

End of the Dance

The late Lady Bouchier's memoirs reviewed

The State of the Discipline

Sage's welcome new textbook: 'a significant contribution to a small need'

Global Shifts

Japan, 1967-'72: Reports from the British Embassy in Tokyo

For the last 18 months there has been a pause in production of *The Japan Society Review*, although reviews have continued to be published online. We are now delighted to be able to resume print production of this bimonthly publication, and over the next six months will also be sending out the missing issues. As ever, we are keen to welcome new contributors with an interest in and knowledge of Japan, and also welcome suggestions as to books, films and events that we should be covering. Our thanks to our previous Editor, Sean Curtin, who initiated and developed this publication over eight years.

Earlier this year, the Japan Society had been looking forward to hosting a book launch and talk by author, translator and champion of Anglo-Japanese relations Lady Bouchier (Dorothy Britton), whose memoir *Rhythms, Rites and Rituals: my life in Japan in two-step and waltz-time* was published in March. Sadly Lady Bouchier passed away on 25 February, shortly before the event, and the book launch became an occasion to remember and pay tribute to a remarkable woman. In this edition of *The Japan Society Review* Sir Hugh Cortazzi reflects on her eventful life as recorded in *Rhythms, Rites and Rituals*.

Many Japan Society members will also be familiar with the work of Nosaka Akiyuki, who died on 9 December 2015, aged 85. Already well-known in Japan, Nosaka gained international recognition when his *Grave of the Fireflies* – a tale of civilian survival at the tail-end of the

Second World War – was adapted by Studio Ghibli in 1988. Shortly before he died, Pushkin Children's Books published a translation of his *The Whale that Fell in Love with a Submarine*, a collection of twelve short stories in the same vein as *Grave of the Fireflies*, each set on the day of Japan's surrender in the Second World War, reviewed here by Annabelle Sami. Nosaka lost his adoptive father and two siblings during the war, his mother also having died shortly after giving birth to him, and this bittersweet collection of war stories channels these experiences.

The SAGE Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies is a major new text tackling the current state, history and possible future of Japan Studies; here Richard Coxford offers his assessment of this important new collection of essays.

Lastly, scholar-diplomat Sir John Pilcher served as Ambassador to Japan from 1967 to '72, a period in which Japan's economy and power grew significantly and her relations with the United States became increasingly strained. In *The Growing Power of Japan, 1967-1972*, Sir Hugh Cortazzi, (who worked with Pilcher during these years and was himself Ambassador to Japan from 1980 to '84) has collated many of Pilcher's detailed reports to Whitehall, and in his review, Japan Society Chairman, Sir David Warren (Ambassador to Japan from 2008 to '12) assesses the insights offered by these reports, and asks how many of Pilcher's conclusions remain pertinent today. §

William Upton

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Editor

William Upton

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Richard Coxford, Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Annabelle Sami and Sir David Warren

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The SAGE Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies

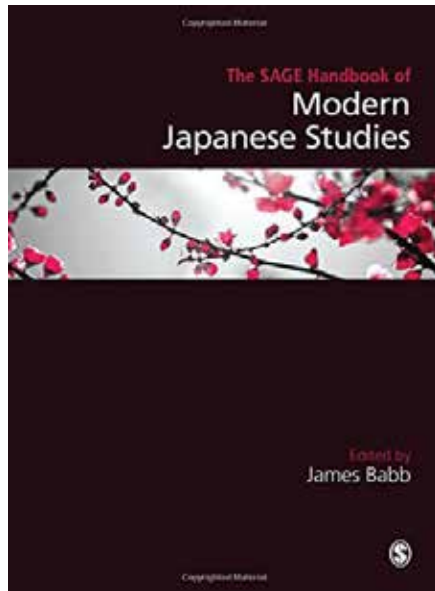
Edited by James D. Babb

SAGE Publications Ltd (2015)

613 Pages, £110

ISBN 978-1-84860-663-0

Review by Richard Coxford



The SAGE Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies does exactly what its title and understated cover suggest, providing in unassuming fashion an immense examination of the current state, history and possible future of innumerable aspects to the study of Japan. It would be folly to attempt to go through the career of every one of the 33 contributors, but suffice it to say that this is anything short of a stella cast. In some ways there is exactly the composition of authors one might expect, with a preponderance of Sheffield, SOAS, St Anthony's College Oxford and the British Association for Japanese Studies linkages running through most of the contributors. Naturally there are big names who did not contribute, but this is intended as an accessible general text. In any event, what really makes this book?

