



The last issue of *The Japan Society Review* in 2019 includes reviews of five books which, in one way or another, explore the interactions and encounters of Japan and Japanese culture with the rest of the world. In *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* Grace E. Lavery explores how Japan captured the Victorian imagination and transformed Western aesthetics, from the opening of trade with Britain in the 1850s, to the present day and the lasting influence of Japanese forms on writers and artists.

Beginning in the Victorian era, Neil Jackson's *Japan and the West* focuses on the architectural influence that Japan and the West have had on each other. In bringing together the main themes of Japanese and Western architecture since 1850 the book shows that neither could exist in its present state without the other.

In *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere*, Jeremy Yellen exposes the history, politics, and intrigue that characterized the era when Japan's "total empire" met the total war of World War II. This monograph examines not only the ideas and ambitions

regarding the Sphere developed by the imperial centre, but also the ways in which the subdued colonies in Burma and the Philippines sought to shape their own future.

In the field of fiction, Ogawa Yoko's novel *The Memory Police* is a dystopian tale about the power of memory and the trauma of loss. Inspired by the diary of Anne Frank and reminiscent of Orwell's *1984*, Ogawa creates a haunting and provocative story envisioning the menaces of totalitarianism and the possibilities for resistance.

Finally, our last review of this issue explores the cookbook *The Japanese Larder* by Luiz Hara, a detailed and accessible introduction to Japanese home-made cuisine. Well illustrated with beautifully shot photographs complementing every recipe, *The Japanese Larder* demonstrates the use of Japanese ingredients, cooking techniques and dishes in a simple way, perfect for anyone wanting to try their hands at Japanese food for the upcoming festive season.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Francesco Cioffo, Jill Dobson, Laurence Green, Andrew Nishiyama Taylor and Laura Richardson.

Image: A wood-block print by Utagawa Hiroshige III of Ginza Street and Nipposha, Tokyo Ginza, designed by Thomas James Waters, 1872-77, from the series *Famous Places of Tokyo*, c.1875. [The Lavenberg Collection of Japanese Prints]. From *Japan and the West: An Architectural Dialogue*.

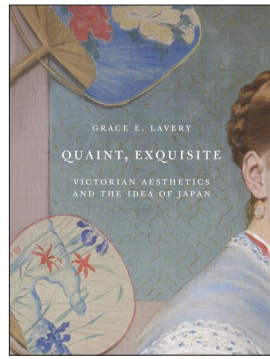
Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan

by Grace E. Lavery

Princeton University Press
(2019)

ISBN-13: 978-0691183626

Review by Laurence Green



In any discussion of Japan, the words *Quaint, Exquisite* seem bound to appear at least once or twice, even now, over a hundred years since Japan first opened its doors to the world. What is it about the particular aesthetic qualities of the nation that ensure these attributes still hold such sway over our idea of what Japan is like, what it represents? Penned by the University of California, Berkeley's Grace E. Lavery, this account seeks to remind us of the excitement and promise Japan held for the Victorian populace in particular, when many of these notions were first introduced. Japan as the 'Other Empire' – the world's first non-Western modernity. Japan as the marked 'exception' to the general principle of orientalism – a higher calibre of exoticism.

Immense in its scope, and encyclopaedic in the sheer number of touch-points it tries to bring in to its core argument, this is a dizzying, remarkably ambitious account (especially considering it tries to accomplish all this within less than 200 pages). But from the introduction onwards, it quickly becomes apparent that we're not in for an easy ride. Throwing the reader head-first into hyper-complex ideas of aesthetic and melancholy, via a stream of big name thinkers (Kant, Bourdieu, Freud, Lyotard and so on), this book isn't for the faint hearted, or those with a dithering attention span. When the opening pages contain a self-acknowledged suggestion from readers to add a glossary of terms, but the definitions themselves only add further complexity, you know you're facing some pretty significant problems with clarity.

