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In our final issue of 2008, you will find a selection of book and film reviews. We also offer our first Japanese language DVD review, which we hope will become a regular feature. Simon Cotterill looks at the cult 2004 film "Kamikaze Girls" (下妻物語) which is due to be released on DVD in January 2009. As in previous years we also have a selection of film reviews from the immensely popular "Premiere Japan" event held annually at BAFTA. Susan Meehan gives us her take on several of the movies including "After School" (アフタースクール) and "Fine, Totally Fine" (全然大丈夫). As the 150th anniversary year of Anglo-Japanese diplomatic ties draws to a close Sir Hugh Cortazzi reviews a recent study analyzing their genesis. Suzanne Perrin examines a fascinating new work on the evolving place of the tea room in contemporary Japanese architecture. Not forgetting our parent-readers looking for that elusive gift, Anna Davis appraises "Origami for Children." Finally, a very big thank to all our reviewers, readers and the Japan Society team for their support in 2008.

Sean Curtin

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New reviews

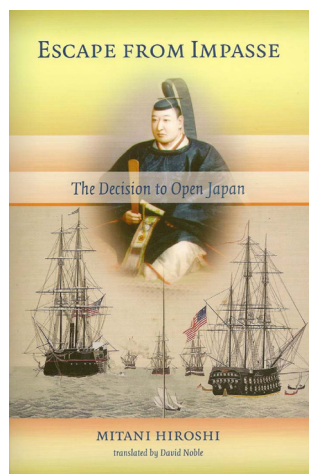
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We are grateful to our regular reviewers:

Sir Hugh Cortazzi	Anna Davis
Fumiko Halloran	Susan Meehan
Takahiro Miyao	William Farr
Ben-Ami Shillony	Tomohiko Taniguchi
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Escape from Impasse: The Decision to Open Japan

by Mitani Hiroshi, translated by David Noble

International House of Japan, 2006, 356 pages including notes and index. Hardcover ¥ 3000

ISBN 13: 978-4-903452-06-7

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This book is a valuable addition to the literature in English about the steps leading up to the treaties of 1858 which opened the way to the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations between Japan and the Western powers. It is also timely, as we celebrate this year the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Yedo, concluded for Britain by Lord Elgin on 26 August 1858.

Professor Mitani's work, like Professor McOmie's 'The Opening of Japan, 1853-55', also published in 2006, concentrates more on the negotiations which prized open the door to Tokugawa Japan, than on the 1858

treaties, which unlike the earlier treaties focussed on trade and diplomatic relations.

Professor Mitani begins with a discussion of the foreign policy of the Tokugawa regime in the 17th and 18th centuries. He points out that the term sakoku (which may be roughly translated as "closed country") dates from as late as 1801 when it was used in a translation into Japanese of an essay by Engelbert Kaempfer who had served as physician to the Dutch in Deshima in the late seventeenth century. "Consciously distancing Japan from the West seemed the most desirable way to maintain peace for Japan." The concept of 'sonnō jōi' (which may be translated as "revere the emperor and expel the barbarians") became part of the philosophy of sakoku. In this context Mitani notes that Koga Tōan, a Confucian scholar, considered that Japan had no need any longer to fear the "diabolical religion" of the West as loyalty to the sovereign had become so deeply inculcated among the samurai and common people. Koga and some others like him even contemplated Japanese overseas expansion.

Mitani points out that the volume of Japan's foreign trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gradually sank, while interest in what was happening in the West grew. Matsudaira Sadanobu who became the

dominant force in the Shogunate in 1787, for instance, "recognized no value in foreign trade other than the importation of books and medicines." However the appearance of Russians around Ezo (now Hokkaido) made Japanese increasingly aware of the need for military preparedness in the face of the potential foreign threat and of the increasing numbers of whaling vessels, many of them British, which resulted in the landing on Japanese soil of foreign sailors. These developments led to the issue of an order to repel foreign ships. But Bakufu officials, such as Mizuno Tadaakira, who became responsible for finance in 1818, wanted to reduce the burden on the daimyo of responsibility for Japan's coastal defence and Japanese defences were accordingly neglected.

The Opium War of 1839-42, however, ensured that strengthening Japan's defences became a major issue. Coastal defence surveys were made, but the costs were high and after leadership changes in 1843 the majority of the plans to strengthen coastal fortifications were abandoned.

