

ISSN 1883-7409 (print)
ISSN 1884-0183 (on-line)



*Outside the Box:
The Tsukuba Multi-
Lingual Forum*

Volume 3, Issue 1

Autumn, 2010

Foreign Language Center

Tsukuba University

Japan

Theory and Other Dangerous Things

- **Translation strategies in praxis with text examples from Japanese** 7
Jeroen Bode
- **Developing Intercultural Competence in Beginning Japanese Courses: The Case of One Japanese as a Foreign Language Environment** 12
Kiyomi Fujii

Teaching Tips & Techniques

- **Tidbits from the Corpus** 24
John P. Racine
- **Pointing to the Moon: Teaching Religious Studies as a Second Language Course** 27
Simon Kenny

Around the World

- **Come Sail Away** 35
Shinichi Nagata

Creative Writing

- **A Cornucopia of Colour: Rainbow Fuji and HDR Imagery** 38
Gideon Davidson
- **Mt. Fuji** 41
Rika Kuwabara
- **The Doomstead** 42
Anonymous
- **A Fallen Thing** 45
Shinji Nagashiro
- **Take Back Your Name (とりもどせ!)** 49
Adam J. Lebowitz
- **Sea of Walls** 50
Laura Acosta
- **The Lens-less Spectacles** 52
John Methuselah
- **Another World on My Bookcase** 54
Nao Shimizu
- **Mistakes and Blessings** 55
Wendy MacLean

The Doomstead

Anonymous

Catherine, a high school English teacher in Morris Heights, New Jersey, is taking her seat at the back of a conference room on the second floor of the Dallas Grand Hyatt. The room is only half-full, but still quite hot and stuffy. A brass plaque outside the door grandiosely gave the name of the room as “The Fountains” and Catherine had been hopeful that against one wall, there would be a cool pool of water set in an alabaster tub of some sort with a pump to stir the water around and make an inviting trickling sound, but no, there is only a pale aquamarine-colored mural of a fountain on the wall. It is large, though, taking up as much space as a large SUV¹, which she has seen quite a few of here in Dallas, though they are getting rare now back home, with only Mr. Stuart, the geometry teacher, refusing to sell or trade his in despite constant ribbing, even mean-spirited comments, from a few of the other teachers.

The speaker, a short pale woman with thick glasses and in a muted green suit with a necklace of brown wooden beads, has set up a paper easel where a question scrawled in black marker slants rightward and down, “*Is Peak Oil to Blame for the Financial Crisis?*”² This speaker is moderately famous all over the Internet peak-oil blogs and Catherine has seen this presentation on-line in a few different places, linked here and there, already. She is a little bit surprised that the room is only half-full, but maybe that is because it is only 8:30 in the morning. Momentarily, Catherine feels indignant: the rush to catch the Friday evening flight out of Newark airport had been tiring, but here she was, early the next day, trying her bleary-eyed best to make the most out of the week-end AFPOS. (Association for Peak Oil Studies) conference. Why did she always have to be the diligent one?

The middle-aged speaker, who has a math

background, launches into her presentation, switching smoothly between Powerpoint and the paper easel, where she has scrawled comments such as “No good, cheap, easily expanded substitute for oil”. Graphs showing the price of oil, the stock market, the interest rates set by banks, whirr by on the overhead screen. Catherine has seen all these before on the computer in her bedroom, and wonders if there is anyone in the room for whom this information is new. The speaker pulls up a graph entitled “Peak Credit”, a cliff shaped like Mount Everest or, more accurately, thinks Catherine, now suddenly in an idle frame of mind, Mont Blanc. A box with the words “*damaged lending system leads to more damage to lending system*” is next. Catherine looks slyly around the room to see if there are any horrified expressions on the slack, tired-looking faces around her. Might there be that cliché, an aggressive, thick-necked and expensively-clad investment banker with a hedge fund right on the brink, or a naïve municipal government official in charge of structuring budgets to whom this will be Big News, and who will suddenly fall off his padded folding metal chair as though his heart has been pierced by a poisoned arrow? But no. Everyone looks blasé, (and no one is well-dressed like a Wall Street banker; everyone looks as scruffy as Catherine, who is dressed in her usual classroom garb: weathered denim skirt and cotton shirt). One young man idly yawns, another one, older and bald, stares glassily ahead, like a bored soldier on duty. The whole room gives off the feeling of one of the staff meetings back at Benjamin Franklin High, where Dr. Rueben, the tall, crested-haired principal with the one permanently high eyebrow and the one permanently low eyebrow, gives lengthy speeches on myriad details (Gum chewing among teachers should be banned! Reassigning parking spaces with fairness in mind—how to best accomplish that!) and leaves the other teachers staring down philosophically into their cups of coffee or doodling on their notebooks.

Despite all the grim financial projections,

¹ SUV: sports utility vehicle.