Much like French theorist Roland Barthes' *The Empire of Signs*, which this book is clearly immensely indebted to in terms of both style and content, it is not so much Japan that Lavery is interested in here, but the 'idea' of Japan. Amongst the various vignettes that Lavery presents, a number particularly stand out. Early on, we are given a vivid comparison of the novel *Moby Dick* – published in 1851 – as an allegory for American pursuit of Japanese trade, the 'white whale'

of untapped commerce which would eventually open to the world following the Meiji Restoration.

We are then given a flavour of the Savoy Opera and the eccentricity of Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*. Here, the reverence for a kind of mythological 'Old Japan' is strongest, the obsession with an exoticised 'exquisite' so prized by Victorian audiences most palpable. The stage is set for a period of ripe opportunism for all 'Things Japanese', as the foremost Japanologist of the era, Basil Hall Chamberlain, titled his popular one-volume encyclopaedia. We are told of Oscar Wilde's love for issuing luxurious limited editions of his works in Japanese paper – an intensely desirable, premium commodity at the time. A section on Whistler's paintings is charming too. They say a picture speaks a thousand words, and here it's literally true – the inclusion of copies of the artist's works (housed in the Tate Britain) sells the book's idea of aesthetic far better than pages of dense theorising. The book's cover image – *Portrait of Emily Caroline Massingberd* by John Collingham Moore (to be found in National Trust property Gunby Hall), is also very tastefully chosen; all prim Victorian modesty set against the thrill of pretty Japanese bamboo fans.

This swell of Anglo-Japanese cultural flow wasn't all one-way. Lavery reminds us of author Natsume Soseki's presence in London between 1900-1903. But perhaps most interesting is the case of Mikimoto Ryuzu, the son of famed pearl magnate Kokichi. We are given an account of Ryuzu's exceptional collector-like passion for the works of Victorian art critic John Ruskin – something that would ultimately culminate in a library of material that exists in Tokyo to this day.

Unfortunately, some of Lavery's other case studies are less convincing. A section on English language haiku, referencing Jack Kerouac and an internet meme from 2012 ("Five syllables here / seven more syllables there / are you happy now?"), falls particularly wide of the mark. In addition, it must be said that the book very much seems to assume prior knowledge of the cultural figures it references – very little preamble or biographical detail is typically given, and the reader is left to fill in the blanks. While there's nothing wrong in getting the reader to work a bit, there's a sense that the book would have benefitted from a more open, welcoming tone.

The irony is that the unrelenting nature of Lavery's accumulation of disparate sources, all in aid of constructing her fascinating idea of 'aesthetic', begins to gradually grow on the reader. But when the book suddenly switches in its final chapter to a Film Studies-

style close analysis of Asia Extreme classic *Audition* and the films of Quentin Tarantino, it's undoubtedly one leap too far. The immense jump not only in time period, but also medium, feels bizarre, and the volume would have felt far more consistent – more 'of a piece' – without this last instalment.

There is a trend, particularly within American academia right now, for the kind of hyper theorised discourse Lavery takes with this book, where the sheer impenetrability almost becomes part of its aesthetic. It

becomes a kind of game, a one-upmanship of amassed knowledge condensed down into thesis form. But for all that this approach boasts in style, hip jargon and a multitude of 'clever' pop cultural references, it remains distinctly lacking in simple, old-fashioned readability. Academic audiences and a more general readership shouldn't necessarily be mutually exclusive. Lavery presents a treasure trove of interesting ideas here, but with a tighter focus and a good sight more clarity, this would have made for a far more engaging study. §

Japan and the West: An Architectural Dialogue

by Neil Jackson

Lund Humphries Publishers (2018)
ISBN-13: 978-1848222960

Review by Andrew Nishiyama
Taylor



In our age of physical and digital infrastructure, it is difficult to imagine a time when the corners of the globe were unconnected or undocumented. There are few places in the twenty-first century for which the mere naming of a destination does not evoke vivid imagery, perhaps with a particular landscape or natural wonder at the fore. Consider those images for longer and something more synthetic will begin to advance: the architecture and built environment of a place also plays a crucial role in our perception of a nation's identity. How does that architecture emerge to become characteristic of a place, particularly through centuries of ever-increasing globalisation? Does the introduction of foreign influences enhance, dilute or eradicate the vernacular of a place?

