

# KITAKYUSHU

# BRIDGES



## A Century of Changes

Bridges is taking a moment to look back at the twentieth century as the City of Kitakyushu experienced it. We will address these themes in a two-part series, starting with the environment now and writing of international relations in the next Bridges. In this issue, we describe how the city entered the century as an emerging manufacturing center that became vital to the economic and military success of Japan. Then, how in mid-century local residents reacted

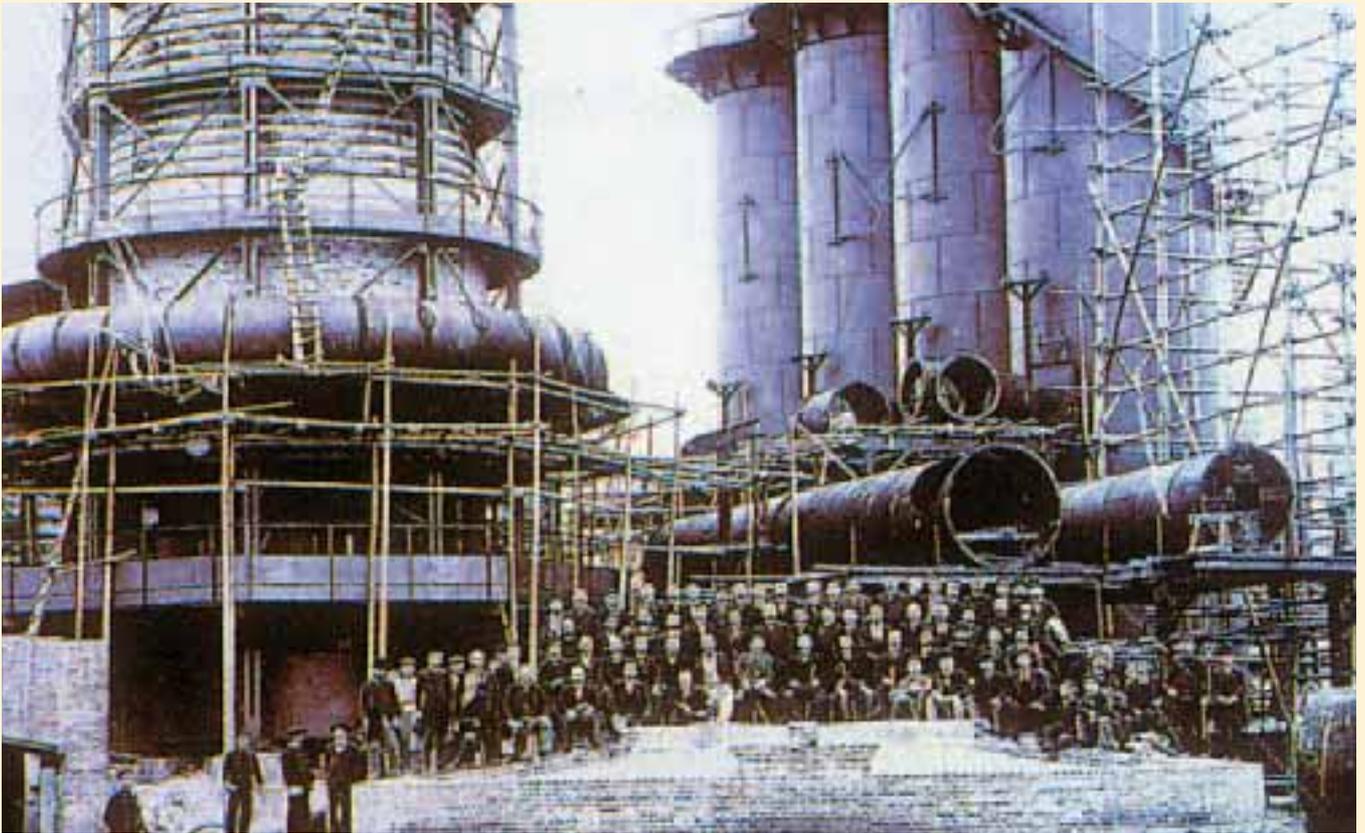
against overwhelming environmental damage and the health threat that pollution posed, and reshaped Kitakyushu into a model environmental city. But as always, this issue covers much more than just one topic; this Bridges has an interview with the Kitakyushu Center for Contemporary Art, Nobuo Nakamura, commemorates the fifteenth anniversary with Incheon, Republic of Korea, and gives the details on O-Hanami, one of Japan's most treasured traditions.