Japan needed intelligence about western intentions and looked to the Dutch as a main source. But they rejected the Dutch advice to develop more flexible policies towards foreign ships. As Mitani comments (page 54): "Viewed in hindsight, the advice given by the Dutch was reasonable and honest. The subsequent forced opening of the country as a result of Perry's military threat gave birth to a profound sense of national humiliation that became one of the fundamental factors in the collapse of Tokugawa authority."

The Bakufu were divided between those argued for increased coastal defences in the interest of sakoku, even if it meant war with Western powers, and those who thought that Japan should give first priority to avoiding conflict. No consensus between these two views could be found.

In 1854 when a decision had to be made on a response to the American demands made by Commodore Perry the majority opinion within the Tokugawa government appears to have favoured rejecting the American demands but in view of the inadequacy of Japan's defences, to try to delay any answer. The Bakufu undermined its own authority when in preparing for Perry's return in 1854 they took the unprecedented action of informing all higher officials and all of the daimyo of the contents of the American letters and seeking consultations on them. Tokugawa Nariaki who led the hard line faction advocated a general proclamation mobilizing the nation for war while working for a peaceful resolution with the foreign powers. This stance came to be termed 'naisen gaiwa'.

In the event the Japanese in 1854 were able to avoid

any major confrontation because Perry's primary concerns were, in Mitani's view, to draw Japan into communication with the Western powers "and to ensure that the glory of that achievement should be enjoyed by the United States and himself." To achieve this he was ready to give up the demands which he had made for the opening of commercial relations. Like the British Admiral Stirling at Nagasaki he was not really interested in trade.

The really difficult negotiations about opening Japanese ports to trade were those in 1858 with Townsend Harris, the American representative, over the US-Japan treaty of amity and commerce. The demand for the opening of the ports of Osaka and Hyogo was a particularly difficult one for the Japanese negotiators as they were so close to Kyoto, the ancient capital. Mitani asks why the Japanese negotiators, knowing the strong imperial opposition to such a concession which they had decided to make, "took the unprecedented step of appealing for imperial authorization of their actions"?

Premiere Japan 2008 at BAFTA 26-28 September 2008



After School (アフタースクール) directed by Kenji Uchida 2007, 102 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

For the fourth consecutive year, the Embassy of Japan organised a superb festival of new Japanese films at the very swanky and welcoming BAFTA premises over the weekend of 26-28 September 2008. Guided by the expert hands of Tony Rayns and Alexander Jacoby, the choice of new releases was extremely good.

The eagerly awaited "After School" (2008), Kenji Uchida's first film in three years, reveals his talent as a screenwriter as well as director. Its UK premiere was held at BAFTA on Friday 26 September and was

preceded by a friendly chat between Dr Rayna Denison, lecturer in film and television studies at the University of East Anglia, and Uchida, who had flown over from Japan especially for the event. This was Uchida's first visit to the UK.

Uchida, it turns out, is a great fan of the Beatles and of Charlie Chaplin. He particularly admires the way Chaplin made films for people to enjoy. Making fun, enjoyable films is central to Uchida's filmmaking and in fact his second feature, "Unmei Ja Nai Hito" or "A Stranger of Mine," which picked up four prizes at the 2005 Cannes Festival, is sometimes described as entertainment not art.

Uchida wasn't prepared to disclose much before the screening of "After School," limiting himself to warning the audience that the mind-bending film might lose them at times and suggesting that it is probably better viewed a second time.

The film starts off by introducing us to Kimura (Masato Sakai) and Miki (Takako Tokiwa), childhood sweethearts, and their good friend and neighbour, Jinno (Yo Oizumi), a former classmate and now a teacher at their alma mater. While Kimura is the quintessential well-groomed salaryman of few words, Miki is the attractive doting wife and Jinno, an engaging tracksuit-clad teacher. Borrowing Jinno's car to drive to work, Kimura asks the instantly likeable Jinno to keep an eye on the heavily pregnant Miki.



Things start to unravel when Kimura fails to return home. One of his superiors at work, in possession of an incriminating photograph of Kimura with a pretty girl, hires Kitazawa, a morose and seedy detective, to find him. Hoping to find clues at Kimura's old school Kitazawa visits Nishi Morisawa High School claiming to be Kimura's classmate. Before long, the affable and curly-haired Jinno becomes embroiled in Kitazawa's hunt for Kimura.

