

## Coming of Age Story

Chris Corker reviews *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

## Colourful Characters

We consider life, death and social issues in Keiichi Hara's *Colorful*

In this issue of the Japan Society Review, we focus on five books and a film. We begin with Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, another great success from the author focussing on isolation and disconnection.

We then move onto the theme of Japanese and international relations with Sir Hugh Cortazzi's review of *British Courts and Extra-territoriality in Japan, 1859-1899*. Remaining on this subject, we offer a review by Ian Nish of two works centered on China as the site of conflict between Japan and the Allied Nations. Both books provide assessments of Japan's more aggressive foreign policy before and during the Second World War and address the darker side of Japanese international relations.

Chris Corker moves on to look at Murakami Haruki's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. As ever, the question is, can it possibly live up to the hype?

Our final review continues this consideration of social issues in Japan as Mike Sullivan examines Hara Keiichi's animated film, *Colorful*, as part of a film festival on the theme of 'youth'. With sumptuous visuals and strong characters, *Colorful* considers issues of bullying, *hikikomori*, dysfunctional families and suicide.

William Cottrell

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MURAKAMI



## Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage

by Murakami Haruki

Harvill Secker, 2014

298 Pages

ISBN-10: 1846558336

Review by Chris Corker

It has been nearly three years since Murakami's last book *1Q84* was released in

English. Personally I found *1Q84* disappointing after the hype, the characters unrelatable and the majority of their motives confused and unbelievable. Murakami's new release *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, another coming-of-age or 'Bildungsroman' story, stands at a manageable 298 pages compared with the daunting 928 of its predecessor, and reads more like a fleshed-out short story than a true novel. This, however, does not detract from the book's appeal, instead giving the work a refreshing simplicity and leanness that Murakami hasn't adopted since his early works such as *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Sputnik Sweetheart*, venturing away from the (pleasantly) complex narratives of *Kafka on the Shore* and *Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Indeed, I was reminded even more so of his first two works, *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball*, which are yet to be made widely available in the UK. As with these two novellas, the characters in *Tsukuru* float, dream-like, in and out of scene, making no apparent difference to the protagonist.

Tazaki Tsukuru, in many ways, is the antithesis of the archetypal Murakami protagonist (Murakami is certainly of the 'write what you know' breed of novelists), having no real interest in drinking, fine food, or jazz – the general bread and butter of Murakami's focal characters. This is because the Tsukuru we are presented with at the beginning of the book – a student, living away from home in Tokyo – is depressed, feeling disconnected and, he admits candidly, suicidal.

'[...] Tsukuru had fallen into the bowels of death, on untold day after another, lost in a dark stagnant void.'

Murakami's characters are typically strong and resilient in the face of suffering, both real and surreal, so readers may be surprised to see one of his creations so downtrodden, and will doubtless infer something crushingly traumatic in his past. And they would be right. Tsukuru's four closest friends from childhood have told him – without giving a reason – that they no longer want to see him.

The four friends each have a colour in their name: *Aka* (Red), *Ao* (Blue), *Shiro* (white) and *Kuro* (black). These colours become their nicknames and Tsukuru refers to

them in this way throughout the book; but more than that these colours come to represent Tsukuru's lack of connection to any of them: 'How great it would be, he often, thought, if I had a color in my name too. Then everything would be perfect.' *Tsukuru*, in Japanese, is simply the verb 'to make'. In his book *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge states that: 'In a novel names are never neutral. They always signify, even if it is only ordinariness.' Ironically, the four friends, as Tsukuru describes them, are merely transparent archetypes or ciphers, the inhabitants of the Mystery Machine, minus the dog; the characters really are that stereotypical. We have the jock; the shy nerd; the sarcastic, smart but plain girl; and the beautiful but mentally frail porcelain doll. But in spite (or perhaps because) of their prefabricated roles, the characters find happiness as a complete unit. Tsukuru, on the other hand, who cannot be fit snugly into any pre-ordained category, sees his lack of definable character – lack of colour – as a fundamental flaw that has ruined this relationship, and will continue to ruin any future relationships he has. This causes him intense anxiety, only exacerbated as those important to him, including a very close male friend, Haida (Grey), for whom Tsukuru may have had intimate feelings, leave him. He begins to see himself as an 'empty container' who others can stand for a while, but not long-term. This lack of connection that Tsukuru feels is referred to often in the book, and *The Doors of Perception*, in which Huxley calls human beings 'island universes' is also referenced. Tsukuru cannot know why his friends hate him – he is not privy to that information, he cannot share their mind – and it is this that nearly kills him.

