In this issue we remember and mark the second anniversary of Great East Japan Earthquake (東日本大震災) which occurred on Friday 11 March 2011. It was a truly unprecedented catastrophe so traumatic that its consequences are still reverberating through Japanese society. The massive cost in human life and the sheer scale of devastation would be difficult for any society to cope with but Japan must also deal with the additional aftermath of three nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant. The trinity of disasters - earthquake, tsunami and triple nuclear meltdown in one incident spanning a 24 hour period make dealing with it one of the most testing challenges ever to face a country. Sir Hugh Cortazzi looks at Contemporary Japan: History, Politics and Social Change Since the 1980s which examines some aspects of the immense challenges which face Japan and how this is currently shaping society. Mike Sullivan looks at a film festival to mark the anniversary while Lucy Starles covers another Japanese film festival which reminds us that even though Japan faces such daunting challenges life still marches on. We then look at an early national tragedy with global implications in Maritime Strategy and National Security in Japan and Britain, From the First Alliance to Post -9/11. On a lighter note Mike Sullivan looks at the mesmerizing performers Siro-A. We would also like to congratulate Mike for winning the prestigious Japan Foreign Trade Council Essay Competition 2012 with his impressive article “Strategies for a Depopulating Japan “ A British Model and a Japanese Legacy.

Sean Curtin, April 2013
number officially unemployed ‘Japan’s unemployment rate would have been 9.3 percent rather than 5.7 percent as of mid-2013’ makes the Japanese unemployment rate comparable to that of some European countries.

Against this background Kingston is not an advocate of greater liberalisation and further labour market reform, but he fails to suggest alternative policies to kick-start growth in the Japanese economy. The expansionist policies of Kuroda, the new governor of the Bank of Japan, were, of course, instituted after this book was published.

I found one reference to the Olympus scandal. It deserves much fuller treatment in any future edition as does the whole topic of corporate governance.

Kingston comments on the issues of the national flag and nationalist animosity and on attempts to instil patriotism and notes that only one Japanese University makes the world list of the top twenty universities. I would have welcomed more on the problems of persuading young Japanese to question their teachers and elders and on their reluctance to travel and study abroad.

These caveats apart Kingston’s book seems to me to be a good introduction to contemporary Japan. But I hope that in any future edition he will take a hard look at some sentences in the introduction which left me with the feeling which is, however, belied by the subsequent analysis that he had succumbed to the myth that Japan was victim rather than aggressor in the Pacific War.

On page 5 Kingston writes: ‘Given the extent of excesses committed by the troops of the shortest duration of the occupation seems barely believable.’ I realize that some actions by allied service men during the war and after were not in accordance with the Geneva conventions and that in battle things may have happened which should not have been allowed, but I do not accept that such acts, which were not approved by allied governments, were in any way comparable to what the Japanese military did in e.g. Nanking or Singapore or in the construction of the Burma-Siam railway, to say nothing of the surprise attack before war was declared on Pearl Harbor. If Kingston was thinking of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki he should bear in mind the casualties which the Americans had suffered in the battle for Okinawa and take note of the responsibility of Japanese leaders for what happened in 1945. Prince Konoe in January 1945 realized that Japan faced defeat but his obstinate and morally blind colleagues refused until it was too late to come to terms with the inevitable.

In the same paragraph Kingston states that during the occupation ‘American troops did commit serious crimes against the civilian population, including murder, rape and arson but he qualifies this by noting that Japan had feared worse knowing how Japanese forces had behaved in occupied territories. Having served with the British occupation forces in Japan in 1946/47 I am not aware of more than a few serious cases and I wonder if the incidence of violence against Japanese by Americans was any greater than it would have been in the USA. Certain themes of the movie is the constant refusal of fair trials of offenders and there was never any attempt to condone or justify violent behaviour.

On page 7, referring to the legal proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), Kingston asserts that the proceedings were ‘deeply flawed.’ In addition, Allied war crimes went unexamined and unpunished, leading many observers to dismiss the whole topic of ‘Victor’s Justice.’ Certainly there have been many criticisms of the IMTFE, but to dismiss the IMTFE in these words is oversimplifying and pandering to the Japanese nationalists who call for judgements of the tribunal to be abrogated. Moreover to refer to ‘allied war crimes’ without explanation or specification is surely misleading.

