

JR TOKAI'S "AMBITIOUS JAPAN!" CAMPAIGN

A Case Study in Advertising

Laura MacGregor analyzes three advertising campaigns launched in 2003 by Japan Railway Tokai and two competing airline companies, Japan Airlines Group and All Nippon Airways. In examining the media response to these campaigns, MacGregor illustrates the pivotal role the national press had to play in generating competition amongst the three companies, acting as it did as a critic of all three campaigns.

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There are two options for high-speed travel on Honshu, the main island of Japan, and Kyushu, to its south: flying or traveling by bullet train (*shinkansen*). For Japan Railway (JR Tokai or "JR") and the two major airlines – Japan Airlines Group (JAL) and All Nippon Airways (ANA) – it is a competitive business, with the key to survival being innovation and promotion.

In mid-September, 2003, JR Tokai launched a major advertising campaign called 'Ambitious Japan!' (English in the original) to mark the October 1 opening of the JR Shinagawa *Shinkansen* station and the extensive revision of its Tokyo-Osaka timetable. The four-month campaign used various advertising channels and received extensive press coverage. At the same time, JAL and ANA launched their own counter-efforts.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the contents of and approaches to (i) the JR campaign; (ii) the counter-campaigns of JAL and ANA; and (iii) mass media coverage of all three campaigns. The specific research questions are:

1. What communication strategies, messages,

and meta-messages are present in the print advertisements of the three campaigns?

2. How does the JR Tokai "Ambitious Japan!" advertisement compare with the contents and communication strategies of past JR Tokai campaigns?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the three campaigns?
4. What do these three campaigns tell us about advertising techniques in Japan?
5. What roles do the mass media (primarily newspapers) play in reporting the events surrounding the campaigns? How do they represent/support/challenge the campaigns?
6. What can we conclude from this case study about advertising in Japan?

I. Background

The *shinkansen* scheduled its debut to coincide with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The first line connected Tokyo and Osaka, a distance of 552km, with Hikari and Kodama trains traveling at maximum speeds of 210km/hr.¹ JR, originally a national railway, was privatized in 1987 and the

Tokyo-Osaka line became JR Tokai's domain. The faster Nozomi train was introduced in 1992.²

On October 1, 2003, the 17th Tokaido *shinkansen* station opened at JR Shinagawa station, the third station in the greater Tokyo area (the other two being at Tokyo and Shin-Yokohama). The timetable was extensively revised and the frequency of Nozomi trains increased, with all trains running at a maximum speed of 270 km/hr.³ The project took nearly sixteen years to complete and cost 95 billion yen. According to the president of JR Tokai, it represented a "milestone comparable to the opening of the [first] *shinkansen*."⁴

II. The Campaigns

The primary target for all three companies, as stated by their representatives,⁵ was business people traveling between Tokyo and Osaka (JAL and ANA also targeted their Tokyo/Osaka-Okayama/Hiroshima routes). All three campaigns ran for roughly the same period, September-December, 2003. JR's "Ambitious Japan!" campaign was comprised of the following media: one thirty-second television commercial, one radio commercial, one print advertisement for both newspapers and magazines, a theme song, posters and flags for display at train stations in Tokyo and Osaka, and banners and stickers for all Nozomi trains. The campaign focused on the opening of the Shinagawa station and the timetable changes.

Both airlines denied having specific campaigns but did acknowledge launching promotional materials to counter JR's campaign.⁶ ANA produced one print ad for newspapers and magazines and two brochures that were distributed to twenty-thousand companies in the Tokyo-Osaka

area. JAL had only one print ad for magazines, train and subway posters, and a one-page leaflet. Both airlines ran a three-month double air mile campaign and promoted their speed, prices, and services.

III. Materials and Method

The following materials were examined in order to answer the six research questions:

- (i) Advertisements, including the print ads for the three campaigns and ANA's brochures, were examined for content and effect as presented through visuals and text. This analysis identified the target audience, objective, proposition, and central message.⁷ The ads were also evaluated in terms of directness/indirectness, presence/absence of comparative techniques, word play, and significant English text and loanwords.
- (ii) Print ads for previous JR Tokai campaigns were examined to compare their approaches with those of "Ambitious Japan!"
- (iii) Mass media, including fourteen newspaper articles from two national Japanese dailies and excerpts from two television programs, were examined for their objective and subjective content.
- (iv) Transcripts from telephone and fax interviews with publicity representatives at JR Tokai, JAL, and ANA were used to confirm the data collected and to support the analysis.

