

## FALL, 2009: BREEZE ISSUE #39

A FREE E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

### ASTRO BOY FOREVER!

*By Frederik L. Schodt*



I love the design of the little robot boy character known as Astro Boy. In my dreams I sometimes see him zooming through the clouds and over mountains, rockets firing from his feet, his right arm outstretched in front of him with fist clenched. Or I imagine him attending Ochanomizu elementary school in Tokyo with his human pals, wearing a Japanese school boy uniform and carrying a knapsack. My house is filled with Astro Boy-themed stationary, badges, action figures, towels, clocks, and other assorted gadgets. Needless to say, I am a big Astro Boy fan. But I may be different from others in that I am also fascinated by Astro Boy in ways that relate more to history than immediate entertainment.

Astro Boy is a message to us from the past. Most North Americans probably know him as the star of an old black and white animated TV series of the same name, syndicated by NBC Enterprises in 1963, or as the star of similarly-named series from 1980, 2003, or even the computer graphics feature film of 2009. The *Astro Boy* story actually has far deeper roots, for it was first created by Japan's late Osamu Tezuka.

a *manga* (comic book) series, titled *Tetsuwan Atomu* , or “Mighty Atom,” in 1951-2. It was a long-running series that Tezuka regularly drew until around 1969, but he also occasionally turned out short episodes in the early 1970s. These stories are now collected and available in English translation as a series of twenty-three paperback volumes from Dark Horse Comics, and to read them is to see Astro Boy in a completely different light than he appears in the TV series or in the recent feature film.

Tezuka—who is known today in Japan as the *manga no kamisama* , or “God of Comics”—began creating his Astro Boy character for the manga series only six years after World War II. It was a bleak time. Japan was still occupied by Allied forces, bombed-out cities were still being reconstructed, and people were still scrambling to get enough to eat. Tezuka was only twenty-three or four, but he knew the children of defeated Japan needed something positive, something new, to help them look forward rather than back. Encouraged by his editors at *Shonen* magazine, he tried to give young readers hope and courage, while wrapping his story in a strong pro-peace framework.

Partly inspired, perhaps, by the 19th century *Pinocchio* story, Tezuka made Astro a ten or eleven year old boy-robot, created by a brilliant-but-unstable scientist named Dr. Tenma, who wanted a surrogate for his real son, Tobio (who had been killed in an auto accident). Astro is eventually disowned by Tenma because, as a robot, he fails to grow like a real human boy. Luckily, however, Astro is taken in by another scientist, Professor Ochanomizu, who—feeling sorry for him—creates an entire robot family for him of a robot father, mother, brother, and little sister. In Tezuka's story, Astro had been created with the cream of Japanese advanced technology, and he had many powers that —quite unlike American superheroes—were all based on pseudo-scientific principles. The most advanced robot of his era, he had rockets in his feet and hands, a computer brain, and searchlight eyes. At the same time, he was so intelligent and natural in his movements that he was fully capable of coexisting with humans and even acting as one. And he did so, enrolling in the fifth grade of the local elementary school. To the delight of young readers in Japan , Astro's parents (also robots) were not as intelligent or advanced as he was, with the result that they enrolled in the first grade of the same school.

Tezuka set his story in a Japan fifty years in the future, and filled scenes in his story with futuristic highways, flying cars, and skyscrapers, as well as robots and new-fangled inventions that few people at the time had imagined. To young fans in then-impoverished Tokyo , most of whom were probably ten or twelve year old boys, it was a hugely exciting world. But at the same time Tezuka was also careful to include both familiar and reassuring scenes. Among the futuristic skyscrapers he always drew some ramshackle old houses of traditional construction. Adult characters often wore Western style suits and ties, but Astro's school teacher occasionally swaggered about with traditional wooden *geta* clogs. And Astro's schoolmates dressed in the uniforms of the 1950s. At first, the exact time frame of the *Astro Boy* story was not entirely clear, but Tezuka eventually settled on April 7, 2003 for Astro's birthday (or creation day). This meant that—while drawing *Astro Boy* in the 1950s as fanciful science fiction for children—Tezuka was in fact creating a story set in our time, today. He gave us, in a sense, a time capsule of an alternative future.

