Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to this distinguished group to discuss my impressions of Japan. I feel honored.

I spent six weeks in Japan in the months of June and July earlier this year (2000). The University of West Florida (UWF) selected me to accompany and tutor five UWF students: Jennifer Anson, Allen Borrelli, Marie Desommes, Kimberly Gaston and Emily Krakau. I am pleased to see two of the students, Kim and Marie, in attendance at this function this evening.

We were attached to Tokyo Communication Arts College, commonly known as TCA. The five students were put up at their respective dormitories. My wife and I were given a tiny 234 square feet apartment in the suburbs of Tokyo (near Kiba station on the Tozai line). Japan is a very rich country, but not in housing. When we first entered the apartment, we were shocked at the smallness of it. But we got adjusted to the compact space within a couple of weeks. This is a testimony to the ability of human beings to adjust. After two weeks, I was perfectly happy in the tiny quarters. There was a bathroom, a one-burner cooking stove, two single beds, and a table which served both as a dining table and as a study table. What more is needed after all? Many of our needs are artificial. In the small apartment, we even accommodated a guest for a week.

Classes were held thrice a week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The long weekends were designed for educational and cultural travel. I am pleased to say that my students made full use of the weekends to study culture, focused largely on bar and night-club culture. You can learn a lot about Japanese culture in the crowded pubs called Izakayas. The salarymen frequent these bars after long working hours. The salarymen are more open, jovial and gregarious at these watering holes than at their work stations. American men can usually find pretty Japanese women to strike conversation with.

In the time available to me, I shall cover the following topics:

1. A quick review of the tourist spots that we as a group visited
2. Observations on Japanese culture
3. Observations on Japanese elections and democracy

OSAKA, KYOTO, NARA AND HIROSHIMA. We took one week off from classes to travel to Osaka, Kyoto, Nara and Hiroshima, all located in the southern part of the main island of Honshu.
Shigeko Honda, and Dr. and Mrs Michael Yots were our leaders during this one week of travel away from Tokyo. Shigeko led us through castles, gardens and up and down the valleys and mountain tops. I had hard time keeping up with her fast pace. She is amazingly fit and full of vigor. It must be the result of her Zen practice.

We visited many places, too many to catalog here. The favorite ones included:

Kamakura. The Daibatsu or the Great Buddha in Kamakura moved me greatly. This immense bronze statue of seated Buddha, 11 meters or about 35’ high, impacted my whole being. The Great Buddha was built in early 1200’s during the Yoritomo Minamoto period. Once it had a roof over it; a tidal wave washed it away 500 years ago. The Buddha continues to sit under the open skies with hills as a backdrop. He sits on a stone pedestal, a broad shouldered figure in deep meditation, with his head slightly bowed forward, his robes streaked green by centuries of sun, rain and the wind.

Nijo-Jo. This palace in Kyoto was built in the early 1600s as a second residence for the Tokyo-based Shogun. The palace took 23 years to complete. Each room in the palace is lavishly decorated with screen paintings by leading artists of the day (the Kano school). Its many rooms were finished in various styles. There was no furniture. The Shogun and his attendants sat on the floor with their legs folded under, in the Japanese style. The floors were squeaking floors that made it difficult for intruders to enter unannounced. This palace was featured in the popular film, Shogun.

Kiyomizu Temple. Built on the side of a hill in the style of Indian temples, the Kiyomizu temple houses the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. A Bodhisattava in his great compassion gives up Heavenly abode and takes up residence among human beings to alleviate their suffering. The chief Deity in this temple can be seen only once in 33 years. The year 2000 was one such year. We were blessed with good Karma to have a view of the presiding Deity.

Todai-ji in Nara. For many people the old capital township of Nara is synonymous with Todai-ji, the great Buddhist temple built in 752 A.D. Nara was once the center of Buddhist art and learning in Japan. Todai-ji’s main hall is the largest wooden building in the world.