IV. Analysis of the Three Campaigns

The JR campaign

Since the JR campaign was the core campaign of the three, it used the greatest variety of ad types. This discussion will be limited to the print

advertisement.

The full-page color newspaper ad ran in the five major national dailies and local newspapers in the areas between Tokyo and Osaka on October 1, 2003.⁸ The advertisement contained a full-page photo on a white background of five determined-looking men in their thirties wearing business suits and running in the foreground, with a Nozomi train bearing the “Ambitious Japan!” banner in the background.⁹ The text of the advertisement (appearing in JR Tokai’s signature orange color) appears in Table 1¹⁰:

Table 1	Text for JR Tokai’s Print Advertisement (in translation)
<i>Headline</i>	Ambitious Japan!
<i>Subheading</i>	On October 1, a new timetable and Shinagawa station opens. A maximum of seven Nozomis per hour.
<i>Body Copy</i>	<i>“Nozomi” in quotation marks in original</i>
1.1	Dreams, hopes, adventures, and self-confidence.
1.2	Wishes that Japanese seem to be forgetting come alive one day.
1.3	October 1, Japan’s Main Street drastically changes.
1.4	Tokaido Shinkansen stops at Shinagawa Station. All trains travel at a maximum speed of 270km/h.
1.5	“Nozomis” increase to a maximum of seven per hour.
1.6	Unreserved “Nozomi” seats are now available and the price of reserved “Nozomi” seats are reduced.
1.7	“Nozomi” used to be a train for special passengers but now it is a “Nozomi” for everyone.
1.8	Even if you decide to take “Nozomi” at the last minute, you’ll be able to catch it right away. You’ll spend less time traveling and more time at your destination.
1.9	Travel creates opportunities to meet new people and develop business impressively.
1.10	Why don’t we begin traveling together on the new “Nozomi” with hope [“nozomi”] in your heart?
<i>Tagline</i>	Your wish will be fulfilled.

The headline, in large Roman letters, is the outstanding textual feature of the ad. The choice of these English words for the headline, and for the campaign slogan, is significant. First, because it is in English, it captures readers’ attention.¹¹ Second, it calls to mind an English expression which dates back to the early Meiji period (1868-1912) when

“In the current economic slump, the campaign communicates the idea of ‘Japan, do your best’ in the same way that Clark motivated the men of Hokkaido University.”¹³

Most text in the ad describes the new Japan and the potential that people have with the new JR Tokai. Only four of the thirteen lines of text refer to the new services (subhead, ll. 4-6). The rest of the body focuses on the dream and wish images, a metaphor for a new Main Street (1.3), and the broader customer appeal (from “special people” to “everyone,” 1.7). The point in 1.7 very

Japan, particularly Hokkaido, was modernizing. Dr. William Clark, founder of Hokkaido University, was and still is famous throughout Japan for his motto, “Boys be ambitious!”¹² Like Clark, JR Tokai uses this slogan to appeal to all of Japan (not just “boys”) to set a goal and achieve it. JR Tokai’s campaign chief confirmed as follows:

indirectly suggests that companies can now afford to allow their employees to use Nozomi, since the price differential between Nozomi and Hikari fares is minimal or nil.¹⁴ The tagline is written in the phonetic *hiragana* script ("Nozomi *wa*, *kanau*"). In daily use, both "hope" ("*nozomi*") and "fulfilled" ("*kanau*") are written in Chinese characters (*kanji*). However, since the tagline is written phonetically, these two words can be interpreted in more than one way. As translated above, it can mean either, "Your wish for new Nozomi train services has been granted" or "Your personal wishes will be granted." Since Nozomi, in *hiragana*, is the name of the train, the tagline can also be understood as, "Nozomi [the train] has been fulfilled," meaning that the full capabilities and maximum services that Nozomi can offer have been realized. A newspaper article offered another interpretation of "kanau," using a different *kanji* meaning to "conquer or beat," thus changing the meaning of the phrase to "Nozomi trains can beat airlines."¹⁵ These alternative interpretations were not confirmed by JR, but are certainly possible. They exemplify the imaginative and creative wordplay techniques common in Japanese advertising.¹⁶

