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"Japanese cherry pride on foreign ground"

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JAPANESE CHERRY PRIDE ON FOREIGN GROUND

Wybe Kuitert

Flowering cherries can be spectacular. When smothered in blossoms, planted en masse they exhilarate the public. Add to this the Broadway confetti-like shattering of petals or their blazing autumn colour, it is clear that cherries are unrivalled beauties. Although not exclusively native to Japan, cherry excitement is particularly high among the Japanese, which is something hardly seen elsewhere in the world. With a natural and cultural history of perhaps two millennia, cherry feelings evolved from a flower accompanying the opening up of the dark forests bringing life to rice farming, through the centuries that it was a precious garden plant of the elite lauded in terse poetry, into mass cherry picnics soothing the minds of salaried persons and businessmen, beggars, priests, officials and shopkeepers in the metropolis and country villages as well. With such a wide impact cherry beauty has been used for political purposes for ages as a tool to advertise the good intentions of administrators of the state. About one and a half centuries ago wild cherries, which were used for that purpose, were replaced in Tokyo by a horticultural product, the now-iconic Tokyo Cherry that became the National Flower. At the time it was called 'Yoshino' and enhanced nationalist messages of Dainippon militarism, while when the Pacific War was over it touted peace in the USA. Such American handling of its national flower bolstered Japan's pride in cherries overseas.

Cherries are known as *sakura* in Japan and although they are not perceived as such by a large majority even today, for some patriotic Japanese *sakura* do still represent the nation. Be that as it may, when brought outside the country without their intimate context, for just about any Japanese the blossoms are quickly understood as representing the home country with all its fond memories. It is this cherry culturalism that encourages all kinds of planting activities outside Japan, often with a role for the Tokyo cherry. The following pages explore species and varieties of Japanese cherries in public space for mechanisms of botany, aesthetics, patriotism, and nationalist politics in Japan, the US, the streets of Germany, and a mountain trail in Tanzania.

Feudal cherries

Cherries are plants of the secondary forest; they accompanied the advance of human civilisation all over the Japanese archipelago where primeval forests were cleared. Naturally, cherries turned into a symbol of human life, vitality and progress, cherished by farmers and villagers. Cherry

planting in ancient Japan became an official action symbolically claiming culture since the ninth century when the emperor replaced a Chinese style plum in his palace with a cherry. Even when in later centuries the power structure shifted as a result of internal warfare from emperors to shoguns the practice of cherry planting remained. The first shogun to take over from the emperor re-planted novel cherries in the area of the imperial palace in the capital Kyoto, obviously asserting not only cultural but also territorial claims as he had brought in cherries from his home provinces in Kamakura to the east. Later, a medieval Buddhist priest was overwhelmed, not only by the beauty of such a rare cherry but also by the new authority: strikingly he proposed cherries as a symbol of Japan. But as new power had come with the collapse of the old, cherries came also to express sadness and notions of death when shedding blossom. Thus, foundations were laid for a vast variety of denotative meanings for cherries.¹

With power struggles and civil strife put aside, Japan united under a different dynasty of shoguns in 1603. Their new capital was named Edo and the dynasty is often referred to as the Edo Period. Urban Edo expanded fast and uncontrolled and many settlers ended up in shabby quarters along the banks of the city's rivers where no taxes were levied. Here the poor and unemployed gathered, and some riverside quarters became famous as districts of prostitution, gambling, and certain politically sensitive, liberal forms of theatre. As a policy of control, the shogun planted masses of cherries along the Sumida River. Similar ornamental planting was provided along important water ducts that brought clean household water to the city. Such planting fixed and reinforced water edges because cherries like to bring their roots to the water, but the choice for cherries had this added function of sanitising not only places but also the mind. Cherries in public space as at Sumida provided the opportunity for a free blossom party on a shogun-sponsored picnic site, a simple joy that served as an officially encouraged release. It permitted an outlet of the tensions that came with the strict and numerous rules which everyone was subjected to and would lead to harsh punishments, including beheading when breaking these. Surely, blossoms improved the public's perception of a great state in the formation enhanced by beauty, an ephemerality that easily overpowered citizens with little cost for the government. 'Viewing the flowers' (*hanami*), with accompanying side-businesses of selling tea, *sake* wine, snacks and a wide variety of personal performances, became a national spring obsession, soothing the day-to-day frustrations of just any Japanese, from beggar to aristocrat.

