s hard to believe that I have put so much time into this, but it truly is my passion. The first part was luck (oversleeping my French test and finding Heisig’s book) and the second part was a funny feeling that something was not right with kanji education today. The third factor was a year off from law school (i.e. free time), and the fourth factor was wanting to help my college friends (one, in particular). If not me, though, by all means, please pick up a copy of Heisig’s book. It was written in 1975, and still the standard. It’s not for everyone, but it was for me. I’d be happy to help you with your kanji studies, even if just if you don’t become my student. Also, check out the “Kanji Clinic,” at <http://kanjiclinic.com/kcnetworkeng.htm> sponsored by Mary Sisk Noguchi, a professor in Nagoya. Good luck, kanji kids.

(Continued from page 10)

but i don't eat jaku or natto
i'm american,
but i don't have a gun
my japanese extends beyond "konnichiwa,"
but i'm sorry,
i can't understand most of the inaka dialect
i usually bow,
but i'll probably sit indian style
i don't say i'm sorry for everything,
but i certainly mean it when i do

And i'm not representative of the entire world out there,
Or of maybe not even a little bit
But I'm here now and tomorrow
And you'll probably still be wondering then.
"Hello."

(Continued from page 5)

a pleasingly tangy undertone to the smoothness of the kanpachi, which was mild and delicate.

After that dish came Nobu's much-revered "new style" sashimi, which in our case was tai (sea bream) Nobu served in a light yuzu soy sauce. Each piece of sashimi was topped with very narrow ginger and scallion strips, laid lengthwise across the rectangular slice of fish to create a pleasing visual statement while adding flavor. What made this new style sashimi, according to our waitress, was the fact that the tai had been lightly seared in oil, rendering its appearance slightly opaque rather than translucent. I enjoyed the yuzu sauce (and by this point was beginning to develop an appreciation of Nobu's skills in that department, what with the Matsuhisa and wasabi soy sauces behind me) and thought the tai was well paired with ginger and scallion, but I suspect I would have to try this new-style sashimi several more times before I could identify the unique characteristics that so separate it from traditional sashimi. Of course it had a light oily veneer rather than the clear, fresh hue of an untreated slice of fish – and therefore absorbed other flavors more liberally across the length and breadth of itself – but apart from that feature, I could not straightaway tell how Nobu's new style Nobu sashimi was a departure from its predecessors. Nevertheless, it was delicious.

Next was a tempura course, and the uni Marlene had

requested was placed alongside a small claw of king crab and more traditional offerings such as a shiitake mushroom, a shiso leaf, and okra. A small, round glass dish of ponzu sauce accompanied the main plate, and after a moment a waiter brought us each a rectangular dish which had three separate sections for salt, lemon and pepper. The uni itself was wrapped in nori before being dipped in batter, and that probably gave it the form it needed to make it viable tempura. It was surprisingly tasty, if unorthodox, and we both liked how the uni's creamy texture contrasted with the tempura's crunchiness.

By this point we were beginning to feel saturated with all this good food, but there were two more courses left before dessert, and they were substantial ones. Just as we thought we were reaching our Nobu limit, sizzling plates of Kobe beef slices were placed before us. Venus encouraged us to hold our napkins up as they simmered down. As I waited for a moment, I noticed how the slices of beef were decoratively arranged with enoki and shiitake mushrooms, small asparagus stalks and a small dish of yuzu soy sauce. Never having had Kobe beef before, I considered this a rare treat. I recalled how Venus had explained to Marlene that the \$120 omakase didn't include more courses than the \$100 or \$80 options, but that it featured higher-grade ingredients. Here was one clear example of what that extra \$20 or \$40 was getting us: an opportunity to try the beef so revered by gourmards around the world. It was good, I determined,

(Continued on page 14)

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Setting On...

Co-Editor Steven Horowitz (Aichi-ken, 1992-94) interviews Ethan Levitas (Nagano-ken, 1993-94) about the *Conversation Continued Project*

A lot of us have ideas about how to improve the JET Program and cross-cultural education. But in this issue you get to meet someone who has crossed cultures, disciplines and standard methods of teaching to create an extremely unique approach to education.

