

## JAPAN TIMES BLOGROLL

## What Japan Thinks

*What Japan Thinks* is a blog that delves into the nation's psyche and returns with sociological tidbits such as how many Japanese find their own faces embarrassing (two out of five); the percentage of Japanese men who "tidy their nose hair" weekly (25); and how many people think "Tandoori chicken" when they hear the words "Christmas dinner" (45.5 percent of respondents). Ken Yasumoto-Nicolson, a mobile-phone software engineer hailing from Scotland and currently based in Kansai, tracks down Japanese surveys, translates them and posts them under the pseudonym Seron.

### How did you get started in blogging?

The spur was a long-time quest I had to find out the reality behind the oft-quoted figures of Japan being 90 percent or more Buddhist *and* Shinto. Anyone who's been in Japan for any length of time will suspect that most people just follow the rituals, but I was looking for data to back that up. Eventually I found that data, translated the survey and posted it to a bulletin



Ken Yasumoto-Nicolson, the Scottish blogger behind What Japan Thinks

board. After a couple of months, I thought I could translate more surveys and perhaps make some money as I improved my translation skills. Thus What Japan Thinks was born.

### What is it about surveys that interests you?

I do get somewhat annoyed by people posting on the Internet about how "the Japanese are all . . .," painting them with a

broad brush that says more about the poster than about the Japanese, and I do enjoy rebutting these comments with quotes from recent opinion polls! On a personal level, surveys help me understand a bit more about Japan, and mobile-phone topics have a direct relationship to my day job.

### **What kind of posts get the most page views?**

I'd love to say some of my more in-depth translations of facets of Japanese society, but as you can see by looking at my Last Month's Top 10 list, it's the trivia that far outweighs the serious. My three top posts of all time are about Japanese emoticons, foreigners that Japanese would like to marry, and wives' farting.

### **And which are your favorites?**

The farting wives poll is one of my personal favorites, and it still lingers in my monthly Top 10 most visited pages even after two years!

For my more serious content, it's the official government-sponsored polls that stand out. As well as telling us what the people think on weighty topics, one can read between the lines and find out what the government thinks too. Statistics are not just the raw numbers; realizing how the framing of the question can influence the results is another key to understanding polls.

### **Do you think surveys are a good barometer of public opinion?**

Ah, I could fill a page or two with my opinions on this, but the main key to judging the value of a poll is to look at the sampling method. Most of the polls I translate are Internet-based, with the respondents chosen from a large pool of people who have signed up to answer questionnaires in exchange for a little money. I avoid most self-selecting surveys as the problem of sample bias often renders them useless, although one company whose surveys I translate targets heavy mobile-phone users, which I think is an interesting demographic, so I feel in that case the value of the data outweighs the sampling issues. I also think people who dismiss all opinion polls as inherently flawed just because results don't always match their expectations are fooling themselves.

## What have you learned from running this site?

I think it's the importance of networking that stands out the most. I'm a bit of an anti-social git, and in real life I try to avoid other foreigners, but online, even though most other bloggers are technically competitors, you can form quite strong bonds, and there's a lot of mutual cooperation.

## Have you seen blogging changing over the years?

When I started out, most blogs were either fluff or personal diary style, but over the last year or so a number of blogs tackling serious issues have launched and a couple of existing blogs have moved up a notch or two. I would highlight [Trans-Pacific Radio](#) as essential reading for anyone interested in Japan, and then use their links to find other quality sites.

*Ken Yasumoto-Nicolson is also the brain behind [brainscannr.com](#) , which claims to reveal the contents of your cranium, and [My Buddhist Name](#) , which furnishes you with a Buddhist name.*

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