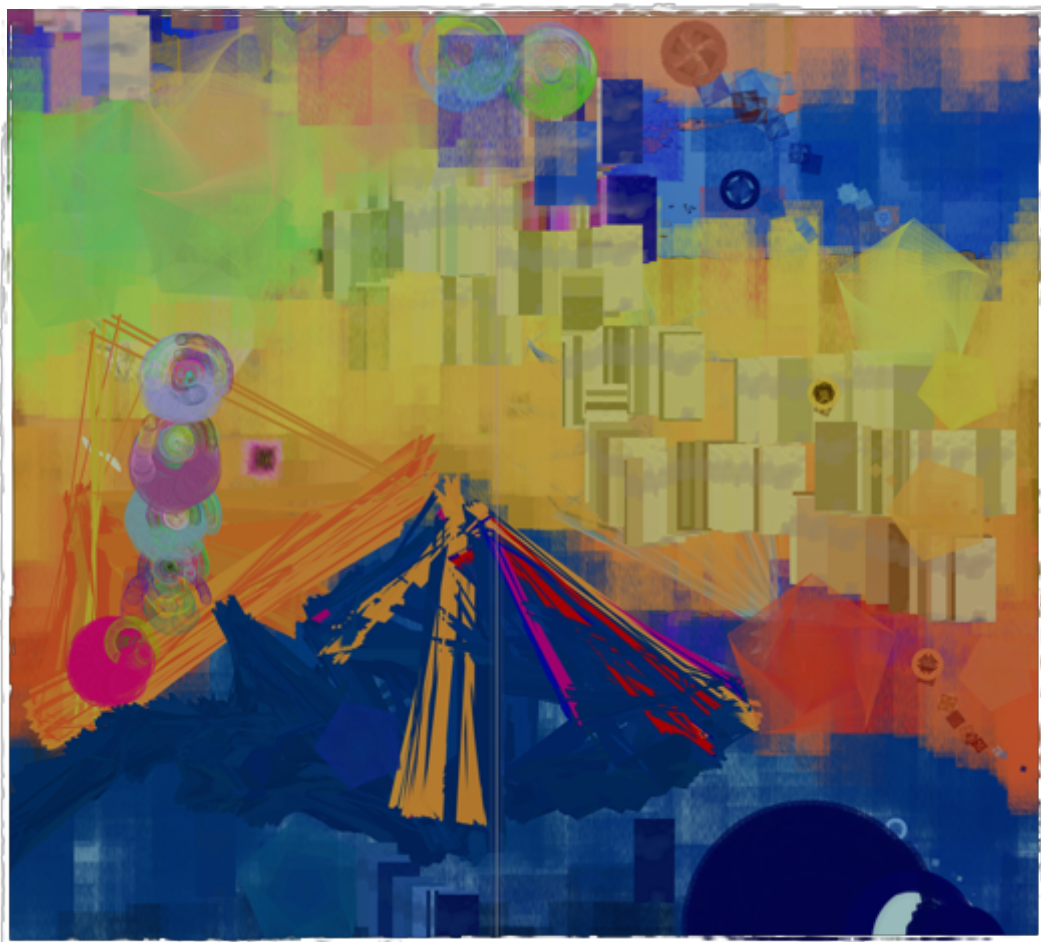


VOLUME
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Between of Keys



A publication of the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group

The Materials Writers SIG was established for the purpose of helping members to turn fresh teaching ideas into useful classroom materials. We try to be a mutual assistance network, offering information regarding copyright law, sharing practical advice on publishing practices, including self-publication, and suggesting ways to create better language learning materials for general consumption or for individual classroom use.

