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Japan–UK Review

Japan Book Review – Japan Stage, Movie, Arts and Event Review

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Editor: Sean Curtin

Managing Editor: Clare Barclay

Our last issue of 2006 reviews an exciting selection of new books ideal for the rapidly approaching holiday season. We also launch our new Arts Review feature with a look at two recently published works, both offered at specially discounted prices for our readers. As those who visit our website regularly will already know, we are now reviewing much more than books and have widened our scope to cover movies, the stage, arts and Japan related events. Our expanded activities mean it is no longer possible to include everything we review in print, but on our website you will be able to find the "full Monty" as well as an extensive archive of book reviews. Links to all the new material and on-line features are also included in this issue.

Finally, from all our regular reviewers and the staff of the Japan Society, a big thank you to our readers for their support, comments and helpful feedback during the year. In 2007 we will endeavor to maintain the momentum with more in-depth quality reviews. Seasons greetings and a good 2007

Sean Curtin

New reviews: www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews.html
Archive reviews: http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews_archive.html

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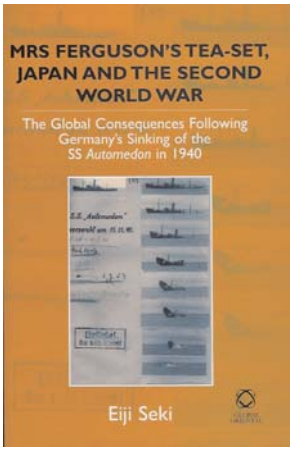


Mrs Ferguson's Tea-Set, Japan and The Second World War: The Global Consequences Following Germany's Sinking of the SS Automedon in 1940

by Eiji Seki,

ISBN 978-1-905246-28-1, pp 187 including plate section, notes, bibliography and index, Global Oriental, 2006, £20.

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

The *SS Autmedon* was sunk by the German raider *Atlantis*, masquerading as the British auxiliary cruiser *Antenor* on 11 November 1940 south-West of Achin Head on the north-western tip of Sumatra on her way to Penang. The Germans discovered on the ship 'Most Secret' papers being sent to the British Commander-in-Chief in the Far East. These 'contained extremely detailed information on the Royal Navy's and the RAF's armaments and positions, the defence of Singapore and possible response measures to Japanese aggression, as well as an analysis of the roles of Australia and New Zealand.' This was a hugely important find and steps were taken by the German commander of the *Atlantis*, Captain Rogge, to ensure that these papers were delivered as soon as possible to German intelligence in Japan. They were then soon in Japanese hands.

Ambassador Eiji Seki, the author of this book, thinks that the Japanese misinterpreted the intelligence in these documents which were out of date by the time the papers reached them. He believes that this was an influential factor in the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbour and open hostilities in December 1941.

The story which Seki relates in this book is a fascinating one and I found it difficult to put it down. He describes in graphic detail the voyage of the *Automedon* and the action which led to her loss. He follows the survivors from her crew and passengers through their hardships, captivity and release as well as the adventures of those who managed to escape. The reader also learns what happened to them after the war ended. Two survivors attended the launch of the book at Daiwa Japan House in London on 2 November 2006.

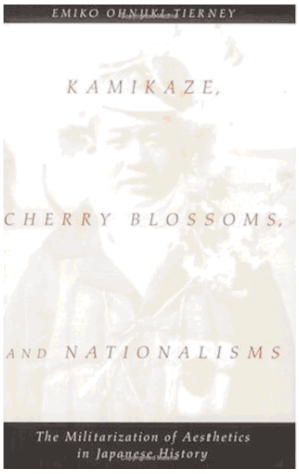
Seki also provides an account of the actions and fate of the *Atlantis* and of its captain who survived to become commander of NATO forces responsible for the defence of northern Germany.

It is hard to understand today why these most secret documents were sent not by a warship but on a merchant ship which might be intercepted and sunk. Communications at that time were difficult and air transport was not only very limited but equally dangerous. Even so and despite the fact that they were in the hands of an experienced and reliable master such as Captain Ewan of the *Automedon*, with instructions to destroy or sink the documents in the event of an emergency, the decision to send these documents by a merchant ship was odd. In fact, as Seki explains, it was only by a series of misfortunes that the documents were discovered. The German raider's instructions to the *Automedon* not to send out a distress call was not obeyed for understandable reasons and the *Atlantis* then shelled the British ship's bridge killing the Captain and either killing or seriously wounding other senior officers. Second officer Stewart who had been injured tried to get at the mailbags in the strong-room but the key had disappeared and before he could act a German boarding party reached the ship. Even so the Germans might not have found the mailbags if it had not been for the innocent request of one of the passengers Mrs Violet Ferguson, who was on her way to Singapore with her husband, that her belongings be rescued if possible. Captain Rogge agreed to help her and as a result Mrs Ferguson's luggage, including her tea-set, was collected from the *Automedon* and the mailbags were discovered before the ship was sunk.

This book is a reminder that the threat to British shipping came not only from German U-boats but also from surface raiders about which less has been written. The story is a salutary lesson in the importance of maintaining document security. It also underlines the fact that even the most significant documentary intelligence can be misinterpreted by wishful thinking and over-optimism.