Jeff Kingston is Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at the Japan campus in Tokyo of Temple University.
Kaidan Horror Classics [妖しき文豪怪談]
The Whistler [笛] , directed by Shinya Tsukamoto; The Nose [鼻], directed by Sang-il Lee; and The Days After [後の日] , directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda  
2013, 121 minutes
Review by Lucy Searles
This year, to mark its tenth anniversary, The Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme is showing a huge range of films by contemporary Japanese filmmakers that all fit within the genre of jidai geki (period dramas -時代劇). These are films that cast a nostalgic eye back on previous eras or events through a variety of genres and mediums in an attempt to give a broad and vibrant picture of Japan’s past. In keeping with this idea is the set of three films the Kaidan Horror Classics. All three of the films are based on famous literary tales or the works of well-respected Japanese authors, giving the films a wonderfully unique vision – modern reinventions of classic tales. While the classification of the films as ‘horror’ is perhaps misleading, all three films feature a link to the spiritual, religious and the supernatural with very little change.

The first film shown is The Whistler based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The second film shown is perhaps the most moving of the three, The Nose is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The final film shown in the collection is the graceful The Days After [後の日 also sometimes translated as Latter Days] that is adapted from a number of fantasy stories from the writer Murou Saisei [室生犀星] and directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda [枝裕和]. The films centers around a young couple that have lost their child, only for him to appear in front of them once again. Is it a reincarnation or a ghost? The film focuses on the peaceful days of the reunited family and the fathers efforts to work out where the child has come from. The film is beautifully shot, with spectacular sequences that perfectly capture the feelings of loss that are explored in the story. A particularly beautiful scene is the moment in which the father tries to seek out where this child has come from, running over a bridge in the twilight and stopping a man with a light to ask if he has seen the child. The whole scene is shot entirely in the reflection of the water, in nothing but shadows, the light from the lamp glowing in the ripples.

While all three films are very different, they do all share a similar vision of the past. The spirituality and mysticism in all three films create a feeling of the past as another world far removed from modern life while showing that the same feelings of loss, loneliness and alienation are the same no matter when they are felt or how the situations change.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.

The film follows the guilt raked monk and his growing paranoia and fear as well as the villagers who live around him. With beautifully shot images of the lush green countryside and the dark shadowy huts of the village the film does not shy away from depicting the squalor and poverty of medieval, rural Japan. The film stands out from the other two, not only because of the medieval time setting which is in contrast to the Showa period films that frame it, but also because the film questions what it is to be ‘normal’ and examines alienation and self consciousness – a message that transcends time periods and can affect everyone.

The Nose [鼻] is based on the story of the same name by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [芥川龍之介], who wrote many stories based on Japanese folklore and classic tales. Directed by Sang-il Lee [李相日] and starring Yutaka Matsushige [松重豊] as a Buddhist monk named Zenichi, who attempts to save a child from the river only to push the child away when he sees the monstrous nose the monk had been hiding.
This book arises from a conference held in London in 2009 organized by the Department of War Studies at King’s College, London and the Japan Embassy. ‘This project [readers are told] represents the summation of the intellectual contributions of leading scholars in the field of British and Japanese military history and strategy.’ Part one, headed Strategic partnership and military rivalry across the oceans covers the years between the re-opening of Japan in the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War in 1945; Part two deals with Strategic priorities from the cold war to Iraq. Part three looks at Maritime strategy in an independent world.

The editor in his introduction says that ‘In reviewing the Japanese and British experiences, the book seeks to identify areas of common security and operational interests that could help develop stronger military ties and reduce the impact of the limitations of national resources.’ These areas are unfortunately not clearly indicated.

As is inevitable in a multi-authored work the approaches of the various contributors vary. The scope of the book is wide and the themes do not lend themselves to clear-cut conclusions. A good deal is made of the fact that both Britain and Japan are ‘island nations’ with important trading relations, but the differences between the two nations both in geographical and historical contexts are significant.

The facts covered in the first historical section will be familiar to those who have studied the history of relations between Britain and Japan up to the end of the war. The British exercise of naval power in the Far East in the 1850s and 1860s was an object lesson for Japan and provided the spur for the Japanese Navy to model itself on the Royal Navy. The balance of power shifted in the twentieth century and Britain came to see Japan as a rival rather than as a friend. Britain was declining and Japan rising. The fall of Singapore in 1942 marked the nadir of British power in the Far East.