Tezuka was a true intellectual, trained as a scientist (he later became a licensed physician), so even though he was drawing a story mainly for young boys, he had to keep himself entertained. For him, this meant exploring what now seem to be shockingly serious issues for children's fare. For example, Astro was a humanoid robot and had to coexist with humans, but in the story the humans were often prejudiced against robots. In manga episodes like “The Tragedy of Bailey,” Tezuka thus tackled subjects such as civil rights. “There are always people,” he once wrote, “who take offense at stories depicting discrimination in too real or raw a fashion, but making the victim of discrimination a robot rather than a human gives lot more freedom, and allows me to be far more provocative.” In other episodes, such as the 1953 e

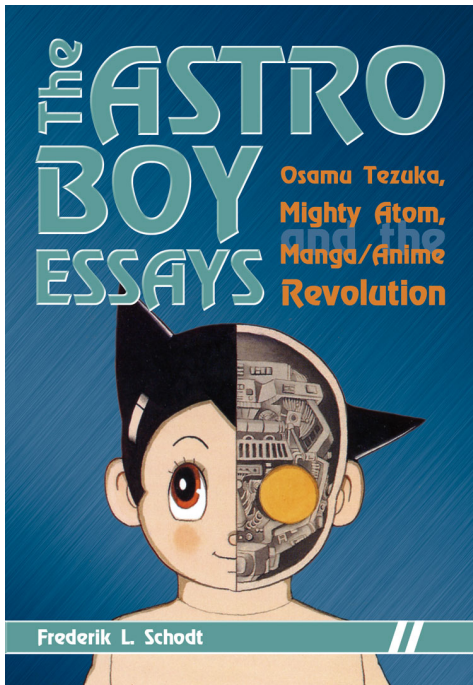
“Red Cat,” he tackled (with a liberal paraphrasing of a famous 1903 work by novelist Doppo Kunikida) the problem of overdevelopment and its threat to the environment—long before most people had given much thought to pollution or even the finite nature of the earth. In the 1955 “Yellow Horse” episode, he explored drug and addiction issues. In 1967-69, in an episode called “The Angel of Vietnam,” he even dabbled in politics and explored the morality of the Vietnam War. And in the 1956 story, “Robot Bombs,” he envisioned an issue that has taken on a special urgency for all of us today—suicide bombers.

Our world today does not exactly look like the world that Tezuka envisioned. We do not yet have flying cars, and we rarely see humanoid, intelligent robots. Yet we are surrounded by intelligent machines and systems, and whether they are computers, ATMs, or the amorphous web that we now daily surf, we interact with them nearly every day. And we are thus increasingly forced to confront many of the existential issues that Tezuka raised—not only about war and peace and pollution and nature—but about artificial intelligence, and the coexistence of man and machine. Loosely interpreted, *Astro Boy* sometimes seems quite prophetic.

There is a second reason that I find Tezuka's *Astro Boy* series fascinating, and it is independent of the content of either the manga or the animated series, and again more related to history. *Astro Boy* was not Tezuka's first manga work, and not the last, for he went on to create scores more. But it has become his most famous, and rightly so. There were comic books and cartoons in Japan before the war, but at the beginning of the fifties, with *Astro Boy* and other now-famous works such as *Jungle Emperor* (also known as *Kimba the White Lion*, 1951-54) and *Princess Knight* (1953-56), Tezuka laid the groundwork for a revolution in the medium. Following Tezuka's lead, more and more Japanese artists began to create longer, more visually-oriented and “cinematic” stories. In the process they elevated the comic book medium from a restricted format mainly enjoyed by children, to a medium of expression that in Japan today rivals film and novels and is also enjoyed by a broad swath of the adult population.

