

The Candle Night News Letter--#1

Candle Night Committee

The Candle Night is an event under the slogan of "Turn off lights and take it slow" on the night of summer solstice. This is a voluntary participatory event, initiated by Japan's environmental non government organizations, or NGOs. <http://www.candle-night.org/>

The Candle Night Committee hopes to extend this event from Japan to the world, to the "Global Candle Night" event. We will provide readers with information and activities of the Candle Night.

This issue features the following stories:

*The report on the "Candle Night"—Summer Solstice 2004 in Japan

*A Vow to "Diet of Light"

*Japanese stories on "candles" and invitation to the readers

'Candle Night'—Summer Solstice 2004 in Japan

Shinichi Takemura

Candle Night Committee

The trend in which people seek a new sense of values and lifestyles beyond the civilization of mass production and mass consumption in the 20th century have been gaining momentum among Japanese citizens. One example that symbolizes this trend is the Candle Night event. <http://www.candle-night.org/>

Under the slogan of "Turn off your lights, and take it slow," for two hours on the summer solstice, the Candle Night event started on June 22, 2003. This voluntary participatory event was originally initiated by several Japan's environmental non governmental organizations, or NGOs.

Responding to calls from the Candle Night committee, various groups such as the Ministry of the Environment (MOE), businesses, municipal governments and public facilities as well as artists in a variety of fields across Japan showed support for the event. Thus, the movement gained momentum and its popularity among the citizens swelled. According to an estimate by the MOE, a total of 5 million people nationwide participated in the event in 2003. Over 200 major landmark facilities, such as the Tokyo Tower, Rainbow Bridge and Himeji Castle, turned their lights off. The Candle Night became one of the major summer events.

NEC Corporation, one of the major manufactures of electrical machinery in Japan, participated in the event on a company-wide basis, with about ten million employees and their family members. Iwate prefectural government also joined the event with all of its prefectural citizens. In this way, large numbers

of businesses and local governments expressed their support for the events. It is a clear example showing cooperation and collaboration among the public sector, private businesses and citizens. This has become a major trend and is now more common in Japan.

In this year's "Candle Night—Summer Solstice 2004" event, more than 5,000 major facilities turned off their lights and convenience stores across Japan voluntarily turned off their signs. During the three day (Saturday-Monday) 2004 Candle Night, an estimated 6.5 million people joined the event.

Last year, many unique local candle events were also held across the country. During their Candle Night event, some towns established their own traditional "light"-scape, while others decided to do a Candle Night every weekend to add to local charm.

Our Candle Night does not place any specific rules on participants. It only encourages them to turn off the lights voluntarily and to enjoy something different and unusual for two hours. The idea of our initiative originated from the Voluntary Blackout movement that started in the United States, but our approach is not limited to energy saving nor power saving.

In fact, many people joined the Candle Night with strong hopes for peace and a clean global environment. However this event is symbolic. Rather than striving to attain a specific goal such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions, it simply gives people an opportunity to review and rethink their lifestyles and themselves during these two hours.

The style of participating in this event, therefore, varies from person to person. Some people focus on strengthening and reconfirming their family bond by taking extra time to enjoy dinner slowly, or taking a bath together. Others go to events such as the Candle Concert, or find themselves re-appreciating the beauty of stars alone in the darkness of downtown. On our website, a truck driver announced his intention to turn off his engines while parked.

The Candle Night event does not focus on attaining any specific goals collectively. Rather, it tries to offer participants an opportunity to discover a new sense of values, or offer an alternative lifestyle for their future. The Candle Night Committee hopes that the event can provide participants with a platform where people can join it at their own will and way.

Sharing the concept without having any specific "rules" may be one example of the Japanese way of thinking. We are sure that by expanding the scope of potential participants, the event has gained the popularity from people of all ranks, beyond regional borders and generations.

Another typically Japanese element is the use of cell phones for joining and enjoying this event. This integrates the cutting-edge IT based community with the slower-paced environmentally aware movement.

The committee invited participants to send messages via the internet several weeks before the event. The "Candlescape" platform can monitor how the participants across Japan have increased on a real-time basis. Participants visited the Candlescape website (<http://www.candle-night.org/2004/jp/apply/index.html>), and sent their messages and their postal code. With the use of postal codes, the system can identify the participant's location and can visualize it on the map of Japan.

Through this map-typed message board, the participants can realize the link with other numerous participants scattered all over Japan. They can share a sense of unity with an invisible community, a so-called a virtual community, where people are linked to each other by a new sense of value.

This network-based participation was enhanced by another web-based program, the "Candle Kaleidoscope," also available on our website. "Candle Kaleidoscope" was a real-time online message board for pictures. Participants sent photographs of their Candle Night taken by mobile phone cameras via e-mail, and those photos appeared on the board on a real time basis. The boards became a mandala-like photo gallery of various images of the Candle Night event. Please visit our website <http://www.candle-night.org/2004/index.html>, click "Kaleidoscope," and you can find the 2004 Kaleidoscope.

Some participants sent pictures of family and friends with a Haiku. Haiku is a form of traditional Japanese poetry, a 17-syllable verse form consisting of three metrical units of 5, 7, and 5 syllables. The art of Haiku or traditional space of light and shadow generated by candle light were revitalized through electrical network.

The next event is the "Candle Night"—Winter Solicits 2004. This is not a large-scaled event like in the summer, but grass-root, voluntary movement for the winter event has already started in many places. In our next news letter, we will report the result of the winter event.

