



Looking at the titles of Japanese books recently released in the UK, it is evident that the landscape of Japanese literature translated into English is becoming more and more rich and diverse. Now, together with the works of celebrated authors, lesser known stories from new Japanese writers are also reaching us thanks to the dedicated effort of publishers and translators.

The June issue of *The Japan Society Review* illustrates this trend by reviewing two different collections of short stories. The first one is *Men Without Women*, the latest work of Murakami Haruki to be translated into English. As Chris Corker points out, in this book Murakami deals not only with questions of isolated masculinity, but also with the problems of constructing heterosexual relationships in contemporary society. The second is the so-called *Keshiki series*, a collection of eight short stories showcasing the work of some of the most exciting writers working in Japan today. In her review, Eluned Gramich explores how travel, migration and restlessness are at the heart of these stories.

Entering into the field of non-fiction, Charlotte Goff reviews Gitte Marianne Hansen's *Femininity, Self-harm and Eating Disorders in Japan*. Through a careful evaluation of a wide-range of media including anime, manga, television drama and literature, this volume examines the construction and representation of normative femininity in contemporary Japanese culture and how these relate to self-harm and eating disorders in Japan.

Finally, this issue of the *Japan Society Review* also includes a review of *Ainu. Pathways to Memory*, a documentary directed by Marcos Centeno Martín in 2014, which 'portrays the problems of identity and assimilation of the Ainu people in Japan and means of preserving and disseminating their culture'. Our reviewer Susan Meehan contextualises the film, examining the historical circumstances surrounding this issue and pointing out some of the contemporary questions and contradictions presented in the documentary.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Editor

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

Reviewers

Chris Corker, Charlotte Goff, Eluned Gramich and Susan Meehan.

Keshiki Series. New Voices from Japan

Time Differences by Tawada Yoko, translated by Jeffrey Angles

The Transparent Labyrinth by Hirano Keiichiro, translated by Kerim Yasar

Mariko/Mariquita by Ikezama Natsukim, translated by Alfred Birnbaum

Friendship for Grown-ups by Yamazaki Nao-Cola, translated by Polly Barton

Mikumari by Kubo Misumi, translated by Polly Barton

The Girl Who is Getting Married by Matsuda Aoko, translated by Angus Turvill

At the Edge of the Wood by Ono Masatsuga, translated by Julie Winters Carpenter

Spring Sleepers by Yoshida Kyoko

Strangers Press (2017)
ISBN-13: 978-1911343004

Review by Eluned Gramich

The first thing you notice about the Keshiki series – the new collection of contemporary Japanese writing from Strangers Press – is its striking beauty. Each of the chapbooks has its own unique design, which reflects the atmosphere of the stories within. The importance of the visual is brought home by the series' title, *Keshiki* or 景色, meaning 'scene' or 'scenery'. These eight booklets carry eight different views of an expansive and ever-changing landscape.

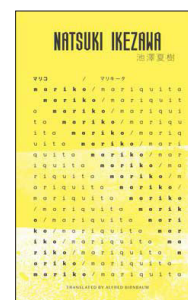
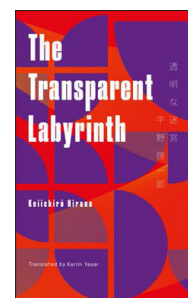
The project, which began in Norwich, has reached Japanese writers and translators across the world. Yoshida Kyoko, for instance, has chosen to write in her second language (English) rather than her mother tongue. She is not the only one to move between languages: Tawada Yoko, a Japanese writer based in Berlin, has written both in German and Japanese. Tawada's novella *Time Differences*, translated from the Japanese by Jeffrey Angles into a flowing English, follows the lives of three young men, locked into a complex love-triangle. Each of them is displaced: the Japanese teacher in Germany, the American in Japan, the German in America. This is one of the more realist stories in the series, and Tawada brings each place alive through personal touches; details that no one but an author who has spent time in those countries could know. Each man lusts for the other, and behind the romantic yearning is also the shadow of homesickness. Tawada succeeds in describing honestly and delicately



those complicated emotions that accompany living abroad, the sadness that comes with not being in the right place at the right time.