In 1963 Tezuka used money earned from drawing popular manga to create an animation studio, Mushi Productions. For the company's first commercial venture he decided to animate none other than his *Astro Boy* story for television, thus creating Japan's first domestically produced, weekly, thirty minute animated TV series. It was a feat that resulted in a huge swelling of national pride in Japan at the time. And it also created the template for today's gargantuan manga and anime industries, because the TV version of *Astro Boy* proved so popular that it spawned a huge merchandise industry, generating toys, stationary, and seemingly endless spin-offs. Executives from NBC Enterprises in the United States also noticed this, and eventually signed a contract with Tezuka and Mushi Productions. With the help of veteran animation producer, Fred Ladd, the series was then cleverly translated and localized for the American market, thus appearing on American television sets as the first weekly animated series from Japan. Later, it would also be broadcast in many other languages around the world, thrilling children everywhere with its originality. So the enormous popularity of Japanese manga and anime in the English-speaking world today can be directly traced back to Tezuka, and to *Astro Boy*.

Osamu Tezuka passed away in 1989, but long, long ago, he had a vision for both anime and manga that turned out to be correct. As he wrote in the foreword to my 1983 book, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, “My experience convinces me that comics, regardless of what language they are printed in, are an important form of expression that crosses all national and cultural boundaries, that comics are great fun, and that they can further peace and goodwill among nations.”



© 2009 Frederik L. Schodt

Frederik L. Schodt is a writer, translator, and interpreter who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the spring of 2009 the Japanese Emperor granted him the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, for his contributions to the promotion of Japanese popular culture in the United States . His latest book is *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* ( Berkeley : Stone Bridge Press, 2007). <http://www.jai2.com>

## FIRESIDE COLLOQUIUM

*By: Thomas Lin*

During the past four months, the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles , in cooperation with Cultural News has hosted a series of lectures followed by networking time at our office. This project was titled Fireside Colloquium and the concept was developed by Shige Higashi, Chair and Publisher of Cultural News, Inc. These mixers were designed for those who are involved in Academics relating to Japan so that they could meet specialist in their field and also other instructors/researchers in the area. Each event brought a special guest speaker who gave a presentation on their area of specialty followed by Q&A and networking time. The concept of a fireside represents a relaxed atmosphere such as a small group of friends or family chatting around a campfire or next to a fireplace in a lodge. In keeping with the theme, the number of participants was kept to between 20-30 guests and the interactions were very casual to promote friendly communication.



The first meeting was held on Thursday, June 25th, 2009, and featured Keiko Tanaka, Curatorial Assistant at The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture. Dr. Tanaka gave a presentation introducing the evolution of female representation in Japan during the early part of the 20th century. She focused on the modern paintings of beauties, which is the fusing of Japanese and Western aesthetics. Her theory is that the images of modern beauties can be used to trace the origins of beauties in contemporary cartoons, Manga, and dolls. This presentation was moderated by Kendall Brown, Professor of Art History at California State University , Long Beach .



The second meeting was held on Monday, July 13th, 2009, and featured Frederick Schodt, writing and Manga scholar who also contributed the Atom Boy article above. Mr. Schodt gave a presentation on his contributions to the art of Manga including his work in translating popular pieces such as works Phoenix and Astro Boy by Osamu Tezuka, The Rose of Versailles by Riyoko Ideda, and Barefoot Gen by Keiji Nakasawa. He is best known for his book titled "Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics" wh won an award for at the Manga Oscars in 1983. In 2009 Mr. Schodt was honored with The Order of t



Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette ? the second most prestigious Japanese decoration awarded by the Japanese government, for his work in translating Japanese Manga to foster international culture exchange between Japan and the United States . This presentation was moderated by Hirokazu Kosaka, Artistic Director of Japanese American Culture and Community Center.



The third and final meeting was held on Friday, September 25th, 2009, and featured Hiroaki Sera, Professor at Shikoku University and Professor Emeritus of National Naruto Educational University . Professor Sera presented his views on the long debated question of Murasaki's opinions and those of her peers on the courtly world portrayed in The Tale of Genji. His approach to this Japanese literary masterpiece is unusual among Japanese educators because of his focus on the mental and psychological worlds of the middle rank court ladies like Murasaki Shikibu that is evident in the novel. Professor Sera has been traveling to Los Angeles since 2006 as a lecturer for The Tale of Genji Workshop, which is sponsored by Cultural News. This presentation was moderated by Professor Joan R. Piggott of the History Department at the University of Southern California .

