



Dr Carmen Blacker (1924-2009), scholar and teacher of Japanese religion and folklore, was an important figure in the field of Japanese Studies in the UK. The book *Carmen Blacker – Scholar of Japanese Religion, Myth and Folklore: Writings and Reflections*, reviewed for this issue of The Japan Society Review by Jim E Hoare, offers new insights into her research and life. This tribute volume not only includes texts written by family members, friends and colleagues, but also reproduces excerpts from Carmen Blacker's diaries and some of her writings giving 'a fascinating picture of a very full life'.

Like the pioneer work of Carmen Blacker, the books and films reviewed in the April issue of The Japan Society Review continue to examine a wide-range of topics in Japanese culture and history. Our film reviewer Roger Macy looks at two very different films dealing with unexplored war-time relationships: the activities of a poets' group in occupied Taiwan (*Le Moulin*) and the experiences of an Irish prisoner of war in Japan (*A Doctor's Sword*). Also involving

the military past of Japan and its legacy in the present day, Sir Hugh Cortazzi reviews the English translation of Kumagai Naoko's work *The Comfort Women: Historical, Political, Legal and Moral Perspectives* which discusses in detail the controversial issue of female sexual slavery in the Japanese colonies during World War II.

In terms of Japanese fiction and literature, this issue brings you reviews of the latest translation of celebrated writer Kawakami Hiromi (*Record of a Night Too Brief* reviewed by Harry Martin) and the second novel of the young author Shibasaki Tomoka (*Spring Garden* reviewed by Eluned Gramich), both recently published by Pushkin Press. And to better understand and contextualise these and other works of Japanese modern and contemporary literature, *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*, reviewed by Alice French, could be a useful and stimulating resource.

Alejandra Armendariz-Hernandez

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## Editor

Alejandra Armendariz-Hernandez

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Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Alice French, Eluned Gramich, Jim E Hoare, Harry Martin and Roger Macy.

(Photo: Carmen Blacker at temple, 1974  
Courtesy of Renaissance Books)

## Record of a Night Too Brief

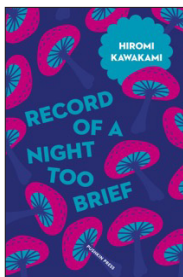
by Kawakami Hiromi

Translated by Lucy North

Pushkin Press (2017)

ISBN: 9781782272717

Review by Harry Martin



Kawakami Hiromi's writing is well known for its original and detailed descriptions of everyday life portrayed with splendid artistry and trade-mark, off-beat style in her most famous novels, *The Nakano Thrift Shop* and *Strange Weather* in Tokyo. Her fascinating explorations of secret lives and relationships and the often nocturnal and crepuscular activities of her characters capture the imagination and draw readers into a world unique to Kawakami's work. *Record of a Night Too Brief* is a late addition to her translated works, having only been released to the English speaking world in 2017 despite its Japanese publication in 1996, over 20 years ago! Originally released under the Japanese title *Hebi wo fumu* (*A Snake Stepped On*), the book incorporates three short stories of an abstract and surreal nature which the translator Lucy North has managed to capture in this well thought-out and ambitious translation.

The three stories are distinctly different from one another but follow a unifying theme of yearning, desire and longing in the minds of young women in three very different states. The first story (*Record of a Night Too Brief*) is a surreal, complex journey through the dreams and subconscious thoughts of a young woman who follows a mysterious and ethereal being through interwoven dream worlds where animals talk and objects and people have no defined mass or state. The delicate textured prose transfers the reader from dream to dream with seemingly no relevance or connection between them other than the driving force of the protagonist's lust and desire. The second story (*Missing*) explores the complex emotions and effects of grief, focusing on a sister's desire to see her lost brother again; and the third (*A Snake Stepped On*) is a profoundly unique story of a girl's relationship with a shape-shifting snake who infiltrates her life,

incorporating an almost biblical theme of temptation and enticement.

Fans of Kawakami's other works may find these stories somewhat removed from her more familiar focus on the everyday and often mundane aspects of suburban life, as these seem to draw much more heavily on traditional Japanese folklore, mythology and superstition. The notion of shape-shifting is very prominent in Japanese myths, as is the personification of animals and natural objects which play recurring and important roles in this work. In all three stories transformation, whether from human to animal, physical to abstract or large to small, features heavily and contributes largely to the intangible nature and dreamlike feel of the book.