Ethan Levitas (Nagano, 1993-94), a photographer by trade, unleashed the *Conversation Continued Project* in 1998 in a select number of Japanese public high schools. The project is a course of study designed to enrich cross-cultural understanding by focusing on the issue of identity. It employs a short textbook created by Ethan consisting primarily of photographic portraits of several Americans, each accompanied by a short passage in English and several follow up questions and exercises. The Americans include a Baptist preacher, a Native American, a Hells Angels style biker and a "hillbilly" from the Ozarks, among others. And the passages are Ethan's accounts of his conversations with these people as he traveled around the country with a makeshift portable photo studio he devised.

The course challenges students to examine the many elements that help form a person's identity, such as nationality, ethnicity, region, culture, family, experience and ambition. He finds this topic particularly relevant in Japan given that Japanese has no direct translation of "identity."

For the project, identity becomes the starting point for a conversation. Students are asked to choose a panel of paired photos and are asked if the two individuals are more similar or different. Then the students compare one of the pictures with themselves. And finally, they are asked to write a conversation between the person in the photograph and themselves. All of these steps encourage students to form an individual connection and to consider the components of identity.

The *Conversation Continued Project* has met with a great deal of success in terms of reactions from both students and teachers. Where the project will go in the future is still undetermined.

The JETAA NY Newsletter caught up with Ethan at the Jazz 'n Java café as well as in cyberspace in order to learn more about his project, his process and, of course, his identity.

JETAA NY: When did you become interested in photography and what about it interested you?

Ethan Levitas: I think I was always interested in photography, stirred by photographs that is, but I didn't pick up a camera until after university when I arrived in Japan as a JET. At that time more than ever, I think I was in need of a way to express myself, to communicate better. I couldn't speak any Japanese, so in the beginning at least it was a difficult to connect with the people around me. And then for my friends and family at home, I felt that my "words" fell short of relating my new experiences ---the colors the light the textures--- in Japan. I guess I needed a new language, and that's what photography became for me: a way of listening to what was happening around me and speaking with others about it.

JNY: When did you come up with the idea for the *Conversation Continued Project*? What was going on that led you to it?

EL: I spent one year in Japan and came back to NYC to learn more about photography. I kind of moved Japan to the background of things and tried to focus on making a new life here, you know as an adult. I started apprenticing with different professional photographers on commercial assignments, from fashion to still life to environmental and architectural. I got better, the photographers I worked with got better, and soon I was managing a studio operation for a very successful fashion photographer. But I was still very much thinking about my own work. And if Japan was in the back of my mind, the impact of the experience

was still very much in the front. For example, the notion of "identity," who "I" am and who "we" are was still very interesting to me. I began making trips on my own around the US and doing portrait sittings with different people from different places. What resulted was a juxtaposition of individuals with different experiences all within a certain circle of "we." All Americans that is.

(Continued on page 9)



外と内
Conversations
about
Identity
by Ethan Levitas

KIRIHARA SHOTEN

(Continued from page 8)

After exhibiting the photographs a bit in the States I quite suddenly, and maybe for the first time in four years, thought specifically about the schools and students in Nagano. Did they ever have a chance to meet the Americans that I met in my travels? What if I brought the "individuals" to them? What might they have to say? And that's how it started I guess.

JNY: How did you further develop the original idea?

EL: I wanted to do more than just objectify, or to "occidentalize" the individuals of the photographs. More than just have an exhibition, I wanted to bring an interaction and conversation to life that would go two ways. What I mean is that I wanted the students to learn about these individuals and about American society, and I wanted them to relate that understanding to themselves and their own society. There was no real blueprint, nothing for me to work off of, and the exercise of building the project and the process kind of evolved together. In explaining what I wanted to do to funders and to educators in Japan and America, I slowly began to understand all the elements involved ---art, society/culture, language, education --- and the workshops developed along the way. There were a number of Japanese teachers who were helpful in the process once I was in the schools, and over a period of six months of installations the workshops really evolved and laid the ground word for what would become the book.



Beppit, Woman, Tennessee

JNY: What obstacles did you face in turning the concept into an actual project?