Kitazawa begins to suspect that Kimura is involved with the yakuza and a bar hostess by the name of Ayumi, but Jinno resolutely remains loyal to his childhood friend, refusing to believe that he is guilty of any duplicity. The complex caper continues to absorb and puzzle the audience until all is revealed and the loose ends tied up.



The audience was then privileged to a Q&A session with Kenji Uchida and Rayna Denison, who expertly enticed Uchida to comment on the central concepts and premises of his film.

'Information' is central to Uchida's films, topical in an age when most of us are suffering from a surfeit of it. Uchida is evidently bothered by the fact that people have their prejudices and tend to jump to conclusions and pigeonhole individuals with the limited information they may have about them. "After School" masterfully illustrates how we fall into this trap. All that needs to be said is that nothing is what it first appears to be.

Romance is also key to Uchida's films. In fact, he always feels that he is working on a love story, though he expresses it within a complicated plot.

Denison remarked on the lack of nostalgia and glamourisation of Japan in his films to which Uchida responded by saying that having lived abroad for four years (he studied at film school in San Francisco), he began to see Japan with foreign eyes and wanted to show Japan and Tokyo as they are, the reality being that Tokyo is rather dirty.

Noticeably reluctant at having to conclude her interview with Uchida, Denison threw questions open to the audience and I asked about his interest in Charlie Chaplin. Uchida said that he had seen each one of Chaplin's films, apart from his short films, ten times over and that his favourite film is "The Kid." So genuine is his enthusiasm for Chaplin, in fact, that he was delighted to recount that he had once dated someone who shares Chaplin's birthday.

I was very lucky to have had a couple of minutes with Uchida at the end of the Q&A. I began by asking what sort of student he'd been. He said that he had enjoyed school, been a good student and had particularly liked football; in fact he appears to be an avid football fan as he admitted that he would spend the main part of his last three days in London watching Premier League games. I couldn't draw him into naming his favourite team. Next, I commented on the quality of the cast in "After School" and wondered whether he would use

them in another film. Uchida didn't rule this out, but said he had no such plans and would hold auditions for his next film, as normal. Before he rushed off to his waiting car, I managed to encourage him to visit Kennington and East Street Market, Charlie Chaplin's old haunts.

My only regret – that I didn't get to see the film twice over the weekend.

Fine, Totally Fine (全然大丈夫) **directed by Yosuke Fujita**

2008, 110 minutes

Review by Simon Cotterill

Opportunities to see Japanese films at the cinema are pretty few and far between in the UK, and when the chance does come around it normally means watching a samurai, yakuza, or horror movie. British cinema audiences associate Japan (and often the rest of the Far East) with wandering swordsmen, lonely gangsters, and scenes of *Battle Royal*/ *Audition*-like gore. To the outside world, modern Japanese cinema is a cinema of individuals and violence. But in reality Japanese cinema is much more than that and, thankfully, now London cinema-goers are getting more of a chance to discover this for themselves.



Besides its screening on Sunday 28th September at BAFTA "Fine, Totally, Fine" ('Zen, Zen Daijoubu') was also shown from 14th November at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. It's a brilliantly subtle comedy which centres upon a quirky bunch of eccentric characters, the likes of which many UK viewers won't have seen in a Japanese film before.

Teruo, a baby faced thirty-something played by Yoshiyoshi Arakawa, lives above a second hand bookshop with his despondent father. His father, who owns the shop seems to have given up on life since losing his wife, while Teruo, a part-time tree cutter, dreams of opening the world's best, haunted theme park. Teruo's best friend Hisanobu (Yoshinori Okada)

is less of a dreamer. A handsome and gentle man, he works in administration at a hospital, where he is blind to the fact he is the centre of female attention. In his spare time Hisanobu helps Teruo create boobey-traps and practice foolish 'horror' stunts, some of which fail, some of which succeed – all of which are hilarious.

Hisanobu is the kind of nice guy who can't say 'no', and one day he finds himself employing the clumsy, accident-prone Akari (Yoshino Kimura) as a cleaner at the hospital, despite the fact she arrives at the job interview bleeding and wearing torn clothes. Akari is a misfit painter, who seems uncomfortable in her own skin and has an odd fascination with a homeless woman. But despite her clear inability to do her hospital job, she manages to lure the romantic curiosity of Hisanobu, and later, once she has left her cleaning job and started work at the second hand bookshop, Teruo also decides that he is in love with her.