The heroism of the merchant seamen who suffered so much and of the many who lost their lives in the conflict is rightly brought out by this story. The author gives due praise to Captain Rogge who treated his captives with consideration, but he also draws attention to the cases of ill-treatment of prisoners, especially of East Europeans, in Nazi Germany.

Ambassador Seki in investigating this story has done a huge amount of painstaking research and he is to be congrat-



Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History.

By Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney.

The University of Chicago Press, 2002. xvii + 411 pages.

Review by Ben-Ami Shillony

(First appeared in *Monumenta Nipponica,* summer 2003)

This is a fascinating book. On the one hand it is a historical treatise, an attempt to understand how and why intelligent and idealist Japanese students, after being drafted in World War II, succumbed to the militaristic ideology and sacrificed themselves as *kamikaze* pilots for the oppressive state which they disliked. On the other hand, it is an anthropological research into the meaning and role of cherry blossoms in Japanese culture. The novelty of Ohnuki-Tierney's approach is that she combines the two spheres into a coherent theory of the uses and abuses of aesthetics by modern totalitarian regimes. She is probably the first scholar to introduce flowers into historical discourse.

As the author shows, the ubiquitous cherry blossoms, with their white and pink petals that scatter in the air with the first wind, have been associated, for a very long time, with Japan and the Japanese. They have symbolized the land and the people, joy and youth, romance and love, creation and procreation, beauty and purity, the impermanence of life and the glorious death of warriors. No other flower has been similarly discussed, portrayed in pictures, described in poems, and romanticized. So much so that the very word *hana* (flower) came to designate cherry blossoms. The affinity between this flower and the Japanese appears in the 1790 poem of the *kokugaku* writer Motoori Norinaga, which equates the Japanese spirit (*yamato-gokoro*) with the fragrance of the wild cherry blossom (*yama-zakura*) in early morning.

Ohnuki-Tierney writes that the Meiji government, intent on turning the Japanese into an obedient and self-sacrificing nation, exploited and manipulated the aesthetic sensibilities of the people. It changed the meaning of cherry blossoms from a benign symbol of cultural self-identity into a malignant symbol of nationalism and aggression. The transformation started in the 1870s, when the government planted cherry trees on the grounds of the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where the souls of the fallen soldiers were enshrined. As a result, the cherry blossoms came to represent the brave soldiers and their rebirth as flowers in the Yasukuni Shrine. The official history of the shrine, published in the mid-1930s, carried cherry blossom decorations on its cover. The military adopted this flower enthusiastically: cherry blossom petals decorated the insignia of the imperial army and navy, and cherry trees were planted on military bases, replacing the pine trees that had grown around the old castles. As the empire expanded so did the cherry trees which were planted in the overseas colonies and territories.

The book dwells on the student *kamikaze* pilots in World War II. Drafted students constituted more than eighty percent of the navy *kamikaze* pilots and about one half of the army *kamikaze* pilots. As the author demonstrates, these pilots were a far cry from the western image of blood-thirsty and fanatic warriors. They came from the best universities, had a thorough western education, were influenced by romanticism and Marxism, and some of them were Christians who carried Bibles on their suicide planes. As young idealists, they sacrificed themselves for what they believed was the noble cause of saving Japan from destruction. They did not die for the emperor or for a god. Their belief in rebirth as flowers in Yasukuni Shrine was a romantic dream rather than a religious conviction. When the *kamikaze* squadrons were formed in 1944, they were given names related to cherry blossoms, such as *Hatsu-zakura tai* (First Cherry Blossom Corps) or *Waka-zakura tai* (Young Cherry Blossom Corps). The "special attack" airplanes carried an emblem of cherry petals, and the suicide gliders were called *oka* (cherry blossom). As many of the sorties took place in the spring of 1945, there were pilots who

carried cherry blossoms on their uniforms (one of them appears on the cover of the book). They saw themselves as flowers scattered in the defense of Japan. Thus the military authorities exploited the impact of cherry blossoms on the Japanese psyche to convince the skeptic students to sacrifice themselves for the state.

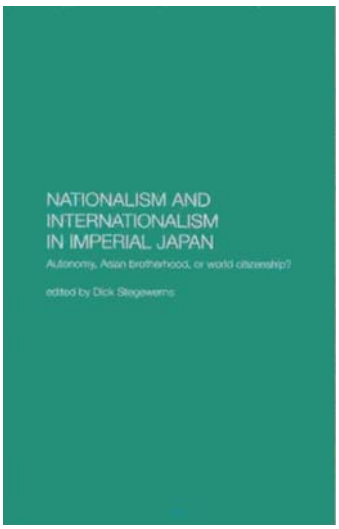
Ohnuki-Tierney does an important job in presenting the fallen students' writings to western readers. She claims that "the extensive writings left by the pilots have never been introduced in non-Japanese-language books, except for a few wills and other writings that fit the image of warriors who died for the sake of the emperor" (p. 20). But she is not the first to do so. Two years before the appearance of this book, an English translation of the famous collection of writings by fallen student pilots *Kike wadatsumi no koe* was published under the title *Listen to the Voices from the Sea* (tr. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn, S.J., Scranton University Press, 2000). Ohnuki-Tierney's book focuses on five student pilots whose writings, in the form of diaries and letters, were published after the war by relatives and friends. From their writings all five appear very sophisticated and intelligent. The appendix lists the amazing number of 1,356 books in Japanese, German, French and English that these students read in their short lives. This raises the questions of how representative these five students were, to what extent their frame of mind also characterized other student pilots, and how much were they different from the non-student soldiers, who also died bravely in war. It would have been interesting to compare their writings with those of other soldiers who died in battle. The author acknowledges the existence of an "invaluable collection" of published letters of fallen soldiers from Iwate Prefecture, but she defers its examination to a "another project" (p. 187). She explains that she chose these well educated and broad minded students because they were "the most unlikely group of Japanese" to sacrifice their lives in war (pp. 19-20). This assumption ignores the fact that intelligent and idealist young people in many other countries did the same in the wars of the twentieth century.

