

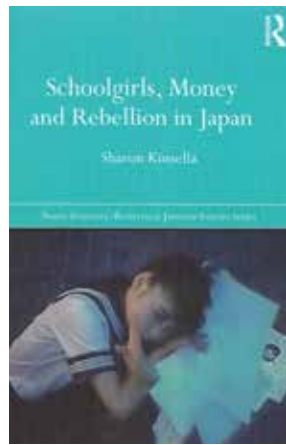
In this issue we are in a self-reflective mood with our main theme actually being our regular reviewers and the Japan Society Review itself. We have now reached the milestone of 50 issues since first appearing in January 2006. To mark the occasion, we have an article by each of our current key contributors with pieces mainly focusing on contemporary issues.

For those who wonder how we reached this landmark, here's a very brief history of our first 50 issues. It all started back in 2005 when we decided to start posting out collected book reviews with the Japan Society mail-shots. This idea was strongly supported by Mike Barrett and Sir Hugh Cortazzi. These newsletter type reviews were extremely popular, so at the beginning of 2006, we launched Japan Society Book Review as a regular bimonthly publication. This would not have happened without the fantastic energy of Clare Barclay, our first managing editor from issues 1 to 12, and the superb support of Sharon Kelly and Robert Guy of the Japan Society team. Our most loyal and dedicated reviewer from the very beginning has been Sir Hugh Cortazzi whose amazing enthusiasm for the project has been limitless. In the early years we also greatly benefited from regular contributions from Professor Ian Nish, Fumiko Halloran, Susan Meehan, Ben-Ami Shillony and Takahiro Miyao. Their ranks were later added to by regular reviewers Mike Sullivan, Lucy Searles, Chris Corker and Ali Muskett. When Heidi Potter and John Toppon joined the Japan Society team, they injected

new energy and direction into the publication. Heidi and John gave us a great makeover and we shortened our name to Japan Society Review. John was our dynamic managing editor from issue 13 to 33 during which time JSR really developed. After John left the team, Jennifer Anderson briefly held the reins before handing over to our current dedicated managing editor Jack Cooke, who joined us with issue 35. Jack has worked tirelessly to improve the publication, making us a more visually appealing and slick production.

Fifty issues and nine years makes it impossible to personally thank everyone involved, but I must mention a number of other individuals. We benefited greatly from the support of Sir John Whitehead, Christopher Purvis, Paul Diamond and Sir David Warren and the contributions of Mikihiro Maeda, Tomohiko Taniguchi, William Farr, Simon Cotterill and Anna Davis. I would also like to thank our excellent layout & production support staff, especially Arthur Comets and Abbie Martin. Finally, thanks to all reviewers who contributed one or two articles, especially Sir Graham Fry, Jason James and Mike Barrett and every other reviewer who has kindly contributed a review and who I have not been able to name in person. Here's to the next 50 issues!

Sean Curtin, Editor, Issues 1 - 50
April 2014



Schoolgirls, Money and Rebellion in Japan

By Sharon Kinsella

Routledge, 2013

238 pages, £26.99

ISBN-13: 978-0415704113

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This sociological study is based on painstaking research and contains much interesting material about

aspects of the life of young women in modern Japan.

The reader needs to bear in mind that, despite constitutional provisions about equality between the sexes, Japan remains a male chauvinist society and Japanese women continue to suffer significant discrimination. Kinsella notes (p.104) that 'the female ratio of the total wages earned in Japan in 2006, women received approximately one third (0.366) of total male wages.' The Japanese birth rate 'reached its lowest point on record in 2005 after a five-year slump (at 1.25 live births per 1,000) and marriage rates reached the lowest levels on record of 5.5 per 1,000 in 2010.' (p.3).

It is also necessary to bear in mind the history of the 'sex industry' in Japan – from the 'floating world' of Tokugawa Japan and the 'Nightless city' of the Yoshiwara, through the war-time 'comfort women' and the 'pan pan' girls of the occupation era to the bars, 'soap-lands' and houses of assignation of modern Japan.