It is later in Tsukuru's life (he is in his mid-thirties), when he feels that he has moved beyond, if not recovered from, the pain of his friends' abandonment, that he meets Sara. Tsukuru feels differently about Sara than he has any woman so far; he begins to fall in love. After telling Sara the story of his friends' abandonment of him, however, she seems to confirm his suspicions that there is something wrong with him, telling him that he doesn't seem 'all there' when they make love. She advises him to go and find his friends – to whom he hasn't spoken a word since the day they rejected him – and ask for an explanation. This is where Tsukuru's pilgrimage begins, leading him back to his hometown of Nagoya, all the way to Finland, and to a shattering revelation.

The journey that follows does have echoes of Murakami's other books: there are phallogocentric elements and a threesome reminiscent of *Hear the Wind Sing*; there are suggestions of a darker side to every character, not necessarily controlled by the conscious mind as in *Kafka on the Shore* and many others; there is a mental breakdown, similar to that in *Norwegian Wood*; and a nostalgic yearning for the past, combined with the unrequited love that has become a Murakami staple. While the characters in

the novel are interesting in their transformation, none of them is as intriguing as Gotanda, Mimi or The Sheep Man in *Dance, Dance, Dance* and *A Wild Sheep Chase*, both of which have strong resemblances to *Colorless Tsuru Tazaki* in terms of theme and style. Also, at times the eroticism feels a little clunky. Murakami won a nomination for the Bad Sex in Fiction Award in 2011 and passages like: 'These insistent caresses continued until Tsukuru was inside the vagina of one of the girls,' are unlikely to mend his reputation on that front. On the whole, I found the translation crisp and clear, although a few phrases, and the innumerable split infinitives, felt a little clunky and I was left wondering if a man in his mid-thirties would really say: 'I am too telling the truth.'

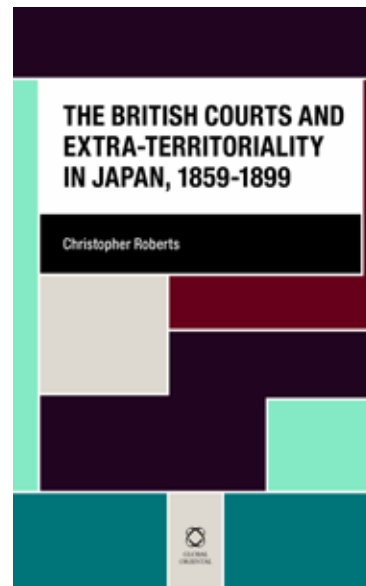
In conclusion, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* is an enjoyable book that harks back to Murakami's earlier years, and Tsukuru is a relatable protagonist who can fit into the system but struggles to truly belong in society. It is a book that begins in an unfamiliar tone but soon employs the familiar Murakami references – Jazz, classical music, food and the Japanese ideal of beauty in mundane tasks – that his faithful readers know so well.

Partway into the book, Tsukuru's friend Haida muses on the transience of talent:

"Talent might be ephemeral," Haida replied, "and there aren't many people who can sustain it their whole lives. But talent makes a huge spiritual leap possible. It's an almost universal, independent phenomenon that transcends the individual."



It's fair to say that Murakami is maintaining his talent as an author, and he may yet grow in popularity. Whether his work will be viewed afterwards as transcending the individual, as it has with so few authors, only time will tell. §



## The British Courts and Extra-territoriality in Japan, 1859-1899

By Christopher Roberts

Global Oriental, 2013

442 Pages, £98

ISBN 9789004257566

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Dr Christopher Roberts is a British lawyer, who formerly practised law

in Japan. He has contributed various portraits of British judges and lawyers who practised in 19th century Japan to the series *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*. In this meticulously researched book, he presents a detailed account of the work of the British courts operating in Japan under the terms of the 1858 Treaty.<sup>1</sup>

As Roberts points out, the extra-territorial provisions of the Treaty were readily accepted by the Tokugawa *bakufu* as their main concern at the time was to have as little as possible to do with foreigners. If the foreign consuls were responsible for their own nationals, there was less likelihood of incidents occurring which might lead to foreign naval (or military) intervention. In the absence of anything approaching a modern legal system in Japan, the provisions were at that time a practical necessity.