WWW.MATERIALSWRITERS.ORG



Table of Contents

Officer Reports

From the Publication Chair (Matthew Keighley)	3
From the Program Chair (Lindsay Wells)	3
From the Coordinator (Adam Murray)	3
From the Membership Chair (Forrest Nelson)	4
From the Treasurer (Marcus Grandon)	4

Column

Writer's Point: Confusion, Agony and Ecstasy (Brian Cullen).....	6
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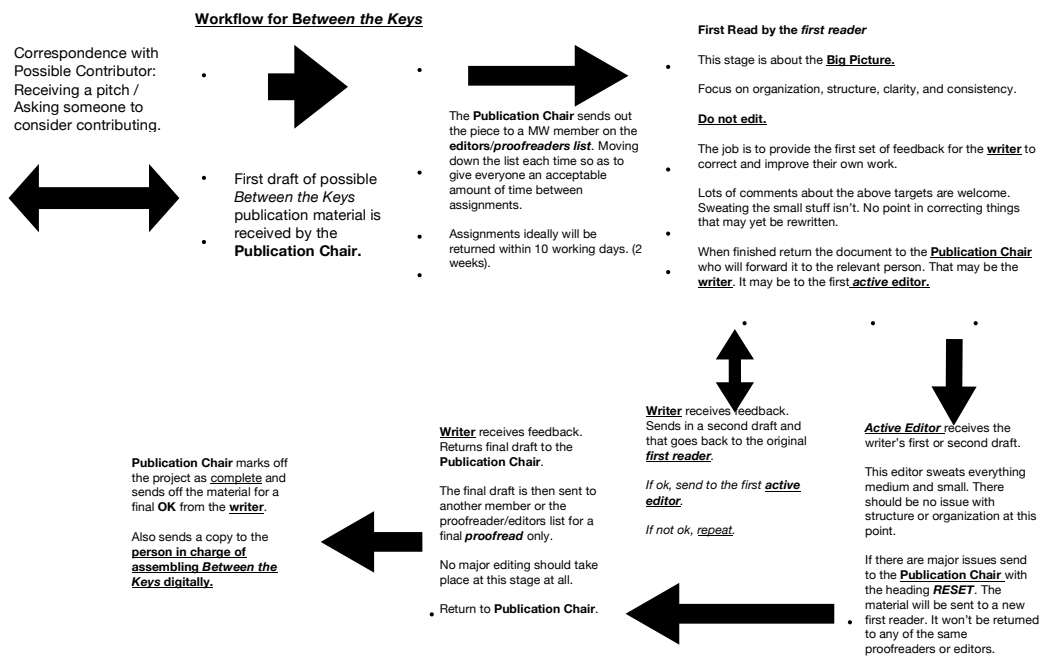
Feature Article

Putting it all together: Making your teaching materials into a textbook (John Spiri).....	8
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From the Publication Chair

Matthew Keighley

In any business there are inevitably bottlenecks, places where the smooth flow of work either slows to a trickle or grinds to a halt. Here in the MW SIG we felt that how we went about putting together BTK had more than a few bottlenecks that were impeding not only how quickly we could produce a new issue, but also the quality and consistency of support we could offer to our contributors. As such, we are beginning to introduce changes to our system, namely introducing a more effective editorial workflow, in order to make sure that BTK improves not only on the page but behind the scenes as well.



As you can see from the workflow above, ***Between the Keys*** is going to need some help from our membership. If you would like to volunteer to join our editors and proofreaders team please email < mattkeighley @ icloud . com > (remove spaces) and we will gratefully add your name to the list. If you have no experience of proofreading or editing that is perfectly okay. We will do our best to introduce you to the process and suggest some introductory texts to help you build up the skills necessary.

From the Program Chair

Lindsay Wells

First, we are pleased to announce that we will be co-sponsoring the 2019 OKINAWA JALT Summer Language Teaching Symposium held in Naha from June 21-23. In addition, we will be sponsoring Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto as a featured speaker. The conference committee is currently accepting proposals for poster presentations, short presentations, and workshops. The deadline for submissions is March 15, so submit your proposals soon. For more details about the symposium, please visit the conference website www.tinyurl.com/okinawa2019 and check out the advertisement on the final page of this issue of *Between the Keys*.

Second, many of you are probably already aware of the theme for JALT 2019: Teacher Efficacy, Learner Agency. The former involves a collective vision for and confidence in student progress. The latter entails allowing students to take charge of their own learning. These two concepts should inform the process of creating teaching materials, but how?

We would love to hear our SIG members' take on these issues in our SIG Forum at JALT 2019. We especially welcome contributions that relate to topics such as: collaboration in creating materials, materials that encourage students to take ownership of their learning, materials that promote critical thinking, fostering a mindset of efficacy in teachers through materials, involving students in creating materials, involving other teachers in creating materials, understanding the needs and goals of local schools and publishers, etc.

