

# Ambassadeur®

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MAGAZINE

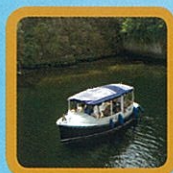
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010

## The Rise of Right Wing Paranoia



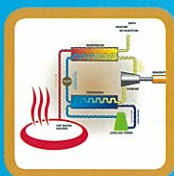
### AMBASSADOR INTERVIEW

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Two Visions



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# What Lies Beneath

After decades of neglect, Tokyo starts to rediscover its waterways

In March last year the Soba Shubo Sho restaurant to the northeast of Tokyo began serving sweetfish tempura with soba noodles for the very reasonable price of 480 yen. What followed was a virtual media storm that made national headlines as television and newspapers swooped on the story and a hungry public ate it up.

The reason for all this excitement was not the bargain price of the new menu addition but the source of one of its main ingredients: the ayu sweetfish was caught locally from the Tama River, something that had not been done for a long time due to the river's poor water quality.

In fact, Tokyo-ites have not eaten from, swam in or really had very much at all to do with their city's rivers for a very long time indeed. While in most major cities waterfront real estate commands top dollar, To-

kyo has resolutely turned its back on its rivers, hiding them behind steep cement walls or burying them beneath roads and highways. All throughout the city you can find place names bearing the suffix for bridge or river, but the bridges and rivers themselves are long gone. Even Nihombashi, the bridge that marks the geographic centre of Japan and from which all road distances are measured, has all but vanished, dwarfed by the metropolitan expressway that thunders overhead.

It wasn't always this way. Though it is hard to imagine today, when the first foreign visitors began to write of the newly opened city of Edo in the 1850s they saw fit to dub it the "Venice of the Orient" and waxed lyrical over a city that seemed to be entirely waterborne.

This may well have been because the

ubiquitous "Paris of the Orient" moniker had already been freely applied to Shanghai, Saigon and just about everywhere else, but in Edo there was good reason for the Venice comparison. In a city that had risen on land reclaimed from swamps and that was crisscrossed by dozens of canals, moats and rivers, the primary mode of transport was indeed its waterways and more than one early foreign commentator was bemused by the apparent absence of any wheeled vehicles. Instead, water taxis carried the people of Edo to where they wanted to go (provided they were of suitable means to afford them; commoners walked) while merchant boats ferried fish and fruit around the markets and flat-bottomed barges tendered to coastal traders moored in the harbor and brought rice from Niigata, soy from Chiba, and apples from Aomori up into the canals;

*Left: What remains of the Shibuya River snakes its way south from Shibuya Station. Once a busy waterway, it is now all but forgotten.*

*Right: CREW's electric tour boat leaves Tokiwabashi for a cruise into Tokyo's past. (Photos: Ikonmedia)*

the rapidly growing city's insatiable appetite welcomed it all.

The waterways were not the exclusive preserve of trade and industry however. Yoshimune, the eighth shogun, initiated the practice of hosting great banquets on the water aboard a luxurious riverboat popularly known as his "Floating Castle". The middle class soon emulated him, holding lavish parties, replete with musicians and seasonal cuisine, aboard yakatabune (party boats) adorned with lanterns and banners. The boating season began in June with a huge fireworks display and lasted all summer, with highlights including rather quaint firefly viewing parties and somewhat less decorous evening cruises on the Sumida River where, to put it mildly, alcohol was present.

By the late 1800s however, this idle was ending and things were changing. More than 50,000 rickshaws were now in operation, and contemporary commentators were bemused to note that most of the city's inhabitants were bewildered by the new-fangled contraptions and generally froze in their tracks when one approached, a phenomenon perhaps quite familiar to Tokyo cyclists today. The upper classes of Edo had, meanwhile, taken to moving about in horse-drawn carriages, while minor nobles, who could not afford such luxury but found rickshaws too vulgar, favored palanquins.

Similarly, by around the same time as Edo became Tokyo in 1868, the process of land reclamation that had helped create the city gradually began to destroy the water world on which it was built. Islands were absorbed and canals filled in and converted into roads and highways, and after trains arrived in 1872, wheeled transport swiftly usurped the boatmen as the most economic form of transport. Speeding up this process were disasters both man-made and natural: many waterways disappeared abruptly in 1923 when rubble from the Great Kanto Earthquake was piled into them; others would suffer a similar fate after the bombing of World War II. One wonders where all the rubble will go when the next cataclysm strikes.