The author regards the harnessing of aesthetics to politics as a fascist phenomenon, following Walter Benjamin's famous saying that fascism aestheticizes politics, while communism politicizes art. Insightful as this saying sounds, exploitation of aesthetics by the state did not start in modern times and it is not limited to fascist regimes. The Romans did it in their monumental architecture, the French did it in Napoleon's triumphal marches, and the Soviets did it in their political rallies. The poem asserting that it is "sweet and noble" to die for the "fatherland" was not composed by a European fascist or a Japanese militarist but, as the author admits, by the Roman poet Horace in the first century BC. (p. 277). The blending of art with military values existed for centuries in bushido, zen, and the martial arts of Japan. When the Meiji government set out to eulogize the "fallen" soldiers who died in the internal struggles in the wake of the restoration, it followed the western pattern at that time of referring to dead soldiers as having "fallen" (although in the west the image was of fallen trees rather than of scattered flowers).

Throughout the book a distinction is made between patriotism, i.e. "the individual sentiment of love of one's country without political dimension" (p. 191), which is considered to be natural and noble, and nationalism, i.e. loyalty to a political unit and a political leader, which is condemned as evil. This distinction is a historical, as the two have usually gone together. When the British fought for king and country, when the French fought for the revolution and Napoleon, and when the Russians fought for motherland and Stalin, were they patriots or nationalists? The fact that prewar Japanese liberals espoused nationalism should not surprise the author and need not be explained by the existence of "feudalistic remnants," as Japanese historians tend to do. Liberalism and nationalism did not contradict each other in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and western liberals were often as nationalistic as their Japanese counterparts.

There are some factual inaccuracies in this book. The Satsuma Rebellion took place in 1877 and not in 1876 (p. 81), Admiral Togo's great victory was in the naval battle of Tsushima and not in the battle of Port Arthur (p. 109), the 2600th anniversary of the legendary establishment of Japan was in 1940 and not in 1872 (p. 132), the Showa emperor never signed the Potsdam Declaration (p. 99), Dalian was not a "small village in northeastern China" (p. 181) but an important port there, Mishima committed suicide in 1970 and not in 1969 (p. 119), and "nikudan" means human bullets and not human cannons (p. 113).

These small faults should not obscure the important message of this book, that our aesthetic sensibilities are in constant danger of being manipulated by the state for purposes that we do not support. The cherry-blossom petals that Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney showers in this study on our historic consciousness are a timely reminder.



Nationalism and Internationalism in Imperial Japan : Autonomy, Asian brotherhood, or world citizenship?.

By Dick Stegewerns (ed.),

Routledge, 2003, xiv + 253 pp.
ISBN 0-700-71496-0

Review by Ian Nish

As the author of a book on Japan's Struggle with Internationalism, I have already encountered the perplexing problems which the scholars who have contributed essays to this book have been researching. The editor has assembled a strong team of experts who analyse how different generations of opinion leaders tried as the twentieth century developed to solve what they perceived as a dilemma: how to reconcile nationalism, the desire for a politically and culturally autonomous Japan, with internationalism, the desire to have a role in a pluralistic liberal world.

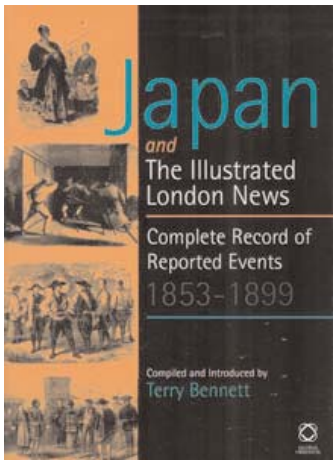
After a theoretical introduction, Part II of the book consists of five specialist studies of important thinkers from the Meiji and Taisho periods : Fukuzawa Yukichi who died in 1901; Tokutomi Soho whose long career as a publicist over-arched the period from the 1880s to 1957; Nitobe Inazo whose publications in English range from 1900 to his death in 1933; Ishii Kikujiro, a diplomat who was thrown into the political arena; and Yoshino Sakuzo who was an active publicist from 1910 to his death in 1933. In Part III there are equally important case studies drawn from the early Showa period (1926-41) on Royama Masamichi, Ishibashi Tanzan and Yokomitsu Riichi, though some of these overlap with those in Part II. In addition,

the contributors mention many more thinkers who do not qualify for a separate chapter to themselves.