Plants used were Japanese mountain cherries (*Prunus serrulata* var. *spontanea*) that enjoy fresh and open soil with groundwater nearby. By the mid-nineteenth century, these cherries were venerable, centuries-old trees as we can see in some of the first photographs taken in the city around that time.² Aesthetics of such a mountain cherry in bloom are complex: depending on the individual tree, young leaf sprouts can be red, green or brownish and appear together with the usually pink buds, with white or pinkish single flowers. As each tree is genetically unique, some exceptional trees became famed, named and celebrated simply because of such intricate botanic details. With modern plant science moving in, many of these received respectable Latin names gaining a modern scientific status.³

The Nation's flower

The feudal world of Edo had been closed to foreigners since the early seventeenth century. But Japan and its shogun had to face reality when American ships appeared in Japanese waters in 1853 demanding free access to the ports. Powerful magnates managed to expel the shogun and fearing colonial occupation by Western powers, began to construct an imperialist nation-state with a modern military to control affairs. Edo became known as the 'East-Capital,' Tō-kyō, in 1868, and Japan entered a period of dramatic cultural change where 'modern' usually meant

'Western.' Health care and medicine were modelled after the Germans and motorised transportation was influenced by the English. England had its rose and France its lily, while Japan's flower was the cherry. Inevitably, the cherry became an optimistic symbol for the modern nation that was quickly modernising after European models. Even the cherry itself was modernised, as the Japanese Mountain Cherry lost popularity as an urban tree and was replaced by a new horticultural form.

A Tokyo gardener had been planting this novel domesticated cherry, in temple grounds north-east of the shogun's palace instead of the mountain cherries that had been there ever since the founding of the previous dynasty.⁴ With modern insights on urban planning, this area was turned into a public park and in a survey of 1884 this unfamiliar, pink-flowered cherry form showed up. Unlike the Japanese Mountain Cherry that blossoms together with the unfolding green, reddish or brownish leaf sprouts, this novel form gave its single flowers before the foliage appeared. On top of that, it was propagated as a clone. A set of full-grown trees provided with their spectacular bare clouds of flowers a clonal-monotone, a sterile-pink ceiling that easily dazed the most simple-minded crowds. As an effect cherry symbolism was in fact bolstered by a snobbish attitude of a conservative elite of aesthetes for whom the real Japanese cherry remained the Japanese mountain cherry, while they condemned this new cherry as having no taste.⁵ But the novel Tokyo cherry was easily propagated, even from root cuttings by just about any farmer and it quickly became a commercial success. More than 50,000 had been planted in Tokyo alone, according to a 1916 report. At the time this cherry was known as 'Yoshino-zakura,' 'Yoshino cherry' a name we will use on these pages.⁶ Local government officials began to promote the public case with its blossoms in their own province or town, throughout the country. The novel European colonial architecture of halls of cities, towns and villages, schools, banks, and later almost all railway stations, brought the modern state in a tangible form to the otherwise unchanged countryside. And all these buildings had their Yoshino cherries. Even Tokyo's highest high street, the Ginza, was lined with them, set exactly on the edge of the sidewalk to receive as much rainwater as possible (Figure 10.1). The Yoshino cherry became a symbol par excellence of Japan's progress and optimism: the new Nation's flower (*Kokka*).

Friendship cherries

After its victories in wars with China and Russia, Japan was a major player in world politics, and cherry messages came along. Planting Japanese cherries in the US had been a long-time dream of Eliza Scidmore, a well-known American author who had visited Japan many times and inspired the planting of Japanese cherry trees in Washington. Practical experience was gained by her supporter David Fairchild, a plant explorer and administrator with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) who ordered cherries from the Yokohama Nursery in Japan for an Arbor Day celebration; in March 1908 each public school in Washington DC could receive its Japanese cherry to be planted in the schoolyard. Years earlier US President William Taft and his wife Helen had visited Japan, during its war with Russia; since then the First Lady had been working on plans to beautify Washington's Potomac Park with Japanese cherries inspired by Scidmore's enthusiasm. For the Potomac project 90 cherry trees were purchased, this time from an American nursery in the spring of 1909. The New York expat Japanese community heard of the project and reacted. Its leader, a wealthy chemist Jōkichi Takamine and the Japanese US consul Kōkichi Mizuno approached Scidmore and joined in to donate an additional set of trees. This initiative was quickly inflated by the Japanese Embassy to an official project of friendship between the two nations. Soon it was announced that the city of Tokyo desired to donate 2,000 cherries for the Potomac Park.⁷ It is the first time that Japanese officials felt compelled to export



FIGURE 10.1 Tokyo's highest high street, the Ginza, was lined with Yoshino cherries, set exactly on the edge of the sidewalk to receive as much rainwater as possible.