The love triangle between best friends Teruo and Hisanobu, and Akari is an unusual, lazy one. No one is really aware of the others' feelings, and no one really seems ready to act on their own. But as this love triangle gently moves towards its conclusion, it has its audience constantly gripped by scenes which are tender, realistic, very funny and very memorable.

Yoshiyoshi Arakawa's performance is a work of comic genius. An actor who looks like a twelve year-old trapped in a thirty year-old's body, Arakawa doesn't rely on his unusual, cartoon-like appearance for laughs. He plays Teruo as a real human being who is struggling with adulthood and is beginning to realise he must turn his childhood dreams into a reality, or risk losing his self-respect. Throughout the film Arakawa deftly draws laughter with a subtle delivery of great lines and expressions that often show an indifference to the world.

Yoshino Kimura, a popular actress and singer, who was born in London, gives an equally compelling performance as Akari. Despite her awkward appearance and her clumsiness Akari is longed for by men. She is fascinated by other people, but uncomfortable being given attention. Kimura manages to balance these contradictions perfectly and slowly draws the audience into Akari's unusual world.

"Fine, Totally Fine" is the debut film by writer-director Yosuke Fujita, a wonderful new talent, who used to work as a hospital caretaker! Fujita won the Japan Film Angel Prize for his screenplay, and the movie has also won an audience award in New York and the Nippon Connection award in Germany.

After its run at ICA, "Fine, Totally Fine" will be released on DVD in the UK. But I suggest anyone of you who has the time should get down to the cinema to see it. "Fine,

Totally Fine" is one of many great comedies to have been made in Japan recently, too many of which have been overlooked for international distribution. Full houses at cinemas are the only thing likely to change programmers' and distributors' minds – and with any luck "Fine, Totally Fine" could be the first in a new line of movies that make UK audiences associate Japanese cinema with laughter as much as violence.

Review by Susan Meehan

"Fine Totally Fine" was an undiluted joy and had the BAFTA audience creased up with laughter throughout. It tells the story of Teruo, a dreamer with the ambition of building the best ever haunted house, rather than continue with his manual job. He lives with his dejected father in a flat above their second-hand bookshop.

Teruo's friend Hisanobu, works as a hospital manager and is altogether more mature. Aware that they are approaching 30, he starts to tire of Teruo's prankish ways. The sensitive and sensible Hisanobu is single, much to the disbelief of his colleagues who are ever anxious to set him up. The lovely but clumsy 'chikuwa'-loving Akari then appears on the scene. One cannot help laughing at her mishaps – her utter inability to open a box of tissues or the havoc she unleashes at the hospital where she has been employed.

Akari spends much of her time painting colourful pictures of a local bag lady, with whom she somehow identifies. Perhaps they are kindred spirits in that it is difficult or impossible for either of them to hold onto conventional jobs.

Akari in fact quits the hospital as she is simply causing too many accidents. Her life takes a romantic turn soon after she begins work at the second-hand bookshop with Teruo, and this determines the course of the rest of the film.

Tokyo Sonata (トウキョウソナタ) directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa

2008, 119 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

I eagerly signed up to watch "Tokyo Sonata" (last of the new Japanese films screened at BAFTA, 26-28 September), knowing next to nothing about the director, but hoping that it might be a family or domestic drama in the fashion of Yasujiro Ozu. I had merely heard the name Kiyoshi Kurosawa and knew he was no relation of Akira's, but hadn't seen any of the J-horror films for which he is known. As the film had won the "Un Certain Regard" Jury Prize at the 2008 Cannes festival, it seemed to come well recommended.



As a result of company streamlining and outsourcing to China, Ryuhei Sasaki (Teruyuki Kagawa) loses his well-paid job. Pride prevents him from confiding in his wife or two sons, so Ryuhei carries on the pretence of commuting to work.

The family drama which ensues is irredeemably depressing and lacking in Ozu's gentle humour or contemplativeness. The film also attempts to embrace too many social ills, I thought - unemployment, suicide, bereavement, family breakdown and burglary to name most of them.

The fact that I found Ryuhei Sasaki a rather unsympathetic character from the outset – scowling, aggressive, alpha male-wannabe – meant that I found it hard to empathise with him in any way, and could only feel pity for his long-suffering family.