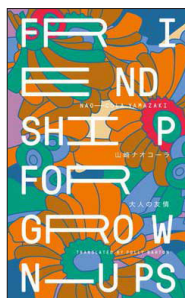
Not being in the right place at the right time is one of the central turning points of Hirano Keiichiro's *The Transparent Labyrinth*, translated by Kerim Yasar. Here, too, we are split between countries: Hungary and Japan. Europe and home. The way in which living abroad can change a person is brought shockingly to life through a horrifying incident of sexual violence. The main character, a Japanese businessman in Budapest, is drawn into a labyrinth of sex and deceit. He shares the experience with a fellow ex-pat Misato, and falls in love with her. When he returns to Japan, he finds her again and they begin a passionate affair. But is it really the same Misato in Japan as in Hungary? Yasar's translation captures the dark world of surveillance and mystery, as Hirano's storytelling explores the dangers of being seduced by foreign lands. Okada's isolation is symbolised by the title: 'he had..., without knowing it, been wandering in a labyrinth, lost. (...) Its walls couldn't be seen or touched, and the world outside wasn't obscured by even a trace of fog. How would he find a way out?' Misato is the only one who understands, but even she is an unknown quantity. The Misato of Hungary and Misaki of Japan embody two aspects of the self: the one who wants to stay and the other who wants to leave.

A similar push-pull relationship is played out in Ikezawa Natsuki's *Mariko/Mariquita*. The different selves are encapsulated in the two names: Mariko and Mariquita, the latter being what Kyojiro's lover calls herself on the tropical island of Guam. Kyojiro, a young anthropologist, arrives to carry out fieldwork on a remote tropical island. As Pico Iyer points out in the foreword (one piece of advice: don't read the foreword before the book. Some give away too much, others too little, and they're far more interesting after you've formed your own impressions), Ikezawa locates Japan, not in relation to Europe or the USA, but in the South-Asian tropics alongside the Philippines. It could not be further from the brooding European cities in Tawada and Hirano's works. Here it's all humidity, jet-skis, blue sky and shimmering horizons as Kyojiro is forced to re-evaluate his unremarkable, work-filled life after his affair with Mariko/Mariquita. Alfred Birnbaum's translation renders expertly into



English the different layers of tone – the casual and formal, the affecting and distancing. Will Koji be able to leave everything behind for love?

These stories show how unwise it is to fix your hopes on one person, because they might not be who you thought they were. In the final short story of *Friendship for Grown-ups* by Yamazaki Nao-Cola: the thinly disguised author, Yano Terumi, discovers the difficulty expectations can cause when she gets involved with a musician, who is also a reader of her novels. Yano realises she can't separate herself from her persona as an 'author', no matter how hard she tries. In her writing, Yamazaki seems more interested in the distance between lovers than in what unites them. The title suggests that real intimacy becomes more difficult as you grow older. To have a real love-affair, it's almost better to be a child: innocent, uncomplicated, trusting. The highlight in this book is its beginning: an amoeba-to-human origin myth mixed up with pop culture and tongue-in-cheek references to her characters. It's funny and clever, and its wackiness is buoyed along by Polly Barton's translation: 'People... began to make noises like "ah" and "ooh". And so language was born'.

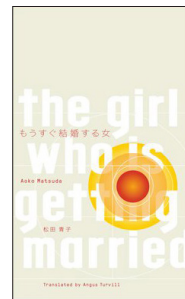


Where Yamazaki's characters consistently fail to get together – apart from the amoebas – sex is the centrepiece of Kubo Misumi's *Mikumari*. By contrast to the sadomasochistic elements in Tawada and Hirano's sexual encounters, Kubo's story of an older married cosplayer's affair with a schoolboy is full of playful eroticism. A schoolboy dresses up as anime characters and learn his lines before each meeting with Anzu. In *Mikumari*, pretending to be someone else isn't necessarily a source of anxiety as it is for Yano Terumi, but of intense pleasure. Through the boy's narration, we get a glimpse into the childless marriage of the woman who's initiating him into adulthood, and the ending is surprisingly melancholy and bittersweet.