Source: print "Tokyo Ginzagai Nipposha" by Kiyochika Kobayashi, 1876, National Diet Library, Japan.

live cherries as a strategy of cultural policy and it is striking to see how eagerly they responded to this cherry enthusiasm that in its essence was American. Without hesitation, in November of the very same year, Tokyo shipped 2,000 large trees of ten varieties, including the Tokyo cherry, to Washington. That a gift of the country's flower with such a profound cultural meaning could be made to a great western power was without doubt enthusiastically welcomed by any Japanese sponsoring or cooperating in the donation.

In the meantime, in the United States, the increasing import of plant material had aroused a growing concern. The USDA had started to inspect imported plants for insect pests and diseases and now there was a splendid case to test policies and administrative authority. Naturally, USDA officials must have felt confirmed in their responsibilities when the shipment from Tokyo proved to be severely infested. With great diplomatic sensitivity, the Japanese side was informed that no other measures could be taken than to burn the trees which was a matter of regret for both parties. In Tokyo however, a second shipment of trees was prepared. The second shipment of not two, but this time 6,000 young trees arrived in Seattle in January 1912 and passed severe inspections without any problem because all the trees had been thoroughly fumigated with hydrocyanic acid gas. Three thousand trees were meant as a donation for New York. The other half of the shipment went to Washington DC, where almost 2,000 Yoshino cherries, the Nation's flower, were planted along the shores of the Tidal Basin in Potomac Park.⁸ Of all the countries in the world, the United States now had a public cherry park on a scale that resembled the best sites in Japan (see Figure 10.3). Every spring the blossom in Potomac Park revived a nationwide

cherry awareness, something that was hardly seen on this scale outside Washington in the US or in Europe at the time. Elsewhere in the world, Yoshino cherries were planted on a larger scale in public space some decades later (Figure 10.2).

Sinister cherries

Japan was now a prospering, modern nation with ambitions. More and more resources needed to be procured, as well as increased self-confidence about territory and goodness of the larger cause. As any other imperialist nation in its flurry of the industrial revolution, Japan also was quickly rereading its own history while inventing new traditions. Just as everything Germanic became an ideology for the Germans moving towards World War Two, Yamato became an ideology for the Dainippon Japanese. The Yamato land, roughly east of Osaka, was with the Yamato people as the main, almost prehistoric clan thought as having formed the origin of Japan. Pioneering the frontier in the primary forests of the archipelago had departed, indeed, from Yamato. The spirit of Yamato represented the ‘pure-blood’ nationalist attitude, including the samurai fighting spirit, all adorned by the natural beauty of cherries. The Yamato Province had its ancient sacred temple at the village Yoshino, famous because of the massive planting of mountain cherries by pilgrims. It had been this village that had served as a godparent for the



FIGURE 10.2 Tokyo cherries are perceived by modern city managers as threatening because of their roots which may cause damage to paving, as in Abbeydale Park Rise, Sheffield, UK. These trees, planted in the early 1930s, were then still known as ‘Yoshino Cherry.’

Source: Fran Halsall, 2019.

cherry 'Yoshino' that we know today as the Tokyo cherry. Besides, there was an old proverb, *Hana ha sakura, hito ha bushi*, claiming that cherry flowers were the best flowers, just as the samurai class was the highest class in the Edo period. Thus the cherry was an emblem in almost all military insignia, and many Yoshino cherries with their quickly shedding petals were planted later as a memorial to repose the souls of those who had died for the fatherland Yamato.

After adventurous militarists entered Chinese Manchuria in 1931, these actions became more and more supported by the government, in the end spreading colonial control further beyond the Korean peninsula deeply into Manchuria. Japan's frontier spirit was firmly set with tens of thousands of cherries planted on the continent. Plans for an astonishing 1 million 'Yoshino Cherries' were set up with a Kyoto cherry nursery in the 1930s for the purpose of planting the glory of the Empire of Japan all over China and Russia along the Siberian Railroad.⁹ Perhaps not all of these cherries were actually grown and planted after all. But most prominently one of the major palaces of the Korean kings in Seoul, to give just one example, was transformed into a botanical garden, zoo and cherry viewing site. Propaganda photos taken by Japanese photographers illustrate how Koreans and Japanese, both in their own traditional dress, are harmoniously celebrating Spring under the massive blossom clouds of Yoshino, enhanced by electric illumination after dusk.¹⁰ Since 1933 primary-school textbooks teaching the national language all over imperial Japan had on the first page a seemingly innocent text: 'It blooms, it blooms, the cherry it blooms' (*Saita, saita, sakura ga saita*). The slogan was part of a conscious propaganda campaign to propagate the cherry as a symbol of Great Japan with all its aspirations. Textbooks were edited by the Ministry of Education, while all school buildings were built and maintained by the central government. Each school had one or more Yoshino cherries, now majestic trees as most were planted around the turn of the century. Japanese educational programmes start in April, and as a rule of thumb this cherry blossoms in mid-Japan in the first week of April. Therefore, the average school child began the new school year under a blaze of Yoshino pink. Teachings in reading and writing started with the cherry and even secondary school biology lessons would begin with the anatomy of cherries. In the late 1930s soldiers' songs began to include imagery and aesthetics of cherry petals scattered as human life, but at the close of the World War Two, a generation of youngsters appeared at the lines of battle even more thoroughly brainwashed on the point of cherries. The infantrymen in their uniforms with dark-pink collars sang the following song:

Ten thousand flower sprigs,
pink as the collar of a soldier's uniform,
are blown in the storm of Yoshino.
Being born as a son of Great Japan
is to die in the turmoil of battle,
scattered as a petal wind.¹¹

This was no cynical soldiers' humour. The official war propaganda was so perfectly organised that this sinister song was intensely sung by soldiers convinced that this was the only, and greatest honour left while their soul would later be consoled by live cherries in the homeland. The association of a hero's death with cherry blossoms scattered by wind, which could be divine for the kamikaze pilots, was coupled with the image of a cherry. It is the Tokyo cherry that shows such a sudden and dramatic scattering of petals. Any Japanese knew from school days that cherries were glorious and magnificent in bloom, but that they shed their blossoms abruptly, all at the same time and without mercy. It hardly comes as a surprise that the suicide planes of Japan's *kamikaze* pilots prominently had a cherry logo mark and were named *Ohka*, Cherry Flower.

Cherries of Peace for the World

After Japan's defeat, the country was in ruin and its spiritual world in a profound state of trauma, a mood that lingered during the occupation by the US forces in the following years. Cherries were no longer felt as a proud symbol of the nation and numerous famous cherry sites entered a state of decay. However, some immediate efforts were made to replant Tokyo cherries.¹² Strikingly, Washington's annual cherry frenzy at Potomac Park had continued during the war mostly without any trace of hatred or spite (Figure 10.3).

As early as 1948, the multi-day cherry blossom festival in Washington included Cherry Blossom Princesses selected from many states. This yearly event must be seen as a calculated effort to consolidate Pax Americana by nourishing the Japanese morale. A timely commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the first treaty to promote mutual understanding and goodwill between the two nations reconfirmed such strategies. The memorial 4-cent stamp issued on 28 September 1960 prominently illustrates a blossom sprig of the Tokyo cherry with the Washington Monument in the background.

By then within Japan, self-confidence was boosted by the prospect of the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games and the mood had turned to optimism now that the 'post-war years' had ended. Naturally, enthusiasm for cherries revived and, embedded in the mood of the day they had turned – as if by a godly wind – into an inoffensive symbol of peace and universal understanding,



FIGURE 10.3 Thousands of sightseers beneath a canopy of 'Yoshino cherries' in bloom, presented as 'Oriental cherry trees' to prevent vandalism in Potomac Park, Tidal Basin, Washington DC, USA, 9 April 1944.

Source: Washington Post Archives.

strikingly as one of the many innocent expressions of Japanese beauty like kimonos or the tea ceremony. Cherry clubs were founded, including a group of breeders and researchers that found their home in the Flower Association of Japan (*Nihon Hana no Kai*), formed in 1962 and sponsored by the Komatsu power-shovel company. Ever since, this Association actively supports the setting up of new cherry sites by local government bodies. Over the years it has sent more than 2.5 million cherry saplings, including 2 million Tokyo cherries to locations across Japan, and to several western European countries.¹³ A second association, not to be confused with this one, was set up two years later by a few Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members of Parliament. It is the Japan Sakura Association (*Nihon Sakura no Kai*) that carries a policy of promoting cherry plantings through diplomatic efforts. It has sent more than 2.2 million trees throughout Japan but most prominently made efforts to spread the message worldwide. Between 1967 and 1991 this second Association supported the planting of cherries in Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, former Czechoslovakia, former East Germany, former West Germany, former Soviet Union, France, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Vietnam.¹⁴ It appears that the more political Japan Sakura Association is often supported practically by the nurseries of the Flower Association of Japan in this global strategy.

Cherry Queens

Japan's post-war cherry diplomacy with its previous ally and axis power Germany was at first most prominent in Hamburg where Consul General Nori Tanimori was one of the actors. Unlike earlier politicians in the pre-war Washington project, he visited nurserymen and gardeners in the Tokyo area in person to prepare a cherry planting project.¹⁵ Shedding light on his motivations he recalled in 1968:

If we would plant flowering cherries, the symbol of Japan in Hamburg's most prominent Alster Park, not only the Japanese but also the people of Hamburg would be delighted; moreover, it would continue to be a living symbol of friendship between Japan and Germany... the almost 1,200 Japanese people living in Hamburg, worrying that their expat Japanese community would become isolated from the local community, expressed their gratitude to the city which had formed the foundation of their daily life and business activities, by presenting the cherries...