*A Snake Stepped On* seems the most traditional and endemic in its inspiration, as snakes adopting female form is a widespread mythology through much of Japan; however, its setting in a contemporary Tokyo context creates a delightfully anachronistic aspect and contrast. *Missing* adopts a far more universal theme and can perhaps relate to a wider audience as it covers grief and longing in a way which transcends cultural boundaries. The loss associated with the change in human state from physical to spiritual may be universal, but Kawakami still manages to infuse a uniquely Japanese slant by setting the sense of loss among the complex negotiations of traditional wedding arrangements between families. The first story is perhaps unique in this theme, as there is a multitude of shapeshifting beings which seem to have been drawn from Japanese mythology yet also Kawakami's own imagination. There is something almost *Alice in Wonderland*-like about the abstract and disjointed fantasy and anthropomorphism of horses, moles and monkeys.

In some ways this is a typical Kawakami work, with the expected eccentricities any fan is likely to enjoy; but in other ways the work stands apart from her others, and with characters continuously changing form, shape and size, this is a truly fantastical story which requires thorough reading, yet rewards with rich imagery that will challenge anyone's powers of imagination. §

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## Spring Garden

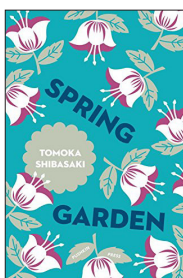
by Shibusaki Tomoka

Translated by Polly Barton

Pushkin Press (2017)

ISBN: 978-1782272700

Review by Eluned Gramich



*Spring Garden* is the second novel by Osaka-born Shibusaki Tomoka, having had her debut, *A Day on the Planet*, adapted into a successful film in Japan. This new book has also garnered the young author great acclaim, earning her the national Akutagawa Prize in 2014. Beautifully and subtly translated by Polly Barton, *Spring Garden* centres on twenty-something Taro.



Recently divorced after a short-lived marriage and still reeling from the death of his father, Taro lives on his own in a one-bed flat in a condemned apartment block. The story follows him and his two neighbours who remain in the emptying building; the ones left behind, without much in the way of family. The unusual friendship that unfolds between Taro and Nishi, the woman from the top floor, leads him to surprising discoveries about his neighbourhood. She spends her time spying on the magnificent family house opposite their concrete block of flats. After discovering a coffee-table architecture book featuring the house called Spring Garden – reminiscent of an art and lifestyle magazine – which she shows Taro, the two of them become fixated on the building's sky-blue walls, décor, gardens and, eventually, even the family who move in. 'Spring Garden' becomes a symbol of everything that the two wish for in life: style, space, independence, wealth, comfort and, most important of all, companionship.

The interest in urban living and the narratives that arise from so many strangers living in close proximity is not new, especially for contemporary literature set in Tokyo. However, Shibasaki succeeds in creating a unique atmosphere, poised between mystery and sympathy, violence and kindness. It isn't just a story of loneliness in a big city; rather, Shibasaki shifts the focus onto the aesthetics of living, and the important relationships that may form by way of art and architecture. Although the novel takes place in a very real, specific place – Setagaya, a middle-class suburb of Tokyo – it is also a dream world. Both Nishi and Taro are big dreamers, walking the world with their head in the clouds, and this is partly what makes them such sympathetic characters. Taro, in his laziness and lack

of ambition, spends most of his time dozing in his flat, reflecting and wondering; Nishi is an anime artist and lives through, and by, her imagination, which includes her passion for the blue-walled house next door and all that it represents. In some ways it's a modern story for an instagram-age. Like Kinfolk magazine, 'Spring Garden' shows off the seemingly 'better' life of an artist couple: a woman doing yoga within perfectly decorated rooms, a man digging in an enviable garden. Nishi clings to the book like a bible: it doesn't matter that these images don't reflect the complex and unhappy episodes of the couple's actual life.

Shibasaki's writing is measured, understated and poetic at the right moments. The language comes alive as she hones in on the grotesque details of plants and animals, the details of a potter's wasp and Japanese snowbell, for instance. Taro's grief at losing his father is portrayed in physical, tangible terms: he grinds his father's remains in a pestle and mortar so that they are fine enough to scatter, leaving traces of his father's body in his kitchen. The way that Shibasaki pulls together the threads of Taro's family life and colleagues without turning the focus away from the condemned building is deftly done, deepening a reader's sympathy with him and making the novel difficult to put down.