**BRIDGES**  
2004  
Vol. 22

**Inside:**

**Cover Story**  
**New in Kitakyushu**  
**Special Report**  
**Plus: Letter from Kitakyushu, Wheelchair Basketball, and more!**

**Environmental History** ..... **Page 2**  
**Kyushu Railway History Museum** ..... **Page 4**  
**Fifteenth Anniversary of Incheon Sister-city Ties**..... **Page 7**



Opening Ceremony of the Yahata Steel Works (1901)

## Environmental History of Kitakyushu

Kitakyushu's twentieth century began in 1901 with the opening of the Yahata Steel Works. National defense and modernization were the major concerns of the time, and Kitakyushu was chosen as the site for the foundry because its seaside location made transport of its products easy, unlike older foundries located in remote and mountainous mining areas. The steel forged at Yahata was crucial in making the armaments that sealed Japan's victory in its 1904-5 war with Russia, helped in the expansion of rail links throughout Japan, and contributed to the textile-focused industrial revolution that funded Japan's transition to modernity.

The Yahata Steel Works was just the first of many major metal and chemical manufacturing plants in Kitakyushu, and heavy industry soon became the backbone of the local economy. These were major developments for Japan that made Kitakyushu, not yet a city, the most developed population center on Kyushu. Steel production expanded dramatically through the first half of the century, fuelled by the demands of a rapidly growing national infrastructure and two world wars. Of course, this development came at a heavy price: pollution was staggering and Kitakyushu's natural beauty was severely damaged. But

the people of Kitakyushu depended on their city's foundries and factories for their economic well-being, and they tended to see pollution as an unfortunate but necessary corollary to "progress" — residents endured even air pollution so bad that pupils in some schools had to break from classes twice a day to wash black soot from their faces. Here, as throughout the industrialized world, people did not realize how fragile are forests and oceans, and how closely the health of the environment relates to our own.



The Yahata Skyline (1960s)



Dokai Bay circa 1965: "The Sea of Death"

## Attitudes Change

The "High-Growth Years" of unparalleled economic recovery and re-expansion following Occupation brought ever more drastic pollution to the country's land, sea and air. But in the 1950s, pollution-related health crises like the world-famous Minamata mercury poisonings convinced people that the economy should not always come first. Therefore, it was health, not conservation of natural beauty, which rose in importance at first. Just like the city of Minamata, Kitakyushu produced metals and chemicals in large quantities, and even had a bay so polluted that it was known as the "Sea of Death." In response to this new awareness of the dangers of



Volunteers on a Kitakyushu river cleanup in the 1970s (top left)

pollution, Kitakyushu women's groups began to pressure local government and industry to change their practices. By the 1970s pollution regulations were strengthened and volunteer groups were trying to restore area rivers. Within a few years, air and water quality indicators in Kitakyushu had improved noticeably, and schoolchildren no longer needed to wash soot from their faces to breathe.