It is not surprising that some young high-school girls have rebelled and indulged in practices, which aroused the interest of populist magazines and sensation-seeking television companies. Some Japanese men, with what some might call prurient or pornographic interest, followed and stimulated the way-out behaviour of such girls. Kinsella has looked hard at the question of how far the media were themselves responsible for at least some elements of deviant behaviour. Were some of the girls involved simply seeking, and wallowing in, publicity? Were they being led on in their responses by the questions posed to them? How far were their answers true or made up to lure questioners on?

Kinsella (page 32) notes: 'From 1996, dressing up in sexy 'adult' clothing, posing for photographs, and competing to have photographs published in magazines became dominant themes in schoolgirl street fashion and the basic formula of a new category of girls' magazines targeted at *kogyaru* (high school girls). Kinsella also points out (p.64) that 'Rather like the *bōsōzoku* bike gangs of the 1980s, who boisterously pressed journalists for appointments in which their deviant performances would be observed, photographed and reported, being a *kogyaru* was a pastime that played blatantly with media narrative about under age prostitution and compensated dating'.

'Compensated dating [*enjo kōsai*] as a salaryman subculture' is the title of chapter 3. 'Compensated dating'

which involved girls in trying to get money from apparently sex-starved young males attracted much attention in the Japanese media in the 1990s. It was as Kinsella notes (p.39) 'a risqué subculture for company and government employees led by male intellectual and fashionable cultural figures. For these people it was a distinctively male subculture that delighted in playacting at the boundaries of teenage prostitution.' Kinsella devotes two pages to what she terms 'Vicarious dating' suggesting that sexual stimulation was for some men a substitute for the act itself.

In a subsequent chapter entitled '*Kōgyaru* chic: dressing as a delinquent girl' she comments (page 84): 'The intensity of their [the girls] interaction with reporters and camera crews and the organizational centring of *kogyaru* activities within the editorial offices of high-school girl magazines hint at the extent to which the sub-culture, while fully-fledged and 'real' was also a highly professionally produced phenomenon.' Schoolgirls in the 1990s had much more pocket money than the pre-war *mogyaru* (modern girl) and the magazines that catered for them needed to keep up their circulations to attract advertisers.

This book inevitably leaves a number of questions unanswered. How, for instance, do the Japanese girls studied here compare with British or American girls of a similar age? Do Japanese girls have more or less sex in their teens than their western opposite numbers? Teenage pregnancy would seem to be rarer in Japan than here in the UK. Is this because they take more effective precautions or because they have less sex? Homosexuality is a taboo topic in Japan despite its prevalence. Do young Japanese girls have Lesbian relationships? How does the continuance of what might be termed the '*kawaii*' syndrome, which attracts hordes of Japanese visitors to Beatrix Potter's former home in the Lake District fit in with the deviant behaviour of the girls who are the subject of this book? I do not criticise Kinsella for not offering answers to these topics but they do show that there is room for further studies in this area of sociological research.

When many years ago I was a member of the Economic and Social Research Council, I used to plead with sociologists to try to avoid sociological jargon. Please, I said, try to write in clear simple English and short sentences. Like so many books by sociologists this book is often very dense.



Like Someone in Love

Directed by Abbas Kiarostami

2012, 109 minutes

Review by Mike Sullivan

Contains some plot spoilers

Abbas Kiarostami is from Iran and has been making movies since the 1970s; his style is quite different to Hollywood

directors who prefer big blockbuster action movies and is more in keeping with Japanese movies that tend to concentrate on character development. It is partly because he tries to involve the audience with the story that his movies can be controversial, for example some people feel that some of his movies lack key narrative explanations, while others feel that the point of this is to make the audience think rather than have the story spoon fed to them. *Like Someone in Love* is no exception to this and this should be kept in mind before watching the movie. Over the years, he has won a number of awards from different countries including Japan's Medal of Honour in 2013. This movie was a co-venture between France's mk2 Group and Japan's Eurospace, it stars Japanese actors and is entirely in Japanese, and was filmed in Japan.