When a new family with young children move into Spring Garden, Nishi befriends them and pulls Taro into the circle too. The events of the novel reach a fraught climax with the apartment block about to be demolished, and Taro forced into making decisions about the future that he has spent years avoiding. *Spring Garden* is a brief, compassionate tale about loss, friendship and architecture, and the many ways we can live our lives. [S](#)

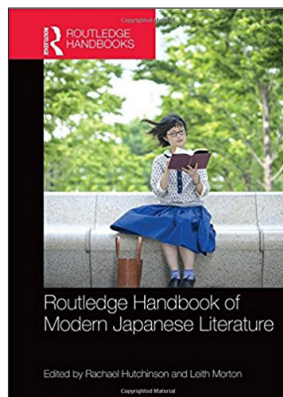
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## The Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature

edited by Rachael Hutchinson and Leith Douglas Morton

Routledge (2016)  
ISBN: 978-1138792296

Review by Alice French



As a student of modern Japanese literature, it is seldom that I have anything affectionate to say about literary handbooks. I invariably associate them with essay crises and revision, and so was very surprised to find myself picking up the new *Routledge Handbook of*

*Modern Japanese Literature* to read for pleasure. The conveniently short chapters make it very easy to dip in and out of, and the eclectic mixture of themes and writers covered means that there really is something to please everyone. From Tanizaki to Twitter novels and feminism to Marxism, this handbook skilfully conveys the extensive scope of modern Japanese literature, in only 341 pages.

The *Routledge Handbook* is particularly refreshing because it does not tackle Japanese literature from an exclusively chronological perspective. Instead, the essays are grouped thematically, creating sections on space and time, gender and sexuality, identity, technology and several others. The first chapter, Stephen Dodd's *Space and Time in Modern Japanese*

*Literature*, sets the stage perfectly for what is to follow, taking the reader back to the Meiji period and Nagai Kafu's 1909 work *The River Sumida* to explain Japanese literature's unique relationship with the concepts of time and space, rooted in the "particularly problematic" notion of the Japanese "home." Chapter two, Jon Holt's essay on modern haiku and tanka, complements Dodd's ideas well by exploring "the Japanese sensitivity to time" in poetry. Along with Freedman's chapter on Kawabata Yasunari and Seaman's discussion of isolation in women's literature, the handbook succeeds in providing an effective overview of some of the fundamentals of modern Japanese literature.

However, the book does not dwell for too long on these, and its true merit lies in its focus on the less talked about themes in contemporary Japanese literature. Section two, for example, covers gender and sexuality, with J. Keith Vincent offering a detailed insight into queer reading in Japanese literature and both Hartley and Hutchinson providing interesting takes on Japanese feminism. In fact, the *Routledge Handbook* as a whole really gives female writers the exposure they deserve, but are often deprived of, with Angela Liu celebrating the work of Mizumura Minae, Kendall Heitzman musing on the rise of women writers, and Jonathan E. Abel giving a nod to the "empress of the cell phone novel," Naito Mika. As Rachael Hutchinson and Leith Morton aptly argue in their introduction, it

is this inclusion of significant sections on queer and female fiction that differentiates this handbook from its predecessors and makes it truly up-to-date.

This is not to say that this handbook is only useful when researching contemporary literature; it also includes comprehensive sections on the works of early 20th century writers and pre- and post-war fiction. I found Chapter Nineteen, *The Akutagawa/Tanzaki debate: actors in bundan discourse*, especially helpful when writing an essay on Tanizaki's naturalism last term. Section Four, which focuses on writing war memory, also acts as a useful, interesting and tactful summary of the effect of World War Two on Japan's literature, but does not dominate the book, avoiding the temptation of defining contemporary fiction purely as a response to the war. The final section instead focuses on Japan's crowning achievement of the post-war period: its technology. Hansen, Saito and Abel provide fascinating perspectives on everything from cell phone novels to *Twitterature*, bringing the reader's journey into modern Japanese literature right up to the present day. Overall therefore, perhaps disappointingly, I haven't got one bad word to say against the *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*. It is well-organised, well-written and, above all, not boring. I could not ask any more of a literary handbook, and can therefore see myself forming a firm friendship with this one as I persevere with my studies of Japanese literature. §

## A Doctor's Sword

directed by Gary Lennon

Screened at the Bertha DocHouse (18 March 2017)

Review by Roger Macy

Does an Irish documentary film deserve space in the Japan Society Review? Only in that it was partly filmed in Japan and the makers have sought to make some generalisations about Japan after its screening in London.