A cherry blossom festival was hosted in 1968 and fireworks were set off for the first time in spring at the Alster River warming up Hamburg citizens to the project. At the time a thousand cherries had been donated by the Japanese community, planted at the Elbe River, the Alsterpark, the Stadtpark, and the Hagenbeck Zoo.¹⁶ In the late 1970s, 5,000 more were donated via the Flower Association of Japan. Other Japanese cherries were planted later at the War Memorial at Fontenay and in the Japanese gardens at Planten un Blomen in Hamburg. Japanese cherries were now fully acceptable as city decoration.

In Bonn, the capital city of Germany during the Cold War, a large Japanese Garden was sponsored by the Japanese government at the federal horticultural show in 1979. The much-admired garden had become the event's main advertising icon.¹⁷ In this mood, administrators

decided to plant cherries as street trees in the inner city. For this project, double-flowering ‘Kanzan’ was selected, and it was grafted on a European cherry, the roots of which can stand the harsh conditions of the city’s concrete jungle (Figure 10.4). Speaking of ‘Kanzan,’ although often used in the Tokyo area, it has no symbolic meaning in Japan. With a history shrouded in clouds, it could very well have been brought in from Korea or China some centuries ago.

Following the US in the meantime, also the Japan Sakura Association started its Cherry Princess and Queen contests within Japan. Nationwide from among communities with active cherry planting policies, female volunteers – ‘rich in spirit’ according to the requirements – can apply. The chance to become Japan’s national Cherry Queen is alluring because it includes an overseas trip to meet the foreign Queens and Princesses, who in the US are selected from among ‘women leaders’ aged 19 to 24. Encouraged, Hamburg has also joined in: once every two years a Princess had been elected from among young women with aspirations in the field, a status that was recently elevated by the Japan Sakura Association to Cherry Blossom Queen. Today only Hawaii, Washington and Hamburg are officially entitled to nominate a Cherry Queen under the umbrella of the Association; they are offered a trip to Japan and some may even have met with LDP Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in person. Ostensibly, cherries can even support such old-fashioned male chauvinism as if nothing has changed since 1948.

Coffee and cherries

While Hamburg embarked on a path to successful cherry diplomacy, Tanzania came in with a different rationale. Because it illustrates the wide range of mechanisms and emotions when it comes



FIGURE 10.4 Early in the morning on Breite Straße, Altstadt, Bonn, Germany, when most people are still asleep, ‘Kanzan’ can be enjoyed before the selfie crowds arrive.

Source: Sir James, (Rainer Henkel), Wikimedia Commons, 2009

to cherry pride outside Japan, the cherries planted on the slopes of the Kilimanjaro are included here as a telling example. Julius Kambarage Nyerere as president in the first decades of independent Tanzania managed to stabilise and unify the country in spite of uncertainty and the political dynamics of the time. By the late 1970s, various regional programmes assisted by multilateral and bilateral donor support could be implemented, among which was the Kilimanjaro region, with Japan as collaborating foreign partner. It has been one of the more successful projects with legacies that are still expanding.¹⁸ Remarkably, Nyerere increasingly criticised the imperialist nations for their unfair economic policies, for example in a speech in Tokyo in 1981.¹⁹ In spite of that, and also due to diplomatic efforts from the Japanese side, the project continued. The Japanese may have various interests, but the very mountain of Kilimanjaro with its striking snow-capped cone appears to have somehow resembled the almost sacred Mount Fuji in the motherland.²⁰ And when it comes to Tanzanian coffee, Japan is after Germany, the largest importing country mostly because of a cherished, mild *arabica* blend marketed in Japan as Kilimanjaro Coffee. In fact, it evolved into the one and only global Tanzanian brand – all of which strengthens mutual interest.

Coffee is auctioned at the Coffee Exchange in Moshi, the town that with its airport serves all major connections to the Kilimanjaro region. Japanese officials visiting the town have valued the spectacular blossom season of the Jacaranda trees as especially impressive. In fact, the Jacaranda is an invasive species from the Americas, but seeing them flower all at once in the distance reminds one of the springtime blossoms of the *sakura* in the home country.²¹ Is it a surprise then that cherry planting was undertaken in Tanzania? In 1977 cherry trees were planted by President Nyerere along a mountain trail on the slopes of Kilimanjaro close to Moshi with help from the young men and women of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers who were dispatched to Tanzania as part of international cooperation policies. A hundred trees were sent from Japan under the auspices of the Japan Sakura Association.²² However, the planting did not generate a lasting cherry enthusiasm as is seen in the US or Germany that share with Japan a history of war. Rather the Kilimanjaro site is visited now and then by chauvinist Japanese bringing business to local guides. According to recent visitor reports, the trees have become a bit overgrown by the lush native plants while the blossom colour of the straggling cherries is remarkably deep pink.²³ Matching the subtropical abundance of the Kilimanjaro mountainsides, the only suitable cherry from Japan must be the Taiwan Cherry or one of its hybrids. Indigenous to Taiwan it is now and then planted as an ornamental in Tokyo as well. This cherry is deep pink in bloom and it can stand climates warmer than Japan, the reason that it is often used by members of the Japanese diaspora in subtropical regions, for example in South America.