In 2005, architect and historian Professor Neil Jackson began researching the Western world's interactions with Japan and the resulting impacts on their respective built environments. Entitled *Japan and the West: An Architectural Dialogue*, Jackson's book opens with a passage on the first Japanese emissaries in Europe in the late sixteenth century. Through their gifting of two folding screens, decorated with depictions of a castle near Kyoto, the envoy provided the Pope in Rome with the Western world's first glimpse of Japanese architecture. From this early encounter, the reader is taken to Dejima in Nagasaki during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the sole port through which Japan tightly controlled its commercial (and, less conspicuously, intellectual) exchanges with the outside world during the Edo period (1603-1868).

With Dutch traders as the principal conduit, Jackson details how everything from book frontispieces to furniture served to present Europe's then-prevalent neoclassical style to the Japanese, while journal accounts and drawings brought observations of Japanese buildings and interiors back to Europe. This delicate courtship between East and West sustained until 1854 when, with the signing of the Convention of Kanagawa, the ports of Hakodate and Shimoda were opened to the United States, effectively bringing an end to the period's isolationist policies and, crucially for the theme of Jackson's book, allowing an intellectual and stylistic dialogue to gain pace and flourish during the Meiji era (1868-1912) and beyond.

The opening of Japan caused a burst of Japonism through international exhibitions in Austria, France, the UK and US in the second half of the nineteenth century, all vividly rendered in Jackson's text. Despite displays ranging from fanciful imitation to faithful reproduction, these exhibitions generally had the backing of the Meiji government in recognition of the soft power they promoted. It is fascinating to imagine how domestic designers, most of whom would have been unable to travel to Japan themselves, would have drawn inspiration from seeing architectural elements and motifs on display at these exhibitions to create works both inauthentic and innovative, neither 'East' nor 'West'. At the same time in Japan, the end of isolationism extended Western-style architecture beyond the confines of Dejima, even though, despite overtly colonial appearances, such buildings had underlying Japanese construction techniques and materials (Jackson cites Thomas Blake Glover's house in Nagasaki as a prime example).

This idea of hybrid design, something which has Japanese or Euroamerican origins but, ultimately, through its transposition between East and West belongs to neither, is a key theme of *Japan and the West* which pervades through the rest of the book.

As the twentieth century unfolds, Jackson draws on everything from the upscaling of Japanese temple architecture for modern building typologies, to the Japanese influence on the Bauhaus movement, to post-and-beam residential architecture in Australia and the US, to the archipelago's embrace of Brutalism, in order to demonstrate just how interwoven the dialogue became by the end of the millennium and the pluralities of its manifestation.

Although the number of individuals involved in bridging Japanese and Western architecture over centuries is too great to detail, Jackson seamlessly incorporates relevant biographical passages for key proponents, and of particular interest are those whose works will likely resonate with contemporary readers. The British architect Josiah Conder (1852-1920), whose works came to typify the Westernisation of Japan in the Meiji era, may be best known to Tokyo residents and visitors for his Kyu-Furukawa Gardens (1917) in Kita ward and Mitsubishi Ichigōkan (1895), credited with beginning the conglomerate's development of the Marunouchi business district. Tatsuno Kingo (1854-1919), Conder's student, was prolific in his neoclassical designs for the Bank of Japan, notably its headquarters in Tokyo (1896), as well as the Dutch-influenced Tokyo Station (1914). Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) occupied a unique position in the dynamic between East and West: he referenced Japanese architecture in the deep overhanging eaves of his Prairie houses

in Oak Park, Illinois (around 1900-1910) before his approach was introduced to Japan in his commission for Tokyo's Imperial Hotel (1923). The inclusion of the Library at the Glasgow School of Art (1909) by Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) is a poignant reminder of the work's importance in British-Japanese design exchanges. Concluding with Pritzker Prize-winning SANAA, known in London for their design of the 2009 Serpentine Pavilion, Jackson highlights the international role of Japanese architects in the twenty-first century and reflects on whether Japan has been able to maintain its own architectural traditions through modernisation and globalisation.