The story revolves around three main characters played by Rin Takanashi [高梨 臨], Ryo Kase [加瀬 亮] and Tadashi Okuno [奥野 匡]. Rin Takanashi (25) is a relative newcomer to the world of Japanese cinema and TV having had parts in a few movies since 2008 including the *Samurai Sentai Shinkenger* series of movies and a few dramas such as *Detective School Q* and *Rookies*. Ryo Kase (39) is perhaps the most recognizable person in this film, he has starred in a number of movies since 2000 such as *The Taste of Tea*, *About Love*, *I Just Didn't Do It* and *Outrage*. Tadashi Okuno is an actor who after seeing *Like Someone In Love*, seems like a face we must have seen somewhere before. This is because he is quite simply amazing in this movie. However, he has only done some TV work in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s as well as some small parts in recent decades.

The movie begins with a bar, Akiko (Rin Takanashi) is arguing on the phone with her boyfriend while close by a female friend listens in while at the same time talking to a man who we never see. It quickly becomes apparent that her boyfriend is suspicious about where she is and is paranoid, even needing to speak to Akiko's friend to confirm that she isn't with a man and making Akiko go to the toilet and count tiles so that he can go to the same place later, and check that she is actually where she says she is by counting them himself. After this phone call, her boss sits at her table and it is evident that her boyfriend's suspicions are justified as her boss tries to convince her to visit a client for an overnight stay. This movie is roughly divided into thirds with the first third focused on Akiko, she has to take a long taxi ride to the client's house and as she sits in the taxi she listens to a number of voice messages which have been left by her grandmother who has come to Tokyo to visit her.

It is from these messages that we get a bit of background information about Akiko, as well as feel sorry for her as it appears she is too ashamed to meet her grandmother, and also feel sorry for her grandmother who waits patiently all day in Tokyo station in order to try and meet her beloved granddaughter. Akiko asks the taxi driver to pass near the station where she spots her grandmother,

and asks the driver to go around again where she once again sees her grandmother and cries before the taxi continues on its journey into the night.

The next third of the movie brings in the character of the client, Takashi (Tadashi Okuno) and involves his interactions with Akiko and then Takashi with Akiko's boyfriend Noriaki (Ryo Kase), increasingly the movie focuses on Takashi with the final part of the movie pretty much carried by him to the end. It is absolutely fascinating how such a seemingly little known actor takes on such a major role so perfectly. He is considerably older than his co-stars (86) and, in keeping with Abbas Kiarostami's preference for mistaken identities, is confused by Noriaki to be Akiko's grandfather. At the same time, he takes on the role of being a surrogate father or grandfather, a role which Akiko herself projects on him.

The plot is considerably more complex than the description above, however this is one movie which is best to view without knowing too much about the story. Unfortunately, despite the brilliant performance by Tadashi Okuno, this is a movie which you will either like or dislike. The audience is expected to piece together some parts of the different characters' back stories themselves, as well as read between the lines of the movie's plot. On my first viewing of this movie, I came away a little dissatisfied from what I had seen, however I feel an increasing need to watch it again in order to think about what Abbas Kiarostami is trying to convey.

Triangle

By Hisaki Matsuura

Dalkey Archive Press (1 April 2014)

350 pages, £10.26

ISBN-10: 162897026X

Review by Chris Corker

Hisaki Matsuura, a professor of French literature at the University of Tokyo, initially made his literary trade as a poet before moving onto novels. There are certainly elements of poetic symbolism and surrealism in sections of *Triangle* that reflect his earlier work. His 2000 novel *A spoiling Rain* won the Akutagawa prize in that same year, while his 2004 novel *Peninsula*, a follow-up to *Triangle*, won the Yomiuri Prize.

One thing that may be apparent to anyone familiar with the work of John Fowles is the striking similarity of *Triangle* to Fowles' 1965 work *The Magus*. Certain events and concepts of timelessness, entrapment, helplessness and misdirected desire are mirrored throughout. And while the endings diverge and the setting is quite obviously different, the similarities are hard to ignore. The protagonists' fatal flaws,



however, are almost polar opposites. While Nicholas in *The Magus* is betrayed by his own arrogant assumptions and often brazenly wanders into traps laid for him obliviously, Otsuki, a former drug addict, is driven more out of a self-hatred and paranoiac fear at his own circumstances, falling in line with a self-destructive enthusiasm. 'What was important was feeling comfortable with an idle lifestyle while maintaining a hatred for being a deadbeat.'