The photo of the five men represents the stated target of the campaign: male business travelers. They, along with the train, symbolize an "ambitious Japan." That the men are also members of the famous pop group TOKIO is significant for several reasons. First, they are a well-known and well-publicized group who regularly perform concerts and appear on television. Second, using celebrities in Japanese advertising is commonplace, with almost 70% of television commercials featuring one.¹⁷ Third, by recording the theme

song for the advertisement as well as appearing in it, TOKIO effectively represents the energetic spirit of the campaign.¹⁸ on their weekly television show "Tetsuwan Dash," for example, the group performs a variety of adventurous and innovative activities such as driving across Japan in a solar-powered car.¹⁹ Fourth, since ANA and JAL both have famous male idol groups (SMAP and Southern Allstars) representing them, JR Tokai may have felt the need to do so as well. Finally, the presence of entertainers in ads helps to popularize the product by appealing to the non-business sector (which makes up 30%-40% of Tokyo-Osaka *shinkansen* passengers).²⁰ The advertisement makes no references to airlines. The only comparisons that are made are comparisons of JR Tokai with its former self, of its services before October 1 and those introduced on October 1. This is a straightforward advertisement: the target (business travelers/general public), the objective (announce new services), and the propositions ("be ambitious, ride JR Tokai") are clear.

Past JR Tokai Campaigns

JR Tokai has had at least seven different campaigns since 1988.²¹ The longest-running campaign, "*Souda Kyoto ikou*" ("Yeah, let's go to Kyoto"), from 1990 until present, is representative of the indirect, image-evoking style that JR Tokai generally uses.²² In the print ads for this campaign, full-color photos typically show a beautiful seasonal scene at a landmark in Kyoto (often a temple). Any text in the ad is related to the photo. The campaign name and logo appear in the bottom left corner, with a small JR Tokai logo below it. Apart from this almost insignificant placement of the company name, the ad does not promote or even refer to JR

Tokai. The objective is simply to stimulate interest in visiting Kyoto. Thus, JR Tokai's first proposition is "go to Kyoto," while "use JR Tokai to get there" is a secondary suggestion.

These ads create images that suggest a way of life- something one could do or somewhere one could go. A similar example is a 1993 television commercial for JR, which begins with a frame showing a smiling young woman dressed for work.²³ The second frame shows the same woman in a bikini. The caption is "If you went to Izu..." and the narration is, "If you went to Izu, a Kodama (name of a JR *shinkansen*) is a fast way to get there." The audience is expected to think that "If [they] went to Izu..." they could undergo the same changes as the before-and-after pictures of the woman, but JR plays on the suggestive visuals by surprising viewers with the spoken, but not written, ending to the preposition. This ad again focuses on the idea of going somewhere – in this case, a popular beach getaway near Tokyo – while only offhandedly mentioning that a Kodama train will get you there quickly. The visuals are powerful because they give you a hint as to what you could be missing by not going.

The purpose of the "Ambitious Japan!"

campaign is different: it announces major changes, the first of their kind since JR Tokai's inception.²⁴ In this kind of campaign, therefore, JR Tokai needs to give at least basic information about the changes, and it does just that: it states that Nozomi train service will increase in frequency and that a new station will open at Shinagawa (Table 1). However, at the same time, it still manages to maintain its characteristic image-evoking style since only four of the thirteen lines of the text give information about the new services (sublead, ll.4-6). The absence of specific details on ticketing and pricing gives this campaign the same vague "image" feel as that in the Kyoto campaign.

The ANA campaign

ANA's full-page color ad appeared in the five national dailies on September 17 and October 1, in local newspapers in Okayama and Hiroshima on September 17, and in a business magazine in September.²⁵

The newspaper ad is text-only, in black and shades of blue on a white background framed with a blue-checked border.²⁶ It contains a headline, two sections of body copy, and a tagline (Table 2).

