

# Through Bright Evening Streets

Photo and essay by Michael E. Stanley

The meeting was a long one, and when I leave the client's office, the sky is dark. A lazy light rain drifts down, turning the sidewalks and roadways into warped black mirrors reflecting the kaleidoscopic lights of Tokyo.

I step to the curb to hail a cab, silently hoping—praying?—that one will be empty and going in my direction. My hopes are answered in a moment by a car that lurches to a stop in front of me. The driver flips the lever by the steering column and the rear door pops open. After 12 years here, that little touch of civilization still amazes me from time to time.

As I move to enter the cab, a bright, feminine voice reaches out from the wet dark behind me. "Would you mind?" she asks, and before I can reply, she is telling me that we're going in the same direction and since cabs are hard to find in the rush hour and especially when it's raining and... I motion her into the cab's back seat. Of course I don't mind. I know her. She is the associate editor with whom I just concluded a meeting. She is loaded with paperwork for yet another meeting she must attend.

As the cab threads its way through the wet evening streets, we talk over the meeting we have just finished and review all the points once again in a casual and open conversation. But even in this relaxed setting, she is ever the professional. Her speech is polished and polite, but never shy or simpering in the manner that has been the stereotype of the Japanese women for so long. She knows what she is doing.

Our conversation drifts to other things. She tells me of a fantastic new Italian restaurant she has discovered.

"It has the best *pesto* Genovese I've ever tasted," she tells me, following this recommendation with directions. I mull this over. Some years ago, I was the one who was recommending restaurants to Japanese female acquaintances. And now the tables are turned. And it is nice: turnabout is indeed fair play; in this case it is enjoyable as well.

The cab driver is muttering under his breath about the unmoving traffic as we approach the spot where I must get out. The driver weaves the cab over to the curb, and pops the door open. I reach for my billfold as I extract myself from the vehicle and ask the driver what the fare will be. Before he can answer, she interjects.

"This one is on the company, so don't worry about it." She smiles. I hesitate just a moment, still holding my billfold. "We talked business, didn't we? And I have to continue on in the cab, so let's just let the accountants pay with a receipt." She turns to the driver and explains that she will pay when she gets out. He nods. She waves to me. "See you at the meeting next week..." she adds as the door closes and the driver turns the cab out into the petrified traffic pattern.

Educated, confident and full of energy, the modern urban Japanese woman is a type unlike her forebears. She will remake this country; the next century is hers.

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