Individual authors, tasked with providing an engaging and sufficiently concise overview of an entire country by necessity tend to engage in some heavy diluting. This book avoids this; it introduces Japan as both a subject and a nation, to the point where almost any reader will learn something new. This collection, while the writing can seem choppy because of the immense number of references in any discipline meta-narrative essay, is broad without being random, and is exceedingly well done. It would do readers of the *Japan Society Review* a disservice to deconstruct each chapter's arguments in depth because some disciplines are entirely alien to this reviewer, so instead, the general scope of each part will be sketched out.

The titles of the four parts (Land, History and Culture; Society; Medicine and Health Care; and Economy) embody such a broad brush approach to Japan as an issue as to be interchangeable, although the chapter listings within them give some clear direction. 'Land, History and Culture' sets the tone

perfectly with a measured chapter by Andrew Cobbing on historiography and the shifting identities of Japan to authors and to the Japanese since the nineteenth century. Delving into the debates just enough to tease out geopolitical ulterior motives behind studies or results, it centres around the perennially significant questions, such as when 'Modern Japan' began, Japanese nationalism, and identity projection, both abroad and at home, particularly Hokkaido and Okinawa.

The chapter on social and cultural anthropology provides a social scientific response to Japanese conformity, the contest between what is modern and what is tradition, and how globalization and consumption have been experienced by the Japanese. Religion (or religions) in Japan usually serves as a barrier to insider knowledge for those of us coming from Western European philosophical and religious traditions, but Lucia Dolce delves into the topic with diligence, cross-examining how it can intertwine with politics (*kōmeitō*, for instance), Japanese modernity, state identity (just think of Yasukuni shrine), plus the ambiguity as to whether Japanese religion is in fact a 'religion' as defined by the West. With methodological and historiographical variegation greater in religious studies than might be said for other humanities, she does a tremendous job abbreviating them.

'Mass Media' opens by denoting the term as historical, because the internet has surpassed any archaic notion of mass media, and then proceeds to a discussion of popular culture, politics and representation in the media. Nishiyama Noriaki provides a very stimulating chapter on natural and cultural heritage management in Japan. From the outside Japan might appear to be successful in protecting its heritage, but he shows how much more complex the story is. It certainly surprised this reader to find that Japan has no equivalent to our National Trust, and waited 22 years before ratifying the UNESCO World Heritage convention.

Human geography begins with an ambitious sounding section on 'What is Japan' but also affords for observations on the state of geography as a discipline in Japanese higher education through time, and the modern Japanese diaspora. Anthony Rausch provides a chronology on the conceptualisation of the Japanese nation as a whole, and gets into questions of decentralization and depopulation from rural to urban landscape, and makes a surprising conclusion that Japanese post-war 'growth' had a negative net effect on regional governments, bar the two where

Japanese identity projection was strongest: Hokkaido and Okinawa.

Second in the thematic bookmarks is 'Society', bouncing from education to feminism, sexuality and gender equality, to policing and 'anti-social behaviours; in Japan. Japanese education's bare-bones functionality is described so that an unfamiliar reader will follow the debates on governance, reform, and the highly charged political issue of whether patriotism or internationalization holds more sway in schools. The question of teaching Second World War history is mentioned, but cautiously. Vera Mackie proffers that Japanese feminism has been built upon international linkages, while Mark McLelland debunks myths about Japanese sexuality and describes the great internal debates, reviewing the legal, education and media histories of sexuality, both standard and 'minority'.

Statistics on female upward mobility make for stark reading in the chapter on 'Gender Equity', and the comparison of laws and their enforcement records likewise suggests that there is much room for improvement. David Johnson then jumps onto that erstwhile question: 'Why is Japan so safe?' before picking apart the achievements of Japanese policing and police accountability, an issue also often brought into question.

When it comes to organized crime Peter Hill focuses on the yakuza, a subject particularly relevant given that their popular image is projected worldwide through film and TV, yet people wonder why they still exist at all. A plethora of fraudulent schemes also make for entertaining reading in this salacious but intellectually sound chapter.