But it was pollution that was to be the last nail in the coffin of the river system. By the 1970s, Japan was feeling the full effect of



its rapid economic growth and many of the few waterways left in Tokyo were positively unsafe. The public frequently welcomed the filling in of smaller canals — they were often stagnant, repositories for old bicycles and garbage, and in summer their stench was overpowering—but the dire state of the rivers began to raise eyebrows. After decades of neglect, environmental laws were overhauled and factory outflows were checked, sewer systems rebuilt, and canals dredged; finally, the tide was turning.

It would take years before real momentum was achieved, and there remains much to be done, but tighter regulations and improved water treatment facilities have certainly paid off. The ayu have returned to the Tama River thanks to a battery of water purification plants, and slowly but surely the people of Tokyo are also rediscovering their "life aquatic". The water quality of most of the broader rivers in the outer suburbs has improved so much that they are now popular weekend walking courses and picnic spots, but it is the renewed interest being shown in the inner city waterways that has been most surprising. Several tours of the waterways have recently appeared, local governments have suddenly opened their purse strings for river-related projects, and even museum exhibitions on the city's riv-

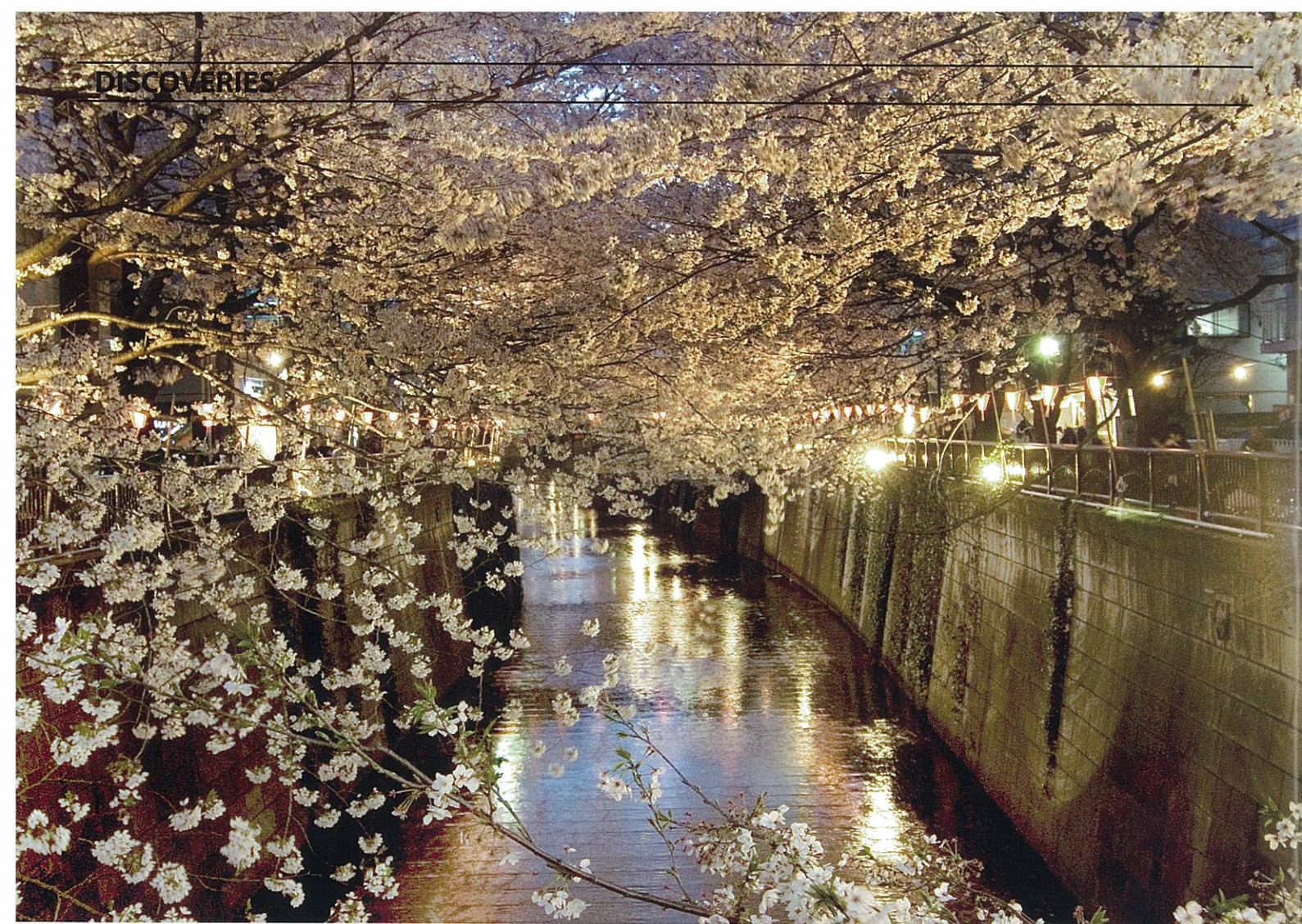
ers have been organized.