The headline, "Make a concrete plan, ANA"

Table 2	Text for ANA's Print Advertisement (in translation)
<i>Headline</i>	Make a concrete plan, ANA
<i>Subheading</i>	None
<i>Body Copy 1</i>	
1.1	To make stereotypes like "flying is troublesome" and "airfares are expensive" a thing of the past.
1.2	Business in Japan is in the midst of big changes.
1.3	To respond, we've put together an answer that is not a theory, but a concrete plan.
1.4	Autumn 2003, Tokyo to Osaka, Osaka to Tokyo, the airline that extends business frontiers.
1.5	The answer is ANA

<i>Body Copy 2</i>	<i>A chart with five one-word headings in Roman letter English and explanations in Japanese: Heading/explanation (only key words translated below):</i>
2.1	Reasonable (New pricing)
2.2	Shuttle (special air service)
2.3	Convenient (increased number of flights)
2.4	Useful (Ticketless service)
2.5	Mileage (Double mileage campaign)
<i>Tagline</i>	For a new style of business trip. ANA

is in direct response to customer requests. This is confirmed by the ANA President's introduction in the brochure, which states that ANA has responded to customer feedback.²⁷ That ANA has built an image as a customer-oriented company has been noted elsewhere as well.²⁸ The first line of the body copy acknowledges customer feedback. Line 2 acknowledges the unstable business climate. Line 3 suggests that while competitors are sitting around theorizing, ANA has taken action by improving their services to meet customer expectations and to support businesses in these "times of change." To prove this, the details of the plan are described in the second section of the body copy (see Table 2, 1.6-1.10).

The katakana loanword "style" is used in the tagline, rather than a Japanese word, thus transforming the common image of business trips as drudgery to something fashionable. The literature strongly supports such an interpretation as one of many effects that katakana words have. According to Takashi, "The primary function of English loans in the language of contemporary advertising is to signal the modernity and sophistication of the thing that is advertised."²⁹

The same can be said for the use of English words in the chart. Using English instead of Japanese

gives an air of intelligence and sophistication. Even if readers cannot understand the words (though many probably can), it looks fashionable and therefore positively reinforces the services that the ad describes. Like the JR Tokai ad, this ad is informative. However, there are no examples of word play, and the single comparative reference noted above (1.3) is indirect. Therefore, this ad is straightforward, objective, and informative. The target (business travelers), the objective (outline of five services), and the proposition ("We're dedicated to serving business travelers") are clearly stated.

Two brochures were used in this campaign: an A4 foldout brochure and a small multi-page pocket guide.³⁰ The pocket guide is titled "Tokyo-Osaka business trip expert," a compliment to users, modestly implying, "you probably already know all of this anyway." It includes flight and ground transportation timetables, maps, and sample schedules, all helpful information for business travelers and certainly more than an airline need provide. Therefore, it serves as yet another testament to ANA's dedication to customer-oriented service.

The larger brochure looks like a prospectus; indeed, its title is "ANA Business Trip Cost Reduction Proposal." The cover is in white and conservative shades of blue with one photo of an

ANA plane in flight and a male business traveler in transit. The word “cost” on the cover is written as a katakana loanword as opposed to a Japanese word, following business conventions to use it as thus, in effect supporting ANA’s image of a cutting edge airline.

The subtitle of the cover, “Business trips on ANA won’t cost you time or money” suggests that other airlines or modes of transportation are more expensive but less time-efficient. Inside, it makes two direct comparisons with JR Tokai: (i) the bottom line on a price chart shows that shinkansen travel is more expensive than any type of ANA ticket; and (ii) an illustrated flow chart comparing the time and cost between shinkansen and airplane travel for a one-day Tokyo-Osaka business trip shows that air travel is 80 minutes faster and ¥2,980 cheaper. However, because there is no written interpretation of what is presented, the conclusion that air travel (ANA doesn’t even distinguish itself from other airlines) is faster and cheaper than taking the train is left to the reader to make.