The British at the time had no real knowledge of the way laws operated in Japan, but they must have realised that the samurai had special privileges, that regulations varied from fief to fief, that torture of suspects was common and that punishments were drastic and cruel. They also knew that Christianity was proscribed.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, extra-territoriality was seen as an infringement on Japanese sovereignty and the Treaties were condemned as unequal. The ending of extra-territoriality was accordingly seen as one of the main aims of Treaty Revision.

As Roberts notes, however, extra-territoriality, while it was regarded as a vital factor protecting the foreign merchants in Japan, did not totally dominate the life of the Treaty Ports. The merchants were there to make money. Administering the extra-territorial provisions of the Treaty, however, provided work for a significant number of British officials and was hugely time-consuming. It was hardly commensurate with the numbers of British subjects resident in Japan

during those years. In 1881, for instance, there were only 1,127 British residents in Japan and 1,426 other Westerners.

In the final years of the *bakufu*, Yokohama was, as I have described it elsewhere, 'a frontier town.' Life was insecure. Apart from threats from two sworded Japanese *rōnin*, fires were frequent and diseases prevalent. Some of the merchants were unscrupulous and arrogant towards Japanese whom they came across, while seamen from visiting ships often drank too much and patronised the brothels. Howard Vyse, the first consul in Kanagawa, advised residents to go about armed. He had no legal training and was eventually removed. Alcock, the first Consul General, inevitably improvised and the initial arrangements were at best inadequate. As soon as Sir Harry Parkes arrived as successor to Alcock, the arrangements improved and a properly functioning consular court system was set up.

In his book Roberts describes the court system and its operation in both criminal and civil cases. Most criminal cases were of a fairly minor nature, although there a small number of cases involving manslaughter and one of murder. This was the notorious Carew case when Ernest Satow as Minister commuted the death sentence, which the court in Yokohama had imposed on Mrs Carew, who had been found guilty of poisoning her husband.<sup>2</sup> A consular jail was maintained in Yokohama up to the coming into force of the revised treaty in 1899.

Most of the civil cases involved commercial transactions, but the majority of the work of the courts was related to shipping. Some of these were complicated and contentious, not least that resulting from the collision in November 1892 off Matsuyama between the Japanese naval vessel *Chishima* and the *P&O Ravenna*. As a result of the collision 74 out of 90 crew members on the Japanese ship were drowned. Dr Roberts devotes chapter seven to the litigation resulting from the accident. He comments (p. 284):

'The incident and the ensuing cases exemplify many practical aspects of the operation of British extra-territoriality in Japan and how the two authorities balanced mutual co-operation to make the system work whilst defending their own interests amidst the emotion of the British community in Japan (and on the China Coast) and equally nationalistic Japanese elements.'

Roberts concludes that while sometimes the local assessors (i.e. jury) were inclined to favour British litigants, the courts worked hard to maintain the law with fairness and objectivity. Difficulties often arose when men of other nationalities were involved. Other Treaty powers,<sup>3</sup> which also had extra-territorial rights, lacked the resources and the will to exercise properly consular jurisdiction in relation to their nationals in

Japan. No detailed studies similar to that made by Roberts, seem to have been made for other Treaty powers. Nor indeed has such a detailed study been made of the operation of British consular courts in other countries in which Britain had extra-territorial rights.

Extra-territorial rights continued in Japan for some time after Japan had adopted comprehensive criminal and civil codes and religious freedom had been guaranteed. There were various reasons for the delay including changes in the Japanese position. The logjam was broken when the British finally recognized that unless they took steps to reach an agreement the stalemate would continue and ill feelings would deepen.

Extra-territorial rights are now largely past history, but they are to some extent perpetuated under some Status of Forces agreements and during military occupations. British Commonwealth Forces taking part in the allied occupation of Japan established military courts, which could and did try Japanese who were accused of offences against them e.g. stealing property or taking part in black market activities involving goods available to British Commonwealth personnel. I do not know of any study having been made of this subject.

Christopher Roberts' comprehensive and interesting analysis of the work of the British Courts in 19th century Japan is a valuable contribution to the history of Anglo-Japanese relations and of the work of British officials in Meiji Japan. It should also be of interest to legal historians.