Part 3, 'Medicine and Health Care', is arguably the most technical, and myth-breaking. The Western image of Japanese health care is of clear success, and the preliminary chapter shows its transnational borrowings and more recent global status as a pharmaceutical giant of sorts. However despite the clear successes of Japanese healthcare, the difficulty and ambiguity of its nature 'on paper' makes for an interesting rejoinder. Thereafter are some very interesting summaries of medical education in Japan, the medico-legal issues, and the rather rarely mentioned subject of mental health. The Japanese debate about malpractice can provide subtle comparison to British approaches, but what really struck me was the Japanese question of whether telling a patient the truth (say, that they have cancer) can hurt them and therefore should be done or not.

Part Four, possibly the meatiest section, is reserved for politics and foreign relations. Questioning the appropriation of 'political "science"' in Japan, notably in the postwar movements towards 'Anglo-Saxon' methodologies, or as the early borrowings are described, 'American imports', it makes a call for greater reflexivity in political studies regarding Japan. The LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) are a wondrous enough political construct to merit citations in two successive chapters, which span the whole series of postwar elections to pick apart and understand LDP 'dominance', then question the nature of postwar democracy itself by wondering whether there are meaningful electoral choices and how, in spite of reforms, these doubts linger. After this comes the sociological concept, with a cross-examination of organizations, welfare, religions, minorities such as the Ainu, and foreigners. Once more the sense that local governments do more to please foreigners and promote their rights than the central government is solidified. Perhaps that says less about Japan and more about human nature; relationships come through more readily in local government than the strained national ones that also juggle the finances and grand diplomacy which often undermine good treatment of immigrants. The give and take between civil society and government also extends to discussing protests, be they derived from labour unions, gender equality movements or political extremism.

Japan's place in international society is expertly dispatched as an issue by Christopher Hughes, Hugo Dobson, Paul Midford and Caroline Rose. Together their chapters examine what drives Japanese diplomacy and how it no longer fulfils any image of a 'reactive state', how 'globalization' affects interpretations, and relations with the principal powers of America and China. As Dobson defines globalization, it makes for very worthwhile discussion of the old notion of Japanese exceptionalism in the present day, and how this transnational, multi-level factor reaches into and alters economics, politics, security and so forth.

Midford's chapter on the Japan-US alliance squarely faces down all of the distinct sides to why the alliance exists, whether it is an equal one, and the ever more pressing question of whether it is a 'help or a hindrance' in Japan's diplomatic manoeuvrability within Asia. The backbone to the analysis is hard to resist: that of two democratic nations within established norms watching a relationship grow out of Cold War prerogative into an East Asian stability mechanism par excellence. Rose, meanwhile, reminds

the reader that Sino-Japanese relations go beyond present hostilities and the generational changes in the two nation's political classes, as pretty much all periods and aspects remain in academic focus with high potential, primarily due to the opening of many new archives.

The fifth and final part addresses the Japanese economy. A summary of the structural changes, oversight and developments since the 'lost decades' ends with an honest assessment of present and future challenges. The chapter on Japanese business and management makes very interesting points and takes a historicist approach to proving them, looking from the Bakufu until the 3/11 triple disaster at specific cultural turning points. Thereafter the economy section shifts to decidedly trickier sociological matters such as the psychological factors behind consumers and consumerism, and the various floating definitions of 'purchasing groups' like *otaku* or Young Men, and labour relations and unionism in Japan since the end of GHQ in 1952.

When it comes to discussing the issue of foreign workers in Japan, there is a very critical stance looking statistically at the flexibility of visas, the biggest immigrant communities, the difference between regular and irregular migrants, and the overall dissonance in Japanese policy on immigration. The number of foreign residents in Japan compared to any other OECD country is decidedly low, which can seem like a deficit of logic when reviewing Japan's labour shortages, while dissonance between the intention and the result of policies evidences that seeking only the highest skilled immigrants is not fool-proof, and also how local policy is more amenable than national policy. Agriculture, the usual tricky question plaguing current free trade negotiations with Japan, be it the bilateral EU FTA (free trade agreement) or the Trans-Pacific Partnership, gets its own chapter, providing insight on its decline, protectionism and reforms, not to mention the potential benefits of *gaiatsu* (external/foreign pressure).

