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Series: My Favorite Kyoto



The Kyoto I see Szabo Zsuzsanna (Hungary)

The Kyoto I see, has mountains as her arms. Being surrounded by mountains, some would feel like being hugged, and some like being strangled. Do you remember the scene from the movie “Gone with the Wind” when Rhett Butler turns to Scarlett O’Hara and says: “You get your strength from this red earth of Tara, Scarlett”? I get mine from the mountains of Kyoto. Go and sit on the bench on the hill behind Enkoji Temple, and feel protected by the mountains.

The Kyoto I see, has Kamogawa River as her legs. Moving ahead slowly, like a woman wearing *kimono* and *geta* shoes, it is Kyoto itself. Sit on one of the stepping stones at Kamogawa Delta on a warm spring day, and join your legs with Kyoto’s.



The stepping stones at Kamogawa Delta

The Kyoto I see, has the prettiest hair when it’s green. Freshly dyed harsh green. Kyoto - as stylish as she is - sometimes dyes her hair pink, and sometimes red. But when her fans gather around her, for me she becomes unapproachable. When there is too much fuss around you, dive into the forest near Shugakuin Imperial Villa and climb Mt. Hiei alone.

The Kyoto I see, is tight-mouthed. I don’t know if you have ever noticed it, but even if you stand next to a four-lane road in the center of the city, there are moments of complete silence. On a late night, on your way home, stop for a moment near an intersection like Hyakumanben, and concentrate on the silence.

The Kyoto I see, has *machiya* townhouses as her heart. If you put your palm on the wall, and stand barefooted on the earthen *doma* floor, you might feel its heartbeat. In the West of Kyoto, there is a Hungarian family, living “together” with a *machiya*, with hearts beating as one. Look up *domaichi* on Facebook, and visit one of the *machiya*-events they organize.

The Kyoto I see, has a bitter bile of denying diversity and change. Sorry for using clichés here, but it’s often said that “what makes a rainbow beautiful is its diversity of colors” and that “only inanimate objects are not changing constantly”. It would be nice to live in a colorful and lively Kyoto. If you feel the bitter taste of being rejected due to being different, come to a place like kokoka Kyoto International Community House, where diversity and change are accepted.

continued on page 6

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Let's do the *Bon* dance!

In Japan, there are many types of dance. It is well known that Japanese people love to watch dances such as *kabuki* and other stage or floor dances. However, in the past, people enjoyed dancing together in groups; it's called a participation type of dancing.

The Bon dance is a very popular participation dance, loved by the common people in Japan. It began more than 500 years ago. From long ago, the most popular type of *Bon* dance in Kyoto is called the *Goshu Ondo*. This dance is actually started in Shiga Prefecture.



A singer, a small chorus, and a band

The stage for *the Bon* dance, called *yagura*, is built like a tower, and can hold about ten people including a singer, a small chorus, and a band. On the stage, the *ondo tori* (lead singer) sings, while the chorus chants to the music of the Japanese bells and drum. The *ondo tori* usually sings the original lyrics, but sometimes will make up his own verses to match the rhythm. It is often compared to rap music, especially the beat and the style, and is interesting simply listening to it.

The people on the ground gather around the *yagura* and dance to the songs and the music. This dance has its own specific steps which are repeated continuously. More advanced dancers sometimes personalize their dancing by making slight changes to their steps. It is fun to experience the togetherness of chanting along with the chorus while dancing.

However, these dances are becoming less frequent year by year because of the complaints about the noise. When I was a child, I used to see these *yagura* stages at shrines and summer festival venues by the Kamo River. It is sad that the dance culture of the common Japanese people is declining.

Although the *Bon* dance is slowly but surely reviving in Kyoto. A musician, Suzuki Kiyoshi, founded a revival of the *Bon* dance festival, encouraging some local people to relive the good times that they had before. At the same time, he held a dance practice meeting for younger people who didn't know the steps of the *Bon* dance. The dance instructors were mostly elderly people from the local area, since they were very familiar with the *Bon* dance.

This revival effort was such a great success that when the *Bon* dance festival was held.

Since this is a dance for everyone, not only Japanese, let us all join in the *Bon* dance festival this summer and enjoy the togetherness of this time. It's okay if you don't know how to dance, you can just dance like everyone else. You can come to the dance practice meeting before the festival.

So, let's have everyone, young and old, form a human ring around *yagura*, and dance and chant together!