## Notes

1. The 1858 Treaty refers to the Treaty of Amity and Commerce (日米修好通商条約), which is also known as the Harris Treaty. It was signed between the United States and Japan on the deck of the USS Powhatan in Edo Bay on 29 July 1858. The treaty opened the ports of Kanagawa, Kobe, Nagasaki, Niigata, and Yokohama to trade and granted extraterritoriality to foreigners along with a number of trading stipulations.
2. In 1897 Edith Carew was put on trial for the murder by arsenic poisoning of her husband in Yokohama.
3. After having to sign the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the USA, Japan soon signed similar treaties, called the Ansei Treaties (安政条約) or the Ansei Five-Power Treaties (安政五力国条約), with Russia, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. §

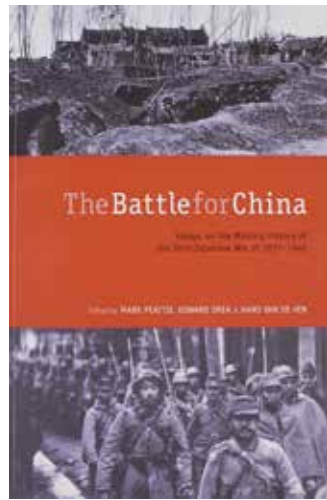
## The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45

Edited by Mark Peattie, Edward Drea & Hans van de Ven

Stanford University Press  
2011

614 Pages, US\$65.00

ISBN 97808047622069

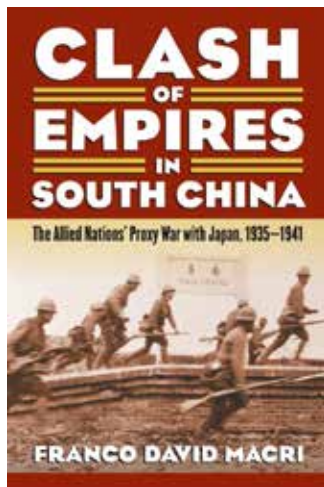


military history, Macri reminds us of the international dimension, namely that these campaigns took place against the backdrop of a world war, or rather a European war, in which the allies were deliberately giving priority to the western front. From December 1941 the allies were opposed to Japan but were not prepared to make expeditions to assist China in her resistance. Thus Professor Macri would argue that China fought a proxy war against Japan on behalf of Britain and the United States.

After Japan's invasion of China in 1937, her armies had remarkable successes, culminating in the capture of China's headquarters at Hankow on the Yangtze river and then Canton, the major city of the south, in October 1938. The Chinese Nationalist government moved its capital to Chongqing in the remote west but there were doubts whether it could survive Japan's sustained air attacks. Japan knew that her armies were superior to China's and had originally assumed that the war would be a limited regional conflict with a favourable result for Japan. But she encountered unexpectedly strong resistance. In a telling simile, the authors observe that "by the end of 1938 Japanese and Chinese military forces [were] like two exhausted wrestlers, holding each other in check, each seeking some alternative thrust... to weaken his grip (Peattie, p. 233)."

A war of attrition resulted. Because of frustration and the high cost of keeping a fighting force in the field, Japan became desperate to end, or shorten, the China war by way of some political settlement. She blamed France and Britain for allowing their ports and river systems (Hanoi, Rangoon, Hong Kong) to be used for the transit of commodities through to Chinese cities. In particular, supplies of munitions to the Chinese armies regularly passed through these ports, thus contributing to China's military resistance. When the Burma Road was temporarily closed and the Japanese took over northern Indochina from Vichy France in 1940, Hong Kong became even more important for the needs of China.

Macri carries the story through the campaigns south of the Yangtze River and concludes at the end of 1941 with the defence of Hong Kong and focusses on the sending of Canadian combat forces there in the fall. While this served in many ways as a deterrent to Japan, the writer believes that the decision to reinforce the colony was both unnecessary and ignoble. Contrary to the received wisdom that Canada agreed to take part in this as a loyal Dominion, he concludes that she was more inclined to follow the wishes of the US from November 1940 onwards. Nonetheless Macri reaches the optimistic conclusion that British/Canadian resistance in the south encouraged Chinese armies in their anti-Japanese struggle and contributed to Japan's feelings of failure. The fall of Hong Kong is followed by the Guomindang army's victory in the third battle



## Clash of Empires in South China: The Allied Nations' Proxy War with Japan, 1935-41

by Franco David Macri

University of Kansas Press,  
2012

465 pages, £38.50

ISBN-10: 0700618775

Review by Ian Nish

These two encyclopaedic works merit a more detailed review than can be given here. They complement each other but are different in their approach.