## Post-Modern Environmentalism

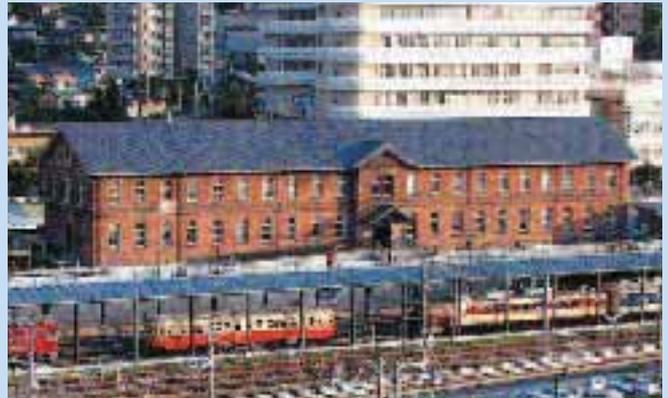
The City of Kitakyushu marked the beginning of its twentieth century by commemorating the centennial anniversary of the Yahata Ironworks with the Kitakyushu Exposition on the themes of people, community, and the environment. Over the last twenty-five years, in Japan as throughout the world, environmentalism has become a framework for purchasing decisions: those concerned for the environment purchase products that consume less energy and wreak less harm in their creation, use, and disposal. Kitakyushu has been making considerable effort for the past two decades on this model. Reducing the importance of manufacturing in the local economy, the city has invested heavily in developing facilities like Eco-Town, a recycling technology research center and a recycling plant that processes automobiles, home appliances, office machines, and plastic bottles. The city has garnered international awards like the U.N. Global 500 and a U.N. Sustainable Development Award while continuing to encourage city residents to do what they can to reduce certain types of consumption. Through Eco-Town and the development of new technologies, like alternative energy sources, Kitakyushu is striving to become a more resource-sustainable city.



Dokai Bay: Present day

## Kyushu Railway History Museum Opens

Over the past 120 years, Japan has developed one of the most intricate train systems in the world. Indeed, trains form the mainstay of transportation here. The new Kyushu Railway History Museum in Mojiko, Kitakyushu describes this fascinating history. Retired steam and electric locomotives—once paragons of speed and efficiency—line up behind the main gate. And inside the oldest railway office building in Kyushu, tickets, schedules, signals, and maps describe the expansion of rail networks into the Kyushu countryside and their sudden retreat in the 1960s. Visitors learn that in Kyushu and throughout Japan



The New Kyushu Railway History Museum

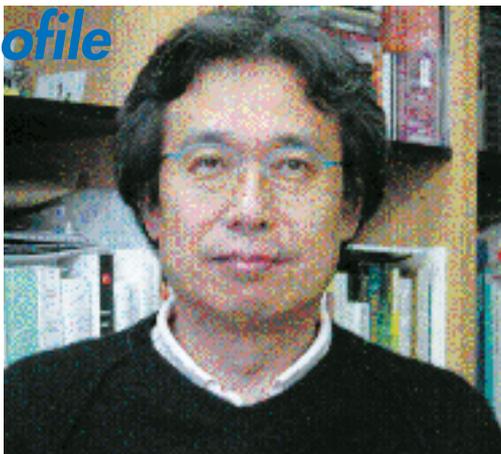


Museum entrance and a 1922 engine

the railroad industry responded to the rise of the automobile by developing convenient urban commuter networks, connecting major cities with ultra-modern bullet trains, and appealing to nostalgia for “slower” times with older trains running to countryside tourist spots—by treating trains as symbols of both modernity and antiquity.

Back outdoors in the Mini-Railroad Park, scaled-down models of Kyushu trains just big enough to carry a couple of adults or a few children run. Kids, for their part, love it. And a quick circuit in one of the mini-locomotives, which ends exactly where it starts, may leave an adult feeling silly, but it reminds you that trains appeal to us as more than just modes of transportation.

## Kitakyushu Profile



Nobuo Nakamura is Director of the Center for Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu, where he has worked tirelessly to attract world-renowned artists and to develop young artists locally. Recently, he has been working on a project called “Bridge The Gap” with the aim of bringing together the top minds in various academic and artistic fields to stimulate new discussions of the interplay between science, art, and daily life. The first “Bridge The Gap” symposium was held in July of 2001. Bridges visited Mr. Nakamura in his office.