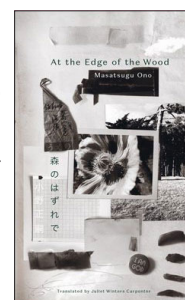


Marriage is also the focus of Matsuda Aoko's aptly titled *The Girl Who is Getting Married*, which follows a woman coming to terms with her best friend's engagement. The storytelling is defined by psychological precision and sharp, aphoristic commentary (Of a dead goldfish, the narrator says: 'Even the smallest of deaths has an undeniable splendour when it happens in front of you', and a shopping

mall: 'It is so bright you could forget the human race has such a thing as shadows'). Matsuda spins the ordinary (the price of tights, for example, or hair removal) into the extraordinary. This style also owes its clarity to the translator, Angus Turvill. As the story develops, the narrator's mask begins to slip, revealing her fear of losing her friend, as well as deeper fears about men and sex. After re-reading, I'm still not sure whether this is a book about female friendship, lesbian attachment or if it's a confessional soliloquy, or a mixture of all three at once.



In the Keshiki series, narratives often disintegrate, obfuscate, mystify. In Ono Masatsugu's *At the Edge of the Wood*, translated by the wonderful Juliet Winters Carpenter (translator of Mizumura Minae's *A True Story*), we leave the known – Japan, Germany, Hungary, Guam – and enter a nightmarish wonderland. Reminiscent of the deliberate dislocation and timelessness of J. M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus*, Masatsugu tells the story of a father and son living alone in a cottage near a wood, while his pregnant wife is staying with her parents. The wood is a place of supernatural power, filled with dwarves, ghosts, changelings, and refugees whose presence is never fully explained. An old woman appears, with a withered breast hanging out of her clothes, and seduces his son. The sound of coughing in the night, harmless at first, grows increasingly menacing. Even the candles on a birthday cake becomes an object of unnamable fear. Masatsugu is a master of balancing the banal ("driving to the shopping centre again") with the ghostly ("the sound of coughing – the sound of a person being strangled"), creating a disconcerting tale that moves between the real and unreal.



Nowhere else is the boundary between real and unreal more blurred than in *Spring Sleepers*. In Yoshida Kyoko's *Spring Sleepers*, the 'genuine insomnia' sufferer Yuki is sent by his doctor on a retreat. His journey takes him to a topsy-turvy realm beyond our world, even our dimension: 'The city was now composed of lines and segments, angles and curves. Triangles, circles, squares'. Language itself breaks down: 'Sun Light, Moon Reflect, River Flow, Wind Blow'. Although written in English, Yoshida's second language, the play with words recalls Japanese kanji.



Perhaps because English is not her mother tongue, Yoshida's language is often daring and punchy, giving us phrases like 'farewell-dressed' and 'cat-walked', a playfulness which is evident, too, in the events of the story. As Brian Evenson notes in his introduction: 'Yoshida subtly passes back and forth between one lens and the other, suggesting that literature is less a national enterprise and more a productive interchange between genres, traditions, languages and cultures'.

