

1998-the Year of the Tiger

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"Tora, Tora" was the secret code to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941. But the tiger here seems a somewhat more friendly version of that famous family who also sent one of their sons to the death of the Buddha.



In 1998 a quite different plan emerged for my January journeys. I decided to combine a Community Service Learning component from the University of Redlands requirements for gradation with the travel course. We would stay in Tokyo in 1998 for the entire month. Here the class at the Asakusa Buddhist Temple seems happy about the change. That year eleven Redlands students -four Americans and seven Japanese- took the class.

From that year until the present, I dropped the idea of going to a second Asian country in January and remained in Japan for the whole month. In 1998 we stayed in Tokyo only got to Kamakura once. At the welcome party given by the Nagareyama International Friendship Association, a Japanese host-father, who was well traveled in Europe and America, joked with me suggesting that the name of my course as "An Asian Travel Journey" was a bit pretentious, for we saw little of Asia save Japan and little of Japan save the Tokyo area, and little of Tokyo-except for Nagareyama. I laughed with him at my false advertising. Then I countered by saying that perhaps seeing a little place in the big world is more valuable than trying to see the whole world in a month, or the whole of America as some Japanese travelers do. Los Angeles, New York and the Grand Canyon are sold as packages for in two weeks in the USA. He laughed in response. In fact, on reflection I realized he was perhaps saying indirectly that to stay so long with the host-families was a burden and that we should be away from the host-families for a week or two. I learned to copy myself by such reflections. Perhaps I will never know for certain.



While at Waseda, I had pre-occupied with the world of that university. Nonetheless, living in NishiWaseda, I walked by an elementary school on the way to work every day. But my own daughters were 19 and 20 that year, so their questions and insights from the two places they spend most of their days were also university centered, and I did not think much about the small children who sang so beautifully, projecting voices more zealously than I remembered from my own school days.

In my second year in Japan at Reitaku University, I became fascinated with the process of education that went on all around me. Reitaku had a kindergarten in the yard just outside my apartment, and often the children were being delivered by parents, in cars and on foot by eager parents who demonstrated a great sense in the process of learning as they dropped off the small prodigies. In another 50 years, I

walked through the Reitaku High School students in their well pressed blue blazers and of to their classes with a cheerful "Konnichiwa." Moreover, one of the scholars in the Research Division of the Institute of Moralogy, Nobo Iwasa had a Ph. D. from Harvard and was proud to have studied under Lawrence Kohlberg. His interest in moral development led him to pose questions about American education that led me to reflect by contrast with Japanese education. Then came the idea of changing the January interim class from the Ariyoshi-san in Nagareyama to visit schools on several levels in Japan. I thought, "It would be great if my students could teach English in the schools as a kind of community service to pay back the kindness of the Japanese people."

From 1998 we have been able to spend time in public Japanese elementary and junior high schools thanks to the Nagareyama International Friendship Association which not only provided home-stays for Redlands students but also the visits to the schools. Then through the associations at Reitaku and the Institute of Moralogy and mainly through the efforts of Mr. K. Miyazaki, our students have been able to teach in the Reitaku High School, Reitaku University, and the Moralogy College, a kind of graduate school in which the level of English is as good and sometimes better than the Americans from Redlands.

In 1998 preparation for the experience of English teaching, I used selections for a book, which was good for practical ideas about coping with Japan, and with ideas of activities in class. (O'Sullivan, 1996).

We learned that the high level of Japanese education has brought high school attendance to almost 98%. We learned that competition to get into the "right school," starts with kindergarten. In Tokyo there are even "tutorial institutions, which accept children of one, two and three years of age for preparation for kindergarten entry." (Henry, 1994). Families could pay 80,000 yen for admission (about \$500 US) and up to 70,000 a month (\$450 US) a month. At the other end of the system are the high school students seeking entry into a university by enrolling in private cram-schools, where a very special variety of English grammar is taught for taking tests.

Others who went with less preparation were sometimes shocked by the differences between school policies on the same levels and even more differences between the different ages. Sometimes the younger the Japanese children were, the more they seemed open to the kind of learning process Redlands students appreciated. Freedom of expression and lively interactions almost always took place between elementary school children who knew little or no English and the Redlands students.