### 1. What inspired you to involve yourself in the arts?

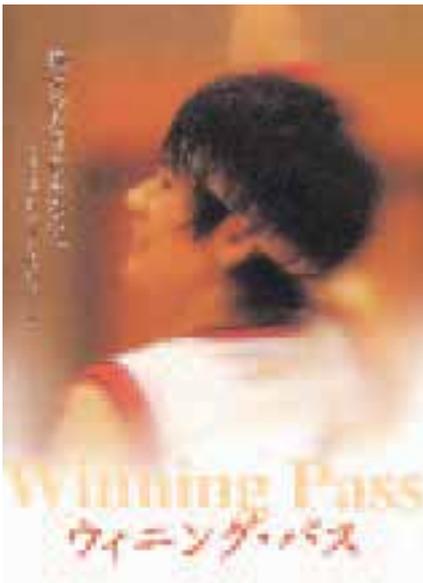
Well, usually in Japan, people start out in art history, then become curators of museums, and so on; they enter the arts world step by step. But my process was quite different because I actually started out studying law, so nothing related to art, but then I stopped in the middle of university and went to England for what was supposed to be just a trip. That was a big mistake, [laughs] because there I met lots of artists and poets and all different people, and it was through these people that I became interested in art. Their stories, and their everyday lives were very interesting to me.

### 2. Would you tell me about the CCA and how you came to head it?

That’s a long story too: I published a book that became very well known in the Japanese art world, especially among art students. It so happened that I did a book-signing in Kitakyushu, and a few people here were really interested in my book, and we began discussing new art programs for Kitakyushu. That is when I came up with the idea of the Center for Contemporary Art. But at first, our events were only one week every summer and involved two or three international artists and about twenty students. After we did this seven times, the city started giving us a little money and we started really talking with the city about founding the CCA.

We wanted to have the best people in the world to come. There are so many artists in some cities. If you throw a stone in New York, you will probably hit an artist, but not around here. And artists, especially well-known artists, who are used

# Wheelchair Basketball Update



Poster for "Winning Pass"

**W**inning Pass," a feature film shot entirely on location in Kitakyushu with the support of the city's film commission and released last November, tells the story of Kenta, a rebellious and basketball-skilled teen, his unwaveringly supportive girlfriend, and his hard-working parents. Kenta and his girlfriend start with big plans to escape and find independence. But after a fight with his parents Kenta stomps out of

the family's home, motorcycles into a stormy night, and meets with a tragic traffic accident. He wakes up to the bitter sobbing of his mother and legs that will no longer respond: he is paralyzed from the waist down. Eventually, Kenta starts playing wheelchair basketball, the girlfriend supports, and mom and dad work hard. Life may not be easy, we see, but its burdens are best shared. The filming of "Winning Pass" involved over a thousand local residents as extras and features appearances by some of Japan's top wheelchair athletes, such

as hometown favorite Seiji Yamami.

The release of the movie closely followed the third international wheelchair basketball tournament hosted by Kitakyushu. This time, it was the Champions' Cup, which involved four men's teams. Australia came out on top, followed, in order, by Italy, Japan, and Korea. Kitakyushu regards both the tournaments it hosts and this film as valuable not only for their own sake, but also in helping to increase awareness of the physical and social barriers faced by the handicapped.



Korea and Japan face off in the Champions' Cup

to traveling in a very small circle of curators, critics, fellow artists, and such, do not want to come to some place that they have never heard of. When we started, none of these people knew where Kitakyushu was and they were not interested, but by going to the galleries to visit these artists, ten times, twenty times, we gradually convinced some of them to come here. And after a while, artists were asking us if we had space for them. And that's how Kitakyushu and the CCA got on the art world map. Now the CCA is even a model for other museums in Japan. Places like Tokyo and Nagoya send people here to learn about how we do things.

### **3. What were your impressions of Kitakyushu before you arrived here, and what do you think of it now?**

Most Japanese cities are really boring because they all try to imitate Tokyo; when people from Tokyo go to Fukuoka they get bored because it's just a smaller version of the same thing. But Kitakyushu has a different feel to it. The architecture here, for example is really unique, with many buildings designed by famous architects. Or the tiny little houses stuck on the hillsides of Yahata. Japanese tend to think of their culture as only the temples in Kyoto, but there is a hundred years of culture here springing from the metal works. The interesting thing about Kitakyushu is that the people are not oriented towards Tokyo.