EL: Well, there were two main obstacles really: precedent and money. It was such a basic, innocent and natural idea --- Ex-JET wants to go back to the schools and talk to the students about his experiences after JET, which just so happens to spring from his experiences as a JET ---, or so I thought. But I think those kind of ideas may be the hardest to accomplish sometimes...the simple ones. I first started talking to organizations that were involved in the JET program, CLAIR in NY and Tokyo, the Ministry of Education, the Nagano Prefectural Board of Education and some smaller municipal boards of education. CLAIR NY was very encouraging and arranged some meetings and in the end even offered a small grant for some of the expenses. But all in all, none of these organizations knew what to do with an individual guy who didn't himself represent some other organization. There was no precedent for this kind of thing and most didn't know what to do with me. They usually said, "Well this looks very interesting. Go try. If the school wants to do it, we won't get in the way" kind of thing. So basically I started over, going not from the top down but from the bottom up, knocking on principals' doors around Nagano. And when I did, I was greeted warmly and invited in. Refreshingly, it all came down to individuals sitting down to cups of tea.

But it was very important, for me in principle and for the project to work, that the schools would not have to take on any financial

responsibility for the workshops. I wanted it to be a gift. So, I had to raise money for the expenses from third parties, which would turn out to be quite difficult. Japan, which already has little non-profit giving, was starting to hit big economic problems, and so I knew I would have to find American-based funders. But then there was the obvious problem of scope: finding funders here to pay for a project that would "benefit" people there. It was complicated but eventually I found that where there is a will there is a way. In the end, the Project was made possible by generous grants, encouragement, and other support from the Japan-US Friendship Commission, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, the New York Foundation for the Arts, CLAIR NY, and of course, yours truly.

JNY: What kinds of reactions did you see and hear from the students and teachers in the classes that participated in your project?

EL: For the workshops, I would go to a school, mount an exhibition and teach classes for two weeks. It was a pretty elaborate and hectic situation. The exhibition consisted of about 24 life-size black and



Asanibaine, Young Man, Montana

white portraits of individuals from different American "group" cultures. Because of its size and quality, the exhibition would spark a good amount of curiosity. Most of the teachers were enthusiastic to participate in the workshops with me. The only problem was that they didn't have much of an idea of what I was trying to get at. At first they expected it to be a lecture about remote places and customs. When they found out that I was going to talk about race and ethnicity, and personal viewpoint, and that I wanted the students to interpret the expressions of the photographs and imagine and create "conversations" between and with the individuals of the photographs, many were skeptical. Above all else, it was meant to be an exercise in imagination and self-expression, which let's face it, most adults have a problem with.

But the students really opened up and let go. Most seemed to really connect with the photographs and relate the "conversion" back to themselves in a really positive way. I guess the best examples I could give would be from their own words, which I'll read from their individual writings (originally in Japanese):

"He values himself as well as something that eyes cannot see. I don't think anything is written in that book (a bible held across his chest); I think he is hiding something deep inside of him with that book. He doesn't tell anyone what it is because it is something only he has to know. He has to know to believe and live. And that makes him alive. Yes, we are more similar."

"There are no people that are the same. I cannot see inside of the heart but when I look at the photos, I could feel like I could see the person's life in the past and what he or she wants to say. I want to be able to see life that way. I want to be able to have my opinions,

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

feelings and ability to communicate in each moment."

"Because of the project, I see that the worry that I am facing may be the worry that everyone is experiencing, the wall anyone will hit in their life. So I began to think to be more optimistic, and more open."

"I began to imagine people's inside, not only what is on the surface. And it made me not to judge so quickly, on first impression. It was interesting that people who seem to have no connection could be very similar in their deep place."

"I had a particular image of American people before, but as I looked at the photographs I could begin to notice the difference of each person's daily life. I was surprised to be able to know many different things from a still moment. It was also fun to be thinking about one human being, not as an American, but like an individual personality like myself. I was reminded there are so many different people, and I wanted to meet them."

JNY: Looking back on the project, would you have done anything differently?

EL: Not really. There were times that I became frustrated, doubtful, but that is a pretty natural reaction when facing such obstacles. I was pretty determined (read: stubborn!). No, I think everything went the way it had to go.

JNY: Where would you like to see the project go?

EL: Well, now that the book is done and the teachers have the resource to continue on their own with it, I hope that more and more students will get the opportunity to use it. Actually, the early signs are encouraging. This past summer, when it was first made available, the

book was adopted by nearly a dozen schools throughout Japan. Most of these were "top-level" academic schools, which is a good sign. I just hope the "average" schools won't be intimidated by the theme.

