

Winter 2001

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# CJST Quarterly

The Canada-Japan Society of Toronto

## Confessions of a CJST President!

***Japanophile rants and reminisces about a land he yearns to visit again after ten years...***

BY JOHN E. LE BLANC  
CJST PRESIDENT

When I first joined the CJST about seven years ago, I remember someone explaining the purpose of Ichi-moku-kai to me and another new member. It was the usual spiel about how it was a great place to network (it was mid-90s, and the term was not yet out of fashion); an opportunity to share good food and fabulous beer; and - the one I remember most - the only place to find people who are still willing to listen to your Japan stories because they have their own to tell you when you are done. How true....

And now to today's cogitations... I was in Japan from 1988 to 1991 (and returned for a visit in 1992), and for that one fortuitous period in my life, my timing was actually perfect! I was living in Tokyo during the height of the bubble economy. The world was knocking at Japan's door, and Japan was out buying the world's most famous real estate, art and whiskey. The unbridled pride of accomplishment puffed out the collective Japanese chest; "The Japan That Can Say No" was born. Western economists and journalists examined the economic miracle that was modern Japan, and admonished the West to pay heed to the mantra invoked by the Japanese manufacturing senseis.

The Nikkei peaked at 36,000. Mom & Pops were yen-billionaires thanks to their tiny slice of real estate anywhere inside the Yamanote-sen. Westerners were welcomed with open arms (with the sadly noted exception of non-Caucasians whose portrayal in the media had poisoned the waters of racial understanding) and were paid obscene amounts to teach "English conbah-sation" at language factories that propagated like aphids on a Toronto summer day. Life was *good*. We spent loads of money in izakayas, department store roof-top patios, sakura-rich parks, and just about anywhere else that offered a place to gather, drink and eat with new friends from all over the world. We all had gravitated to this wondrous land to learn, earn and - above all - have fun. And did I ever! Did I mention "them were the days"?

Fast forward to the present. How I have changed. How Japan has changed - or so I've read. That is the confession: I have not been back to Japan in ten years. My understanding of the land that helped shape my present identity has been reduced to whatever I can glean from the media, the odd book, Japanese friends, and stories from CJST members who are still fortunate enough to visit on a regular basis.

Ten years after the burst of the economic bubble, Japan languishes in a recession that teeters on depression. John Ibbiston in the *Globe and Mail* reports that the Japanese population will start to decline by 2007 - a mere five years from now. He further states that by 2050 Japan will have lost a full one-third of its population. By 2100, the population will have declined by half. If you keep following the math to its wacky

(continued on next page)

## Once a Gaijin...

### Visible Minority

BY STUART CREEMORE

I guess I've been sounding like a raving lunatic since coming back from Japan, but there's just so much that pisses me off these days!

Of course there's all the usual stuff, like the idiocy of our political leaders, the greed of our money merchants, the incompetence of our service providers, the self-righteousness of just about everybody else - but I'm almost used to that now. This is about something else, something that I just can't seem to understand. Maybe it's because I'm a middle-class white Canadian male, but I know that shouldn't matter; in fact, I'm not even supposed to be proud of that.

Here's the problem: I can't figure out what this Visible Minority thing is all about, so I'm going to reveal my ignorance here and hope that someone more enlightened can clue me in at the next Ichi-moku-kai. Recently there was a posting for a job sent in by the "Special Advisor, Employment Equity and Diversity Management for Parks Canada." Her job is to "foster diversity through practices that are conducive to the recruitment, development and retention of designated group members." So the position she posted was "open only to members of a visible minority group across Canada." And that's where I get lost.

What the hell is a "visible minority"? I mean, who qualifies?

Exactly what do you have to look like? I know a few people with really big noses - at least two or three times the average - you can't miss them. I wouldn't go out in public with a schnozz like that, but people don't even seem to notice! And I know a lot of really, really short people - they're in a small minority too. And some hideously ugly people. And a few who walk funny.

