

# JAPAN NOTES

NOTE 19 SUMMER 2007

<b>Sake at Seki</b>	<b>Kanji</b>	<b>Speech Contest</b>	<b>Miso</b>	<b>Eto</b>	<b>MNC</b>	<b>Nihongo</b>
An unusual experience of tasting and rating eight kinds of Sake	Find out how many kanji Japanese learn in elementary school	The new exciting annual event took place in April	One of the most ingrained food in Japanese culture	A little trick to find out someone's age without asking	Japanese culture and firms going multinational	Learn the word "shitsurei" used in a variety of ways in Daily conversation
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## Sake at Seki

Although Japanese sake has been gaining popularity among Americans and among women in Japan, perhaps the majority of American sake enthusiasts do not have the opportunities in the U.S. to savor its rich variety.



This year again, in response to popular request among our members and their guests, JAS coordinated a sake tasting event

at Seki's Japanese Restaurant on Delmar. Some 30 people came to enjoy. It was the maximum number of people Chef Seki said he would be able to handle for the special evening.

There were eight brands of Sake to compare and several dishes of unique but delicious Japanese cuisine specially prepared by Chef Seki



for the night. At the end of the delightful party, the survey results were turned in to see what was the most popular brand. Following are the voting results. It could be a good guide as to what brands of Japanese sake you would like to try the next time you are in a Japanese restaurant.



<u>Brands</u>	<u>Character</u>	<u>Votes</u>
Harushika	Light, Smooth, Extra Dry	5
Otokoyama	Light, Smooth, Dry	5
Hitori Musume	Light, Smooth, Medium Dry	3
Kariho "Nagahage"	Rich, Smooth, Very Dry	2
Nanawarai	Light, Smooth, Dry	2
Mineno Hakubai	Rich, Soft, Dry	1
Bishonen	Rich, Sweet	1
Shochikubai ( Nigori )	Rich, Creamy, Sweet	0
	Total Votes	19

## 漢字 : Kanji

Did you know how many kanji (Chinese characters) Japanese children must learn ?

Before WWII, news paper editors were said to know about 20,000 characters. Nowadays, 1,945 characters are commonly used.

Japanese children must learn 1,006 characters before finishing the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

1 <sup>st</sup> Grader	80 characters	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grader	160	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grader	200	
4 <sup>th</sup> Grader	200	
5 <sup>th</sup> Grader	185	
6 <sup>th</sup> Grader	181	
	Total	1,006 characters

If you know 1,006 characters, you can read 90% of daily newspapers.

## The 1st Annual Japanese Speech Contest



Daniel Carr from Webster University gives a speech on classical music



Audience and judges



Chris Brown's lecture on Japanese pop-culture



Dr. Bird demonstrates Origami



Surprise prizes after Bento lunch

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, a Japanese Speech Contest sponsored by Japan America Society of St. Louis was held on the University of Missouri - St. Louis campus. Eleven contestants from high schools and colleges in the St. Louis area competed in high school, college beginner, and college intermediate levels.

Preset topics were assigned to each level. High school students talked about their friends. College beginner students shared a memorable/interesting time in their lives, and students in intermediate level expressed their passion for their favorite extracurricular activities.

Despite the fear we all share, the fear of public speaking, all contestants displayed their outstanding skills in Japanese language. As if making a speech in a foreign language was not impressive enough, students came to the event being well prepared and presented their speech in a very professional manner. Speeches were very informative and often brought laughter and smiles into the room.

Monetary prizes and certificates were awarded to students in each level who particularly exhibited a high level of organization and eloquence in their speeches.

The speech contest was carried out along with another event, Japan on Campus. Participants in Japan on Campus enjoyed making sushi, an Origami (literally, paper folding into a variety of forms) workshop, and a lecture by Chris Brown, a Japanese popular culture specialist.

After the sushi and Origami workshop, participants all gathered in one room to savor Bento lunches from Seki Japanese restaurant and received surprise prizes.