Politicians who had to balance these issues in practice shared the same dilemma and were unquestionably influenced by these thinkers. In general those covered in this volume are not academics but intellectuals who had had the privilege of travelling abroad and were sensitive to global problems. Their prime concern is with finding a place for a resurgent Japan in the context of broader international society. In the main their ideas are carried in mass circulation journals, published weekly or monthly, rather than textbooks; and so they are names fairly well-known and respected in Japanese society. This is a group of individuals which does not have a parallel in the west.

But they were addressing a problem which was not unique to Japan. Nationalism and internationalism are difficult terms which require definition and, even when defined, interpretation. For Japan there is the problem of translating these western concepts appropriately into Japanese. Thinkers in other countries, not least in Britain, had a similar problem in reconciling the interests of the nation-state and the interests of internationalism. It was easier for non-Japanese publicists to 'toe the internationalist line' because their countries were, after the carnage of the first world war, less ambitious and inclined to rest on their laurels. Japan, on the other hand, had grappled with the creation of a modern nation-state amid fears of foreign intrusion and had known international success in wars with China and Russia. It was hard, therefore, for Japanese publicists to advocate international restraint at a time when the generality of the public had built up considerable expectations in return for their sacrifice. That was why, when a world body was set up in the form of the League of Nations, Japanese intellectuals rushed to support it and hoped to reconcile membership in it with the prevailing nationalism of the 1920s. This was a struggle and many of those in these studies changed their minds during their lifetimes as the trajectory of Japan's development changed.

It would be invidious to draw special attention to any one study in this book. The standard of the research, writing and presentation is very high. It deals with an important aspect of Japan's prewar history and illustrates the doubts and uncertainties felt in intellectual circles. It illustrates a diversity which is a useful corrective to many studies of 1930s Japan. This is a volume which will be valuable for historians, political scientists and general observers of the Japanese scene as the climate of debate changed in the 1930s.



Japan and the Illustrated London News: Complete record of Reported Events 1853-1899,

Compiled and introduced by Terry Bennett,

Global Oriental, 2006, 411 pages including index, fully illustrated, £125, ISBN 1-901903-26-5,

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

The Illustrated London News was among the first journals to carry illustrations of contemporary events. The journal, which started in 1842 before the advent of photography, had to rely until 1887 on engravings printed from woodblocks. The first article in the Illustrated London News relating to Japan appeared in May 1853. It was devoted to 'The United states Expedition to Japan' and included a portrait of Commodore Perry and an engraving of the US Navy's steam Frigate *Mississippi*. In 1855 Admiral Stirling's visit to Nagasaki was covered in some detail and sketches of Nagasaki were reproduced.

The most interesting reports in the journal were those contributed in the years between 1861 and 1887 by the artist Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) who founded and edited the *Japan Punch*, a satirical record of life in the foreign settlement. He was a talented artist who had the ability to draw quickly. He had an engaging personality and became a close friend of Ernest Satow, who was then a young Japanese language student, but who became the leading Japan expert of his era and British Minister to Japan from 1895-1900.

One of Wirgman's earliest reports was an account of the murderous attack on the British Legation then housed in the temple of Tozenji at Shinagawa which was in those days not far from the water's edge. With this report, among other illustrations of the affair, he included a sketch showing Japanese *ronin* attacking two British members of the legation

There were some unfortunate gaps in Wirgman's reporting. There is, for instance, no account of the infamous Namamugi incident in 1863 when Richardson, a British merchant from Shanghai, was murdered while riding on the Tokaido. This led in due course to the British expedition against Satsuma and the bombardment of Kagoshima. Wirgman, however, managed to join this expedition and gave an account of the action. He also accompanied the forces which destroyed the batteries in the straits of Shimonoseki in 1864 and thus reopened the straits to foreign shipping. His graphic illustrations of these events are fascinating.

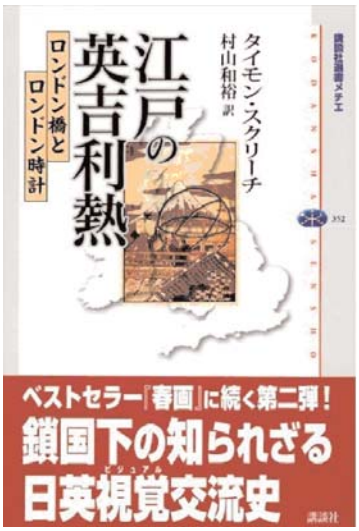
Wirgman later cooperated with the pioneer photographer Felix Beato, turning landscape photos of Yokohama and Tokyo into engravings which could be reproduced in double spreads in the magazine. The development of sepia photography in the 1880s revolutionized the way in which the journal covered events. The Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 was reported and illustrated in some detail and the ILN had something of a scoop.