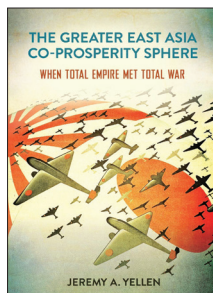
Japan and the West is carefully structured around the Shogun (Edo), Meiji, Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1926-1989) periods and the painstaking research that has gone in to its creation is clear. Despite its impressive scale and scope, the narrative is fluid, brisk and a pleasure to read, adding to the book's broad appeal. To those who have visited Japan, the book will give explanation to the country's (particularly Tokyo's) at-times idiosyncratic urban built environment. To a broader readership, Japan and the West will add depth to the resurgent interest in the Japanese architecture of popular publications and recent exhibitions. Finally, to architects and designers, Jackson sheds light on innovation and originality in the creative process and reveals Japan to be a nation which will always sustain a unique sense of place and never cease to inspire. §

The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War

by Jeremy A. Yellen

Cornell University Press (2019)
ISBN-13: 978-1501735547

Review by Francesco Cioffo



If you are looking for a captivating grand narrative about how the Japanese military elite, intoxicated by the rhetoric of Pan-Asianism and imperialist megalomania, formulated a coherent masterplan for the control of the entire East Asian region, and perhaps the world, this is not the book you were looking for.[1] But if you are willing to question many of the popular assumptions about Japan in the time of total empire and total war, then Yellen's book is definitely the one.

The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (thereafter the *GEACP Sphere*) is in fact a truly timely

addition to the historiography of modern Japan in general and a fundamental contribution to the study of the Japanese wartime experience. In what could be the very first monograph on the topic written in English, the *GEACP Sphere* is a very well-constructed study divided in two main sections covering respectively the high politics of the 'core' and the anti-colonial responses of the 'periphery'. The convincing argument put forward by Yellen is that the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' (thereafter the Sphere) was a 'contested, negotiated process, one that bound Japan's imperial dreams with anti-colonial aspirations of nationalist leaders in Burma and in the Philippines' (p. 11). In this book, therefore, the Sphere is not theorised as the consequences of Pan-Asianist indoctrination, an economic masterplan, or a mere imperialist slogan. The Sphere, he argues, was Japan's response to the diplomatic challenges that arose from the establishment of the post-WWI international

system and the attempt to build a new regional economic and political order.

At the core of Yellen's argument is the idea that the Sphere never became a clear and articulated ideology or plan (p. 6). It was a discourse in flux, negotiated, contested and appropriated by a wide array of actors from both the colonial centre and its periphery. The life of the Sphere was closely linked to Japan's fortunes during the Pacific War. Yellen identifies three main transformations in the life of the Sphere. An initial phase, in which Japan broke with the post-WWI order (the so-called Washington-Versailles System) and declared its intention to establish a 'new order' based upon its mix of anti-colonial anti-Westernism and forms of 'new imperialism' (granting nominal independence, while maintaining de facto control over the colonies). The second phase, at the peak of Japanese offensive in Asia, the Sphere was idealised as a political economic hierarchy under Japanese leadership. In this particular moment, Japan's 'total war' theorists and the architects of Japan's 'total empire' conceptualised Asia as an appendage of the Japanese economy. In these schemes, Japan had to retain most of the high-skills and capital-intensive products, while lower-skilled labour-intensive products, along with natural resources, had to be located in the colonies. The final phase coincided with the post-1943 period when defeat was a much more real possibility for Japan. Paradoxically, Yellen notices, this is when more concrete ideas about the Sphere emerged.