The Consortium of Rediscovery Edo-Tokyo Tourism Walk (CREW) was established in August 2008 to study the development of local revitalization through tourism in the center of Tokyo, namely Chuo-ku, Chiyoda-ku, and Minato-ku. They currently operate a tour exploring Tokyo's river culture and have seen interest in it grow steadily.

"With the filling in of the canals and increasing water pollution, people just lost interest in recreation on the rivers," says the head of CREW, Tatsushi Kimura. "Now, after much effort has been made on water purification, people are starting to reconsider the rivers, and the river transportation system — especially in regard to tourism — is becoming popular once again."

CREW's carbon-friendly electric tour boat offers a leisurely — and wonderfully quiet — hour-long tour of the central waterways accompanied by an historical commentary. Slipping silently beneath Nihombashi and past the spot where criminals and anyone unlucky enough to fall foul of the Shogun were publicly pilloried, you are soon made aware of just how important a role the river system played in Tokyo's history, in both good times and bad: in addition to the former sites of markets and

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The Meguro River in Naka-Meguro is a good example of how the old canal system can play a part in modern Tokyo. Lined with cherry trees, it has helped a relatively unknown part of Tokyo become fashionable and rejuvenated the local economy. (Photo: Ikonmedia)

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palaces, a stone monument marks the spot where Edo families left messages seeking lost children, while on another section of embankment a sinister black smudge reveals what is thought to be the legacy of a WWII incendiary bomb.

Strangely, it is partly due to one of Tokyo's latest infatuations that people are rediscovering what was Edo's great love affair. When the Tokyo Sky Tree is completed next year, Sumida Ward plans to organize cruises down the Kitajukengawa river so that visitors can gaze up at this modern marvel, and in 2009 the ward budgeted 270 million yen to build a pedestrian bridge, riverside terrace and walkway, a pier and water purification facilities; for 2010, the figure is set to leap to 820 million yen. Koto Ward, meanwhile, hopes to steal some of its neighbor's thunder with water tours of Fukagawa, one of the few parts of Tokyo that still retains a hint of what Edo must have been.

Kisarazugashi, once the site of Edo's busiest seafood market, will also soon have

a new quay, and it is hoped that Kisarazu in Chiba Prefecture, the town that originally gave the market its name, will participate in re-enactments of the shipping of fresh seafood to the city as part of the 100th anniversary of Nihombashi.

The rehabilitation of Nihombashi itself however, remains a tantalizing, almost pie-in-the-sky dream. The relocation of the metropolitan expressway to a subterranean road network, as championed by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (and opposed by Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara), seems positively utopian, especially to the average Tokyo taxpayer who will be footing what is expected to be a 500 billion yen price tag. The success of Odaiba's man-made beach and Akarenga Soko in Yokohama have shown that such developments are popular however, and even small, more localized attempts to beautify waterways have paid off; in Nakameguro, the Meguro River, though still sunk well below street level, is lined with cherry trees that are not only popular in sakura season but have

helped turn what was once a nondescript suburb into a leafy pedestrian heaven that is rivaling Aoyama for fashionista appeal, replete with a river-based arts festival.

No amount of money is ever going to bring the water world of Edo back, but it is arguable that Japan's construction industry, ever on the lookout for something to keep itself occupied with, might be well employed in making the city's riverbanks a little greener and its canals a little less like storm water drains. Stranger things have happened, especially in Tokyo. ☺

#### A J Taylor

Sumidagawa – The Beloved River of Edo runs from 22 September to 14 November 2010 at the Edo-Tokyo Museum, Ryogoku, Tokyo; closed on Mondays.

For information on CREW river tours, please visit their homepage <http://www.edo-tokyo.info/> (in Japanese only) or email them in English at [info@edo-tokyo.info](mailto:info@edo-tokyo.info). The tour narration is currently conducted in Japanese, though there are plans to include materials in other languages in the future.

# Unlocking Potential in Japan

Whether a corporation or SME, firms are always looking for good ideas to find new clients and markets. Researching and developing such ideas and drawing up business plans, however, costs time and money.

