

THE SAYONARA PRINT ISSUE

JQ
JETaa NY MAGAZINE
jetaany.org/magazine

WE INTERVIEW
JAPAN'S
AMBASSADOR
TO THE U.S.
ICHIRO
FUJISAKI



**NY NATIONAL CONFERENCE
WRAP-UP – SEE PAGE 5**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

NIPPON SPRING AWAKENING,
AUTHOR MALENA WATROUS,
JET ADVENTURES IN
OKINAWA, AND MORE

BRINGING JAPAN A
LITTLE CLOSER TO YOU

Sept/Oct 2010 Vol. 19 Issue No. 5

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A Message from the New Executive Director, CLAIR New York



Dear JET alumni:

My name is Masaaki (Masa) Akagi, the successor to Mr. Sasaki, the colorful and energetic former executive director for the Japan Local Government Center (CLAIR New York). Unlike former executive directors, who were all officials from the Ministry of General Affairs of the Japanese national government, I am the first JLGC executive director whose background is in sub-national government. I have worked in Hyogo Prefecture (her capital is Kobe City) for 30 years, mostly in the fields of industrial policy and international economic development for Hyogo Prefecture.

First of all, on behalf of all 47 prefectures, 19 designated cities, and over 2,000 municipalities, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all U.S. JETs for your contributions to the JET Program in Japan and JETAA in the United States. I strongly believe that Japan could not have internationalized her communities and improved the English communication ability of her young stars for these 23 years without the JET Program. I also think that the JET Program will be indispensable to the survival of Japan in today's turbulent and globalized marketplace.

As my first major official duty as executive director after my arrival on July 20, I participated in the 2010 JETAA USA National Conference held in Manhattan from Aug. 12 through 15. There were serious discussions about the 10-point document created to explain the benefits brought by the JET Program and plans for the JETAA USA national portal site. The alumni's love and enthusiasm for the JET Program are so impressive that the Japanese people shall certainly recognize more deeply the importance and effectiveness of JET.

While the JET Program and JETAA came under review in the so-called *shiwake* administrative review, they both survive. Some cost reductions and reengineering might be needed, but most people in Japan don't doubt the importance of the JET Program, and I think now they will also better understand JETAA. I, as the executive director of CLAIR New York, would like to promise my best efforts to support both the JET Program and JETAA activities.

Once again, I thank all of you JETs in the U.S., and especially JETAANY, for your contributions to and love of Japan.

Masaaki Akagi
Executive Director, Japan Local Government Center
CLAIR New York

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Interviewed in August for a piece aired on NHK News' Biz Spo program. Domo to JETAANY's David Savino, rear left.

From the Editor

It's been a busy August! Our New York chapter recently hosted its first-ever JETAA USA National Conference, and we'd like to thank all the participants for making it a huge success.

Also, in a long-simmering bid to be even more hip with the times, this is **JQ's** final issue in bimonthly print form. We'll be back soon in an all-online format, serving up the best digital Nichibe news, events, and activities, with the aim of including stuff from all of our chapters. That's right, *all* chapters. With this "open" format (no deadlines! no space limits!), I encourage more of our JET readers to submit material in order for us to become a stronger and more timely "national international" publication. E-mail me below and we'll talk. Until then, stay tuned for some exciting new changes.

Editorially yours,

Justin Tedaldi (Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)
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From the Ambassador of Japan to the United States

I have always believed that the JET Program is very important for the United States and Japan, and that the JETAA chapters and 25,000-plus alumni across the U.S. are valuable assets for both countries. This is why I decided to participate in the national JETAA gathering, although I did not receive an invitation this time but hope to receive one next year for the first time.

However, 24 years after its inception, the JET Program has come to the point where we have to re-evaluate its impact. In order for any kind of program to maintain its sustainability, there are three things I believe to be true to: 1) prove the effectiveness of the program, 2) continue to make progress, and 3) appeal to the public.

In order to maintain the JET Program, I am working on two new projects, the "JET Ambassador" and the "Reverse JET Program." I believe that those who participated in the JET Program have introduced Japan and Japanese culture in various ways to their families, friends, and co-workers since returning to their home countries. I am hoping that JETAA can expand this kind of activity to routine school visits during which JETAA members introduce Japan to the students. The embassy and consulates can help when introducing this project. We can make the first contact to schools and create lists of those who are interested. In each area, I am hoping to launch this program as "JET Ambassador" across the U.S.

The other idea I would like to introduce is the "Reverse JET Program." On the whole, when compared with China, Korea, and other Asian countries, the English ability of Japanese people is a lot weaker. I believe that the most effective way to drastically improve the English ability of Japanese people is to improve the English ability of Japanese English teachers. I am considering a possibility of introducing a program that would give Japanese English teachers the opportunity to come to the U.S. for one year to study English and teaching methods at universities. This will drastically raise the English proficiency level of Japanese English teachers and thus enable them to communicate and collaborate with ALTs with more confidence. In this regard, JET and Reverse JET will have synergistic effects on each other. I would really like to make this happen in the near future. In order to gain as much support as possible, I would like to ask JETAA to promote this idea among individuals in both Japan and the U.S.

I believe that the JET Program is a true diplomatic asset to Japan, and I hope we can keep working together for the future of JET. I would really appreciate it if JETAA can give us proposals on how to improve the JET Program.

Ichiro Fujisaki
www.us.emb-japan.go.jp



Become part of the **JQ** family. Write for us!
Send your story ideas to magazine@jetaany.org.