Professor Peattie and his associates assembled about twenty experts on the war of 1937-45 in order to provide "a military history of the Sino-Japanese war based on Japanese, Chinese and Western sources [which] does not exist in English." To remedy this, they managed to attract seven Japanese and seven Chinese specialists who participated in a 'scholarly dialogue' on this broad and controversial topic and have contributed essays to this excellent conference volume. Apart from expert analyses of the Chinese and Japanese armies in 1937, the studies concentrate mainly on the war in the north and central belt of China, where Chinese industry and population were larger and most of the major campaigns were conducted. The volume takes the story down to the Ichigō offensive [一号作戦] in the south in 1944 – the largest military operation in the history of the Japanese army, involving half a million troops.

Professor Macri's book is a single-author work, dealing mainly with Japan's campaigns in South China between 1939 and 1941 and ending with the Japanese capture of Hong Kong. While it is primarily a

of Changsha, the key strategic point on routes to the south. Macri records that this Chinese victory was a notable success in the global war since the fighting in Southeast Asia had seen many catastrophic allied defeats.

Both books make an interesting point for historians of Japan when they observe that on a number of occasions Japanese naval commanders in the China seas were more aggressive than their army counterparts. The southward strike on Hong Kong was to a large extent a naval affair and naval commanders were by 1941 dissatisfied that their endeavours had not been as successful as they had hoped and were correspondingly tough-minded. By contrast, the army commanders, doubtless aware of the guerrilla warfare being waged by the Chinese people, gave the impression of not being unreasonable to negotiate. Of course much depended on the personalities of the commanders concerned and the circumstances of the moment. While it is clearly unwise to generalize over such a large front and with such large forces involved, it is an unexpected conclusion and merits further examination.

There is consensus between these authors that China's role in the war has been underestimated in the English language literature. Not only did many Chinese army units fight well, the three victories at the battles of Changsha being a testament to that, but the mere survival of the Nationalist government at Chongqing, despite intensive and persistent aerial bombing, made a real contribution to the anti-Japanese cause. And the Nationalist and communist guerrilla groups held at bay many Japanese divisions which might otherwise have been transferred to other trouble spots.

These splendid studies supply the evidence for a reinterpretation of the Asia-Pacific war of which the China war was the origin and later became the centrepiece. They also have a global message for today: Do not assume that military victories will guarantee long-term political solutions! §



opened in 2009. The talented chef behind this restaurant originally had her own catering business before being asked to run the sashimi takeaway counter in Selfridges. Besides her restaurant, catering business and giving sushi lessons, she has also taken the time to write a book to reveal some of the 'secrets' behind Japanese food. Sushi Slim came out in 2013, it is a lovely looking book and a quick flick through reveals many beautiful photos.



In the introduction Makiko explains her view that Japanese food has the ability to boost both slimming and natural beauty, furthermore she claims that it is also the perfect fast food for busy people. As can be gathered from the title of the book, there is a focus on becoming slim through eating Japanese cooking. For example, a facts and figures page shows how Japanese people tend to apparently only eat until they are 80% full, that the calorie intake in Japan is considerably lower than the global average and, in a typical week, we are told Japanese people will eat around 100 varieties of food in comparison to 30 in the UK. She goes on to explain about the different health benefits of specific ingredients and to devise a meal plan.



## Sushi Slim

by Sano Makiko

Quadrille Publishing, 2013

128 pages, £12.99

ISBN 1849491755

Review by Mike Sullivan

In my opinion one of the best Japanese restaurants in West London is Suzu in Hammersmith, which is run by Sano Makiko and was

Before actually going into the specifics of making sushi, Makiko provides a very thorough explanation behind basic things such as cooking rice correctly, cutting vegetables, choosing fish and how to cut fish as well as elaborating on key ingredients that can be found in a Japanese kitchen. The rest of the book consists of step by step guides to making different kinds of sushi as well as other simple yet delicious dishes. This is aided by illustrative photos which make the instructions easy to follow and also made me hungry! For example, for hosomaki rolls her simple paragraphs combined with clear photos make it seem very easy to make this kind of sushi. The following pages show the different kinds of ingredients that you can put in hosomaki and look very delicious.