The book ends on a subject that for many has acquired a great deal of gravitas since 3/11, Energy – and it proves very informative at this interesting time as Japanese nuclear stations are reactivated. Ranging from energy source to energy source rather than any over-elaborate thematic structure, it is an astute exploration of the changes within Japan since the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 that saw Japan diverge from America on Middle East policy, and in the post-Fukushima political landscape. The idea put forward

that Japan is at an 'energy crossroads' akin to the 1970s powerful, and I certainly hope the authors are right that Japan will make a substantive energy decision, although their suggestion that it would be by 2016 and 'the next' House of Representatives election was perhaps made before the 14 December 2014 snap election.

To quote the book itself, 'When we learn about Japan we learn about ourselves, and others around the world' (p. 24). *The SAGE Handbook* is a brilliant tool for just that. It serves as a very good primer and review of the Anglophone study on Japan, and is far from being impenetrable to the general public. Most chapters have a bibliography roughly equal in page length to their essay, and within this cross-disciplinary study of Japan explicitly execute their own sustained interdisciplinary methods too.

So overall, this edited collection is a massive contribution towards a tiny need. Japanese studies have been making such headway that academics might even now say 'Japan is BACK!'. *The SAGE Handbook* exceeds itself by not just capturing a small portion of that success, but presenting a refreshed and comprehensive review of the state of play that itself inspires appreciation of all manner of study on Japan, and could very well motivate the continuation of the Japan interest boom. §

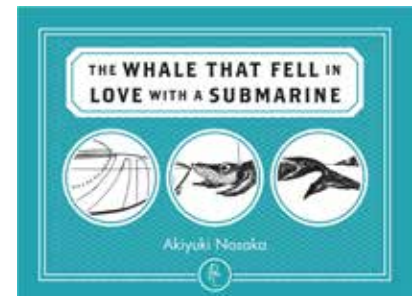
The Whale that Fell in Love with a Submarine

by Nosaka Akiyuki
Pushkin Children's Books (2015)

112 Pages

ISBN-10: 178269027

Review by Annabelle Sami



Don't let the title fool you – this collection of short stories contain poignant, melancholic and tragic tales set on the day of Japanese surrender, 15 August 1945.

The issue of war in children's stories is always difficult to negotiate and Nosaka certainly doesn't shy away from the brutal truth of life in Japan during the Second World War. The subjects of Nosaka's stories meet and create fleeting connections – be it a prisoner of war with a little girl, or a whale with a submarine. Nosaka throws together these symbols of innocence and violence against a bleak landscape. But as these



The *Whale that Fell in Love with a Submarine* is illustrated by Mika Provata-Carlone, who writes: 'The feeling of these stories is that we must make the unendurable, the unutterable, the utterly inhuman impossible, and it is this feeling that I tried to illustrate.' (www.bookanista.com/war-stories-children/)

glimpses of friendship are kindled, they are just as quickly doused – Nosaka does not imply hope where there was none.

Nosaka was born in 1930, and each of these stories is coloured by his own childhood experiences of the horrific implications of war for civilians. Although it is important for children to be presented with the truth, it may be that these stories are a bit too brutal for a young child to take. For instance, one of the stories 'The Mother That Turned into a Kite' describes a mother's desperate struggle to keep her child alive using moisture from her own body as they slowly burn to death after an air raid. The desperately sad descriptions, although true to life, may well leave some children with nightmares – they certainly did for me.

This being said, the stories carry potent messages that speak pertinently to adults and those children old enough to understand. The subjects of these stories are the victims of circumstance, set up by those in power. On the final page of the book, Nosaka writes, 'On 15th of August, the war the grownups had started finally ended' and this is a particularly telling line. The adults' war and the children's book share the same harrowing stories – tales that children must know if the book's pacifist stance is to make an impact. But perhaps this book is best left for educational purposes, rather than bedtime reading, and for children old enough to understand the important messages in the writing behind the frightening narrative. §

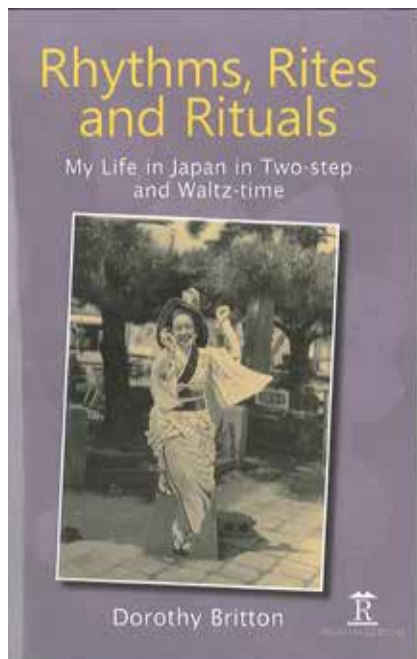
Rhythms, Rites and Rituals: my life in Japan in two-step and waltz-time

by Dorothy Britton
Renaissance Books
(2015)

256 pages

ISBN 978-1-898823-12-4, £16.50

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



What a wonderful title! And what an interesting story Dorothy has to tell!