Actually, the one other thing I would like to do with the book/project is to connect with the JET Program. I'd like to get the books into the hands of JET teachers and let them lead the lessons in their individual schools. Again, I think it is a very natural connection. I think it would take some of the pressure off Japanese teachers, who might not feel comfortable teaching a theme like 'identity,' and it would be a good resource for the JETs, who unfortunately spend a lot of time playing classroom Jeopardy.

JNY: What's next for you?

EL: Well, I've been stretched pretty thin over the past few years with this project—teaching, fundraising, "selling" the snake-oil, so to speak. I'd like to get back to the images, to just making photographs again. I am getting tired of all the words...

Despite the above statement, Ethan Levitas welcomes your words regarding the *Conversation Continued Project* or other topics. He can be contacted at ethanlevitas@netscape.net.

RANDOM CREATIONS FROM OUR PAST

The Kariya Song

Steven Horowitz (Kariya-shi, Aichi-ken, 1992-94)

E E E7

E
Let me tell you 'bout a place that I hold dear

G
If you live in New Jersey it's not too near

A
But if you come to Japan Then I'll probably see ya

E E7
In Kariya

E
It's not too pretty the sky's not to clear

G
The streets have no names and they're curvy and queer

A
But I'm gonna be staying the rest of the year in Kariya

A
Well Kariya's got factories all around

G
It ain't got no grass. It just got the ground.

G
I ain't trying to put nobody down

B - -
'Cause Kariya - - That's my hometown

E

Well I came after college to start my career

G
Do whatever I want, I couldn't be freer
A
So if you come by my place, I'll by you a beer
E
In Kariya.

Hey Obaa-chan

Jody Mousseau (Kagawa-ken, 1997-2000)

Hey Obaa-chan, what's up?

You're aiming for me...

Please don't run into me with your bike as you're looking at me

Or into that rice paddy over there...

I'll look right back at you, while you're wondering if all gaijin have blue eyes.

And you're probably just dying to bow and smile at me,

And if you want, I could answer every question you've been wondering about in the past 20 seconds.

Much to your surprise

i eat sushi

i can use chopsticks

i slurp my udon

i've even learned not to blow my nose and just snort instead

i can cook,

(Continued on page 6)

SOME RECIPES TO TEST YOUR CHEF SKILLS

Lynette Martyn (Shiga-Ken, 1995-97)

Here are some recipes that I picked up when I went to cook meals with my Japanese friend once a week in Japan.

Easy Home cooking from Akemi's Kitchen:

Shiga-ken Japan Satsumai Imo Gohan (Sweet Potato Rice)

- 1) Prepare salted rice (preferably in a rice cooker) - about 2 tsp of salt per 3 servings.
- 2) Peel Japanese sweet potato and cut into half inch cubes, fry in oil until cooked and drain on paper towel.
- 3) Mix potatoes into rice. You can add something for color and additional taste such as wakana (young greens) or flakes of nori.

Note: Not sure how this recipe would work with American yams, but it is worth a try....

Tofu no Misokake (Tofu with Miso Topping)

- 1) Mince carrots and sauté with minced meat (pork or chicken- optional).
- 2) After carrots and meat cook add in some miso. Any miso is fine but I recommend a mix of red miso and regular miso. A darker miso is better.
- 3) Add some chopped scallions.
- 4) Heat up tofu in water either in a skillet or in the microwave.
- 5) Top with the miso mixture.
- 6) Enjoy.

Chicken & Pickled Plum Salad (Tori to Umeboshi Salad)

- 1) Boil or grill chicken breast and rip/shred into pieces.
- 2) Mix with crushed umeboshi (pickled plum) and mayonnaise.
- 3) Serve on a shiso leaf (ooba) to be fancy or use as a fancy chicken filling in a sandwich or salad.

One leftover dish from my fridge in Manhattan:

Tekitou Fried Rice (Anything Goes Fried Rice)

This is a great recipe because it does not call upon

fresh ingredients in the house, great when you have no time for grocery shopping and need a last minute meal. Cheap & quick. Whenever I order Chinese delivery I either don't eat the rice or I order an extra. This dish works great with brown rice or white rice. I always use a wok, which has worked very well for me, but I assume you can use a large skillet or pot if you don't have a wok.