### **4. Many people feel that contemporary art is inaccessible and hard to understand. How do you respond to this?**

I agree, because if I weren't in the arts world I would never think about it, either. I had never been in a museum before I

was twenty; I just happened to meet artists in pubs and become interested in the way they talked. In general, people try too hard to understand contemporary art, but they don't need to. Very naturally, if you just look at it and it is interesting, then that is all you need. It's quite straightforward. Artists have always worked in pretty much the same way, no matter what generation, so when Cézanne and Guaguin lived, and started painting, no one accepted it; they thought these guys were crazy or stupid. But after fifty or a hundred years people started to think that their paintings are great. That hasn't changed.

### **5. The CCA has hosted a seminar called "Bridge the Gap?" here in Kitakyushu. Would you tell me about it?**

Contemporary art interacts with all different fields of knowledge, but when art focuses too much on itself it loses appeal and tends to become very hierarchical. But when people from various fields get together, they have really interesting discussions about all sorts of things without worrying about the hierarchy. In other words, if you already know what is going to come out of a conference before you start, there is no real reason to go through with it; we wanted to have the kind of conferences where something disastrous happens, where new ideas come out. So we invited thirty people from all kinds of fields—scientists, architects, sociologists, all kinds of people—and all kinds of interesting things came out, which we collected and published in a book that has done very well in America and Europe. Our goal is to make this a regular event and open it to the public.

# LETTER FROM KITAKYUSHU

**A**nnyonghaseyo!  
My name is Yeo Younhee and I am from the City of Ulsan in the Republic of Korea. I came to Kitakyushu this June, after a one-month orientation in Shiga Prefecture, on a training program run by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) to learn about promoting tourism. My first impressions of the city were that it is near to my own Ulsan, and that it is a very pleasant place to live. Tourist information signs in Kokura station are written in Korean, English, and Chinese and make life here comfortable.

My knowledge of Kitakyushu before coming here was very limited: I had learned of it as one of Japan's four major industrial centers and that it focused on the metal,



Yeo Younhee at work in Kitakyushu City Hall

machinery and chemical industries. I expected a landscape covered with factories. But I was wrong; when I arrived here the natural beauty of this place surprised me. The mountains, rivers, grasslands, coastal areas as well as the warm and friendly people of the city make me think of it more as a tourist spot than as an industrial powerhouse.

The place I love best here is Hiraodai, a large limestone plateau that is covered with limestone formations that look like meandering sheep and mysterious caves like the nationally-designated Senbutsu limestone cavern. It is a place you can enjoy throughout the year.

Please visit the Kanmon strait, where past, present and future coexist. The century old Mojiko Station awaits you. Also, the soothing sounds of the sea, the nightlights of Shimonoseki across the strait, the sight of the cars crossing the Kanmon Bridge and the ships coming and going through the strait will surely warm your heart.

About twenty minute by train from the city center sits Mt. Sarakura. The perfect weekend escape for those who enjoy hiking. It takes about an hour and a half to reach the summit, during which you listen to songbirds. Looking down from the top of the mountain is probably the best view in the city. On the way down take a dip in the hot springs, where you can soak outdoors and look back at your climb. It is another view well worth seeing. Kitakyushu, formed by the amalgamation of five cities in 1963 in search of stability and economic prosperity, was the first city on the island of Kyushu to reach a population of one million. And forty years later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is still reinventing itself. It has both beautiful nature and wonderful people. Why don't you come take a look for yourself?

Yours Truly,

Yeo Younhee

## Nature in the City:

**U**nlike many cities, Kitakyushu is lucky enough to have beautiful natural escapes within its limits. Mt. Sarakura, a six-hundred meter peak that dominates the scenery of the Yahata district, is the most visible of these. Mt. Sarakura is a favorite climb of Kitakyushu residents, one of the best features being that a car is unnecessary to access it: you can walk from the train platform to the top of the mountain. The climb is relatively short, only about five kilometers, during which you will see almost no human-made features besides the trail itself. Once at the peak, though, the entire landscape of Kitakyushu spreads out before you in a 180-degree panorama. Turn to the south to see Kyushu's rolling mountains stretch past the horizon. Those without hiking boots can ride the cable car that lifts passengers to the summit in style. And for people seeking a few comforts in the forest, a Shizen-no-Ie, or Nature Home, sits a few hundred meters away and provides a great place for individuals or groups to take a lunch-break.