The two events attracted more than 50 attendees. The events were intended to provide more opportunity, especially for the younger population in this area, to experience many aspects of Japan through language, food, popular and traditional culture. JAS expects future speech contests to grow in size and provide more opportunities for the community to participate in events such as Japan on Campus.



Udomporn Udomritthawut receives a first place in high school level



Attendees pose after the contest



An anime clip was used in Mr. Brown's lecture



Bento lunch box from Seki



Making Sushi roll

## Miso

*Miso*, introduced like *sho'oyu* to Japan from China over one thousand years ago, is another absolutely essential ingredient for Japanese daily cuisine.

Actually, we should have talked about *miso* first rather than *sho'oyu* as we did in the last issue of Japan Notes, for in the beginning there was *miso*, and then *sho'oyu*. Actually, *sho'oyu* was discovered in the process of making *miso*.

Perhaps for that reason, Japanese always refer to these two most indispensable ingredients as in juxtaposed words “*miso, sho'oyu*,” not in a reversed order as “*sho'oyu, miso*,” although linguists may maintain “*miso, sho'oyu*” sounds more rhythmic than “*sho'oyu, miso*”.

Also, it is interesting to note that you find a word “*miso*” in many Japanese phrases. そこが味噌だ

-*SOKOGA MISODA*- (That's the point. That's the beauty of it.) 味噌臭い-*MISO KUSAI*-(nerdy)、味噌糞にやっつける-*MISOKUSONI YATTSUKERU*-(beat someone very badly, bark at someone very badly) 手前味噌 -*TEMAE MISO*- (boasting)、味噌っ滓-*MISOKKASU*-(a good for nothing, *KASU* meaning sediment or scum)、味噌を付ける

-*MISOWO TSUKERU*\_(make a mess of something, embarrass oneself), to name a few. But, it is puzzling that you seldom find a word “*sho'oyu*” in common Japanese phrases. So, *miso* also tops *sho'oyu* in this area.

*Miso* is either made of rice, barley or soybeans. It takes expertise and a long period of time - several months to three-four years for just aging - to produce good *miso*.

Rice *miso* is most popular all over Japan. Barley *miso* is used in the western part of Japan and soybean *miso* in the central region. The color of *miso* runs from dark red brown to pale brown. The taste also runs from salty to less salty. Darker *miso* is more distinct in flavor and somewhat saltier than light varieties.

Just like choosing a wine you prefer, in choosing *miso* you will eventually arrive at what flavor, aroma and taste you like the best, depending what kind of cuisine you are cooking. You may like the darker, saltier kind the best for your *miso* soup while you may like the paler color and less saltier kind (Japanese call it “sweet kind”) for marinating.

Today in St. Louis, you can buy several varieties of *miso* at Korean and Chinese grocery stores.

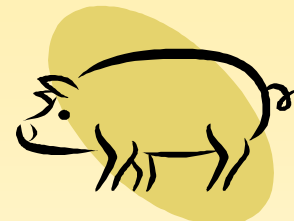
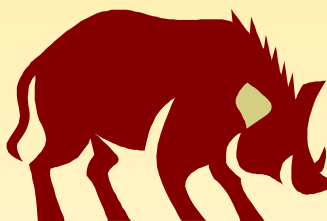
## Guess Someone's Age by ETO

To Japanese this year is the Year of the Wild Boar.  
To Chinese, the Year of the Pig.

It is unknown why the Pig has become the Wild Boar in the Japanese zodiac which, as you know, came from China originally. Perhaps, the Japanese thought that a wild boar looks more courageous, and thus more appropriate than a pig to represent a year even though a pig appeared to be more sensitive and intelligent.

In zodiac paper place mats ubiquitous in Chinese restaurants, you can see the twelve animal signs of zodiac - the Rat, the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit, the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Sheep, the Monkey, the Rooster, the Dog and, of course, the Pig ( Wild Boar ). Japanese call the twelve year cycle calendar the *eto* or the *juunishi*-twelve animals.

Interestingly, although the calendar system is quite quaint- it came to Japan thousands years ago- every Japanese today knows in which animal year he or she was born. As always, it is sort of fun, and reassuring, to know your own Zodiac.