But that's not the kind of people our special advisor is interested in, I'm sure. They have to be somehow "normal" visible minorities, I think. Not freaks of nature. More like what I was in Japan - "*Hora, gaijin da!*" In fact, Japan must have been full of "special advisors" because so many teaching jobs were only open to white North Americans, and some even asked for photos to prove it. Of course we thought that was unfair, especially for Asian-faced teachers, but from the school's point of view, gaijin faces like mine stood out in staff photos, and that was a major selling point. I'm sure by now you must think I'm not only stupid, but maybe dangerous too.

Okay, let's say I marry a Japanese woman and have kids. What I want to know is, would these kids automatically qualify as a "visible minority," or does it depend on what they end up looking like? If they resemble their Japanese mother, maybe they could apply for one of these "open only to members of a visible minority" deals. But if one of them ends up looking more like me, would that kid be categorized differently than his/her own siblings?

Canada is full of children of mixed marriages, so where do you draw that visible minority line? We might have to create a new government department just to sort out who's visible and who's not. I wonder if I could get the job, eh? ■

## Confessions...

(cont'd from previous page)

conclusion, the population of Japan in the year 3000 will be 500. In the words of someone much younger than myself: "What's up with that?!"

One of the main goals of the JET program was to provide native-speaking English teachers to Japanese students; it also sought to give the students a glimpse of the world outside of Japan's previously insular borders. The program also provided JET participants with the invariably memorable experience of life in Japan, which the JETs would subsequently share with people back in their home countries. The JET program embraced a philosophy of reciprocal education.

I wonder how well the intent has taken seed. I wonder if the Japanese who interacted with the JETs, and the JETs who returned with an understanding of Japan, have both benefitted in a manner that will now help Japan adjust to the ever-evolving world order. The country needs to muster the ability to be "The Japan That Can Say Yes" rather than the one that has been saying "maybe" for far too long.

I think it's time for me to find a way to return to Japan to see for myself what's happening and what may lie ahead. While I'm there, I will definitely have to stop by the odd izakaya or rooftop patio just to see if the beer tastes the same. Science is science after all. ■

# Restaurant Review

***A worthwhile trek to the ungodly suburbs  
for terrific eats and un-Kaji prices***

## **Zen**

2803 Eglinton Ave. E.  
Scarborough, ON  
416-265-7111

About \$90 for two  
Food available for take-out

### REVIEWED BY

MARGARET BUCKWORTH AND ADRIENNE YOUNG

Sigh. Finding great Japanese food in Toronto seems to involve a whole lot of sacrifice these days. Last time (for Kaji), we drove to the neglected industrial wasteland of Etobicoke, which seemed a bizarre choice for a first-rate Japanese restaurant. This time, your intrepid reviewing crew journeyed all the way to Scarborough for their dinner, and My God, it was A Long Way Out.

Anyway, on the heartfelt recommendation of Fumiko Shiba (who is always right on these issues), as well as the good opinion of our editor and our former consul general, we drove for A Long Way. Past many strip malls, to the land of the auto dealer and the big-box hardware emporium, to seek Seiichi Kashiwabara's small restaurant, Zen.

The décor of Zen is conventional but comfortable. The two booths opposite the counter are cosy for gazing into the eyes of a significant other (Good plan! We approve!), but otherwise, you won't find anything very thrilling about the look of the place. We, of course, sat at our usual perch for this kind of restaurant: the sushi counter.

Naturally, the reason to come here is the sushi. The chef and owner, Seiichi Kashiwabara, was formerly the sushi chef at Masa and is generally acknowledged to be in the same league as Mitsuhiro Kaji and Hiro Yoshida (of Sushi Kaji and Hiro Sushi, respectively). Among the sushi and sashimi we tasted, we were particularly taken with the *tai* sushi (red snapper) with,

instead of the usual soy sauce on the side, a bit of Okinawa sea salt and a small squeeze of lemon on top. Oh yum. After munching our way through that, we asked to try the salt separately, and yes, there is a distinct difference. (Margaret: "I have been accused of being a rice snob but now you can also accuse me of being a salt snob. Adrienne already was. I have been converted.") Kashiwabara-san won't tell us where he got the salt, though. That's a secret.