Every kind of sushi is explained in this lovely book; however it is just as enjoyable to browse the photos. They serve as a reminder of how varied Japanese cuisine can be. §



programmes and movies such as *Doraemon* and *Crayon Shin-chan*. In 2007 he wrote and directed *Summer Days with Coo*, in 2010 he directed *Colorful* which was based on a story by Mori Eto and last year he completed his first live-action movie, *Hajimari no Michi*, which was a biographical movie about filmmaker Kinoshita Keisuke. *Colorful* won the award for Excellent Animation of the Year at the 34<sup>th</sup> Japan Academy Prizes, and at the 65<sup>th</sup> Mainichi Film Awards it won the Animation Film Award.



In direct contrast to its name the movie opens to a rather colourless scene, a dreary train station where shadowy figures either sit around or queue to get on a train. They are all the recently deceased. We view the inside of the station in first person, representing the view of someone who recently died and has no voice, their thoughts are shown as lines of text against a black background. This voiceless person seems to be aware that they died and have become resigned to this, although it appears they no longer remember their past life. Suddenly, a little boy pops up, who seems relatively normal in comparison to the other shadowy figures. He announces that the protagonist has won the lottery and will get another chance at life. This doesn't seem to get the reaction that the little boy expected, our voiceless person seems unmoved by this and intent on joining the others departing the train station. However, with no small dose of exasperation and a bit of force the protagonist is led by the boy, Purapura, to a lift which leads back to life.

The protagonist is told that it is the soul of one who made a dreadful error but is being given the chance to return to life in order to realise its mistakes and atone for them. It is told that a boy has just died and that it will take its place. The protagonist opens its eyes to find a grieving family consisting of parents and an older brother – Makoto had attempted suicide three days before and had just died. In astonishment the doctors and family see him open his eyes.

Makoto is often visited by the little boy Purapura in order to give him guidance as he knows nothing about the life that he has taken over. However, as Purapura only gives him snippets of information Makoto behaves as he thinks he should, which surprises everyone around him. He is grateful to his family, he announces his intent to study hard at school and he directly tries to



## Colorful

Directed by  
Hara Keiichi

Shown as part  
of the Japan  
Foundation UK's  
annual touring film  
programme

127 minutes, 2010

Review by Mike  
Sullivan

(Contains plot  
spoilers)

This year's Japan Foundation UK annual touring film programme offered an expansive introduction to Japanese cinema with the theme of 'youth.' A number of different movies were shown around the UK and many of the stories were of young men and women struggling to make sense of their identity in today's world. The movie *Colorful* was screened at the ICA and included an introduction by the film's director, Hara Keiichi, as well as a Q&A afterwards.

Hara Keiichi is most well-known for directing TV

talk to those around him. All of these actions surprise people. One of his classmates becomes obsessed with how he is not the same person. As we gradually find out from Purapura, before committing suicide the Makoto from before had no friends at school, talked to no one and at home tended to remain in his room.

The new Makoto is told that he has six months before his new life will end and that he needs to remember what he did wrong in his previous life before the six months ends. During this time he learns about his family, about the other children at his school and about what had driven the previous Makoto to his death. This movie has a number of elements which touch upon a lot of different topics.

This ranges from dysfunctional families, *Hikikomori* (young people who live reclusive lives), bullying at school, and of course the issue of suicide.

Unfortunately, the pacing of the movie is a little

uneven, and at 127 minutes a little too long, especially as some plot elements are quite simply too obvious.

The movie is addressing topics that need to be talked about and should be applauded for this; however some important discussion points are omitted, such as how to address bullying, etc. Finally, there seems to be a suggestion from how Makoto has been represented that what he really needed, more than anything else, was to be kicked out of his rather selfish indulgent shell. This was how I felt but unfortunately this also means that he is at least partially being blamed for his own situation.

Apart from the issues mentioned above, as well as the film's length, the movie is full of beautiful scenery and incorporates real life footage that has been blended with animation. This has been done really well and can make your eyes doubt whether you are watching an animated movie or a live-action movie. §



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## Interested in writing for the Japan Society Review?

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