The production of this book clearly involved a great deal of work not least in extracting the references to Japan. The original text was handset in small type and was hard to read. In this edition typesetting errors have been corrected and larger type used. The book of items relating to Japan which was published in 1973 with translations of articles into Japanese was incomplete and inadequate; a new full edition of the original articles and illustrations was needed.

Students of the history of Japan and in particular of Japan's relations with foreign countries in the second half of the nineteenth century will find this book invaluable. It contains contemporary eye-witness accounts of events and profiles of important individuals together with illustrations which show much better than descriptive prose what the life was like at that time. The source material in this book is in many ways unique. At first there were no Japanese language newspapers,

and English language papers published in Yokohama generally did not carry illustrations. Anyone, however, looking for a contemporary analysis of the course of events or explanation of the background to for instance the Meiji Restoration and the movement for a constitution will be disappointed. Perhaps it is unreasonable to hope for this from a popular illustrated journal.

The publishers are to be congratulated on reproducing this unique resource for historians, but this is not just a book for specialists. It can be read with pleasure and interest by anyone who wants to know what Japan was like in the latter part of the 19th century. Let us hope that this book will be a forerunner for a further volume covering the Russo-Japanese war and later events.



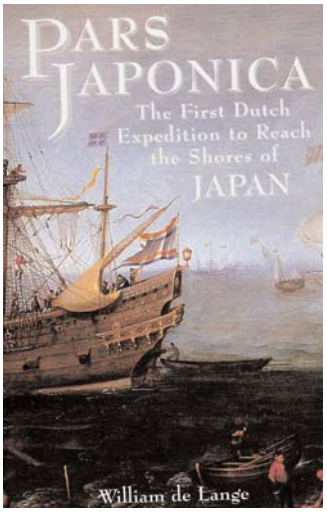
Edo no igirisu netsu: rondon-bashi to rondon-dokei (The Image of England in the Edo Period: London Bridge and London Clocks),

by Timon Screech, translated by Kazuhiro Murayama,

Kodansha, Tokyo, 2006, 254 pages, ISBN 4-06-258352-6

Review by Sean Curtin

This is a fact-packed scholarly study of the image of England in Edo Japan. It is crammed full of great illustrations as well as a host of fascinating information on the yoyo-like history of the British presence in Japan and their fluctuating image. The English East India Company first set up shop in the Land of the Rising Sun in 1613, but within a decade were forced to quit, departing in 1623. The subsequent Civil War prevented their return until the end of the century. When they did re-establish a presence, the Brits were initially welcomed, but the rival Dutch East India Company was reluctant to give up its monopoly on the Japanese market. So, it pulled out the stops to blacken and blur the English name, eventually succeeding in pushing the British out of the country once more. In 1813 they bounced back to restart trade for a third time, on this occasion in a mission sent by Stanford Raffles (of Singapore fame). However, not before too long they were yet again made to withdraw, before once more yo-yoing back with the opening up of the country in the 1850s. This book analyzes the fascinating two centuries between 1613 and 1813, which have not been extensively studied in English or Japanese. The project grew out at a talk Dr. Screech delivered for the Japan Society during Asian Art Week, 2003



Pars Japonica: The First Dutch Expedition to Reach the Shores of Japan,

by William de Lange,

Floating World Editions, 2006, 268 pages including index, notes, sources and17 illustrations, 21 maps & charts, ISBN 1-891640-23-2

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

The long subtitle to this book reads: 'How a seafaring raid on the coast of South America met with disaster and how, against all odds, one ship was eventually brought to the shores of Japan by the English pilot Will Adams, the hero of *Shogun*.' William de Lange, through his careful research into Dutch, English, Japanese and German sources, has produced a book, which gives a new perspective to the arrival of William Adams in Japan in 1600. A good deal has been written about Adams and his contributions to the development of trade relations with Japan and his relationship with Tokugawa Ieyasu, but comparatively little has appeared about the voyage of the Dutch fleet of five ships, of which the *Liefde (Love)* with Adams as the pilot was one. This interesting book thus fills a gap

The story begins in 1597 with a request to 'the States of Holland and the States General' for permission for a fleet to the East Indies to bring spices and other goods back to Holland. From the outset, however, it is clear that, while the development of trade was a primary motive, the fleet was equipped for fighting at sea and on land. The Dutch were at war with Spain and Portugal and the route, which the fleet proposed to take to the East Indies, via the straits of Magellan, would inevitably bring them into Spanish South American waters. The provisions for the voyage were limited to allow for significant armaments and troops to enable the fleet to carry out raids on Spanish ships and territory and commandeer provisions from Spanish occupied territory. The five ships which ironically all had biblical names (*Faith, Fidelity, Gospel, Hope and Love*) behaved as pirates once they had passed through the Straits of Magellan. They were not the first vessels to pass through the straits but there were hardly any reliable maps or charts of the area and the passage was a hazardous one.