Similarly, in her afterword, Yoshida writes that the aim of the Keshiki series is to create a home for this interchange between 'migratory writers'. Travel, migration and restlessness are at the heart of these stories. As Yoshida says: 'The language of our writing is a strange land where we travel'. After reading and re-reading these stories, I can only hope that Keshiki will continue its journey into new and unexplored territories. §

Men Without Women

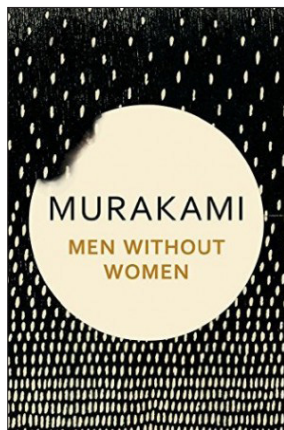
by Murakami Haruki

translated by Philip Gabriel
Harvill Secker (2017)
ISBN-13: 978-1911215370

Review by Chris Corker

Sharing its name with an Ernest Hemingway short story compilation released in 1927, Murakami's *Men without Women*, like its titular predecessor, deals not only with isolated masculinity, but also with the delicately balanced equilibrium of heterosexual relationships. What is signified in the title is not only physical absence of women in men's lives but also the difficulty of these opposites to live harmoniously due to societal pressures. What at first glance appears to be another straightforward battle of the sexes, however, soon evolves into something far more sweeping in scope.

The difference between Hemingway and Murakami's collections is the way they deal with their respective gender roles. In Hemingway's famous 'Hills like White Elephants', contained within his *Men Without Women*, a couple reflect on their decision to have an abortion. The gender roles here are clearly defined, the man practical but lacking in empathy, the woman more empathetic but without that functional mode of thought. In Murakami's *Men Without Women*, however, the case is best described as inverted. It is the women who take the position of power, who are also prone to infidelity and quick to throw away sentiment. Meanwhile, the men are left to pine and agonise, creating romantic illusions to keep themselves content. The antiquated gender roles have been reversed. This effect, while successful in ostensibly creating a sense of evolution, feels false in reality. Simply switching one rigid stereotype with another is a thinly-veiled ruse that often forces the characters into two-dimensionality. This is perhaps



the biggest failing in an otherwise very strong collection, one which leaves the reader with much food for thought.

Male loneliness is not new ground for Murakami, whose characters often find themselves deserted by their female partners. In both *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* and *Dance Dance Dance* the protagonists' partners leave abruptly and without explanation. The stranded males are forced afterwards to seek companionship in oddballs, teenage girls and sometimes even talking animals. Based in Tokyo, it's likely that Murakami is influenced by his surroundings. In no other city in the world is loneliness so apparent, and in no other city in the world have shrewd businesses so adeptly catered for the demand for companionship. From hostess bars to maid cafes, to companion pillows and the newly announced *Gatebox*, an alarm clock-cum-digital girlfriend which sends loving text messages while its owner/boyfriend is at work. In a city with one of the highest population densities in the world, citizens are crammed so tightly together, but they have never been so far apart. It is arguably that Murakami's portrayal of loneliness, which everyone has experienced at some time and in some form, is one of the key factors in his popularity. In *Men Without Women* he gives it one of its most potently heart-rending illustrations.

The beginning of the book welcomes the reader into the comfort of familiarity. The first two stories take the form of Beatles song titles, an enduring theme of the Japanese author. 'Drive My Car' features a protagonist who, after losing his wife and turning to drink, has his licence suspended and is unable to drive. When he hires a masculine female driver and they form a close bond, he reveals the secrets of his dead wife's affair. This evolution of the protagonist from one who drives women (his wife) to one who is driven by a woman is one of the more pronounced examples of gender role reversal. In 'Yesterday', a man recounts his friend from his youth in Tokyo, a

smart and good-looking young student with little enthusiasm for taking the university entrance exams. On a whim the friend decides to intensively study and then completely mimic the Kansai Japanese dialect, much to the horror of his Tokyo-based parents and preppy girlfriend.

While the awkwardness of male-female relationships features heavily in these two stories, a more prominent theme begins to take shape. While in 'Drive My Car' the protagonist makes references to having to play a part in his everyday life just to survive ('It's gotten so hard that I have a hard time drawing a clear line between the two. That's what serious acting is all about' (p. 25), the protagonist in 'Yesterday' wants nothing more than to shun preconceived ideas about how he should live his life. This is a theme that continues throughout the book, the characters, regardless of their gender, often finding it difficult to piece together the juxtaposed parts of themselves, one half what they are, one half what they are supposed to be. 'Because', says the protagonist at the beginning of 'Yesterday', 'in the final analysis, the language we speak constitutes who we are as people' (p. 46). By the end of the story, however, this sentiment seems hollow and the protagonist contradicts himself in supporting his friend's decision.

