



Kimonos and cellphones: young Japanese women today.

REUTERS

# Tokyo Governor Warns against 'Criminal Genes'

By Tony Laszlo

"I was shown a corpse whose skin had been viciously stripped from the face, leaving it completely unrecognisable ..."

WITH THIS DESCRIPTION of an exceptionally brutal murder, Ishihara Shintaro, the Governor of Tokyo, set the stage for classic incitement of racism and xenophobia in "Japan – Defend your Internal Flank!", a column that appeared on the front page of the 8 May 2001 edition of *Sankei Shimbun*.

According to the governor, the Tokyo police had correctly theorised that both the victim and the perpetrator were foreign, most likely Chinese. What led the police to that conclusion? "This type of criminal modus operandi is simply not employed by Japanese people," Ishihara writes. "There is a justifiable fear that it will not be long before the entire nature of Japanese society itself will be altered by the spread of this type of crime that is so indicative of the ethnic DNA [of the Chinese]."

The governor not only holds that "ethnic DNA" exists, he declares that the Chinese have a brutally criminal set of it. The Japanese, by inference, are genetically peaceful and law-abiding. But the writer is not content to stop with essentialism and racism. Rather, he calls upon the people of Japan (but only those with Japanese blood) "to preserve the country's national fabric and social virtues", to rally around him.

"The time has come for us [the Japanese people] to drive out this encroaching evil," he says, referring to foreigners, especially Chinese, who he paints as criminals so fierce that "even the Japanese gangsters hesitate to enter" certain central districts of Tokyo at night. "We must ensure that the evil does not take root in Japan and destroy our society to come," the governor writes.

Ishihara provides no scientific evidence to back up his "criminal ethnic DNA" theory. Like the classic racist leaders before him, he

employs essentialism to lead the reader to the 'obvious' conclusion: Chinese people are intrinsically evil, and more violent and criminal than the Japanese, by virtue of their genetic make-up.

The governor does put forward statistics to 'prove' that foreigners are mostly criminals and most crime is being committed by non-Japanese. Unfortunately, the statistics are purposely misleading and often simply wrong. Ishihara states that there is no reason to believe that crime committed by foreigners will decrease. This is most curious in light of the fact that latest police figures (1999-2000) show that arrest of foreigners is on the decline. Ishihara portrays Japanese prisons overflowing with foreigners; in fact, foreigners represented 1.9% of persons arrested in Japan in

2000. And many of these foreigners (in the case of Chinese nationals, 2 373, or half) are arrested for non-criminal violations such as failure to present an Alien Registration Card.

While it is true that the *Sankei* caters to the right-leaning audience, it is also a very influential newspaper (fourth among Japan's nationally distributed dailies). Nor is Governor Ishihara some crank personality on the fringe of society. He is the elected leader of Tokyo and his popularity ratings make him a strong potential candidate for the Prime Minister seat.

'ethnic DNA'

'racially impure'

'criminal genes'

suspect spoke a language that appeared to be Chinese (or was Chinese-like)," are also common.

These kinds of problems have arisen, in part, because discrimination in Japan is sometimes structural. For example, a Ministry of Public Management 'resident certificate', used to list members of families, may not include names of family members who happen not to be Japanese, such as adopted children. Television polls ignore non-Japanese viewership. 'Japanese Only' signs on private and quasi-public establishments remain in place in more than 100 establishments across Japan. Only Japanese are allowed, as a rule, to join volunteer fire-fighting brigades.

It is not enough to urge the media to give greater and more appropriate coverage. A re-examination of the ideas of racial purity and diversity by the media and the government would effect a more lasting change to the way these concepts are understood in Japanese society.

TONY LASZLO is the Director of ISSHO Kikaku, a Tokyo-based NGO which monitors multiculturalisation in Japan. As a journalist, he covers social and political issues in English and Japanese. He also lectures at a number of Japan's universities and acts as a consultant.

they are always suffering.



Zimbabwean **Blackman Ngoro** reports on reporting Africa from Japan...

## How Africa Fares on the Nikkei Index African news in Japan is framed by investments and technology

FOR JOURNALISTS in Japan, the gathering and passing along of news is organised around press (*kisha*) clubs. These clubs effectively define news as that which has import for the West, including Japan. Good or bad, it's only news if it is likely to affect stock markets. Reporting in Tokyo is mostly about exchange rates and business, finance and economic news.

If you're African, as I am, and you want to report on Africa or the rest of the Third World, you'll have to develop your own network, one which doesn't depend on the *kisha* clubs. Not even the Foreign Correspondents

Club is big on Third World issues, unless it's something like the US bombing Sudan.

In my own case I have to be creative. To make any Third World report of mine attractive, I have to dress it up in the garb of investment or technology news, say. This is because Japanese companies are in Africa for the same reason as anyone else, and that's to turn a profit.

To get that kind of information, you must get inside Keidanren, the powerful business umbrella organisation, and then get to know the companies within that organisation which have investments in Africa, or are plan-

ning to. This is akin to establishing a completely new beat where there wasn't one before. You also have to hobnob with African diplomats and Japanese politicians who have an eye on Africa.

This is not as boring or tedious as it may sound. After a glass or two of wine a diplomat might let slip a bit of inside information, 'off the record' mind you. You can always call the following day and coolly ask him to confirm what he said. Even if he asks you to hedge it with "sources said" or "according to embassy officials", you will have earned yourself a juicy little piece.

All in all, reporting on Africa here is more exciting, but you generally have to stay sober. No falling about at the press club or you'll miss a story or a deadline and then you can kiss your job goodbye.

BLACKMAN NGORO is a Zimbabwean freelance journalist now working in Tokyo. He has worked for the South African *Sunday Independent* and *The Argus*. He is working on a masters thesis on the issue of Japanese media coverage of Africa.