

PAC O'CONNOR
JAPAN'S MODERN
IMAGE
WEEK 12

1995: JAPAN'S *ANNUS HORIBILIS*

- **January: The Kōbe earthquake**
- **March: The Sarin Jiken**
- **August: WWII + 50 years: Japan must apologise!**

Reading 1: The Kōbe earthquake



1995 WAS A BUMPER YEAR FOR BAD JAPAN NEWS with the Kōbe earthquake in January, the Sarin attack in March, and, in August, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War.

ON JANUARY 17 1995, SOON AFTER THE KOBE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK, a friend in Japan sent Hannu Aronsson some TV images from Japan on IRC (Internet Relay Chat), and she posted them on a simple website in Helsinki, Finland.

Over the next few days, the world's newspapers hurried to Hannu's site and her TV photos were used again and again by newspapers around the world. Here's her original message:

The earthquake happened early morning 5:45am JST January 17 near Kobe, epicenter was at Akachi. 7.2 on the Richter scale. Reported (as of 11:45pm January 17 Tokyo news) 1590 dead, 1017 missing, 6334 injured, 7876 homes destroyed, 900000 houses without electricity, many without water and gas. Telephone calls not going through to many places. Shinkansen ruined, JR reports traffic will start again in 2-3 weeks. No water - no firefighting. Some large modern buildings and a hospital also collapsed. 600-800 aftershocks detected, 30% chance of an aftershock being as powerful as the main quake. All of this information is from IRC only. I don't know much, I just wanted to put these images up somewhere quick.

Let's hope the best for our friends in the quake area!

Clippings please, Success of Web

This WWW page and #kobe has been mentioned in the *Seattle Times*, *LA Times* (received), *San Jose Mercury*, *SF Chronicle* (received), *Washington Post* (sent), *Anchorage Daily News* (received), etc... I guess it got to all these papers through some common news provider.

I scanned in some of the [newspaper articles](#), check them out!

We'd like to get **clippings** that mention this URL (yup, the real world kind, with scissors from the paper, preferably whole page showing the name of the newspaper etc :-). The address is Hannu

Aronsson/kobe.html New address: Lahnatuohontie 7 A 12, 00200 Helsinki, FINLAND. Thanks

THE EARTHQUAKE was big news and hard information was limited. In 1995, Japan had less than 300,000 internet users and few were posting earthquake pictures. Newspapers around the world took a short cut to Aronsson's site and reported what they could. Her site was "accessed 37655 times and transferred 770400816 bytes [pictures downloaded] in total during 45 days. Accesses from 8433 different hosts, averaging 4.4652 accesses and 91355.5 bytes transferred per host" (Aronnson 1995).

Reading 2: Reporting Kōbe, reporting Japan

SOON ENOUGH, THE WORLD'S PRESS GOT TO KŌBE and started filing reports on the stunning toll of the earthquake: 6,400 dead, \$100 billion in damage. Volunteers began arriving from Japan and around the world. Initial volunteer activity was organised by a mixed group, with little government guidance or help. Even the local Yakuza in Kōbe organised food and drink and helped old people and children. Nearly 300,000 people were in emergency shelters in cold (-2°C.) weather, including cars and tents.



SLOWLY, THE IMPRESSION of a bureaucracy unable to cope with the unexpected began to leak out of Japan. The government and city authorities hesitated to accept offers of help from other countries, even from specialized disaster teams. On the 21st January, two women from Kobe Citizens Central Hospital went to the town hall to ask for ten volunteers to help carry water at the hospital, in order to free up nurses for more specialised tasks. Town hall officials turned the women away, although 5,000 volunteers were available. Three years after the earthquake, more than 27,000 families were still living and working in

temporary buildings.

JAPAN WAS THE FIRST OF THE ASIAN 'TIGER' ECONOMIES. With few natural resources except the ingenuity of its people, one of the nation's perceived strengths had been its administrative foresight, its planning ability. But after the earthquake, with Japan getting deeper into recession in the 1990s, the world began to lose respect for Japanese-style economic management. When foreign reporters looked closer at the way Kobe City and the national government guided rescue and rebuilding after the earthquake, they connected what they saw with the larger problems in Japan's economy. Japanese and foreign reports from Kōbe soon raised questions about Japan's top-down administrative style and even its social stability. After Kōbe, the administrative foundations of Japan looked decidedly wobbly.

- “Just as the earthquake itself strips away Japan's Western veneer, revealing its Asian core and leaving it with the sort of massive death toll one would expect in a city of the Third World, so the prospect of a fatal quake exposes the unchanged, Asian contours of the Japanese soul” (Peter Popham, the *Independent*, 18 January 1995)

However, Brandon Robshaw found a ‘festival of schadenfreude’ in the British press: gloating over the slow official response to disaster relief, Japan's punctured pride in its technological presentation.

- “Of course, Japan is not Utopia. But Japan is certainly no further from Utopia than this country.” Robshaw found that, “the disaster is being used as an opportunity to score points over them. It's almost as though an Asian country has no business being a First World Country” (the *Guardian*, 1 February 1995) [Hammond and Stirner 1997: 102, 101].

