

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, January 2025

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

## Holiday Travel, Reading and Dancing!

*This is a continuation of an article that appeared in the December 2024 **Outloud** post.*

Without my old Taiwanese friend and his daughter, I would have wasted a full precious day out of my four-day-trip.

The super typhoon never allowed us to do anything like exploring scenic spots or even visiting museums. The rain pounded down like a waterfall, and the windshield wipers couldn't keep up with it. Still, I turned my eyes to sights outside the car window.

He took the highway to Yingge District, famous for its porcelain production and sales. Barely two stores were open on the old streets of Yingge, where we learned how to enjoy tea in a traditional pottery shop. Because of the storm outside, I was able to spend a long time in one store, which would be impossible for tourists with more hectic itineraries.

A shopkeeper with an engaging manner served tea to each of us in two different cups: glazed and unglazed for us to compare the flavors. According to her, brewing tea with high-quality tea leaves is not the single best way to enjoy tea. "You can appreciate the aroma and taste of tea more distinctly with an unglazed pot and cup than a glazed one. The steam escaping from them makes the tea taste comparatively better." Smooth Chinese words flowed from her lips. And either my friend or his daughter interpreted them for me.

"Look at this bottom of this cup. It's round like a tumbler doll, so the tea won't spill even if you tilt it carelessly." She let me flick the cup with my finger like a roly-poly toy. I admired the ingenuity, and the whole set of utensils was appealing, but one cup was as expensive as my 2-night stay.

Afterwards, they took me to a local market with many restaurants, half of which remained open even during the storm.

Taiwanese dishes are a series of surprises. Pig's trotter, goose claws, duck's beak, and other unfamiliar foodstuffs were displayed in glass cases.

Behind the stand in the arcade, dim sum chefs wrapped dumplings with unbelievable swiftness.

When I peered in at a snake soup restaurant, my friend told me that the small piece of meat in the bowl wasn't worth the high price. Instead, he shared a story of how he nibbled some snake flesh from a specimen he was using for an assignment at medical school. "The meat was fresh for sure! And afterwards, I glued the bones together to make it look perfect," he grinned.

The Taiwanese people I met later were unforgettable.

All had one thing in common, which was an unpretentious and friendly attitude. Regardless of whether they understood my English or not, they were great communicators.

For example, a wrinkled, old woman set up a small desk facing the sidewalk, where she prepared and sold betel nuts. An old man, probably a regular customer of hers, loitered alongside. When I stopped in curiosity, she spoke to me with gestures. So did he. I soon understood that a piece of betel nut cost 50 Taiwan dollars.

Some Taiwanese people, particularly the elderly, legally chew betel nuts wrapped in leaves with quicklime soaked in water because of its stimulant and anesthetic properties. This, I learned later.

On a hill in Wulai District, I disappointedly wandered about a church, when a Taiwanese woman approached me. A landslide caused by the typhoon prevented me from going up the trail to a famous waterfall. Instead, she revealed to me a mystery only the local folks knew. She pointed to the hill in front of us, on the other side of the Catholic church where we stood. "At night, a huge cross appears on that rock."

There were other things that I couldn't do and places I couldn't go, but the typhoon brought me many other encounters.

I can't describe how much I appreciate my friend's hospitality.

I'd like to welcome his family to Matsuyama in the near future.

(Miwa N.)

Several years ago, I cowrote and edited an article about Matsuyama's New Dogo Music.

In those days Dogo Music was a strip club that, on nights when the manager was certain they wouldn't be raided, staged a raunchy, explicit show that left nothing to the imagination.

The night I chose to do research, the audience was overwhelmingly elderly, clad in hotel yukata, there because not much goes on in Dogo after 8PM, and one can only take so many hot spring baths.

When it was over, I found the whole thing kind of depressing, the male and female dancers sort of listless, and the cheering, stamping and hooting from the senior citizens in the audience a little alarming.

Like screening Biology class films called "How Babies Are Made" in a sports bar on a Friday night.