Director Tomoko Kana reads **JQ**! See our back issues at
<http://jetaany.org/magazine/archive>.

Nippon News Blotter

7/30/10: China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. Depending on how fast its exchange rate rises, China is on course to overtake the United States and vault into the number one spot sometime around 2025, according to projections by the World Bank, Goldman Sachs, and others. In an assessment disputed by Beijing, the International Energy Agency said last week that China had surpassed the United States as the world's largest energy user. ([Reuters](#))

8/5/10: Japanese speed-eater Takeru Kobayashi was cleared of charges of trespassing and resisting arrest after he rushed the stage at the annual Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest in Coney Island in July. Brooklyn Criminal Court resolved the case, which also included charges of obstruction of governmental administration and disorderly conduct, with an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal. Kobayashi must stay out of trouble for six months for his record to be restored. ([New York Times](#))

8/6/10: U.S. ambassador to Japan John Roos became the first American representative to attend an annual ceremony to honor the victims of the bombing of Hiroshima. Roos's presence at an event to mark 65 years since a U.S. bomb left Hiroshima in ruins has raised hopes that president Barack Obama will visit the city when he attends a meeting of APEC leaders in Japan in November. Envoys from France and Britain—both nuclear powers—and the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, also attended for the first time. ([The Guardian](#))

8/9/10: Popular singer Hikaru Utada, known by the stage name "Utada" in the United States and Europe, announced on her blog that she will take an indefinite break from music starting next year. She wrote: "I want to take a break from the glitzy life of an artist and focus on life

as a person....In order to advance as an artist, I have to grow as a person first." According to the announcement, Utada will continue being active as a music artist through the rest of this year. ([Mainichi Daily News](#))

8/10/10: Prime Minister Naoto Kan apologized to South Korea for Japan's past colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula in the hope of building future-oriented bilateral relations. In a statement released ahead of the Aug. 29 centenary of Japan's annexation of the peninsula, Kan expressed deep regret over the suffering inflicted during Japan's control from 1910 to 1945. Kan said the Korean people of that time were "deprived of their country and culture, and their ethnic pride was deeply scarred by the colonial rule, which was imposed against their will." ([Kyodo News](#))

8/17/10: Japan's government will consider further stimulus steps, potentially making it the first developed country to turn to additional fiscal spending since the global crisis, as a strengthening yen threatens its faltering recovery. But the additional stimulus is expected to be relatively modest and is likely to involve reallocating funds rather than new spending. The Nikkei newspaper said the government's stimulus steps may include extending the year-end deadline on subsidies for household purchases of energy-efficient consumer electronics. ([Reuters](#))

8/21/10: Studio Ghibli Inc. has decided to remove a four-year-old Acorn Republic shop selling goods depicting Totoro and its other popular characters from a public relations facility promoting the safety of nuclear power plants in Fukushima Prefecture following criticism. The animation studio led by director Hayao Miyazaki is known for producing animated films centered on concerns about human impacts on



the environment including *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Studio Ghibli President Koji Hoshino apologized in a statement on the company's website, stating that it was an "unwise move which could cause misunderstandings." ([Japan Today](#))

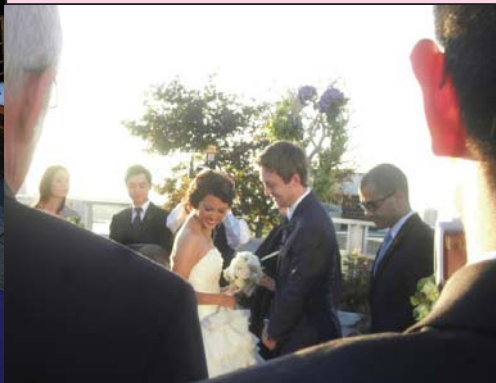
8/27/10: Prime Minister Naoto Kan said he will take firm measures on currencies when needed and will meet the Bank of Japan governor, increasing the possibility the central bank will ease policy soon as it confronts a surging yen. Japanese policymakers are now struggling over how to put a cap on the currency, which hit a 15-year high against the dollar this week and threatens to derail an export-led recovery. ([Reuters](#))

9/5/10: Democratic Party of Japan heavy-weight Ichiro Ozawa said he would stake his political life on serving as the nation's leader, while Prime Minister Naoto Kan reiterated his resolve to revitalize the nation's economy by creating jobs, as the two contenders sought to garner support in the party's leadership race. In responding to Ozawa's criticism over the way to compile the fiscal 2011 budget, Kan, who is seeking reelection as head of the party in the Sept. 14 leadership race, said in the joint event that he will come up with a budget designed to boost the nation's economy. The winner of the election will likely also be PM. ([Japan Today](#))



JETAANY's Secretary Ties the Knot

Congratulations to Janelle Jimenez and Hugh Prysten (both Shimane-ken, 2005-08), who were wed at Tribeca Rooftop Aug. 20. We wish them the best for their honeymoon in Spain and Morocco and their lives in NYC!



JETAANY Society Page National Conference Wrap By Goshippu Garu

The **2010 JETAA USA National Conference**, held Aug. 12-15 at the posh **New York Helmsley Hotel**, was a resounding success—*otsukaresama* to all the executive board and the rest of the planning committee!

