

TOKYO LETTER

The Merry Month of May

Japan is a nation that celebrates its seasons like no other. Where else, for example, are the vernal and autumnal equinoxes elevated to the status of legal holidays? Where else does the year's first plum blossom make front page news—albeit usually on the rawest day of February? What other country produces documentary films that almost invariably proclaim, with great pride, that it is a nation with four distinct seasons? The date of the arrival of the "rainy season," which lasts from mid-June to mid-July, is a perennial subject of speculation here, and the concept that there *is* a rainy season is unshakable. Never mind that, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency's own statistics, there are more days of rainfall and more of it during August and September when the great typhoons come roaring through.

Indeed, the seasons in Japan often take on an arbitrary aspect. Come the prescribed date and winter uniforms are changed to summer ones or vice versa, heating and/or air conditioning are switched on or off, electric fans and gas heaters appear in or disappear from shop windows. People may freeze or swelter, but it is clearly the human element, not the weather, that is out of season.

Foreigners often don't fathom just how important the seasons are to the Japanese psyche. Greeted by a Japanese friend's mid-June complaint about the heat, a foreigner might suggest an outing to the beach, only to be startled by the equally startled response that it's too cold. Confront a Japanese with his own country's data on rainfall and try to undermine his rainy season theory, and you will, at best, be met with stony silence.

But I have been asked to write about May, which the Japanese—with their usual jump-the-gun

approach to the seasons, describe as "early summer." For what it's worth, I cannot think of it as anything but spring.

Whatever you call it, May lacks the fervid celebratory mood of high summer, the brilliance of the autumn, the clear crispness of the winter, and the early spring's aura of rebirth. It also lacks, respectively, the oppressive heat and humidity, the typhoons, the often bitter cold and winds, and the rain. In short, there's nothing all that spectacular about May, but then there's not much to complain about either. It's a pleasant time to be in Japan.

It is, perhaps, in view of this that the last two of the three stepping stone holidays known as Golden Week are in May. May 3 is Constitution Day, marking the promulgation of that oft-controversial set of principles drawn up under the auspices of the Occupation Forces after World War II, and May 5 is Children's Day. Unless you like traffic jams and wall-to-wall people, however, these are good times to stay close to home.



Last year, for instance, the National Police Agency estimated that nearly 60 million people, or more than half of the Japanese population, would travel somewhere during Golden Week, while, according to the Japan Travel Bureau, one in 10 had plans to make at least an overnight trip. On May 3, 1982, Ueno Zoo played host to 115,000 visitors and an estimated 80,000 traveled to Mt. Takao, a popular hiking spot west of Tokyo.

If you are out and about around this time, though, you are likely to see the festive "koinobori," colorful paper or cloth streamers in the shape of carp, hoisted from residential rooftops or on a tall bamboo pole in the yard. These are the traditional decorations for Children's Day, which, way back then, was a celebration exclusively for boys. A "koinobori" was originally put up for each son, a very large one (10 meters or longer) for the eldest, the others ranging down to a small one if there were a baby boy in the family. Today, particularly in the countryside, there seems to be a certain amount of exaggeration in the matter, with many homes boasting five or six "koinobori." There are several legends to account for the choice of the carp, but the consensus appears to be that the fish represents manliness in the determination and strength it shows in fighting its way upstream each year. In addition, it symbolizes ambition, energy, strength and perseverance—traditional values to instill in growing boys.

May is also the time for several major festivals in Tokyo itself. Around the middle of the month, the Kanda Matsuri at Kanda Myojin Shrine in Ochanomizu features a procession of portable shrines and Japanese music, dances and festival drums. Then, around the third Sunday of May, the great Sanja Matsuri at Asakusa Shrine takes place. Fancy shrine palanquins are carried through the streets by men wearing little more than the colorful wood-block-print-type tatoos festooning their bodies. There is also a huge parade of cour-

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tesans, traditionally clad workmen and nobles, and a performance of festival music.