'Samsa in Love' and 'Scheherazade' present isolation in its literal and devastating form, the protagonist being totally cut off from the world. While in 'Samsa in Love' this isolation is wrapped in intrigue and never fully revealed, 'Scheherazade' deals with the real-life Japanese phenomenon of *hikkikomori*, best translated as shut-ins; people who isolate themselves from society in the most straightforward way by never leaving their apartments. Scheherazade, so dubbed by the protagonist, is a care worker who, like Princess Scheherazade of A Thousand and One Nights, entertains the protagonist with tantalising tales to draw him out of himself. And, of course, this rehabilitation also includes sex. Lots of it. This is a Murakami story after all, and would therefore be incomplete without some ailment being cured through intercourse with a kindly, charming older woman.

'An Independent Organ' addresses ageing, but is also replete with the themes of the collection as a whole, namely those of society's pressure to conform and the reversal of gender roles. Dr Tokai, advancing towards his sixties, is happily living the bachelor lifestyle when he develops an unrequited love for a younger woman. His pining for her is very much in the

style of stereotypical feminine behaviour, and indeed when his condition is discussed by two concerned parties his apparent anorexia is described as a condition that afflicts 'almost always young women'. As with the rest of the collection, however, Dr Tokai's love sickness is indicative of a deeper existential crisis. On seeing an account of the dehumanizing process in Nazi concentration camps, he begins to wonder at his own worth should his title, smart clothes and wealth be taken from him. The conclusion he comes to leaves him unable to take any further pleasure in life.

The strongest story of the collection, 'Kino', brings with it echoes of Murakami's best works. This is the sort of story that only Murakami can write, the adventure that takes pace in a microcosm, a sedentary Odyssey where Odysseus takes the plane home because the seas look a bit choppy. The titular Kino, after discovering his wife being unfaithful, quits his job and opens up a small bar in a quiet suburb. Listening to jazz and reading books, his routine is occasionally interrupted by stray cats, Yakuza-types and nymphomaniacs. Seemingly unmoved by his wife's conduct and their ongoing divorce process, Kino finds contentment in his self-created haven and its unbroken equilibrium.

One day, however, he begins to notice snakes circling his bar and takes them as an ill omen. When one of his peculiar regulars advises him to leave before something bad happens, he escapes to Kyushu. 'Kino' does a great job of introducing mystery and keeping the reader intrigued, and while it does have many similarities to Murakami's earlier work, it's difficult to not wish that, as he turned the short story 'Firefly' into Norwegian Wood, he couldn't do the same here. As it is, it remains an accomplished short story but also a prematurely-ended tease at something greater.

With this collection, Murakami, delves far deeper than just the roles of the sexes to portray the everyday artifice people rely onto survive in society, drawing focus on the unease this can cause within them. Those that actively shun this pretence find themselves in no better predicament, inevitably misunderstood by those around them and ostracised from common society. In a book that grows in skill and confidence with each story, Murakami has deftly portrayed the modern human condition in a way that is both sensual and heart-achingly sad.

In the final, titular, story 'Men Without Women', the protagonist's ex-girlfriend is describing her love of elevator music:

'When I listen to this music I feel like I'm a wide-open, empty place. It's a vast space, with nothing to close it off. No walls, no ceiling. I don't need to think, don't need to say anything [...] everything is simply beautiful, peaceful, flowing. I can just be' (p. 227).