The author makes his argument through six main chapters. The first three chapters are mainly dedicated to the high diplomacy in Tokyo and its main characters. Chapter 1 discusses the formation of the Tripartite Pact and how it was driven by Japan's fear of Germany, which posited a direct threat to Japanese interests in Asia. In Chapter 2 Yellen focuses on Foreign minister Matsuoka Yosuke who envisioned the Sphere as a return to forms of 'old imperialism' such as the sphere-of-influence diplomacy. Matsuoka thought that the liberal consensus of the post-WWI era was crumbling and that nations were re-forming their own political and economic 'blocks' and Japan could not be left out. The third chapter is centred upon the whirlwind of private and public imaginative efforts that tried to define the Sphere. Most interesting, this section investigates how Japanese fortunes in the war had a direct impact on how the Sphere was constructed.

With Chapter 4 we enter the second part of the book and thus the focus progressively shifts away from Tokyo and towards the colonial elites of the Philippines

and Burma. In this chapter, Yellen unravels the incorporation of the two colonies within the broader Japanese empire, asking crucial questions about why did these 'patriotic collaborators', as Yellen defines them, actually collaborated with Japan and what were their real goals?

Chapter 5 analyses the late turn of the Japanese empire towards a vocabulary of liberal internationalism aimed at rallying supporters in Asia while seeking peace negotiation with the Allies. Perhaps more importantly, this chapter also focuses upon the 'contested' nature of the Sphere and how nationalist leaders in the colonial periphery re-appropriated this rhetoric of liberal internationalism to further their goals of national independence. The final chapter explores the consequences of the previous chapter by looking into the 'nominal independence' granted by the Japanese to the Philippines and Burma. Local leaders in fact sought to build up their nation-making experience and to use the Japanese to form crucial institutions that were deemed fundamental for the future independence of these countries.

It could be argued that the limit of Yellen's book is that in its portrayal of politicians and nationalist leaders, a good part of the gruesome and brutal details of the Japanese imperial expansion in South East Asia are left unexplored. Although the author recognises this early in the book, it could have helped to incorporate more decisively into the narrative how Japanese brutality across Asia influenced the re-conceptualisation of the Sphere from the colonial periphery. Furthermore, we cannot but notice that to focus on the colonial elites of just the Philippines and Burma has somehow limited the scope of the study, which, arguably can be much broader. In the vast and complicated structure of the Japanese empire, composed by 'new imperialist' polities (Manchukuo, the Dutch East Indies, Burma and the Philippines among the many) and more canonical 'old imperialist' regimes (Korea and Taiwan), Yellen side-lines other political groups that were also part of the Japanese empire such as *Azad Hind*, the Provisional Government of Free India formed in exile with Japanese support.[2] The experience of Indo-Japanese anti-colonialism and the contributions of Indian 'patriotic collaborators', such as Rash Behari Bose, Mohan Singh and the more notorious Subhas Chandra Bose, could be also analysed to test Yellen's argument and to expand its scope to the totality of Japan's complex wartime experience.[3]

Having said that, *the GEACP Sphere* is surely a well-argued and excellently structured book that will

soon become a core reading for the history of modern Japan. The book provides a detailed introduction to the historiography of the Sphere and of the Japanese empire from both the Japanese and the anglophone perspectives. Furthermore, students will also benefit from the extensive bibliography gathering primary and secondary sources, both printed and online, from more than six different countries, truly making this book an example of meticulous transnational research.

Perhaps more crucially, Yellen's argument restores the agency of those key actors from the colonial periphery that have often been silenced due to the presence of grand narratives too focused on the events of the 'great men' in Tokyo, but also silenced by the stigma of wartime collaborationism that still haunts many countries. By proposing a detailed and varied array of perspectives, Yellen thus decentralises the history of the Japanese empire and shifts the attention upon the interconnectedness of centre and periphery. Although we had assumed that the power

unbalance between the two necessarily translated into Japanese hegemony, Yellen convincingly shows that there was much more going on under the surface and 'secondary' characters often held much more power than we realised.

Notes

[1] For just a brief list of the many books on the topic see www.bookscrolling.com/the-best-books-about-japan-the-pacific-war-during-ww2/.

[2] Peters, Aaron (2019). "Comparisons and Deflections: Indian Nationalists in the Political Economy of Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1938.", *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 32: 97–128.

