

COMMUNITY



Never mind the culture gap: In a picture from the book, Yoshi croons to Maud's pregnant belly. | COURTESY OF YOSHI AND MAUD

Issues | THE FOREIGN ELEMENT

Everything you wanted to know about Western women (but were afraid to ask): No-holds-barred guide targets Japanese men .

by **Kaori Shoji**

Here's an open secret: Japanese men have a bad international reputation on the romance front. Duh! Global surveys consistently reveal they're pretty low on the list of desired men by Western women, often huddled together at the lower tiers of the pyramid along with Chinese, North Korean and Nigerian men. Sad, sad, sad.

Still, speaking from a Japanese woman's perspective, this is not entirely incomprehensible. While some Japanese men can be absolute dreamboats in business suits, the majority of *Nippon danji* (true-blue, born-and-bred-in-Japan males) often illicit complaints from their fellow countrywomen, and the list of amorous ailments is long. Very long.

One author has decided to do something about it: Caroline Pover. Having lived in Tokyo since 1996 and brought to the English-language publication scene such notable works as "Being A Broad in Japan: Everything a Western Woman Needs to Survive and Thrive" and the first in her

series for women “Ask Caroline,” Pover has now come out with the very detailed and extremely instructional “Love With a Western Woman: A Guide for Japanese Men.”

Let it be noted right now that on the back of the book there’s an “Adult Content” warning. Also worth mentioning is the frequency of passages devoted to discussions about sex and, er, the size of the Japanese male organ. (Good news: It doesn’t matter. Really.)

Not to say that the contents are offensive or reprehensible (maybe a PG-13 rating) in any way — rather, large dollops of honesty and humor top every page like whipped cream and the writing is fast-paced, friendly and enormous fun.

The book is based on 150 interviews conducted with Western women either already locked into relationships with Japanese men or who have had that experience. Or maybe they’d like to give the whole enterprise a try.

In either case, the interviewees show an astonishing amount of knowledge in dealing with Japanese men, a field Japanese women can of course relate to and certainly learn from. Pover herself has been married twice to Englishmen and mentions in the book that if her second husband doesn’t work out, she’ll be on the lookout for a Japanese one.

Readers — especially if they happen to be Japanese men looking to brush up on English skills and get some dating tips while they’re at it — may be surprised and extremely gratified to know how highly desirable they really are in the eyes of many Western women. (According to the findings of Pover, the No. 1 most desirable Nippon danji is actor Ken Watanabe.)

OK, so Ken-sama is a tough act to follow but no matter: Western women aren’t looking for icons but real-life Japanese men willing to share real-life love, preferably on a long-term-commitment basis. Pover takes the reader step by step through getting to know a Western woman, asking her out on a date (casual and otherwise), what to talk about and what not to do (whatever else you do, do not shake hands when saying goodbye), how to utilize body language, and what Western women most appreciate in Japanese men.

A lot of times, this could be physical. The book discusses the physicality of Japanese men at length, and though many Japanese men feel they could do better with a hairy chest, Pover’s book assures them that a lot of Western women are actually turned off by body hair and totally turned on by the firm, moist skin texture of the typical Japanese male.

And if your English conversational skills aren’t up to scratch, no worries. These days, Western women are more likely to be versatile Japanese speakers and, unless she happens to be your English teacher, the Western woman doesn’t really give a hoot what your TOEFL scores are.

“Rather, I think everyone’s looking for what we’ve always been looking for,” Pover said during a phone interview. “Qualities like sincerity and kindness and the ability to show affection and to say ‘I love you’ are always in favor with Western women. And I would guess for women every-

where.”

For Pover, expensive dinner dates followed by gifts of flowers are never the point of romantic relationships, but “when you have a cold and your husband or boyfriend brings you tea with lemon and ginger — now that’s romantic.”

No arguments there. But Japanese women know that this particular variety of romance is hard to come by on the archipelago. Many of us feel that chances of encountering a man who actually knows how to make a lemon and ginger tea in the first place — much less bring it to a sick woman’s bed — could be on par with the chances of being abducted by an alien. Maybe slightly less than that. Japanese men are among the most fastidious and finicky on the planet — if their wives or girlfriends had a cold, they’d be worried about getting germs first and then maybe express concern later.

“I think it depends on the man,” says Pover (whose book avoids generalizations, skepticism and cynicism like the plague). “I find that Japanese men can be great caregivers, and the women I’ve interviewed say Japanese men take great pride in caring for their families. They really have a strong sense of duty. That can make a woman feel very loved, and secure.”

As with her other works, “Love With a Western Woman” makes observations and draws conclusions almost exclusively from interviews, rather than turning to reference material.

“I like to base my writing on real interviews,” says Pover. “I like giving people a voice and that whole process, you know, of talking to people and writing about them.”

After collecting the interviews, Pover took off for a weeklong writing session in Saipan and finished the book in the course of six or so days. “That was in first week of March 2011,” she says. “And then the tsunami came and I was evacuated along with everyone else in the hotel.”

Upon her return to Tokyo, Pover decided to put the book off for a while and see what could be done to help people in Tohoku. “I put the book aside for 1½ years, because I really wanted to focus on Tohoku and activities relating to the area.”

She currently divides her time between living/working in the U.K. and Oshika Peninsula off the coast of Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture. After 3/11, the peninsula actually moved 5.3 meters from its original position, a stat often cited as an example of the scale and impact of the earthquake.

Pover says that though she will continue to work (lecturing, fund-raising) in and for Tohoku, she decided it was time for the book to come out. “I had gotten a lot of traffic on my website from Japanese men wanting tips on love relationships,” she says. “I was so surprised, because I didn’t really think Japanese men were all that interested.”

But there was an audience, and with an entire book already written, it seemed like the right time

for Pover (who runs her own publishing company called Alexandra Press) to get it out into the world. “Originally, I had just meant to get the Japanese translation version out,” she says. “But so many people told me they would love to read it in English as well.” True, Pover’s warm and spontaneous writing style may be diminished in translation, and there’s nothing like an extensive self-help book to improve language skills.

Though Pover’s book is encouraging and positive throughout — and she herself comes off at times as a head cheerleader for the Japanese Male Team — there have got to be some things about the Nippon danji that annoy the daylights out of her, right? She replies: “Women I interviewed says it’s the long working hours. I’ve heard that often, and it’s the No.1 complaint.” Yeah, we hear you.

At the same time, Pover says because they are used to being on equal footing with men, and also used to voicing their needs, a Western woman will come right out at the beginning of the relationship and let the man know what she’s looking for. “And he must do the same. Both parties should talk things over, communicate with each other and reach an agreement.”

In her view, “the problem starts when people start lowering their standards. I think men and women should go into relationships really wanting to be better friends, better lovers, lovelier people — and to give more of themselves and be more than they are.”

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