The brochure is a creative, persuasive piece of advertising, making direct comparisons with JR Tokai. It shows that ANA is attempting to live up to its “concrete plan” stated in the newspaper ad (1.3) and follow its motto: lower prices and faster service.

The JAL campaign

A photo of a green chalkboard at a train station is the main element of the ad.³¹ It contains the headline in handwriting along with the date of October 1. The phrase “message board” is printed at the top. Below the message board is the subhead and a small photo of a JAL plane. The tagline appears at the top of the ad, and the corporate slogan, “Dream Skyward.” is at the bottom with the JAL logo. Above it is the body copy with price and number of planes per day for flights to Osaka, Okayama, and Hiroshima, and a pitch for the double mileage campaign.

The headline is the central emphasis of the ad: “*Nozomi e. Saki ni, itteiru ne.* ♡”. Two interpretations are possible. First, the message could be addressed to a woman named Nozomi (a common girl’s name), who is taking a Nozomi train. That the message is from a woman is indicated by the feminine handwriting, the feminine “*ne*” at the end of the sentence, and the heart symbol. This is a clear reference by JAL to JR Tokai’s campaign. The double meaning is humorous since it pokes fun at the competition (JR) and the people who use it: it chides Nozomi for taking a slower mode of transportation when she could have taken a plane, and also the JR Nozomi for being a slower mode of transportation.

Table 3	Text for JAL’s Print Advertisement (in translation)
<i>Headline</i>	To Nozomi [who is taking a Nozomi]. I [the person taking JAL flight] will be there before you.
<i>Subheading</i>	60 minutes to Osaka. 75 minutes to Okayama and Hiroshima. Let’s fly on JAL
<i>Body Copy</i>	Price, number of planes per day and double mileage campaign information (translation not included)
<i>Tagline</i>	The sky is fast. The sky is cheap.

Since it will be understood as such only by readers who are aware of the JR campaign, there is no direct comparison. In fact, comparative advertising is generally shunned by the industry, and the Japan Advertising Code reflects this stance: "Let us avoid slandering, defaming, and attacking others."³² However, through the implicit technique of wordplay, it becomes a cleverly crafted, direct but subtle comparison telling readers that JAL is faster than JR Tokai. The tagline, "*Sora wa hayai. Sora wa, yasui,*" formalizes these two selling points using rhyme and word repetition to create an easy to remember phrase. However, it should be noted that, like ANA, JAL doesn't say that it is fast and cheap (or faster and cheaper), but says "the air is fast and cheap." Therefore, it leaves it to the reader to decide which company to use. The target (travelers) and objectives (entertain readers, promote high speed, low cost) are clear, while the proposition ("JAL is faster than *shinkansen*") is implicitly stated.

V. Comparison of the Three Campaigns

All three companies stated that their primary targets were business travelers.³³ However, their ads suggested some differences. The JR Tokai ad made their stated target clear with the photo and the body copy, but by using a pop music group to represent them and a campaign name with a popular appeal, it strengthened its resonance with the general public as well.

Both the JAL and ANA campaigns focused on time and price. ANA's specific focus was on taking business travelers away from JR Tokai, while JAL aimed to take general travelers away. Since both airlines' services were almost the same, they

distinguished themselves by the scope and tone of their ads: ANA was target-specific and serious, JAL was general and entertaining. The ANA ad was part of a larger effort to target the business community, which they did directly with their brochures. The fact that ANA may have taken more aggressive action than JAL was due to the fact that in the first fiscal quarter of 2003, ANA was trailing behind JAL in the domestic market share.³⁴

The JAL ad made an implicit comparison with JR Tokai by using the competing product name, while the ANA and JR Tokai ads were more evasive in their comparisons. Only in the brochures did ANA unleash a direct comparison with JR Tokai. This showed again that ANA took the most aggressive action.

JR Tokai's main priority appeared to be motivating readers, while unveiling its new services was secondary. As a result, the composite message was "Ambitious Japan! = JR Tokai's new services."