Part two begins with a discussion of Japan’s post-war defence policy. The emphasis from the start was on the defence of the Japanese archipelago, but following the fall of communist regimes in Europe Japan was forced to turn its attention to participation in international peace activities. The development of Japanese policy was slow and tortuous. Japan faced constitutional and legal obstacles as well as deep-seated pacifist attitudes at home which inhibited more effective actions. The Japanese response to the first Iraq war was seen as belated and although Japanese financial assistance was in the end considerable it earned limited goodwill. Japanese defence forces can now take part in ‘expedient missions’ but ‘there are still significant gaps in the relevant Japanese operational doctrine (page 155).’

Part three begins with further discussion of the political and ‘normative’ constraints to Japan’s national security. Japanese ships can now provide protection for Japanese vessels from Somali piracy, but Japanese rules of engagement are more restrictive than those of other countries. Japanese defence policies have some way to go before they can be seen as those of a ‘normal’ power. It is unfortunate that this book was put together before the implications for Japanese defence policy of the growth in Chinese naval strength, including the procurement of China’s first aircraft carrier, could be properly considered. The Senkaku islands in the South China Sea which are the subject of dispute between Japan and China are not even listed in the index.

This review is written for members of the Japan Society rather than for the defence community as a whole. It does not, therefore, deal with the various discussions in this book on British defence policy and strategic objectives.

SIRO-A

Leicester Square Theatre, Friday 1 February – Monday 22 April 2013

Review by Mike Sullivan

SIRO-A are a six member group originally from Sendai who have been based at Leicester Square theatre since the 1st of February and will finish on the 22nd of April. They first started performing in 2005 and since then they have won the 2011 ‘Spirit of the Fringe’ award at the Edinburgh Festival 2011. Their unusual performance can only be described as an amazing blend of dance, music and technology, as the boundaries between different genres become increasingly blurred. SIRO-A are at the forefront of a new wave of performers.

The small theatre in Leicester Square filled up surprisingly fast as the audience sat down in expectation of seeing something very different to other mainstream theatres, as we waited we were entertained by one of the cast members using a camera on the audience members and putting funny images over the screen image. The following hour passed by far too quickly as these well practised performers flawlessly pulled off a show which is amusing and brilliant. Dancing is given a new perspective as although the dancing itself is very good, the mixture with technology is astounding as it is perfectly timed with special effects. A notable example is the Peacock Dance which incorporates on stage dancer with multiple projections of his same movements on the screen behind him. A personal favourite is a dance performance by two of the cast members using suits covered in lights.

Throughout the show there are multiple costume changes, such as cast member Abe Toshinori’s personal history being presented via the medium of photos which quickly tell us everything about him and the use of shadow puppetry to show a cast member having trouble with an unpleasing end for the cast member. The use of shadow puppetry is prevalent in the show in order to allow multiple things to happen at the same time, as demonstrated in one section where one cast member is able to create an amazing visual display of his shadows doing several things and creating music at the same time.

SIRO-A has proven to be very popular, and seeing parts of their performance on the internet does not do justice to experiencing the actual thing or seeing it for yourself. It is a visual splendour complimented by technological prowess and musical talent.

A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901

by Watanabe Hiroshi

translated by David Noble


543 pages

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Professor Hiroshi Watanabe is professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo and a specialist in the history of Japanese and Asian political thought. Students of Japanese history, philosophy and politics will find this book of outstanding value. It is clear, well-constructed and readable and covers the development of Japanese political thought from the ancient to the modern period.

The book is wide and the themes do not lend themselves to clear-cut conclusions. A good deal is made of the fact that both Britain and Japan are ‘island nations’ with important trading relations, but the differences between the two nations both in geographical and historical contexts are significant.

The facts covered in the first historical section will be familiar to those who have studied the history of relations between Britain and Japan up to the end of the war. The British exercise of naval power in the Far East in the 1850s and 1860s was an object lesson for Japan and provided the spur for the Japanese Navy to model itself on the Royal Navy. The balance of power shifted in the twentieth century and Britain came to see Japan as a rival rather than as a friend. Britain was declining and Japan rising. The fall of Singapore in 1942 marked the nadir of British power in the Far East.