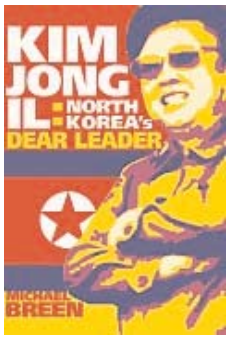
The expedition sailed from the Maas in late June 1598. The crossing of the Atlantic was a difficult one and the ships crews soon began to suffer from scurvy and disease. More than one hundred men 'had been lost, either in combat, through disease, or by law' by the time the ships reached the straits of Magellan in April 1599. The crews were ill-equipped for the southern winter and they were short of food. The death toll climbed and skirmishes with the natives in southern Chile led to further casualties. They eventually got away from the straits in early September 1599, but in the storms, which they encountered, the ships were dispersed.

The expedition was a huge loss to its merchant backers and resulted in a large loss of life. The *Faith* was the only one of the five ships, which got back to Holland in July 1600 with a

skeleton crew of thirty-six having lost two-thirds of its men on the voyage. The *Fidelity* after various skirmishes reached Ternate in the Spice Islands in December 1600 with a crew reduced from eighty-six to twenty-four. Only three of these managed to get back to the Netherlands after the crew had been tricked and then slaughtered by Portuguese and natives. The crew of the Gospel were captured by the Spanish and only nine managed eventually to get back to Holland. The *Hope* and the Love decided in November 1599 to make for Japan because the woollen cloth, which they had on board, was not suitable for the tropics. The two ships managed to keep together despite their depleted crews until the *Hope* was lost in a storm. The crew of the *Love* 'had reached appalling depths' by the time they reached the vicinity of Japan. Adams lamented 'the misery we were in, having no more but nine or ten able men to go or creep upon their knees: our captain, and all the rest, looking every hour to die.' The *Love* had eleven 'great chests with coarse woollen cloths' and 'nineteen large bronze pieces of ordnance and other small ones, five hundred muskets, and five thousand balls of cast-iron, three hundred chain-shot' as well as other armaments. The Japanese found all these weapons useful.

The book, in addition to recounting Adams' meetings with Tokugawa Ieyasu and what happened to the ship, also explains what became of the Dutch members of the crew who survived the voyage.

The decision to go to Japan does not seem to have been made in the Netherlands in advance of the departure of the expedition, but to have been an ad hoc decision. If the skipper of the *Love* had not been in such a dire condition when the ship arrived off Japan, he rather than Adams would have been summoned to see Ieyasu and the 'first Englishman in Japan' might never have achieved his fame.



Kim Jong-il: North Korea's Dear Leader, who he is, what he wants, what to do about him,

by Michael Breen,

John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd. (Singapore), 2004, 200 pages,ISBN: 0-470-82131-0

Reviewed by Tomohiko Taniguchi

Read this review online
http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/06kimjongil.html

North Korea in the 21st Century, An interpretative guide,

by J.E. Hoare and Susan Pares,

Global Oriental, 2005, ISBN 1-901903-91-5 (Cloth), 1-901903-96-6 (Paperback), 253 pages (including index, references/bibliography and black and white illustrations).

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi
Read this review online
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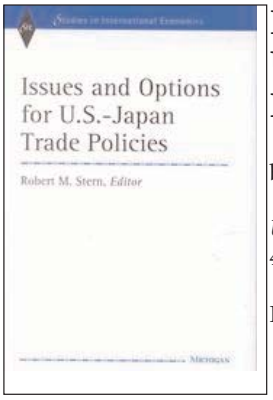


Issues and Options for U.S.-Japan Trade Policies,

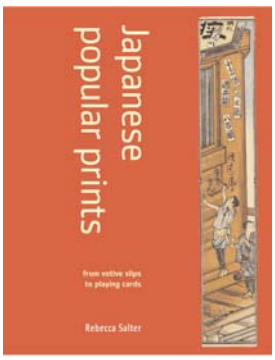
by Robert M. Stern (editor),

University of Michigan Press, 2002, 450 pages, ISBN: 0-472-11279-1

Review by Takahiro Miyao

Read this review online
http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/06issues.html

Arts Review



Japanese Popular Prints - from votive slips to playing cards,

by Rebecca Salter,

A & C Black (London), and University of Hawaii Press (Honolulu), 2006, 208 pages; full colour throughout (221 images), ISBN: 07136 65173, Price: £30.

Review by Marie-Thérèse Barrett

Rebecca Salter's book is not just another study of Japanese prints. Extensive research on *ukiyo-e* has somewhat elevated their status beyond that of street art. This book, on the other hand, focuses on truly *popular* images - calendars and board games, votive slips and measles charms, playing cards and toy prints. These were cheap, disposable items, full of fun and playful imagination but, as Rebecca Salter shows, technically just as skilful as the great masters' works. As a print-maker herself, she has combined her practical knowledge of the subject with in-depth research of a neglected topic full of visual discoveries, useful historical overviews, clear technical explanations and fun anecdotes.

