



Judgement Day

Today, I'm going to try something I haven't done for a very long time. I'm going to write this week's story in longhand! (Relax! I won't ask you to try and *read* it that way; I'll type it out once I get home.)

Yes. I'm sitting on the train, on the way home from a (long) day out in Tokyo. I've just spent the day sitting as a judge. Eh? Was Dave selected for jury duty?

No, that's not possible for me, as that sort of responsibility is only requested of Japanese citizens; permanent residents such as myself are excluded. But even though today's venue was not a courtroom, the mood among the judges - I was one of a five-member panel - was completely serious nonetheless.

The venue? A TV studio. The case requiring judgement? A competition between the two prefectures in which Mount Fuji is located - Shizuoka and Yamanashi - to determine which of them has the best views of that famous peak.

At the time I accepted the request to appear on this program, I had done so quite light-heartedly. Being 'opinionated' is not a problem for me, and I anticipated a pleasant session of looking at photographs and giving my thoughts on them. But the reality was quite different.

In the studio were two teams - one from each prefecture - and they had gone to great lengths to prepare a series of very beautiful views of Fuji. It soon became very clear to us that 1) all the photos were excellent, and 2) our votes were going to be taken *very* seriously by these contestants, who were mostly people involved in tourist promotion for their area. They were playing to *win*! And the losers would go back home with their heads bowed in shame.

Realizing this, my fellow judges and I put aside all playfulness, and took our responsibility seriously. We viewed the photos carefully, listened intently to the presentation that came with each one, and were invited to inspect them at close range, after which we returned to our seats to pronounce judgement. How bad it then felt to see the crestfallen faces of the losing side at each step of the five-stage contest!

It was an extremely closely-fought competition. As it turned out, one team (I am not at liberty to reveal the winner at this time) took 3 of the 5 stages. The losers took it gamely, and could only console themselves with the fact that they won the 'popular vote', earning more votes in total than the other side.

All in all, it was a most interesting experience, and it has given me a small insight into the work of a real judge, a job that I can now understand carries a very great responsibility.

And now, please excuse me while I look online and see if I can find a place where I can place a bet on the results of the great Mount Fuji photo contest that will be broadcast on Fuji TV (of course!) on the evening of March 11th, here in Japan.

I'll clean up!

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