[3] For the controversy of Subhas Chandra Bose's grave in Tokyo see <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-paid-for-upkeep-of-netaji-subhas-chandra-bose-s-mortal-remains-in-japan/articleshow/50719763.cms>. §

The Memory Police

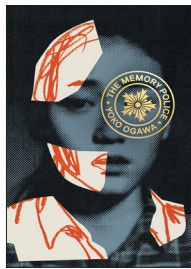
by Ogawa Yoko

translated by Stephen Snyder

Harvill Secker (2019)

ISBN-13: 978-1846559495

Review by Jill Dobson



The original title of Ogawa Yoko's latest novel to be translated into English is *Hisoyaka na kessho* (密やかな結晶), literally rendered in the French title, *Cristallisation secrète*. The Orwellian English title creates expectations that this will be a political novel, whereas in fact it is something far more elusive and subtle. First published in 1994, *The Memory Police* is now offered in translation by Stephen Snyder, the seventh of Ogawa's novels and short story collections to appear in English. This is only a fraction of her full playlist: since *When a Butterfly is Broken* (*Agehachō ga kowareru toki*, 揚羽蝶が壊れる時), which took the Kaien Prize in 1988, Ogawa has published a book or two almost every year and won a range of major literary awards, including the Akutagawa in 1990, confirming her place in the pantheon of contemporary J-lit.

Anglophones were introduced to Ogawa by a short story published in the *New Yorker* in 2004. In what Snyder refers to as his ongoing 'ethnography' of the publishing industry, particularly the selection and commodification of non-Anglophone writers in translation, he describes the 'discovery of' Murakami

Haruki by then *New Yorker* editor Robert Gottlieb in the early 1990s as the first step in Murakami's apotheosis as an international phenomenon. Snyder mentions the pressure on J-E literary translators to reveal 'the next Murakami' and suggests that Gottlieb's successor, Deborah Treisman, 'discovered' Ogawa to develop 'her own global Japanese *New Yorker* writer'. [1] A seemingly odd choice: as a writer, Ogawa is nothing like Murakami. She does not write about apathetic (yet irresistible to women) 30-something men and jazz bars, and there is nothing in Ogawa's work that suggests she aspires to the global cultural 'cool' embodied by Murakami. Compared to Murakami's signature urban magical-realism, Ogawa's world is dark and surreal, sometimes sexually explicit and violent (*The Hotel Iris*). 'Quirky' suggests levity, and there is none of that in *The Memory Police*.

The novel takes place on an unnamed island where, for the past 15 years, things have regularly disappeared, not just physically but from memory. This disappearance is enforced by the Memory Police, the only manifestation of authority. The narrator, a writer, also unnamed, is told by her artist mother as a child that 'things go on disappearing, one by one', but is reassured that it 'doesn't hurt': 'One morning you'll simply wake up and it will be over, before you've even realised ... you'll feel that something has changed from the night before, and you'll know you have lost something, that something has disappeared from the island' (p. 3). The

islanders simply acquiesce to these disappearances, quickly forgetting. When birds are 'disappeared' at the beginning of the novel, the narrator notices a 'small brown creature' flying overhead, which almost triggers a memory of her father, an ornithologist, but instead she comes up against a mental void: 'I realised that everything I knew about [these creatures] had disappeared from inside me: my memories of them, my feelings about them, the very meaning of the word "bird" – everything' (p. 10). Her attempts to hold onto her fleeting memories are futile, her mind wiped like a hard drive attacked by a malignant computer virus. In the market that afternoon, she sees people freeing their pet birds from cages, dazed but compliant. It is impossible to grieve for what cannot be remembered, and the islanders soon get on with their increasingly minimised lives.