There are many other local events in and around Tokyo during May. The most notable of these is the Grand Festival of Toshogu Shrine in Nikko. A procession of 1,000 persons dressed as Edo period warriors relives an event that took place more than 350 years ago, when the remains of

Ieyasu Tokugawa, founder of the Edo shogunate, were transferred to Nikko. Preceded by three portable shrines, the procession of Shinto priests and armored soldiers is reminiscent of the past glory of the Tokugawa clan.

For those inclined to quieter forms of recreation, both wisteria and azalea are in full bloom in May. The Kameido Tenjin Shrine in the

Kameido area of Tokyo is famed for its lovely ponds, arched bridges and wisteria trellises, while the Nezu Shrine and Rikugien Garden, also in the capital city, are known for their colorful and abundant azalea bushes.

Indeed, May is a merry month in Japan, too, and the abundance of fine weather at this time of year gives us all ample opportunity to enjoy it.

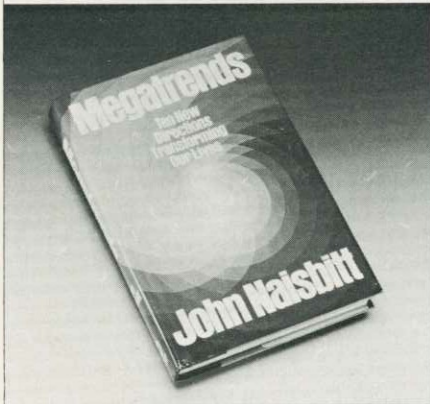
(Susan L. Scully)

BOOK REVIEW

By Chikao Tsukuda
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"Megatrends"

by John Naisbitt, Warner Books,
290 pages, \$15.



When I went to New York recently on a business trip, I bought this book on the recommendation of a friend. I enjoyed it exceedingly.

Using content analysis, the author has been engaged for many years in reading changes in the undercurrents of American society. In this book, he reports his latest findings. His writing style is concrete and lively and he gives an abundance of examples to support his points. Introduced below are some of his many important observations.

From Industrial Society to Post-Industrial Society

This subject was treated long ago in a report by Japan's Industrial Structure

Council, but Naisbitt shows persuasively that post-industrial society (or information-oriented society, as it is more often called in Japan) is no longer just an abstract intellectual concept but is actually growing at a rapid rate. He also advances the unique view that the factor which will determine the success of technology in the new era is the principle of "high tech/high touch." He says that high technology makes possible high touch and that high touch is necessary for high technology.

The most outstanding example of high tech/high touch is the disco, where strobe lights flash on the ceiling and the floor is so crowded that one can hardly move (an example actually given on page 45 of the book). Another case is the simultaneous activities of robots (high tech) and a QC (quality control) circle (high touch) in a factory. The ability to maintain and operate a high tech system is as important as the ability to design the system, he contends.

From a National Economy to a World Economy

Some might say that this, too, is self-evident. But the important point is that the American people have actually begun to think this way.

Other points he makes in this section include:

— The situation with *Japan As No. 1* is not dissimilar to a new world champion emerging in a declining sport.

— The United States has already gone beyond an industrial society, and it is too late now for it to regain supremacy in industrial fields.

— Redistribution of labor and production on a global scale is unavoidable. Every industrial field will see an international change in players.

— The new global model = production sharing. A global economy requires global investment.

From Short-term to Long-term

What he says here is:

— Strategic planning has no value without strategic vision.

— The United States is swarming with cities, companies, trade unions and political parties, which are like dinosaurs waiting patiently for the weather to improve. The weather will not improve. Nor are they aware that the ground under their feet has begun to move. What they most need to do is reconstruct the concepts behind their respective roles.

The other important trends Naisbitt notes are:

— From centralization to decentralization. Renovation should come from the bottom up.

— Representative democracy declines in a society where information is transmitted instantly. Participatory democracy is necessary.

— From hierarchical structure to information networks.

— U.S. population movement to the southwest. Emergence of three megastates (California, Florida and Texas).

— From limited this-or-that options to pluralistic options. Professional and lifestyle diversity.

Megatrends is an extremely interesting book. I recommend it to anyone involved in one way or another with the United States.

The Japanese edition, translated by Kenichi Takemura, is now available from bookstores throughout Japan. It was published by Mikasa Shobo this March (259 pages; ¥980).