- 1) Heat wok and add a dash of sesame oil.
- 2) Add whatever leftovers you have in the house or keep in the freezer (see ideas below). Try to add a veggie, a meat, some scrambled egg and some Chinese pickle if you have it.
- 3) Keep mixing everything while it cooks (I use cooking chopsticks or a wooden spoon).
- 4) Add leftover rice which has been kept in the refrigerator (the older, the better, fresh rice does not work well). Declump the rice as you mix with the other ingredients.
- 5) Lastly add some spice. You can buy fried rice spice packs at the grocery store. Japanese udon or ramen spice mixes work well, depending on the flavor of the ingredients you use, you may not need much spice. A little soy sauce and/or black pepper works well as an alternative.

Ingredient ideas:

can of mixed veggies
frozen box of peas and carrots

chopped onion or garlic

frozen shrimp

any frozen or leftover meat (chicken, pork)

leftover Chinese food (chopped up in pieces)- especially broccoli

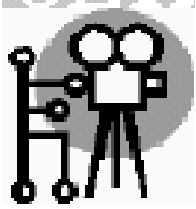
diced hotdog or turkey dog

scrambled egg

Chinese sliced Szechwan pickled cabbage (buy a can in Chinatown and keep in your fridge forever)



If you have any questions, feel free to e-mail Lynette at lmartyn@hotmail.com.



FILM REVIEW: BUS TO QUEENS

Takes a Look at Cross-Cultural Issues

By Gabrielle Speaks (Kochi-ken, 1996-98)



"Bus to Queens," a short film by Joshua Marston, is a story about a young Russian couple who find themselves in New Jersey late at night. They are trying to get to Queens and come across two Pakistani men who they ask for help. The film is in English, Russian, and Punjabi, without subtitles.

At the heart of the story are language, communication, and culture. A seemingly minor miscommunication escalates into a disastrous situation. The film poses several questions about how we communicate; not only verbally, but also how we communicate feelings and intentions, and what we understand through our cultural beliefs and perceptions. Even if you don't speak Russian or Punjabi, you can imagine what kind of dialogue is taking place in the film. At one point, the Russian man and one of the Pakistani men find something in common. Later we see them in a situation where they are unsure of each other's intentions. From there the mistrust only gets worse and drama ensues.

The film, shown recently at **The International Center in**

New York, was sponsored by *Artists & Audience Exchange*, a **New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA)** public program. The Center provided a multicultural audience, and filmmaker Joshua Marston, a 2001 NYFA Artists' Fellowship recipient, was on hand to discuss the film, how he made it, and the source of his ideas. Much of the audience were non-native English speakers, including Russian speakers who only understood the English and Russian in the film, and Pakistani speakers, who understood only the Punjabi and English. The post-film discussion revealed how audience members from different cultural backgrounds reacted to the film in unique ways, further emphasizing Marston's theme of cross-cultural communication difficulties.

"Bus to Queens" is a thought provoking film, which forces us to contemplate cross-cultural interactions, the impact that they have on us, and to question the way- we communicate our own intentions to others.

"Bus to Queens" can be viewed on video cassette at The International Center at 50 West 23rd Street, 7th Floor.

TALE OF GENJI

TRANSLATED EXCERPTS COURTESY OF STONEBRIDGE PRESS

Murasaki Shikibu's Tale of Genji

From the translation *A String of Flowers Untied...Love Poems from the Tale of Genji* by Jane Reichhold (Stonebridge Press November 2002)

On New Year's Day, Genji's palace is open to distinguished visitors. On a beautiful cloudless day, with the green grass beginning to show among the patches of snow, everyone seems filled with happiness. After greeting callers all morning, Murasaki and Genji sit together before her charming garden as Genji congratulates her on their happiness.

usu kōri	at last the thin ice
toke nuru ike no	has melted from the pond
kağami niwa	the mirror reflects
yo ni tağuinaki	an image unequalled in
kage zo narabe ru	these times of two side by side

In the middle of winter the nobles are invited to accompany the Emperor on an outing to Ōharano for hunting. Not wishing to go, Genji claims to have a defilement that prevents him from joining them. The Emperor sends Genji a brace of pheasants with a poem.

yuki fukaki	in the deepest snows
oshio no yama ni	of Fine Salt Mountain
tațsu kiji no	a pheasant has flown
furuki ato wo mo	yet today you should have been
kyō wa tazuneyo	searching for ancient footprints