The new design of the January interim would be to spend the entire month in Japan, mostly in Kashiwa and Nagareyama. No more stopping in Hawaii to prepare the class with readings and reports. No more journeys past Japan to South East Asia. I was afraid that the class would not have a strong enrollment.

The fact only four students were traveling with American passports and seven were Japanese meant we could not have translation during the days we were teaching

English. The design of the new format included as well the class REL 325 Japanese Religions and culture was retained most of the successful features of the previous 7 winters in Japan.

On our arrival Narita Airport was open, but it closed the next day as did all the subways and trains. We could not get to the Meiji Shrine as planned, and all the students stayed with their host-families or their real families in the Tokyo area. I would have liked to have seen Asuksa the way that Hiroshige captured it, but, alas, it would have been a long walk in deep snow from Matsudo, where I stayed with the Sugimoto family.



Our schedule was as follows:

1. Visit to the Meiji Shrine on the first week, delayed because of the snow.
2. View a Kabuki performance- this year we got to see "Terakoya" (Temple School)an appropriate topic for the year we started to teaching English in the village of Nagareyama. The play is about a young man Michizane hiding out in a school where he could be protected by his teacher played by the famous actor Kichiemon.
3. Have a zazen with Nishijima-sensei and hear a lecture about Dogen's teachings.
4. Hear a lecture about Moralogy in Kashiwa given this year by Mr. Shigeru

Taniguchi, Director of the International Department and meet with President Mototaka Hiroike who has always showed a warm welcome to us and always asked my students for their impressions of Japan and then draws them into insights from what they say.

5. Hear a lecture at Waseda by Dr. Kaminski dealing with the 14 years of living as a Gaijin in Japan and raising two children of complex ancestry in that country, far from his native land of Poland

6. View objects in the Tokyo National Museum which were on a special exhibition from Kyoto, entitled the "Forefathers of the Degon Sect Narrative Picture Scrolls."



The students were allowed, as always, to choose their own object of special interest to write about and to present in an oral report.

A new event this year was the Edo Tokyo Museum, suggested by Mrs. Ariyoshi. Under one roof on several levels, the Museum has life-size-street with a collection of shops and homes from the Edo period. I like the oldest things represented; the students liked some of the newest. I liked the Edo-period Bridge, the students preferred the ancestor of the old automobiles.

Since this year was a community service class, we also took the opportunity to interview several of the "homeless" men living in the Ueno Park, about their life there. Their modest "homes" of blue tents, with their shoes carefully taken off outside the opening, and their rather good clothing, leather jackets and warm hats, represented another contrast to the homeless of Los Angeles with whom we were more familiar. Sometimes it was hard to tell who was homeless.



Tony Golden recorded an interview with the homeless man in the middle of the picture above in Ueno Park. Using Ken Oishi as a translator we talked at length to one homeless man had lost his business, his wife and children went to live with his wife's father. Tony was surprised that the man was "very happy to answer our questions," and found there are some differences between homeless in Tokyo and those in LA. In Japan the homeless "always wash their clothes in the fountain at the park and hand them out to dry. They take their shoes off before they go into their tents." None of them asked us for money. Tony reported that the man we talked to for the longest period was "caught up on the issues effect the economy and the country."



Here Professor Nonaka of the Reitaku High School welcomed the Redlands students to be teachers at the Reitaku High School, in what I consider the most important new part of interim class which allowed us to do community service there the Reitaku High and by the efforts of Mrs. Ariyoshi in the Nagareyama elementary and junior high schools. All of the students from Redlands became overnight "teachers of English." Each of them dressed up like a salariman, with coat and tie. We were given a warm welcome by Mr. Michio Nonaka, Head of the English Department in the Reitaku High School. He earned a Master's Degree in Education in America and has excellent command of English. We were divided into five sections for English teaching at various levels for the sophomores and juniors. The seniors were taking a special program to prepare them for entrance examinations into universities in Japan.