While this characteristic may be necessary for the reader to understand Otsuki's persistence, when those of sounder mind may have stayed well away, it also makes it harder to sympathise with his character, as he wallows in his self-made squalor.

Despite the flaws with Otsuki's character, the story is an intriguing one. While wondering through the maze-like Tokyo backstreets after an unfulfilling romantic affair with a married woman, Hiroko (who, as in *The Magus*, is transformed into tantalising bait), Otsuki is surprised to bump into one of his old colleagues, Sugimoto. Otsuki's distaste and fear of this character is clear from the offset, and Sugimoto represents a seedy and nefarious past that Otsuki is ashamed of, trying unsuccessfully to forget and move beyond. Sugimoto implores Otsuki to meet his new boss, Koyama, who he refers to deferentially as 'Sensei'. After much persuasion, Otsuki agrees. At Koyama's house he is shown a pornographic film shortly after his arrival, in which images of hardcore sex are inter-spliced with grotesque images of feasting maggots and cannibalistic insects. Shortly after this aversion therapy-like film, which Koyama refers to uncompromisingly as 'art', Otsuki is asked to contribute his own directed scene, featuring Tomoe, a young girl he will come to desire and detest in equal measure. Here is highlighted the conflict in man of his baser instincts against his civilisation, his constant struggle to stand above other living things with an assumed transcendental nobility.

'... Things of beauty, things of filth, they're all the same when you burrow down to the core. If you descend to the depths, you reach a place where everything becomes one, a place where total opposites melt into each other completely. Beauty and pollution, life and death, lowliness and nobility, penis and vagina.'

From this point on events take a surreal and pernicious turn as Otsuki is sucked into a savage and convoluted maze, where each turn only offers more questions, or nothing at all. In-between each bizarre occurrence, Otsuki wanders through never-ending backstreets in the Tokyo summer heat, trying to find answers, or trying to find himself. There is a strong feeling throughout that everyone is implicit in the deception, further highlighting the isolated position of Otsuki and adding to the drama.

As the story is set in central Tokyo, anyone familiar with the city may recognise the names mentioned, such as Yotsuya, Asakusa and Shinjuku. In tone with Otsuki's own desperate feelings are the economic times, the novel taking place slightly after the economic bubble has burst, leaving manual labourers out of work and

destitute, the national mood sombre.

As mentioned before, there is a metaphysical element to the narrative, with philosophies on time similar to that which Vonnegut set out in *Slaughterhouse 5* and a buried layer of existentialism. There is also a meditation on the art of Japanese *Kanji*, as Koyama tries to match the achievable perfection of the inanimate with the imperfect animate, but this will have little resonance with many western readers, and doesn't always feel convincing. These elements, combined with the ongoing mystery and suspense of Otsuki's journey encourage the reader to press on, searching for that answer that literary fiction often makes temptingly elusive. This narrative drive, however, does ebb away towards the final third of the novel, as it assumes a more conventional action narrative, the intrigue and introspection taking a back seat to a sequence of scenes that feel ill-fitted when compared to the rest of the novel, better suiting a Hollywood blockbuster.

Overall, *Triangle* is a brave and sometimes brutal novel that isn't afraid to bend conventions and use the surreal to disorientate the reader. While its promise marginally outweighs its delivery, it is still a commendable, and for the most part, intriguing and addictive work.

Woman in the Dunes, by Kobo Abe, Adapted as a play and directed by Micha Colombo

Theatre503, London, 14 -18 January 2014

An interview with Micha Colombo by Susan Meehan

Kagami Theatre hopes to tour Woman in the Dunes more widely around the UK in 2014 and is currently preparing for a second round of fundraising in order to make the proposed tour possible. The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation supported the London theatre premiere which received extremely good reviews. It was certainly packed on the last night, when I went to see it and I know that it sold out on its first evening as well. I had the pleasure of congratulating and also interviewing Micha Colombo on 24 January, soon after her run at the Theatre503 had come to an end.

Susan: You studied Japanese at Cambridge – what brought you to directing and acting?