*A Doctor's Sword* had the potential to explore an interesting, off-beat topic – the relationship of Ireland to Japan during WorldWar II. In my own researches into the period, I have noticed that Japanese-sponsored, English-language material on culture, even tourist promotion material, is likely to turn up in Ireland – the only English-speaking country in the world with which Japan did not engage in warfare. I have also noticed the intense annoyance of the British Foreign Office at the tardiness of bringing to heel the Japanese



representative to Dublin at the end of the war. The complexity of the subject expands when one considers the 50,000 Irishmen who served – for their old colonial masters – in the British Forces in WorldWar II.

Aidan MacCarthy was a newly qualified medical doctor from County Cork when he signed up in London in 1939 with the RAF, "for the money", his family report in the film. When caught in the fall of Singapore, MacCarthy's troubles and journeys begin. The film duly recounts the well-known maltreatment

of prisoners of war (POW) by Japan in WorldWar II, but completely overlooks the much worse treatment of those without POW status. Having got in so deep, one can surely forgive MacCarthy when we catch sight of his Japanese POW record as 'Joseph MacCarthy, British', but it's a detail the film accidentally gives us and is not commented on.

The real Aidan MacCarthy lived an honourable life as a doctor in Ireland after the war but, unfortunately didn't write of his experiences until the 1990s, after a stroke. We hear his recorded voice on the radio from that time, presenting himself as purely a "Catholic Irishman". Even 40 years later – and even now, well into the third millennium – the dual identity of many of those in Ireland cannot, it seems, be openly faced. It's not just that the border-crossing between Ireland and the U.K. in 1939 is invisible to the viewer in this film, the heroic fight against the Axis powers, in which

MacCarthy took part, is implicitly owned by anyone of MacCarthy's identity. With so much history suppressed, the film devotes itself to the titular sword, residing since 1945 in County Cork, together with a photograph of a Japanese officer, wearing same sword, offering 'this', i.e., the photograph, as a token of friendship. Of course, the surrender of swords was the outwardly and bodily token of a hundred thousand surrenders and more. The evident fact that, when jailer became prisoner, this particular sword did not make its way up the chain of command, is a misappropriation long since time-barred. For this film, however, its 'gift' was a unique token of everlasting friendship, worthy of far more time than MacCarthy ever seemed to have spent on it.

The film's director, Gary Lennon, was present for a Q&A at the Bertha Dochose. He had been to Japan. He wanted to tell us how "the Japanese" are not facing up to their WorldWar II history. §

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## Le Moulin

directed by Huang Ya-li

Screened at the ICA in the Essay Film Festival (29 March 2017)

Review by Roger Macy

There are all sorts of banners under which a Japanese film might be screened in the UK, and a recent banner was the Essay Film Festival, now in its third year in London. However, *Le Moulin*, might seem a strange choice for a Japan Society review – arriving under a French title in London, changed from its original Mandarin Chinese title. Nevertheless, the film's language, apart from translations for the listener, was entirely Japanese and its subject was very much about Japanese culture.

*Le Moulin* comes from the name of a poetry society in Taiwan in the 1930s. Its authors, like most educated people in Taiwan at the time, wrote entirely in Japanese. This particular society wrapped itself in a modernist banner and tied itself overtly to metropolitan France. Its members continued to write and publish after wartime print restrictions closed *Le Moulin*. Abruptly in 1945, Japanese language was suppressed and a slice of Taiwanese cultural history became unavailable to subsequent generations, until recent scholarly interest. Uncovering the unknown is, of course, the business of documentary film. But there are no known moving images of the members of *Le Moulin*, and this work is of a rarer genre – that of the poetry film.