After the festival ends and everyone has left or gone to bed, Genji is still looking for someone with whom to spend the night. While checking to see if the person he once visited has left her door ajar, he hears a young woman's voice reciting a bit of a poem from an anthology, "What can compare with a misty moon of spring?" Genji is surprised when the woman comes closer to the door to view the moon. He reaches out and grabs her sleeve. She is frightened and asks who he is. Genji recites this poem to reassure her.

fukaki yo no	deep in the night
aware wo shiru mo	it's a joy to see the moon
iru tsuki no	enter the mists
oboroge nara nu	I think nothing is misty
chigiri tozo omou	about the plight we share

Genji thinks of the Suzaku Emperor, of the last time he saw him, and recalls how, at their farewell, he reminded Genji so

much of their own father. As he goes inside, he mentions that he still has a robe, a gift from his father, that he always keeps by his side.

ushi to nomi	a single robe
hitoeni mono wa	yet the two sleeves
omooe de	are wet with tears
hidari migi nimo	on one side bitterness
nururu sođe kana	on the other affection

As winter comes and people in the city send fewer letters, Genji begins to miss Murasaki even more. He thinks of having her brought to Suma but decides that the punishment is for him alone and she should not be subjected to such hardships. While observing someone unsuccessfully trying to light a fire with wet wood, Genji murmurs.

yamagatsu no	a mountain person
iori ni take ru	in this hut tried to light
shiba shiba mo	firewood many times
kototoi ko nan	just as often I have wished

NEW YORK DE VOLUNTEER

By Nina Morgenlander (Okayama-Ken)

It all started in Coney Island ten years ago.. Noriko Hino had just moved to New York and she had always wanted to see the beach at Coney Island. When she finally went she was shocked at how dirty it was. It wasn't the beautiful Coney Island that she imagined. So she got a garbage bag and began picking up the debris. It was filled in no time. When people asked her what she was doing she didn't have the language skills at that time to explain it to them. But it started her thinking. She dreamt of one day going back to Coney Island with a group, all wearing matching T-shirts, who cleaned the beach together.

Fast forward to May 2002. While telling the story to Kazumi Terada, Noriko got the idea to start a Japanese volunteer group where people could incite "a positive social change by promoting volunteerism." With the help of Kazumi and some other friends NY de volunteer was born.

Their first step was to find volunteers. They posted their information on the internet, but most of their volunteers were found by word-of-mouth. The next challenge was to find various volunteer activities that they could do as a group with little or no language skills necessary so that the members who couldn't speak English could still volunteer. For their first event they teamed up with NY Cares. They went to Marine Park where they planted, painted, and did maintenance work.

That was last May. Now NY de volunteer has almost 500 volunteers participate in their events. They boast that they have organized two large events involving over 50 volunteers and nine smaller activities involving 10 to 35 volunteers. They have workshops, biweekly volunteer programs, tour programs, volunteer abroad programs, and a corporate partners program, not to mention a monthly orientation program for novice volunteers called Pub de Volunteer (formerly known as Café de Volunteer.) Six major events are already scheduled for 2003.

Noriko, the founder, spends all of her time working (without pay) for NY de Volunteer. She is the president while Takeharu "Tak" Kato is the VP. They have a staff of 15 others including a Program Director, a Development Director, a Finance Director, and two IT people. Not to mention the 260 plus subscribers on their mailing list. While most of the volunteers are Japanese the number of non-Japanese volunteers are growing. They hope to start a Tokyo de Volunteer and possibly even one day have several locations in cities all over the world. Their mission is to "create a forum for people to contribute their time, skills and enthusiasm through volunteering, raise awareness of the social and community issues, and encourage (the Japanese) community to feel a stronger connection with the larger NY community."

Organizations needing volunteers may post their needs on their web site or contact them by email, phone or in person. If you can recommend any projects and/or organizations where they can volunteer you can email them at: staff@nydevolunteer.org

(Continued from page 7)

upon pairing a slice with some enoki mushrooms, swishing them in yuzu soy sauce and placing them in my mouth. As with the toro tartar I quickly devoured everything before me, smiling with pleasure all the while.