Despite all other hurdles that the characters overcome in the world, despite everything else they accomplish, it is this *just being* that always eludes their grasp. §

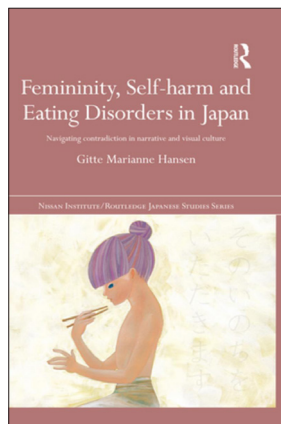
Femininity, Self-harm and Eating Disorders in Japan

by Gitte Marianne Hansen

Routledge (2015)

ISBN-13: 978-1138905306

Review by Charlotte Goff



Hansen tells us in the introduction to *Femininity, Self-harm and Eating Disorders in Japan* that its inspiration came from a conversation overheard not in Japan, but the Copenhagen fitness club where she worked before moving to Japan. The three subjects which form the mainstay of this analysis are concerns worldwide, but Hansen uses Japanese visual and narrative culture as a window into their thematisation in the specific context of contemporary Japan. Through careful evaluation of media including anime, manga, television drama and literature, Hansen addresses three central questions. First, she asks what constitutes normative femininity in contemporary Japan. Second, Hansen questions how this normative femininity is presented in Japanese culture. Finally, she asks how self-harm and eating disorders and their cultural representations relate to normative femininity.

Modern Japanese women, Hansen argues, find themselves torn between conflicting norms of femininity. The traditional feminine norm sees woman as mother and wife, positioning her within the domestic sphere, whilst a more recent but co-existing norm locates women outside, in the social world. Under pressure to perform multiple, paradoxical roles in order to be accepted as women, Hansen claims that both female characters and some real women show signs of fragmentation. These women seek both to navigate 'contradictive femininity' and repair their fragmented selves. For the female characters in visual and narrative culture, techniques such as the 'doppelganger' are deployed. Hansen looks for example at Yazawa Ai's manga series *NANA*, in which two female characters both named Nana double up in order to fulfil expectations in both domestic and social spheres. In Anno Moyoco's *Hataraki-man*

(working man), (1) female character Matsukata Hiroko is able to transform between one version of herself located in the traditional female norm, and another self, described as male, who is a successful journalist.

Non-fictional women, Hansen points out, are unable to use the techniques open to their created counterparts. These women therefore turn, sometimes, to maladaptive coping mechanisms including self-harm and eating disorders. Whilst she does not claim that self-harm and eating disorders are exclusively the products of mixed messages about femininity, Hansen conceives them as tools sometimes used in the battle to navigate contradictive femininity. I was left wondering why Hansen chose to put self-harm and eating disorders in one category, beyond their shared use of self-directed violence. It would have been interesting to see more consideration of related behaviours such as suicide: though suicide is a huge concern in Japan, Hansen mentions it only briefly, and blurs the distinction between self-harm and attempted suicide. However, she raises interesting points about the culturally-defined nature of what societies consider to be healthy or sick, questioning the norms which dictate that self-cutting and purging are pathologised, whilst cutting in the context of piercings or tattoos, or strict dieting, are thought healthy.

Some of the most interesting parts of this text were Hansen's interpretations of implicit themes in Japanese culture. Her point that the name 'Midori' can be considered a shorthand for someone rebellious, who doesn't follow social norms, as well as her analysis of Murakami's short story *Midori iro no kemono* (the little green monster), prompted me to reconsider my belief that Murakami's books could be discounted so quickly for portrayals of women who are passive and written to distract or cater to the lone male protagonists. Hansen put forward a case for Murakami as an author who, rather than perpetuating these negative images of women, exposes and implicitly criticises them. Similarly, she subverts the accepted idea that the female protagonists who predominate Studio Ghibli's output always represent a positive image of femininity, through a detailed analysis of implicit themes of disordered eating in *Spirited Away*.