² Peak oil: the idea that oil extraction (of a country, an oil well, a region, the globe) reaches a peak and then declines.

the graphs with their sloping downward movements, Catherine feels, against all account, more and more relaxed as the speaker continues her presentation. (This eventually happens to her also during staff meetings when Dr. Reuben gets a hold of a line of thought, like a dance partner, and won't let it drop—the process of watching Dr. Reuben's thought processes becomes pleasurable.) Catherine's mind is free, now, to focus on her real purpose in coming here to AFPOS: namely finding a suitable husband who will save her when The End of The World As We Know It (“TEOTWAWKI”, in peak oil circles) arrives. Catherine has thought this through very carefully and researched it all meticulously. Morris Heights, like all suburbs everywhere, was built on cheap energy: everywhere you look there is little else besides huge highways with gargantuan interchanges, sprawling fast food outlets, and shopping malls in oceanic parking lots. A constant flow of oil has kept the food trucks coming, the huge supermarkets stocked, the cars (including Catherine's little blue Honda) running, and the roads in good condition. It stands to reason, therefore, that once this particularly dense and rich energy form wanes, as the oil geologists on the Internet say already happened in 2005, Catherine's way of life, which, by the way she feels is perfect except for the detail that it is unsustainable, will come to a crashing halt. Catherine doesn't know exactly what will happen to the school she works at, to the other teachers, or to the small city where she lives, yet there is a layer of unease, a pall, blanketing the conversations, the roads, the newspapers, the magazines, the government, and worst of all, the malls, where the blank windows of shut-down stores stare at shoppers in the few remaining open shops like the accusatory eyes of hungry relatives excluded from the largesse of a will. The word “crisis” appears in newspapers: financial crisis, economic crisis, unemployment crisis, debt crisis, banking crisis. Catherine feels a rising sense of worry about the future, and it does feel good to come here to AFPOS where people seem to feel the same sense of alarm, even if they do look bored in this hotel meeting room as they sit and watch the bluish

glowing pixilated Powerpoint screen.

If she can find a man—here at this very AFPOS conference, perhaps—with a food-producing farm who won't mind sharing it with her, however, then she will be one of the lucky ones even if she loses her job and her income. She has tried flirting vaguely on-line on the peak-oil blogs. “LOL”, she will type gaily if someone makes a joke. Oddly, two colorful images prevailed in the peak-oil world on-line: one was the Titanic—some people were rearranging the deck chairs, other people were heading for the lifeboats, and such. The other image was the petri dish.³ Generally speaking, in this line of reasoning the spherical world became a bounded circular petri dish and humans were, (a little insultingly and ridiculously, she had to admit), re-imagined as some kind of energy-addicted yeast culture.

10:31 pm May 12, 2009 “*as is typical of overshoot, because of the lag times involved, by the time people wake up and understand the problem, it will already be way WAY too late. The Titanic will be listing badly in the water.*” .

11:45 pm July 31, 2009 “*We may not escape our sad fate, but the good news is that we have not yet exhausted all our fuel sources nor made the petri dish unlivable, yet.*”

As often as not (in the virtual world as in the real one, she muses speculatively) all the good men seem to be already married. And then it was the Internet, with all of the conventions against exchanging personal information, and the on-line contributors were scattered all over the world. But certainly, Catherine thinks, there are people, some of them, (she liked to vary Jane Austen's famous opening line): *single men in possession of a good doomstead who must be in want of a wife*. A doomstead was just another term for “farmstead”, a place with a merry bubbling spring of fresh water, a set of fields with handsome growing grain, and 15 free-range chickens⁴ in the yard, handily set aside, as it were, for TEOTWAWKI. In a pinch, she

³ Petri dish: a round glass dish with a cover where yeast and bacterial cultures are grown in laboratories for study.

⁴ Free-range chicken: chickens that are not kept in cages

might settle for a man who actually lived on his doomstead, but such a person, she has reluctantly concluded, might, in truth, be a romantic mismatch for her. She strongly expects that the one she finds will own a doomstead on the side but work as a teacher or maybe a librarian or a doctor in a town, with its culture and restaurants and shops. The most suitable person for her, she has come to conclude (she hopes she is not being overly picky and narrowly selective about this, but why not aim high?) would probably be a *museum curator*, someone with some knowledge of art and aesthetic movements in history, to complement her own expertise in English literature. He would be a museum curator with a small farm but he would not be living there now, perhaps it might be something he has inherited but wisely not sold off.

She has gathered—from various sources, some stories, newspaper articles, rare drives out to country areas, and such—that the people who lived full-time on isolated farmsteads and homesteads were independent and hardy rural sorts with definite points of view. They might be good at hunting and fishing and clever about fixing things, but these types of people are not ones she knows and knows how to talk to. Catherine is a little uneasy about moving to a remote rural farm. Nevertheless, she is determined to go on supporting her dear and darling 68-year old mother, Faye, still in perfect health, with whom she lives and has lived devotedly all her life. To be sure, Faye doesn't seem to grasp the concept of a global energy shortage or any sort of resulting economic problems stemming from one—and why ever should

she? Faye has *joie de vivre* and a shining sparkle in her eyes—and is not the worrying sort. She is still fit enough to play tennis and golf every week, and drives herself around town with gusto. To her, gasoline is just something else that appears with monotonous regularity for sale along the side of the road. To Catherine, this kind of faith (Faye sometimes says with a laugh, “It’ll last until I go to glory at least!”) just makes her mother even more innocently endearing, more lovable, and more worthy of protection.

Many unceasing waves of financial gloom having washed thoroughly, PowerPoint-style, over the audience, and coming to the end of her presentation, the speaker attempts limply to say something cheery, however indistinct and unconvincing, about how awareness of the “*feedback loops*” (here she draws some circles labeled “*government*” “*economy*” “*farm inputs*” “*public*” and mysteriously connects them with red, yellow, blue and green arrows) might give people the knowledge they need to act together to avert the worst economic impact of the crisis. The audience, whose numbers have slowly and stealthily increased while the speaker talked, applauds and Catherine, aged 45, not too old to make the brave leap out of the New Jersey suburbs, and with a copy of James Howard Kunstler’s *The Long Emergency* tucked optimistically under her arm as an artful conversation-opener, stands up and determinedly makes her way to the hallway where there is a table set with coffee, and where a man, possibly even a museum curator in possession of a certain kind of small farm, just might be waiting to meet his own doom.