Life with the Sasaki is certainly grim – everyone is tense, and other than calls to meals hardly any words are exchanged; no wonder the boys are desperate for outlets – the younger Kenji (Kai Inowaki) surreptitiously using his lunch money to pay for piano lessons and the charismatic elder brother Taka (Yu Koyanagi), a mainly absent university student, set on joining the American army.

The excellent Kyoko Koizumi plays Megumi Sasaki, the sympathetic, resigned, tolerant housewife who desperately tries to keep the family from disintegrating and keeps it fed. The scene in which she fails to find a taker for her homemade doughnuts is pure pathos.

To the film's credit, the acting is very good as are the scenes of Tokyo. It also highlights Japanese social ills – unemployment, the lack of counseling on offer, humiliating and unhelpful job-centres, thwarted ambitions amongst the young and the long suffering wife.

All in all, it is a horror film of sorts.

Kamikaze Girls (下妻物語)

directed by Tetsuya Nakashima

2004, 102 minutes, DVD release: January 2009

Review by Simon Cotterill

"Kamikaze Girls" won Best Picture and Best Director at the 27th Yokohama Movie Awards, and its two lead actresses, J-pop stars Kyoko Fukuda and Anna Tsuchiya both attracted numerous plaudits, including nominations by the Japan Academy for outstanding performances. That said, Kamikaze Girls is nothing like a typical award-winning picture.

Despite its English-language title, "Kamikaze Girls" actually has nothing to do with war, pilots or even women taking on traditionally masculine roles. The literal translation of its Japanese title is 'Shimotsuma Story', and the film is set in this quiet, rural town in Ibaraki Prefecture. In the eyes of young Momoko (Fukuda), Shimotsuma is the epitome of dull, but she has been forced to live there after her father got on the wrong side of the Yakuza by selling fake Versace. Momoko fantasises about a French Rococo-style existence, full of sleep, sweet foods and lacy apparel. She dreams of the Château de Versailles, and decks herself out in Tokyo's finest and frilliest haute couture, from the legendary 'Lolita' fashion store 'Baby, The Stars Shine Brightly'.



Momoko is fiercely individual; her motto is "I was born alone, I'll die alone. So if I can't live alone, I'd rather be a flea." She's also fiercely determined to be pretty – but not to please anyone other than herself. She doesn't care at all about boys or the other people in Shimotsuma, apart from her eccentric grandmother, and she spends most of her time travelling between Ibaraki and Tokyo for shopping trips. Aspiring to be like the French aristocracy, Momoko feels unsuited to conventional work. She instead uses various unscrupulous schemes to raise the money she needs for Lolita dresses, including selling off her dad's fake Versace clothes behind his back. One day, when Momoko is lying on her porch, looking pretty, and gazing into the distance, a new 'Versach' customer rides up on a motorbike and shakes her out of her hazy Rococo reverie.

Ichiko (Tsuchiya) is a hard-talking, head-butting, dirty clothes-wearing, always-spitting, member of an all-girl 'Yankee/Bosozoku' motorcycle gang. In a city, girls from such opposed fashion worlds would rarely socialise. But in their small town world where everyone else buys clothes from the same store, these two girls are pushed together by their unique appearance and individual spirit. They slowly become strong friends, although Momoko does receive one or two head butts from Ichiko along the way.

Kamikaze Girls' basic premise 'two kids from different tribes unite and come-of-age together' is hardly unique – particularly in recent Japanese cinema. But, nonetheless, it is an extremely unusual film; both brilliantly funny and extremely surreal. Director Tetsuya Nakashima employs an array of filming styles and Tim Burton-esque, candy-coloured hues to make Momoko's life in Shimotsuma seem far less dull than she considers it to be. His imaginative use of animated sequences, plot-rewinds and MTV-like, fast-cut montages borrows from films like Fight Club and Kill Bill and constantly keeps viewers on their toes. In one memorable moment, Nakashima mixes the film's narration style and has Momoko turn to the camera and says "Now here's a cartoon to keep you kids amused" before launching into a manga sequence.

Kamikaze Girls offers the western viewer an interesting glimpse into two of Japan's oddest fashion scenes. Both the Lolita and Yankee styles were massive in Japan in the early nineties and both can still be seen around certain areas of big cities. However, in these cities now their popularity has somewhat diminished; replaced by Hip-Hop, black culture-influenced fashions. These days it is in the Japanese countryside and small towns that Lolitas and Yankees can most easily be found. The film presents both of these youth tribes – whose adherents consider their clothes as part of their skin – in a lovingly detailed way, useful for the uninformed westerner. But the film isn't pure homage, the two cultures are compared and criticised throughout and in the end both Momoko and Ichiko themselves begin to challenge their ideals.