But just recently, Ehime native and popular actress/comedienne Tomochika posted a lovingly accurate parody of a Japanese eighties mystery drama on YouTube.

The English title was something like "Dogo Stripper Murder Incident". And it was partially filmed on location at the New Dogo Music theater. The only strip club still doing business in Shikoku and one of the few such theaters remaining in Japan.

And that made me wonder what form had the club taken post-Covid, post-everyone-with-an iPhone or Android (which, if you think about it, what with its instant access to naughty videos, is basically carrying places like Dogo Music in your pocket).

For one, the venue seemed about half the size that I remembered. And the 6PM audience was pretty sparse as well.

There were one row of seats and one row of wooden stools surrounding a rotating platform connected to a runway and a small main stage.

As the lights went down, a recorded announcement cautioned the audience.

"We can't..."

"You can't..."

And that intrigued me.

I did my research and was all prepared to drone on and on siting stuff like the late 19th century Civilization and Enlightenment (bunmei kaika 文明開化) movement of wholesale social and governmental westernization.

Meaning that if the West was uncomfortable with pictures of naked ladies, Japan could be uncomfortable too.

Or what about the 1907 revision of the Criminal Code that forbade the depiction of "obscene" (waisetsu 猥褻) images with article 175?

But even after reading all that, I realized there was actually no legal consensus in Japan on what

constitutes "obscene".

Still, a decision handed down by the Japanese Supreme Court might provide a clue.

"..materials that aroused desire must be obscene because of a proposed universal feeling of shame."

In other words, the law states that everyone in Japan is basically ashamed of this topic. And because everybody is already ashamed, there is no reason to define obscene.

So forget Japan's fertility festivals, fertility images and figures and shrines dedicated to fertility.

According to the Supreme Court, Japanese are ashamed. Universally even.

At the conclusion of the one-hour show, the last of three dancers, now completely nude, was going to pose for a photo with a cheery couple from Kagawa (a town justly famous for udon noodles).

Chatting away with the audience, she realized she'd forgotten to put her underwear back on. And as she hurried to do so, she remarked that the law was quite clear.

If her photo sans pants somehow ended up online, she could go to jail, and she didn't like that idea one bit.

After posing for pictures with members of the audience, all of whom looked to be fans of hers and the club's regular customers, the rotating stage stopped in front of each of us where she concluded her act by basically shoving her bare bottom in our faces.

And if that ain't one of Japan's many, many, many cultural, legal AND social contradictions, I don't know what is.

(Editor)

In July of this year, The Kodomo Hon no Mori Matsuyama, Matsuyama Children's Book Forest, will open.

The plan is for the library to be installed on the 2nd floor of Saka No Ue No Kumo Museum, a building designed by world-renowned architect, Tadao Ando.

This new public library is Ando's fourth children's library, a project which he started in Nakanoshima, Osaka in 2022. Since then other libraries have been built in Kobe and Tono, Iwate.

Osaka is Ando's hometown, and Kobe's library was built to commemorate the major earthquake in 1995 as well as to pass on the legacy of the city's recovery to future generations.

Tono is a land of folklore and a place that also managed to recover from a disastrous earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

A new children's library will finally arrive in our own city this summer.

Around the same time, the Children's Honnomori Ship will launch from the Setouchi region of Kagawa. This library ship will sail from island to island in the Seto Inland Sea and hopefully help kids who live there have an amazing experience with books.

In an interview, Ando recalled that, as a child, he couldn't read many books. As an adult, he realized how much he enjoyed reading. That's why he wants kids to encounter as many books as possible (and spend less time on their smartphones).

Though our daughters are now both grown-up, I am enthusiastic about this project. I love children's books myself.

Our girls often recall how they learned basic scientific knowledge and concepts from books in their early childhoods. They're referring to all the books I used to read to them before they went to bed.

Since the library has raised 4 million yen through crowd funding to pay for books to stock the

library, my husband and I made our own donation to the city last month.

I believe this new children's library will pique the endless curiosity children have for books and stories and remind grown-ups how they were when they were young.

I can hardly wait!

(Kay)