At Reitaku each of my students seemed to have a fan club by the end of the week. Here Luc watches over his group.



Luc, Tony, Nick, Chris and Ken had their own teams. At first Ricky and Nami served as translators, moving back and forth between classrooms. In the high school two of the teams were given a selection about Shakespeare. Tony wrote, "my first class was pretty toughthen I jumped right into Shakespeare, but every time I asked a question all I got were blank stares, and no one raise a hand. Talk about a tough crowd." In the next class, he reported the focus was to have been on vocabulary building.

The following day in another setting, "we still did Shakespeare, but we put the class into groups to answer questions and to come with vocabulary that they didn't understand. By the third day in the high school Ken worked with Tony and both felt "the teaching is just getting better and better...after we finished with Shakespeare, we spent the rest of the class time letting the students ask us questions. They all got into groups and come up with different questions to ask us about anything they wanted." (Tony Golden, unpublished journal for Day 11, Jan 23, 1998).

Also we taught in the junior high school where Mrs. Ariyoshi's daughter was a student. There the presentations were less formal. The students were dressed in gym clothes, as did the Redlands students. There was a great deal of activity in the playground that year, and some of the boding took place in a huge snowball struggle between various elements of the students and Redlands visitors. The snow was more than a foot deep and as we walked through it that morning, it occurred to me that if this had been America the students would want to throw snowballs.



Each day students were to write in their journals about what we did that day, whether it was in the visit to museums, temples or classrooms. The very first assignment was for observations about their first day in Japan. The Americans wrote about the warmth of the receptions by their host families, one about his first Japanese bath. Memorable by contrast were the reports of Japanese back home.

Nanae Miyahara is from Nagano, but she stayed that month in Tokyo with a cousin. She wrote that "my biggest surprise of Japan was that most of the people who live in Tokyo have their own phone." Compared to the United States 70% having phones is a crazy phenomenon in Japan. Even high school students have a pager or cellphone. So on that first day she set out to find one. Of course, she ended up buying one "a pine and cute cellphone, and I can use it in Nagano." As a music major, "Nanae was the best musical theorist in my whole class," her music teacher once told me, "and she did not even own an instrument."

"But now she owned a phone and she bought one which played music", I thought to myself!

Actually Nanae and her phone were the "tip of the iceberg" for me, for in the few years since 1998, many students come to class on campus with phone. I learned from Peter Madler in January that the students who go to Salzburg all buy a cellphone with a European connection and can receive calls on the "Monchsberg" (the hill where the residence is) located. What a difference that is from 1997, when the students had to line up outside the building in a cold phone booth to receive, or make their calls. Soon, cellphones will be so cheap that students going to a country for a month will buy one for their calls, then throw the cellphone away. Now, email remains popular.

On our way to Kamakura on January 27, 1998 I met John Moore in our subway car. When we started to talk and exchanged meishi, I recognized him from I had just read his article "Market changes hit ELT (English Language Teaching books) in the Daily Yomuri that day for his picture and an article which he had written were in my hands as I began a conversation with him. Such an encounter make Tokyo seem like a small town, but seeing a Gaijin and then starting a conversation were regular events for me in Japan and I often found out new things about this "my second hometown - i.e. Tokyo. We talked about the market in Japan being in a "post=bubble" era. He commented that the year just ended was a fairly miserable year on the whole for the industry (that is the sale of English teaching materials) and he had been in Japan for 14 years. I thought he has been her all the twelve years since I came and two more besides. He went on to compare the sales of "workbooks" in which students would do their homework and pass in to the teacher for correction. He told us that only one out of five Japanese students use such workbooks as compared to 4 four out of five European students who use workbooks in their study of English. Obviously there is room for that workbook industry to grow. This interested me greatly in that my daughters use such workbooks during her years of teaching English in Taiwan; and some of the students on the train with me that day, would, I hoped, be back in Japan to teach English. >

We went to the Big Buddha Temple in Kamakura and to several other places in that lovely city by the sea.