Origami for Children: 35 Easy-To-Follow Step-By-Step Projects by Mari Ono and Roshin Ono

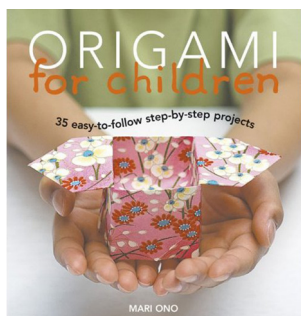
Cico books , 2008, 128 pages.
Hardback, £14.99

ISBN 13: 978-1906094386

Review by Anna Davis

This time two years ago, I remember feverishly wiping my brow as I attempted to teach my then class of five year olds how to make an origami heart for their Valentine's cards, fumbling and stumbling through my own ineptitude,

whilst all the time trying to appear in control of my hands. So when "Origami for Children" by Mari Ono and Roshin Ono landed on my desk, it was with some trepidation that I opened it. What a pleasant surprise, then, to discover it to be straightforward and enjoyable to use, a colourful book that is, crucially, user-friendly.



I followed the photographs and simple instructions and was delighted to find that my own efforts looked surprisingly similar to those in the book (a rare event for me when following any sort of illustrated set of instructions). Next I did a little outsourcing, and was pleased to hear of similarly

favourable outcomes produced by both a teenager and a six year old. It's the sort of book you'll actually want to use as it's very good for the ego – your chances of recreating the varied projects, with minimal intervention from a more adept friend/neighbour/child are high.

The book begins with a short introduction and explanation, and helpfully, a chart explaining the meaning of the various arrows used throughout. The projects themselves are presented in six categories – toys, origami fun, animals, party time, sweets and foods and vehicles. Creations range from the more traditional "fusen" (balloon) and "kabuto" (samurai helmet) to the contemporary hot dog and an ever-practical teddy bear's necktie. Most projects can be made with standard origami paper, although some of the animals and foods (millefeuille, anyone?) will be more effective if made with specially printed origami, or plain paper and an artistic hand. Each project is given a difficulty rating and there is a good balance of levels.

The book also includes a guide to suppliers in the UK and with this information you have all the tools to start folding away. "Origami for Children" would make an ideal present for an artistic child, a useful resource for teachers and parents and an ideal introduction to origami for adults as well. I may even consider giving those origami hearts another try...

New Zen: the tea-ceremony room in modern Japanese architecture by Michael Freeman

Eightbooks Ltd, 2007, 240 pages.
Hardback, £35.00

ISBN 13: 978-0-9554322-0-0

Review by Suzanne Perrin

A specialist in Asian art and architecture, Michael Freeman is a London based photographer who has

contributed several publications on Japanese and Oriental themes. The text, design and photographs are all done by him for this book.



There has always been a western fascination with "Zen", whether it be austere Buddhist practices, minimal gardens of rock and sand, ferocious sword-play, or tranquil tea rituals. This latest offering to the Zen catalogue of associated topics deals with an exploration of

contemporary Japanese architecture, and how the constraints of a tea room, Chashitsu, are finding expression in contemporary Japan by well established and up-coming designers.

The flyleaf states: "Since the 1990s Japanese architects and designers have been re-interpreting the Chashitsu [tea ceremony rooms] creating modern meditative spacesfeaturing a vast array of materials including paper, wood, plastic, stone, aluminum, glass and concrete."

Freeman introduces the book as "a series of experiments, undertaken individually and with little in the way of publicity" for its designers and architects. He calls the tea room "a very loaded space", due to its six hundred year tradition of infusing art, culture, philosophy, ideology and design all around the central act of making tea for a guest (or two).

The book first peruses the history of the tea ceremony, drawing on quotations from Sen no Rikyu, Kobori Enshu, Tenshin Okakura and Lafcadio Hearn, all renowned writers on the way of tea and its basic concepts. An Introduction gives an overview of the evolution of the tea ceremony serving to enlighten readers with the genre, and is illustrated with a plan view of a traditional tea room with a glossary of terms for tea ceremony procedures. Ensuing section titles cover areas devoted to New Traditional, Modern Materials, Garden Settings, and Contemporary Interpretations.