The practice meetings

6/16 (Sun.) *Bon* dance practice meeting with international students

15:00~16:30 at Sakyo Seibu IkiIki Community Center

7/27 (Sat.) *Bon* dance practice meeting the day before the festival

19:00~21:00 at Sakyo Tobu IkiIki Community Center

The *Bon* dance festival

7/28 (Sun.) Kinrin *Bon* Dance Festival 18:00~21:00 (*Bon* dance 19:00~)

at Takagishi Minami Park (37 Takagishi-cho Shishigatani Sakyo-ku Kyoto)

8/3 (Sat.) Yosei Summer Festival 17:00~21:00 (*Bon* dance 20:00~)

at Yosei kids park "Kibo no Hiroba" (6-2 Tanaka baba-cho Sakyo-ku Kyoto)

8/31 (Sat.) Yoshida Higashi Night Market 17:00~21:00 (*Bon* dance 20:00~)

at Yoshida Higashi shopping street



Suzuki Kiyoshi

A percussionist who pursues the enjoyment of music. He started working on various musical activities in the local areas in the 1990's, and recently has been producing the local *Bon* dance festivals here in Kyoto.

TOKUDA Motoko

Sakamoto Ryoma - A Legacy of Pax Tokugawa*- Part II

Continuing from Part I of previous issue of Life in Kyoto, here is the exciting finish of the story of Sakamoto Ryoma.

Ryoma was the ‘baby’ of his siblings, beloved by his three older sisters and an older brother who was the head of the stem family. Ryoma was free to pursue his own dreams, unencumbered with the responsibilities of carrying on the stem family name and fortune like his brother. His loving sisters and brother surely looked after Ryoma in his training and education while growing up, to enjoy and to fulfill his life.

When Sakamoto Ryoma came into the scene, the process of democratization in Pax Tokugawa was advancing to its goal of popular government, with stem families in *daimyo* domains, villages and towns all voicing their desire to deal with the threat of violence posed by Perry’s black ships and their big guns. It’s very telling how far this democratization process had progressed in that *Bakufu*** could only muster up an ineffective army of mere 15,000 men to oppose those who wanted Tokugawa** to resign and Meiji Restoration to be realized.

Now, here is the *pièce de résistance**** of Sakamoto Ryoma’s story and Kyoto. It’s a mosaic story of romance, sacrifice, intrigue and happiness, which every full blooded Japanese young man and woman yearns for. Ryoma and his beautiful girlfriend, Narasaki Oryo, often stayed at Teradaya Inn in Kyoto for rendezvous of love. There is a romantic account of Oryo, when about 100 police *samurai* loyal to the Bakufu were about to raid Teradaya Inn to arrest Ryoma. Seeing the danger while Oryo was taking her beauty bath, she ran upstairs naked to warn Ryoma. The bathroom with the bathtub was downstairs, and up the stairs was the *Ume-no-Ma* (Plum Room) of the Inn where they slept.

It is said that one of Ryoma’s sister sacrificed her life for him because she loved her ‘baby’ brother who was being persecuted by the *Bakufu*. Ryoma’s intrigues included maneuvering two powerful rival *daimyo*, the Choshu and the Satsuma, to form a political coalition to oppose the *Bakufu*. Ryoma also helped form a national navy and establish a commercial enterprise along the lines of modern business practices and management methods.

Ryoma married Oryo, and it is said they took the first honeymoon ever in Japan, which has now become a must do for all Japanese just married couples ever since. Had Ryoma not been slain, he and Oryo would have lived happily ever after.

You can find out more about Ryoma’s story in Kyoto. You can visit the Teradaya Inn as it’s still there and see the *ume no ma* and the bathtub downstairs. You can take a leisurely stroll along Ryoma Way (Ryoma Dori) in Kyoto and take in Ryoma’s story together with Kyoto’s role in the development of modern Japan.

* Pax Tokugawa: Period of peace enjoyed by the Japanese people from when Tokugawa Ieyasu became *shogun* in 1601 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, more commonly known as the Edo Period.

** Tokugawa Bakufu: Government of Japan at the time when Perry sailed into Edo with his black ships.

*** *pièce de résistance*: A noun meaning main, outstanding feature.



Teradaya Inn in Kyoto



Ume no ma (Plum Room)



Beautiful Narasaki Oryo,
Ryoma’s wife

Seiji Sanada

Women's Rugby Team "Kyoto Joinus"

This year, Rugby World Cup tournaments will be held in Japan. During the last tournament held in England in 2015, Japan beat South Africa who was the favorites to win the tournament, and gained world-wide attention. Because the World Cup tournament is being held in our own country this time around, the expectation of the Japanese national team is increasingly high.