Todai-ji houses Japan’s largest Daibatsu, or Great Buddha. A 15-meter or about 50’ high Buddha is seated on a lotus throne. It represents the Cosmic Buddha, presiding over all levels of the Buddhist universe. The religious spirit that created this immense work of art moved us greatly. One of the students in the party commented, "I am not a very religious person. I have seen many cathedrals and churches. But the religious fervor of the people who created this magnificent monument has touched me and moved me beyond measure." In the great hall of this temple, there is a wooden pillar in the rear of the building. At the bottom of this wooden pillar is a hole, which is the size of Buddha’s nostril in the bronze statue above. I believe the hole is only 18” long and probably 12” wide. If you can wiggle through this narrow hole, you are a
candidate for Buddhist Heaven. I tried to go through the tight hole, but lost my nerve. I am pleased to say that both Kimberly and Marie (in the audience) wiggled through the hole. They are thus good candidates for the Buddhist Heaven. I will have to wait till my next life.

Geisha Girls. As we were cruising the narrow streets of Kyoto, we came across fully costumed Geisha girls. The men in our party managed to get close to the girls and had their pictures taken with them. Later we learned that these Geisha girls were not authentic; they were in fact college students on lark from school for a day, dressed in rented Geisha kimonos.

Hiroshima. Hiroshima Peace Park generated different emotions. On August 6, 1945, 140,000 lives were extinguished instantaneously in Hiroshima. Kimberly had tears. Everyone was somber.

The bomb was dropped for the stated reason of shortening the War. If this explanation is accepted, what was the need for a second bomb that fell three days later on Aug 9 on Nagasaki?

OBSERVATIONS ON JAPANESE CULTURE

I have learned many things about Japan. Japan is an unique island civilization. It is separated from the Asian mainland by a large body of water. Korea, the closest neighbor, is 100 miles away. China is 500 miles from Japan. These distances, large in ancient times, helped create an unique and distinctive civilization. Japan may be compared with England in being separated from continental civilizations. England is only 21 miles from France, the distance between Dover in England and Calais in France. Japan is thus more isolated.

Japan nonetheless is a cultural daughter of China, just as the Europe is a cultural daughter of Greek, Roman and Judaic civilizations. One popular stereotype is that Japanese have been nothing more than borrowers and imitators. The truth is quite the contrary. Japan has developed in unique ways, as seen by the following:

- the thick tatami covered floors
- the sliding paper paneled walls
- the wall recesses for art objects
- the charcoal burning hibachi for heat
- the deep bath tubs for relaxation and purification
- the small manicured rock gardens which have been copied over the world
- the Zen method of meditation
- distinctive cuisine and esthetic presentation
- Kabuki and Noh drama theater
- a sense of beauty and attention to detail
These and other facets of life in Japan speak to a highly developed civilization.

Japanese language is like no other language. Even though Japan has borrowed its writing method from the Chinese and even though many Chinese words are incorporated into Japanese just like Greek and Latin words make up a greater part of the English language, Japanese is as different from the Chinese as English is from Greek. Because Japanese is a different and an unique language with no close relatives, the Japanese face many problems in learning a foreign language, especially English. Even University students who have studied English for many years lack spoken English fluency. You ask for directions in English: they begin to suck air in puzzlement.

Because of English language deficiency, Japan is falling behind in the world in software engineering and information technology. Even though India is much less developed economically than Japan, it is ahead of Japan in the fields of software engineering and information technology. Part of the reason for this gap is the widespread use of the English language in India. Prime minister Yoshiro Mori visited India in August, 2000 to negotiate a deal with the Indian government. From 5,000 to 10,000 Indian computer professionals may be imported into Japan from India.

IMPLICATION OF JAPANESE UNIQUENESS. Japan’s geographic distance from the rest of Asia and its linguistic uniqueness have made the Japanese highly self-conscious. Japanese believe that they are like no other people. This awareness of uniqueness on the part of the Japanese have lead to feelings of both inferiority and superiority toward non-Japanese. Japanese tend to exhibit feelings of superiority toward their Asian neighbors. Toward the West, however, they often exhibit feelings of inferiority. This is unnecessary.

A TRUE NATION-STATE. Japanese insularity from the rest of Asia has helped it become a true nation state. A nation state is both a nation and a state. The word ‘nation’ emphasizes the idea of unity and homogeneity among the people. Japanese unity and homogeneity is evident in numerous facets. For example, a common language is spoken in the several thousand islands that make up Japan. The Japanese people belong to a single ethnic and racial stock. The aboriginal people called the Ainu inhabit the northern island of Hokkaido, but their number is very small.