All SIG members are welcome to participate. This is a great opportunity to share your knowledge and work with a wider audience and gain valuable presenting experience. If you are interested in participating in the Forum, please send an email to < wells @ mejiro .ac .jp > (remove spaces) by April 1.

From the Coordinator

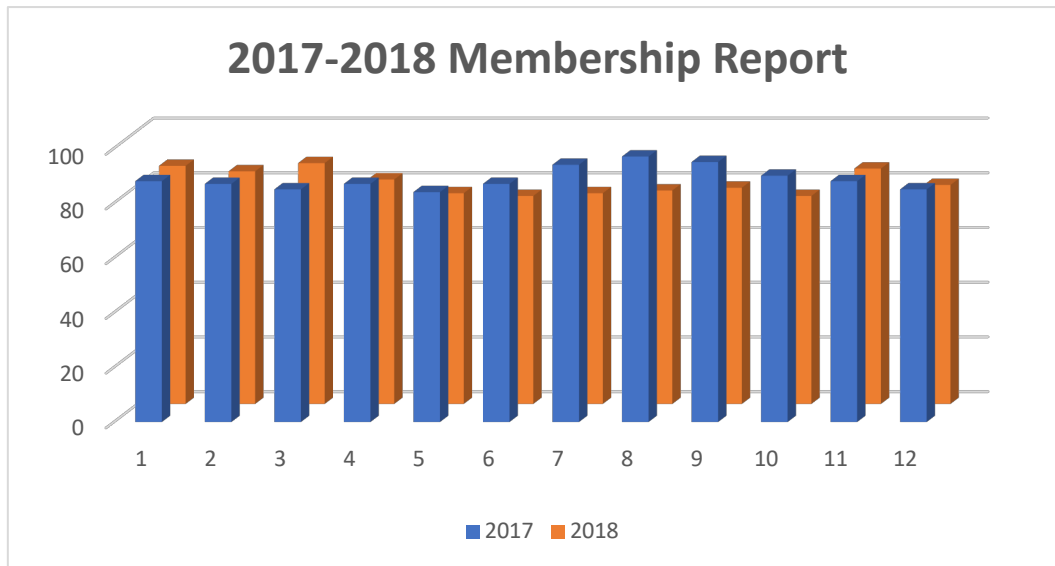
Adam Murray

I am hoping that everyone is enjoying some well-earned "downtime" between the academic semesters. I apologize for the delay in getting out this issue of *Between the Keys*. Our SIG Forum "Diversity and Inclusion in Teaching Materials" at JALT 2018 was a success. I'd like to thank Lindsay Wells for organizing and the panelists for sharing their ideas.

It looks like that the 2018-2019 year will be an exciting time to be a SIG member and I am looking forward to sharing our plans over the next couple of months.

From the Membership Chair

Forrest Nelson



The chart above represents the monthly number of JALT MW SIG members. For 2018, the average membership was 81 members. The lowest membership was in the month of May at 84 and the highest membership was in March at 88. Comparing 2017 and 2018, membership began to decrease in April of 2018. Finally, there has been about an 8.9% average decrease in membership in 2018 compared with 2017.

From the Treasurer

Marcus Grandon

After several years building the financial health of the SIG, we have now reached a comfortable level of savings. In 2019, we plan to put these resources in action by co-sponsoring the conference in Okinawa. We believe that the conference will make a profit, which would add to the coffers. We are also looking into co-sponsoring a materials related speaker at the International conference in November. If any SIG members have any thoughts about how we can spend some of this money, please raise your ideas with me or any other officers so that we can discuss proposals as a team.

Writer's Point: Confusion, Agony and Ecstasy - A Material Writer's Perfect Storm

Brian Cullen (Nagoya Institute of Technology)

"Hi Brian. I am confused. I don't believe we discussed an interview. Did you perhaps send this message to the wrong recipient? I mean, I have written materials, but..."