By the way, did you know that rugby in Kansai area started in Kyoto? In 1910, the students of Daisan High School (now a college at Kyoto University) practicing in Tadasu no Mori Forest was the beginning of rugby, where presently in this forest, there is Sawatasha sub-shrine dedicated to the god of rugby. Although there are many rugby teams in Kyoto where it's popular from long past, from among them I like to introduce here a women's rugby team called "Kyoto Joinus".

Kyoto Joinus was established in 2013, mainly made up of junior high school students. Besides practicing on weekends and holidays, they also participate in junior tournaments. On this occasion, I went to see Kyoto Joinus practicing.

On this day, the practice started at eight in the morning. The players did basic training such as, running passes and ruck practices for about one hour. After each session, the players gather around the coaches who instructed them on what they noticed. Though it was a short session, all the players were having fun during the rigorous practice sessions.

After practice, I interviewed the players. First, I asked why they started playing rugby. Many said that they began to play because of the influence of their parents playing rugby. I also asked what was fun about playing rugby. They said "It's fun to play together with everyone", "It relieves stress". Finally, when I asked what their dreams are for the future, one promising player said "to be a national player representing Japan".

I also interviewed the staff on the team. I asked the coaches, Mr. Nakazumi Nobukazu and Mr. Takeda Yusaku about what points they keep in mind when instructing the players. They said "The players come from many different schools, who enjoy playing together as a team of friends. Within this kind of team environment, not forgetting the feelings of gratitude and being sincere, coaches wanted through rugby, for the players to develop intowomen who have strong core of character". Also, I asked Ms. Akatsuki Sachiko, the chair of Kyoto Prefecture Rugby Football Association Women's Committee, in charge of operations of Kyoto Joinus, about managing the team. She said "Because the players are mostly junior high school students, I enjoy seeing the developing of their growth to maturity. My aim is to make a team and develop players who are loved".

Kyoto Joinus is also making efforts to promote women's rugby and recruiting players. Compared to men players, women players are still few. Ms. Akatsuki also said "Many people may think rugby is a man's sport or a

dangerous sport, but this is a misunderstanding. Rugby is a sport which everyone can enjoy playing safely". For women who feel like to try playing rugby, why not begin with Kyoto Joinus? Even adults or foreigners are welcome. You can look for more information on the facebook home page.

KYOTO JOINUS

facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/kyotojoinus/>

E-mail : rugby_kyoto_girls777@yahoo.co.jp



Practice



SUZUKI Hidetoshi

Many disasters happen in Japan ~ kokoka disaster drill 2019 ~

Disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons and storms often hit Japan. *Tsunami*, fires and collapsed houses caused by earthquakes have killed a lot of people. To protect us against these disasters, we must first check the safety of homes, which have been lived in for a long time, and their surroundings. Thus, we must be cautious of fires, especially in kitchens where combustible materials such as gas are used. The gas flow for stoves is automatically shut off when any big earthquakes take place, but, as an additional safety measure, other combustible materials should not be left around the stove. Additionally, most old electric heaters have weak safety features, so things such as clothes, which can catch on fire easily, should not be put close to electrical heaters. When evacuating from your home, the circuit breakers in your house should be turned off.

kokoka is designated as one of the refuge places in Kyoto and it organizes a disaster drill annually for foreigners. I had an interview with Ms. Kibayashi, who is in charge of the disaster drills, about what plans they have for this year's drill. She explained, "There are foreigners from countries where earthquakes never happen who have never experienced what they feel like. They can experience earthquake-like shakes with a simulator in the disaster drill." She continued, "They can also practice fire-fighting and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). We hope that every participant will come to know more about disasters and what actions need to be taken should they happen."

Let us take this opportunity to learn from these disaster drills and be better prepared for these disasters.