Dorothy Britton was born in Japan on Valentine's Day in 1922. Her father was a British engineer whose life she has described in her portrait of him in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, Volume VI, (edited

by Sir Hugh Cortazzi, reviewed in Issue 10, Vol. 2, No. 4). Her mother was American.

Dorothy was a baby in Yokohama when the city was destroyed in the devastating Kanto earthquake of 1923. She and her parents survived and her mother managed to get on board a ship, which took them to Ko-be. After a few weeks in Kyoto they were able to rejoin her father who had worked hard to help the victims of this natural disaster.

She learnt to speak Japanese from her earliest days and first went to school in Yokohama. After her father's early death, she had a couple of years at an English boarding school where she was scolded for spending her free time studying a Japanese school text book instead of improving her Latin. She later went on to school and college in the United States, but also spent some time in Bermuda, where she became a keen yachtswoman. There, after the outbreak of the Second World War, she was employed for a time as a postal censor, although her knowledge of Japanese characters at that time was limited.

Dorothy had a good ear, which helped her to be bilingual in English and Japanese and enabled her to speak French fluently. Her sense of rhythm and her natural appreciation of sound nourished her love of music and poetry. At Mills College in the United States she studied composition under the French refugee composer Darius Millhaud. She learnt to play the piano, the ukulele and the harp. She wrote poems from an early age.

At the end of the war she and her mother returned to England and for a time Dorothy worked for the Japan Service of the BBC. They longed to return to Japan where the seaside cottage, which her father had built on the coast at Hayama, had been taken over as a beach house by the British Embassy. Eventually they were granted visas by SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers) and in due course they were enabled to take possession once again of their beloved cottage where Dorothy could swim and add to her collection of shells. Dorothy was at that stage in her life employed as librarian in the British Embassy and later in the British Council.

I will not attempt to summarize her later life, which involved much travel around the world and various romantic episodes. She recounts these with admirable frankness. One long-lasting and fraught affair was with the famous Japanese composer Dan Ikuma [團伊玖磨] whose opera she translated and whom she nearly married. Her attachment to Cecil ('Boy') Bouchier, whom she eventually married after his wife died, began when Bouchier (Air Vice-Marshal Sir Cecil), who had been commander of the air contingent of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan (1946-48), was the representative in Tokyo of the British Chiefs of the Defence Staff.

Sir Cecil had a son, Derek, who had had a tragic accident as a child. The brain injury which Derek suffered meant that he could not talk. Cecil was devoted to his son but feared that Derek's life would prevent him from marrying again. Dorothy however immediately felt great affection for Derek and has looked after him devotedly since Cecil Bouchier died in 1979.

Dorothy's memoir, apart from being a frank and moving record of her peripatetic life bridging the three cultures of Britain, America and Japan, has much to tell the reader about her contributions to cultural interchange through her inspired compositions and fluent translations including her version of Matsuo Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*.

During her long life in Japan, Dorothy developed friendships with Japanese in all walks of life from the Empress to the local fishermen. She also has much to tell her readers about Japanese life and customs including marriage. (On one occasion Japanese friends arranged a formal *miai* with an American for her, but neither participant took it seriously). She was much impressed by what she saw of the Suzuki method of teaching young children to play the violin and thought that language teachers should try to use similar techniques. Dorothy herself helped improve the teaching of English in Japan by her recording sessions with NHK. She also learnt to appreciate the Japanese ability to remain silent when we feel the need to keep up a conversation. She notes that the art of English party conversation, which she taught for a time at a women's university in Japan, was quite new to the Japanese. §

Japan Society Publications: Call for Proposals

The Japan Society has long engaged in the publication of books which further the UK-Japan relationship and/or the understanding of Japan in the UK. These have included works produced or commissioned by the Society, as well as those which have been initiated by others and published under the Japan Society imprint.