What a lovely and confusing start to my interactions with Cynthia Akazawa when I interviewed her about her experiences in materials writing. This was actually my second contact attempt, but it was completely my fault that the initial conversation hadn't taken place. The first attempt had been six months previous when a mutual friend in the world of EFL publishing had passed Cynthia's name on to me and recommended her highly. He had forgotten to let her know that I would be in touch, so it wasn't so surprising that my initial message full of strange questions wasn't answered. I got distracted as other projects came up, and I had actually forgotten about the interview questions I had sent until one day recently when I was clearing out old mail and remembered my mission. I decided to send the questions one more time. My second contact attempt proved just as confusing to Cynthia as the first, and it took some explaining on my part to clarify my intentions.



Cynthia Akazawa

When I think about what the world of material writing encompasses, and its need for multi-level relationships between publishers, teachers, booksellers, students and beyond in order for it to function, it's really not that surprising that communication breakdowns, and, subsequently, instances of confusion can and do occur. Material writers who have been in the profession for a long time have two very effective tools at their disposal in order to best respond to confusion when it does arise: flexibility and creativity. Cynthia demonstrated both these qualities in her ability to jump right in and answer my questions even though she hadn't been sure who I was or why I was so inquisitive.

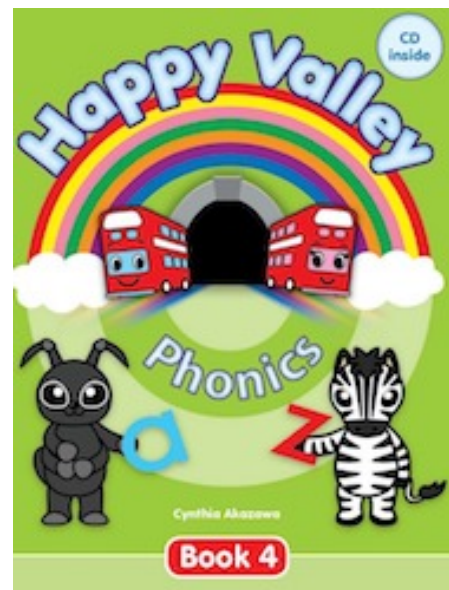
To start off our discussion, Cynthia began with a clearly creative description for some of her own experiences in the field, stating that creating materials for publications was at times "both agony and ecstasy." Agony can be defined as "extreme physical or mental suffering" and ecstasy as "an emotional or religious frenzy or trance-like state." From this, I think it's fair to deduce that Cynthia is a person who has strong feelings about her various projects. To figure out where this depth of feeling comes from, let's have a look at how Cynthia is involved both directly and indirectly in the field of materials writing.

When Cynthia is not enjoying agony or ecstasy through freelance writing assignments, she spends most of her time as a teacher at her private language school, Interact English School, located in Kurashiki, Okayama. According to the school's Facebook

page, the teachers “work hard to develop sound discrimination, phonemic awareness, and literacy skills from age two to adulthood.” In a post on the same page, Cynthia shares research and some of her thoughts on phonics: “Ever wonder why young learners are slow to begin speech production? Motor control is an important part of it. Take the time to work on articulation and fluency in each lesson to encourage students to work their oral motor. The brain connection between oral motor and phonemic awareness is critical.” This willingness to keep up with the research in the field of phonetics is a good sign of how much she cares about her learners and is willing to work hard for them. Some of her other recent posts look at other useful research into the field of learning in general, such as the connection between gut function and memory, and the positive effects of music training on sound discrimination and language learning.

Working in these ways with the learners at her school and applying the findings of research led her to developing a reading program that subsequently generated much interest in various online learning communities on the subject. This eventually led to her being approached by the EFL publisher Modern English to author Happy Valley Phonics Books 4, 5 and 6 to complete a planned six-level phonics book series. Level 4 was published in March 2017.

Happy Valley Phonics Book 4 is a four-skills pre-literacy textbook that supports a synthetic phonics methodology. Cynthia says that the series aims to address deficits in sound discrimination and phonemic awareness by getting students to use accurate pronunciation as they work through a series of segmenting and blending exercises that progressively link the sounds of the English language to text. Grammatically graded stories and songs at the beginning of each unit serialize an ongoing narrative for deeper processing to build language comprehension. An interesting component of the book which sets it apart from most phonics books are the phonetically graded readings at the end of each unit which are designed to improve reading fluency. The website for the book notes that it includes “eight extensive listening stories and 22 grammatically-graded songs which aim to recycle language while systematically putting in place core reading comprehension skills for future learning”, clearly constituting a massive amount of work by the author.