## 2009 ANIME EXPO - ALL JAPAN BOOTH

*By: Thomas Lin*



This year, the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles was invited by the Anime Expo Convention Organizers to host a booth at the annual show to promote Japanese animation. Together with the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles , and the Japanese National Tourist Organization in Los Angeles , the three Japanese governmental organizations hosted a booth during the three day convention.

The purpose of the booth was to introduce Japanese culture other than Anime to convention goers so they could experience another side of Japan . Activities conducted by the three organizations included instructions for writing your name in Japanese, origami folding workshops, making tanzaku or wishes written on a strip of paper and then hung on a tree, and finally a quiz contest with prizes for the winners. Information related to studying Japanese and also traveling in Japan was also provided at the booth for all show goers.

During the opening ceremonies of the convention, the Honorable Consul General Junichi Ihara made a speech to the attendees, which was a significant event because it marked the first time a Consul General has made a speech at any anime convention in the United States. The booth received an overwhelming number of visitors showing great interest in Japanese language, culture, and travels along with anime. This event proved to be very successful and we thank the Anime Expo Convention Organizers for the opportunity. We look forward to having a booth again next year for the 2010 Anime Expo.

## THE JAPAN FOUNDATION GROUP - TOUR PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS (U.S. GROUP) 2009

*By: Thomas Lin*



In June of 2009, 24 educators from around the country, including Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, were invited to participate in a two week tour of Japan in an effort to expand and improve Japanese language education on the level of primary and secondary education in the U.S. Administrators from elementary and secondary schools were invited, along with those who are involved in local administration in primary and secondary education from the United States to exchange their opinions with Japanese teachers and local administrators by observing Japanese education, culture, and society.

This program is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, schools, enterprises, academic experts and many others.

The tour started in Los Angeles , where the participants attended a one day orientation to learn about the Japanese language (by Dr. Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku from University of California , San Diego ) and also to go through a basic crash course on speaking Japanese along with etiquette training (by Maki Watanabe Isoyama from the Japan Foundation in Los Angeles ). They also listened to presentations from select leaders of local Japanese governmental organizations here in Southern California to better prepare them before they leave on their trip. These leaders including the Honorable Consul General Ihara, from the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles, Jane Hicks, a participant from last years group, Director Shigeru Kimura, from the Japan External Trade Organization, and Director Hidenao Takizawa from the Japan National Tourism Organization. Most of the participants had very little to no knowledge of Japan and were very excited to meet their fellow educators from around the nation and also in Japan .

During their time in Japan , the participants got to experience Japanese schools, companies, and culture by participating in school and company visits and also by partaking in traditional Japanese activities such as eating Japanese food, touring famous Japanese landmarks and experiencing the traditional art of tea ceremony. By being in Japan , the educators were able to see the country with their own eyes, and form their own opinions about the country to be able to take back to the states to share with their fellow educators. These experiences also allowed the participants to reflect upon their journey and rediscover the American education system by witnessing both the similarities and differences between the two countries.



Upon returning home from Japan , many of the participants expressed their gratitude for the program and praised its success in introducing Japanese culture. Many thought that this was a moving experience and this opportunity allowed them to bring back a piece of Japan to their classrooms. The Japan Foundation hopes that this program continues so many more educators from the United States and around the world will have the opportunity to see Japan with their own eyes.

# THE JFLA NIHONGO LIBRARY NEW BOOK REVIEW

*By: Thomas Lin*



## 2008 JLPT Questions and Correct Answers

The Japan Foundation along with the Japan Education Exchanges and Services (JEES) has released the latest 2008 Japanese Language Proficiency Test Questions and Correct Answers for all levels. It comes in two volumes, one for levels 1 & 2 and a second volume for levels 3 & 4. Information included in each volume includes a copy of the 2008 test with CD for the listening section, a list of correct answers for every question featured in the 2008 test along with how each question is scored, and instructions for people who have never taking the test before with statistics for the 2008 test from every country it was administered. This book is very useful if you are studying for the JLPT and want to see what the test looks like. It also good practice to prepare for this year's JLPT by going through last year's test to see how well you do.

