

**News from the Ever-Morning-Land**  
**(Why not call it that if the Sun is always rising?)**  
**By Kenneth Pararo**



When I first stepped off the plane in Tokyo I was in a genuine state of shock. I'm not one who is shocked easily but after a 17 hour plane ride, the reality of the distance I had traveled had marinated long enough for me to realize that this physical distance represented an ideological one as well. I was on the other side of the world, , enveloped in a new culture in near direct opposition to my own and I was buzzing with a stupefying, numb sense of potential.

I have now been in Japan (Hachioji "八王子" to be precise) for a little more than two months which has been plenty of time to become acclimated to the new language, culture and people. The first weeks were certainly the hardest, though that's not to say they were difficult in an unpleasant way: they were the most exciting. I studied Japanese at Georgia State for nearly 3 years and was in a fairly advanced class by the time I was able to study abroad, but as soon as I arrived I felt reduced to the mental communicative abilities of a child, which posed an interesting challenge. Those reading who have traveled abroad may be familiar with this experience: the inability to convey your desires and thoughts. It's quite a humbling experience that highlights the subjective nature of both language and culture. I recently reflected on fact that I have (since arriving in Japan) been able to use English with unfiltered, un-impinged, impunity meaning basically that I am currently in an environment in which the vast majority of the vocabulary I possess to describe the world is largely inscrutable to most people I may find myself surrounded by at any time. This realization has been an enlightening one and inspires me to constantly reevaluate the weight of the words I chose to use. To paint a simple picture of the strangeness this situation entails, simply imagine suddenly possessing the ability to walk down the street saying anything (from innocent remarks about the weather to angry curses) and to be equally

misunderstood regardless. It is a strange lightness.

The aforementioned realizations about language and culture have gone far to help me grow me as a person. I have become extremely outgoing; I now have a level of extroversion that I have never experienced. I don't think I would have ever been able to feel so in touch with myself or others without coming to Japan. I have met countless interesting people both Japanese and other foreigners alike. I have experienced cultural differences that I would have never been able to have while still living in the United States (such as the nightly trips to the ofuro where all the students staying at my dormitory participate in a public bath between the hours of 7pm and 1am), and I have learned much more than is possible to explain through words no matter how vivid or apt. Every day is an adventure that promises something new to be experienced and something new to be learned.

I would like to quickly address an issue that was brought up many times before I left: radiation and safety in Japan. I never thought that the radiation situation in Japan was dire. I watch many YouTube videos and listen to an equal number of podcasts made by foreigners living in Japan. Almost anytime the topic of radiation is broached each person unequivocally says that the media in the United States is milking the situation for the viewership that such drama promises which to me makes sense enough to believe. Now being here in Japan for some 2 months I too can attest that Tokyo is safe and more than habitable and I assert that the same can be said for much if not all of Japan outside of the Tokyo area. There is no doubt that the earthquake and tsunami in the Sendai area and Fukushima were devastating. Some 20,000 people lost their lives in a such sort span of time and more still are homeless with no prospect of being employed anytime in the near future. Those who survived have little left and are still in need of necessities and basic comforts. This is the true situation that deserves attention in Japan. If more emphasis could be focused on the welfare of these people and less on the threat of nuclear fallout (stories that guarantee viewership for American news corporations) more might be done in the way of helping the victims of the recent disasters....

Before I return to the States I will continue to make an concerted effort to improve my Japanese. I have come a long way since arriving and can now express myself at perhaps a toddler's level, which is an frustration that inflames my desire to learn more and more so that I can express myself while in Japan as fully as possible (though I may still opt for an occasional English romp as a sort of stream-of-consciousness-catharsis). So far my trajectory for achieving this goal is progressing strongly forward.

When I return to the US (and it was a process to finally arrive at the decision to return) I will not be able to attend GSU for a semester. The Japanese semester ends in early February and so I will return having already missed a little over a month of the spring semester. This is not a problem because as with many of the self-discoveries I have made while in Japan, a deep love for music has surfaced. I plan to move to Atlanta, get a job and start a band within 2-weeks of returning stateside and I couldn't be more excited about it! After the end of the spring semester I plan to take summer classes, then at the end of the fall 2012 semester, graduating. Until then 頑張ります.