It is clear that for Hansen, 'feminine' is not a fixed position, but rather exists on a spectrum. Hansen discusses female representations as varied as the woman trapped in sand in Otsuichi's short story *Mukashi yūhi no kōen de* (long ago at dusk in the park), to the housewife-turned-model Miki Makoto in television drama *Bara iro no seisen* (the rose-coloured crusade), to artist Aida Makoto's *Toretate ikura-don* (bowl of rice with fresh salmon roe) in which a young girl, stomach squeezed by male hands, dispenses salmon roe from her vagina. She jumps, too, between

different forms of cultural product: from anime to text, and from TV drama to visual art. Because of this, in addition to its obvious appeal for people interested in women's studies and mental health, Hansen's book should appeal to anyone wanting insight into diverse Japanese narrative and visual media. §

Note

(1) Translations are Gitte Marianne Hansen's.

Ainu. Pathways to Memory

directed by Marcos Centeno Martín

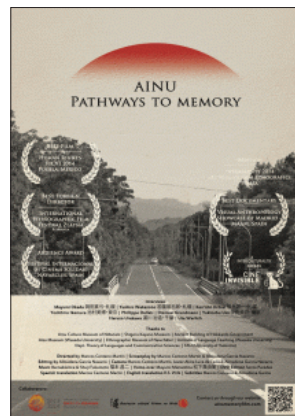
Released in 2014

Review by Susan Meehan

Marcos Centeno Martín is a lecturer in Film Studies, Department of Japan and Korea at SOAS, University of London. In 2014, he released *Ainu. Pathways to Memory*, 'which portrays the problems of identity and assimilation of the Ainu people in Japan and means of preserving and disseminating their culture' (1).

Concern about the preservation of the Ainu and Ainu culture is nothing new. In 1910, *The Daily News* reported, 'The politest people of earth came to London yesterday. They were a party of Ainu, relics of a dying race, which is said to have once occupied the same position with regard to the Japanese as did the Saxons to Britain...'. These ten Ainu had come to be exhibited as a living display at the Japan-British exhibition of 1910 (2). Fortunately, the Ainu still exist, though numbers have severely dwindled. The official number of Ainu in Japan stands at 25,000 though it is likely that only 20,000 exist.

Centeno's thorough research into the Ainu over the last ten years has fed into his film. It is a mixture of informative documentary and interviews with Ainu specialists in Japan and Europe and with Ainu in Japan. His aim is to shed light on and to support the Ainu community as it attempts 'to regain its culture and dignity' (3). Centeno's voice-over and interviews with three Ainu specialists from the University of Hokkaido (Dr Okada Mayumi, Dr Wakazono Yushiro and Dr Ochiai Ken'ichi), establish the basics – the Ainu



are an indigenous people of northern Japan, Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and the Kamchatka Peninsula. Those living in Hokkaido were stripped of land and their culture when the island was incorporated into Japan in 1869 by the Meiji government, which came to power in 1868, marking the end of feudalistic Japan and the emergence of the modern Japanese state. Many Ainu customs were prohibited and salmon fishing and deer hunting, which the Ainu relied on, were restricted. The Meiji government asserted its control over Japan by affirming that Japan was socially and culturally homogeneous, ignoring its minority populations. An 1899 regulation promoted the assimilation of the Ainu through learning the Japanese language and engaging in agriculture (rather than the hunter-gatherer ways of the Ainu). This law was only abolished in 1997.

An interviewee remarks that former Prime Minister Nakasone, as recently as 1986, said, 'Japan is a racially homogenous nation, and there is no discrimination against ethnic minorities with Japanese citizenship'. This comment bothered and politicised many Ainu at the time, keen to redress this perception (4). Centeno finds it imperative to show how the Ainu's lifestyle and culture were suppressed by the Meiji government and how they were dispossessed of their lands. A number of Ainu are concerned with remedying this obliteration of their culture by making efforts to reassert it. These 'paths to memory' – as some of the Ainu revive or restage ancient ways of life and share their history and culture with the younger generations, both Ainu and *wajin* (non-Ainu Japanese) seem to be a source of self-worth.