These two volumes can be purchased at your local Japanese Bookstore and we have a list at the link below. If you do not have a local Japanese Bookstore, you can also purchase this along with other useful study aids for the JLPT from an online reseller. The 2009 JLPT is coming up fast so hope you are well into your preparations studying for the test.



## NIHONGO de CARE-NAVI

“Nihongo de Care-navi” ( <http://nihongodecarenavi.jp/> ) is a website to support foreigners who are learning Japanese language to work as nurses and caregivers in Japan . The content of this website is now available as a book. Useful expressions and examples of verbal contact in nursing and caretaking scenes are provided in Japanese and English.

Vocabularies and expressions are categorized by scenes the reader may face in caretaking job. Terms required in each scene, such as “Bathing,” “Examination/Test,” or “Report” can be found at once, both in Japanese and in English.

This book is full of illustrations, making the book easy-to-understand and reader-friendly. There are also columns to enrich the understanding of customs and relationships in Japan . This book comes in paperback size to make it for handy reference.

# THE JAPAN FOUNDATION, LOS ANGELES - JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION GRANT RECIPIENTS (2009-2010 FISCAL YEAR)

*By: Mamiko Nakai*

## Grant Program for Japanese Language Courses Abroad

- New Heights Academy Charter School ( New York , NY )
- Ocean Charter School ( Los Angeles , CA )

- RI Japan Society Language and Culture Center ( Providence , RI )

#### **Grant Program for Developing Networks between Japanese Language**

- AATJ ( Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese )
- NCJLT ( National Council of Japanese Language Teachers )

#### **Short-Term Training Program for Foreign Teachers of the Japanese Language**

- Culver City Middle School (TSUBAKIYAMA, Margaret - Culver City , CA )

#### **Japanese-Language Program for Specialists in Cultural and Academic Fields**

[2 month course]

- SASAKI, Lindsey - New York University ( New York , NY)
- SHAN, Lianying - Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN)
- WEI, Xin - Pennsylvania State University (State College, PA)

[6 month course]

- RICHARDSON, Carla Takaki - University of California at Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz, CA)
- HU, Fang Yu - University of California at Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz, CA)

#### **Japanese Language Speech Contest Support Program**

- Alaska Association of Teachers of Japanese (Fairbanks, AL)
- Association of Florida Teachers of Japanese (Boca Raton, FL)
- Arizona Association of Teachers of Japanese (Tempe, AZ)
- California State University , Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)
- Duke University (Durham, NC)
- Hyogo Business & Cultural Center (Seattle, WA)
- Japan-America Societies in Texas (Houston, TX)
- Japan-America Society of Central Ohio (Columbus, OH)
- Japan-America Society of Georgia (Atlanta, GA)
- Japan-America Society of Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh, PA)
- Japanese American Association of Northern California (San Francisco, CA)

- Japanese Language Scholarship Foundation - Aurora Foundation (Los Angeles, CA)
- Japanese Teachers Association of Michigan (Livonia, MI)
- Louisiana Association of Teachers of Japanese (Baton Rouge, LA)
- North Carolina Association of Teachers of Japanese (Raleigh, NC)
- Northeast Council of Teachers of Japanese (New York, NY)
- Southern Nevada Japanese Teachers Association (Las Vegas, NV)
- United Japanese Society of Hawaii (Honolulu, HI)
- University of Colorado - Boulder (Boulder, CO)
- Vanderbilt University (Nashville, TN)

## BACKSTAGE TO HANAMICHI

*A Behind the Scenes Look at the Color, Magic and Drama of Kabuki*



During October, 2009, the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles , will be presenting **Backstage to Hanamichi** - *A Behind the Scenes Look at the Color, Magic and Drama of Kabuki* with lead actors Nakamura Kyozo and Nakamura Matanosuke from the world-renowned Shochiku Company. This is a rare opportunity to learn about the three artistic components of Kabuki and to catch short performances highlighting two contrasting styles in this traditional art form from Japan .