While we were recovering from that experience, a waiter came with the final course before dessert: asari miso soup in a covered bowl (a sight we'd often seen in Japan at the end of a meal), then a rectangular platter graced with sushi. Venus read off the names of the fish from left to right – *toro, hamachi, king salmon, tai, kohada* – and my mouth watered. Actually, it watered as soon as my eyes spotted the toro on the far left. Anticipating that the fatty tuna would be delectable beyond belief, Marlene and I both decided to save the best for last and work from right to left, beginning with the kohada (shad). It had a slight salty taste, not unlike mackerel. The tai was excellent, as were the salmon and the hamachi. Then, for the grand finale, I reached for the toro. It literally melted in my mouth. Even in Japan, I'd only come across toro of that quality once or twice. Feeling it dissolve, I understood why Japanese people call toro Nobu the king of sushi. Again, in my moment of weakness and pure bliss, I felt it was well worth the extra money to enjoy something so exquisite, if only once.

Marlene and I exchanged knowing smiles and exhaled. "That was exceptional," she said. It wasn't over yet, though – next came the dessert course. First was a yamamomo granite with gold flakes served in a martini glass. Then came a small black-and-burgundy hued bento-like box with chocolate cake bathed in a white chocolate mint sauce, flanked by a generous scoop of matcha ice cream. Even just visually speaking it was almost overwhelming, the sight of such decadence. I'd heard of the Japanese sprinkling gold flakes on sushi at exclusive Ginza sushiyas, and here the flecks were winking at me from atop a tempting dessert.

After closing with the dessert, Marlene and I could not have asked for anything more. Choosing the omakase, we'd put ourselves in the chef's hands, and we had no regrets for making that choice at Nobu. For my part, I have no regrets about the price tag either. I'll be grinning each time I open up my homemade lunch at work, remembering the fantastic evening we had in Tribeca just a couple of weeks ago, glitzy gold flakes and all.

(Continued from page 4)

The most boggling question I will forever wrestle with is that in one vending machine they will frequently have coke in three different size cans (tiny, normal, and extra big), all for the same price? I just can't quite get this one. Some small lapse in capitalism? Social differences in effect? Who would ever get the tiny can? Even if I wasn't very thirsty, or if I was a tiny person, I would get the big one. I have never seen anyone get the small one. It is weird!

And of course there are countless other drinks, and stuff, in the vending machines. There is beer of all sizes, huge ones. Unfortunately, those beer machines turn off at 11 PM - you wouldn't want the beer to get in the wrong hands? The machine in our building has hot corn soup. Let me tell you, it is very disappointing to press the wrong button and instead of Coke, get corn soup. You can find candies, ice cream, and of course, rice. The rice vending machines are very common. For about 40 bucks you can restock the shelf with a huge bag of rice. I know, I know...you want to know about the stranger stuff ...

In Kyoto I saw a machine with items that cost as much as \$100 - it was some sort of electronic device - a strobe light of sorts. I also saw various dirty videos and even underwear. Pornography machines are a dime a dozen. One acquaintance informed me that during the day they are turned off, and you can't tell what is in them - but at night, the neon lights come on and there are magazines and videos that you can

buy. Batteries are quite common as well. After consultation with others in the area (thanks!), I have compiled some more vending machine items:

- oxygen (on Mt. Fuji)
- genki-drinks (energy drinks)
- toothpaste, tooth brushes and floss
- French fries, rice cakes
- Ice creams
- onsen tickets (hot springs)
- amusement park tickets (I guess this is like subways?)
- whale-meat
- continents thought to have vanished with the last ice-age (OK - I'm not so sure about the last two!)

There is so much out there that I haven't yet discovered here in Japan. However, I'll be sure to let you all know of any new discoveries or advancements with the foundation of Japan's economy. And I will try not to take the convenience for granted. Seriously.