The film doesn't provide any clues as to whether the non-Ainu Japanese care much about landmarks for the Ainu such as the Japanese Diet recognizing the Ainu as indigenous people in 2008, but my sense is that most feel that the Ainu have largely assimilated.

While the first half of the film shows Centeno's interviewees addressing the frailty of Ainu culture and the discrimination the Ainu have encountered, the latter part focuses on concrete efforts to revive the Ainu language and Ainu culture.

Centeno visits various cultural centres and museums which are promoting the preservation of the Ainu culture including the Ainu Culture Centre in Tokyo, the Museum of Ainu culture established in 1992 in Nibutani and the Shiraoi museum which dates back to the 1970s. The museums in Shiraoi and Nibutani look like 19th-century Ainu villages replete with chise or Ainu-style houses made of wood and thatched roofs. This was done, it is suggested, to recover an old way of building houses. Though these museums are one way for the Ainu to present their culture, there is often a theme park element to them. Some of the Ainu who promote Ainu music or culture at these sites tend to live a somewhat dual existence straddling their current life and this other romanticised version.

It is amiss to suggest a collective identity for contemporary Ainu, who are such a diverse group of people. The very end of the documentary hinges on the fact that Ainu culture still exists and can be expressed in many ways, not just through Ainu dance, and that many young Ainu are looking towards a new future. This is certainly worth further investigation.

There is no question that Centeno is a passionate advocate of Ainu culture and I would agree that it is important to maintain diversity and different types of culture and ways of life which embrace a range of thinking and encourage the acceptance of a variety of lifestyles. While Centeno presents a platform for the interviewees and refrains from providing ready-made conclusions, his choice of interviewees is limited and they largely share the same opinions. There is also a lack of young Ainu representation.

The exchanges with the Japanese academics are a bit dry, and fairly historical rather than reflective of the present situation. The interviews are divided up into short segments and interleaved with one another, making it all feel rather patchy. The soundtrack is a mish-mash as well, partly Ainu music and partly fusion, merely adding exotic background music.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that many Ainu are justifiably and demonstrably seeking to recover or even reconstruct their culture before the last few remaining Ainu-speaking members of the community die out. In many cases this is from a sense of pride, identity and validation. The importance to them of



Image from *Ainu. Pathways to Memory*

their Ainu identity cannot be underestimated. Political activism has been a factor in rescuing languages from extinction, so the Ainu should not lose hope as their precious language and/or way of life can be salvaged if there is a will. As Judith Thurman points out in a fascinating article for *The New Yorker*, the BBC finally launched a Welsh language radio station in 1977 and since 1999 Welsh language instruction for students up to the age of 16 has been mandatory in Welsh state schools, leading to a revival of the language. In 2011, 19% of the Welsh population were found to speak Welsh (5).

Though few speakers of Ainu exist, the language seems to be undergoing something of a renaissance and it is through films like Centeno's that this interest can be encouraged amongst Ainu and non-Ainu alike. §

Notes

- (1) From the documentary's official website, <https://ainumemoryfilm.com/los-creadores/>.
- (2) Miyatake, Kimio, 'Ainu in London 1910: Power, Representation and Practice of the Ainu Village', in Hotta-Lister, Ayako and Nish, Ian(eds.), *Commerce and Culture at the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition, Centenary Perspectives*, Global Oriental, 2013, p.112.
- (3) From the documentary's official website, <https://ainumemoryfilm.com/sinopsis-del-documental/>.
- (4) In a retrograde step, I discovered that as recently as 2014, a member of the Hokkaido Prefectural Assembly stirred controversy by stating it is 'highly questionable' that the Ainu are an indigenous people of northern Japan ('A Shameful Statement on Ainu', *The Japan Times*, editorial, 17 November 2014).
- (5) Thurman, Judith, 'A Loss for Words – Can a Dying Language be Saved?', *The New Yorker*, 30 March 2015.