Aspiring executives or entrepreneurs, on the other hand, face another problem; they must gain skills and knowledge that equip them well for senior positions. How to help both parties?

JMEC - the Japan Market Expansion Competition - is a business training program in Japan that is based on a business plan competition. It has been matching business clients and up-and-coming executive since 1993

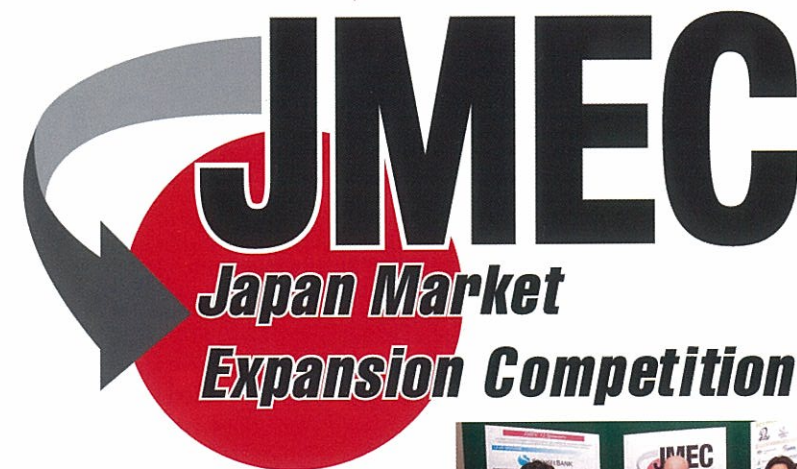
Participants are put in teams to be lectured, mentored and judged by experienced Japan-based businesspeople in how to research and compose a professional business plan for project clients who pay a very competitive fee for this confidential service.

Initiated by the Australian and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Japan, the program is now supported by 14 chambers in addition to a great number of corporate sponsors from the foreign business community in Japan. Nearly 800 graduates and almost 150 client organisations provide testimonial to the success of the concept.

#### Uncovering a promising niche market

Chubb Japan, a JMEC project client in 2005/06, is a subsidiary of The Chubb Corporation, a US property and casualty insurer headquartered in New Jersey. The Chubb Corporation has for years marketed the trademark-protected Chubb Masterpiece™, a personal lines product, to affluent clients in the US, Europe and parts of Asia. It is a comprehensive insurance policy that can include coverage for homes, cars, boats, valuable possessions and collections and also can include personal liability insurance.

Selling such insurance in Japan is a relatively new industry. While there were many extremely wealthy people during the



Chubb Japan's Tokyo team.

heydays of Japan's Bubble Economy in the 1980s, they did not show their wealth but they spent money discretely, such as on art that was never publicly displayed. The new generation of Japan's affluent in the 2000s, however, are more inclined to spend, and to be seen spending money - and this is the market that Chubb Masterpiece™ targets.

Chubb's Tokyo team wondered about the potential in this and what challenges it would face. They needed reliable data on the size and needs of the market to build a case and to interest the firm's senior management. With no department for personal lines product in place at the time and few members of staff in the office, there were not enough resources in-house to conduct a comprehensive research and to prepare strategic recommendations. So they became a JMEC project client.

#### Minimum time – Maximum expertise

After Santosh Sali came to Japan from India in 2004 he worked as an Oracle database administrator at a bank and a media firm. He joined JMEC in autumn 2005 and was put in a team with two Australians, a Brazilian, and two Japanese with experience in sales, marketing and in IT technology. "Our team was very keen on learning. At the time none of us had an MBA or much experience in strategic business. We wanted to understand the nitty-gritty in business and how it makes a difference," said Sali.

The JMEC lectures and workshops equipped participants with much needed theoretical knowledge, as the lecturers



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and mentors—all seasoned professionals who had worked for many years in Japan—openly shared their expansive knowledge with the team to help them gain valuable hands-on experience. Sali and his team learned how to do business research and compile a professional business plan, including financial statements, to convince Chubb senior management that there is indeed a market for personal lines products in Japan.

Sali knew that success in a market often depends on paying attention to the specific ways of doing business there. "You cannot easily get this information from books or learn it at a business school. Actual experience in the respective business environment with expert guidance is crucial. It might take five to ten years to figure out the details by yourself, but with JMEC you get it in less than one year. JMEC produces practical executives at a much lower price than you would pay for attending a business school where you only learn the theory," he argued.

#### Practical Learning Experience leads to Fast Career Advancement

Sali's JMEC experience was very useful when he later studied for an MBA.

"The lecturers explained the various strategic business areas and how they work

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