Micha: I have always loved drama from an early age – from being a regular participant in my local village panto as a child, through school plays and lots of student drama while at Cambridge. After university, I initially went into a more corporate role in marketing, but eventually realised my heart was still in theatre, so I made the choice to pursue it professionally. I took the plunge, left my job and got a place at one of the big London drama schools, the Academy of Live & Recorded Arts (ALRA), to train professionally as an actor. While there, and since graduating, I started to realise that my love of theatre might extend beyond performance to include directing and writing too. I'm still pretty early on in my career in theatre, so time will tell where it takes me.

Susan: You founded the Kagami Theatre – can you

tell us about this venture?

Micha: The most obvious answer is that my university studies and time spent in Japan have instilled a long-term love for Japan and broader East Asia (I have also lived and worked in Beijing) and so I want to do my bit to share and showcase a culture that I have found inspiring over the years. There is also another more nuanced reason that I started Kagami Theatre. I am by no means an expert in Japanese theatre or in its representation in the UK (yet!) but from a personal, anecdotal perspective I sometimes get the impression that Japanese culture is exoticised in the UK and I feel this can be a little reductive. While admittedly, there are times when it is very useful and interesting to explore our differences and what makes a culture unique, I do however feel that there is also a need to emphasise the universality, the humanity that exists across all cultures. Difference is always appealing for novelty's sake, but I believe theatre has a powerful role to play in building empathy and helping us make sense of the human condition collectively. So I hope with Kagami Theatre to provide some alternative perspectives on Japanese culture through its ideas and stories rather than its aesthetic.

Susan: Why do you think *Woman in the Dunes* resonated with the audience at Theatre503?

Micha: As I mentioned in the previous answer, we really tried with *Woman in the Dunes* to focus on themes that resonate with contemporary audiences in the UK. We live in a global economy that has inequality at its heart. When national economies 'develop' and 'progress' this doesn't necessarily translate to every individual in equal measure. For me, one of the powerful points of the story was the exploration of how people survive when they effectively get left behind by society. Each of the characters in the story is trying to make sense of the harsh conditions in which they find themselves and trying to carve out a normality within that. The story really challenges our notions of purpose and achievement and we received a lot of audience feedback that this exploration of why we work struck a real chord with people.

Susan: Is Abe Kobo your favourite author?

Micha: I am terrible at choosing favourites I'm afraid, I think it's impossible as different writers give you different things! But I think Abe Kobo was a truly visionary person. I absolutely loved reading more of his work and researching his processes and ideas in preparation for the show. He has

been a real inspiration to me and I'm sure I will create more work related to him in future.

Susan: What was most difficult about this particular project? What was the easiest aspect?

Micha: There were lots of challenges about this project, mainly practical. We had to create this production on a very small budget generously funded by the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation. Without that support, this project may not have been possible. Budget restrictions meant we had to be creative with our production design and seek to keep costs absolutely minimal across all aspects of the production without sacrificing quality. Also, there were some staging challenges that were pretty daunting – the



main one being how to represent a 20 metre deep pit of sand and the movement of props and people in and out of said pit when staging the show in a 5m by 5m square studio space! The easiest aspect, or perhaps one of the most enjoyable was gathering the team together – actors, designers, stage manager. I was so lucky to find a fantastic team of really creative people who also loved the story and wanted to help bring it to life. I thought it might be tricky finding others who were as excited as me about the piece, but in fact, I had a wealth of great talent to choose from.

Susan: How different was the first performance on Tuesday, 11 January from the last on 18 January?

Micha: We only had a short first run this time but even then the show shifted and evolved over just 5 nights of public performance. I felt it gained pace and the actors really started to ground their characters and make the dialogue come to life. It takes a live audience to make you realise what moments really zing and which need further work. There is always room for improvement, especially since I am relatively new to the game, so I will be editing the script and making some structural changes if we manage to secure funding for another phase of touring the show.

Susan: What other Japanese authors / playwrights have influenced you?