The Midtown summit included 40+ delegates spanning 18 of the 19 JETAA U.S. chapters. On Friday, the conference began bright and early with the opening remarks made by JETAANY President **Megan Miller Yoo**, Ambassador and Consul General to New York **Shinichi Nishimiya**, and Executive Director of CLAIR **Masaaki Akagi**. Later, session topics included The Future of JETAA, How to Improve Interchapter Collaboration, Membership Management and Recruitment, Event Planning, Leadership Transitions and Succession Planning, and Basic Fundraising for Registered and Non-registered 501(c)3 Chapters.

On Saturday, sessions commenced with the technology session (covering the **Regional Tech Conference** in Portland as well as the JETAA Member Database and **JETAAUSA.com**), workshops for treasurers and on funding, career development services for members, and the “Future of JETAA” press release. On the final day, Ambassador of Japan to the U.S. **Ichiro Fujisaki** held a discussion with the delegates about the future of JETAA and an update on what is happening with the Japanese government. The conference closed with delegates breaking out in committees such as The Future of JETAA, Bylaws, The Future of JET/Press Kit, Improvements to JET, the next National Conference, and Technology. The conference was covered by the media, including **Kyodo News**, which ran stories in the **Japan Times** and the **Mainichi Daily News**.

Happily, it wasn't all business—some great social events also took place throughout the National Conference. Thursday night kicked off with a welcome reception at **Bao Noodles**, a Gramercy restaurant owned by JET alum **Chris Johnson**, who led the delegates through a sake tasting as well as several Vietnamese specialties. Afterward, dulcet delegates karaoke'd at nearby **Japas 27**. Friday night kicked off with a reception at the Residence of Ambassador Nishimiya and was followed by a special reading of the play **Sake with the Haiku Geisha**, penned by JETAANY board member **Randall David Cook**. A full house enjoyed the show, featuring not only a number of seasoned actors—including three from the original Off Broadway production—but also JET alums **Ann Chow** and **Megan Miller Yoo**. On Saturday, the delegates were joined by CLAIR and the ambassadors for a New York Harbor boat cruise, courtesy of CLAIR. On Sunday, JETAANY Webmaster **Lee-Sean Huang** led a group of delegates to the East Village for ramen and some Japanese-style shopping. Thanks again to all involved and see you next year!



The welcome reception took place at Bao Noodles (owned by JET alum Chris Johnson), where everyone enjoyed Vietnamese dishes, sake, and good conversation. The photo includes delegates from D.C., Texoma, Portland, New York, Hawaii, and more.



The conference wasn't all about the sake, though— delegates attended sessions from 9 a.m. onward Friday through Sunday. Delegates discussed the future of JETAA and how to continue doing successful programs with limited resources. Pictured here are the delegates from 18 chapters from across the country in mid-discussion.



JETAANY invited speakers to provide insight on topics ranging from “Addressing Tech Needs” to “Basic Fundraising for Registered and Non-registered 501(c)3 Chapters.” Pictured here is Clara Solomon presenting “Career Development Services for Members.”



Ambassador Nishimiya invited the delegates, volunteers, and CLAIR staff to a reception at his residence.



Randall David Cook, a JETAANY board member, held a reading of his Off Broadway show *Sake with the Haiku Geisha*. Pictured here are the delegates from Northern California, Pacific Northwest, and CLAIR, who were all excited to see the show.



The CLAIR reception was held on a boat cruise around New York Harbor. Ambassadors Shinichi Nishimiya, left, and Ichiro Fujisaki, right, spoke to delegates, telling them how the JET Program and its alumni are valued by the Japanese government. Ambassador Fujisaki is the first Japanese ambassador from D.C. to attend a JETAA National Conference. Pictured here are JETAANY members with the ambassadors.



JLGC Welcomes a New Face

Hello everyone,

I'm Hotaka Kawasaki, a new staff member at the Japan Local Government Center.

I was born in Shizuoka Prefecture, which is famous for Mt. Fuji. My father liked climbing mountains so much that he moved to Shizuoka, and he also named me after Mt. Hotaka, a beautiful mountain between Nagano and Gifu Prefectures.

I am interested in visiting, living, and working in various areas around Japan. That's why I took a job at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which is responsible for the basic administrative systems and fiscal policies of Japanese local governments.

At the same time, I am also interested in living and working abroad, and I have been looking for such an unusual chance for a long time while working at "domestic" offices. And now, this is it. I got the chance to come here to New York!

At JLGC, I am in charge of cooperative activities with JETAA and other organizations in the U.S. and Canada, as well as all of JLGC's budgeting and disbursements. I'm very happy and excited about this precious opportunity, and I'm looking forward to meeting you sometime!

JETAANY wants to know your business! E-mail goshippugaru@gmail.com with your news and/or photographic documentation and it just might end up on the Society Page of JQ. We look forward to hearing from you!

Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki: The JQ Interview
By Justin Tedaldi
(Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)

Ambassador of Japan to the United States Ichiro Fujisaki was a special guest at New York's JETAA USA National Conference in August. On the final day, JQ sat down with the ambassador over coffee for this exclusive interview.

What's your history with members of JET Program, and what has the relationship been like continuing through today?

I came to the United States two years ago as ambassador, and ever since then I've been thinking that this is a very important way of improving relations with JET and the United States at a grassroots level. And I've made some proposals myself—like the JET Ambassador, that's my idea. I'm always thinking about how I can improve the JET Program. And when the D.C. chapter has a meeting, farewell receptions—things like that—I always participate in them, and also I invite the consul in the selection committee to my room in the embassy, and discuss how we can improve the selection process with them.

Tell us about your time as a junior high school student in Seattle in the 1960s. Why did your family move to the U.S., and what are your memories of living there at the time?