Religion does not divide the people in Japan. Although three religions—Shintoism, Buddhism and Christianity—are found in Japan, they co-mingle peacefully. Buddhist temples and Shinto Shrines may occupy the same compound. A Christian wedding is followed by a Shinto ceremony. Funerals are by Buddhist rites. Different religions co-exist and co-mingle.

Japan is unique in the sense that it lacks significant religious and ethnic strife. The rest of the world is afflicted with social conflict. Both India and China are divided by ethnicity, language and religion. The United States is divided by race and ethnicity. Even Great Britain, generally regarded as unified, exhibits strong sub-national loyalties among the Scottish, the Welch and the Irish.
Japan indeed may be the most unified nation-state in the globe. This leads me to make an important observation about conformity in Japan.

CONFORMITY IN JAPAN. A sense of conformism and group loyalty is a dominant feature of the Japanese culture. To get ahead you have to get along. A nail that sticks out gets pounded down, as an often repeated saying in Japan. The group defines the individual in Japanese society. The individual is important only in as much as he is a part of the group. The cultural trait of groupism is evident in many facets of life: business leaders are similarly dressed in blue suits and ties; school children are uniformed.

Japanese trait of groupism defines even the top rungs of political leadership in the country. Japanese Prime ministers are team players; they are not strong leaders in their own person. It is hard to find in Japanese leadership the equivalent of a Winston Churchill, a John F. Kennedy or an Indira Gandhi. Japanese Prime ministers rise to their position because of their skills in consensus building and in arriving at compromises. Seldom do they rise to their position because of the strength of personality, or the force of ideas.

Karel Wolferen in his Enigma of Japanese Power (Alfred Knopf, 1989) observes as follows:

The Japanese prime minister has less real power than any head of government in the Western world, or in most countries of Asia. He also has considerably less power than he is implicitly credited with by most casual foreign observers. . .

Suzuki Zenko had polished the Japanese skills of side-stepping decisions to an extend unprecedented among post-war prime ministers. In the years when Tanaka was prime minister, a then invisible Suzuki had helped keep order within the ranks of the LDP, thus giving Tanaka a reason for picking him as prime minister. . .

His elevation to prime minister was totally unexpected, because few people had ever noticed him before. What was apparent soon enough, however, was that he had no understanding whatsoever of economic or diplomatic affairs. Suzuki’s paramount interest was never to incur anyone’s wrath, and the way to ensure this was to do absolutely nothing.

The Japanese Prime ministers are rotated out of office with great frequency. Between 1989 and 2,000, Japan had 9 different Prime ministers. Prime ministers change because of change in factional balance within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The present PM Yoshiro Mori assumed office upon the death of PM Keizo Obuchi. It is not clear how long he will last. If past history is any guide, his tenure cannot be long. He belongs to a minority faction within the LDP.

JAPANESE ELECTIONS

I was fortunate to have witnessed elections to the lower house of the Japanese Diet, the House of Representatives. Four hundred and eighty seats were filled on June 25 by a two tier election method: a
A combination of single seat method and the method called *proportional representation.*

Elections in Japan are much different from those in the United States. They are of short duration, lasting only 3 to 4 weeks.

Election dates are not fixed under the law. Within the four-year cycle of the life of the parliament, elections may be held at any time.

Two separate election methods are employed: 300 seats are filled by the American style single member district election method. The remaining 180 seats are filled by the Proportional Representation (PR) method. Under the PR method, people vote for parties, and not for individual candidates. Seats are allocated to different parties in proportion to the percentage of the vote each party receives.

The party that receives majority of the seats in the parliament gets to select the PM. If no single party has a majority of seats, a coalition government among several parties is formed. The present government headed by Mori is a coalition government of three parties: the LDP, the New Komeito and the Hoshuto.

Japan has two elections, one to each of the two houses of the national parliament. In contrast, America has many national and state level elections.

Because of the short duration of election campaigns, Japanese political parties spend less money in campaigning than do parties in the United States. Even so, Japanese parties raise millions of dollars for their war chests.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) headed by Yoshiro Mori was returned to power in June, although with a reduced margin of victory. The LDP got 233 seats, down from 270 seats in the previous election, a reduction of 37 seats. Because the LDP does not have a clear majority in the HR (233 seats out of a total of 480), it has joined hands with New Komeito( 31 seats) and Hoshuto (7 seats) to form government.