Filmmaker Huang Ya-li has told his story entirely in the Japanese words of his subjects. Much of the 162 minutes of this film are devoted to the poetry. Most are narrated by a Japanese speaker, with written translations on screen in Mandarin and English. A few were presented in written Japanese, also with translations. But a story was told, because these members had also been vivid letter-writers, often reporting from Tokyo to their distant island.

Whilst the spoken word is the driving medium of the film, Huang manages to construct a film with some strong visual imagery. He is helped by many of the poems that use household objects as metaphors. These poets were of a modernist hue so Huang could relate their subjects to contemporary newsreel footage as, more easily, he could do with the letters.

Reaction to individual poems is a very personal thing and the combination of Huang's aural and visual imagery that I liked might not, I accept, appeal to others. The combination of translations and imagery gave me a sense of understanding of the Japanese that would not be justified by my linguistic ability. I was helped further in this respect by a Hokkien-speaking maid, who has to learn Japanese in order to address her employing family in acceptable manner. I was offered a ladder up



to the poetry, aided further by a recreated programme of 'let's practise Japanese' on a made-believe radio.

The film has passages of recreated footage shot by Huang, some in Tokyo. It also has a post-war coda, when several of the members found themselves very much on the wrong end of the White Terror. Alas, with poetry and historic images for this period being unavailable, it makes for a bleak ending. There's very little more that I should or could say. In reviewing those other select members of the poetry-film genre, I can at least pull down the translated poem of, say, Tarkovsky's father, write it down, and conjure up his son's imagery in *Mirror*. But *Le Moulin's* poems are

still to be made readily available. It's possible that the translation was part of the appeal for me, as it could equally be for Taiwanese Mandarin-speakers now: unlike the only book published so far which renders the poems into Mandarin without benefit of the originals, Huang makes a point of serving up a course of Taiwan's linguistic history as it was spoken. This is all the more remarkable, as Huang is not a Japanese-speaker, but used collaborators. So, will the poems measure up to the ears and eyes of today's speakers of Japanese? Fortunately, Huang is taking his film to Japan this summer so at least the topic can be opened to scrutiny. §

## The Comfort Women: Historical, Political, Legal and Moral Perspectives

by Kumagai Naoko

Translated by David Noble  
LTCB International Library  
Trust/International House of  
Japan (2016)  
ISBN: 978-4 924971-42-4

This book is an English  
translation of *Ianfu mondai*, originally published by  
Chikuma Shobo (2014)

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

The 'Comfort Women' remain a contentious issue especially between Japan and South Korea. This book, which looks soberly at the various perspectives of the problem, is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the issue. Kumagai Naoko first sets out the 'points of contention' and goes on to discuss the facts that can be firmly established. She asks 'how much free will did the comfort women have' and the extent of coercion exercised by the Japanese military authorities. She looks at the problem in the context of sexual violence in war and occupation. She also considers the historical background and officially licensed prostitution in Japan.

In Chapter Three, she considers where responsibility for the suffering of comfort women lies and 'why Japan's military regulations did not prevent rape and enforced prostitution'. This leads on to a discussion in Chapter Four, of the Asian Women's Fund and Japan's moral responsibilities. In this, she compares Japan's response with the German Foundation 'Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future'. Chapter Five concentrates on the evolving concept of women's



human rights. In the Final Chapter she seeks for a way to achieve genuine reconciliation.

The author notes that the comfort women issue first emerged as a political controversy at the beginning of the 1990s. Why did it take so long after the end of the war to become contentious and why has it remained so hot a subject compared for instance to the treatment of allied prisoners of war or the misery and destruction caused by Japanese forces in China and the territories occupied by Japan in the Pacific War? Kumagai Naoko does not confront these questions directly, but one reason was surely the legalistic approach at first adopted by the Japanese government in order to limit its obligations to pay compensation. This was compounded by Japanese insensitivity to what was a highly emotional issue especially for the Korean women who had been coerced into becoming sex slaves for the Japanese military. Feelings in Korea were also incensed by the attempt of Japanese historical revisionists to rewrite the history of the Japanese aggression in Asia.

Kumagai Naoko notes (page 6) that when the issue was raised in House of Councillors in June 1990 the Japanese ministry of labour asserted that comfort women had been recruited by private sector entrepreneurs and it was 'beyond its capacity to investigate the matter'. This was not accurate. There had been comfort stations operated by the Japanese military. The women were supposed to be paid for their services but it seems clear that many 'did not actually receive the money they were owed' (page 29).