My father was a diplomat, and he was assigned to Seattle in 1960. We went there in August, and I came back in February of '62; I had to come back to resume studies in Japan. At that time—that was 15 years after World War II—Japan was still a very poor country, and the United States was so shiny. Everything was so new to me: a huge refrigerator, and drinking Coca-Cola and eating ice cream not on birthdays, but every day; that was something very special to a Japanese kid coming to the United States for the first time.

Was life as a student here something you could relate to when you first learned about the JET Program and met with its cultural ambassadors?

I'm not answering your question directly, but the second time I came back here was in 1970. I was sent back to the U.S., and I thought, This is a totally different country. So many hippies—and the Vietnam War. The one that was talking to me was that we went to Harvard

Language School there, and everyone was barefoot, walking on the street! Barefoot at the time—ask your father or mother about those things. It was really a different time, and I thought, This is a different America. The third time I came back was 1985, as an embassy officer, and [now] this is my fourth time.

What's your impression of the



"I'm always thinking about how I can improve the JET Program. And when the D.C. chapter has a meeting or farewell receptions, I always participate in them."

JETAA National Conference so far, and what have you enjoyed most about it?

This is the first time that I participated in the National Conference. As a matter of fact, I didn't get an invitation this year. But I heard about it, and thought that I'd like to participate in it. I cut my summer vacation, which I spent in Japan, and I came back for this conference. And I felt it was really great. I enjoyed the river cruise, the Statue of Liberty, and the night of dance with the youngsters, and it was really good. A lot of good discussions and ideas came up, and I thought that people were really committed and enthusiastic about the program that they've already finished. And it's great, because they have already finished in Japan, but they still want to continue to improve

what they have done. And I think this attitude was very interesting to me.

There has been a lot of talk about the JET Program being scaled back or cut by the ruling DPJ. What can JET alumni and supporters do to make a case for the value of JET that Tokyo will recognize?

I encourage Japan to look at it, and

as ambassador been for you personally?

For any diplomat, not only a Japanese, to be sent to Washington is a great honor. It's the most important country for Japan, especially, and to come from Japan to this country is very important, so it's a great honor. It's a great responsibility, as well, but I enjoy it every day at what I'm doing. However, because we have had a government change in the United States and a government change in Japan, it's incredibly important. Today is not a continuation of yesterday, so we always have to be alert of changes back home, as well.

In that period, Japan has undergone a lot of social and political change. What is the impression you get from your colleagues in the U.S. about this?

I think my colleagues in the United States are thinking that the changes happening to them in politics is one particular thing which has not happened for a long time. So, we understand that this is time for observing the situation.

Name some of your personal highlights in your career so far, and what you liked best about some of the different positions you've had.

It sounds a bit too diplomatic, but I've liked all of the foreign postings. First I probably would say Indonesia—Jakarta. That was such a unique and important country for us [regarding] economic cooperation; I learned a lot. Second, I went to Paris, talking about macroeconomics. Third, I went to London to the international divisions, and it was very good to be working there. Fourth, I was sent to Kiev, and I was the consul minister in the embassy...it was a time of a lot of changes, and it was very rewarding to be working there, as well. Then I went to Switzerland, and I was in Geneva.

What made you decide to work in diplomacy? Who were your influences and idols when you began your political career?

My father was a diplomat, and I think that helped influence my decision to become a diplomat.

Earlier in August, China passed Japan as the world's second largest economy, with analysts predicting it will overtake the U.S. in 15 years. How can Japan stay competitive against such remarkable growth?

For the economy, I would like to point out three things. [\[Con't. on 8\]](#)

How have these last two years

**JoAnn M. Hunter Goes
From Broadway to Tokyo
By Lyle Sylvander
(Yokohama-shi, 2001-02)**

JoAnn M. Hunter is a Japanese American dancer and choreographer with multiple Broadway, touring, and regional credits to her name. Lyle first met JoAnn while working as a production assistant on the Broadway musical *Steel Pier*, and he recently talked with her about her career and experience overseeing the Tokyo production of the Tony Award-winning musical *Spring Awakening*.

Tell us about your background. Where were you born and raised?

My father was in the American military and met my mother while he was stationed in Japan. I was born at Tachikawa Air Force Base outside of Tokyo. When I was two years old, my family moved to Hawaii and then Rhode Island, which is where I grew up. We only spoke English at home, so I never learned to speak Japanese nor did I have any Japanese friends growing up. In fact, I was the only person of Asian descent in my neighborhood—most were Italian American.

How often did you travel to Japan?

We never did while I was growing up. In fact, my mother has never been back since we left. I only returned recently—first in 2008, as the associate choreographer for a revue of American pop songs from the 1960s called *Trip of Love*. Then I returned in 2009 for the Tokyo premiere of *Spring Awakening*. *Trip of Love* opened in Osaka, and during a break in rehearsals I flew to Sapporo to visit my relatives for the first time. Even though they didn't speak English, we had a great time together.

How did you become interested in dance?

My mother has always had a love for dance even though she never danced herself. When I was 10 or 11, she asked me if I wanted to take a ballet class. She opened a phone book, closed her eyes, and pointed—that is how I found my first dance teacher. Her name was Nancy LeFebvre DiCicco and she was my first mentor. When I was 17, I received a scholarship to study dance for the summer. I came to New York between my junior and senior years of high school and

never went back home. I love this city!

What was your first Broadway show?