Cherry pride revived in Tanzania in recent years when the Sakura Girls Secondary School was founded by Japanese sponsors, not far from Moshi; of course, real *sakura* was brought in to teach the girls about the beauty of the flowers. For this project, 350 trees were sent by a remarkable Japanese club, the '*Yōkō Sakura for the Repose of the Souls of the Dead and Peace Exchange Association*.'²⁴ The cherry 'Yōkō' is remarkable not only because of its biology but also because of its history. Yōkō is a recent cherry variety, popular in Japan where it is also known as the Cherry of Peace, or the Queen of Cherries. It was bred by Masaaki Takaoka who in his twenties was a 'Youth School' teacher. Such schools were set up by the Ministries of Army and Education in the 1930s and were meant to prepare youngsters for service in war – who mostly did not return. Out of remorse Takaoka had spent many years of amateur breeding to find a cherry that would commemorate his war-dead students and it was 'Yōkō' that passed all tests. It has the Taiwan Cherry as one of its parents, therefore it can stand warmer climates; in fact it is now spreading over Japan as a new star plant replacing the Tokyo Cherry that suffers from climate change-related weakness and disease.²⁵ Apart from a remarkable effort for the repose of souls of the war dead in Tanzania, the success of 'Yōkō' leaves the impression that cherries need to be clonal and take advantage of some heavy symbolism to become star plants in Japan.

Unifying cherries

The pre-war Nazi regime's sumptuous scheme to rebuild Berlin into a grand capital called Germania included the rebuilding of both the Italian and Japanese embassies. Most of this megalomaniac project was never realised, but the diplomatic missions of the Axis Powers became restyled in the last years of war as magnificent city palaces, exhibiting alliances on a scale too large to be practical. At the invasion of the armies of victory, both buildings in the Tiergarten quarter escaped devastating air raids but were looted and left unattended until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

So far, politically it had not been correct, if not impossible to invest in cherry diplomacy in the divided capital, either in East or West Berlin, although the Japan Sakura Association had its activities elsewhere in divided Germany. But with the fall of the Wall, this position changed. Historic events were followed in detail in Japan, as it was perceived that finally the War had come to an end. The wish to celebrate peace and commemorate the passing of history with cherry planting was strongly felt among the Japanese, but unified Berlin was not ready for that. Tetsuo Terasaki, a correspondent for the Asahi television company and for many years based in Berlin was aware of the problem and cleverly managed the planting of two commemorative cherries at the Glienicker Brücke.²⁶ The acumen of his strategy was that on the one hand, the bridge had a profound historical meaning as it had been the only hole in the Wall that fenced the West off from the East: it was the bridge over which Russian and Allied forces had exchanged prisoners and mutually arrested spies during hostilities and anxieties of the Cold War. On the other hand, the land at the bridge on which cherries were to be planted was not Berlin but owned by the city of Potsdam in former East Germany (Figure 10.5).



FIGURE 10.5 A Japanese mountain cherry from northern Japan in flower at the Glienicker Brücke, Potsdam, Germany.

Source: Ono Yūji, from *Katei Gahō*, April 2016.

For East Germans, Japan was an imaginary world of cosmopolitan freedom and a cherry donation must have been an attractive project.²⁷ In the East moreover, tree activism had proved the power of plants in fostering citizens' opposition against dictatorship.²⁸ This all helped to smoothen decision-making. One year after the Berlin Wall fell, in November 1990, these first two Japanese cherries could already be planted. To be in tune with Germany's climate, but perhaps also because of too pregnant symbolism, the cherries selected were not Tokyo cherries, but wild *Prunus serrulata* var. *sargentii*. It grows into a sturdy tree, native to northern Japan with flowers usually more pink than the Japanese Mountain Cherry. The modest project established Terasaki's position as a cherry activist, and over the following decades, he would be at the centre of large-scale planting actions all along the former line of division, the Berlin Wall. But for the site of the Wall, the land ownership in many cases was not clear. Moreover, Eastern and Western politicians had more important things to do, while administrators of the newly formed Berlin Park Office were not attuned to cooperation – for which this exotic planting in its different perspective provided an attractive testing ground (Figure 10.6).