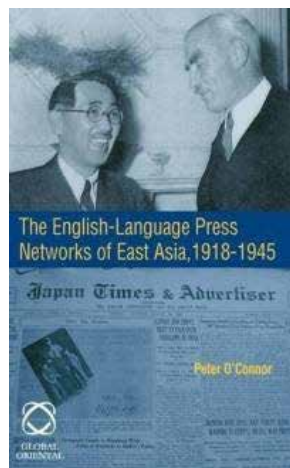
Micha: Lots! I have always enjoyed reading Mishima and Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, I went to a great rehearsed reading of *Getting Lost* by Maeda Shiro at the Japan Foundation a few years back which sparked a few thoughts. I loved Sei Shonagon when I read her at university. I also think there is a rich tradition of folk tales in Japan that are a real treasure trove of exciting stories.

Susan: What are you aiming to do next?

Micha: If possible, I would love to share *Woman in the Dunes* with a broader audience via a tour, but this is all subject to funding. I am now starting to think about Kagami Theatre's next project. I have a feeling it might be something devised this time, perhaps around some of those great folk tales I mentioned, but we'll see.

Susan: Which play has impressed you most over the last few years and why?

Micha: A production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* by Benedict Andrews. This was Chekhov like I'd never seen it before and packed a real punch. The design was startling and an integral part of the action rather than simply acting as a backdrop, and included a huge mound of earth and a stage of raised blocks that were progressively cleared away throughout the second half. The dialogue felt alive and contemporary so that I had a strong sense of empathy with the characters rather than seeing them as museum pieces. It was emotionally vibrant.



The English-Language Press Networks of East Asia

By Peter O'Connor

Global Oriental, 2010

405 pages, £61

ISBN: 978-1-905246-67-0

Review by Ian Nish

'This book,' the author starts boldly, 'argues that the English-language press of East Asia played a significant role in the shaping

of international perceptions of Japan and East Asia (page 1).' Professor O'Connor justifies this claim with a wealth of detail gleaned from years of research in the field and from countless publications on the subject of Japanese government propaganda.

While newspapers in Japan were published from the middle of the 19th century onwards, the first major strides towards an organized industry were taken in 1891, just after the Meiji constitution had been ratified, with the founding of the *Japan Chronicle* in Kobe by Robert Young and the *Japan Advertiser* in Tokyo by a Scot named Meiklejohn. The global press in those days was not concentrated as today in the hands of large corporations but was small, local and diversified. So the English-language press of the East Asian treaty ports was not exceptional. It served the foreign mercantile communities and a fair number of Japanese in days when the Japanese-language press was slowly developing. But these were hard times for proprietors and idiosyncratic editors trying to survive in an uncertain market; and there were periodical crises when compromises had to be made. (The Japanese side of the story being complicated

enough, we are excluding from this review the complexities of the Chinese and Korean press which O'Connor also covers).

The main part of this study begins at the end of the first world war. O'Connor detects the emergence of three broad networks among English-language newspapers, magazines and news agencies. Firstly, Japan which was naturally anxious to present a favourable account of her actions to the world, had through the Information Bureau which the Foreign Ministry set up in 1904 begun to influence the press at home and through diplomatic channels abroad. Secondly, the *Japan Chronicle* group based in Kansai, capable and well-informed, had links with British media in Shanghai and Tianjin as also with Fleet Street. O'Connor describes this as 'the British network' since it reflected views and prejudices of the British mercantile community, though not necessarily British government thinking. It was not uncommon for the British embassy in Tokyo to speak of the editors as 'suffering from an exaggerated critical faculty.' Competing with the British-oriented media was, thirdly, the *Japan Advertiser* group which operated under the ownership of the American Wilfred Fleisher from 1908 till he sold it in 1940. His associates in China were often strongly anti-British but the *Japan Advertiser* under the editorship of the Scotsman Hugh Byas for three periods from 1914 until 1930 kept a neutral stance. These two groups tended to be critical (though not in unison) of the editorial line taken by the English-language outlets supported by 'the Foreign Ministry network' which was becoming increasingly associated with the *Japan Times*. In the later 1930s the position of foreign newspapers became even more precarious because of shortage of revenues, government censorship and wartime conditions. The result was that the *Chronicle* accepted a subsidy from the Tokyo government in 1938 and the *Advertiser* sold out to the *Japan Times* in October 1940. The 'Foreign Ministry network' proved to be the most durable of the three groups but was regarded with suspicion abroad, thus destroying its original objective of winning foreign support.