The sheer amount of work and drive involved perhaps explains at least part of the “agony” of Cynthia’s experience. “Writing is very time consuming, and it really doesn't pay that much,” Cynthia says. “Had I not felt deeply committed to the work itself out of a desire to fulfill a creative vision, I could not have justified the hundreds of hours I devoted to the project.” Another aspect that can sometimes be agony is working with other people. “Collaboration is necessary, but that doesn't mean it is always easy. There were debates and compromises along the way.” This flexibility certainly contributes to Cynthia’s ability to push forward with a project even when conflicting perspectives came into play. In addition, as most textbook writers discover, the work doesn’t actually stop when the writing is done because that is when the marketing must begin. She says, “One must be willing to attend conferences and make presentations to promote the product once it is published. Most

writers enjoy working quietly at home, but they can't avoid spending weekends on the road.”

Having heard about the agony, perhaps it is time to focus on the “ecstasy”, the good things that we get out of writing materials and presumably the reason that most of us do it, unless of course we actually enjoy seeking out agony. For Cynthia, the keys to this ecstasy seem to have been threefold: fun, freedom, and creativity. She was fortunate to work with a publisher who gave her a lot of creative freedom to conceptualize an original vehicle for the classroom. This is in happy contrast to the growing trends in the world of EFL towards packaging materials from pre-existing resources coupled with a lack of creative freedom in many projects. Cynthia used her freedom well and productively. She wrote songs and stories to develop the characters from the Happy Valley Student Book series. She says, “That was so fun. Collaborating with people who possessed compatible skill sets enabled all of us to make something bigger than we could have achieved individually.”

When I asked Cynthia what advice she could offer to other material writers, she was very practical and focused: “Be clear on what you want from a project. Is it a one-shot opportunity, or do you want a long-term relationship with a publisher? The time to negotiate terms is *before* you sign a contract, but don't expect to get rich. Rather, weigh the value of the work itself and gauge your level of enthusiasm for the project. Collaboration can be a satisfying way to spend your free time, but it only works well if people trust and respect each other.”

Cynthia has clearly developed her expertise in the specialized area of phonics, stays up-to-date in research into learning, and works extremely hard on behalf of her learners. As a result she is sailing through the seas of confusion, sometimes helped by the winds of ecstasy, and only occasionally scraping upon the rocks of agony. Her flexibility and creativity in the field ensure many successful projects ahead.

Putting it all together: Making your teaching materials into a textbook

John Spiri (Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University)

We are presently in an era of unprecedented access to self-publishing services. When I stand at my table, Global Stories Press, in the publisher's area at a JALT conference, a significant number of teachers who stop to talk to me eventually mention their materials that they would like to make into a textbook, usually by self-publishing. I'm always happy to answer any questions they might ask because of the enjoyment and professional development I've reaped creating my own materials.



John Spiri (right)

I believe there are many advantages to teachers and students alike when the materials are made by the teacher. Such a teacher is more intimately invested in the lesson and is almost desperate to make activities work. When self-made lessons flop, there is no one to blame but ourselves. Claiming that self-publishing your own materials amounts to “professional development” might not be obvious, but a lot of learning and insights can occur by pushing yourself to create something that is the right level, engaging, and educational for your students.

One of the main questions that people ask regards the very practical matter of transforming ideas, handouts or documents into a physical book. Printing is the big step because it requires a cash outlay—very often a significant amount—and the resultant stock needs to be kept and, within a reasonable amount of time, moved (sold or given away).

Knowledge about putting an idea into book form, and contacts, can become dated fast in a world where print-on-demand is becoming more common. Teachers want to feel they can get their printing costs back, at the very least. Since the per copy cost for a print run of 1,000 is considerably less than a print run of 500, and a fraction of even smaller print runs, self-publishers will be tempted to print more. However, there are significant downsides to large print runs that should be considered. Regardless of the cost per text, larger print runs are more expensive than smaller ones. More importantly, first time self-publishers will likely want to change the text after a year or even after one course as they might find mistakes or realize an activity could be better. Worse, their teaching situation might change.

Finally, for accounting purposes, stock counts against your deductions every year. Thus, for those new to self-publishing, a smaller print run is probably the way to go.