In Japan itself in the meantime, Terasaki's employer, the TV Asahi was increasingly criticising the ruling Liberal Democrats of the country's one-party democracy. Perhaps this too is behind the enthusiasm of the viewers of the channel of whom an estimated 20,000 individuals over the five years of a cherry campaign donated 140 million yen – roughly amounting to 1 million euro – for which almost 9,000 trees could be planted. The first set of 3,000 was supplied by the Flower Association of Japan in 1991. Besides a wide range of less current varieties, most of the cherries were again 'Kanzan' along with a smaller number of Tokyo Cherries. Behind this decision is the difficulty Terasaki had to convince Berlin administrators, many of them with



FIGURE 10.6 The TV Asahi flowering cherry avenue of 'Kanzan' follows the former site of the Berlin Wall with its security corridors, today along the border of Brandenburg and Berlin City.

Source: photo "TV Asahi Mauerpfad", by PNN Ottmar Winter, April 2019, Tagesspiegel.

academic degrees, that European fruiting cherries do not carry the intimate feelings of beauty that the Japanese feel for their own blossom trees. Correct feelings were not fully acquired by the Berliners, and the Japanese became convinced that Germans like double-flowered cherries: about 70% planted in the TV Asahi campaign is 'Kanzan.'²⁹

Over the years the huge Berlin Japanese Embassy building was repaired and refurbished celebrating the unification; it now stands proudly along the Hiroshimastraße, the street not lined with cherries, but with horse chestnuts, while only one European double flowering cherry stands in the Embassy's front garden. When Susumu Hasumi, Liberal Democratic Party Congress member and Managing Director of the Japan Sakura Association visited Berlin in November 2011 accompanied by the Cherry Blossom Queen, they could only feel impressed by the large building of the Embassy. What surprises most is that their blog does not report on any cherries for Berlin,³⁰ perhaps as these were planted by rival TV Asahi. Yes, deeply embedded in cultural nationalism Japanese cherries are a source of pride when standing on foreign ground, but sometimes not.

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Notes

- 1 On cherry history in Japan see: Wybe Kuitert, *Japanese Flowering Cherries* (Portland Oregon: Timber Press, 1999), 34–100; Wybe Kuitert, 'Cultural Values and Political Change: Cherry Gardening in Ancient Japan,' in Michel Conan and John W. Kress, eds., *Botanical Progress, Horticultural Innovations and Cultural Changes* (Washington, DC: Harvard University Press, 2007); Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 27–153.
- 2 Centuries-old Japanese Mountain Cherries at Koganei in Tokyo are seen on a photo by Kimbei Kusabe in Kakuzo Okakura and Frank Brinkley, *Japan, Described and Illustrated by the Japanese* Vol. III (Boston & Tokyo, 1898), facing p.108.
- 3 Manabu Myoshi, 'Japanische Bergkirschen, ihre Wildformen und Kulturrassen', *Journal of the College of Science of the Imperial University of Tokyo*, 34 (10 March 1916), art. 1, introduces the rows planted at Koganei as selections from the wild (*Wildformen*, pp. 10–11) and gives the 38 *forma* of his wild *P. mutabilis* a spectacular Latin name (pp. 41–73).
- 4 See Wybe Kuitert, 'A Cherry Gardener in Tokyo's Ueno Park' forthcoming, on the early history of this clonal variety.
- 5 The *Sakura-no-Kwai* was a club of elite cherry lovers in the 1920s where Miyoshi Manabu elaborated aesthetics from botanical details, see Manabu Miyoshi, 'Kagakujō yori mitaru Nihon no sakura,' *Sakura*, 1, 3 (1920): 2–12; cf. note 3 above.
- 6 See Ernest Henry Wilson, *The Cherries of Japan* (Publications of the Arnold Arboretum 7), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 15–17, who gives *Yoshino-zakura* and *Somei-yoshino-zakura* as vernacular names. 'Yoshino' in quotation marks indicates here that the name is of historic interest, not used today in plant science. See for this: Iketani Hiroyuki, Katsuki Toshio, and Kawahara Takayuki, '*Prunus × yedoensis* 'Somei-yoshino', a Correct Cultivar Name for Yoshino Cherry,' *The Journal of Japanese Botany*, 81, 2 (2006): 123–125. Tokyo cherry is the correct name in English for 'Somei-yoshino'; see Wybe Kuitert, 'Observations on the Tokyo Cherry', *Shakkei*, 28/3 (Winter 2021/2022), pp. 2–8
- 7 Ichirō Fujisaki, 'Gaikōkan to sakura,' *Kasumi-gaseki kai*, 5 April 2013.
- 8 Roland M. Jefferson and Alan E. Fusoni, *The Japanese Flowering Cherry Trees of Washington, D.C.: A living Symbol of Friendship* National Arboretum Contribution no. 4 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1977); Margaret R. Pooler, 'Preservation and DNA Fingerprinting of the Historic Tidal Basin Cherries,' *Journal of Environmental Horticulture*, 17, 4 (1999): 185–189; Fujisaki, 2013.
- 9 Tōeimon Sano, *Sakura no inochi niwa no kokoro* (Tōkyō: Sōshisha, 1998), 54.
- 10 Jung-hwa Kim, 'The Origin and Evolution of Botanical Gardens in Korea' (PhD Diss., Seoul National University, 2017), 180–184.