Slow Life—A Vow to "*Diet of Light*"

Kaoru Mende: lighting designer, leader of the Transnational Lighting Detectives, professor at Musashino Art University

I am a lighting designer and have been working in the field of urban environmental and architecture lighting. My job is to propose designs for indoor or outdoor lighting to meet the clients' expectations. Against the current trend in lighting design i.e. adding up excessive light, I often focus on "shadow design" as a way of lighting. That means that beautiful shadows or striking darkness can be generated by reducing unnecessary light and using minimum lighting only in necessary places. As a matter of fact, lighting design

is synonymous with shadow design. I believe an important theme in lighting design is the careful use of shadows and darkness. It's not just about filling a space with light.

We are all suffering from "*bulimia of light*." In fact, there are many people who have never been moved to tears by watching the sky full of stars, or those who have stepped on shadows under the bright moon light. They have been forced to live watching bright TV and computer screens since they were born. Some children are not able to sleep in the darkness. This is especially true for Japanese people, who like to use extremely bright fluorescent lamps even for residential use. Due to limited sources of illumination in the past, the Japanese have come to associate bright lights with wealth and abundance. They have come to have an unusual sense of brightness. The Japanese are not proud of their insensitivity to light. The reason behind this insensitivity is that Japanese people have never experienced an eye-friendly, comfortably lit environment. The Japanese have worked hard to light brightly and evenly but now realize that it's the quality of the light matters, not the quantity.

Excessively high luminance levels at convenience stores and drug stores create a living environment where day and night are reversed. Nobody would be troubled, nor would anything happen if all the convenience stores across Japan turned off the ceiling lights by half and lowered the light level to 500 to 700 lux at night. Customers may be stunned at first, but they would get used to it comfortably in a week or so. Another change could be made to vending machines, which are lit up all day. The lights could be turned off during daylight hours, probably without any notice or reaction.

To reduce the excessive lighting, what we call "*Diet of Light*," is one of the central issues in the 21st century. How can we abandon the vested interest of using abundant lighting we have created since the last century, and how can we get away from "light bulimia?" Lighting habits can be compared to eating habits. This means that using a small amount of light wisely could be compared to enjoying a small amount of healthy food. Japanese people have been enjoying one of the healthiest and the most traditional diets in the world. Why can't we also enjoy "*healthy*" amount of lights, similar to the healthy traditional low-calorie, low-fat vegetarian-like diet? Should we go to a fasting center to do that? One of the important goals in living a so-called "slow life," a relaxed, simplified life, is how to use lighting effectively. We need to experience the utter darkness and its beauty to find a better way of using minimum lighting in the so-called "slow life". We need to reduce the volume of light in life. We need to start by enjoying the darkness and the night. It is important for us to turn off lights and get back to darkness because real darkness can make people realize their fears. It can also make people reflect on their inner self, give them time to think of their loved ones and of their past. Furthermore, when in complete darkness people can then appreciate and be fascinated by even small amounts of light. The Candle Night movement offers us an opportunity to share the value of a "Diet of Light" with people all over the world. The experience of darkness, even for a brief moment, is important.

Notes from the Candlelight Committee: In the Candle Night—Summer Solstice 2004 event, Japan's major

convenience stores such as Seven-Eleven and Lawson cooperated to turn off their signs altogether. On Omotesando Street in Harajuku, Tokyo, one of the trendiest fashion streets in Japan, fancy boutiques such as Channel and other stores turned off the lights during the Candle Night event. This means that people's sense of value seems to be changing.

Kaoru Mende is one of the leading figures of the event in Omotesando.

In Japan, there remain many folk tales, stories and local practices associated with candles. Today, we introduce you to one of those stories, "The Red Candles and the Mermaid," written by Mimei Ogawa.

Once, there lived a mermaid in the northern sea .in Japan. The mermaid, wishing for her daughters happiness, decided to let her new-born live in human society. The daughter was brought up by an old couple who made and sold candles. She grew up to be a gentle girl. She started drawing beautiful pictures on the candles to repay the old couple for their favor. The candles became very popular as the rumor spread that if they were offered on the shrine, ships wouldn't be wrecked. Despite growing very rich, the couple was enticed by a merchant into selling the girl. The merchant had heard about the mermaid, wanted her for his freak show. The girl didn't stop drawing pictures on the candles until the last minute. When she left the house, she colored some candles all in red. On the night she was sold, a woman came to the candle shop and bought the red candle. That night, a big storm broke and the boat the mermaid girl was onboard sunk. Since then, the superstition has persisted that if red candles were lit at the mountain shrine, a big storm would come and the person who saw the flame of the candle light would die in the ocean. The town was ruined in the end.

Interestingly, other candle-related practices are still observed in Hokkaido, a northern island of Japan.

On August 7th, the night of Tanabata, the Star Festival according to lunar calendar, groups of children walk around neighborhoods knocking at each door singing "Ro-so-ku da-se-yo" meaning "give us candles," or we will scratch you. (The phrases vary from region to region.) Then residents give them some sweets. This practice originated from an old tradition of visiting neighbors to ask for candles during Obon, the period that ancestor's souls are said to come home. Recently most residents serve children sweets instead of candles. This is similar to "Trick or Treat" in the Halloween of Western countries, isn't it? Although there are only a few towns in Hokkaido who still observe this annual event, children in those areas look forward to the local event and enjoy it every year.

Are there any "candle stories" in your country? If you have unique stories, practices or festivals associated with candles or light and shadows in your country, please let us know. We would like to introduce them to our world readers, too.

If you find the Candle Night Newsletter interesting and want to continue to receive our newsletters, please

e-mail us at eninfo@candle-night.org to confirm your subscription.

Please forward the newsletter to friends and suggest that they start their own free subscriptions. We want to extend this movement to the world.

We are looking forward to your feedbacks from this newsletter.

We hope you enjoyed this issue of the Candle Night Newsletter. We will be back next issue with more information and stories.

Candle Night Committee
eninfo@candle-night.org