VI. Discussion: Advertising in Japan

The JR Tokai campaign and the two counter-campaigns by JAL and ANA are significant in that all three were launched on the very same day. This is an unusual example, made possible only by the fact that the airlines had advance notice through the media and other channels of JR Tokai's plans. In any case, the airlines clearly believed JR Tokai's innovations were a significant threat and they took action to protect themselves.

The three campaigns presented here are representative ads in that they contain of several characteristics common to the Japan advertising industry. Three of the techniques utilized in the campaigns will be discussed in this section to help

place them in the overall context of the Japanese advertising industry.

Word play: Double meanings

Thanks to the multiple writing scripts available in the Japanese language (two phonetic scripts, Chinese characters with multiple readings, and romanized letters), wordplay is a common technique in daily communication and in the mass media. In advertising, all of the available scripts and techniques are used to suggest double meanings, creating interesting and often humorous messages as evidenced by the JR Tokai and JAL ads in this study. Examples are plentiful; to demonstrate how double meanings are communicated, two advertisements from other industries will be presented, one from 1965, and another from 2006.

First, a 1964 print ad for a Toshiba electric rice cooker shows a cartoon-like sketch of a young couple kissing, with sketches of hearts surrounding them.³⁵ The literal translation of the text is: “Newlyweds. Rice is hot too.” (“Shinkon hoyo hoyo. Gohan mo atsu atsu.”) “Hoyo hoyo” has several meanings: fresh (i.e., bread), hot and steaming (i.e., soup), and as in the above text, “newly married couple.” “Atsu atsu” means hot (temperature). The double meaning is: “With a Toshiba rice cooker, you can keep not only your rice hot, but also your marriage (love, passion)” thus creating an innocently playful advertisement. Furthermore, thanks to the euphemistic cartoon image, readers can accept the romance shown in this ad. A photo of a real couple would have been unacceptable, particularly in the 1960s. Thus, the use of a cartoon, together with the wordplay, softens a potentially risqué ad and remains a technique commonly used today.

Second, a 2006 print ad for stereo shows a photo of a camel with the word “raku” in roman letters below it. “Raku” can be written as “camel” and “easy” [to use]. The metaphor of a camel is used to represent the stereo’s targeted feature of being easy to use, creating a clever and memorable image for the product. To distinguish this stereo as the “raku” stereo is especially important to help identify it among the many competing companies and models.

As is clear from the above examples, the extended writing scripts for the Japanese language offer a wide palette for advertisers to choose from when writing their ad copy. The results are entertaining and memorable. Furthermore, because the direct meaning can be downplayed to send a more subtle message: the love between the couple upstages the fresh rice just like the woman addressee, Nozomi, takes the chiding intended for JR Tokai. Since direct confrontations are not allowed, the double meanings present a loophole for the JAL campaign. The JAL ad is a typical usage of implied meanings to communicate messages. Thus, the above examples show clearly that advertising in Japan creatively makes use of its flexible language, while reflecting its non-confrontational culture.

Comparative advertising

The three campaigns illustrate an interesting point about the language of Japanese advertisements. The trend in Japan is to avoid using comparative or superlative language, and on the rare occasion it appears, to compare the product or company with itself (i.e., then versus now). JR Tokai effectively avoids comparing itself with airlines by focusing exclusively on announcing the new services and

changes. The ANA brochure doesn't say "we're better than JR" either. It merely shows charts for JR Tokai and itself of a sample one-day business trip from Tokyo to Osaka with travel times and price information for each company. Thanks to the absence of comparative language, ANA is able to avoid damaging its reputation or JR Tokai's. However, even this kind of quasi-comparison is an unusual advertising technique.

Imagery: Dreams

Both the JAL ad and the JR Tokai ad make reference to dreams: JAL's slogan during the campaign was "Dream Skyward." and the JR Tokai ad spoke of dreams, wishes, and hopes (Table 1, ll. 1-2; tagline). The implication by both companies is that by flying JAL or riding JR Tokai, your dreams/wishes will come true. Companies trying to persuade Japanese customers that they can make their dreams come true are fairly common. There are numerous examples of dream imagery in slogans and campaigns made exclusively for Japan, including the following: Toyota, "Drive your dreams"; PanaHome (Panasonic appliances), "Trust in Dreams"; TOMY (computer game software), "TOMY Dream Energy"; Sony Vaio W computer,

"Open new dream. Open new world"; and Yoyogi Animation College, "Keep your dream."³⁶

By using dream imagery, these companies are asking customers to put their trust in them by buying the product and in return, the companies will fulfill customers' dreams/wishes/hopes. The goal of setting up this win-win scenario is to build a close relationship between the company and the customer: you trust us with your dreams and we will give you great products that will make your dreams come true. This is a simple but effective proposition that tends to appeal to Japanese consumers.