The majority of the comfort women were Korean or Japanese although people of other races and nationalities were involved in occupied territories. Kumagai rejects the argument made by some Japanese conservatives that comfort women should be equated

with licensed prostitutes. She also contests arguments based on Japanese military regulations, which paid scant attention to adherence to international law.

The crucial statement of 4 August 1993 by Kono Yohei on comfort women (reproduced on pages 98 and 99) acknowledged the involvement, direct and indirect, of the Japanese military in the establishment and administration of the comfort stations as well as in the recruitment of the women involved. She notes that Japanese prime ministers Hashimoto Ryutaro, Obuchi Keizo, Mori Yoshiro and Koizumi Junichiro issued letters of apology which expressed personal remorse and contrition, but these were not regarded as a sufficient acknowledgement of the Japanese government's

responsibility for the comfort women system and hence of a legal obligation to pay compensation.

Kumagai concludes (page 178) that the Korean demand for 'sincerity' from Japan stems from the fact that they do not sense integrity and consistency in Japan's apologies, because 'it is unclear what the apologies are for' and because they are sometimes accompanied by 'controversial remarks appearing to justify Japan's past actions.' She understands the Korean demand for 'uncovering the historical truth'. In order to achieve a fundamental resolution of the comfort women issue she urges that it should 'be understood as an issue of individual human rights'. **S**

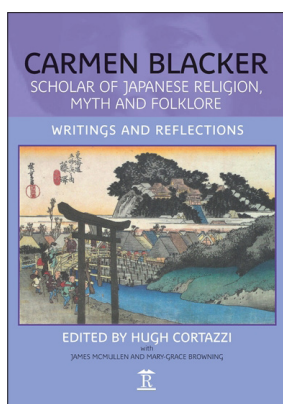
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## Carmen Blacker – Scholar of Japanese Religion, Myth and Folklore: Writings and Reflections

edited by Sir Hugh Cortazzi  
with James McMullen and  
Mary-Grace Browning

Renaissance Books (2017)  
ISBN: 978-1-898823-56-8

Review by Jim E Hoare



of his son, Major General F. S. T. Piggott, twice military attaché in Tokyo. The friendship would last until Julia's death, and the encounter would consolidate Carmen's interest in things Japanese and eventually lead to her career in Japanese studies. General Piggott, perhaps recognizing a fellow enthusiast, encouraged her and provided her with formal training in the language. He was something of a controversial figure, who could see no wrong in the Japanese, but Carmen clearly regarded him with affection and benefitted from his training as her account of "Two Piggotts", published in 1991[1], makes clear.

I only met Dr Carmen Blacker (1924-2009) once, towards the end of her life, when she was already very ill. Although our only previous contact had been a somewhat scratchy exchange of letters over a possible contribution to a volume of Biographical Portraits that I edited, I found her easy to talk to and charming. Our main common ground was her first book, on Fukuzawa Yukichi, which had been published in 1964, as I started my own far less distinguished career in Japanese Studies. Reading this fascinating mixture of her diaries, more formal writings and reminiscences by those who knew her makes me wish I had known her better. Her companion and later husband, Dr Michael Loewe, and several former students and friends contribute memoirs. These inevitably overlap, but they bring out the many formative influences that made her what she was.

Clearly important was family life and school. It was through school that she met Julia Piggott. Carmen was already interested in Japan and the Japanese language but the meeting with Julia Piggott was to provide a strong boost to that interest. Julia, who had actually lived in Japan, was the granddaughter of F. T. Piggott, a legal adviser to the Meiji government and the daughter

Piggott's tutoring and her own efforts meant that by the time war came with Japan in 1941, she already had a good command of Japanese. After some intensive training in military Japanese at SOAS, she joined Bletchley Park. It was not a happy experience. She felt undervalued both in terms of salary and the work she was given. However valuable it might have been as war work, she did not enjoy the monotony of carding Japanese words that might just be useful in decoding. She was much happier when she moved back to SOAS as a special lecturer in Japanese, a move which also allowed her to enrol in a Japanese degree course; her fellow students included other future leading lights in Japanese studies, including Ron Dore. Although in those days her first in 1947 would have qualified her for a university post, she preferred to spend another two years studying the quite different field of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford. A scholarship at Harvard followed. But whatever else she was doing, her interest in Japan did not fade. A Treasury Scholarship finally took her to Japan soon after the fall of General MacArthur. Japan was still under post-war occupation and MacArthur, the Supreme Commander

of the Allied Forces, had hitherto refused to allow such visits. In Japan, she worked on the thought of the nineteenth-century thinker and educationalist, Fukuzawa Yukichi, founder of Keio University. This would become her SOAS PhD thesis and her first book.