- 11 Munemutsu Yamada, *Hana no bunkashi* (Tōkyō: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1977), 115–116.
- 12 Akihito Hiratsuka, 'Sakura wo sukue 'someiyoshino jumyō 60-nen-setsu' ni idomu otoko-tachi,' *Bungei shunjū*, March 2001, 158–159.
- 13 According to the website of this Association: <http://www.hananokai.or.jp/sakura/sakura-area/sakura-area1/>. Accessed 1 August 2019.
- 14 According to the website of this Association: <https://www.sakuranokai.or.jp/about/jigyo/>. Accessed 1 August 2019.
- 15 Fujisaki, 2013, op. cit.
- 16 Toshiyuki Kawakami, 'Hanburugu no akura matsuri,' *Keizai to gaikō – Gaimushō* 585, no.43 (1971): 76–79.
- 17 Christian Tagsold, *Spaces in Translation: Japanese Gardens and the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 122–124.
- 18 Aleck Humphrey Che-Mponda, 'Aspects of Nyerere's Economic Thought,' *African Study Monographs*, no. 6 (1986): 45–55; Hisatsugu Toyoda, 'Tanzania – kirimanjaroshū nōgyōkaihatu,' *Journal of the Japanese Society of Irrigation, Drainage and Reclamation Engineering*, 52, 9 (September 1984): 842–851; see also numerous Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) reports, for example *Tanzania rengo kyōwakoku kirimanjaro nōgyōkaihatu keikaku tanki senmonka hōkokusho* of March 1988.
- 19 Che-Mponda, 'Aspects of Nyerere's Economic Thought' 53–54.
- 20 Blog by Yurato-san 'Kirimanjaro kokuritsu kōen shūhen ryokō-ki' posted October 2011 <https://4travel.jp/travelogue/10618011>. Accessed 14 July 2019.
- 21 Toyoda 1984, 850, op. cit.
- 22 Relying on Yurato-san 2011, and a blog posted June, 2014 by Dōsoshin 'Kirimanjaro no sakura' <https://article.dososhin.com/cherry-blossom/>. Accessed 14 July 2019.
- 23 Yurato-san 2011, op. cit.
- 24 See the post <https://www.facebook.com/PEACE.YOKOSAKURA/posts/1188376987938267:0> also the website of the *Yōkō Sakura for the Repose of the Souls of the Dead and Peace Exchange Association* https://www.yoko-sakura.com/?page_id=325. Both accessed 30 July 2020.
- 25 Ritsuko Mōri, 'Kanposu do jorudon 'yōkōsakura' hiwa = sakura ni kometa nihonjin no omoi' *Jornal Nikkey Shimbun* (Sao Paolo), 1 April 2016. Also Wybe Kuitert, 'Developments in Japanese Flowering Cherries,' *The Plantsman, Royal Horticultural Society*, 15, 1 (2016): 33 on botanical details.
- 26 Hideko Kawauchi (ed.), 'Berurin ni saku heiwa no sakura,' *Katei Gahō*, April 2016, 86–103.
- 27 Perceptions of Japan in Eastern Europe behind the Iron Curtain had this added position opposing suffocating communism, as explained by Piotr Splawski in a 2014 lecture at the Sainsbury Institute, Norwich, UK.
- 28 See Chapter 18 in the present volume 'Occupying Public Space, Generating Public Spheres: Street Tree Art and Activism in East and West Berlin' by Sonja Dümpelmann.
- 29 Tetsuo Terasaki, 'Berurin no kabe kara sakura he, dō yatte reisen no isan wo uketome kaete ittaka,' *Sakura no Kagaku*, 8 (2001): 82–86.
- 30 http://www.sakuranokai.or.jp/2011/11/?post_type=blog. Accessed 25 July 2019. The visit to the Japanese Embassy on 6 November 2011 was to report on the Hamburg Cherry Queen.