English Text

English slogans made for Japanese companies and products, such as JR's "Ambitious Japan!" campaign, tend to appear more frequently than Japanese slogans. In addition to the five slogans containing the word "dream" presented above, the following examples further illustrate the prevalence of English.³⁷

Generally, roman English slogans are of two types: those that are syntactically correct in English and those that are not. The first two slogans in Table 4 are of the first type, and the rest are examples of

Table 4: English slogans

Company	Slogan
Sapporo Beer	LOVE BEER?
Ajinomoto (<i>foodstuffs</i>)	Mama Loves You
Kirin Beverages: Fire canned coffee	Believe your fire.
0123 Moving Company	We care you.
National Milk Board of Japan	Milk de Shape Up
Toyota Duet (<i>automobiles</i>)	Fun! Car! Go!
Toyota bB (<i>automobiles</i>)	Make Wonder - bB

English with no syntax. Roman English tends to be used in advertising for its visual appeal and for its meaning as is understood in Japan; that is to say, it need not be grammatically or syntactically correct to be understood by Japanese audiences. For example, the individual words “we-care-you” are understood perfectly as “we care about you” or “we take care of you” which is all that the company wants to say. Similarly the Toyota Duet slogan communicates the idea that when you want to have fun, you should take this car for a drive (or take this car and go somewhere). Leaving some leeway for the reader to interpret slogans, like in the case of JR’s vague “Nozomi *wa kanau*,” is preferred in Japanese advertising circles so that anyone who sees this slogan can understand and enjoy it in his or her own way. Thus, the idea with the slogans is not to exclude anyone, which subscribes to the strong group mentality that exists in Japanese society.

Though the advertising strategies used by the three travel companies are fairly commonplace, the great interest that the press took in the rival campaigns – with close newspaper coverage spanning more than a full month around the launch date – is highly unusual. The additional media hype expanded the scope of the campaigns and made the public more aware about what the companies were doing.

VII. Newspaper Articles

Fourteen articles relevant to the campaigns were collected from two Japanese national dailies, Asahi Shimbun and Nihon Keizai Shimbun between September 17 and October 22, 2003. Of the 14, nine cover JR Tokai. Seven of the nine articles covering JR Tokai present negative facts,

interpretations, and/or public opinions. Examples of negative headlines are: “Nozomis increase, companies in trouble: allowing Nozomi for business trips will cost”;³⁸ and “Passengers fooled.”³⁹ One negative interpretation of the campaign can be seen in the following sentence: “Passengers with non-reserved car tickets might go to Tokyo [where the train originates] so they can be sure to get a seat.”⁴⁰ This line suggests that building a new shinkansen station at Shinagawa, only a short distance from Tokyo station, was a poor idea because the new reduced pricing of non-reserved tickets would prompt many passengers to bypass Shinagawa, which was built for convenient access, and go to Tokyo as they did until now. Therefore, it criticizes JR’s business decision to build another station in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The articles clearly and correctly describe the measures taken by JAL and ANA to compete with JR, using the word “taikou,” meaning “rivaling” or “countering.” This characterization matches both airlines’ intentions to rival JR Tokai rather than each other.⁴¹

The articles also say that JR Tokai is “battling against the airlines”⁴² and “using this opportunity to regain its share from airlines.”⁴³ While this may be true, the JR campaign is not a competitive campaign: first, there is no sense of competition in the ads; second, the JR Tokai president made a public statement denying competition: “We don’t feel the current situation is severe, but airlines do.”⁴⁴