My first Broadway show was *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* in 1989. I followed that with *Shogun: The Musical*, based on the novel by James Clavell. It had a disappointingly short run but was a beautiful show visually—both the sets and costumes were spectacularly designed to evoke feudal Japan. Soon after *Shogun* closed, I was cast in *Miss Saigon*, which was an enormous



"I think the young Japanese performers and audiences found *Spring Awakening* especially liberating."

hit. In total, I've danced in fourteen shows on Broadway, including *Guys and Dolls*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Chicago*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. I've been an associate choreographer on four shows, most recently *Curtains* in 2007.

Tell us about *Spring Awakening*.

I worked with choreographer Bill T. Jones as an associate on the Broadway production, which opened in 2006 and ran for two years. It won eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book (by Steven Sater), Best Score (music by Duncan Sheik, lyrics by Steven Sater), and Best Direction (by Michael Mayer). In 2009, I

was hired to recreate the Broadway production at the Shiki Theatre Company in Tokyo. The director, Michael Mayer, had approval over casting and we kept him updated in rehearsals by video, but I was the only member of the creative team to make the trip to Tokyo.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in dealing with Japanese performers?

I found that it was difficult for them to come out of their shells. Initially, they were so timid and afraid to make mistakes. I convinced them that no one was going to judge them in the rehearsal space and that it was okay to be adventurous and try new ideas. It was a struggle to get them to give me more but they finally understood what I was going for and trusted me. I also had two wonderful interpreters/assistants working for me, which helped immensely.

Did anything impress you about the rehearsal process in Japan?

I was especially impressed with the work ethic and dedication of the actors. Our rehearsals finished at 6:00 p.m. and then they would rehearse for an additional three hours on their own time. They worked so hard that they never had to call for a line, and the swings [musical theater understudies] actually took their own initiative to learn everything they had to learn.

How was the show received in Tokyo?

It really appealed to younger audiences. The cast itself is made up of mostly 18- to 25-year-olds and the show is fundamentally about sexual awakening and discovery, a universal theme that everyone goes through at one point in their lives. There are many things not usually depicted on the Japanese stage, such as nudity, sexual intercourse, and homosexuality, and I think the young Japanese performers and audiences found it especially liberating.

What are your plans for the future?

Right now, I'm planning to choreograph a new production of *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*. It has a revised book and will be directed by Michael Mayer, who also directed *Spring Awakening*. We plan to open next season at the Off Broadway Vineyard Theatre and, if all goes well, we shall see.

Watch videos of the Japanese production of *Spring Awakening* at www.shiki.gr.jp/navi02/news/005510.html.

[Con't. from 7] One: China has ten times the population [of Japan], so it's expected that China would take over Japan in terms of GDP. However, you have to also look at the content of the economy. That means research and development, content, and investment into foreign countries, contributions to international organizations like the UN. So, economies should not be judged only by GDP here, but the content.

Point two: The Japanese and Chinese economy is compatible; complimentary. China is such a big market now [that] the Japanese economy needs to export to China, so we need that market.

Point three: However, there are existing rules like WTO, intellectual rights, etc., which we expect China to abide by. On global municipal

situations, China has been expanding its military spending [at double digit rates] for the last 20 years as an announced figure. In those 20 years, the average Japanese defense budget was 0.9 percent. I don't know why that kind of expansion has to be continued. We need a bit of transparency.

Japan has relaxed visa requirements for Chinese tourists partly as a measure to stimulate its economy. What other ways might it reach out to China in the future as it grows into a larger world power?

I was in Tokyo for two weeks until yesterday. I went to several sites in Japan and was impressed with so many Chinese people there. It's really totally different from the last time that I was in Japan for a long time five years ago; it's totally different. That shows that China's

economy is really growing. Now, China should be engaged in international issues...they are doing it for the UN and WTO and all that. I think they're operating as a very big partner, and they continue to expect China to do so.

Some Americans I know who also lived in Japan years ago are growing disillusioned with Japan due to its economic and leadership problems, not to mention its hard-line stance on immigration despite the rapid graying of Japanese society. Has Tokyo planned to modify any of these policies here in the 21st century? You pointed out two issues, economy and immigration. As for economy, the Japanese government debt is more than 180 percent of GDP, twice the ratio of the United States. This should not be sustained. So, we really have to look at

Through the Eastern Looking-Glass With Malena Watrous By Sharon Moskowitz (Fukuoka-ken, 2000-01)

Much like the smell of fresh *tatami* or the taste of *shochu*, the novel *If You Follow Me* by JET alum Malena Watrous is sure to transport you back in time to your own life on JET. Inspired by her two years as an ALT in Shika, Ishikawa-ken, Watrous explores the complexity of life as a rural JET through the eyes of the book's heroine Marina.

From navigating ambiguous relationships with Japanese coworkers to trying to abide by a myriad of arcane rules in day-to-day life, Marina experiences the proverbial highs and lows of culture shock all the while learning firsthand about Japanese culture and, perhaps more importantly, herself. Sound familiar?

When Marina arrives in Japan joined by her female lover Carolyn, she has come to start a new chapter after the tragic suicide of her father, leaving behind her grieving mother. She struggles internally with her father's death as she tries to adapt to her foreign surroundings in Japan. As the story unfolds, we get a sense of Marina's background, her family life, her impetus for coming to Japan, and even a small taste of her sex life. As I read along, I found myself alternately cringing and nodding in agreement at many of Marina's actions as they reminded me so much of my own difficulties and occasional sloppy faux pas in Japan.