**PARTY POSITION AFTER LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS, JUNE 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Previous Strength</th>
<th>After Elections</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minshuto</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Komeito</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiyuto</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCP</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table of election data printed above shows that Japan is a multiparty system-- some ten parties competed for seats in the election of 2000. The two major parties in Japan are the LDP and Minshuto (the Democratic Party of Japan). Despite setbacks, the LDP continues to be the dominant party in Japan. The LDP has governed Japan for 42 out of last 45 years. Several reasons can be attributed for the success of the LDP.

The opposition is divided among many diverse groups and factions. The combined popular vote for the opposition parties exceeds 50 percent. Because the opposition parties compete against each other, their total share of the parliamentary seats falls below 50 percent.

The LDP is a party of patronage. It patronizes construction companies through lucrative building contracts. Some 550,000 construction companies employ over 6 million construction workers. This working force is a large reservoir of support for the LDP.

The LDP is the party of success. From being a decimated economy during the war, Japan has emerged as the leading economic power in the globe. Because the economic miracle happened under the hegemony of the LDP government, it has built strong legitimacy among the population.

DEMOCRACY IN JAPAN

Democracy in Japanese is a foreign import. It is a gift from above. The Constitution was drafted under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers. The Japanese Constitution is commonly referred to as the MacArthur Constitution.

Japan does not have a long tradition of democracy. It was ruled by authoritarian Shogun regimes between 1603 and 1868. The 15-year old Meiji Emperor was restored to power in 1868. An authoritarian constitution was adopted in 1889, with the emperor’s power being defined as sacred and inviolable. The emperor’s subjects could not use his personal name. When he traveled in public, the citizens could not look at him. They lowered their eyes.

Some of my colleagues in political science argue that Japanese democracy will not survive a national crisis. They argue that democracy has shallow roots in the Japanese soil, and that Japanese democracy is a revolution from above, not one from below. I disagree.

Japan has been a great success story of the second half of the twentieth century. From being 60 percent destroyed during the Great War, it has rebuilt itself and now is an economic leading power in
the globe. Its economy is only second to that of the United States. The economic success has legitimised the democratic regime.

The Constitution has functioned well since its adoption in 1949. Government changes, although frequent, have been made within the constitutional framework. National leaders have not been assassinated. Coups have not occurred. The generals have not grabbed power. Riots and rebellions have been few. Civil liberties have been protected. The press is free and parties compete for power.

Democracy has sunk roots into the Japanese soil. Japan has succeeded in transforming itself from an authoritarian to a democratic regime. This is a singular achievement and Japan can be rightfully proud of this achievement.

EXPECTATIONS OF JAPAN

The world expects a lot from Japan, now that it is a member of the big league.

Japan needs to reach accommodation with its Asian neighbors, and acknowledge its less-than-noble behavior during the War. An apology might even be appropriate to the peoples of China, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Readers may wish to review Iris Chang’s book, *The Rape of Nanking*, for a description of Japanese horrific behavior during the War in Nanking, China.

Now that Japan is an economic superpower, it needs to do more in helping less developed regions of the world in achieving economic development. It has a proud record of economic aid to poorer nations. It can do more.

Japan can be a natural leader of an activist Peace Movement in the world. Japan suffered a great deal on account of war. It has renounced war as an instrument of national sovereignty. Its Peace Movement is active and large. Japan should assert leadership in this important area.

Domestically, Japan must solve its housing problem. Housing is in acute short supply. Japanese have a high annual per capita income, but they enjoy a lower standard of living than people in other developed nations. This needs to be redressed.

I was told by knowledgeable Japanese that their educational system stultifies rather than simulates. Learning occurs by rote. It is burdensome. The educational system cries out for a change.

CONCLUSION

My observations of Japan leave me fully convinced that Japan will rise to meet all these challenges and do more. Its history is one of rapid transformation when the call is made.

In the short time made available to me this evening, these are a few of the observations that I am able to
make. Of course, I will be happy to answer your questions.

Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you very much for your attention.