As a general rule, the Japan Society aims to issue one publication each year and is now inviting proposals for future projects. We welcome proposals for books of any genre, including, but not limited to, academic works, guides, children's books and translations of works in Japanese. The only criteria are that proposed publications should further the aims of the Japan Society as set out on the 'About' page of our website, should represent quality in their field, and must be of interest to more than specialist scholars.

Further details on how to apply: japansociety.org.uk/38450/call-for-proposals/

All expressions of interest will be considered by the Publications Committee in April each year, and those selected will then be presented to the Board for final approval.



The Growing Power of Japan, 1967-1972: analysis and assessments from John Pilcher and the British Embassy, Tokyo

compiled and edited by
Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Renaissance Books in
association with the
Japan Society (2014)

433 pages

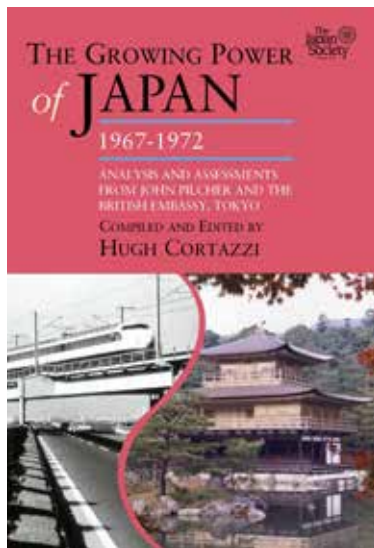
ISBN 978-1-898823-06-3

Review by Sir David Warren

Sir John Pilcher (1912-1990) was British Ambassador in Tokyo from 1967 to 1972. These were important years for Japan. The 'iron triangle' of Liberal Democratic Party politicians, Japanese business and the bureaucracy, ruled supreme. It delivered exponential economic growth, which in turn brought renewed national self-confidence, not least in the wake of the successful 1964 Olympics, but also serious environmental damage. Left-wing noises often seemed increasingly irrelevant. The worldwide upsurge of student protest was felt in Tokyo, as on campuses in Europe and the US, but to little political effect. Japan prospered within the security alliance with the US: but tensions in the relationship remained, climaxing in the shocks of 1971, with President Nixon's overture to China and abandonment of fixed exchange rates.

John Pilcher brought the mind of a scholar as well as a diplomat to his post. He had served as a language student in the Japan consular service before World War Two. In the 1950s he had been head of the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. He was also a man with a finely-developed sensitivity to Japan's history and culture, and, perhaps less common among his peers, Japanese philosophy and religion.

He took up his role at a time when relations between Britain and Japan had yet to achieve the sense of partnership that has existed for much of the last thirty years. Although there was increasing interest in the UK in Japan's economic and social development, residual bitterness over Japan's wartime behaviour persisted. Economic relations were marked by continual friction over trade barriers which the Japanese showed little interest in removing. Pilcher recognised the importance of getting British politicians



and businessmen to understand Japan's potential and develop closer links, not just in the commercial sphere.

Until traditional methods of diplomatic reporting were swept away by instant electronic communication, it was customary for ambassadors, in addition to their daily letters and telegrams, to produce longer reports, known as despatches, which developed broader themes at greater length. Those of general interest were printed and distributed widely within the Foreign Office and other departments. Sir Hugh Cortazzi, one of John Pilcher's distinguished successors as Ambassador, has collected and edited Pilcher's surviving despatches from Tokyo in this handsome volume.

In reading these detailed and sometimes learned essays, it is interesting to reflect on how, while some themes are timeless, so much in the geo-political context has changed. Pilcher was reporting at a time when there was a fear that Japan was as likely to be seduced by the 'pull' of China as to maintain the alliance with the US. At the same time, a sense that nationalism was only dormant, coupled with a suspicion of the Sōka Gakkai Buddhist cult and its political offshoot, the Kōmeito, encouraged fears of a fascist resurgence. The UK was withdrawing from east of Suez, the US's military might was being found deficient in Vietnam. How could Britain exploit more actively Japan's rapid development as an economic powerhouse? And wouldn't this be immeasurably helped, as Pilcher rightly notes in April 1970, by our joining the (then) EEC [European Economic Community]?

