

**2011 JET-MIP ESSAY**

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

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RINKU TOWN – A PLACE OF LIGHTS AND COLORS

Though the all thirty-two of us boarded the same plane on the same day, at the San Francisco International Airport for a nonstop flight to the airport in Kansai, and though all of us, 10 days later, boarded a similar flight in the opposite direction, the experiences that took place in between were as unique to each of us as they were unforgettable. In my mind and in my photographs, memories of the Rinku Town Ferris Wheel and the surrounding area remain most vivid.

From the moment I first saw the Ferris wheel, it struck me as an island of color and light in a city that so far had shown me only shades of gray and rain. The first night we arrived, due to typhoon passing through, the weather conditions were deemed unfit for bicycle riding, and our wish to see the Ferris wheel closer up was denied. My window faced the right direction, so as darkness descended I had a view of the merrily spinning wheel and its many colors.

When the typhoon blew over, and conditions were suitable for biking, we visited Rinku Town on many occasions. It became sort of like a home base for us. While the institute was where we slept and where we took most of our meals, it didn't really feel like Japan. That is to say, we were surrounded by so many non-Japanese people, and ate so much non-Japanese food, that while it didn't feel like America, it didn't really feel like Japan either. Rinku was the nearest easily accessible place that looked and felt like we all thought Japan would.

One particular evening, Tim and I took the Institute's shuttle to Rinku, and after visiting the Hyaku-En shop and the supermarket, we waited for the return shuttle as the sun set. The entire complex was awash in evening sunrays, and saturated with orange-cream light. The lights of the Ferris wheel had just been lit, and as darkness hadn't taken over yet, their light was soft pastel-colored.

I never actually went up in the Ferris wheel, though throughout the trip it remained a gaily-lit anchor in the night sky; like stars to ancient mariners, the Ferris wheel at Rinku was a constant reminder that if we headed in that direction we would be somewhere familiar.

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