O'Connor's interesting final chapter entitled 'Publicity Warriors' deals with the way in which the *Japan Times*, now in charge of an amalgamated media, sets about reorienting the press in the conquered areas of Asia between 1941 and 1945. However hateful it was, English had, for practical reasons, to become the prime language of the armed occupation of the Asian continent and the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

This is a subtle story, full of twists, inconsistencies and contradictions. Generalization and interpretation are difficult. How significant was the expatriate press in an era of rising nationalism in Japan (and, of course, China)? It is probably fair to conclude that it had an effect much greater than its resources and circulation would suggest. In the 1930s these newspapers operated in the environment of a propaganda war and managed to have their say, even if it hardly affected policy-making in Japan or China. And yet elsewhere in the world where academics covering East Asia

were few in number and foreigners with a knowledge of East Asian languages fewer still, these observation posts were heavily relied on. Foreign Ministry archives around the world now show that the views of these journalists were much read and had the effect of keeping diplomats on their toes. Moreover journalists from these papers like Morgan Young, Hugh Byas, Thomas Millard and Edgar Snow independently published many authoritative books on contemporary issues which carried great weight in 'shaping international perceptions' of the area.

Professor O'Connor who has systematically analysed a vast amount of archival sources and has previously published a 40-volume series on related topics, has now distilled his findings in this compact volume. Students of the East Asian region will find this encyclopaedic work of reference an essential tool for their understanding. It is, however, a sad commentary on how a once free press can decline over time into one purveying government hand-outs!

The Return of Japan's Long Lost Telescope

Article by Sean Curtin

Four centuries ago King James I gave Japan its very first telescope, at the time this was a cutting-edge piece of technology. The gift was the perfect symbol to mark the beginning of what was to become an extremely fruitful and long-lasting bilateral relationship. Sadly, the original telescope has been lost to the mists of time, but as part of the Japan400 celebrations in 2013, to mark four centuries since the first official encounter, a new telescope was constructed using traditional methods. The idea of restoring a lost symbolic artefact has deep cultural roots in English mythology and literature stretching back to the Arthurian legends.

The original telescope's tale begins back in April 1611, when the East India Company ship the *Clove*, under the command of the intrepid Captain John Saris, left England and set sail for distant Japan. The mission was made up of three ships of which only the *Clove* went all the way to Japan. Saris' commission was to first go to Yemen and the Spice Islands, primarily to seek trade, and then to Japan, if possible. Because his first two ports of call were not especially successful, Saris was motivated to go on to Japan. After a dangerous sea voyage lasting more than two years, the *Clove* arrived in Japanese waters in June 1613. It is believed the Earl of Salisbury, a close advisor and Chief Minister to King James, helped supervise the complex task of sending

the first British vessel to Japan and organizing the dispatch of the telescope, which was the most advanced scientific instrument on the planet at the time.

This was a daring mission to what was then the very edge of the known world. After sailing along the Japanese coast, Saris eventually landed at Hirado, located in modern day Nagasaki Prefecture. Here he was warmly greeted by the local ruler, Matsura Hoin, the Lord of Hirado. Lord Matsura helped ensure the telescope's safe passage to Japan's paramount ruler, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Along with the aid of William Adams, an Englishman who had arrived in Japan in April 1600 on a Dutch ship, Saris was able to gain an audience with the ruling elite and initiate the first official contact. On 8 September 1613, Saris had an audience with the immensely influential retired Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. He gave the legendary leader a letter from King James and several gifts, including the nation's first ever telescope, a device which had just been invented in Europe. Saris also opened a trading post and factory in Hirado, which he subsequently handed over to his colleague Richard Cocks upon departing Japan in December 1613.

The spyglass brought by Saris was the first to leave Europe for any destination, as well as the first ever sent to Asia. To the people of the time, the telescope was a fabulous piece of technology and certainly a truly impressive gift. Sadly, all physical traces of this magnificent device have completely vanished and we do not even have a picture of it. The surviving written Japanese texts describing the telescope are contradictory, so we have no real idea what it was actually like.