The book begins with a letter to Marina from Miyoshi, her supervisor and team teacher. She has failed to separate her *gomi* (trash) properly, to which he informs her, "your neighbors feel some stress about you." Throughout the book, Marina continues receiving letters from Miyoshi (despite the fact that they work together), often on the subject of *gomi* protocol and her transgressions thereof. He high-

lights her mistakes and expresses his disappointment in her, all the while tempering his scolding with such encouraging Japanese platitudes as "please try harder."

As the default topic of Miyoshi's letters to Marina, *gomi* is a safe, reliable medium for communication. Slowly, the subject begins to take on a more metaphorical role as it becomes a symbol of the unfamiliar and complicated rules Marina must learn to follow, and an excuse for her Japanese neighbors



JET novelist Malena Watrous in Japan. (Courtesy of the author)

to scrutinize her unfairly for her mistakes under an intense microscope. Eventually, Marina begins to feel that people in fact see her as a form of *gomi*, reflecting, "I am a temporary person, leading a disposable life."

Marina grapples with the transient nature of her life in Japan, a reality that feels intensified by the recent untimely death of her father. With a contradictory sense of inherent sadness and joyous freedom, Marina's feelings about being a "temporary person" are sure to resonate with former JETs, especially toward the end of the book, when she realizes that "no one expects me to get everything right. There are some advantages to being a temporary person here."

Marina's sense of how she is perceived by the Japanese is also rattled when she agrees to pose as a

model for her coworker Keiko's elementary school art class. The children draw her only as a *karakuta* (character) with little regard to how she actually looks. When she asks Keiko about it, she is told that the students "copy idea of you...they know Western face has tall nose, folded eyelid....They can't really see you."

The theme of relationships is pervasive throughout the book. Marina must constantly negotiate the tension between the dual nature of

Are they still only mere colleagues? Friends? Potential lovers?

Back at work, Miyoshi begins to avoid Marina and his letters stop coming, to which she laments, "I was surprised to find that I missed his *gomi* letters, not the corrections but the personal stuff that seeped through the cracks."

It soon becomes clear to Marina that in Japan, what goes on at an *enkai* stays strictly at an *enkai*. The behavior (or perhaps, misbehavior) of the staff is restricted to the party and must not be mentioned at work if one is to maintain the ever-elusive workplace "wa."

When Marina finally confronts Miyoshi with her anger at his avoidance of her at work, he tells her "a Japanese *enkai* is a kind of parallel planet. What happens on this planet has no consequence on earth." Little does Miyoshi realize that to Marina and many real life JETs in similar situations, Japan itself is something of a parallel planet.

Marina's life in Japan is at once fascinating and incredibly familiar. Reading the story feels like being at an *izakaya* chatting with a JET colleague, or looking at the photo album of a close friend who has shared your experience: you recognize the general picture, the jokes are shared, and the characters feel somehow prototypical, yet the particulars are different enough to keep you sharply engrossed.

As I read along, I was surprised to find some of my own emotions which have lain dormant for a long time reactivated by Watrous's lively prose and eerily astute observations. *If You Follow Me* bravely tackles the contradictions of life in Japan and is refreshingly honest in its treatment of both good and bad (not to mention downright weird) aspects of life on JET. Reading it feels less like you are reading a novel and more like the novel is reading you.

For more on *If You Follow Me*, visit Malena's homepage at <http://malenawatrous.com>.

the economy in society...give more stimulus, and this is what the Japanese people are looking for, as well. Second, as for immigration, it is true that Japan is not as developed as some other countries are, and I do hope that in the years to come it will open more to direct immigration, but I cannot commit myself at this stage.

Is there any one place that's your particular favorite to visit?

I should answer New York [laughs], but I like

many places; I don't really have a favorite. But I think it's great to live in Washington, D.C., and to come up to New York from time to time like this.

How do you feel about the growing influence of Japanese culture on the West? Have some of the things that have achieved popularity surprised you in any way?

I think what I have observed in my political life-

time is that we were just trying to create something very traditional of Japan in here...[Japan] amalgamated Japanese tradition with Western architecture and art, and created something new with the Japanese flavor, or tradition. And this is quite unexpected in fashion, architecture, and art, and I think this has a great impact that I do see here. A lot of people have incorporated the Japanese touch. It's not trying to tell you that we have this, but it's already in it and pretty well accepted naturally. And this [Con't. on 11]



This issue features Stuart Wallace (Nagasaki-ken, 2006-07).

A U.S. fighter jet flies low overhead with a deafening roar. I look around and all I can see are terraced rice paddies, banana trees, and jungle. I stink to high heaven and I haven't spoken English for weeks. A butterfly the size of a dinner plate lands on my scythe and I ask myself, "Where am I?"

Throughout four years in Asia, I've often had these "where am I?" moments. Now, I was having one of them in the middle of a rice paddy during a farm stay in Okinawa.

I found myself in Okinawa through the **WWOOF Japan program**. WWOOF is an international organization with country chapters worldwide that connects farms with volunteers. Volunteers get room and board in exchange for about six to eight hours of work a day. I had chosen this farm in particular because the host family doesn't speak English.

I arrived in Okinawa in July and will be here until December. Five months should be plenty, I'm hoping, of preparation time for the Level 2 Japanese test in early December.

But why Okinawa? Why Japanese language? It all started with the JET Program.