She was however, moving into more exotic areas of study. In Japan she did not confine herself to libraries or the study of documents. She travelled and revelled in what she could do and see. More and more she was drawn into what would become her life's work into the realms of orthodox and esoteric religion, and myth. These were not abstract studies. She began visiting temples and shrines, participating in services and ceremonies, some most rigorous. It was a practice she followed well into her advancing years. It gave her a real insight into the more remote parts of Japan.

It also revealed how much the country had changed over the fifty years from her first arrival. Once pilgrims had travelled in decrepit trains and then hiked far into the mountains to reach their sacred destination. By the time of her later visits, all this had changed. Air-conditioned trains and buses provided modern pilgrims with a pleasant and comfortable experience. With the lack of sheer physical effort went some of the old beliefs. It was not necessarily a change of which she disapproved; after all, she took the air-conditioned buses herself, but her diaries record a clear sense of regret at the passing of the old ways.

Each reader will have favourites among the materials included. For me, Carmen's diaries, supplemented by autobiographical extracts from other writings, are the best part of the book. They take up about a third of the whole and the extracts have been largely limited to material related to Japan, including her wartime experiences. This is understandable, but it perhaps gives a somewhat distorted picture, for she clearly had many other interests that went well beyond Japan. Nevertheless, what we have gives a fascinating picture of a very full life. There is much on two esoteric sects with which she was involved. These were the *Ten-sho-kotai-jingu-kyu*, or "Dancing Religion", and the *Ryugu kazoku*, both ran by formidable ladies, the first by Kitamura Sayo (1900-1967), and the second by Furata (later Fujita) Himiko, the "Dragon Queen", as well

as on more conventional religious groups. The diary is full of casual encounters – meeting T. S. Eliot on a bus, for example – and strange experiences, among them visiting a clearly unexciting 'sex museum' in Shimoda with Hugh Cortazzi. The diary section also includes a selection of photographs; Carmen making friends with a cow was my favourite, while the last one, showing her with Michael Loewe after she had received the OBE in 2004 is the most poignant.

The third part of the volume reproduces some of her writings. For me, the most interesting were a series of pen pictures drawn from a variety of publications. These included three pioneering scholars of Japan, Chamberlain, Aston and Satow, Marie Stopes, Arthur Waley, and Christmas Humphries, as well as two very different Japanese, the eccentric scholar Minakata Kumagusu and the writer and painter Yoshio Markino. In deft phrases, she brings these very disparate figures to life. They also show that if she had stuck to intellectual history rather than religion, she would probably have had an equally successful academic career.

Sir Hugh Cortazzi in his notes to the preface, remarks on her failure to become a professor. As he says, she might well have done so when the University of Cambridge created a chair in 1984, but she preferred to concentrate on her research and teaching, which she preferred to the administrative tasks that then tended to fall to professors. Now she would probably have been offered a personal chair but it was different then. All the evidence is that she could have coped with the administration; it was largely due to her efforts, aided by Cortazzi, that Cambridge did not abandon Japanese Studies altogether. That they now thrive is a testimony both to her vision and abilities as an academic fighter. She did not need the professorial title. As this handsome tribute shows, her talents and abilities were clear.

[1]Carmen Blacker, "Two Piggotts: Sir Francis Taylor Piggott (1852-1925) and Major General F. S. G. Piggott (1883-1966)", in Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Gordon Daniels, eds., *Britain and Japan 1859-1991: Themes and Personalities*. London: Routledge 1991, pp. 118-127. §

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## Interested in writing for the Japan Society Review?

Please write to [alejandra.armendariz@japansociety.org.uk](mailto:alejandra.armendariz@japansociety.org.uk) with examples of your work and information about your knowledge of and interest in Japan.

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