Part two begins with a discussion of Japan’s post-war defence policy. The emphasis from the start was on the defence of the Japanese archipelago, but following the fall of communist regimes in Europe Japan was forced to turn its attention to participation in international peace activities. The development of Japanese policy was slow and tortuous. Japan faced constitutional and legal obstacles as well as deep-seated pacifist attitudes at home which inhibited more effective actions. The Japanese response to the first Iraq war was seen as belated and although Japanese financial assistance was in the end considerable it earned limited goodwill. Japanese defence forces can now take part in ‘expedient missions’ but ‘there are still significant gaps in the relevant Japanese operational doctrine (page 155).’

Part three begins with further discussion of the political and ‘normative’ constraints to Japan’s national security. Japanese ships can now provide protection for Japanese vessels from Somali piracy, but Japanese rules of engagement are more restrictive than those of other countries. Japanese defence policies have some way to go before they can be seen as those of a ‘normal’ power. It is unfortunate that this book was put together before the implications for Japanese defence policy of the growth in Chinese naval strength, including the procurement of China’s first aircraft carrier, could be properly considered. The Senkaku islands in the South China Sea which are the subject of dispute between Japan and China are not even listed in the index.

This review is written for members of the Japan Society rather than for the defence community as a whole. It does not, therefore, deal with the various discussions in this book on British defence policy and strategic objectives.

SIRO-A are a six member group originally from Sendai who have been based at Leicester Square theatre since the 1st of February and will finish on the 22nd of April. They first started performing in 2005 and since then they have won the 2011 ‘Spirit of the Fringe’ award at the Edinburgh Festival 2011. Their unusual performance can only be described as an amazing blend of dance, music and technology, as the boundaries between different genres become increasingly blurred. SIRO-A are at the forefront of a new wave of performers.

The small theatre in Leicester Square filled up surprisingly fast as the audience sat down in expectation of seeing something very different to other mainstream theatres, as we waited we were entertained by one of the cast members using a camera on the audience members and putting funny images over the screen image. The following hour passed by far too quickly as these well practised performers flawlessly pulled off a show which is amusing and brilliant. Dancing is given a new perspective as although the dancing itself is very good, the mixture with technology is astounding as it is perfectly timed with special effects. A notable example is the Peacock Dance which incorporates on stage dancer with multiple projections of his same movements on the screen behind him. A personal favourite is a dance performance by two of the cast members using suits covered in lights.

Throughout the show there are multiple costume changes, such as cast member Abe Toshinori’s personal history being presented via the medium of photos which quickly tell us everything about him and the use of shadow puppetry to show a cast member having trouble with an unpleasing end for the cast member. The use of shadow puppetry is prevalent in the show in order to allow multiple things to happen at the same time, as demonstrated in one section where one cast member is able to create an amazing visual display of his shadows doing several things and creating music at the same time.

SIRO-A has proven to be very popular, and seeing parts of their performance on the internet does not do justice to experiencing the actual thing or seeing it for yourself. It is a visual splendour complimented by technological prowess and musical talent.

A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901

by Watanabe Hiroshi

translated by David Noble


543 pages

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Professor Hiroshi Watanabe begins with a summary of Confucian thought and much of the book is devoted to an analysis of the various interpretations of Confucian precepts made by Japanese scholars in the Edo period including Hakuuki Ari (鶴巻 独往), Sorai Ogyo (原中 翔超) and Shokei Ando (安藤 昌益).

Confucianism was not a religion, but was regarded as the official philosophy of the ruling elite. Confucian teaching, however, did not always conform to the realities of Tokugawa rule. The Confucian concept of meritocracy which lay behind the Chinese selection of officials through competitive examinations was at odds with the Tokugawa system where ‘the army was the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy, the army.’ The army consisted of the samurai who were an hereditary elite whose ‘stock in trade was the violent maiming, and slaughter demanded by warfare’ (pp.27-28). ‘The looting and pillage . . . often associated with the warrior class’ were hard to reconcile with the benevolence (仁 – 仁) of Confucianism. The ‘way of the warrior’ (bushi 霧雨), as it developed in the peace enacted by the Tokugawa, which was ‘based on a very personal sense of honor and shame’ was ‘reduced to little more than sham and playacting’ (p.38).