There are a few exceptions, however: people whose memories persist, among them the narrator's mother, who is already dead when the novel opens, and the narrator's editor, known only as R. As more people are taken away by the Memory Police, the narrator decides to hide R., whose memories put him in danger. (Ogawa has referred in interviews to her childhood fascination with the diary of Anne Frank and the preparation to make the hidden cupboard habitable is described in some detail.) In return for being hidden, he attempts to restore her memories by showing her items that have already been 'disappeared'—a ferry ticket, a music box—and sharing his own memories, but even the discovery of old objects hidden by the writer's mother inside her sculptures fail to summon anything more than a dim recall: 'The swamp of my memory was shallow and still' (p. 230).

Parallel to the main narrative is the protagonist's own novel-in-progress, which begins as a romance between a female typing student, who attends classes in the bell-tower of a church, and her typing teacher. One day, her typewriter breaks, and her teacher invites her up to the top room, behind the clock face, where he carries out repairs. She finds she is unable to speak; her voice is now trapped inside her broken machine and the student herself is trapped inside the bell-tower.

When novels disappear, thus depriving the writer of her livelihood, she gets a job in a spice shop. R. takes her manuscript into safekeeping in the secret room and encourages her to continue, but she can barely manage to write the letters of the alphabet. Struggling, she manages to finish her novel for R's sake. Treated like a doll by her teacher, stripped and washed and

dressed up in bizarre outfits, the imprisoned student becomes so helpless that she is unable to cry out when another student comes knocking on the door. Her captor mocks her: 'You've already been absorbed into this room.' When he lures another young woman up to the bell tower, with another broken typewriter, the student is completely erased, prefiguring the writer's own erasure.

Throughout the book, other things disappear—roses, photographs, fruit—but there is no protest, no questioning, and no explanation of what power the Memory Police represent. Since maps have 'disappeared', nobody knows the full extent of the island or what lies beyond. There is mention of a successful escape from the island by boat, even though boats 'disappeared' years ago; someone had retained a memory of boats and was able to repair and sail one (p. 114). Hearing about this escape, the narrator cannot quite imagine how these people crossed the water, so completely has the concept of a boat been expunged from her mind. Otherwise, the islanders submit to their fate, even as, towards the end, they start to disappear themselves, body part by body part.

Like the protagonist of her novel, the writer becomes increasingly disembodied, despite R.'s attempts to revive the disappeared parts of her body as well as her memory: 'One after another, he tossed pebbles into the swamp of my mind, but instead of coming to rest on the bottom, they continued to drift deeper and deeper down, without end' (p. 270). Eventually, her body becomes merely one of the 'disappeared' objects hoarded in R.'s secret room. He is left with her memory, denied the solace of forgetting.

Read as a political allegory, the novel is frustrating. It demands a more subtle approach. As a disturbing fable about the importance of memory, which forms us, and the tragedy of its loss, and how those who insist on remembering—or who are unable to forget—in the face of general amnesia become outcasts, the novel has a melancholy power. Admirers of Ogawa's work will find much to like in this latest translation. More literal readers may simply find it baffling and bleak.

Notes

[1] Snyder, Stephen (2016). "Insistence and Resistance: Murakami and Mizumura in Translation", *New England Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4. [S](#)

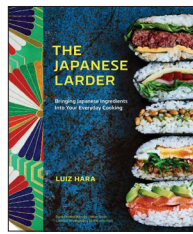
The Japanese Larder

by Luiz Hara

Jacqui Small (2019)

ISBN-13: 978-1911127628

Review by Laura Richardson



The Japanese Larder: Bringing Japanese Ingredients into Your Everyday Cooking is the second cookbook by London-based Le Cordon-Bleu trained chef and founder of *The London Foodie* blog, Luiz Hara. Hara specialises not only in Japanese cooking but also in the so-called “Nikkei cuisine”, a hybrid of Japanese and Peruvian cooking created by Japanese migrants to South America in around the 1900’s. Peru has the second highest population of Japanese residents in South America, second only to Brazil, and the impact the community has had can be felt all over. The influence on food in particular is hugely significant and since the arrival of the Japanese and the introduction of Nikkei cuisine, fish has become a staple ingredient in the Peruvian diet. Beyond South America, the popularity of Nikkei Cuisine is now flourishing throughout Europe (one very good example of this is Indo Kitchen in Stockholm).