Love and peace,
Matt

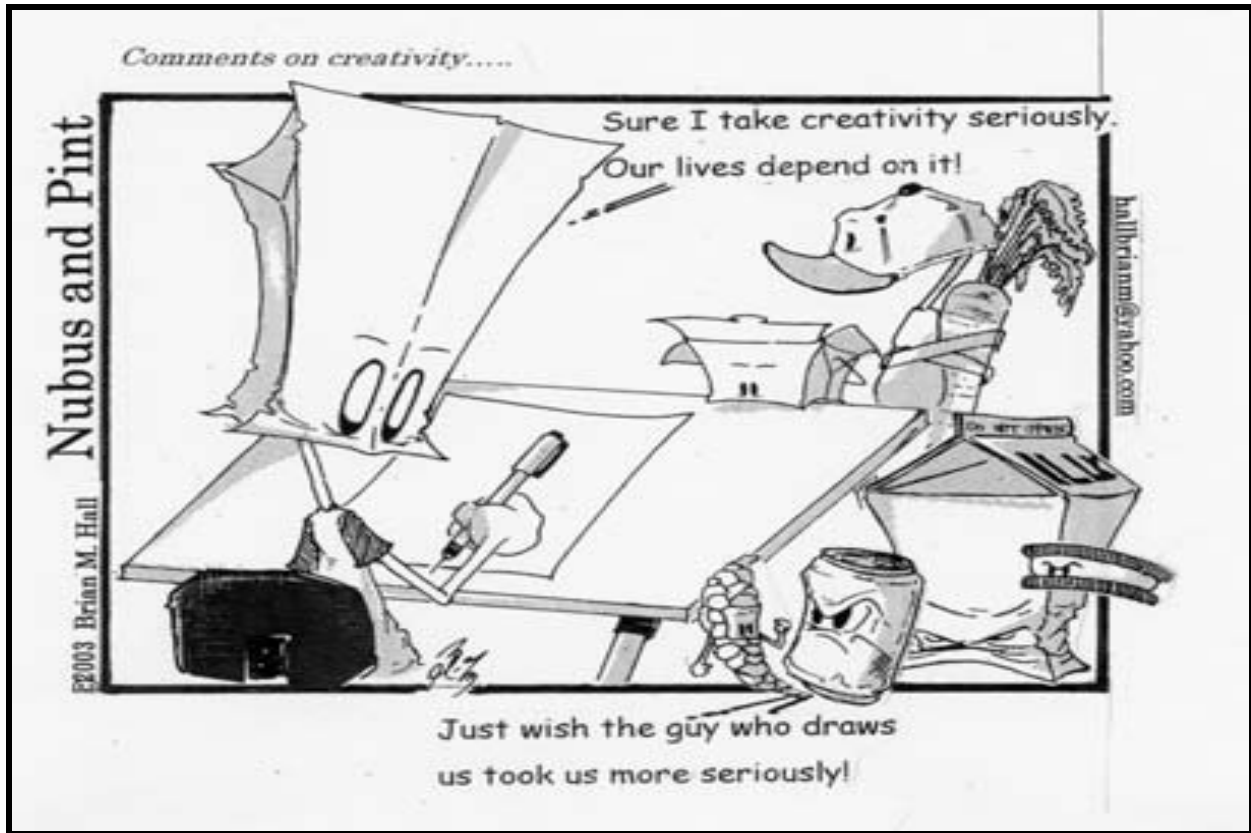


THE RIGHT BRAIN TOP 15!

Based on our incessant emails, you might think that we at the JETAA NY Newsletter had trouble obtaining article submissions for this issue. Au contraire, mis amigos. We were, in fact, so overwhelmed with your writings that most of them, like the resumes you send to companies, went straight into the circular file. We would, however, like to acknowledge the submissions that came close, but just missed the cut. So, without further ado, here are:

THE TOP 15 ARTICLES THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT INTO THIS NEWSLETTER

15. Cheese Grits and the Japanese Government
14. Hip Hop JET Diary: "What Up, Bro?" and Other Madd Cool Expressions I Tizzaught My Students
13. My Favorite Temples! A Former JET Takes Us on a Painstakingly Detailed Tour
12. Climbing Mt. Fuji! The Same Former JET Drags Us Up Japan's Famous Symbol
11. The Japanese: Lemme Tell You About'em
10. Zero to Hero and Back to Zero: A Male Perspective on Reverse Culture Shock
9. Inappropriate Origami
8. Playing the Shakuhachi: A Neo-Freudian Perspective on Traditional Japanese Music
7. Obsessed with Hiragana!!!
6. Dude, Cell Phones in Japan are So Cool!
5. A Revisiting of the Terrible Hardships Faced by White Americans Living in Japan
4. Short Fiction: How I Found the Perfect Job Through the JETAA Network
3. Seven Great Recipes for Toast (or Flan)
2. A Post-modern Evaluation of Epistemological Themes in Japanese Educational Substructures
1. JETAA and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy



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