Tokugawa rule was accepted for over 250 years if only because peace and civil order were preserved and there was no recurrence of the decades of terror that had prevailed before Tokugawa hegemony was achieved. But if the Tokugawa had received the ‘mandate of heaven’ should this mandate be preserved for ever? The Confucian precept of dynastic overthrow or hõbaku (代交) seemed sound to Ieyasu who usurped power, but ‘began to seem disruptive and traitorous in a world at peace’ (p.109). Confucian precepts could thus be used against the maintenance of Tokugawa rule.

Confucianism was not the only philosophy which potentially undermined the shogunate. The researches and teaching of Mabuchi Kamo (野村 賢三) and above all of Norimaga Motoori (本居 誠之) on Japan’s ancient texts also challenged Confucian philosophy and undermined the basis of Tokugawa rule. Norimaga thought that ‘the ancient way’ signified ‘the great and honourable
customs of our august land’ before they were polluted by the importation of teachings from the Asian continent [p.238].’ Norinaga believed that ‘the emperor rules not by virtue, but by heredity. Therefore, his sovereignty is absolute’ [p.245].

Another force for change was the perception which developed in the Edo period of Japan as an entity or country. As Japan became more prosperous under the pax Tokugawa, travel increased and there was increased demand for maps not only of Japan but of the rest of the world. Rangaku (Dutch studies) led to more information becoming available about the world outside Japan. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was apparent to many in Japan that the land of the rising sun could no longer remain isolated from the rest of the world. The idea that Japan was opened in one fell swoop by the force of Perry’s Black ships is a oversimplified myth. The time was ripe for change.

Watanabe has much else of interest to say about the Edo era and its codes and beliefs. His chapter sixteen on ‘Sexuality and the social order’ underlines the differences between China and Japan in relation to the role of women. Men and women mixed much more freely in Japan. Women ‘were expected to join men in performing quite arduous outdoor labor’ and women could and did participate in commerce [p.296]. Virginity was not a prerequisite for marriage. Women were expected to exercise their charms whether they were wives or courtesans or as Watanabe puts it ‘Ordinary women were courtesans in plain dress, courtesans were gaudier and more gorgeous wives’ [p.304]. The section of this chapter on homosexuality ends with this comment: ‘Homosexuality was an emblem of the misogyny arising out of the solidarity and machismo of the warrior class, as well as a symbolic expression of warrior rule in the realm of gender relations’ [p. 309].

Coming to the Meiji period Watanabe notes that ‘It was commonly (though tacitly) understood that restoring imperial rule did not actually mean reinstating personal rule by the emperor.’ He also points out that the Meiji leaders were frequently inconsistent in their beliefs and actions, ‘Many underwent multiple conversions’ [p.355], but this should not be held against them. Pragmatism was justified. He stresses that the Meiji state was not ‘a simple fusion of Western institutions of representative government with the ‘traditional’ Japanese emperor system.’ Indeed ‘the emperor system was modelled in certain respects on the monarchies of the contemporary West’ [p.389].

In the context of the Meiji Revolution (he prefers this to Meiji Restoration) he discusses in some detail the writing on political issues of Yukichi Fukuzawa who saw freedom as ‘liberation from a hereditary caste system.’ For Fukuzawa ‘the purpose of government is to guarantee order and advance the welfare and happiness of the people.’ Watanabe comments that Fukuzawa’s political philosophy at times ‘seemed a cynical pragmatism, at others lukewarm compromise, at others an effectively restrained idealism.’

Watanabe’s book explodes various historical myths and contains much food for thought. I commend it to all students of Japanese history and politics.

Mike Sullivan wins the prestigious JFTC Essay Competition 2012

JFTC Essay Competition 2012 winner: ‘Strategies for a Depopulating Japan’ A British Model and a Japanese Legacy by Mike Sullivan

We are proud to announce that Japan Society Review writer Mike Sullivan has won the prestigious Japan Foreign Trade Council Essay Competition 2012 with his article ‘Strategies for a Depopulating Japan’ A British Model and a Japanese Legacy. Mike was flown to Tokyo in January for the award ceremony, where he received the Grand Prize of 1,000,000 yen for his work. There were 216 essays submitted from 50 different nationalities for this year’s competition, but despite very stiff competition Mike came out on top.

Mike commented, ‘It was an honour to be the grand prize winner and to be flown to Tokyo. I enjoyed my trip and it was a great experience to be part of a prestigious award ceremony.’