I was an ALT in a high school on Hirado Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, from 2006-07. After that, I decided I wanted a taste of China and, through the JETAA job bank, I found a program in Shenzhen City. After six months there, I crossed the border to the Hong Kong Japanese School Primary Section (also found through the JETAA job bank). The job was a dream come

true and it was there, while stricken with swine flu, that I found myself with the time to study Japanese properly. I took JLPT4 and JLPT3 on the same day and passed both.

I went to the farm in Okinawa for a month, and then started a contract teaching job at Japan Women's University in Tokyo. I enjoyed the opportunity to experience Tokyo, but I wasn't satisfied with how much time I had to study. So I decided to volunteer and headed back to the farm in Okinawa.

The farm is about an hour north of Naha Airport in a town called Yomitan. An American military base is nearby and conversations sometimes have to stop as the planes and helicopters land and take off. The farmhouse is two stories and quite large. There's an adjacent field which grows pumpkins, bell peppers, and goya. The front garden grows dragonfruit, papayas



Stuart participated with a Japanese team in Hong Kong's annual dragon boat festival.

and shikuwasa. A two-minute truck ride into the jungle takes us to an expansive terraced rice paddy enclosed by banana trees.

We wake up at 7:30 a.m. and eat homemade bread and peanut butter. It's hardly a Japanese breakfast, but it embodies the mixed culture of Okinawa. Around 9 a.m. we get into our overalls and head out to the rice paddy or the garden or wherever there is work to be done. At 12:30 p.m., neighborhood chimes call us back home and we eat a modest lunch, often featuring goya or Spam. We take a short nap and at 2:00 p.m. we're back at it until the late afternoon chimes at 6:30 p.m. After dinner I do the dishes and I'm usually in bed, exhausted, by 10:00 p.m.

On rainy days, I study Japanese and I write about previous adventures in my blog as a way to remember English. In writing my

blog, I realize just how much my experience with JET has shaped my adventures.

Holidays during JET allowed me to take my first travel adventures into Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China. After a brief visit to China, I knew I wanted more. While I lived there, I was able to present a different opinion on Japan to Chinese people by sharing my experiences in Nagasaki.

In Hong Kong, I had the privilege of being part of the Japanese expat community. I attended sake tasting events, went to Japanese restaurant openings, and even participated in the dragon boating festival on a Japanese team. I had the best of both worlds: a city I love and a culture and language of which I'm very fond of.

I took private Japanese lessons with colleagues from work and found

lights of Tokyo. Nearly everyone in the town of 1,000 speaks Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, and Guarani (a native Paraguayan language).

The **Japan International Cooperation Agency** works closely with the Japanese school there, which boasts 100 students compared to the 30 in Buenos Aires. Natto and sake are readily available at the local supermarket.

I spent a few days there chatting with farmers in Spanish and Japanese and having another one of those "where am I?" moments. When I was returning from Colonia Yguazú back into Argentina, I met some Okinawan girls whom I now see regularly. It's a small world and, for me, a frequently Japanese one.

So why, after all this time, all this study of Japanese language? It may come as somewhat of a surprise but I actually have no interest in living in Japan. I love Japan, but I want a more relaxed place to make a home. I'm learning Japanese because I love the expat communities I've encountered.

Everywhere I've traveled, I've met Japanese and they almost always have an interesting story, an open mind, and a willingness to listen. Of course, people who match that description can be found all over Japan, but the Japanese lifestyle is just not for me. I also feel special, as I did in Hong Kong, being part of a foreign expat community.

As an American, I can help bridge Japan to other cultures by showing that Japan isn't just for Japanese. It elicits a sense of stewardship for Japan. All of my adventures have shown me that sharing Japan with other cultures is, for me, a greater pleasure than living in Japan.

So, wish me luck! After I pass the test in December, the plan is to get my elementary school teacher's license in Texas, study intensive Chinese for a year at Shenzhen University, then get my Spanish from 90% to 100% in South America, and finally learn French and Arabic.

Throughout all my linguistic adventures, I know I'll always share Japan as Japan was shared with me in Nagasaki during the JET Program.

Back to the rice paddy!

Visit Stuart's blogs at <http://thatsfantastic.wordpress.com> and <http://stuartsjapanesestudy.wordpress.com>.

**Book Corner: *Just Enough*
By David Kowalsky
(Hiroshima-ken
ALT/CIR, 1991-93)**

When thinking about all the huge challenges the world is facing—global warming, deforestation, and food and water shortages (just to name a few)—the obvious thing most people do is look *forward* for new technologies and energy methods to solve these (and many other) problems. But what about looking backward?

In researching his book *Just Enough: Lessons in Living Green from Traditional Japan* (Kodansha International, 2010), Azby Brown looked back at how Japan in the late Edo period (1603-1868) remarkably overcame many of the identical problems that we face today in around only one generation. Brown argues that the Japan of the Edo period met all of the objectives of the Hanover Principles for sustainable design*, achieving sustainable and renewable forestry, agriculture, architecture, city planning, and transport. *Just Enough* is required reading for anyone looking for inspiration on how to make today's world more sustainable.

Azby Brown should be a familiar name to people interested in Japanese home design and carpentry. He's written four books on those topics, and is on the faculty of the Kanazawa Institute of Technology and as the director of the KIT Future Design Institute in Tokyo.

Just Enough is no traditional history textbook. It is presented as a narrative from the point of view of a contemporary observer living in Japan over 200 years ago before Japan opened up to the West and became an industrialized nation. The overall purpose of the stories in the book are to convey the mentality of "just enough"—a famous Zen saying ("Ware tada taru wo shiru," or, "I know what 'just enough' is") as it guided the life of millions of Japanese.