Kabuki with its magnificent beauty and highly refined skill has become a rare jewel among the great theater traditions of the world. Its actors must undergo years of rigorous training in order to master its three artistic components of music (*ka*), dance (*bu*) and drama (*ki*) before being allowed to perform before a live audience. In order to create the magic that is seen on stage, the kabuki actor is supported backstage by a team of unseen artisans and craft men including costumer stylists, wig masters, musicians and prop masters.

**Backstage to Hanamichi** provides the audience with a rare glimpse into the traditional world of this centuries-old live theater and the painstaking preparation that leads up to an actor's grand entrance onto the *hanamichi* stage.

The lecture/performance includes two performances demonstrating kabuki dance classics: Sagi Musume (The Heron Maiden) and Shakkyo (Lion Dance), contrasting the lyrical style of the *onnagata* (an actor specializing in female roles) with that of the dynamic, acrobatic style represented in the heroic Lion Dance.

This traveling lecture and performance will kick off with two performances in Los Angeles on Thursday, October 15th, 2009. The program will be presented in conjunction with the 100th Anniversary Celebration of The Japan America Society of Southern California. Following the inaugural performance, the group will travel to San Francisco for a performance on Saturday, October 17th, 2009. Afterwards, the group will continue to Seattle for the third stop in their five city tour with a performance on Monday, October 19th, 2009. Following Seattle will be a stop in Portland for the fourth performance on Wednesday, October 21st, 2009. The tour will conclude in Denver for a final performance on Saturday, October 24th, 2009.

#### **Presented by**

The Japan Foundation  
Shochiku, Co., Ltd

#### **Co-Sponsored by**

Japanese American Cultural and Community Center  
Japan Society of Southern California 100th Anniversary

#### **Co-organized by**

Consulate-General of Japan in Los Angeles  
Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco  
Consulate-General of Japan in Seattle  
Consulate-General of Japan in Portland  
Consulate-General of Japan in Denver

#### **Supported by**

Japan Society of Northern California  
Japan America Society of Nevada  
LA Tokyo-kai  
Japanese Association of Colorado  
Japan-America Society of Oregon

#### **Sponsored by**

Miyako Hotel Los Angeles  
PENTAX Imaging Company  
Denver Tofu  
Pacific Mercantile Company



# 2009 JLPT UPDATE



The registration period for the 2009 JLPT ended on Friday, September 25th, 2009. This year we had just over 3800 individuals register for the test, which will be held on Sunday, December 6th, 2009. During the first week of November, we will be sending out test vouchers and vital information sheets through the mail so be on the lookout for that. If you do not receive your test voucher or vital information sheet, you can print out a copy of your voucher from your profile in My Account as well as the vital information sheet from our website. This will all be available at the beginning of November.

If you have a Gmail account and are having problems receiving email from us, please unhide your Spam box to see your filtered mail.

With less than two months left before the test, we hope you are studying hard for the test and wish you best of luck in challenging the 2009 JLPT.

Past Issues (2020)	▼
Past Issues (2019)	▼
Past Issues (2018)	▼
Past Issues (2017)	▼
Past Issues (2016)	▼
Past Issues (2015)	▼
Past Issues (2014)	▼
Past Issues (2013)	▼
Past Issues (2012)	▼
Past Issues (2011)	▼
Past Issues (2010)	

Privacy - Terms

Past Issues (2009)



Breeze #39

Breeze #38

Breeze #37

Breeze Past Issues

Breeze Issues #1-#36 (PDF)

**Headquarters**

**New York Office**

**Center for Global Partnership**

**Volunteer**

**ボランティア募集**

**Japan Related Links**

**Job Openings (Updated)**

**5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100**

**Los Angeles, CA 90036**

**P. 323.761.7510**

---

**Annual Report**

**© 2019 The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles**

**Web Design.**