In many respects this first gift of such an innovative piece of world-changing technology was the perfect symbol



The world debut of the new telescope at Hatfield House

to inaugurate a highly successful, centuries-long relationship of scientific, economic and cultural exchange. It is a shame that this potent emblem of friendship no longer exists. Thanks to the vision of the Japan400 co-chairs, Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, along with the very generous funding for the entire project by Robin Maynard MBE, a new telescope was commissioned in 2013. The new instrument was painstakingly created over a year-long period by

Ian Poyser, one of Britain's foremost craftsmen in the field of traditional brass telescope construction.

Having recreated such a historic symbol from the genesis of the Japan-British relationship, a fitting location and occasion had to be found for the telescope to make its global debut. Monday 9 September 2013, almost four hundred years to

the day from the original presentation, was selected as the date to reveal the newly-commissioned brass instrument. Hatfield House, built by the 1st Earl of Salisbury, who helped organize its dispatch to Japan, was selected as the special venue. To add a further layer of historic resonance, two direct descendants of key 1613 dramatis personae were present at the ceremony. These were the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury, and Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the Lord of Hirado, where the Clove had landed 400 year ago.



A close encounter after 400 years – Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the ruler of Hirado and the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury

A lunch was held to celebrate the historic Saris-Tokugawa encounter and the first public appearance of the newly crafted spyglass. It was announced that the beautiful instrument was to be a gift to the Japanese people from Japan400, being given as a renewal of the original gift. It is hoped it will symbolise the centuries-long exchanges in culture, diplomacy and trade between the two great nations as well as the long-standing and mutual cooperation in science and technology. Later that same day, the telescope made its second public outing, this time at the world-famous Tower of London, where the Shogun's gift to King James, a magnificent suit of Japanese armour, is on display. After its day in the sun, the telescope was returned to the workshop for further internal work to be completed.

The next time the instrument was on display was at the 'Two Cultures United by Tea' event organized by Japan400 and held at the magnificent Banqueting House in Whitehall on Sunday 15 September 2013. At this spacious location many people were able to admire it and the general impression of the gleaming brass device was extremely favourable. This was perhaps the best chance the British public had to see it before it returned once again to Mr Poyser's workshop for a final series of refinements to its optical array. Like the original telescope, it was destined to be dispatched to Japan, but fortunately there would be one final opportunity to view it before it left the UK.

On 17 January 2014, Japan400 and the University of Cambridge organized a unique seminar entitled 'From King James's Telescope to the Present and the Future: the Japan-British partnership in science and technology' at Jesus College, Cambridge, which is one of the university's most ancient colleges. This conference was kindly sponsored by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and Toshiba of Europe and functioned as a farewell event for

the telescope. A highly distinguish academic gathering, including Lord Rees FRS, Astronomer Royal, was assembled to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Japan-British scientific relations and bid adieu to the glistening optical device. The symposium was chaired by Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, the co-chairmen of Japan400, and by Professor Roberto Cipolla, Fellow of Jesus College.



A Farewell for the Telescope – From King James's Telescope to the Present and the Future, Symposium and Celebration of the Departure of the Japan400 Telescope for Japan

After the conference, there was a dinner in honour of the departing telescope. Japan400 will send the telescope to No. 1 House at the British Embassy in Tokyo before it tours a number of Japanese cities with strong British historical connections. It will eventually come to rest in Shizuoka City. The telescope will be a key part of the Ieyasu400 celebrations, which will commemorate the life of the great Japanese leader Tokugawa Ieyasu, who died in June 1616. The telescope will eventually be placed on permanent display in a specially reconstructed tower of Sunpu Castle in Shizuoka City.

The telescope's farewell dinner was held in one of the oldest parts of Jesus College, which was built on the site of a twelfth-century Benedictine nunnery. This ancient venue gave the proceedings an almost spiritual quality and as I looked at the telescope, it made me recall the Bible passage, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.' (Luke 15:9, King James Version).

[Events in Brief](#)

Japan Society Annual Lecture by Tim Hitchens, British Ambassador to Japan, Monday 3 March 2014 at Nomura International plc, One Angel Lane, London EC4R 3AB

Read more at:

<http://www.japansociety.org.uk/33769/update-from-tokyo/>