The book covers mostly the late Edo and Meiji periods (18th to early 20th centuries) but starts with a history of woodblock printing in Japan, a technique introduced from China together with paper-making, its earliest surviving examples being the Buddhist prayer slips inside the million miniature wooden pagodas dedicated by Empress Shotoku in 764. The author emphasises the role of woodblock printing for the dissemination of beliefs, news and knowledge as well as fun and games in the Edo period (1615-1868) when it flourished. The "reservoir of skill" of carvers and printers who had honed their talents on Buddhist scriptures for centuries was now used for secular purposes. Apart from advertising kabuki actors and pleasure quarter beauties, popular prints propagated news and superstitions. For example, the 1855 Kanto earthquake inspired dramatic factual images as well as pictures of giant cat-fish, which were believed to be the cause of such disasters. Social satire was included, too. Builders were shown befriending the cat-fish, as earthquakes brought them extra income! Medicine charms and adverts for lotions

and potions were also an essential part of the popular print culture. And, when Japan experienced a travel boom in the early 19th century, maps, guides and gazetteers gave practical advice on inns and sights which complemented the virtual tours given by Hokusai's and Hiroshige's famous landscape series. As a spin-off on this travel craze, travel board games became popular. The book illustrates two fascinating examples, both starting (of course) in Nihonbashi: one, a circuit of Kamakura, Enoshima and Oyama, by Hokusai; the other by Hiroshige, combining the *Tokaido* and the *Kisokaido* routes on the same board, leading the two players different ways to the same destination, Kyoto. These examples show how great artists applied their talent to wherever popular demand lay.

Stylistic innovations were also often used to stimulate a market hungry for novelties. Rebecca Salter shows how Okumura Masanobu depicted the kabuki stage in Western perspective style (*uki-e*) in the 1740s in order to create the "shock of the new" for his public, not out of scientific interest. Likewise, the fashion for mirror prints in the 19th century developed because of the amazing optical illusions created. All in all, the author emphasises the playfulness at the heart of Japanese popular prints, which also provided a safety valve in Edo society, otherwise tightly controlled by the Tokugawa regime.

This unique record of a threatened craft could only have been written by someone with a deep knowledge of Japanese art, society and language as well as being personally acquainted with the few elderly craftsmen surviving. The book reads pleasantly in a style that will satisfy both the specialist and the general public. Japanese terms are given with a clear explanation and a further glossary at the end (one little quibble, the use of "alphabet" to refer to *kana* instead of "syllabary"). The text is illustrated with a wealth of images that testify to the amount of original research by Rebecca Salter. The pictures recreate the "shock of the new" and provide much fun for the contemporary reader. Explanatory inserts, a glossary and a bibliography make the book a model of clarity and will surely become an essential work on a rich and fascinating aspect of Japanese art and society as well as being a delight to read just for pleasure.

Marie-Thérèse Barrett, NADFAS Lecturer in Japanese Art, Course Tutor (Japan module) for the British Museum's Diploma in Asian Art

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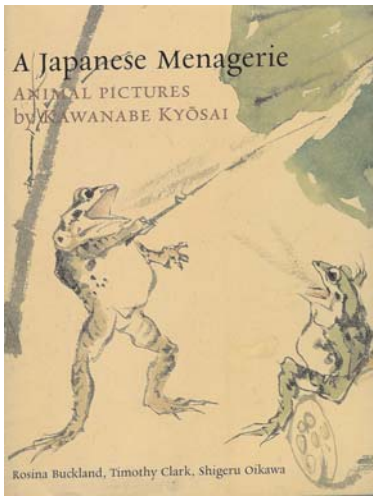

A Japanese Menagerie: Animal Pictures

by Kawanabe Kyosai, Rosina Buckland, Timothy Clark, Shigeru Oikawa,

British Museum Press, 2007, ISBN-13: 978-0-7141-2442-I, ISBN-10: 0-7141-2442-7, pp 112 including colour plates, £16.99.

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This delightful book will amuse all art and animal lovers and would be a very acceptable present in the Christmas stockings of adults as well as children.

Kyosai's life spanned the end of the Edo period and the first decades of the Meiji era. He belonged to the Kano school of Japanese painting, but was also a master of the wood-block print. He was above all a superb draftsman and even in his cups, as he often was, he could dash off a humorous drawing with a few deft lines. He understood human foibles and delighted in satirising these in his paintings and prints.

Kyosai has been underestimated by some critics who saw him as a second-rate artist in comparison with Hokusai or the great masters of the Kano school, but attempts to rank artists in this way are specious. Kyosai may not be one of the world's 'greatest artists' but he was a significant figure in the history of Japanese art and I regard him as a great artist. Josiah Conder, the British architect who contributed so much to buildings of that period, became his disciple and friend and many examples of his work found their way to Britain contributing to the development of Japonisme.

This book is not and does not pretend to be a book about Kyosai or the whole gamut of his art. It concentrates on his depiction of animals - hence the title 'Menagerie'. Kyosai in depicting animals doing things normally associated with human beings was following in a long-standing Japanese tradition going back to the Chojugiga (Toba Sojo-emaki) of medieval times. Animals in Buddhist philosophy had souls like human beings and could aspire in rebirth to become humans and eventually reach Buddhahood. There was no absolute distinction between humankind and the animal kingdom.

Kyosai, wanting to satirise the bureaucrats and the habits of his age, was inhibited by censorship from doing this too obviously. He accordingly depicted animals doing human activities. This did not seem strange to Japanese viewers. The satirical picture on the cover depicts a frog as a schoolmaster, pointing at a lotus leaf substituting for a blackboard and declaiming to frog pupils who are probably repeating the teacher's words. This was produced at the time when universal primary education was being introduced. The book contains another charming sketch on a fan showing a frog postman by a telegraph pole; this was drawn at the time when Japan joined the universal postal union and established a national postal service. Another Kyosai picture of frog acrobats is exhibited on the stairs to the reopened Japanese gallery at the British Museum.