Kamakura near the Hasedera Kannon Temple that Luc Diggle had one of his strongest memories. Here Luc shows his famous bow that won the hearts of many Japan

After Kamakura we went to a Chinese restaurant in Yokohama to celebrate the Chinese New Year at the invitation and generous spirit of Michiko's mother.

As for political events in July 1998 Obuchi Keizo would become Prime Minister of Japan. During the rest of that year and 1999 he would have success handling banking crises. I was surprised when he appointed Miyazai Kiichi Minister of France. I remembered that the role of prime minister in Japan is a less enduring responsibility than the office of president is in the USA. I would not expect President Clinton to have appointed his predecessor, even if they had been from the same party, to a job in his Cabinet.

In 1998 the dollar was at its highest value in twelve years. I wondered and asked if that created the homeless in Ueno. At one dollar to 140 yen, the exchange rate was the same as it had been in 1986 when we first arrived and watched it go slowly downward.

At the time of our departure, Tony Golden wrote, "I will say that I had a wonderful time and I plan to go back. I am kind of sad to be leaving because I was there for just long enough to feel like home. I am, however, looking forward to my own bed." (Golden, Jan 29, 1998).

The winter Olympics would started in Nagano soon after we returned to California. I had a great longing to go up there where Gary Snyder has lived two decades earlier and try to feel the changes this was making to those mountain communities. That had to be saved for another year. I read an article in The Japan Times for January

29, 1998 about the Zenkoji which had been a pilgrimage spot for many years and must have been for Gary Snyder. I read about the priest Takakazu Fukushima whose grandfather and father had served in that historic temple. I was surprised to hear that he earned a Ph. D. in chemical engineering and studied in America at Stanford. Years later he remembered his promise to his father, and the selection of his home of Nagano as the site for the Olympics he took orders at Hiei-san the same temple I had visited in 1986 on the Waseda Kansai journey. He talked about the use of folk takes to introduce the foreigners.

In his senior year for the fall semester Luc Diggie returned for the exchange program at Waseda, then graduated with a double major in Asian Studies and in Religious Studies. He recently wrote about his attempts to continue learning Japanese back in Massachusetts with his friend Sachiko.

"I mentioned my time at Waseda, and that I was struggling to keep up my Japanese. Of course, talking in Japanese isn't like talking in English. My body had become slight more constricted, my back hunched over just a bit, as if to suggest a more destitute physical state. I was too busy vigorously denying the suggestion that my Japanese was any good to notice how much smaller I seemed to have become. My hands and head would shake back and forth in short rows whenever Sachiko suggested something like atama ga ii desu .

Most surprising of all was her recognition of this change in my posturing. She actually pointed out the gestures, and remarked that they were good. Of course I responded in what seemed like the only possible way: with three short under the breath interjections, ie, ie, ie to which she again called approving attention.

The strange part was that this conversation would probably have not taken place in any of millions of social interactions involving a few unfamiliar Japanese and Gaijin either here, or abroad. Sachiko seemed to regard the physicality of our conversation with the same importance as the words spoken. I felt as if she was complimenting me on a performance of some kind, and that one would be able to give some objective grading of techniques employed at various junctures during the conversation. She also seemed to imply that these things were far less important between us because, after all, we were to people (even if one of them was a Gaijin) chatting it up outside of a certain context. Nonetheless, it felt good to have my clumsy attempts at Japanese recognized. I bet you know very much about what I mean, and how I felt." "Yes, Luc, I know what you mean, and "Bravo" to you for your continuation of the study of Japanese and this reflection on the process," I told him.

In the summer of 1998 I was able to return some of the kindness that the Miyazaki Family had shown me when they visited my home in California.



Here our German Shepherd, Hildegard, gives them a warm, if overly demonstrative, welcome. They were not there many days, and before long they actually learned to go swimming in the pool with Hildegard.



Now, as I finished writing and revising this chapter - "1998 the Year of the Tiger" I found this sad image of a tiger in the U. S. News and World Report looking out from his cage. This has not been an essay about our responsibilities to animals. Perhaps the inclusion will offset my erring ways.



Here the back of the ema records the names of those who went on the first Community Service - Teaching English class.