◆ kokoka disaster drill 2019 ◆

Date: June 15 (Saturday) 2019 from 11am to 4pm

Place: kokoka Kyoto City International Community House

Fee: free participation and free emergency food will be provided

Target person: foreigner of resident in Kyoto

Application: refer to homepage of kokoka or phone (075-752-3511)



Earthquake simulation vehicle



Practice fire-fighting



FURUTA Tomiyoshi

kokoka Kyoto International
Community House Library

Library Letter

2019/6 - 7

 kokoka recommends this book

“The Book of Japanese Tea” (Bilingual)

Author:
Oscar Brekell
Publisher:
Tankosha, 2018



Middle-grade green tea, refined green tea, covered tea, coarse tea, roasted green tea and powdered tea...there are all kinds of Japanese tea. This book explains clearly the differences in each type.

Also, this book introduces a Japanese tea production area and the proper way to pour tea. You should come to kokoka's Library (2nd floor) and read this book!

By the way, roasted green tea is kokoka's※ favorite tea; kokoka likes its good roasted flavor.
※kokoka is kokoka Kyoto International Community House mascot.

『Cute, pretty Russia from A to Z.

Sweet and simple designs』 (in Japanese)

Author: Miho Ioka, Publisher: Seigensha, 2018

This book is about all types of pretty Russian designs, of buildings, toys, food and so on. It makes me feel very peaceful seeing so many of them. The author has visited Russia about forty times. That many times!? That's great!

kokoka wants to go to Russia someday, too.

The following items are also available:

Books for foreigners to help their daily life in Japanese, study Japanese, learn about Japanese law, visas, Japanese culture and sightseeing in Kyoto.

Books for Japanese to learn about foreign countries, overseas travel, extended stays, studying abroad, working holidays and volunteering.

Newspapers and magazines from all around the world.

Books are not available for check-out.

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continued from page 6

The Kyoto I see, has contemporary art as her womb. It's not really visible, but in my opinion, the future of the city depends on it. In Kyoto, traditional art forms like *Noh*, *Kabuki* or Japanese dance are mainly advertised, but sometimes you should go to gloomy live music places, like "Urban Guild", or hidden theatres like "Under-Throw", and dig up contemporary art.

*The author has been living in Kyoto for 9 years as a student of modern Japanese literature.

The New Era Name, Reiwa

News reports on April 1 were full of stories about the new era name of Reiwa. The Japanese term for era names, *genko*, formerly called *nenko*, is printed on calendars to indicate the imperial era. In Japan, the era's name is often used on documents of government institutions and companies. Also, it is used when you state your date of birth.

This time, however, the change of era has both the previous era's name of Heisei until April 30 and the new era's name of Reiwa, starting on May 1. The 31st year of the Heisei and 1st year of the Reiwa (usually called *gan-nen* in Japanese, meaning the 1st year) are coexisting in the year 2019, so it may feel a little awkward. On the other hand, there are still many Japanese people still using both the Japanese and Western calendars. We can refer to a particular age group or a generational period by just saying "born in Heisei" or "popular song of Showa," which is convenient.

These days, there are a lot of people whose mother tongue is not Japanese, and they have difficulty in using the Japanese honorifics, or *keigo*. The usage of Japanese honorifics changes depending on the speaker, the listener and the person under discussion. When the emperor is the topic of the story, the highest honorific words are used. Therefore, when you are watching TV or reading a newspaper reporting about the emperor, you may find some types of honorifics which are not common.

One aspect you have to pay attention to is how we address the emperor. The previous Showa Tenno Emperor's name conveys the meaning "the Emperor of the Showa period." But the new emperor can be referred to only as Tenno Heika (His Majesty the Emperor). He can also be called Kinjo Tenno Heika, where the word *kinjo* means "present" or "now." The present Emperor is never referred to as Reiwa Tenno. The word "Heika" is an honorific title only used for the ruling emperor and empress, and the retired emperor and empress who abdicated.



"Reiwa" is a newly formed word, combined from two *kanji* characters "rei" (beauty) and "wa" (harmony). These meanings were chosen from various possible meanings to create this word. For those who are interested in Japanese history and culture, it will be interesting to check out the anthology of ancient Japanese poetry called "Manyoshu" and *waka* (Japanese poems) which are the sources cited for the forming of the new era's name. Although these are my personal thoughts, "Reiwa" can easily be associated to "peace", as the character "wa" also means "peace". I have a feeling of clear beauty and kindness from the sound of the word. When the era changed from Showa to Heisei, I felt that something ended. However, now, I want to celebrate the change with a fresh feeling that something good will start like from a New Year's Day.



Heisei Reiwa

KAWASAKI Masashi, translated by KANAYA Chinami

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