READING 3: WEIRD AGAIN: THE SARIN ATTACK ON THE TOKYO SUBWAY



THE SARIN JIKEN BEGAN IN THE TOKYO SUBWAY IN MARCH 1995 BUT IT SOON BECAME A COMPOSITE OF ABOUT FOUR MAJOR INCIDENTS, EACH OF THEM A MAJOR STORY. ON MARCH 20 1995, THE RELIGIOUS GROUP AUM SHINRIKYO organised an attack using the poison gas sarin on passengers on the Tokyo underground which left twelve people dead and injured about 5,500. The group's leader, Asahara Shoko, was eventually arrested and indicted for murder in relation to the Sarin jiken. He and some of his 104 followers were also indicted on other charges including:

1. Murder in relation to a 'trial' sarin attack in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture in June 1994 (7 killed, 600 injured)
2. The kidnapping and murder of lawyer Sakamoto Tsutsumi and his wife and infant son
3. The kidnapping and death of Kariya Kiyoshi (Tokyo notary public) in February 1995
4. The lynching (group murder) of Ochida Kotata (Aum member) in February 1994.
5. Another possible thirty-three murders of Aum followers between 1988 and 1995.

THE US MEDIA WERE AT A LOSS IN REPORTING THE TOKYO UNDERGROUND ATTACK Many, like *Time* magazine's James Walsh, reached for their stock of hand-me-down psychology:

"SHOKO ASAHARA, THE FOUNDER OF AUM SHINRIKYO (AUM Supreme Truth), may be the man of whom all Japan is terrified right now, but not so many years ago he was simply a failed purveyor of health tonics. Bushy-bearded and usually pictured wearing satiny pajamas, Asahara, 40, admires Hitler, boasts that he can levitate and offers to bestow superhuman powers on his disciples. Yet a look at his life reveals a rather pathetic figure at war with the world..."

THE JAPANESE MEDIA RELATIONSHIP WITH AUM WAS COMPLICATED Until the Sarin incident most Japanese newspapers left Aum alone, ignoring the rumours about the crimes associated with the cult. Some journalists said that that at the time there was a taboo against criticizing religious organizations. One of the few exceptions was the *Mainichi Shinbun's* 1989 'Aum Shinrikyo no Kyōki' series, which went into Asahara's criminal background and explored the stories emanating from the compound at Matsumoto.

TO DATE, NONE OF THE GLOBAL MEDIA has been able to explain Aum or Asahara. Either they don't fit any parameters – menace, exotic etc – or they fit them all. In the end, they were just "weird". Mullins, Mark R. 1997. "Aum Shinrikyo as an Apocalyptic Movement." in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer, eds. New York, NY: Routledge. 313-324.



Reading 4: War memories: JAPAN MUST APOLOGISE!

1995 WAS FULL OF JAPAN NEWS, BUT NONE OF IT WAS POSITIVE In January, the Kōbe earthquake (Hanshin daishin). In March, the Sarin attack on the Tokyo underground. Then in August came the 50th anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the 50th anniversary of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. The world press reporting of the earthquake showed lamentable bureaucratic inflexibility in Kōbe and Tokyo, and this led to a reinterpretation of Japan at national level. The Aum incident made Japan's institutions look out of touch, and Japan as a whole look a lot more dangerous.

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PACIFIC WAR did Japan few favours either. As we saw in coverage of the 1971 Imperial visit to Europe, memories of Japanese ill-treatment of soldiers and civilians remained fresh, whatever *The Times* might say in amelioration. 1995 brought out a latent hostility towards Japan in Britain and the United States, but this was only partly rooted in War memories. In Britain, the press were keen to assert Britain's moral superiority in discussions of Japan's 'failure to apologise' for the war, and in the fact that the United States, not Britain, bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In January 1995, the John Major government in Britain decided not to send Japan the same invitation to the Victory over Japan celebrations as it would later send to Germany for the Victory in Europe celebrations. Major was keen to establish a compensation fund for British Prisoners of War and veterans of the Pacific War, but met with no success in Tokyo. A series of articles in Britain's conservative press promoted the Major campaign:

"THIS MAN REPRESENTS JAPAN. HE WILL BE AN HONOURED GUEST AT THE VE-DAY CEREMONIES. THIS MAN WAS TORTURED BY THE JAPANESE. HE WILL NOT BE INVITED TO THE VE-DAY CEREMONIES" (*DAILY STAR* 22 JANUARY 1995)

"JAPAN MUST BE MADE TO APOLOGISE" (*DAILY MAIL*, 23 JULY 1995)

"SAY SORRY TO POWs, MAJOR ORDERS JAPAN" (*DAILY EXPRESS*, 29 JUNE 1995)

"JAPAN ON VERGE OF APOLOGY" (*THE GUARDIAN*, 8 AUGUST 1995)

Japan had been apologising for fifty years, but when in August another official apology came, it was treated as a victory:

"VETERANS WELCOME JAPAN'S APOLOGY FOR PRISON CAMPS" "TRIUMPH AFTER YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING" (*DAILY EXPRESS*: 12 AUGUST 1995)

This reaction was prompted by a letter of apology written by Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi to John Major, but then the *Guardian* maintained that it was the wrong apology, as Japan should have apologised "for going to war in the first place" (14 August 1995). There were also complaints that Murayama's letter only repeated what Hosokawa had said in his 1993 apology. Interestingly, Murayama's letter had been sent before the Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversaries, but not published by the British Government until afterwards, which allowed the press campaign for apologies to gather force during the most sensitive period (Hammond and Stirner 1997: 104-5).