The most famous feature of Mt. Sarakura can only be enjoyed in darkness; the expansive view of the lights of Kitakyushu at night is said to be worth a hundred million dollars, although no one has checked the monetary value for sure. And you may find yourself in good company—following a little known Japanese tradition, every New Years, a hundred or so diehard individuals even collect on the peak of Mt. Sarakura to welcome the first dawn of each new year.



Nightview from Mt. Sarakura

# Fifteenth Anniversary for Sister-cities Kitakyushu and Incheon

Last year the City of Kitakyushu and the City of Incheon, Republic of Korea celebrated the fifteenth year of their sister-city relationship. The two cities agreed to establish ties in 1988, the year that Seoul hosted the Olympics, as a way to formalize and build on long-standing connections that began as private visits and sports exchanges. Since then, along with the exchange of diplomatic visits and other formal events, the relationship has

allowed citizens of both cities to experience each other's cultures through home-stays and folk art performances. Last year the two cities commissioned and exchanged statues that symbolize



Korean dancers perform at a culture exchange



Dedication ceremony for memorials given to Incheon (top left) and Kitakyushu (bottom right)



A Kitakyushu Taiko drum group performs in Incheon

the importance of their relationship.

Economic links have also been an important component of the connection between Incheon and Kitakyushu. Both cities have been regular and active participants in "Pan Yellow Sea City Conferences," first held ten years ago, which aim to encourage trade throughout East Asia. And just recently, both cities have been declared deregulated zones by their national governments last year. Under these trade-promoting programs, barriers to international trade will be reduced, leading to a potentially dramatic expansion in trade between the two cities.

# A Glimpse of Japan

## O-Hanami

This section of Bridges introduces topics of Japanese culture as seen in and around Kitakyushu. This time, we are jumping the gun by a few weeks in introducing O-Hanami, or cherry-blossom viewing. O-Hanami is one of the favorite events of the year because it signals the beginning of spring with the beautiful blossoms of Japanese cherry tree. Cherry blossoms bloom just as temperatures warm enough to allow picnicking, a seemingly perfect combination. Flowering starts in Okinawa and creeps up the island chain over the course of a month and a half as the weather gradually shifts. To provide the right space for O-Hanami, cities plant cherry trees throughout parks and other open spaces. In Kitakyushu, Kokura Castle is the most popular site for O-Hanami. People sit under the trees and enjoy their first chance to frolic outdoors in months with barbecues, games, and a little bit of the alcohol.



Enjoying O-hanami at Kokura Castle



### Population:

1 million; 11th largest city in Japan, 2nd in Kyushu Region

### Climate:

Temperate; Mean temp: 15

### International Recognition

UN Global 500 Award for Environmental Clean-up; UNCED Local Government Governmental Honors for Environmental Education; Earth Summit 2002 Sustainable Development Award.

### Industries

*Traditional base*— steel & metal, ceramics, machinery, chemicals, shipping  
*New industries*— computer software, environmental technologies, robotics, assistive technologies

### Local Life:

- \*With 1048 hectares of parkland, 3rd per capita among major Japanese cities
- \*Summer season of exciting festivals
- \*City of mountains and waterfronts

### Current Projects:

- New Hibiki Port (open in 2004)
- New Kitakyushu Airport (open in 2005)

Website: [www.city.kitakyushu.jp/~english/](http://www.city.kitakyushu.jp/~english/)



Published by: International Relations Section  
City of Kitakyushu  
1-1 Jonai, Kokurakita-ku, Kitakyushu 803-8501 JAPAN  
PHONE: 81-93-582-2162 FAX: 81-93-583-7947

Edited by: Craig Colbeck  
E-mail: 11030100@mail2.city.kitakyushu.jp  
No. 0312085F  
Published 2004/03/01