Alongside Nikkei cuisine, the growth in popularity of Japanese food in general does not appear to be slowing down. What were once little known ingredients, things such as miso, tofu, mirin and rice vinegar, can now be spotted on the shelves of many of our well known supermarkets. So, it’s no wonder that so many of us, having picked up something to use in a specific recipe, find barely used bottles and packets of ingredients sitting in the back of our store cupboard months later with no idea of what to do with them next. *The Japanese Larder* can help with that as it goes beyond being simply a recipe book and rather is an informative introduction to a wide and varied range of those Japanese ingredients. It is designed to enlighten budding home cooks on the many and sometimes unexpected ways in which traditional Japanese ingredients can be used.

The Japanese Larder is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one begins with key Japanese seasonings: soy sauce, miso, dashi broth, sake, mirin and rice vinegar. This comprehensive introduction helps to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of each ingredient, allowing them to go on to try and recreate some of the recipes featured throughout the remainder of the chapter. Recipes like Mackerel in Soy and Balsamic Glaze (using soy sauce) and Slow-Braised Pork Belly (using miso and sake). Through the following chapters we are introduced to Ferments, Spices and Condiments, Rice, Noodles and Tofu, Fruit and Vegetables, Beverages and finally Sauces and Marinades. Each chapter features recipes using the ingredients detailed, a break from the usual ‘starter, main, dessert’ format that we may be used to seeing.

Alongside relatively well known dishes like the ever popular katsu curry and traditional recipes like *Oyakodon*

(simmered chicken and egg over rice, literally translated as “parent and child donburi”), *Buta no Kakuni* (braised pork belly) or *Soboro Gohan* (minced chicken and egg on rice), Hara introduces the reader to his own creative recipes in which he cleverly combines Japanese ingredients with more familiar flavours like parmesan cheese in his Udon Noodles, Truffle Butter and Parmesan, Marmite Chicken and Salmon cured with maple syrup. These combinations may seem surprising to some but this creative approach is sure to encourage the reader to be more experimental with their cooking. The result is recipes that will appeal not only to connoisseurs of Japanese food who are seeking something new but also to anyone who has never tried Japanese food before and perhaps for one reason or another were a little afraid to do so.

The Japanese Larder also explores Japanese food traditions, one example of this being *tsukemono* (Japanese preserved vegetables), a staple in the Japanese diet usually eaten as a side dish. Recently fermented foods have become a huge phenomenon with health food specialists in the West too. It is said that increasing our intake of the probiotics contained in ferments improves our gut health, which in turn is believed to improve both our mental as well as physical health. This makes *tsukemono* and fermented food an apt addition to the book.

Something that certainly sets *The Japanese Larder* apart from other Japanese cookbooks is Hara’s instructions for making your own ingredients like tofu and udon noodles. This is perhaps not something that many readers will have considered trying before. Accompanied by step by step photographs, the instructions are easy to follow, surprisingly simple, and may even prove to be more cost effective than buying premade packaged items. Intentionally or not, this encouragement to create more of what we are eating from scratch is another trend that Hara has tapped into.

The book itself is striking with its silk fabric binding and is filled with beautifully shot photographs complementing every recipe. It is then finished off nicely with snapshots taken around Japan, offering us a little glimpse into Hara’s travels. The star of the front cover is the *Onigirazu*. A particularly fun recipe to try, *Onigirazu* can only be described as a cross between an *Onigiri* (Japanese rice ball) and a sandwich. It is made by layering a sheet of rice with a number of fillings, like avocado, salmon, egg or even slightly more unconventional options like cheese and pickle. This is then topped with another layer of rice and wrapped tightly in nori (seaweed) creating a sandwich effect.

The Japanese Larder helps to expel the myth that Japanese food is complicated to make and brings a range of new and exciting dishes to your dining table. As well as the recipes on offer, I am sure it will also inspire readers to go on to try and create their own dishes, combining ingredients they may have never considered using before. [S](#)