

VOICES From THE NEW YORKERS

“Adulthood” in Kimonos and Suits by Kia Cheleen



Japan recently celebrated “Coming of Age Day,” where young adults all over Japan who have reached the age of 20 in the past year will be celebrating their adulthood. Women are dressed in colorful kimonos with beautiful obi sashes and intricate hair ornaments. Men were dressed in traditional Japanese clothing or in Western-style suits. They are ready to be celebrated as adults at their seijin-shiki (Coming of Age ceremony).

When I first went to work in Japan, I had to give a speech at age 22 to a group of 20-year-old Japanese about “becoming an adult.” What on earth did I know as a young American about becoming an adult? I had just graduated from college! It made me think about the benefits and expectations of “coming of age” in each country. At a certain age, we get the right to drive, vote and consume alcohol, amongst other things. Our responsibilities increase. Are we ready for more responsibilities at a certain age, such as paying bills, feeding ourselves and making sure we are going to school or work on time? Do we have good enough decision-making abilities or life experience, for example, to vote for the leaders of our country?

We now have coined the phrase “adulthood” when we feel like we are doing something which is “grown up.” Who defines what it means to be an adult versus not an adult? Does putting on a suit or a kimono suddenly make us adults? What was your defining moment when you felt you had become an adult?

(Kia Cheleen is an intercultural consultant and a Japanese/English writer, translator and interpreter. Visit her at www.gillespieglobal.net or e-mail kcheleen@gmail.com)

THE JAPAN VOICE

COOL JAPAN from New Yorkers’ Viewpoints



From left: Mr. Nakajima, Ms. Onuma, Ambassador Yamanouchi and Mr. Yoshimori

Celebrating the New Year Japanese Style in New York New Year’s Business Card Exchange Party

The Consul General of Japan in New York hosted a New Year’s Party at the Nippon Club on January 10 alongside the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New York, Inc., The Nippon Club and the Japanese American Association of New York. 216 people attended the event. Following the national anthem, the CEO of each organization made a New Year’s speech and then made a toast to the New Year. Traditional Japanese New Year’s food was served and guests enjoyed themselves.

(Ryoichi Miura/Translated by Chikako Iwasaki and shunji Imai)

A Turbulent Relationship Between Japan and the United States

The second year of the Reiwa era, 2020, is an important year for us [Japanese]. We have the Tokyo Olympic/Paralympic Games, and the United States has the Presidential Election. These happenings might greatly affect the Japanese economy. Looking back at history, it’s been 60 years since New York City and Tokyo became sister cities, 60 years since the Japan-United States Security Treaty was established and 75 years since the war ended. It has also been 115 years since The Nippon Club has been established and 500 years since Magellan found the strait and globalism began.

Finally, it’s been 160 years since a group of samurai diplomats arrived in the United States to exchange instruments of ratification

of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. They left Yokohama on February 13, stayed in Washington, D.C. for three weeks and arrived in New York on June 16, 1860. This was the beginning of our relationship with the United States.

There are lots of things that we need to discuss in the world: North Korea, the Taiwan election, the Middle East and so many other things that are going on. To have a good relationship with the United States is the core to building peace and prosperity. I’m hoping people who are in New York City will play a big role to make this relationship stronger.

(Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi, Consul General of Japan in New York)

Alternating Between Hope and Fear

Looking back at the year 2019, there was only a 3% growth in the economy compared to last year, the lowest since the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. With a global business recession causing trade conflicts, a decrease in investment activities, sensitive situations in developing countries, high pressure from the economic situations in Argentina and South America, the situation in the Middle East, a price hike on daily use products, inequality in economics and citizens protesting corruption, there are so many things going on in the world. I even had to cancel a business trip to Chile due for security reasons. On the other hand, we can see hope in the manufacturing industry. The economy in China is getting better, so specialists see a bright future in the global economy. If that is the case, then surely the global economy will be better. This year will be an exciting year for us as we have Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. We want to continue to exchange ideas and create a bright future for Japanese society in this city.

(Katsurao Yoshimori, President of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

The Year of New Prosperity

There are a lot of big news stories around the world this New Year’s season, so I feel this year will be the “Year of Change.” Last year was the beginning of the Reiwa era, a new epoch for Japan whose name represents beautiful souls sharing their hearts with each other and fostering cultural exchange. In the Rugby World Cup, the Japanese team fought very well, and people of the world understood that Japan is a peaceful country with a principle of hospitality called omotenashi. This is the second year of Reiwa, and we will have the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, so Japan will receive focus from media all over the world.

The Nippon Club was established in 1905. This year we are celebrating our 115 year anniversary. Members are enjoying our programs and fostering friendship between Japan and the United States. Since this year the world will have its eyes on Japan, we would like to introduce Japanese traditional culture through our cultural programs, art galleries and sport events. As you know, there are a lot of facilities in this building, including a Japanese restaurant. So please enjoy the delicious taste of Japanese cuisine like shabu shabu and such. 2020 is the year of the rat in the Japanese traditional calendar; it represents prosperity and the beginning and growth of new things. I would like to make the club more enjoyable and contribute to the members. (Masaki Nakajima, President of the Nippon Club)

Year of the Census

In the Japanese American Association, which we call JAA, 80% of the members are Japanese from Japan, and 20% are Japanese American. We have been contributing through our many activities. This year is the year of the census which occurs every 10 years. It is very important for struggling ethnic groups to get social welfare from the government. As you know, most Japanese in the United States keep their Japanese nationality because Japan does not permit dual citizenship like the United States. Because of that, Japanese nationals do not have voting rights, and it means politicians do not care about people who cannot participate in elections of any kind. However, even if you do not have American citizenship, you can fill out the census documents as a Japanese in the United States so that you are counted as part of the “Japanese related population.” So please do not throw away the application form, and please fill it out. January 31 is Fred Korematsu Day, which is a memorial day of protest to the President’s Order 9066 in World War II. That order forced Japanese Americans to be sent to concentration camps. I want to highlight Japanese American history this year and promote to more young generation members such as Japanese weekend school graduates. (Susan Onuma, President of the Japanese American Association of New York)



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