This book provides both a political history of the era and a fascinating commentary on it. In addition to the major set-pieces clearly written by Pilcher himself, there are analyses by members of the Embassy staff on Japanese social and economic policies, and political developments. In 1969, for example, we have a report on Japanese science and technology innovation and later a detailed memorandum on the Government's White Paper on the quality of life in Japan – health, social security and housing. Trade features strongly throughout: Japanese protectionism needs to be tackled and British exporters need to try harder. The first 'British Week' was held in Tokyo in October 1969, the year that Britain achieved a balance in visible trade. Pilcher gives an entertaining account of the commercial and cultural activity that this included (whose idea, one wonders, was it to choose 'The Battle of Britain' as the film representing British cinema?).

John Pilcher understood the growing importance of commercial diplomacy, but acknowledged that it was not his métier. He had, however, a profound cultural

understanding of Japan, and it is his cultural analysis that lies at the heart of this book. His theme, developed at length across a number of the despatches, is the importance of understanding Japan as an 'abnormally cohesive' society – a monoculture (although he does not use this modern neologism) – and the Japanese as a people 'without a philosophy or moral code of universal application.' These arguments are extended across despatches dealing with the contemporary mood, the role of women and student rebellion. There is an impressively detailed and persuasive analysis of the role of the Emperor, including as the head of Shintō, submitted in advance of the State Visit to Britain in 1971. Much of Pilcher's writing is imbued with a sense of regret for a lost Japan that he had known, before the war and the environmental depredations of rapid post-war economic growth.

There is some excellent social and economic observation in these essays, particularly a penetrating piece from July 1970 on 'Japan's Changing Society and the New Generation'. There is a powerful sense throughout of the uniqueness of Japan, with an abundance of historical, literary and philosophical allusion. But some of the political and economic analysis is modulated through this cultural prism too, which seems to me on occasion a weakness. For example, the 'Nixon shocks' of 1971 were turning points in twentieth-century history: they deserved a deeper analysis of the geo-political implications for the Asia-Pacific region than the psychological generalisations (we even have a reference to the 'end of the Pinkerton-Butterfly honeymoon') in Pilcher's despatch [the fictional Pinkerton abandons his Japanese wife in *Madame Butterfly*].

These memoranda were not written as public documents, and some of the tone and judgements will grate on modern audiences. It was customary at the time Pilcher was writing for Ambassadors to regard their correspondence with the Foreign Office as privileged and private communication between like-minded officials and attitudes towards the world outside that closed circle inevitably seem to us rather condescending. John Pilcher wrote with considerable literary style and wit: some of this will strike modern readers as a little self-conscious, and more than once the Ambassador finds himself led astray in pursuit of a lively metaphor.

The judgements on Japan are also sometimes couched in terms that an Ambassador today, nervous

of a despatch ending up on the front page of a national newspaper, would probably not use. But Sir Hugh Cortazzi is right not to have edited the record in any way. He observes at one point that he paused over including one disparaging piece on the Japanese businessman abroad, whose critical tone puzzled the Foreign Office and which some members of the Embassy thought ill-judged. But he was right not to leave it out: it is important that the record should be as complete as possible, even if, with similar themes being developed over a period of nearly five years, there is inevitably a little repetition.

How influential were these despatches in changing British attitudes towards Japan? It is hard to tell. These lengthy and erudite essays belong to another age, compared with reports written for modern standards of official and political attention span. It would have been interesting to have had a little more here on the FCO reaction to some of these reports: there is a telling comment by the head of the FCO's Planning Staff, (later Sir) Percy Cradock, in October 1970 on John Pilcher's 'hedging his bets' on the possibility of a revival of Japanese militarism.

But the level of expertise in Japan, and the unique nature of its complex political and business culture, is impressive. Many of the younger diplomats whose research and contacts informed John Pilcher's analysis and judgement reflected those values, and went on to distinguished careers themselves. And the groundwork was laid during those years – for closer political contacts (Ted Heath, the first British Prime Minister to visit Japan, went to Tokyo in 1972, a few months after John Pilcher had been succeeded by Sir Fred Warner), as well as a more focused and professional approach to doing business with Japan, led by Hugh Cortazzi himself.

Above all, one has the sense of a man who combined many admirable values – modesty, good humour, a profound attachment to spiritual values, deep culture, a capacity for friendship and for enjoying his work, great diligence and conscientiousness, a Rabelaisian wit. Above all we also see in Sir John Pilcher a serious commitment to building closer links between Britain and Japan, and ensuring that those charged with this responsibility in the UK understood why Japan mattered, what made it special and how the complex task of realising this objective could be taken forward. This volume is a fitting tribute to his work. §