Moving on to the main dishes, we definitely recommend the *Gindara saikyou yaki* (black cod with miso). We think it may be a close sibling of the dish with which Nobu made his fortune in New York. (*Speaking of which, check out Page 4 for a link to Nobu's famous cod recipe! – Ed.*) On the night we visited, the special was a fried fish presented in chunks, with all of its bones carefully excised and also fried -- we had that as well. It was a strikingly handsome presentation, by why do we always end up being encouraged to feast on fish bones when we go out to eat with Fumiko? It is most odd. This time, Fumiko got the head and (eek!) Adrienne and Margaret were made to eat the body and tail, bones and all. Adrienne was reprimanded for not eating the entire spine. How uncivilized! (Adrienne: "Okay, it tasted really *quite* good, but it was also spiky-looking and I frighten easily.")

Finally, save room for dessert if you can. Kashiwabara's wife, Kazuko, makes a very tasty mandarin pie.

The last thing we would like to mention before rating is the price of our dinner. Perhaps because of the location, perhaps because some of the ingredients were less exotic, Zen was much less expensive than Kaji. We love Kaji but, being honest folk and unwilling to embezzle from our friends, family and employers, we hesitate to go except for divinely special occasions. Zen is not inexpensive, but it is affordable. As we like it immensely and want to go back soon, we think this is very good news.

Overall, we think Zen is a terrific little restaurant. Again, we take away points for location (very far, somewhat inelegant), but add back for pricing, which we think is very kind indeed.

### Three-sushi rating



P.S. - Is anyone going to Okinawa? We want to place an order for salt! ■

## CJST Founding Members: Have all 10 been identified now?

In the last Newsletter, Bronwyn Best informed us that there were ten CJST founding members, of which she was able to name seven. Margaret Cornish-Kehoe was able to supply an additional name.

Since then, Ken Mark has contacted us to add himself and another name to the list.

These are the ten names we have now:

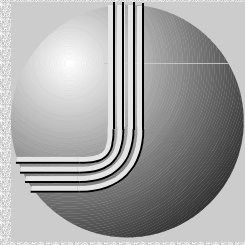
**Bronwyn Best**  
**Michael Donnelly**  
**Ted Goossen**  
**Anthony Liliefeldt**  
**Ken Mark**  
**Cody Poulton**  
**Ken Richard**  
**Charles Rummel**  
**Susan Tsuji**  
**Bob Ulmer**

Well, folks? Tell us if this list look correct and complete to you!

The CJST is thriving in its 21st year of operation, and we would like to pay tribute to the individuals who made this all happen in the first place.

## Some cool links:

- The September 2001 issue of *Wired* features several articles on Japan under the heading, "Is Japan Still the Future?" Includes a William Gibson essay on Tokyo.  
[www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.09/japan.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.09/japan.html)
- So you think you can tell who's Japanese, Chinese or Korean just by looking? Take this test!  
[www.alllookslike.com/](http://www.alllookslike.com/)
- Wish you could dine at Nobu in New York? Or at least cook like him? Here's his simple but elegant recipe for Black Cod with Miso:  
[www.epicurious.com/run/recipe/view?id=105872](http://www.epicurious.com/run/recipe/view?id=105872)



## CJST QUARTERLY

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Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not of the CJST or its Board of Directors.

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- Would you like to write an article on a Japan-related topic?
- Would you like to review a Japanese restaurant? (You will receive a rebate of up to \$75 if your review is printed.)
- Would you like to review a recent Japan-related book? (You will be provided with the book, which will be yours to keep.)

**Please email Linda with your ideas!**