Your *eto* tells you about you; what you do not like to know and what you love to know, equally. For instant, you are the Boar, you are.....Well, eat at a Chinese restaurant next time.

More importantly, with *eto* you can conveniently guesstimate other persons' age by nonchalantly asking what *eto* his or hers is. Especially hers.

If a lady looks approximately 30 years of age and if you manage to learn that her *eto* is the wild boar, you know for sure she is 36 years old.

You see, she could not possibly be either 24 or 50.

*UCHI-SOTO Syndrome ill affects Japanese Corporations on the road to MNC ?*

For decades I ran offices of Japanese companies in the U.S. and I became keenly aware of a few stumbling blocks for Japanese corporations in becoming a true MNC.

At closer look, these stumbling blocks are inter-related with each other.

Stumbling Block (A)

Japanese are very detail oriented, and cautious.

Stumbling Block (B)

Japanese are obsessed with the resigned notion that Japanese situations are too unique for foreigners to fully understand their complexities and nuances. Yes, an yielding concept; a feeling of helplessness.

Hence, Japanese are pretty cautious and wary in delegating authority to non-Japanese.

Today, however, I think more of another and larger stumbling block - the **UCHI-SOTO** syndrome in Japanese society.

**UCHI-SOTO** is, in Japanese, the distinction between someone inside and someone outside. This distinction is found everywhere in the Japanese society. The nature of the distinction is quite complex, and unfortunately, Japanese-foreigners relationships are its unfortunate reflection.

Thus, the problem is that outsiders are less trusted than insiders. However, the determinant as to who are insiders and who are outsiders are a relative matter. Foreigners working in a Japanese company are insiders in relation to the Japanese employees of other Japanese companies. But yet they are outsiders in relation to the Japanese employees who work in the same company.

Thus, this **UCHI-SOTO** distinction plays a really determinant role in delegating authority. And so long as Japanese companies do not overcome this **UCHI-SOTO** syndrome, they will not be successfully on the road to becoming a true MNC.

Further, I have a strong feeling that the **UCHI-SOTO** syndrome has a lot to do with the unique importance Japanese have attached to **ie** (household) from olden days, for “ Japan is identified as an **ie** society whereas Europe is equated with feudalism “ ( “Is Japan an **ie** Society, and **ie** Society a Civilization ? “ - Takei Sugiyama Lebra-)

But, of course, I must further study the history of Japanese society to substantiate this feeling.



— Yoshiaki Shibusawa —



*Conversational Japanese*

Common Expressions in Work Place ( Part Four )

shitsurei 失礼

*Shitsurei* literary means rudeness; bad manners; a breach of etiquette.

As in *Shitsureina koto wo iu*

To say something rude

*Shitsureina koto wo suru*

To do something rude

But, you also say “ *Shitsurei* “ when you want to leave before someone. It is the most frequently used expression in the office when you leave before someone.

*Osaki ni shitsurei shimasu ( or itashimasu\* )*

*Sumimasen osakini shitsurei shimasu ( or itashimasu\* )*

Sorry, I'm leaving now ( before you do.)

\**Itashimasu* is, as you already know, is more polite way of saying than *shimasu*.

You also use the word *shitsurei* when you address or accost strangers, or when you want to apologize before you say some-

thing that you really would like to avoid to say. Or, before you interrupt someone.

*Shitsurei desuga*.....

Excuse me, but.....

*Shitsurei desuga*.....

Perhaps I shouldn't say so, but.....

*O'hanashi chuu\* shitsurei desuga*.....

Sorry to interrupt you, but.....

\**o'hanashi* means *your talk* and *chuu* means *during* or *while* .

*Shitsurei shimasu*, and *sumimasen* which we talked about in the last lesson, are frequently used expressions by Japanese, particularly in the office. Are Japanese more apologetic by nature ? Perhaps. But, Japanese also know how to use those expressions in order to alleviate and ameliorate uncomfortable, embarrassing, or sometimes even hostile, situations in everyday life.