It is difficult in a short review to do more than mention some of the many other attractive and striking images in this book. I particularly liked that of a crow in a branch in winter and another of an egret in rain on a black background contrasting with a similar image on a white background.

Tim Clark explained at the book presentation at Daiwa House on 7 November 2006 the striking sketch of a rabbit with a whip on a tiger as probably having been dashed off on New Year's Eve, as under the signs of the zodiac the year of the tiger moved into the year of the rabbit.

The book contains informative articles by Rosina Buckland on 'Kyosai and the Meiji-era Art World', by Shigeru Oikawa on 'Kyosai's Comic Zoo' and by Timothy Clark on 'Human' Animals in Japanese Painting. It also has a foreword by Israel Goldman whose collection of Kyosai animals inspired this book.

This review should rightly end with the cat and the mouse on the back cover.

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Stage Review

Madmen in the Courtyard,

by the Mugensha Theatre Company,
inspired by Franz Kafka's The Knock at the Manor Gate, Director So-un Kotakebayashi,

Theatro Technis, London, Saturday 7 October to Saturday 21 October 2006

Review by Sean Curtin

For anyone interested in modern Japanese theatre the energetic Mugensha Company's innovative play Madmen in the Courtyard is a must. It imaginatively explores the link between existential philosophy and literacy lunacy from a uniquely Japanese perspective. Unlike many recent Japanese productions brought to the UK, this one is easily accessible to the non-Japanese speaker, using linking narration and other devices to explain the plot. While the unconventional mix of reality and the absurd will not necessarily appeal to everyone, it is certainly worth experiencing.

The action all takes place in a haunted courtyard, apparently set in contemporary Japan. A pantheon of Japanese writers have individually pawned themselves after each experiencing a period of writer's block. This gathering of deceased literary giants battles it out with each other in a series of zany scenes as they all seek to return to creative form and escape the crazy courtyard. Suicide attempts are the standard normal when the writers' efforts end in failure. Japanese literary master Ryunosue Akutagawa, played by the versatile Yoshiharu Masuda, is the central character in this carefully crafted cascade of bedlam. Akutagawa is supported by other legendary figures like Yasunari Kawabata, Osamu Dazai and Yukio Mishima.

The narrative becomes a little opaque at times as we lurch from reality to the absurd, a plot device which allows the audience to witness an extraordinary diverse sequence of scenes ranging from erotic apple tasting to a suicide seminar. The whole menagerie is held together by the dynamism of the actors who somehow manage to flit from sword fights to love-suicide with seamless ease.

Whatever you make of this matrix of madness and existential angst, it certainly forces one to think about the cultural influences and pressures faced by of some of Japan's leading writers of the last century. Indeed until I saw this production I never actually realized just how many of the well-known Japanese authors depicted in the play had taken their own lives: Ryunosuke Akutagawa poisoned himself, Yasunari Kawabata gassed himself, Osamu Dazai drowned himself and Yukio Mishima disemboweled himself. Suicide appears to be a fixture of the Japanese literary world.

While I found the production both entertaining and thought-provoking, it was also somewhat disjointed. There seemed to be two distinct, competing entities within the narrative. On the one side, there was a philosophical exploration of life and death while in the other corner a tempest of mayhem and madness vied for dominance. The conflict between the two was never properly resolved. This duality mostly likely stems from the multi-authorship of the piece, which was organically created from a collaboration of all the actors in the company. The Japanese characters that make up the group's name, Mugensha, translate as Dream Reality Company, which basically embodies their approach in this production.

The performers justify their work with the explanation that the dividing line between genius and madness is wafer thin. Over two thousand years ago the Roman philosopher Seneca endorsed this sentiment when he wrote that "there is no great genius without some touch of madness." However, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, while not specifically referring to theatre companies, observed that madness is rare in individuals but the rule in groups.

Movie Review

Premiere Japan 06 -

First in Translation - New Japanese Cinema
at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), 195 Piccadilly, London W1J 9LN, 22-24 September 2006
Review by Sean Curtin
Read this review online
http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/baftajapan06.pdf

Events Review

Global Consumer Money Transfers (GCMT) Conference 2006

Mandarin Oriental Hotel, London, UK,
30 October 2006
Review by Sean Curtin
Read this review online
http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/06globalconsumer.html

The Invest Japan Symposium 2006

Creating Value through Innovation
Organised by Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) & Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)
Supported by Confederation of British Industry, UK Trade & Investment & Nihon Keizai Shimbun
26 September 2006
Institute of Directors, 116 Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5ED
Review by Sean Curtin
Read this review online
http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/06jetro.html

Japan Perspectives

Heizo Takenaka: "I think it is very difficult for any individual to continue for a long time as Japanese prime minister and I understand this is also true for this country.

Read this article on-line

http://www.japansociety.org.uk/reviews/06takenaka.html