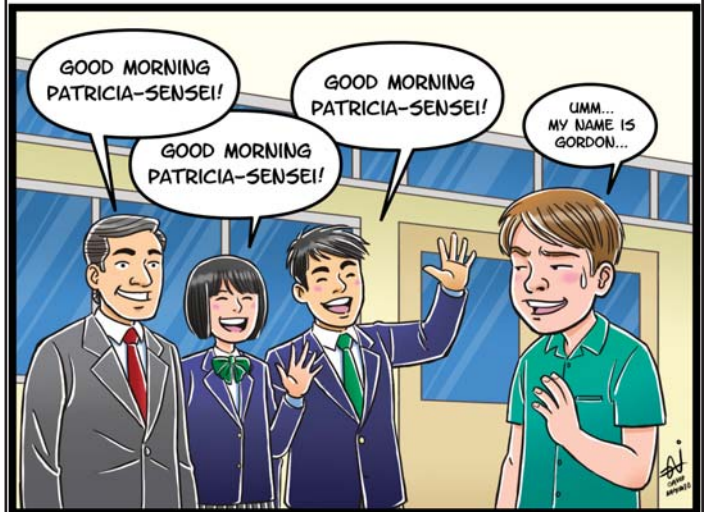
The book is organized into three parts: "Field and Forest," "The Sustainable City," and "A Life of Restraint," describing extensively one character in each—the farmer, the carpenter, and the samurai. Each part concludes with a "learning" section with very broad conceptual suggestions (examples: "reinvent the urban waterway" and "use water more fully"), as well as suggestions that households and individuals can implement (examples: "aim for a locally sourced lifestyle" and "promote new ethical standards").

When reading *Just Enough* you don't have to worry about having difficulty visualizing something like rice cultivation or the layout of the house of a samurai. Brown includes excellent illustrations (he drew all of them himself) that greatly help to visually tell the stories in the book.

Some books are read and quickly forgotten, but I know the next time I visit Japan, I will look at the country differently and notice things in a way I wouldn't have if I hadn't read *Just Enough*.

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN CIR, 2002-04)



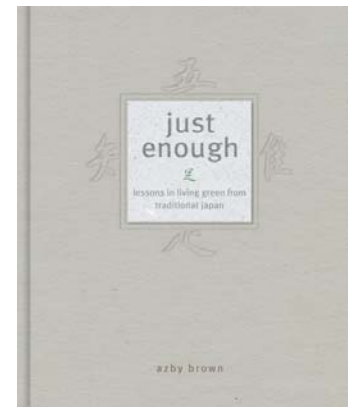
**Don't worry.
They'll stop calling you by your
predecessor's name in a month or two.**

For more *Life After the B.O.E.*, visit www.lifeaftertheboe.com.

*Principles drafted by William McDonough and Michael Braungart in preparation for the Hanover Expo of 2000.

Definition of sustainable development: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Source: the report on the United Nation's Brundtland Commission of 1987.

Visit *Just Enough's* website at www.justenoughjapan.com.



[*Con't. from 9*] is a brand new phenomenon.

What is it like to work with Ambassador and Consul General in New York Shinichi Nishimiya? What things do you discuss when you make contact?

I've known him for years. He was one of the top diplomats we had, and we worked together very closely when he was director-general of North America [Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. So, I was very comfortable while working with Mr. Nishimiya. We picked articles, I sent e-mails, and I think he has a very sound judgment on many issues. I think he really is a top diplomat for Japan to send to New York.

What are some effective ways that Americans can continue to promote Japanese culture to others who might be unfamiliar with it?

I think that if we're talking about JET people, my idea, which I explained today, is JET Ambassador, which is to send people who are coming back to the United States to try to go around to grade schools and junior high, to tell their experiences to students. If they acquire interest

in Japanese language and the way of living, then the students may want to become JETs; they may want to learn another language, they may want to learn about history, tradition, and culture. So that, I think, is what I really want to see.

Tell us about your hobbies and interests outside of your busy work life. Are there any new things you've tried recently?

I go to opera, concerts, and movies. Today I'm going to see *Freddie the Leaf* this afternoon; it's a show in New York. The last movie I saw was *Inception*—my wife liked it; it was too complicated for me, personally. I would like to watch the film *Salt*, as well; I have not seen it. I occasionally play golf with friends in Washington, D.C. And to tell you the truth, I make so many travels, that many of my weekends are used for that, as well.

Regarding all the countries and governments you've worked for, do they tend to have a common answer for what Japan's greatest strengths are?

I think that Japan's feature is, in my view, one: Japan is a non-nuclear country, but it has been

assisting foreign countries with economic cooperation and peace. Second is Japan's innovation and research and development power, which is number one in energy and altogether number two next to the United States. So, it can contribute to the world with that.

Number three: Japan's way of amalgamating Japanese tradition into Western culture and civilization. That is what I think Japan's contributions are, and I think some of the elements of Japan's strengths or features can be appreciated by the rest of the world.

What is the message you would like all attendees of the JETAA National Conference to remember as they return to their own communities back home?

One: JET is appreciated. It has to be continued. Two: However, nothing can be taken for granted. Efforts have to be made to always improve. Three: Best of luck, and let's meet next year.

For more on Ambassador Fujisaki, visit www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/english/html/embassy/ambassador.htm.

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