Before sharing information about my top printing options as of December 2018, I'd like to provide a quick synopsis of how I've had texts printed to date. My first printer back in 2000 to 2003 was based in Kumamoto. The binding was excellent—the remaining texts, which are no longer for sale because new editions have been printed, are still in good shape. However, the very first printing revealed a significant problem—the paper was glossy! Thus, students couldn't clearly write in it in pencil. Two teachers told me they wouldn't use the text just for that reason. This serves as a warning to choose paper carefully. I now look for recycled paper options.

Some university bookstores also offer a printing service. The "seikyo" (CO-OP) at my national university in Tokyo paid entirely for the print run and set the price. The print quality seemed mediocre—the cover was barely thicker than the inner pages for example—but the glue binding was sufficient for the 15-week term. However, they kept the money received as well. For teachers who have no interest in making money, this is a great option. Unfortunately, there might have been a miscommunication because the CO-OP staffer seemed to expect me to keep having them print that text for that course. He seemed disappointed or even annoyed when I declined to print more for the next school year. It might be worth discussing long-range plans in advance.

That briefly summarizes two different types of printers and some issues that arose. Below I will describe the printing service I have utilized for 7 or 8 years and am pleased with.

When printing, the cost factors are: page count, paper quality, color vs. black and white, size, cover, and, of course number to be printed. For my printer in Korea, zassiprint.jp, for example, it is far more economical to choose a print run of 1,000, or at least 500. For example, a recent estimate (Nov 2018) I received was as follows:

56 pages	56 pages
natural (recycled) paper at 80kg	natural (recycled) paper at 80kg
one color (black and white)	one color (black and white)
A5	A5
170 kg. matte cover	170 kg. matte cover
500 copies	250 copies
Cost ¥105,000	Cost ¥92,500

Thus, for a little over ¥10,000, a self-publisher can get 250 more copies. It's often tempting to be optimistic and take that extra step and print more, but that's more books to stock—which means finding space for them while safeguarding them from humidity and other damage. And if they don't sell or have to be reprinted, the cost of the extra books, however small relative to the first print run,

is still wasted money and resources. It's important to think carefully and realistically and not be unduly influenced by lower per copy cost.

I have not used Zassiprint exclusively, however, because doing truly small print runs of 1-20 books is not possible with them. I have tried Amazon's Create Space print-on-demand (POD) service for small print runs, but shipping from the U.S. tends to be prohibitively expensive. Unfortunately, amazon.jp does not offer any POD service. I recently found and tried a POD company in Japan, ACCEA. With branches in major cities, this is truly a Print-on-Demand (POD) option. However, publishers should be prepared to submit everything online on a website that only displays in Japanese. In contrast, I communicate via email and occasionally by phone with Mr. Park at Zassiprint. Mr. Park will actually set up the Adobe Illustrator file for me (getting the spine the correct size is beyond my skill level) for the cover. ACCEA service is not personalized in that way. Although the ACCEA website is not terribly complicated, there are quite a few steps to work through before receiving a print version. Like with Zassiprint, expect to do all correspondence in Japanese.

Putting your self-made activities into a textbook is a big step. A teacher might seek to self-publish a textbook for the sake of students, who benefit from having all activities bound together, and possibly for having other teachers utilize your textbook as well. Most find that self-publishing is an exciting way to enrich your teaching and test new ideas. It makes success in the classroom more urgent and personal. I feel completely committed to teaching the best possible class every time I use my own materials! Now, with various print services available, self-publishing is more accessible and affordable than ever. Those with questions are welcome to send a message to < globalstoriespress @ gmail . com > (remove spaces).

2019 OKINAWA JALT SUMMER LANGUAGE TEACHING SYMPOSIUM



JUNE 21 - 23, 2019

Call for papers: March 15, 2019 23:59 JST

All teachers and researchers involved in language teaching and learning are encouraged to submit an abstract for **posters, short presentations, and workshops** in two categories:

1. Best Practices (innovative and successful classroom practices)
2. Research on learning and teaching languages (study, action-research, field review)

Plenary Speaker

Rod Ellis

Featured Speakers:

Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto

David Kluge

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<http://tinyurl.com/okinawa2019>