While it may not be part of their campaign, the reality is that JR Tokai needs to fight back: in the four years between 1997 and 2001, JR’s share of the Tokyo-Osaka route fell from 81% to 70%, and the

airlines' share rose from 19% to 30%.⁴⁵ The results of the first three weeks of the campaigns showed that even after its huge investment, JR Tokai was still in danger: while it posted an overall increase in customers, it did not meet its daily target average of 60,000 passengers from Shinagawa station. During the same period, ANA and JAL group continued to report gains.⁴⁶

JRTokai's stance is noncompetitive—potentially threatening but unthreatened. Its confidence, however, is undermined or at least counterbalanced by the press, which pinpoints its weaknesses, such as: (i) books of tickets in bulk costing more than before;⁴⁷ (ii) passengers bypassing the new Shinagawa station with its purported convenience and continuing to go to Tokyo station in order to get a nonreserved seat; and (iii) fewer numbers of trains stopping at Shinagawa than advertised.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the media's labeling of the campaign as a battle against the airlines is inaccurate. While in reality JR Tokai may be competing with airlines, it is not actually part of the campaign. Thus, while the media may objectively report and interpret the facts, it also takes liberties by dramatizing them.

VIII. Conclusion

This article examined the "Ambitious Japan!" advertising campaign of JR Tokai and the counter-campaigns of the two competing airlines, JAL and ANA. Based on an analysis of the print advertisements of the three companies, and press coverage of the events surrounding the campaigns, the following conclusions were drawn.

JR Tokai used an advertising approach that

was consistent with past campaigns: (i) it did not use comparative strategies, even though in this one, it was poised to rival the competition; (ii) it motivated readers to take a journey; and (iii) it used special images, in this case, an English headline and a pop music group, to attract attention. In this campaign, the journey was figurative, inspiring readers to fulfill their own dreams on one level and the dream for a better Japan on another. Though the language of most of the ad was direct and informative, the headline and tagline had double meanings.

The JAL advertisement used a dream metaphor too, but used wit and humor rather than a motivational message or slogan. It promoted itself as superior to JR Tokai by using wordplay to make a suggested comparison. The all-print ANA advertisement was the most serious and focused of the three: unlike the other two campaigns, it used business language to target business travelers exclusively. It presented itself as a customer-oriented company with details of its "new style of business travel." Furthermore, it made it clear that it was competing with JR Tokai.

The significant national press coverage of the campaigns and surrounding events put the spotlight on what, in another case, may not have made news at all. That the press took interest not only in JR Tokai's developments but also those of the airlines was both an advantage and a disadvantage to all three. Thus, the press acted as both reporter and critic, clearly illustrating that the world of advertising is a complex and challenging one at the mercy of everyone it reaches out to.



ENDNOTES

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- 9 *Asahi Shimbun*, "Ambitious Japan!" [advertisement], October (morning) 1, 2003, 6.
- 10 This and all subsequent translations by the author. Terminology used in Table 1 is derived from Yuichiro Yamada, "Quaker Oats," in Yuichiro Yamada, Malcolm Benson, Harimochi Kazuro and Murakami Susumu (eds.), *Culture, Language, and Advertising: Studies of Japanese and English Advertisements* (Hiroshima: Institute for Advanced Studies, Hiroshima Shudo University, 1997), 63-86.
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- 15 *Asahi Shimbun*, "gekiretsu PR sen: JR Tokai > > koukuu gaisha" (fierce P.R. war: JR Tokai vs. airlines), September 25 (morning), 2003, 13.
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- 22 For a collection of print ads from 1993 to the present, see JR Tokai [Souda, Kyoto, Ikou.], "JR Tokai Museum," <<http://jr-central.co.jp/museum/kyoto/list.html>, linked from <http://kyoto.jr-central.co.jp/>>.
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- 26 *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, "guitaisaku o dase, ANA," 28.
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- 40 *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, "norikae mo raku ni" (transfers comfortable too), September 29 (morning), 2003, 42.
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- 46 *Asahi Shimbun*, "shinkansen Shinagawa eki, kaigyō 3 shuukan no riyōkaku, mokuhyō shitomawaru" (three weeks after Shinagawa station opens, number of passengers short of goal), October 22 (morning), 2003, 11.
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