Freeman likens the appeal of the Chashitsu in modern day Japan as being "an inspiration" from older traditions of austerity and simplicity in the face of 1980s "Bubble" economy excess and indulgence. Very relevant then, in the light of current financial crises across the globe.

It is with these ideas of re-interpreting the formula of Chashitsu as an oasis of calm reflection in a frenetic world, translated by contemporary architects such as Arata Isozaki, Kengo Kuma, Kisho Kurokawa, Shigeru Uchida and many lesser known names working in the design field, that draws together the threads of tea culture, Zen ethos and cutting edge design style.

The photography throughout is beautiful, with carefully chosen images showing the details of materials, surface textures, light, pattern and space that all contribute to the harmony, respect and reverence for craftsmanship that goes with tea aesthetics. There is much to fascinate here in the many and varied ways of constructing a tea room - or space.

In the section marked "Contemporary Interpretations," one example offers a portable tea space called Sankio (In the Mountains), by Shigeru Uchida from 2005, a light, cubic structure measuring 2.8 sq metres with a height of 2.3 m, made from an open lattice of black bamboo strips woven into a mesh for walls, with a black wooden floor vestibule and thin woven mat flooring for the main space. This flexibility allows for kakejiku (scrolls) to be hung anywhere along the lattice walls. The ro (hearth) is not sunken but placed in a wooden designed box in the corner for portability. The visuals are stunning, both inside and out.

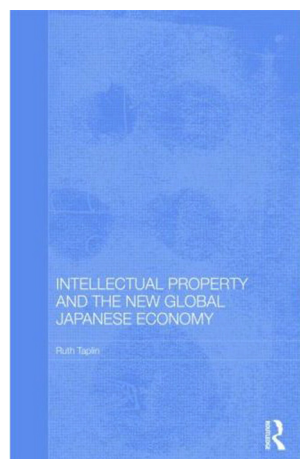
Other innovative places for tea areas (some challenge the meaning of the word 'room') include a Chashitsu located within a greenhouse complex in Millennium City near Narita by Hiroshi Iguchi; the "Too High" (Takasugian) tea house perched on top of a truncated tree with views of the Nagano hills in Chino by Terunobu Fujinori; the circular steel and glass rooftop tea space with fixtures more appropriate to a bathroom than a tea room by Kunihiko Hayakawa; and an aluminium suitcase that unfolds into a portable, tent-like structure that creates possibly the smallest tea space imaginable, by Toshihiko Suzuki.

Overall some thirty-seven examples are illustrated, but despite the variety of formats and excellent photographs, not enough information is given on the materials and construction of these iconoclastic "tea spaces." Even so, this is a 'must have' coffee table book for Japanese design aficionados everywhere.

has attempted to develop its own new approach to intellectual property issues, especially those which stress the importance of innovation. This recent development has emerged in part as an attempt to inject new life into the anaemic Japanese economy which has struggled to shake off the shadow of stagnation and the deflationary spiral that engulfed the country during the nineties.

Taplin works hard to demonstrate why she firmly believes the Japanese economy was revitalised during the Koizumi administration of 2001-06. She shows how Koizumi skilfully used both economic and political structural reforms to attain his goals. He also embraced a radical IP drive that included the general Japanese population. His objective was to integrate Japan more firmly into the global economy, something Taplin thinks he achieved.

The book discusses what the author sees as the "landmark decisions" involving employees' rights to compensation and the "bold attempt" by the Tokyo Stock Exchange to create a market in cooperation with the London Stock Exchange which caters to small and medium enterprises (SME) companies. The author passionately believes these companies are often the locus of innovation. Taplin considers that these developments all point to a period of change ahead for Japan that "has only previously occurred in the nineteenth century". The book is recommended reading for those interested in understanding how the Japanese economy is changing, the evolving role of IP in revitalizing the economy, and how Japan is attempting to adapt to the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly globalised world.



Intellectual Property and the New Japanese Global Economy by Ruth Taplin

Routledge, 2009, 196 pages.
Hardback, £35.00

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-46597-7

Review by Sean Curtin

This well-structured book examines the various ways in which intellectual property

(IP) is used in Japan. It incorporates information provided by frontline decision makers in the country and is highly informative. It also looks at how Japan

